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## **Identity Crisis and the Emergence of the Picaresque In Literature From Early Modern Spain and Twentieth Century Argentina**

Mary Johnson Shepherd  
*University of South Carolina - Columbia*

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IDENTITY CRISIS AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE PICARESQUE IN LITERATURE  
FROM EARLY MODERN SPAIN AND TWENTIETH CENTURY ARGENTINA

by

Mary J. Shepherd

Bachelor of Arts  
Wofford College, 1998

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

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Accepted by:

Francisco J. Sánchez, Director of Thesis

Isis Sadek, Reader

Lacy Ford, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Eliza Jane, Josephine and Virginia.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Francisco Sánchez, my Thesis Director, for generously sharing his time and expertise with me. I am thankful for his ongoing encouragement to me as a student at USC, as well as throughout this project. I am grateful to Dr. Isis Sadek for her willingness to read my thesis and take time to provide me with her valuable feedback. I wish to thank all of my professors, especially Dr. Sánchez, Dr. Jorge Camacho, Dr. Lucille Charlebois and Dr. María Mabrey, for inspiring me to be a better writer and for changing the way I view the world. I am grateful to my parents, Bunny and Pope Johnson, who have always encouraged and supported me. Also, to my three children, Eliza Jane, Josie and Virginia, who have unknowingly served as a constant reminder to finish what I started.

## ABSTRACT

The picaresque genre and character appeared in what is considered the first modern novel, Lazarillo de Tormes, which was published anonymously in 1554, when Spain was on the cusp of a slow transition out of feudalism. The pícaro has continued to appear in literature across regions and epochs. This thesis looks at the socio-ideological factors that give birth to picaresque identity and behavior, as well as the verisimilitude of fiction in relation to reality. The first part of this study is dedicated to the Spanish picaresque tradition and focuses on the universal qualities of the literary figure and genre, as well as the pícaros socially-specific nature. The introductory chapter shows how Picaresque literature responds to the social conditions of Early Modern Spain, and in doing so, introduces new ways of defining value, in relation to money, culture and the individual. Drawing from Maravall's interpretation of Baroque culture, the second chapter connects large-scale crisis to human behavior and identity. A comparative study of Lazarillo De Tormes and El Buscón examines the paradoxical traits of the pícaro and how his behavior both connects and excludes him from traditional seigniorial society as well as that of an emerging bourgeois state.

The second half of the thesis identifies picaresque tendencies in literature produced in early twentieth century Argentina by Leopoldo Lugones and Roberto Arlt. The introductory chapter outlines the social tensions that arise as a result of rapid economic development that occurs between 1880 and 1930, and considers the influence of these changes on human behavior. The third and fourth chapters explore the

relationship between language and national identity, as well as the ways in which gender representations influence cultural values and solidify social hierarchies. The modern picaresque studies of Malkmus, as well as the gender theories of Mosse and Masiello, trace a connection between picaresque behavior and social countertypes. The third chapter examines the ways in which Lugones employs *modernista* techniques to respond to modernity. In his poem, “á Histeria” and his short story, “La lluvia de fuego”, paradoxical representations, reminiscent of the early picaresque literature, connect the construction of social value and identity to the period of crisis and transformation in which the works were published. In the fourth chapter, I argue that the protagonist of Arlt’s novel, Los siete locos, is deficient in those qualities recognized as constructing the masculine ideal, and therefore reflects the cultural incongruency of the state.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Backwards and Forwards: the Social Context of Picaresque Literature*

The picaresque genre originated in early modern Spain, with the first novel, Lazarillo de Tormes, which was published anonymously in 1554, when Spain was on the cusp of a slow transition out of feudalism. The first pícaro, Lazarillo, was forced to rely on wits and deception to attempt to transcend the destitute future assigned to him and countless others who were born without lineage in early mercantile Iberian society. The autobiographical style of the novel chronicled the difficulties of daily life, from the perspective of a common man and utilized self-parody to expose the hypocritical principles of the ruling classes. The folkloric language evidenced a departure from humanist and ecclesiastical-confessional literature, typical of the era, which was firmly rooted in high culture and promoted the ideals of the monarchy and Catholic Church (Friedman 190). Maravall, in his 800- page influential study of the genre, relates the deviant behavior of the pícaro to the intransigent authority of a vulnerable monarchy, which at the apex of economic and territorial expansion was, in reality, on the verge of bankruptcy. Drawing specifically on Emile Durkheim's theories of deviation, anomie and egoism, Maravall aligns the birth and evolution of the early pícaro with the decline of Spanish dominance in Europe and the Americas. Unique to his study is his differentiation between the delinquency of marginalized, literary figures and the deviancy and

individualism of true pícaros, who only appear in certain periods, in which specific socio-economic conditions are present (415, 416). While Maravall's pícaro is fundamentally a product of his environment, the literary figure has maintained prominence in literature across regions and epochs. This thesis aims to identify picaresque tendencies, first, in the literature produced in the pre-mercantile circumstances of early modern Iberia, and later, within the period of modernization of twentieth century Argentina, with the goal of examining the conflictive nature of progress, conceptualized in representations of social identity.

In the most generalized interpretation, the pícaro is the anti-hero who offers parodic insight into the difficult living conditions of the poor through first person, episodic accounts of his missed opportunities and social blunders. His mistakes never coincide with or lead to either his personal growth or his social promotion. The testimonial style of the novels legitimizes the protagonist's harsh depictions of reality<sup>1</sup>. The witty language solidifies his subordinate social position, by mocking his impudent behavior and signaling the obvious gap between the written word of the author and the naïve perspective of the character. Maiorino, in his chapter, "Renaissance Marginalities", references Perez-Firmat's study on liminality to explain the "center-periphery dialogic (al)" conditions in which the picaresque is formed (xvi). He shows how surface "dualisms", inherent to all picaresque works, such as contrasts between "rich/poor, integrated/marginal, country/city, (...) master/servant", not only thematically categorize the genre, but also emphasize their discord with the "epic order" (xvii). He notes that in "humanist models, the future had to be shaped as a complete and perfected memory of

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<sup>1</sup> See pages 420-421 of La picaresca desde la historia social, where Maravall explains the idea of the Picaresque having a "valor literario y testimonial".

the past”, or rather a “world of exemplary achievements and impeccable precedents” (xxv, xvii). Much has been written about the “creation of the Spanish myth”, and the ways in which the written word was manipulated and regulated by those in power<sup>2</sup>. The picaresque works deviated from these models. They developed a narrative within the literary realms of failure, poverty and disgrace, and therefore, initially, seem to create a more veritable connection between fiction and reality. However, it is impossible to measure the reliability of the protagonists without reflecting upon the intentions of the true authors, who were not marginalized. According to Maiorino, center-periphery dialogism is completely ‘reciprocal’ and ‘relational’ and social or literary liminality only exists when there is a “contextually determined center” (xvii). The idea of the pícaro as periphery and the nobleman as center, or the genre as a ‘transgress(sor)’ or ‘violat(or) of ‘previous norms’” is complicated when one considers the shifting literary, social, and political landscape of that “contextually determined center”, as well as the mutual gain in reciprocity (xvii). In pre-mercantile Iberia, society revolved around the unwritten code of honor and privilege, which placed the Monarchy and the Catholic Church in its nucleus. Birth dictated the individual’s function and responsibility within the structure of a stratified society and social identity was contingent upon one’s birth. Wealth and political hegemony in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, though initially reinforcing the authority of the Monarchy, culminated in weakening their power during the transition out of feudalism.

In his chapter “The Wealth and the Literature of the República”, Sánchez examines how financial prosperity, primarily due to the flood of bullions from the conquest of the Americas, contributed to the emergence of the bourgeois state and the

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<sup>2</sup> See the introductory chapters of Tilting Cervantes and Mirror of the Myth.

eventual destabilization of the ruling classes. He notes that in the developed bourgeois state, hierarchies would “be based on agreements of formal principles that [would] supposedly be executed by representatives of the (national) society” (Early Bourgeois 30). But in early modern times, those representatives were also individuals who were born into privilege and had “inherited the function of their class identity” (30).

Therefore, their interests to self-promote through titles and public status did not always align with the financial growth of the state. Puñales-Alpizar explains the turmoil of early modern Iberia in terms of ideological conflict. She describes “tres discursos: el de la sangre, el económico y el religioso, cada uno de los cuales promueve una categoría distinta de valores, a saber: el linaje y el origen como fuente de autoridad; la búsqueda del bienestar y la riqueza material; y la virtud y las buenas obras como definición del ser”

(1). International and local trade, as well as the management and circulation of bullions from the Americas, provoked ideological debate about power, the economy and national identity. For example, if Spain continued to expand territorially in Europe through military force, she would also destroy the commercial capabilities of smaller surrounding kingdoms (Sánchez 17). Some believed that trade with other kingdoms was a better way to promote Spain’s fiscal stability, than was gold from the Americas. Though gold created an “accumulation of reserve funds at (...) national treasuries”, its value was subject to market fluctuations, was frequently over-valuated or adulterated, and consistently produced “inconsistent results” (Sánchez 16, Vilches 36). Vilches explains that gold had no fixed market value, but it was the idea that it represented that “lured local nobility and financiers from abroad” to invest in the colonization (36). However, those investors were less interested in the financial stability of the treasury than they were

in their own financial gain (37). As the colonization expanded the national debt continued to rise. The circulation of money had major financial and social implications that extended outside of national borders. Genoese banks, for example, controlled “export regulations, loan procurement, and debt financing for the monarchy” (Vilches 46). The gold piece ceased to operate as “commodity money, but rather as money of account” (47). Vilches explains that this phenomenon created an “abstract value” for gold. The monarchy and merchants had “purchasing power”, without having any real material wealth. Gold became a metaphor for both wealth and financial ruin, as scholars, writers, merchants and the monarchy struggled to understand and stop the rapid depletion of their national treasury and restore their wealth and power<sup>3</sup>.

Phillips describes the early modern period of crisis in Spain, as one of the least understood in history. Her study concludes that political unrest did not always coincide with economic decline, and that the idea of a “single rise and decline” as being a gross mischaracterization of an extensive, widespread period of instability (532). In his chapter, “Social Tensions and the Consciousness of Crisis” Maravall also warns against reducing what he calls a “long period of profound social crisis” to specific wars, plagues, political unrest, or the economic fluctuations that were attributed to a wide range of variables (Baroque 23). Maravall explains the crisis in terms of human behavior in a period in which notable transformation occurs in the consciousness of the people. He explains: “(...) el cambio- que podemos apuntar en la herencia del cristianismo medieval y del Renacimiento- en virtud del cual ese hombre con conciencia de crisis nos hace ver que ha venido a ser otra su actitud ante el acontecer que presencia, y que frente a la

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<sup>3</sup> See pages 43-52 of New World Gold, where Vilches describes how Spain became rich and poor at the same time.

marcha adversa o favorable de las cosas no se reduce a una actitud pasiva, sino que postula una intervención” (58). Maravall provides the example of the political and economic writers who began to borrow medical metaphors to talk about the “sicknesses of society” as well as speculate on possible “curative measures” (60). The mentality that human intervention could influence a situation for better or for worse indicated a departure from the traditional medieval belief system. Sánchez also cites the most prominent *arbitristas* of the time to highlight varying perspectives on the economic and political climate of the period. Summarizing the writings of Luis Ortiz, for example, he explains the *república* as “the sphere of wealth ...independently conceived from the sphere of political subordination” (25). He notes, that “unlike the kingdom, the *república* is not reduced to the geographical territory where groups and ‘estates’ are subjects of the Monarchy; rather they are economically related to these territories in so far as they pursue the attainment of wealth” (25). Sánchez suggests the ideology of the *república*, or the civil state, as being independent and distinct from that of the Monarchy or Catholic Church, as well as being “understood as existing in the process of becoming” (25). In the same sense, literature was also beginning to define itself in a space, influenced by, but separated from institutions of power.

In the introduction of Culture and State in Spain: 1550-1580 , Lewis and Sánchez point out the connection between culture and literature in Humanist and picaresque models.

