

2017

Piglia and Russia: Russian Influences in Ricardo Piglia's *Nombre Falso*

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PIGLIA AND RUSSIA: RUSSIAN INFLUENCES IN RICARDO PIGLIA'S *NOMBRE
FALSO*

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

Comparative Literature

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2017

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DEDICATION

To my Mother, who taught me to read and modeled a love of learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of so many dear teachers and friends. Dr. Wenger, you showed me that literature could be not just interesting but an important guide for everyday living. Dr. Gentry and Dr. Chris, you challenged my thinking and broadened my vision. Marc and Dale, you infected me with your passion for the Russian language, and taught me so much about life as well. Dr. Kalb and Dr. Ogden, you gave me such an excellent introduction to Russian literature, and have encouraged me so much throughout my studies. I would not be here without your support. Dr. Rajca, you stretched me and challenged me to consider new ideas, and you also introduced me to Piglia's work. Gina, thank you for standing by me through thick and through thin, these past eleven years and for your faithful encouragement with this project. Mouhamed, thank you for your daily encouragement and love. Life with you is an adventure, and now that this project is complete, I look forward to what comes next!

ABSTRACT

In his work *Nombre falso* (*False Name*, 1975), leading Argentinian writer Ricardo Piglia (1941-2017) presents a double tale composed of the story of a search, and of the supposed results of the search: the short story *Luba*. According to the narrator, the short story is written by influential Argentinian author Roberto Arlt (1900-1942), but it is in fact a distorted copy of Russian writer Leonid Andreev's (1871-1919) *The Dark* (*T'ma*, 1907). Piglia mixes real life with falsification to create his work, changing elements of the life of Arlt and modifying Andreev's story. In this work, I revisit Piglia's text, paying close attention to the relationship between the prologue and the short story *Luba*, as well as the contrast between this text and Andreev's original. While previous analyses of Piglia's text focus on perspectives from Latin-American studies, here *Luba* is contrasted with *The Dark*, as I examine the two texts using a Russian historical, political and literary perspective. I argue that Andreev's context influences the reading of Piglia's work and that the differences between the original and the copy offer a new and unique perspective on community versus individuality in literature.

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since Argentinian author and literary critic Ricardo Piglia (1941-2017) published his collection of short stories,¹ *Nombre falso* (False Name, 1975), critics have puzzled over the final story, titled identically to the whole book, *Nombre falso*. The story is composed of two parts, the first *Homenaje a Roberto Arlt* (Homage to Roberto Arlt) and an appendix, the short story *Luba*. In *Homenaje a Roberto Arlt*, the narrator describes his project to collect unpublished stories by Roberto Arlt (1900-1942), one of Argentina's leading authors, influential on contemporary Latin-American literature. *Luba* is the reward for his search, the supposed final work of Arlt before his death, but is in fact a work largely taken from Leonid Andreev's (1871-1919) story *The Dark* (T'ma, 1907).

Many have interpreted Piglia's work as deliberate plagiarism, arguing that the text is a defense of intertextuality, a challenge to orthodox conceptions of authorship or a critique of the economics of art. And yet, few have considered the numerous Russian references in the work, both throughout *Homenaje* and in the form of *Luba*, whose origins have been noted, but not adequately explored. This study will seek to explore Piglia's references to Russian literary and political figures and the reason he chose to use a Russian text in his own work. It will clarify how Piglia modified Andreev's *The Dark* in his own work *Luba*, and how both texts are themselves an illustration of Piglia's view

¹ This is Piglia's second collection of short stories. The collection includes "El fin del viaje" ("The End of the Ride"), "El Laucha Benítez Cantaba Boleros" ("Mousy Benitez Sang Boleros"), "La caja de vidrio" ("The Glass Box"), "La loca y el Relato del Crimen" ("The Old Lady and the Crime"), "El precio del amor" ("The Price of Love"), and "Nombre falso."

of literature. By examining the interconnection with Russia in Piglia's *Nombre falso*, one can gain greater appreciation for Piglia's elusive text and more fully understand his belief in the communal nature of literature.

Nombre falso at first appears to be a description from real life. The narrator in *Homenaje* shares his name with the author, Ricardo Piglia. Like the author, Piglia-the-narrator² is a literary critic and writer. In searching for Arlt's unpublished works, he posts advertisements in the newspaper, offering to pay for any works contributed. He tells of his long hours in Argentina's national library, laboring over books and research as he prepares his text. Martina, supposed to be one of Arlt's friends and past landlord, brings him a notebook, in which Arlt wrote ideas for a novel, together with chemical formulas, presumably for his experiments in making rubber stockings. Between the pages of the notebook, Piglia-the-narrator finds letters written to and from Arlt's friend, Kostia.³ Among general conversations about literature and Arlt's attempts to invent the stockings, the letters reveal that Arlt sent Kostia a manuscript for a novel he was writing before his death. Arlt's notebook is missing some pages, which the narrator believes contain the manuscript of the unpublished novel. Hoping to find the work in Kostia's possession, Piglia-the-narrator travels to meet Kostia, who admits he has the manuscript. The narrator pays Kostia in exchange for a typed copy of the novel, only for Kostia to return the money a few days later, with word that he has published the story under his own name, and titled it *Nombre falso: Luba*. Piglia-the-narrator fails to understand what would

² In order to distinguish between the two Piglia's I will refer to the narrator in *Homenaje* as Piglia-the-narrator and to the author as Piglia throughout this work.

³Though Kostia is fictional, critic Rita Gnutzmann suggests he is based on Italo Constantini, who was one of Arlt's actual friends.

compel Kostia to act in such a way, but Martina, who has found yet another box of Arlt's, revisits him. The box contains the missing pages of the notebook, the manuscript for the story, which the narrator attaches as an appendix, *Luba*.

Luba tells the story of an anarchist revolutionary who seeks refuge in a brothel in order to escape from the police. He spends the night with a prostitute named Luba, discussing ideas of purity and goodness. He looks down on her for her way of life, priding himself on his own self-sacrifice for his cause, but she rebukes his arrogance, and convinces him that it is shameful to be pure. In the end, the two escape the brothel to return to the band of revolutionaries, presumably to aid them in their revolutionary cause. Though *Luba* was not written by Arlt, it closely resembles both his linguistic and literary style and the themes he writes about—crime, prostitution and social revolution.

Many have assumed the details of the narrator's search for Arlt's unpublished works are from real life, and that *Luba* is, as the narrator claims, the final work of Roberto Arlt before his death. Piglia-the-narrator records so many seemingly accurate details in *Homenaje*, and *Luba* is such a persuasive imitation of Arlt's style, language and thematic elements that many critics have accepted *Homenaje* as a true account, attributing the story *Luba* to Roberto Arlt. Sergio Waisman, who first translated *Nombre falso* into English describes how even Arlt's daughter was fooled by the story. "When *Nombre falso* was first published in Argentina, Mirta Arlt, Roberto Arlt's daughter, telephoned Piglia to tell him that he did not have the right to publish a newly discovered story of her father's without her permission, and wanted to know where he had found it" (Waisman, 208). But as critic Rita Gnutzmann notes, though many of the dates, names and correspondence attributed to Arlt are factual, much of the carefully crafted *Homenaje*

is a playful distortion, a literary hide-and-seek. These deliberate errors in *Homenaje* lead some, such as Gnutzmann, to question the supposed Arltian authorship of *Luba* and the aim of the whole text.

A close reading reveals multiple mistakes and discrepancies. Piglia-the-narrator exhibits a lack of skill in researching and accurately conveying the simplest of details, casting doubt on his abilities as an author and critic. Arlt's supposed landlord is first named Andres Martina (Piglia, 91) only to be called Martinez a page later (92), but changed back to Martina in his final appearance (129). Piglia-the-narrator first claims that Arlt wrote in his notebook between the 2nd and 30th of March, 1942 (91), but later says it was between the 3rd and the 27th (109). In seeking to establish when Arlt may have last visited Kostia, the narrator states that Holy Week in 1942 was between the 22nd and the 25th of April (113), but a look at Latin-American church calendars confirms that in fact, Holy Week in 1942 took place between the 2nd and 5th of April (callendariovenezuela.com and mihellin.es). Piglia-the-narrator even confuses the month in which Arlt died, claiming it was in the month of June (113), when in reality he died in July!

Rita Gnutzmann has noted other discrepancies in the text, along with truthful details, which give the text at first look an appearance of validity. While Piglia-the-narrator mentions Arlt's essay *Las ciencias ocultas*, which at the time was not published in a book, he also names several essays which Gnutzmann says cannot be found among any of Arlt's works: "Un perro andulaz," "Genios de Buenos Aires," and "Alegría fúnebre" (Piglia, 90) (Gnutzmann, 438). At the same time, two of the works he describes as unpublished Gnutzmann claims are among those most often published: "La inutilidad

de los libros” and “La terrible sinceridad” (Piglia, 90) (Gnutzmann, 438). He also mixes up the dates for the publication of *Separación feroz*, and provides a false name for the editor of another text. In addition, though the notes attributed to Arlt are written in his style, these ideas were not expressed by him in such explicit detail; however, these ideas are similar to a vein of thought to which Piglia himself adhered. Piglia thus mixes truth with fiction, real life and writing (Gnutzmann, 438-439).

Gnutzmann sees these simple, seemingly careless errors in the text as a tribute not only to Arlt, but also to the prominent Argentinian story writer and poet Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), and to Juan Carlos Onetti (1909-1994), a leading Uruguayan novelist and friend of Arlt’s. These authors, similarly to Arlt, frequently mixed true and false details within the same text, blending real life and fiction. She believes *Luba* is not a text by Arlt, but a text by Piglia himself, written in similar fashion to both Arlt and Borges, his literary heroes, who frequently falsified dates, changed numbers and distorted names in their fiction. Gnutzmann also describes how the themes of the text (an encounter with a “pure” prostitute, surviving through visiting a brothel, a revolutionary fight and philosophical arguments) are those which anyone acquainted with Arlt’s work would recognize, pointing out that Piglia’s imitation of an Arltian text is effective. (Gnutzmann, 437-441). Piglia’s text invites readers to enter into a detective search, just like the narrator’s, in order to uncover the truth of the authorship of the text. “El lector a lo largo del texto persigue pistas como el detective-narrador Piglia, pero lo debe superar, ya que este lo engaña con la falsa solución de un cuento arltiano.” (Throughout the text the reader pursues clues just as the detective-narrator Piglia, but he must surpass him, for

he [the narrator] deceives him with the false solution of an Arltian tale) (Gnutzmann, 446).