Indeed, picaresque literature is above all concerned with the way in which discrete individuals emerge from and grow on the basis of a relationship between the knowledge that reality is devoid of truth and the intuition that, to the moral or religious dimensions of selfhood, there has now been added an economic dimension represented by the acquisition of ‘cultural’ or ‘symbolic’ capital. Literature thus becomes a major intellectual

practice of (...) Spanish Humanism because it constitutes an effective vehicle for transmitting and reflecting upon a new form of general knowledge which places 'Man' at its center. (...) Hence, this writing represents the first sustained effort in Spain to think about the role of 'culture' in the formation of individuals. (xii)

The picaresque was developing into a genre, precisely because it distinguished itself from the traditional literary canon and culminated from so many opposing social and literary ideologies. Unlike humanism, at the center of the picaresque literature was the lowest of men, the marginalized rogue whose birth would forever limit him socially. However, his behavior and reaction to his circumstances, was indicative of his desire to intervene, buck the system, and create value for himself. Maiorino explains it as a genre and literary figure that paradoxically "support[ed] itself on what it violat[ed]" (xviii). Clearly, the picaresque works were influenced or inspired, in part, by the belief in the relationship between human intervention and situational outcome. Though the pícaro never succeeds in *medrar*, he believes that he will<sup>4</sup>. Maravall explains how this mentality took root during the initial phases of economic crisis, when smaller predicaments had not yet developed into full blown catastrophe (Baroque 21). Positive outcomes or averted disasters, "inverted" traditional ideals and placed a superior valuation on the capacity of man. However, man was also culpable when things turned out badly (45). This nascent form of reasoning involved a great deal of speculation and reliance on external symbols, to inform decisions and assumptions. During the transition out of feudalism, appearances and outer representations became less reliable, but more valuable<sup>5</sup>. In his chapter, "Picaresque Econopoetics", Maiorino offers the example of successful Spanish

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<sup>4</sup> The verb, *medrar*, in the literary context of Early Modern Spain, refers to social ascension within the seigniorial system. Maravall explains this as the primary goal of the pícaro. See pages 350-396 of his La picaresca desde la historia social.

<sup>5</sup> Also see La picaresca desde la historia social, pages 419-421, where Maravall explains the external nature of honor.

businessmen who cashed in their wealth for land or noble titles, rather than investing it in business and trade. Manual labor began to be associated with those individuals of Jewish or Arabic descent. As a result, a mentality of superiority over labor developed. This destroyed the middle class and created a substantially larger population of poor people (3). Sánchez addresses the problem of speculation and appearance from the standpoint of production and consumption. He argues that disproportionate forms of taxation, debt and decapitalization were worsened by an “overvaluation of aristocratic ideals” and “a lack of productivity” (37, 38). The gap between noble status and actual material wealth was ever widening and the representation of wealth was not reliable. There is no better example of this, than the starving squire in the third chapter of Lazarillo de Tormes, whose suit and cape conceal his indigent state. In El Buscón, Pablos almost loses his life for posing as a gentleman. In the third book of the novel, he even goes so far as to place crumbs in his beard, to create the appearance of satiation and wealth. These are a few of multiple examples of the ways the picaresque model exposed the unreliability of appearance in Spanish society.

In the same way that gold failed to create a “material presence of value”, the Spanish monarchy relied on external representation to conceal their weakening infrastructure. They had thrust themselves into a situation in which they were forced to adapt to inevitable change, but also in which they struggled to maintain the notorious power and authority they had achieved under much different social conditions. The picaresque draws from the social implications of this crisis and helps fill the gaps between literature and value, nation and identity, and perception and reality during the transformation out of feudalism. The following chapter will analyze the classical

picaresque novels, Lazarillo de Tormes (1554) and El Buscón (1626), from a sociological perspective. Focusing on Maravall's interpretations of deviation, anomie and egoism, the study relates the paradoxical aspects of the pícaros' identity to widespread ideological incongruency. Published almost a century apart, the novels share a common plot structure and style. Both revolve around the episodes of characters that are born without lineage, but believe that they are capable of overcoming the imposed social system of the Spanish monarchy. In Lazarillo, the protagonist's upward mobility is contingent upon his relationships with various masters who share in the worldview of the declining feudal system. Without a master, or an *amo*, Lazarillo is incapable of accessing social opportunity. At the same time, however, his servitude provides visual confirmation of the stability and power of the ruling classes. The conflict of interests, between master and servant, forces Lazarillo to deviate or "usurp" the social values of the classes to which he aspires. His delinquent behavior results from his state of subordination, but also reflects his freedom as an individual to break from traditional social and moral obligations. In El Buscón, the protagonist, Pablos, also breaks ties with his family and origins, in hopes of becoming a gentleman. He initially attempts to better his life by going to school and serving a gentleman's family. When he realizes that his decision will only cause him further shame and humiliation, Pablos resorts to a life of crime. His behavior highlights the egotistical nature of the pícaro, which compensates for his lack of social distinction and bears witness to the conflictive climate that resulted from living in a period of transition, which was further complicated by the problem of appearances. Maravall draws on Durkheim's and Weber's theories of collective consciousness to explain how the pícaro both declassifies himself from and confronts organized society,

precisely because he thrives among mentalities and realities that do not complement one another (304). He is born into a mentality that accepts social ostracism and learns to function in spite of it. At the same time, however, he is attracted to the distinction of a social sector that flaunts a lifestyle of idleness and comfort. The first half of the thesis examines the canonical works of the genre to explore the ways in which picaresque literature ties ideological crisis to individual behavior and identity. The second half of the thesis applies Maravall's theories of the picaresque to literature produced in another region and period of social upheaval that unfolded in the twentieth century.

The roots of a national identity crisis that transpired in Argentina also grew out of ideological transition and social tensions brought about by rapid economic growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century<sup>6</sup>. During the period of 1870-1930, also known as the "Liberal Era", Argentina embraced capitalism and free trade and transformed itself into one of the most important economic and cultural hubs of Latin America (Winn, 90). Modernization and growth resulted from what Rock surmises as "a simple trinity of foreign investment, foreign trade, and immigration" (131). As the British led the way in the European Industrial Revolution, they also realized the untapped economic potential that lay in Argentina's vast pampas<sup>7</sup>. In spite of suffering depressions in 1870 and 1890, Argentina continued to progress, due to capital from Britain, and later from the US, Germany and France (Rock 168-169, 171). Foreign investments, primarily from England, funded government loans and the construction of railroads and factories. Capital was also channeled into banking and other business ventures that would connect Argentina's resources to European interests (Winn 100).

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<sup>6</sup> See Winn's chapter, "The Perils of Progress" and Sarlo's chapter, "A Landscape for Borges", pages 9-12.

<sup>7</sup> Skidmore and Smith's Modern Latin America, pages 70-75, as well as Rock's, Argentina 1516-1987, page 160.

Argentina's assets and ability to supply Europe and the United States with meat and grain transformed the socio-economic and political landscape of both the rural pampas and the capital city. Agricultural production increased the demand for labor, which also came primarily from Europe. In the middle of the nineteenth century, immigrants began to flood the pampas, where they were guaranteed work as tenant farmers or as temporary or permanent laborers (Sabato 83, 89). They were immediately integrated into a sharecropping system and an established social hierarchy which placed the landowner on top. Sabato, citing the Rural Code of 1865, calls attention to the language used to describe the relationship between the landowner and his workers. The "*rural master* (...) hires the services of any person in the benefit of his rural property, and the *rural peon* is he who renders them in exchange for a certain price or wage" (93)<sup>8</sup>. He explains that the primary goal of the *estanciero* was to "ensur[e] capital accumulation on the basis of his rural enterprise. He combined wage labor (...), sometimes even renting out part of his estate, thus realizing both profit and rent and playing the roles of both capitalist and landlord, though generally subordinating this second aspect to the first" (138). Most laborers and tenant farmers had job security, but were forced to live on meager wages. Few had the ability to save money to purchase land, animals or equipment, and were therefore dependent upon an establishment that financially favored the landowner. Towards the end of the century the pampas were saturated with laborers. In search of a better life, both established and newly-arrived immigrants began to migrate or settle in Buenos Aires, creating a diverse urban population that began to define the city and nation. Between 1880 and 1930, Argentina became home to 2.5 million immigrants

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<sup>8</sup> See Sabato, especially chapter 3, which categorizes rural wage labor in the latter half of the century in terms of a stratified social context.

(Winn 105). Rapid urban development created jobs in transportation, manufacturing, processing and construction for skilled workers and laborers. Though there was no lack of opportunity in the city, most working-class immigrants found themselves living in deplorable conditions. By 1910, over a third of the population inhabited crowded tenements in the neighborhoods surrounding the city port, La Boca (Winn 107). This period of growth was dependent upon immigrant labor in the city, agricultural production from the rural interior and capital from Europe and the United States. Yet, it was primarily the Argentine elite who reaped the financial benefits of this system. Prosperity temporarily overshadowed the issues that arose due to drastic demographic changes, dependency capitalism and rapid urban growth, and Argentina was increasingly becoming more susceptible to social unrest.

Politically, Argentina was still struggling to define itself. Though independence was won in 1816, the nation had failed to achieve any sense of national unity during the nineteenth century. Much of the conflict revolved around trade and government. Unitarians believed in free trade and in a central government in Buenos Aires, while Federalists favored trade protection and local autonomy in the interior provinces (Winn, 92). Civil wars between the Federalists and Unitarians (1814-1880), the dictatorship of Rosas (1829-1851), and the extermination of the Indians (1870-1884) were a few of many of the events that created the political baggage the country carried as it entered into its phase of economic expansion<sup>9</sup>. Winn notes that the latter half of the nineteenth century was characterized by “the struggle to define Argentina’s identity between two opposed visions of the nation...: one stressing the ‘civilizing’ influence of Europe, the

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<sup>9</sup> See Winn’s chapter, “The perils of Progress”, which expands on the nineteenth century civil wars as well as the impact of the dictatorship of Rosas on Argentine society.

other defending a notion of American autonomy” (91). According to Skidmore, Argentines lacked “a clear-cut sense of nationality” as they entered the phase of modernization. “Their nationhood was ill-defined because the flood of immigrants, mostly concentrated in Buenos Aires, had accentuated the longstanding contrast between the densely settled, Europeanized, cosmopolitan capital city and the rough-hewn, cattle-oriented society of the vast and lightly populated interior” (75).

As the country developed economically and became more demographically diverse, national unity became more important, but harder to achieve. Growth was most visible in the capital city where new buildings, roads, restaurants, theaters and banking centers magnified progress, but also created boundaries between social groups that had or that lacked access to the city’s new offerings (Skidmore 71, Sarlo 9-12). The visible signs of “golden age” prosperity concealed the political corruption, the economic injustices and the inequalities between the upper and lower classes (Skidmore 73). As Winn explains, the “Paris of South America” was a “paradise for the rich, but (...) a purgatory for the poor (88,108). According to Martinez, the Argentine Oligarchy, also commonly referred to as the “Argentine elite” or as “*la gente decente*”, was primarily made up of large landowners who had control of social and economic policy during the “boom years” (2,3). The majority was Argentine-born and lineage was more valued than wealth (2). She explains:

Only a very small percentage of the elite class worked. They owned estates and banks and disdained labor. (...) [They] supported British business groups which controlled the transportation systems in the country. Scobie states that ‘the attitude toward manual labor fostered by Argentina’s early economic developments produced major distinction between the *gente decente* and *gente de pueblo*’ (219)<sup>10</sup>. He also maintains that the wide strata among *gente de pueblo* impeded any movement toward solidarity among the working classes. (3)

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<sup>10</sup> Martinez and Scobie use the description, “gente de pueblo”, to generally refer to the working class.

The socio-economic conditions of the working classes forced men and women out of their traditional social roles and prompted debates on immigration, workers' rights, the distribution of wealth and the domestic and financial responsibilities of women (Rock, 187). "Peripheral" political parties, like anarchists and socialists, materialized to counter the liberal elites, whose social policies impeded the upward mobility of the lower classes. Each party sought to enact their vision of modernity and the distribution of power in the growing city. Sarlo explains that urban culture was increasingly "defined by the principle of heterogeneity" (12). The city became an "arena for national and cultural mixture where, hypothetically all meetings and borrowings [were] possible" (12). This heterogeneity was threatening to those whose power depended upon maintaining social hierarchies that reinforced their authority. Their desire to establish an "identity of a national subject" was eclipsed by the "fusion" of cultures and circumstances that "eluded neat division" (Masiello 167). As a result of this, gender became politicized as a means to stratify society and establish clear parameters of social identity.

In his book, The Image of Man, Mosse recognizes a correlation between the perception of gender and the representation of the power of the state. He asserts that modern stereotypes of gender, which were inextricably linked to the identity of the nation, evolved from the standards of manliness and femininity that were established in early modern times (17-20). The "aristocratic ideals" of value, which were determined by birth and lineage, developed into the "moral imperatives" that shaped cultural discourse of bourgeois society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (18). Masiello also explores gender within the context of modernization and the way in which the female becomes "a construct of ideology and fiction" (8). She explains that the

modern social subject was a “self-divided”, an individual who was subjected to a conflicting “dual system of beliefs” that either promoted the traditional ideals of the past or encouraged participation in the modern experience of consumption, competition and pleasure (165-166). Malkmus also addresses the concept of the “dual –man” in modernity, who simultaneously functions as a hero/ victim. He is an individual who is both suppressed and free, empower[ed] and disenfranchise[ed], “self-aware and self-deceived (9)<sup>11</sup>. He argues that modern picaresque literature is a reflection of this paradoxical “human condition in modernity” and the way in which the individual “confronts conflicting role expectations (...) rhetorically, within a given social framework” (8).