Waisman, in his introduction to *Assumed Name*, also points out the mixture between truth, fiction and literary criticism. Similarly to Gnutzmann, Waisman believes the text is about the literary identity of Argentina. The book is “so much about the country in which it is written... so ingrained with issues of that country’s identity and its literary canon...” Argentina of the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s is “a country wrought with sociopolitical unrest, punctuated by military takeovers.” Piglia’s work in the midst of such an “environment of violence and death” is less about answering and more about raising questions to discuss a national literary identity. This analysis fits well with Gnutzmann’s, seeing the text as an invitation to join in the search for truth (*Assumed Name*, 1-3).⁴

A few critics, notably Ellen McCracken, have realized, due to Piglia’s hints at various points in *Homenaje*, that *Luba* is actually extremely close to Leonid Andreev’s story, *The Dark*, and have labeled *Luba* a plagiarism, calling it either a translation, or a near word-for-word account of Leonid Andreev’s tale. McCracken notes that Piglia’s “plagiarism” is well hidden: “Libraries have catalogued the story as Arlt’s, and scholars have either voiced uncertainty about its authorship or analyzed it as if it were indeed his” (1072). One such example McCracken gives is Aden Hayes, who wrote a book on Arlt’s stories and accepts Arlt as an author, devoting an essay to *Luba*. The Library of Congress

⁴ Waisman’s appears to be the only translation of *Nombre falso* into English, though the book was previously translated into Portuguese and French. Waisman attributes the short story “Luba” to Roberto Arlt, including his name in the copyright information, though in his introduction he does acknowledge that that the story is “allegedly” by Arlt. In *Borges and Translation: the Irreverence of the Periphery*, Waisman acknowledges that *Luba* is Piglia’s version of Andreev’s story.

also has the story catalogued as Arlt's, information that has been passed on to universities like the University of California and the University of Massachusetts (1081).⁵

In a later work, Waisman acknowledges Piglia's appropriation of Andreyev's text as plagiarism, arguing that it is appropriate for a homage to Arlt:

Piglia rewrites Andreyev's story in a language and style resembling Arlt's, signs Arlt's name to it, and includes it in his own book of fiction...Piglia practices a form of plagiarism reminiscent of the writer to whom he is paying homage. For the origin of 'Luba' is an appropriation, a case of creative plagiarism, best exemplified in Argentina by Arlt's troubled (and troubling) relationship to canonical literature (208).

McCracken believes Piglia is plagiarizing in order to challenge a societal structure which forbids the act as "transgressive." She terms his technique "metaplagerism," acknowledging that there are "slight" changes to Andreev's text, notably the ending in which the prostitute and the revolutionary escape rather than being arrested. "In contrast to the usual copying and stealing that we call plagiarism, metaplagerism here calls into question the concept of literary private property, as does the inflated documentation of Piglia's parodic scholarly essay, which claims the stolen text as the narrator's own discovery and property" (1072). She suggests that Piglia's is a post-modern text which requires post-modern readers who can understand what he is doing. Piglia demands a truly active reader, both hiding his "crime" and making it evident (1072).

⁵ Maria Mudrovic argues that many have noticed the connection between "Nombre falso" and "The Dark," yet fails to name these critics in her letter to McCracken. From my own research, I have not found many who do comment on this connection, and some who do, such as Bosteels, cite McCracken's work as their source. As far as I can determine, McCracken is the only critic to have actually read a copy of Andreev's text while studying "Nombre falso."

Like Gnutzmann, and Waisman, McCracken sees the primary message of Piglia's *Homenaje* as challenging ideas of authorship and originality, emphasizing the ever-present dependence of writers on works and authors from the past. But McCracken also believes that Piglia's text is a critique of capitalism, especially as it pertains to art. "Piglia suggests that it is literature's connection to the economic under capitalism that explains the crimes perpetrated here and that lies at the root of the uneasiness and doubts these details cause" (1077). In copying or "stealing" literature in order to be paid, literature is corrupted.

Leading critic Bruno Bosteels mentions the epigraph at the beginning of *Nombre falso*: "Solo se pierde lo que realmente no se ha tenido" (The only things that we lose are those that we never really had). Bosteels notes that though Piglia attributes this quote to Roberto Arlt, it is actually Borges', agreeing with Gnutzmann that the text honors both Arlt and Borges (Bosteels, 229). Piglia acknowledges this in his own diary, in notes for the novel, saying he will take Borges' quote but say that it is Arlt's (Piglia, "Los Años Felices" 411).

Bosteels elaborates on the idea of Piglia's text being a critique of the economics of literature, proposing a political reading of *Nombre falso*. He argues that intertextuality and originality are only one aspect of the text, and must be understood in connection with the political themes of the text (Bosteels, 230). He centers his essay on the influence of two figures on Piglia's understanding of art: Chinese communist revolutionary Mao Tse Tung (1893-1976), and Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), German poet and playwright influenced by Marxism. Bosteels describes *Nombre falso* as a "materialist critique of literary production" (232) and a critique of "the political economy of art" (237). The

extensive footnotes throughout *Homenaje* that Piglia-the-narrator attributes to Arlt which discuss “money, beauty and revolution” and also other publications of Piglia lead Bosteels to believe that Piglia is against art for art’s sake, and wants art to be useful.⁶

Certainly the political atmosphere and ideology of Piglia’s time are valuable for a correct interpretation of the text, as well as an understanding of his views on ownership and originality of literature. Piglia was drawn to Marxism and Socialism, and during his time as an editor and journalist for the journal *Los Libros*, he challenged literary criticism of the time, incorporating Marxist ideas in his book reviews (Benavides, Web). To fully appreciate both Piglia’s understanding of intertextuality and his historical-political ties to Brecht and Mao, it is important to explore why he chose a text from Andreev, and why he chose the particular text *The Dark*. In addition, while the connection between Piglia and Andreev has been acknowledged by a few critics, the significance of Piglia’s other numerous allusions to Russian literature and history in the *Homenaje* has not been adequately explored.

While the intertextuality is broad in Piglia, including various Argentine and European writers, Piglia is heavily influenced by Russia, both its historical-political and its literary heritage. Roberto Arlt, to whom Piglia-the-narrator is supposedly paying homage, was himself deeply influenced by leading Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) and had read Andreev’s works.⁷ Gnutzmann cites Dostoevsky as a known model for Arlt’s writings (Gnutzmann, 443), and Waisman describes Andreev as “one of

⁶ Bosteels’ argument is explored in more depth in chapter two of this thesis.

⁷ Critic Stasys Goštautas explores Dostoevsky’s influence on Arlt in his book *Buenos Aires y Arlt: (Dostoevsky, Martínez Estrada y Escalabrini Ortiz)*. He also makes mention of Andreev. See chapter one for a more detailed description of the relationship between these three authors.

the Russians whom Arlt admired and read—in translation, that is” (Waisman, 208). Furthermore, Andreev's story is an analogy of Piglia's argument for literature to be seen not as an original or pure product, but as a blending of ideas, past and present, which influence the author.

Throughout *Homenaje*, Piglia makes references to Russian authors and influential characters, often in the notes and letters attributed to Arlt. Piglia-the-narrator examines entries in Arlt's notebook where he brainstorms his novels, describing his protagonist as a sickly murderer who plans out the perfect crime (Piglia, 94). This character, Lettif, is described on the one hand as a pure young man, in part based on Dostoevsky's protagonist Prince Myshkin in his novel *Idiot* (The Idiot, 1968). On the other hand, the notes also describe Lettif as motivated by money, and in his cunning murder plot he bears more resemblance to Radion Raskolnikov from Dostoevsky's *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (Crime and Punishment, 1866). Raskolnikov is named numerous times either by Arlt or by his friend Kostia in their correspondence found between the pages of the notebook.

Piglia also introduces Russian political figures into *Homenaje*, such as the nineteenth-century anarchist revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin and the Bolshevik revolutionary Nikolai Bukharin (Piglia, 106, 109). Piglia mentions several other political figures as well, recorded in Arlt's supposed notebook, which includes descriptions of Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), head of the Bolshevik party during the 1917 Russian revolution, Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), and Russian author Maxim Gorky (1868-1936). Lenin's, Gorky's and Trotsky's ideas of art are discussed, and Gorky's in particular are critiqued by Piglia's Arlt in the notebook for what he sees as a failure to fully realize that art is not untouchable or to be held aloft, but something which

should be practical and which can be used by the people (Piglia 104-106). While Russian revolutionary leaders and writers certainly “used” art to further their political agendas or ideals, art was often limited to this specific purpose. Piglia’s Arlt presents a more extreme utilitarian belief, perhaps over-simplifying the actual views of these thinkers on art and beauty. This discussion will be expanded in the next chapter.

But why does Piglia choose a text by Andreev, and this particular text, *The Dark*, for his homage to Arlt? First, because the historical and political context in which Andreev was writing is similar to Piglia’s own context in Argentina. Leonid Andreev, born in 1871, lived through a time of increasing instability in Russia, with revolutionary sentiment growing, and the rule of the Tsar under threat from would-be-assassins. The period shortly after the 1905 revolution and before the 1917 revolution was characterized by political unrest, violence, and uncertainty. *The Dark*, written in the middle of this era, in 1907, describes a bomb-throwing revolutionary who hides out in a brothel, a story clearly relevant to the time in which it was written. Ricardo Piglia is writing in 1975, after decades of military coups, dictatorships, violence and social unrest, and just before the most brutal government Argentina had witnessed came to power in 1976. Bosteels believes the political situation is key to understanding *Nombre falso*, which is published “immediately before the dictatorship when the author together with a large part of his generation still lived in a period of revolutionary fervor...” (Bosteels, 230). Piglia identifies with Andreev’s political and historical context, and sees Andreev’s text as fitting into his current context.

In addition to the historical and political similarities between Andreev and Piglia’s situations, the plot of Andreev’s story, modified by Piglia, is an illustration of

intertextuality. The story centers on a discussion between Luba, a prostitute, and a revolutionary hiding from the police. He prides himself on his purity, his focus and discipline in his mission and his lack of concern for his own pleasure, valuing his self-sacrifice and despising the prostitute. Luba challenges this ideal, pointing to evil and injustice in society and asking him what right he has to be “good.” Andreev’s revolutionary vacillates between giving in to his physical exhaustion and desire to know a woman and his sense of self-righteousness in his abstinence. In the end he decides to give himself and his “purity” to the prostitute by giving up his virginity, which she claims will make him better, by uniting him with the common men he claims to fight for. Piglia takes this plot and uses it as an illustration of literature. For Piglia, the prostitute represents art or writing, which is not “pure” or original. In *Homenaje*, Piglia’s Arlt refers to literature as dirty and as “crime.” Piglia, in Arlt’s footsteps, questions the value of “pure” or “original” literature, and lifts up “sullied” or “dirtied” literature, literature which has been mixed or “stolen” as the true “good” art.