The second half of this thesis examines picaresque tendencies that emerge in gendered representations in the works of Leopoldo Lugones and Roberto Arlt. Taking in account Mosse’s and Masiello’s theories on masculinity and femininity at the turn of the century, the third chapter examines gender and identity in the literary production of Leopoldo Lugones. In the poem, “á Histeria” and the short story, “La lluvia de fuego”, antithetical representations of empowerment and victimization, man and woman, transparency and deception, serve to highlight *modernista* manifestations of picaresque mentalities. Considering the idea of “double perspective” through the “language of dissimulation”, I propose that the sociological roots of the genre emerge in the grandiose, authoritative language of the poem, and in the egotistical nature of the protagonist in the short story, thus connecting literature, culture and identity through paradoxical representations reminiscent of the early pícaro (Malkmus 8).

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<sup>11</sup> See pages 8-10 of Malkmus’s “Introduction: Boxing (In) Life Stories, as well as his concluding chapter pages 186-187.

Arlt's first novel, El juguete rabioso (1926), or *Mad Toy*, contains many of the structural features that are characteristic of the original picaresque novels. Autobiographical, episodic and satirical, the adult/ narrator/ protagonist carries the reader through his formative years in a time in Buenos Aires when economic status and nationality determined whether one was socially ostracized or accepted. This thesis, however, will examine one of Arlt's later novels, Los siete locos (1929), which lacks many of the structural and stylistic criteria that are typically associated with the genre. However, this study bases itself on the premise that the pícaro is a figure who represents the conflicting ideologies and values that characterize modern society. Malkmus determines that modern and early picaresque literature delves into the "ambiguities of social roles, including gender roles", and in that process dismantles and reflects upon some of the more confusing or unsettling aspects of modernity (7, 9-12). I propose that the Arlt's protagonist, Erdosain Remo, represents the paradoxical aspects of social identity which connect him both to the early pícaro and to the time of ideological transformation in Argentina.

## CHAPTER 2

### DISSIMULATION AND REVELATION IN THE EARLY PÍCARO

The Picaresque structure and character appeared in what is considered the first modern novel, Lazarillo de Tormes, which was published anonymously in 1554. Written in Spanish, instead of Latin, and based on the life of a social rogue, the novel serves as tangible evidence of a break with the ecclesiastical-confessional literature of the Middle Ages, and signals a growing system of modern beliefs, that contrasted with those of the Spanish nobility. The pícaro has maintained salience in modern literature and has continued to provoke debate in modern critical studies. In Spanish Picaresque Fiction, Dunn refers to the “repressive nature” of the theories surrounding the genre, demonstrating that the variety of classifications is only surpassed by the number of its contradictions and limitations (14). The theories in conflict, which typically cover about twenty works published between 1550 and 1650, are further complicated by unresolved themes inherent to each individual work (Dunn 5). For example, in Lazarillo de Tormes, the relationship between the real, anonymous author and the protagonist/ narrator is as problematic to the reception of the text as it is to know that Quevedo is the creator of Pablos, the pícaro in El Buscón. Also, the pícaro is universally known as an anti-hero, or the character that exposes the unpleasant aspects of peripheral society. However, it is difficult to establish the reliability of the protagonists, or measure the verisimilitude of fiction in relation to reality, without questioning the intentions of the true authors, who were not marginalized. The seemingly simple novels, about the adventures of a social

rogue, simultaneously frustrate and absorb the attention of the reader. The purpose of this work is to identify common traits in the original pícaro in two distinct works, to determine how the literary figure reveals aspects of reality during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Lazarillo de Tormes (1554) and El Buscón (1626), were published almost a century apart, but share a common plot structure and style. Both revolve around the episodes of characters that are born without lineage, but believe that they are capable of overcoming the imposed social system of the Spanish monarchy. There has been much debate about the intentions of each author. Not only written anonymously, the first edition of Lazarillo was initially banned by the Spanish Inquisition and published outside of national borders. Lazarillo is typically characterized as novel of social criticism, where the naïve orphan shares his life stories, while also revealing social and religious hypocrisies. Francisco de Quevedo, on the other hand, belonged to the social sector known as *la pequeña nobleza*. His novel has been analyzed as a parody of the genre, and even as work that warns against “la vida bellaquería”, where the author pokes fun at his protagonist, Pablos, who attempts in vain, to ascend in a society that values privilege over work. Curiously, the reader’s reaction to the author’s intentions has no bearing on the picaresque model. Maravall, in his book, La picaresca desde la historia social, sustains that the pícaro is fundamentally a product of his society, and is distinguishable from other marginalized literary figures (423). Words like “marginado”, “pobre”, or “engañoso” are restrictive. While they describe certain aspects of the character, they do not address his specific social nature. According to Maravall, picaresque behavior is not a result of either his “herencia biológica” or of his “determinacion psicológica” (423). His conduct

is tied to the tense social conditions that surge during the Early Modern period, when the belief system of the Spanish aristocracy temporarily retards inevitable progression to a pre-capitalist society. According to Maravall, it is the perception of crisis that begins to change the behavior of the people and gives birth to the various representations of the pícaro. This comparative study aims to identify the social factors that create picaresque tendencies and the ways in which they manifest in each novel.

Beverly explains that during the Early Modern period, “the focus of human activity shifts from countryside to city; from production for consumption to production for the market” (35). This epoch is also commonly referred to as a period of crisis. Urbanization and nascent mercantilism begin to transform the way the individual functions and identifies himself in society. Marked by war, hunger, and widespread disease, it is also a period associated with mass migration to the city. This rural exodus is crucial to understanding the picaresque literature (Maravall, Baroque 14). First, it is indicative of a new consciousness in the individual, who begins to recognize the role he plays in creating his own destiny. Facing a lack of opportunity in his homeland, he goes in search of a better life in urban centers. For Maravall, the progression to the city not only points to an economic situation, but also to a sociological process. The communities within the smaller kingdoms begin to break up and disperse, creating a “depersonalized” society, a factor which influences human behavior (Baroque 14). “A mass of people who know themselves to be unknown to one another behaves differently than a group of individuals who know they can be easily identified” (Maravall 15). This historical aspect also creates favorable conditions for the pícaro, who can only carry out his *malas artes* in a place where his identity does not connect him to his humble origins. In Lazarillo, the

protagonist is both helped and hindered by the instability that characterizes his social environment, and thus, embodies the conflicting values of his time.

In the first chapter, Lázaro, the adult/ narrator, begins his story “del principio” in order to describe the factors that determine the future conditions of a person born without lineage (62). His name, already in diminutive form, was derived from the literal location of his birthplace in the Río de Tormes, where his mother gave birth to him in the darkness of a desolate mill where his father was working. Lazarillo loses his father at the age of eight; first to prison, and later to battle. His widowed mother, hoping for a better future in the city, deserts their *aldea* in Salamanca. In the city, after becoming pregnant with a black man, the couple is arrested for living on stolen goods. They lose their jobs and are forced to separate. When the mother realizes that she cannot give her son a better future, she searches for an *amo*. Of her initiative, Lázaro says:

Sin marido y sin abrigo se viese, determinó arrimarse a los buenos por ser uno dellos, y vínose a vivir a la ciudad, y alquiló una casilla, y metióse a guisar de comer a ciertos estudiantes, y lavaba la ropa a ciertos mozos de caballos del Comendador de la Magdalena, de manera que fue frecuentando las caballerizas. (66)

According to her son, the mother has the perception that, by arriving to the city and aligning herself with “los buenos”, she can gain financial security. Though she finds a job distantly connected to a nobleman, she continues to be stigmatized, incapable of fulfilling her goal to become “uno dellos”. She loses her husband, her lover, her child and her job. She suffers public shame and continues to find herself in questionable relationships, “padesciendo mil importunidades” in her new job (68). Because of her identity and origins, she is permanently rooted in the periphery of a society that prevents her participation.

The pícaro, on the other hand, believes that he deserves to enjoy the privileges that are reserved for the ruling classes, in spite of his birth predicament. In order to fulfill his primary goals, which are “el medro y la comodidad de la vida”, the pícaro sheds his true identity and separates himself from his origins (411). This tendency, known as “doble desvinculación” or the double rejection of the family and birthplace, is fundamental to changing the course of his predetermined life. He takes advantage of urban spaces, where his anonymity allows him to simulate new identities. As an unknown entity, he experiments with a variety of *malas artes* to accelerate the process of *medro*, or upward social mobility. Maravall stresses that the privileges that “corresponden a la mínima parte [de] un nivel social como suyo”, do not motivate the pícaro (411-412). He aspires to benefit from the values and goods that remain out of his reach. In contrast to his mother, Lazarillo does not conform to his situation. Because he “no puede conseguir por caminos rectos la riqueza y (...) el cortejo distinción social del que aquella forma parte”, he resorts to manipulation, or what Maravall describes as “la conducta desviada” (419).

The perception of crisis, as a fundamental cause of instability, relates specifically to the development of the pícaro. During the initial phases of the transition out of feudalism, members of the lower classes began to recognize their value as possible commodities in a modernizing economy, but were still prohibited from participating in that way (Beverly 39). Maravall observes that while the economic expansion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries “afloj[a] las normas de exclusión en el goce de bienes y valores”, the social infrastructure continues basing itself on “el sistema de reserva de derechos para los ‘honrados’” (413). For Puñales- Alpizar, the crisis is a result of the “funciona[miento] simultane[o] de varias ideologías, cuyos valores están en conflicto”

(1). There are “tres discursos: el de la sangre, el económico y el religioso, cada uno de las cuales promueve una categoría distinta de valores, a saber: el linaje y el origen como fuente de autoridad, la búsqueda de bienestar y la riqueza material; y la virtud y las buenas obras como definición de ser”(1). The novel is published during the second half of the sixteenth century, when the “dependencia estamental” between lords and servants is beginning to dissipate. The servant “encuentra una cierta libertad, que le permite (...) buscar a quien server” (1). The episodes in the novel highlight the predicament of the early pícaro. His social mobility depends on the *amos* that share in the worldview of the feudal system. Each one requires that Lazarillo conform to the established hierarchy, which forces him to deviate. At first, he deviates to survive. Later he does so to guard his *oficio real*. The tension produced in each chapter, between the protagonist and his *amo*, is a micro-cosmic, fictitious representation of large scale conflict, which marks the slow deterioration of traditional hierarchies.

Based on external appearances, Lazarillo assumes he can benefit from the financial wisdom of the blind man, the charity of the priest, and the social privileges of the squire. However, in order to profit from the relationship, he has to dodge the limitations that each one imposes upon him. Lazarillo gives credit to his first *amo*, the blind man, for “despert[arlo] de la simpleza en que, como niño, dormido estaba” and for “alumbrarlo y adrestarlo en la Carrera de vivir.” (70). He adds that the blind man was the wisest of his *amos*, because he “tenía mil formas y maneras de sacar dinero” (69-70). He was also one of the greediest. Lázaro says that “me mataba de hambre y así no me demediaba de lo necesario” (70). Deprivation maintains Lazarillo in a subjugate state. In order to obtain the desired goods, which in this situation take the form of the coins, wine, grapes

and sausage, Lazarillo has to outsmart his master. For example, when the blind man senses that his servant is stealing his wine, he begins to guard his bottle, “asa asido” (73). Undeterred and thirsty for the wine, Lazarillo invents a long straw to be able to continue to drink from a safe distance. The blind man senses the threat and responds “asent[ando] la jarra entre las piernas y atapa[ndola] con la mano” (74). Though the bottle is securely guarded next to the old man’s body, Lazarillo doesn’t give up. He finagles “una fuentecilla” of wine through a hole in the bottle which he covers with wax (74). He pretends to be cold, so that he can position himself between his master’s legs, melt the wax, and drink from the fountain. The blind man discovers the trick and beats him mercilessly with the jar. But the delinquent act exhibits Lazarillo’s characteristic persistence.

According to Maravall, delinquent conduct evidences the prevailing social situation of anomia. He explains it as the “desajuste en la relación individuo-medios-metas”, where certain individuals lack access to the resources needed to accomplish their social, cultural, and financial goals (416). Lazarillo has no legitimate way of obtaining the blind man’s wine, the priest’s hidden bread, or the squire’s cape. His conduct is a reaction to injustice, which then provokes a more extreme degree of oppression from the *amo*. Maravall summarizes it as a “conciencia que se difunde de un estado crítico y los temores que con ello se provocan en los grupos privilegiados lo que da lugar a que se vuelvan a cerrar las compuertas y se refuerce el régimen de valores y bienes para los grupos altos” (413). This cycle of “cerrar las compuertas” to Lázaro, repeats in every chapter (413). When he succeeds, his behavior is justified. When he fails, his subordinate position is solidified. The pícaro is defined by his willingness to risk shame in order to succeed.

The links between deviation, anomia, and triumphalism transcended socio-economic boundaries in Spain during the transition out of feudalism. Paraphrasing the sociologist, Durkheim, Maravall explains that in societies of “elevado índice de transformacion” the “conducta divergente es con frecuencia ‘premiada’”, and he who has “‘exito’ es propuesto como un modelo de seguir” (418). The highly regarded conduct of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was that of a monarchy which was “poco escrupuloso” and driven by the “común inspiración de la codicia” (418). Their corrupt and repressive practices were venerated by a society that aspired to participate in their exclusive way of life. The legitimization of their conduct lent itself to an attitude of triumphalism, which transferred to the individuals, who lived under the moral precept of a double standard.