In this thesis, I suggest that Piglia draws on Andreev’s tale and “dirties” it not only as a way to illustrate his idea, but to practice it. Critics such as McCracken and Bosteels often refer to Piglia’s *Luba* as a translation or plagiarism of Andreev’s text, according to which the text would be a close word-for-word transmission (in the case of a translation), or a borrowing of Andreev’s ideas while claiming them for one’s own (in the case of a plagiarism). First, it is interesting that Piglia never attributes the story to himself, but rather to Arlt, all the while hinting at Andreev, as McCracken notes in her essay. In addition, a closer examination of *Luba* and *The Dark* reveals significant changes to Andreev’s text (beyond those mentioned by McCracken), making *Luba* more than a

mere translation. In her book *Reception Studies*, critic Lorna Hardwick defines various uses of prior texts by later authors. She describes an “adaptation” as being “a version of the source developed for a different purpose or insufficiently close to count as a translation” (9). I suggest that the term “adaptation”, as defined by Hardwick, is better suited to describe Piglia’s text than the terms “translation” or “plagiarism.”⁸ In reality, what Piglia does is much more complex, deliberately modifying another’s story, which he believes takes place in all good literature. Piglia makes changes which would identify the text’s initial location and time period, turning it into an Argentinian text, appropriating it to his own context. He also makes significant changes to the ending of the story, introducing new characters and giving the revolutionary and the prostitute a hopeful future.

In addition to Piglia’s intertextual relationship with Andreev, as well as references to other European or Argentinian authors, he also creates intertextuality between all the short stories in his collection *Nombre falso*. He mixes fiction and real life, eliciting active participation from his readers. Through this structure, Piglia questions the idea of originality and exclusive authorship, emphasizing the need for community and relationship in writing and reading literature.

Piglia’s *Nombre falso* argues not just that literature should be a communal enterprise, but that it is by its very nature communal, rather than individualistic. Everything that we live through, stories that we hear from others, and books that we read, become part of our memory and viewpoint. We are shaped by what we have read, by

⁸ Piglia himself, both in his diaries at the time of his writing *Nombre falso* and in literary theory after, does refer to what he has done as plagiarism, but his definition of plagiarism is perhaps more similar to Hardwick’s concept of “adaptation” than it is to the standard definition of plagiarism.

other's stories, and any attempt to write flows out of that. This is why Piglia says that "...writing is always a particular way of reading..." (Bosteels, 231). By looking into the Russian references and analyzing the modifications Piglia has made to the text, his central theme, that of stories not being original or pure but rather appropriated from other's experiences or writings, becomes even more evident. In each carefully crafted borrowing and modification, Piglia overtly practices that which he believes is the very heart of literature, a communal sharing of ideas, characters and stories.

CHAPTER 1

EMERGING FROM THE OVERCOAT: PIGLIA'S RUSSIAN LITERARY HERITAGE

As already discussed, *Nombre falso*'s inspiration from Russian literature has been uncovered by some critics in the connection between the appendix, *Luba*, and Leonid Andreev's *The Dark*. In this chapter, I seek to explore this connection further, exploring numerous additional references to Russian literature and literary theory evident throughout *Homenaje a Roberto Arlt*, long before one reaches the appendix—references unexplored in scholarly literature until now.⁹ In writing a homage to Arlt, it is certainly fitting that Piglia would make references to Dostoevsky and to Andreev, two of Arlt's favorite authors. Piglia himself was also widely read in Russian literature and literary theory, and themes from his readings found their way into his own writing, both fictional and theoretical. Piglia's use of Andreev's story is appropriate, because Andreev and Piglia shared various similarities in their lives and in their philosophies of art, which is most evident in comparing the respective origins of *The Dark* and *Luba*.

Nombre falso is divided into narrative portions describing how Piglia-the-narrator collects various unpublished works of Arlt, and his record of the works themselves,

⁹ Ellen McCracken does rely on references to Andreev in *Homenaje* to uncover the origin of *Luba*, but leaves her analysis here. Rita Gnutzmann mentions Dostoevsky briefly, alluding to a character in *Demons*, but does not mention Dostoevsky works explicitly referenced by Piglia.

chiefly Arlt's notebook, various letters to and from Kostia and the short story *Luba*. The notebook, letters and many of the footnotes, comprised of supposed works of Arlt, are peppered with explicit and subtle references to Russian literary or historical figures. The first obvious reference is found in the notebook, where Arlt is laying out ideas for a new novel. He describes his protagonist, Lettif, as a sickly, pure young man, a mixture between Hamlet, Myshkin and Luis Castruccio¹⁰ (Piglia, 94). Prince Myshkin is the epileptic hero of Dostoyevky's *The Idiot*, so innocent and generous that he is labeled an idiot. But as Arlt's description continues, Lettif appears to be more fashioned after another Dostoevsky character, the murderous Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment*.

Piglia-the-narrator, reading the notebook, comments that Lettif is a sickly murderer who designs the perfect crime. Dostoevky's Raskolnikov hatches a plot to murder an old pawnbroker with an ax, planning out every detail so as to get away not so much with the loot, but with the crime itself, to rise to the level of Napoleon by being an exceptional man who has the right to kill. Lettif murders the prostitute he is living with and then crawls into bed and falls asleep, just as Raskolnikov does after killing the old woman (Piglia 100). At Lettif's trial, his friend and lawyer, Rinaldi, argues in Lettif's defense, citing Raskolnikov as an example of judicial precedent, for the rationale behind Raskolnikov's crime and Lettif's are similar (101). Dostoevsky's novel is thus inserted into a novel which Arlt is supposedly writing, which is in reality a novel within the novella Piglia is writing. Piglia does something similar with the use of Andreev's *The Dark*.

¹⁰ Luis Castruccio was an Italian immigrant who gained fame after poisoning his servant in order to collect money off of his life insurance policy. Though he thought out the "perfect crime," he was caught when police investigated the death further. His story and trial bear similarities to Arlt's Lettif.

During a discussion of the practical use of beauty,¹¹ Arlt notes that there is no universal beauty (Piglia, 105, 106). This phrase directly contradicts prolific Russian author Leo Tolstoy's (1828-1910) theoretical work, *What is Art?* (*Chto takoe isskustvo*, 1897) which Piglia himself had read, along with various other Tolstoy works (Los Años Felices, 268-269, 41, 52). In the work, Tolstoy concludes that true art is universal, respected by all, appreciated by all. Tolstoy does not believe in art which speaks only to one ethnic group or to one social class. Arlt appears to contradict this belief, focusing on the varying responses to art from one to another. Tolstoy and Arlt share some common perspectives, as both are skeptical of beauty for beauty's sake, believing art to serve a purpose. Where they differ is in that purpose, Tolstoy wanting art to unite humanity towards moral goodness, drawing people near to God, while Arlt's purpose appears to be less moral than economic.

A list of books, which Piglia-the-narrator believes Arlt has either read or is planning to read, includes Maxim Gorky's memoirs of Lenin, Nikolai Bukharin's writing on economic politics, and Leonid Andreev's *The Dark*. Bukharin authored works on revolutionary theory and was friends with Lenin and Trotsky, but later sided with Joseph Stalin, Lenin's successor, forcing Trotsky into exile.¹² The reference to Leonid Andreev foreshadows the text that is to come, and later on an actual copy is found in together with the manuscript for Luba (Piglia, 109, 129).¹³

¹¹ This discussion is detailed in chapter two.

¹² Bukharin was later executed by Stalin during the Purges, after disagreements on the collectivization of agriculture.

¹³ Simón Radowitzky, a native Ukrainian rather than Russian, is another revolutionary mentioned by Arlt. Radowitzky was involved in the Argentinian anarchist movement, then fought in the war in Spain, and was later killed in Mexico. Arlt remembers his words to his fellow prisoners while in chains at the prison camp Ushuaia, where he calls his fellows thieves and assassins and urges them to resist capitalism (Piglia 106).

Between the pages of the notebook, Piglia-the-narrator also finds a series of letters between Arlt and his friend, Kostia. Arlt is asking Kostia for feedback on his rubber stocking enterprise, as well as on his idea for a novel, presumably, *Luba*. Kostia responds by criticizing the stocking sample sent to him, but highly compliments the novel, suggesting, however, that it seems to obviously Russian. “El cuento en cambio es de primera: la única contra es que parece un poco forzado. Quiero decirte, ¿no podrías encontrarle una vuelta que sonara menos San Petersburgo? (la puta y el anarquista, Oh Dios mío, ¿cuándo te vas a decidir a leer a Proust?)” (The story on the other hand is first rate: the only downside is that it seems a bit forced. I mean to say, can’t you find a way to make it sound less St. Petersburg? (The prostitute and the anarchist, oh my God, when are you going to decide to read Proust?)) (Piglia, 111). St. Petersburg is one of the most influential Russian cities, the capital for many years. But it is also the most literary of Russian cities, known to inspire leading Russian writers such as Dostoevsky and Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852), who set many of their best-known works in St. Petersburg.

Piglia-the-narrator contacts Pascual Nacaratti, with whom Arlt was inventing rubber stockings,¹⁴ and asks about Kostia. Nacaratti recalls Kostia as spending his days reading Bakunin. He also describes a growing animosity between Kostia and Arlt, and the tendency of Kostia to ridicule Arlt’s ideas. He would make fun of Arlt, teasing him by mixing up the title of Arlt’s story *The Seven Madmen* (*Los siete locos*, 1929), with an Andreev story, *The Seven who were Hanged* (*Rasskaz o cemi poveshennykh*, 1908). After a fight, Kostia also compares Arlt to Raskolnikov. When Piglia-the-narrator finds Kostia

¹⁴ Nacaratti is a real-life character, friend of Arlt’s, and they were involved in an enterprise to perfect rubber stockings.

in a bar, Kostia describes Arlt as liking prostitutes with innocent faces—a comment that evokes Dostoevsky’s famous gentle prostitutes,¹⁵ who find a further echo in Andreev’s Luba. He also describes Arlt’s particular enjoyment of “poorly translated” Dostoevsky novels (Piglia, 115-119). Piglia fishes for information about the story Arlt was writing. Kostia says Arlt wanted to write something which imitated Dostoevsky’s *Idiot* (120).