For example, the immoral behavior of Lazarillo’s masters is always deemed acceptable, while the protagonist’s conduct is considered ignominious. In the first chapter, a random passerby asks the blind man about the abuse of Lazarillo. When the master responds with the stories of his servant’s manipulative behavior, the individual takes the side of the *amo*, exclaiming, “¡Castigaldo, castigaldo, que de Dios lo hubréis! (76). In the second chapter, the narrator tells of the priest who gorges himself on food and wine, while starving Lazarillo with rations of onion and bones allotted every four days. Dying of hunger, Lazarillo discovers how to steal pieces of bread while his master sleeps. When the priest discovers the infraction, he punishes Lazarillo with a beating that thrusts him into a state of unconsciousness for three days. The narrator says, “de lo que sucedió en aquellos tres días siguientes ninguna fe daré, porque los tuve en el vientre de la ballena, más de como esto he contado oí, después que en mí torné, decir a mi amo, el

cual, a cuantos allí venían lo contaba por extenso” (102) The priest boasts of having discovered Lazarillo and punished him sufficiently. He derives pleasure from Lazarillo’s suffering and uses the story to entertain his neighbors, who laugh when “torn[an] de nuevo a contar [sus] cuitas” (102).

In his analysis of Durkheim’s and Maravall’s theories, Freixa affirms that “es la sociedad quien juzga el carácter desviado del sujeto y por eso el triunfalismo del pícaro funciona como una consecuencia psicológica (...) derivada del propio estado anómico” (34). Social judgement contributes to the picaresque’s shame, but also to his desire to usurp social values, and triumph in the process (419). He wants the lifestyle that social acceptance concedes. Therefore he must reject and embrace the paradigms of tradition and the glorification of a lifestyle based on idleness and appearance. Yet to achieve that life, he is forced to adopt an industrious attitude. According to Maravall, this picaresque characteristic insinuates a growing “espíritu capitalista” that surges during the initial stages of modernization (465). Although Lazarillo depends on his masters, he also takes charge of his own life. With exception to the priest, it is always Lázaro who takes leave of his *amos*. He deserts the blind man, the squire, the friar, the pardoner, and the chaplain. After having worked four years for the chaplain, Lázaro has earned enough to “vestir[se] muy honradamente” in second-hand clothes. He says, “Desde me vi en hábito de hombre de bien, dije a mi amo se tomase su asno, que no quería más seguir aquel oficio” (150). His success reinforces his desire for social mobility, but is always overshadowed by his shameful reality. Beverly characterizes his mobility in economic and sociological terms. He describes Lazarillo as:

the first modern novel because it is the first to show on the level of form and content how human life is shaped by forces that the emergence of the capitalist

mode conjures up. Yet it is also the novel of the impasse of capitalism in Spain. [Lazarillo] constitutes a new form of freedom and mobility, but also of degradation, made possible by market society: the individual. (37)

In the last chapter, Lazarillo is at the height of his career. He has achieved an *oficio real* and has a wife who is a “diligente servicial” (153). At the same time, he suffers public shame for having married a woman who gives favors to the Archpriest who employs him. He mentions that there have been “*algunas malas cenas por esperalla algunas noches hasta las laudes, y aún más*” (154). Yet he also demonstrates his willingness to accept the assurances of his employer, who says that his wife enters “*muy a su honra y suya*” (154). Lazarillo sacrifices his reputation to enjoy the benefits of his new lifestyle. He says, “*tengo en mi señor arcipreste todo favor y ayuda*” (153). He describes how the nobleman shares his bread, meat, old shoes and home with the couple (153). In reality, his reputation would be of no interest to the privileged Toledans. Yet his priorities demonstrate his consent to partaking in a lifestyle that he has always criticized. For Lazarillo, there is a cost to every success. To validate or “elevate his commodity value”, he is forced to morally depreciate himself (Beverly 37).

Contradictory language develops throughout the novel. In the prologue, he degrades himself with an authoritative voice, mentioning his “*estilo grosero*”, as he cites Plinio and alludes to Tulio (61-62). He suggests that his story has an aesthetic value, capable of “*deleitar*” the reader. He subtly assumes there is an audience who wants to read about the man who lives with “*tantas fortunas, peligros, y adversidades*” (62). In reality, Lazarillo is a social nobody. He explains that his book is his response about a case, to *vuestra merced*. Yet he never describes it with any transparency or detail. Instead of acting in conformity with his superior, he deviates. He elects to tell his own

story based on his own conditions. By deciding what to expose or omit, the narrator creates a value for himself. In the last chapter, Lázaro boasts of his new position in the city. He says that “en toda la ciudad, el que ha de echar vino a vender, o algo, si Lázaro de Tormes no entiende en ello, hacen cuenta de no sacar provecho” (152). In actuality, he holds a low-level position and his success is overshadowed by his consent to be cuckolded. His participation in the questionable relationship implicitly reinforces the Archpriest’s authority as well as Lázaro’s perpetual subordination. But, as Maravall explains, the pícaro does not feel “obligado a reconocer su fracaso” (470). And without vanity or belief in himself, the pícaro is like any other marginalized literary figure.

The vanity of Pablos, the protagonist of El Buscón, distinguishes him from other delinquents and other pícaros. Pablos, like Lazarillo, refuses to conform to his assigned life. Where Lazarillo reflects the social dilemmas of the early stages of modernization, Pablos reflects the aspects of urban chaos in the seventeenth century and the growing anxiety resulting from the deterioration of the seigniorial order. Both novels explore the social implications of Catholicism during the period. In Lazarillo, it is the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church that surfaces in the episodes of the greedy priest, and the friar who “rompía más zapatos que todo el convento” (133)<sup>12</sup>. In El Buscón, Pablos exposes the intransigent socio-religious principles of the century, which glorified individuals with *sangre limpia*, and incriminated those of *converso* ascendancy. Many critics consider Pablos the prototypical representation of the pícaro and the novel a culmination of all the structural, thematic and stylistic characteristics of the genre. For others, Pablos is a parody of the literary figure, who personifies the fears and resentments of his author,

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<sup>12</sup> The quote refers to the sexual, and possibly homosexual, activity of the Friar.

Francisco de Quevedo. Cruz affirms that critics, who equate the pícaro to a literary tool for social criticism, refuse to categorize his novel as part of the genre (117). She says that “Despite the author’s rejection of juvenilia, The Buscón has most often been considered a manifesto of his aristocratic, conservative position” (117). Notwithstanding, like Lazarillo, Pablos follows the same picaresque tendencies, as outlined by Maravall.

In the initial chapters, Pablos describes the circumstances of his birth and the factors which lead him to dissociate from his humble origins. His father, Clemente Pablo, was a barber and a thief. His mother, Aldonza de San Pedro, practiced witchcraft and was known in her town as the “zurcidora de gustos” (7). In his edition of the novel, Iffland observes multiple references to their converso background, specifically related to the names of their family members. He explains, “Pablos was a name considered typical of Jews and *conversos* in Spain at the time. The added ‘s’ of his son’s names gives it an unmistakably popular ring” (5). Of the name of the mother, Pablos says:

Sospechábase en el pueblo que no era cristiana vieja, aunque ella, por los nombres y sobrenombres de sus pasados, quiso esforzar que era descendiente de la letanía. Tuvo muy buen parecer, y fue tan celebrada, que, en el tiempo que ella vivió, casi todos los copleros de España hacían cosas sobre ella. (6)

Pablos explains the socio-religious double standard of the period in two sentences. The mother has to protect herself against social discrimination, while at the same time, is “celebrada” for her “buen parecer” and her sexual value. Pablos describes a caring family and parents who were “tan hábiles y celosos de [su] bien” (8). Though they wanted to teach their son how to survive, the boy was not initially interested in thievery or witchcraft. He says, “yo siempre tuve pensamientos de ser caballero desde chiquito, nunca me apliqué a uno ni a otro” (8). Pablos, much like Lazarillo’s mother, believes that he can join higher social ranks through legitimate, acceptable actions. He attends

school, serves don Diego in pupilaje, and goes to the University of Alcalá. However, every step on “los caminos rectos” further promotes his subordination, which ultimately leads him to negate the values that obstruct his social ascent.

Maravall explains that divergent conduct results when society “eleva unos valores y cierra el paso de conseguirlos a unas personas” (427). Pablos wants “aprender virtud resueltamente” (9). He registers in school because “sin leer ni escribir, no se podía hacer nada” (9). But instead of dedicating himself to his studies, he is forced to concentrate on dodging the relentless harassment from his classmates, who make fun of his mother by calling her, “puta y hechicera” (11). On one occasion, after a fight with another student, Pablos asks his mother if their accusations are true and if “[le] había concebido a escote entre muchos o si era hijo de su padre” (11). She responds, “... muy bien hiciste en quebrarle la cabeza, que esas cosas, aunque sean verdades, no se han de decir.” (11). Maravall affirms, “no hay pícaro en su propia tierra” and as long as Pablos is tied to his disgraced family, he will never ascend socially (245). He justifies his decision to leave school, by explaining that he will “servir a don Diego, o, por mejor decir, en su compañía, y esto con gran gusto de sus padres, por el que daba mi amistad al niño” (15). Pablos naively assumes that his friendship with Diego has priority over his service to the young gentleman. His muddled perception delays his ultimate realization that the unlikely friendship is of no benefit to him. Though as adolescents, they share a death bed in Cabra’s care, and recuperate together in don Diego’s home, it is the university experience that confirms the undeniable social division between the two. After enduring the phlegm attack, the beatings from other students, and the criticism of his friend, Pablos decides to take his destiny in his own hands. It is a decisive moment in the novel when

he emphatically resolves “de ser bellaco con los bellacos, y más, si pudiese, que todos”, thus beginning his life as a pícaro (40). The series of humiliating experiences “en la compañía” of his friend, reinforce Maravall’s theory that the socially excluded were necessary for the preservation of established hierarchies (435). Pablos, at his friend’s side, was visible confirmation of the seigniorial status of the young don Diego. Dunn maintains that the appearance of authority was especially significant to don Diego, who shared Jewish blood with his inferior counterpart:

The blood that Pablos is seeking to deny is not simply plebian or criminal, it is the blood of his Jewish ancestors. But Don Diego is a converso, too. For Pablos it is one more dishonorable fact to add to the rest. Don Diego’s is a very different case. As long ago as 1949, Luis F. de Peñalosa showed that the Coronels of Segovia were all conversos, a fact well known in Quevedo’s time. The ancestor of this fictional Don Diego, then, was Abraham Seneor, a noble, wealthy, and respected Jew who converted to Christianity and was baptized by Queen Isabella on 15 June 1492. More recently Carroll Johnson (1974) produced evidence to show that in 1589, members of this family went to court to prove that they were legitimate descendants of Abraham Seneor, and so entitled to protection under the royal privilege granted to their illustrious ancestor... So Don Diego, the mediator of authorial justice, is descended from ancestors who had crossed the invisible boundary from Jew to Christian under the highest patronage and succeeded in changing name, appearance, and identity... Although in the early chapters Don Diego accepts Pablos in a way as a fitting servant and companion, there is no sign that either he or anyone in his family accepts Pablos as ‘one of us’ (157-158).

Just like Antofña, who tries to “arrimarse a los buenos”, Pablos initially hopes to find honor and virtue at his friend’s side. From a moral perspective, it seems oxymoronic to use the word “virtue” to describe the lifestyle of the university students. But Pablos doesn’t refer to the intrinsic value or ethic morality of the men, but rather their external appearance, which classified them as socially superior. For Maravall, every “capa de estratificación, cada estamento tiene asignados para sus individuos un papel o rol social”, that corresponds to a collection of external symbols designated by society (526). The pícaro has to usurp the representations that designate social superiority (526). When

Pablos realizes he cannot achieve honor living in the shadow of his friend, he breaks away to search for new ways to acquire the desired symbols.

In Lazarillo, the protagonist rebels within the seigniorial hierarchy. Each chapter is named for the *amo* that he outsmarts. Pablos, on the other hand, totally separates himself from the system, risking his life as a free agent. In a comparison of two theories on deviation, as outlined by Merton and Cohen, Maravall identifies two initial stages typical of picaresque deviation. First, the pícaro decides against adopting accepted social values. Then he begins to feel inclined to legitimize himself within his excluded group, with actions that complement his new identity. In El Buscón, Pablos openly rejects the notion of servitude. When don Diego dismisses him and suggests that he serve one of his classmates, Pablos responds, “Señor, ya soy otro, y otros mis pensamientos; más alto pico, y más autoridad me importa tener” (52). Taking charge of his identity for the first time without his friend, Pablos creates value through petty crimes and other ploys that entertain his friends and grant him roguish prestige. He robs the patisserie, steals chickens, kills some pigs and tricks the police several times. The riskier the scheme is, the higher it elevates his value. The self-interested attitude that he adopts in Alcalá, converts into a fundamental character trait. He only works with others if there is a chance for self-advancement.