These many references to Russia, its history and literature, indicate that there is a deeper connection between *Nombre falso* and Russia than just a simple replay of Andreev’s *The Dark*. One particular area of connection lies in the fact that in writing a supposed homage to Roberto Arlt, Piglia is recognizing Russian culture’s profound influence on Arlt and his writing. In his book on Roberto Arlt, critic Stasys Goštautas describes the influence on Arlt’s writing of figures including Andreev, Dostoevsky, as well as Lenin, Bakunin, Gorky, and Tolstoy.

Goštautas mentions Arlt’s admiration for Andreev, suggesting that Arlt’s *The Seven Madmen* is borrowed from Andreev’s *The Seven who were Hanged*, a popular novel at the time (Goštautas, 87, 247).¹⁶ He also gives an extended analysis of the influence of Dostoevsky’s work on Arlt, focusing on the impact of Dostoevsky’s *Demons* (*Besy*, 1872) on Arlt’s *The Seven Madmen*, *The Flamethrowers* (*Los lanzallamas*, 1931) and *Mad Toy* (*El juguete rabioso*, 1926) as well as the similarities between Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* (*Zapiski iz podpol’ya*, 1864) and Arlt’s *El amor brujo*

¹⁵ Many of Dostoevsky’s works involve the image of a “pure” or “innocent” woman, often a prostitute. Sonia in *Crime and Punishment* prostitutes herself to provide for her step-mother and step-siblings after her father’s death. She encounters the murderer Raskolnikov, and it is her influence and sincere love which lead him to confess his crime. Liza in *Notes from Underground* listens to the underground man’s advice and leaves the brothel, and despite his rage when she comes to his home, she responds to him gently, causing him even more torment.

¹⁶ As mentioned earlier, Kostia, Arlt’s friend in *Nombre falso* suggests the same.

(*Bewitched Love*,¹⁷ 1932) (Goštautas, 98-104, 109-113). Arlt's own writing was deeply influenced by the Russian literature he read in translation, as well as by the Russian revolutionaries and anarchists whose philosophy was embraced by many in anarchist or communist movements throughout Latin-America.

Another reason Piglia's text is speckled with Russian references is that he himself was also very well read in Russian literature and literary theory, and as in Arlt's case, this shows up in his works. His interest in Russian literature can be seen in his diaries and his theoretical writings. In *Formas breves* (*Brief Forms*, 1999), a work of literary theory, he mentions Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, playwright and author Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) and novelist Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), and includes various references to Raskolnikov (*Formas Breves*, 17, 57-59).

According to his diaries, Piglia reads Gogol's *The Overcoat* (*Shinel'*, 1842), and he quotes Dostoevsky's famous line, "We all came out of Gogol's Overcoat," a statement testifying to the reality of literary influence on future writings, evoking thoughts of the kind of intertextuality at play in Piglia's own *Nombre falso* (*Años de Formación*, 48). Piglia reads Dostoevsky's *Idiot* and quotes Dmitry from *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat'ya Karamazovy*, 1880) (*Años de Formacion*, 96, 217, 272). He reads and rereads *Notes from Underground*, citing it as the best of Dostoevsky (*Los Años Felices*, 95).¹⁸

¹⁷ Translation mine.

¹⁸ On the Anagrama website, anagram-ed.es, the publishing company of Ricardo Piglia's diaries, there are three volumes listed of *Los Diarios de Emilio Renzi*. I have referenced here only the first two volumes, *Años de formación* (*Formative Years*) and *Los años felices* (*The Happy Years*). In an article on the series, a third volume is mentioned, *Un día en la vida* (*One Day in the Life*). I was unable to find this volume, which leads me to believe it is yet to be published. Its title is reminiscent of yet another great Russian work by the outspoken Soviet author and critic, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

In his diary, Piglia also includes and elaborates on a long note by novelist Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883) on Tolstoy, describing Tolstoy's religious conversion and consequent belief that a pair of boots is more valuable than his epic work, *War and Peace*. Piglia describes a similar vein of this extreme form of populism in his own country, under Perón, a desire for shoes and not books, a desire for concrete production, something useful. He also cites a quote on Dmitry Pisarev who in an essay on Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* (*Ottsy i deti*, 1862) echoed Turgenev's character Bazarov's belief that the shoemaker is more useful than Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), the beloved poet and storywriter lauded as the father of Russian literature (Los Años Felices, 46). This discussion on the utilitarian function for art is very similar conversations found in Arlt's notebook, suggesting that these ideas may come not just from Arlt, but from various Russian authors and thinkers. After another long entry on Tolstoy, Piglia writes that he needs to reread *What is Art?*, the work in which Tolstoy affirms that good art is universal, and will lead to a moral life. He also reads *Anna Karenina* (*Anna Karenina*, 1877) and writes about Tolstoy's famous descriptive strategy of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization (Los Años Felices, 268-269, 41, 52). Further in the diaries, Piglia studies Russian literary theory, reading critics such as Boris Tomashevsky (1890-1957) and Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) (Los Años Felices, 79).