For example, at the university he associates with the housekeeper to more easily deceive his housemates, saying, “Si se compraba aceite de por junto, carbón o tocino, escondíamos la mitad...” (42). But, later he adds, “¿Pensará v. m. que siempre estuvimos en paz? Pues ¿Quién ignora que dos amigos, como sean cudiciosos, si están juntos se han de que no procurar engañar el uno al otro?” (43- 44). Pablos proceeds to tell about his

successful scheme of stealing chickens from the *ama*. He convinces her that she has committed blasphemy by calling to the chickens, “pío pío”, which, according to Pablos, was the “nombre de los papas, vicarios de Dios y cabezas de la Iglesia” (44). After he throws her into a state of panic, Pablos tell her, “yo ... podré dejar de acusaros; pero será necesario que estos dos pollos, que comieron llamándoles con el santísimo nombre de los pontífices, me los deis para que yo los lleve a un familiar que los queme, porque están dañados” (44). He takes off to share the chicken with the other servants, who “celebr[aron] en extremo”, while demonstrating his ability to advance himself at the expense of others (45). The same occurs when Pablos returns to his birthplace to retrieve a small inheritance from his father. He explains, “comencé a disponer mi partida para Segovia, con fin de cobrar mi hacienda y conocer mis parientes, para huir dellos” (52). Lacking any real affection for his family, it is only his pecuniary interest that motivates his return.

In one sense, the pícaro personifies the “fundamental egoism [that] was recognized as the basic motive for human actions” [and] whose “common disposition [was] to seek one’s own well- being at the cost of another’s” (Maravall, Baroque, 203). This mode of behavior transcended all social classes in the seventeenth century. Just as Pablos schemes to socially accelerate, he also recognizes the potential of being deceived by another. Maravall attributes this mentality, in part, to the isolation of many individuals who were living in anonymity in the dense, bustling cities. But his egotistical and individualistic spirit bears witness to the conflictive climate that resulted from living in a period of transition, which was further complicated by the problem of appearances. Maravall draws on the Durkheim’s and Weber’s theories of collective consciousness to

explain how the pícaro simultaneously declassifies himself from and confronts organized society, precisely because he thrives among mentalities and realities that do not complement one another (305). On one hand, his origins firmly root him to the social sector “que se veía autorizada a servirse tan solo de los recursos que en cada clase le otorgaba” (304). His parents are proud of their background and anxious to teach their craft to their son. Pablos is born into a mentality that accepts social ostracism and learns to function in spite of it. At the same time, he is attracted to “las aspiraciones que suscitaba la expansión de la nueva época”, or rather, the distinction of the social sector that flaunted a lifestyle of idleness and comfort. Pablos is trapped between two conflicting ideologies, without belonging to either one. When Pablos meets the fake hidalgos, he learns how to navigate between the opposing worlds of poverty and nobility, by changing his external appearance. One of the men explains to Pablos, “Sustentámonos del aire, y andamos contentos. Somos gente que comemos un puerro, y representamos un capón” (104). After dressing him in a mocked-up version of noble attire, they arm him with a survival bag, which is made up of “hilo negro y blanco, seda, cordel y aguja, dedal, paño, lienzo, raso, y otros retacillos, y un cuchillo”. The false hidalgos assure him that “con esta caja puede ir por todo el mundo, sin haber menester amigos ni deudos; en ésta se encierra todo nuestro remedio” (104). They take their act so far as to methodically place crumbs of bread in their beards, to create the appearance of satiation. For Durkheim, the collective consciousness of society, or the dominant belief system, can diminish the egoism of the individual. But because the seventeenth century is a period of such dramatic ideological incongruency, it is the egoism of the pícaro, more so than society, which dominates his persona and provokes his behavior. As a

marginalized figure, Pablos, like the other pícaros, exposes the weaknesses of the state, and the ambiguous terrain of pre-determined society.

In the Foreword of Maravall's Culture of the Baroque, Spadaccini refers to seventeenth century Spain as:

a culture contrived for the benefit of monarchical-seigniorial sectors of society for the purpose of facing up to a world in which changes had deemed to turn things upside down...It is a culture of reaction against the mobility and change, that for much of the sixteenth century, had threatened to erode the 'hierarchal construction of states'. (xix)

The pícaro embodies this process of "value inversion" and the conflicting interests of the masses, the individual and the state during the early modern period (Baroque 21). His pre-capitalist and triumphant spirit manifests in his competitive nature, while his efforts are inspired by his desire to achieve the idle and ostentatious lifestyle of the ruling classes. He criticizes the social sectors that stigmatize him, and at the same time, is repelled by the family and friendships that disgrace him. His appearance and conduct relegate him to the margins and classify him as a social aberrant, while his manipulative behavior imitates that of the classes that suppress him. In the same way that the nobility uses appearances and repression to decelerate inevitable social change, the pícaro represents the modern individual, reduced to his innovation and industry. Pablos and Lazarillo, like other pícaros, originate from the conflict and chaos. They are also "contrived" fictional figures, who, in their reaction to instability, expose the hidden realities of both ideologies.

## CHAPTER 3

### PICARESQUE MENTALITIES IN THE *MODERNISTA* WORKS OF LUGONES

Malkmus, in his analysis of the picaresque in German modernist fiction, refers to the literary figure as a “half-outsider”. Focusing less on the classical aspects of the genre that deal with social roguery, poverty and marginality, he describes the character as a “reflection of the human condition in modernity”, and connects him to socio-ideological transformation that took place in the twentieth century. Referring to the picaresque study of Guillen, Malkmus argues that it is “the language of dissimulation” that creates a ‘double perspective of self-concealment and self-revelation’ in modern and early picaresque literature (8). While the *modernista* and avant-garde works of Leopoldo Lugones are never characterized as picaresque fiction, the poetic voice frequently demonstrates a need to both conceal his true identity and to create an authoritative presence where there is none. Characteristic of his works are undertones of disharmony that exist among concrete and formal structures that camouflage representations of anxiety during a period of modernization. Considering the idea of “double perspective” through “dissimulation”, I propose that there are identifiable picaresque tendencies in his work. Beneath his grandiose, almost codified language, are antithetical representations of the modern individual which reveal *modernista* manifestations of the picaresque. This paper will examine how illusions of power and control reflect how the author confronts modernization stylistically and thematically in the poem, “á Histeria” and in the story, “La lluvia de fuego”. Drawing on Mosses’ gender theory, this study will also examine

the representation of masculine authority, which reveals picaresque tendencies and a connection between socio-ideological change and the identity of the individual.

The literary production of Lugones, always under scrutiny, has been the center of countless literary, cultural, historical and political studies. His works are connected to the rapid transformation of Argentine society at the end of the century and the influence of these changes in Hispano-American *modernista* literature. His early work exhibits many of the prevailing *modernista* characteristics that were introduced by the genre's originators, such as sexual imagery, the concept of universal harmony of the cosmos and the poet portrayed as a creator/superior. In his later work, however, the power of the city overcomes that of the poet, signaling a stylistic transformation as *modernismo* transitions into the avant-garde. The relationship between culture and language is fundamental to his fiction. Mosse says that socio-historic and political events are inseparable from the development of modern identity. Lugones's work serves as a point of departure for analyzing the influence of social circumstance on the formation of individual identity.

In the prologue of his first collection of poetry, Las montañas de oro (1897), Lugones combines descriptions of nature, the poet, and the universe to describe the role of poetry. He employs traditional symbols to emphasize the privileged position of the poet, who could foresee and contemplate the cosmos. Similar to Huidobro's famous phrase, "el poeta es un pequeño Dios", Lugones says that the poet "tiene su cabeza junto a Dios" (12). Lugones, like the other well-known *modernista* writers, incorporates the idea of the poet/creator or poet/prophet, which came from the Romantics at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when intellectuals in Latin America shared the same status as representatives of the state (Kirkpatrick, Dissonant Legacy 20-21). But when Lugones

publishes Las montañas de oro in 1897, writers do not have the same social importance as economists, businessmen, scientists, or politicians. Immigration, foreign investment, discoveries in science and medicine and new technologies contributed to the accelerated progress of modern society, and also, to the diminishing importance of the poet.

Lugones' attempt to re-establish the authority of the poet is significant, because it connects the work to its real social context. Kirkpatrick describes the transformation, when the *modernista* poets, "...forcefully removed by personal circumstance from the towering, exalted position of poet-seer...let down the guard gate to the ivory tower to catch a street-level glimpse of the...cit[y]" ("Technology and Violence" 357). In Lunario sentimental (1908), the collection published eleven years later, the change in perspective is notable. Lugones seems to form part of the multitudes that he observes. He abandons his ideals and begins to incorporate neologisms and everyday words. The prologue of his first collection, not only connects Lugones to early *modernismo* and its European influences, but also signals his desire to recreate individual prestige that no longer exists. The authoritative tone seems to conceal his apprehensions about the imminent deterioration of poetry and the poet, which mimics his preoccupation with society and politics.

Mosse focuses on how external social circumstances produce anxiety in man and influence identity formation. Lugones' literary and political careers always intertwine. His political beliefs become a source of anxiety, as they provoke profuse public criticism which frequently overshadows his work. Lugones begins his career as a socialist, and dies a fascist. Socialist verbiage in the prologue, in phrases like, "Pueblo, sé fuerte, sé poderoso, sé fecundo; / Ábrete nuevos cauces en este Nuevo Mundo;..." indicate the

writer's perspective in a time when socialism responded to a rise of nationalism in Latin American countries, recently liberated from Spain (62). The omniscient tone in the prologue introduces what the violent images produce in the poetry of Las montañas de oro. Lugones eventually abandons his representation of the privileged poet, but continues to pose questions about the authority of man.

In his chapter, "Masculinity in Crisis: The Decadence", Mosse covers some of the factors that magnified apprehension about modernity in Europe, which parallel some of the dramatic changes that occurred in Buenos Aires at the turn of the century. He explains how rapid progress was not limited to the economy and industry. An interest in mental and physical illness began to encourage more open discussion about sexuality (105). Diseases, like hysteria or neurasthenia, were defined through gendered terminology, which further complicated ideas about normative society (85). Mosse distinguishes between the "type" and "countertype". Definitive factors, such as mental and physical health, self-control, morality and stereotypical masculinity were tied to social normalcy, or at least "the image that society liked to have of itself" (79). As a result, feminism, homosexuality, mental illness and decadence, for example, were characteristics that formed a "countertype", or rather, represented the degeneration or regression of modern society<sup>13</sup>. It is this dichotomy that Lugones develops as a central theme in his violent poem "á Histeria". Antithesis and hyperbole are the dominant rhetorical devices that convey the eroticism and violence in the masculine poetic voice and the feminine representation of hysteria.

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<sup>13</sup> Mosse explains that the words "decadence" and "degeneration" were used interchangeably towards the end of the twentieth century. The original meanings, however, differed in medical and literary terminology. It is important to note that "decadence" was not always a negative word. See page 81 of the chapter, "Masculinity in Crisis: The Decadence" for his explanation.

Apostrophe begins in the title and directs the poetic voice towards the subject, Hysteria, which is personified and animalized as a feminine/ androgynous form. At first, the hysteria seems dominant, as the initial phrase describes a physical subjugation of the poetic voice. She has, around his throat, "...el nudo de [su] abrazo", un abrazo que es "...como nudo de horca-" (2, 15-16). In the darkness, fear and confusion come alive in exaggerated descriptions of nature that have physical and emotional human characteristics. The jungle is "temblorosa", "dolorosa", y "triste", and the "tinieblas" that "miraban" are imposing images, that diminish the representation of the poetic voice (4, 9, 1). At the same time, we can sense his will in the word, "espoleaba", that subtly connotes determination, as well as in references to the horse (3). The "formidable ijar de aquel caballo" that "galopaba" are descriptions that imply force, power, and sexuality (3-4, 11). Also, phrases like, "nuestro horror" and "nuestro espanto" contrast with a feeling of desolation and suggest a struggle or a convergence, more than a total submission (5, 10).

Antithesis is produced in the contrast between the interminable and the finite, which exaggerates the contradiction between frustration and relief. The phrase "mil años" repeats three times (12, 20). The horse, or "el viento negro" that is an "enorme potro" that "ha corrido una carrera de mil años" seems to be trapped in a jungle described as "temblorosa" y "larga" (19, 9). They are nightmarish descriptions that portray frustration. At the same time, there is a natural unleashing, evident in the emissions of bodily fluids. The "espumante potro" (10), and "la selva dolorosa/ cuyos gajos-echaban sangre" (6-7) and the horse's "sudores" (11) describe in physical terms, an animalized eroticism, or what Kirkpatrick characterizes as "the explicit link between sexuality, victimization, and the woman" always present in Las montañas de oro

(Dissonant Legacy 92). The idea of victimization and punishment in relation to the woman also reinforces Mosse's theory. He argues that woman and men at the turn of the century were considered equal, as long as the woman remained in the sphere of the home. The women that were considered threatening were those who tried to enter the political or commercial realms. While gender roles were changing, sexual terminology "had become part of public discourse" (Mosse 105). The lines between sickness and health, man and woman, the nation and identity were not blurry. Men and women who failed to represent the traditional ideal, were marginalized.

The subject of Lugones' poem is an exaggeration in itself. The masculine voice struggles with a stereotypically feminine disease. The poem implicitly employs what Malkmus describes as two characteristic features of modern picaresque fiction: the interplay between "self-exploration" and "self-assertion" which is always underlined by representations of failure and shame (186). In the last two stanzas, Lugones ties sickness and madness with sin and punishment. The hyperbolic and antithetical expressions convey confusion and exaggerate the theme of death. Nature is portrayed through extremes. The abyss, "tan profundo- que allí/ no había Dios" (21-22), the "montes lejanos" (22), and the waves of the ocean "hirviendo en los peñascos" (28) are descriptions that lead up to the climax of the poem, when the hysteria "desat[a]" the "formidable nudo" of his neck (30-31). In that moment, the poetic space transitions from the external to that of the eyes and the soul. Groups of words, like, "brasa lasciva", "crimen", "pecado", "locura", "sonámbulos", "espasmo", and "fiebre", tie a mental condition to physical illness and penalization, further connecting it to the lexicon of the socio-historic moment (45, 50, 49, 48, 45-46, 34). Reflecting on Mosses' theory, the

religious vocabulary is most likely more of a reflection on social punishment than Christian punishment. Strength, courage, and the ability to tolerate pain or resist sexual temptation became the social parameters from which society could make judgments (Mosse, 101). When the poetic voice and the hysteria enter into the infectious space of the eyes and the soul, sick desire and a lack of restraint carry them both “bajo una eterna frialdad de mármol” (54). Lugones, through excessive, codified language, correlates an authentic human state with shame, rejection and death, suggesting a link between the weakness of man and the instability of his social environment.

Victimization, power and death are consistent themes in Lugones’ work and frequently manifest in the image of a man reduced to his animal instincts. Man attempts to overcome a situation which is out of his control, and in the process reveals his human weakness. Malkmus notes that picaresque tendencies produce paradoxical representations of “narcissistic self-absorption” and victimization. “As an underdog , he presents himself as a victim (...), marginalized by the cruelty of a perverted moral cosmos or by the growing inclusion of man’s bodily existence in mechanisms and calculations of state power” (9). Although many critics have categorized Lugones’ short stories as precursors to the avant-garde movement, González and Kirkpatrick identify numerous *modernista* characteristics in his prose. González notes that Lugones “took *modernismo* to its limits, to the very doorstep of the avant-garde” and that his short stories “attempt to confront modernity more directly” (Companion 20). Lugones reflects on the challenges that are inherent to progress, nascent capitalism and the instable political environment in Buenos Aires in his fictitious sketches of individuals that are at the center of major predicaments. The author typically creates an illusion of credibility or authority in the protagonist, who

ultimately submits to his lack of control. He frequently employs scientific vocabulary or socio-psychological data to construct an illusion of authenticity and authority. González suggests that some of the symbolism in his works hint at his racist or his developing fascist ideologies (Companion 62-66). Kirkpatrick, however, warns against the “impulse” to make a direct connection between the thematic elements in his prose to his shifting political beliefs. In the introduction to Leopoldo Lugones: Selected Writings, she says, “we can trace the contradictory impulses of Lugones, his populist positions that hardened into exclusionary fascism, within the context of a rapidly changing Argentina. Yet [...] these stances are not the most reliable tools for judging his literary works, for his fiction and poetry reveal struggles of the human subject that can lie outside public pronouncements” (Lugones xv-xvii).

Thematically, “La lluvia de fuego”, of the collection Las fuerzas extrañas (1906), is similar to, “á Histeria”. The protagonist struggles with circumstances that are out of his control, while his mental and physical reactions do not complement one another. The main character tells about a copper rain that descends upon the city, and eventually forces him to take his own life. The *modernista* influence is obvious. Lugones employs scientific and erudite terminology to exaggerate the illusion of authority and deepen the division between the representation of the masses and that of the protagonist. Picaresque elements manifest in the individualistic and egotistical nature of the main character, which uncovers implicit social themes and connects the work to its period and its literary movement.

The action develops in the fictitious setting of an unspecified locale, distant from the Western world. The wealthy protagonist lives in luxurious solitude on a beautiful

piece of property, distanced from the bustling city streets. The passage of time is marked by the abnormal circumstances that begin to interrupt the man's daily activities, which revolve around his physical pleasures. He spends his day eating, reading, and observing his animals and gardens. When the copper rain first descends upon the city, the protagonist's body exhibits signs of distress, which contrast with his calm, pragmatic mental rationale. When flecks of hot copper sting his slave's skin, as he crosses the garden to bring his master another plate, the protagonist describes that, "Tenía en su desnuda espalda un agujerillo, en cuyo fondo sentíase chirriar aún la chispa voraz que lo había abierto" (63). After he orders his slave to go to bed, he says, "Bruscamente acabó mi apetito" (63). Later he describes his "letargo digestivo", as "el vago terror [se] alarmaba" (65). He attempts to calmly assess and address the situation, saying, "decíame todo eso claramente, lo discutía conmigo mismo" (65). At one point in the story, the copper rain abruptly stops, allowing the protagonist a brief respite from ensuing catastrophe. In that moment he expresses a "desconocido bienestar solidario" that becomes contagious on the deserted city streets that instantly begin to overflow with crowds of people who immediately resume their normal activities. The protagonist invites some friends over to celebrate, explaining that "la gente sentía necesidad de visitarse después de aquellas chispas de cobre" (66). After a filling meal and lots of wine, he says, "nunca me acogí al lecho con más grata pesadez de sueño" (66). But his body senses something that his mind tries to dismiss. Imminent danger provokes a physical reaction that interrupts his sleep. He says, "Desperté bañado en sudor, los ojos turbios, la garganta reseca...por mi cuerpo corrió como un latigazo el escalofrío del miedo" (67). He is thirsty for water and running out of options. He notices that his birds were

beginning to “morir de sed” (68). Descriptions of digestion, hunger, thirst, chills and sweats reduce him to his animal instincts. But when he realizes that there is no escape from death, his rationale kicks in again. He retreats to his basement, where he finds his hidden bottle of poisoned wine. “Reanimado por el vino, examiné mi situación...No pudiendo huir, la muerte me esperaba; pero con el veneno aquel, la muerte me pertenecía” (68). In that moment, death tempts him more than it scares him. Before he takes a sip of the wine, he describes the pleasant sensations that fill his mind and body. He reflects on “las voluptuosidades de [su] existencia de rico” and how “el regocijo de la limpieza y una dulce impresión de domesticidad acabaron a serenar[se]” (74). It is notable that feelings of guilt, sadness, fear and loss are absent in the final moments of his life. The man is reduced to his base nature and his human arrogance. Antithetically, the protagonist constructs the illusion of power in order to surrender himself to his impotence.

Sexual references emerge in images of excess, where the protagonist lacks emotion or morality and is filled with illusive superiority. He alludes to his “última orgía” and mentions how he smiled “vagamente a un equívoco mancebo, cuya túnica recogida hasta las caderas en un salto de bocacalle dejó ver sus piernas glabras, jaqueladas de cintas” (65). His wealth and refined lifestyle are represented by his bisexual desire and gluttony, which counters what Masiello characterizes as the “traditional behavior” or “modern ideals” of modern culture in Argentina (140). She explains that:

(...) respectability was created to serve the needs of the state, while sexual fantasies were projected onto women, subalterns, and racial ‘others’ (...). Masculine respectability [was the] hallmark of authoritarian cultures in Latin America, where manliness legitimized the prominence of the upper classes

against the allegedly deleterious effects of women and working class sectors (142-143).

In “La lluvia de fuego”, the protagonist belongs to the upper class, but doesn’t represent typical bourgeois respectability. He lacks a sense of moral obligation and is unapologetic about his materialistic, gluttonous lifestyle. Similar to the individualistic picaresque mentality, the protagonist does not feel compelled to “atenerse a las convenciones sociales”, but rather entitled to live according to his impulses (Maravall 302). To advance the illusion of male authority, Lugones emphasizes the mental and physical separation between the masses and the protagonist.

The main character is cultured and arrogant. His residence is a refuge filled with animals, lush vegetation, rich food and space to guard his possessions. Outside the walls of his property are open, crammed city streets, defenseless to the copper rain. When the copper rain temporarily stops, the protagonist is alerted by the sounds that come from the streets, when “llenó el aire una vasta vibración de campanas” (65). He immediately goes to his terrace to observe the action below. He describes an orchestration of chaos, while the people take advantage of the break in the rain. Some are busily retrieving copper pieces to sell. Others solicit perfumes, picture books of bestial sexuality, and fabrics that promised to incite “el insomnio y el deseo” (66). The descriptions of smells, of drugged animals, of exotic people dressed in vivid fabrics and colorful jewels connect commerce to the marketing of pleasure. The protagonist is the consumer and the masses both the commodities and the producers. Though this form of picaresque individuality is self-imposed, it highlights the paradoxical relationship of social “detachment” and “dependency” in the protagonist (Malkmus 15). His secure, tranquil residence is separated from the vulnerable city streets. But he also depends on the goods that lie

outside of his property. When the copper rain begins to completely detonate the city, there is a chilling moment when the protagonist runs out to his terrace to observe the unimaginable. He exclaims in excitement, “Y decidí ver eso todo lo posible, pues era, a no dudarlo, un espectáculo singular. ¡Una lluvia de cobre incandescente! ¡La ciudad en llamas! Valía la pena” (68). The annihilation of the city and its masses converts into entertainment for the protagonist.

The contraposition between the street and the home reveals Decadent roots in Lugones’s *modernista* work and uncovers distinct perspectives about the role of the individual within the modern social context. The Decadent influence crystallizes in various meanings related to science, writing and psychology. González explains that the metaphor of the interior was a “defensive response to the challenges posed by scientific discourse at the end of the nineteenth century” (37). The bedroom, the office and the home converted into a refuge, distanced from the disharmony and chaos of progressive society. Also, foreign objects, tranquil gardens and luxurious fabrics sharply contrasted with the representations of filth of base society. At the same time, the word, “decadence” was also attached to notions of progress, elitism and illness. González paraphrases Susan Sontag to explain that “the use of illness as a metaphor for social injustice in modern political rhetoric harks back to the French Revolution, but it is in the second half of the nineteenth century when ideas such as ‘decadence’ and ‘sickness’ are firmly joined together when talking about society and culture” (38)<sup>14</sup>.

Lugones complicates this connection in “La lluvia de fuego”. The house is a refuge and visible physical divider from the masses and the city. However, the refuge fails to save the protagonist from imminent death, and his lifestyle appears to be

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<sup>14</sup> González quotes page 78 of Sontag’s book, *Illness as Metaphor*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

dependent upon the production of goods and services provided to him by the common people. At the end of the story, when the protagonist begins to smell that the copper rain has started to invade the basement, he expresses his satisfaction with himself. He says, “La singularidad de la situación, lo enorme del fenómeno, y sin duda también el regocijo de haberme salvado, único entre todos, cohibían mi dolor reemplazándolo por una curiosidad sombría” (71). Ironically, of course, the natural power of the copper rain does not differentiate him from anyone else. The supposed physical and mental separation is a product of his imagination.

Just like the man himself, Lugones’s literary and political legacies were constructed on the basis of incongruency. Known for his constantly shifting political beliefs, and for being one of the most polemic writers of his time, Lugones has always found himself in the center of conflict. He has been criticized for his formal style and his exaggerated use of *modernista* techniques. On the other hand, he has been praised for his innovation and courage to challenge literary and social boundaries. Lugones’s precarious social position is personified by his protagonists and poetic voices, who struggle with forces beyond their control. The illusion of male authority is broken down in sexual imagery and macabre themes. Picaresque tendencies are revealed in antithetical and exaggerated representations of man and woman, interiors and exteriors, and victimization and power, which reveal the dissonant nature of the time, and parallel both the rupture and confluence between fiction and reality.

## CHAPTER 4

### PICARESQUE LIBERTY AND GENDERED INFERIORITY

The modern city is a privileged space where the concrete and symbolic forms of a culture in the process of transformation are organized in the dense network of a stratified society (Sarlo, 18).

In his book, The Image of Man, George L. Mosse establishes a correlation between the perception of gender and culminating socio-political events that began to develop in the eighteenth century. He relates the construction of modern masculinity to decisive historic moments, focusing specifically on the period of modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century- the same time in which Arlt and Lugones make their mark on the social and literary scene in Buenos Aires. According to Mosse, on the surface, modern society appears to be powerful, stable and progressive. At the same time, the image of modern man conceptualizes ability, knowledge and strength. He asserts that modern stereotypes of gender, which were inextricably linked to the identity of the nation, evolved from the standards of manliness and femininity established in early modern times (17-21). The “aristocratic ideals” of value, which were determined by birth and lineage, developed into the “moral imperatives” that shaped cultural discourse of bourgeois society at the turn of the century (18).

The period of capitalist expansion in Argentina between 1880 and 1930 is commonly characterized as one of crisis. Mass immigration contributed to unprecedented urban growth in the capital and transformed the language and

demographics of the city. European and North American investments boosted the economy and elevated Argentina's positioning in an expanding global market, but also magnified social tensions at home. European political and social ideologies influenced the working class immigrant population, as well as the Argentine elite, whose fiscal health depended upon foreign credit (Winn 187). Progress and change prompted conflict between newly formed political parties who all sought to enact their vision of modernity and the distribution of power in the growing city. These changes also fostered the desire to create public policy which reflected congruent cultural ideals and values<sup>15</sup>. Masiello notes that the expansion of the city "gave way to a fusion of identities and boundaries", and a modernity that was contingent upon "multiplicity...and contradictory tendencies that refused containment" (167). At the same time, political and social upheaval prompted a widespread fixation on the "the identity of a national subject", which had historically been portrayed through gendered representations. For example, in the nineteenth century, after the wars of independence, prosperity was conceptualized through the representation of the family, and authority and order through that of the patriarch (Masiello 18). Images of women were often tied to "the motherly qualities of the nation", and its traditional ideals, while those of men represented strength, "self-control and moderation" (Mosse 9). The latter half of the nineteenth century was characterized by "the struggle to define Argentina's identity between two opposed visions of the nation...: one stressing the 'civilizing' influence of Europe, the other defending a notion of American autonomy" (Winn 91). The desire to establish a national identity and a recognizable socio-political hierarchy, was intensified in the period of

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<sup>15</sup> Winn's chapter, "The Peril's of Progress", Sabato's, "Introduction", and Masiello's pages 165-169 describe how the Argentine elite attempted to create an image of national unity to the world, and specifically to their foreign investors.

urbanization, when prosperity was most visible in the capital city, enjoyed by a small population, and was the result of urban immigrant labor and production from the rural interior.

The problems inherent to nation development and identity become evident in the language of the time. Anderson describes nation- building, as involving the process of creating an “‘imagined community’, invented by those in power to celebrate their values within the culture of the state” (3, Anderson quoted in Masiello). Masiello explains the link between nation-building and language as “the desire to consolidate a mythical center (as) a unifying force” (3). Sarlo links urbanization, national identity and language: “The street is certainly proof of change, but it may also become the site where these changes are turned into literary myth (Sarlo, Borges 9)” She notes that physical indicators of transformation, such as new buildings, roads, restaurants, theaters and banking centers magnify rapid progress, but also create more visible boundaries between social groups that have or lack access to the city’s new offerings, and as such, become sites of “celebrat(ion) and judge(ment)” (9, 12).

What we find here, therefore, is a culture defined by the principle of heterogeneity which, in the urban space, makes differences extremely visible... If the quick road to fortune makes the city the site for a utopia of upward mobility, the possibility for anonymity converts it, into the preferred, indeed the only possible, place for the *flaneur*, for the conspirator (who lives his solitude in the midst of other men), for the erotic voyeur who is electrified by the gaze of the unknown woman who passes by. Vice and the breaking of social moral codes are celebrated as the glory or the stigma of the city. Public space loses its sacredness; everyone invades it, everyone considers the street as the common place, where wares are displayed, creating desires which no longer recognize the limitations imposed by hierarchy. (Sarlo, Borges 12-13)

So, on the one hand, the lines are blurred between the public and the private, and social stigmas are amplified. On the other hand, the dense city populace allows for a

spirit of anonymity, which relaxes the individual's moral obligation to society. The link between the identity of the nation and that of the individual, and the extent to which literary and social subjects contribute to or detract from the formation of the national narrative, is inherent to picaresque studies. This paper aims to identify picaresque elements that emerge in gendered representations in Roberto Arlt's novel, Los siete locos (1929). Gender is only one of multiple factors that shape identity, but one which seems to create a concrete frame of reference from which to make social comparisons. Comparisons based on external appearance are culturally driven by the established stereotypes, which are the products of the values and belief systems esteemed by those in power (Mosse 23). This study also intends to show how the writer mediates value and identity in a time when the nation was in the process of defining itself and its values politically, socially, culturally and globally.

Some of the archetypal characteristics of the original pícaro are reborn in Erdosain Remo, the protagonist of Los siete locos, published by Roberto Arlt in 1929. Arlt was a product of the culture and life about which he wrote. His works do not reflect the greatness of the modern city, but rather the plight of the masses, specifically the anomalous elements of base society. Erdosain is one such representation. The novelistic structure is not consistent with the traditional model of the genre. However the protagonist is defined by his egotistical nature, engages in delinquent behavior and constantly shifts between states of victimization and power.

The plot revolves around a group of destitute criminals from Buenos Aires who conspire the usurpation of the government and the brainwashing of the masses. Their goal is to create a new society, funded by brothels and created on the basis of a lie. The

novel begins when Erdosain is accused of stealing six hundred pesos from his employer and given twenty four hours to return the money. On the same day, he discovers that his wife, Elsa, plans to leave him for another man. Erdosain sets out in search of a loan, asking for help from various shady characters in the city. The “Rufián Melancólico”, a pimp and friend of his acquaintance, the “Astrólogo”, loans him the money. Meanwhile, the protagonist is planning to kill his ex-wife’s cousin, Barsut, who has acquired 20,000.00 dollars through an inheritance. The idea is to start the society with the stolen money, and to continue funding it through a string of brothels, managed by the “Rufián Melancólico”. Subject to the authority of the Astrólogo, Erdosain and the other “locos” believe in the probability of the mission, though never develop it into a concrete plan.

The plot unfolds between the monologues and dialogues of the seven main characters, related to the reader through an omniscient narrator. The author’s and commentator’s footnotes function as reliable sources of information, though lack credibility. The multitude of manipulative voices disorients the reader, and emphasizes the fragmented structure of the novel. Erdosain’s egoism ties him to the original pícaros. Like Lazarillo and Pablos, he lacks value in his social environment. The state of conditional liberty in which he lives, connects him to the socio-economic and political context of Buenos Aires in the early twentieth century.

The narrator follows Erdosain, as he aimlessly wanders the urban streets and contemplates his pathetic circumstances. His shameful financial state is reflected in his disheveled appearance and his compromised health. His desire to change the course of his life is channeled into impulsive behaviors that push him into deeper humiliation. He is self- absorbed, like the original pícaro. His egoism paradoxically compensates for his

lack of social identity. In the space of his imagination, of bogus stories and empty rhetoric, Erdosain assumes roles of authority and acquires virtues of purity and morality. Maravall explains that “the falsification of virtue” by the pícaro, not only relates to his longing for material goods, but also for creating social validity (534, 535). His primary objective is social “distinction”, yet he consistently proves himself incapable of internalizing any intrinsic feature of any one identity (534, 535). Erdosain exhibits this characteristic throughout the novel, but his superficial nature becomes particularly evident when he spends the night with Hipólita, the lame prostitute.

In the chapter, “Dos Almas”, Hipólita arrives to Erdosain’s apartment in search of help. With her husband recently incarcerated, she doesn’t know where to go. Erdosain is pleasantly surprised to so easily encounter a woman in need, but his emotions throughout the night fluctuate between attraction, anger, self-pity and disgust. In one moment, he tells Hipólita about a visit to a brothel, when his shame overcame his “terrible urgencia carnal” and he suddenly felt the need to “hacer [una] obra de misericordia” (164). He describes his entrance into the room of a sixteen year old prostitute, with “...ojos celestes y una sonrisa colegiala”. Instead of undressing, he places her money “encima del lavatorio” and insists that she remain dressed in her cover-up (165). Erdosain explains to Hipólita that he wanted to leave the prostitute with “el más lindo recuerdo que se [le] ocurrió... entrar y no tocar[la]” (165). Supposedly the madame intervined and threatened him, but not before the young girl “tom[ara] los cinco pesos y los entr[ara] en su bostillo” (165). Of the reaction of the prostitute, Erdosain says, “los brazos se anudaban en mi cuello... me miró todavía a los ojos y me besó en la boca...y cuando yo estaba en el umbral me dijo: ‘Adiós hombre noble’” (165). Erdosain contrives the story to appear

honorable to Hipólita in a moment in which he feels attracted to her. His manipulation takes form in the exaggerated detail:

...tengo la esperanza de que algún día nos encontraremos...vaya a saber en dónde. Pero ella, Lucienne, no se olvidará nunca de mí. Pasarán los tiempos, rodará por los prostíbulos más miserables...se volverá monstruosa, pero yo siempre estaré en ella como me había propuesto, como el recuerdo más precioso de su vida. (165)

Mosse explains that “normative manliness”, as a representation of “settled, bourgeois society” was conceptualized in cultural discourse through acts of “restraint”, “self-control”, “will-power”, and “empathy” (94). Erdosain temporarily acquires the characteristics of an ideal, stereotypical male. By representing himself as “misericordioso”, he figuratively elevates himself to an authoritative position, capable of granting charity to an inferior.

Later in the night, however, after having divulged his plan to murder and steal the 20,000 from Barsut, he asserts his pseudo-authority through fear and manipulation. He tells Hipólita of his need to “negar” God “para siempre”, and to “romper el débil hilo que [lo] unía a la caridad divina” (174). He refers to himself as “montruoso” and portrays himself as ethically and morally unconscionable. Unapologetically, he describes his perverse conduct towards a nine year old girl. He says, “Empezamos a charlar... Lentamente, sin poderme contener, desvié la conversación hacia un tema obsceno...más con prudencia...sondeando el terreno” (173). He continues to explain how his private chat on a public bench does not go unnoticed, adding, “... y yo, despacio, en ese momento debía tener una cara de criminal...fíjese que desde la garita de los guardagujas dos cambistas me miraban con atención, le revelé el misterio sexual, incitándola a que se dedicara a corromper a sus amiguitas...” (173). Erdosain relishes in the idea of inciting a

reaction in the bystanders who are observing him. His deviant, self-serving behavior, at the expense of an innocent child, momentarily satiates his desire to claim a recognizable identity, even if it's a perverse one.

Other times, the protagonist fantasizes about unleashing the socio-economic potential that lies dormant in his true identity. He believes his appearance to be so shameful that it could cause a “‘millonario melancólico y taciturno’”, who “‘lo est[á] examinando por los gemelos de teatro’” to send for him. The millionaire, emotionally moved by his “‘semblante compungido y meditativo’”, decides to rescue him from his “‘sufrimiento de tantos años’” (23). He supplies him money to construct a “‘laboratorio de electrotécnica’” where he can work on his inventions and study “‘los rayos Beto, el transporte inalámbrico de la energía, y...las ondas electromagnéticas’” (23). Focalizing through the protagonist's thoughts, the narrator adds, “‘cuando él pensaba que el ‘millonario melancólico y taciturno’ podía observarlo, ... no les miraba el trasero a las criadas, fingiendo estar inmovilizado por la atención que prestaba a un gran trabajo interior’” (24). Whether it is fear, love, pity, sexual excitement or disgust, Erdosain is specific in describing the reactions he desires, yet inconsistent in the types of roles he assumes. His blatant hypocrisy signals his level of insignificance and his total lack of identity as an individual.

Erdosain's identity is constructed on the basis of a lie, and it is this character trait that most parallels the elements of textual manipulation. The original picaresque novels feign autobiography and manipulate the reader through the interplay of naivety and retrospect from the perspective of the child/adult narrator/author. In Los siete locos, the shifting focalization of the narrator reveals inconsistencies in Erdosain's representations

of reality, which further undermine his identity and cast doubt on his credibility. For example, when Erdosain and Hipólita spend the night together, the protagonist temporarily assumes a child-like persona. With his head on her lap, he begins to confess his fears and his unrealized dreams of becoming an inventor. He believes that Hipólita is engrossed in their lengthy conversation. Though she appears to be engaged, she is secretly disgusted by his weakness. She thinks: “los débiles, inteligentes e inútiles; los otros brutos y aburridos” (166) But when Erdosain opens up about Barsut’s pending assassination and the prospect of 20,000 pesos, Hipólita quickly regains interest, while maintaining an unaffected semblance. She thinks to herself, “No cab[e] duda. Aquel hombre est[á] loco...Con este imbécil es necesario proceder prudentemente” (173). She waits for an opportune moment to establish a more intimate connection with him. When he begins to reveal his most perverse and atrocious thoughts, Hipólita strategically falls to her knees and begins to kiss his hands. She exclaims, “Deja...déjame que te bese esas pobres manos. Sos el hombre más desdichado de la tierra (...) quiero besarte los pies(...) Sos el hombre más desgraciado de la tierra. ¡Cuánto sufriste, Dios santo! ¡Qué grande que sos...qué grande es tu alma!” (174). Following her passionate response to Erdosain, the focalization shifts again, in the form of a footnote. A message to the implicit reader appears at the bottom of the page. It says, “Nota del comentador: Diríale más tarde Hipólita al Astrologo: ‘Me arrodille frente a Erdosain, en el momento en que se me ocurrió la idea de extorsionarlo a usted, aprovechando la confesión del proyecto del homicidio que me hizo él’” (174).

Erdosain fools himself into believing that he can fool Hipólita. Hipólita believes that she can manipulate Erdosain into co- conspiring against Barsut. Similarly, the

narrator feigns credibility by shifting focalization and providing testimonial evidence in the form of misleading footnotes from the author and the commentator. The excessive layers of manipulation in the text call attention to the gap between actions and words and to the disconnection between representation and perception. The characters are reduced to their impulses and therefore disengaged from any of the moral or social constraints of normative society, but also perpetually rooted in its margins. It is within this sphere of relative liberty, that picaresque tendencies emerge and connect the novel to its real socio-historic context.

In the introduction to his book, The German Pícaro and Modernity: Between Underdog and Shape-Shifter, Malkmus explains that embedded in “issues of credibility...is also the question of why the modern picaresque is predominately the site for male gender negotiations and constructions...” (7). Drawing on studies of the picaresque by Guillén, Malkmus argues that the pícaro “is a figure who, confronted with conflicting role expectations, has to stage himself rhetorically within a given social framework”. In this way, the picaresque has always been “used as a tool for exploring the ambiguities of social roles, including gender roles” (7- 8). Sarlo explains that gendered power struggles in twentieth century Argentine literature, reflected the “obese[sion] por el problema de la época: el poder” (Modernidad 53). Masiello also connects “gender ambiguities” to periods of transition, specifically between “one form of government to another, or from a period of traditionalism to a more modernizing program” (8). When Arlt publishes Los siete locos in 1929, the “centralizing discourses” of Argentine culture were still being defined by the traditional value system of the elite oligarchs and nationalists, but were not representative of the majority of the population.

Accelerated change resulted in a surge of conflicting socio-political ideologies that converged with a bombardment of new forms of cultural expression and propaganda designed to both entertain and educate the masses. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, workers' strikes, political rebellion, anti-Semitic and anti-communist violence were not uncommon and served to highlight the marginalized side of economic development (Winn 111). The "peripheral" groups, like, anarchists and socialists, criticized capitalism and "protest[ed]" against the "'bourgeois' character of (...) of 'progress'" (Winn 111). The expanding middle class "favored political reform" but also "aspired to join the elite, not overthrow it" (112). At the center of political strife were debates on the distribution of wealth, subsidized housing, women's suffrage, the legalization of divorce, education and prostitution (Rock 187). Out of necessity, more women were transitioning out of the home and into the workforce. As more women became earners for their families, rates of male unemployment increased too (Masiello 170). Prostitution, child labor and human trafficking rates also soared during the first twenty years of the century (Guy 168). As different political parties clamored to gain authority and as economic conditions made it less feasible for individuals to conform to convention, dominant culture placed more emphasis on social stratification as a means to define national identity. The public was inundated with imagery and literature that debated the role of women, capitalism, sexuality, hygiene and the home. Gender became politicized as a way to push public policy and enact reform (167). Mosse explains that socially marginalized individuals "provided a countertype that reflected, as in a convex mirror, the reverse of the social norm..." (82). Normative society could not define itself effectively without images that inverted the values that they upheld (82). Immigrant

women, working mothers, prostitutes, and even the “nouveau -riche” were “perceived as a threat”, but also as a visual confirmation of the existence of a hierarchy that bound them to their social identity and value (Masiello 167).

Erdosain, as a male protagonist, epitomizes dysfunction and failure. He doesn't have a job, a home, a bank account, or a wife. His sex life, outside of brothels or masturbation, is inexistent. He behaves erratically and lacks any sense of moral obligation. His nervous nature imbues him with effeminacy, another characteristic that widens the gap between his identity and the masculine ideal. The female characters that populate the novel are equally impaired. Hipólita is a disabled prostitute. His ex-wife is an unhappy adulteress. His mother is absent. Outside of the main female characters are exploited children, adolescents and imagined bodies that inhabit trains, streets, whore houses and the perverted dreams of the protagonist. They represent weakness, immorality, greed, servitude and perverted desire. Erdosain, like the other main characters, is incapable of overcoming the social limitations of his identity through his actions, and therefore, is reduced to his rhetoric. Malkmus explains this picaresque tendency as the representation of the “human experience of modernity”, where the individual is a manifestation of both “disenfranchisement and self-empowerment” (187). Like the original pícaros, he exhibits modern characteristics of innovation and industry through manipulation, while simultaneously epitomizes “social ostracism” (187).

Maravall explains that the picaro “asimil[a] la importancia cultural atribuido al objetivo sin interiorizar con la misma intensidad las normas institucionales que rigen las vías y los medios para conseguirlo” (427). Citing an example from El Buscón, Maravall reminds us that Pablos expresses his desire to “profesar la virtud”, rather than ‘poseer’,

‘merecer’ o ‘alcanzar’. In the chapters, “Discurso del astrólogo” (102) and “La farsa” (114), the idea of having a title is so seductive to Erdosain, that he naively believes in the Astrólogo’s improbable mission, “inspirada (por) un bandido llamado Abdala-Aben-Maimum” (108). The Astrólogo explains to Erdosain how Maimum’s followers “mentían descaradamente a todo el mundo” and “no creían en absolutamente nada” (108). He adds, “Nosotros le imitaremos. Seremos bolcheviques, católicos, fascistas, ateos, militaristas, en diversos grados de iniciación” (108). He assigns Erdosain the title, “Jefe de Industria” (115). Erdosain, upon hearing and pronouncing his new name, describes “un placer físico... sintiendo la potencial de su personalidad flamante” (117). He begins to imagine how he will assume an “irónico” expression during the upcoming meeting of “Jefes”, while “los cuatros secretarios con papeles en las manos y las lumas tras de la oreja se acercar[án] a consultarle, mientras que en un rincón, con los sombreros en las manos, inclinadas las cabezas canosas, estar[án] los delegados de los obreros” (95). So swept away by the vision of the future, Erdosain is unaware of his real value in the Astrólogo’s scheme, which is to do the footwork in Barsut’s murder and serve as the scapegoat for the robbery. Even though the prospect of social distinction is contingent upon the Astrólogo’s pseudo- authority, Erdosain’s title figuratively and temporarily elevates his value. Erdosain is like the future masses of people that Barsut wants to brainwash- “tiene la necesidad urgente de creer en algo” (115). This exemplifies what Malkmus might describe as the performative nature of the modern pícaro, who has the “narcissistic task of creating [his] own existence” and “maintaining belief in his own enterprise” (186-187). When his “satirical performance of selfhood” is successful, his egoism increases (187). When it fails, he epitomizes humiliation and disgrace. The

variety of values represented in his pseudo-roles emphasizes the distance between Erdosain's fantasies and his reality. His attempts to transcend the boundaries of his imagination, or apply the power he derives there to his real life, are in vain. He is paradoxically liberated and paralyzed by the defining constructs of his social environment. He robs his employer, perverts minors, throws his money away in brothels and deceives his co-conspirators. He is socially unaccounted for, and therefore, is free to act in accord with his erratic impulses. But his actions result from his desire to separate himself from the masses of unknowns, where his behavior goes unnoticed.

The novel does not adhere to the structural criteria of the original picaresque novels. However, the social behavior and identity of the protagonist expose the paradoxical aspects of a society in the process of modernization. Masiello describes the twentieth century "social subject" as "alienated, "indecisive", or as a "self-divided", a figure who is "caught between traditional forms of representation and a modernizing emerging capitalism" (187). The pícaro personifies the social implications of this ideological conflict and the disparity between the projection of and perception of social identity. Vacillating between "freedom and ostracism", social mobility and marginality, "empowerment and disenfranchisement", the pícaro inverts and debases the idea of a "national subject" or identity built on the basis of congruent social ideals and values.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

In his article, “Rhetoric of Representation”, Smith argues it is “reductive” to attempt to identify the socio-political or religious origins that inspire the picaresque style (107). “Social circumstance does not ‘produce’ writing in any direct sense. The very variety and proliferation of picaresque texts (...) is proof enough of this perhaps unpalatable fact” (107). While many agree with the New Historicist perspective of Smith, innumerable publications continue to debate the ways in which the novels reveal truths about the social realities of poverty and repression in Early Modern Iberia. Maravall dedicates 800 pages to his analysis of the genre, from a socio-historical perspective, yet he affirms that literature does not create a “retrato de la sociedad”, but rather a “testimonio que hay que analizar e interpretar (14). The questions that continue to plague the genre always return to the grey area that exists between fiction and reality, culture and writing. Friedman notes how autobiography, particularly fictionalized autobiography, emphasizes the distance between “observation and expression...world and word” and the “distance between life and art” (183, 184). This thesis does not attempt to close those gaps or resolve the irresolvable. Instead, it explores picaresque behavior and identity in various works, as evidence of literary and socio-ideological rupture in prevailing belief systems. The first part of this study is dedicated to the Spanish picaresque tradition and focuses on the universal qualities of the literary figure and genre, as well as the pícaros socially- specific nature. The introductory chapter establishes the historical context of

Early Modern Spain, as feudalism waned and a bourgeois state began to emerge. Though Spain had achieved unprecedented global power, the monarchy had overextended itself financially, militaristically, and territorially. This study looks at the specific issues that compromised the social order that marginalizes the pícaro. It also shows how he exposes and takes advantage of the instability that defined the era. Picaresque literature illuminates the problem of appearances in Early Modern Spain, and in doing so, introduces new ways of defining value, in relation to money, culture, and the individual. Drawing from Maravall's interpretation of Baroque culture, as well as his adaptation of Durkheim's theories of deviation, anomie, and individualism, the second chapter connects large-scale crisis to human behavior and social identity. A comparative study of Lazarillo De Tormes and El Buscón examines how the paradoxical traits of the pícaro connect him to a conflictive environment, which releases him from any moral obligation to society, but also hinders his ability to access opportunity. Both Lazarillo and Pablos epitomize low-birth marginality and the absurdity of social advancement through individual effort. Yet their desire to change the course of their pre-determined life through self-promotion reflects a modernizing mentality that emerges as the social parameters of a seigniorial society deteriorate.

The first half of this thesis shows how picaresque literature exposes the socio-ideological contradictions that mark the beginning of the decline of Imperial Spain, and how individuals react when dominant culture is trapped between its mythical past and an uncertain future. The second half of this thesis transitions out of the pre-mercantile circumstances of Early Modern Iberia, to focus on the literature produced in Argentina in the early twentieth century. While there are few, if any, clear comparisons to be made

between the two historical periods and regions, both are marked by the social implications of rapid progress and expansion. The introductory chapter outlines the tensions that arise as a result of the economic and demographic development that occurs between 1880 and 1930, when Argentina enters the global market and transforms itself into one of the most important cultural hubs of Latin America. This chapter also touches on the relationship between language and nation-building, as well as the influence of propaganda in determining cultural values. The third and fourth chapters examine picaresque tendencies that emerge in gendered representations in the works of Leopoldo Lugones and Roberto Arlt. In his book, The Image of Man, Mosse connects the representation of gender to the power and identity of the state. He shows how “aristocratic ideals”, that were established in early modern times, evolve into the “moral imperatives” that shape cultural discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (18). The third chapter examines the relationship between the image of gender in society and picaresque behavior in the *modernista* works of Leopoldo Lugones. Malkmus notes how the pícaro paradoxically confronts modernity by shifting between states of “self-representation” and “self-concealment” or “self-exploration” and “self-assertion” (186). In Lugones’ poem, “á Histeria”, the masculine poetic voice struggles with a stereotypical feminine disease. Antithetical representations of man and nature convey confusion, as well as undermine the authoritative voice with representations of shame and failure. In his short story, “La lluvia de fuego”, the protagonist struggles with extreme environmental circumstances. His lack of control emphasizes his individualistic and egotistical nature. Though he is not the prototypical, marginalized pícaro, he is considered a social countertype. His picaresque behavior uncovers implicit social themes

and connects the work to its period.

In the fourth chapter, I argue that Erdosain Remo, the protagonist of Arlt's novel, Los siete locos (1929), exhibits the fundamental characteristics of the early pícaro and epitomizes the dilemma of the marginalized social subject in modern times. While he is desperate to create the image of social conformity, he fails to internalize any of the values upheld by normative society. At a time when gender helped to solidify social hierarchies and define national identity, Erdosain is deficient in those qualities recognized as constructing the masculine ideal. Erdosain is incapable of overcoming the social limitations of his identity through his actions, and is therefore, reduced to his rhetoric, or what Malkmus characterizes as the modern picaresque performance (188).

The pícaro, according to Malkmus, epitomizes the tension between the “visible actions of a human being as he appears in society” and his “invisible motivations”. He exposes “rifts and ruptures rather than congruence (...), (and) the split between inner and outer man, between reflection and action” (8). Similar to the pícaros, who depend on deceptive measures to validate themselves socially, the texts are also based on embellishment and manipulation. The pícaro thrives in the gaps between representation and perception, myth and reality. He fails to internalize the characteristics of any one ideology or identity, yet in the process, succeeds in diminishing the integrity of those vacillating ideals on which cultures are based.

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