While there are few direct references to Andreev in Piglia's diaries, there is reason to believe that he was familiar not only with Andreev's *The Dark*, but also with aspects of his life and philosophy, chiefly, the similarities between the origins of Andreev's *The Dark* and Piglia's *Luba*. A look at Andreev's life and work, especially *The*

Dark, may shed light onto why Piglia may have chosen a story from Andreev to write his homage.

Leonid Andreev was a carefree youth, who enjoyed stories from the beginning and wrote well in school. At age seventeen he decided he wanted to become a well-known writer, and wrote that “he intended to destroy established moral codes. He spent some time working on technique, first improving the prose of his diary entries, and then trying to imitate the style of many different writers” (Newcombe, 13). Piglia also began writing a diary at a young age, and certainly his *Nombre Falso* challenges the established codes of literature and what is permissible in writing.

Andreev and his family faced many financial struggles, especially in his youth. He began to write for *The Courier*, starting with court reports and over time being given more journalistic opportunities, which helped his family’s financial struggles significantly. At this time he adopted a pseudonym, James Lynch, and authored a journal series with the title “The Trifles of Life.” Newcombe notes that the subjects he wrote about were not always trivial, however, and he used his writing to attack various contemporary social evils. When he came to write fiction, his first story was rejected by the editors for being “confused” and “abstract,” and they suggested he try to write about something from real life. He offered them *Bargamot and Garaska*¹⁹ for their 1898 Easter edition, and it was this story which caught the attention of Gorky, who helped him truly begin a writing career (24-25).

¹⁹ This story is about Bargamot, a constable, and Garaska, the town drunk. Bargamot invites Garaska to his home for Easter breakfast, rather than sending him to jail. At the table, Bargamot’s wife calls Garaska by his full name, Garasim Andreich, eliciting strong emotion from Garaska, who says he has never been called his full name in all his life.

Similarly to Piglia, Andreev often mixed real life with fiction, often blurring the line between the two. When he attended university in Moscow, Andreev requested help from the Society for Aid to Needy Students, and later, in *The Grand Slam*, “Andreev makes one of his characters pay regular contributions to this fund, perhaps as a tribute to the help it gave him” (Newcombe, 17). When he was a hungry student in St. Petersburg, he wrote about a “starving student,” drawing from his own real life experience (16). This mixture of reality and fiction is significant, because at the time in Russia there was an increased interest in symbolist writing, a break from the predominant realism of the nineteenth century. Maxim Gorky led a group of writers to oppose the symbolist movement and further the realist form of writing. Andreev was helped and mentored by Gorky, but he was also interested in the symbolist movement, and the more mystical side of life (28-29). He formed his own “particular blend of realism and symbolism,” making his writing unique during this time-period (30). Andreev once said to a friend “In painting, as in literature, nature gives me only the material; in my laboratory I reshape it, and this new life is both like and unlike real life. And who knows when art is more perfect--when it is brought close to reality or when it is removed from it by the artist’s fantasy?” (Woodward, 254).

Andreev was skeptical of pure goodness or pure religion, always seeing the suffering around him as a betrayal of ideals, and many of his works questioned the idea of purity. He was pessimistic and skeptical in regards to human nature and collective society, but he encouraged revolt, even as he despaired of lasting societal change (King, 77-84). Piglia’s outlook at the time of writing *Nombre falso* seems to be more positive, which is why he changes Andreev’s pessimistic ending for a more open one.

Andreev soon became one of the most popular authors of his time, and remained so for nearly a decade. His popularity faded soon after, however, even before his death. At the time of his death he had so little money left that it could not cover his own funeral (White, 175). After his death, various authors wrote down their impressions of Leonid Andreev, among them Gorky, who considered Andreev his closest friend (258). Letters written between Andreev and Gorky show their long correspondence and friendship, as well as their continued conversation and critique of each other's ideas and works. Yet, the two friends did quarrel and stopped communicating for a number of years. And the cause of their disagreement was Andreev's publishing his story *The Dark*.

After the death of his first wife Alexandra in 1906, Andreev, devastated, accepted an invitation from Gorky to visit him on Capri. While there he met a Socialist Revolutionary in hiding, Pyotr Rutenburg. Rutenburg had taken part in the assassination of the priest, Father Gapon, who played a role in the Bloody Sunday massacre that sparked the revolution of 1905 (Carlisle, 17). Gorky told Andreev of Rutenburg's various adventures, among them an episode where he hid from the police in a brothel and "found time to give the prostitute who concealed him a sermon about her way of life. Naturally she slapped his face" (Newcombe, 83). Andreev drew from this anecdote to write *The Dark*, in which a young revolutionary escapes the police by hiding in a brothel. "The story caused considerable discussion at the time, as it fitted the atmosphere of general disappointment in the revolution...the failure of the revolution disheartened the Intelligentsia..." (Kaun, 244-245). Gorky was offended by the liberties Andreev took in modifying the story, and the two refused to write each other for several years after the story's publication (Woodward, 178).

In 1911, the estranged friends reignited their correspondence, still deeply conscious of their past differences. In one letter, Gorky explains to Andreev why their friendship was marred by *The Dark*. He says he was angry “since with this story you stole from the poor Russian public the alms fate had given it. The incident actually took place, but not as you have described it; it was better, more human, and more significant” (Yershov, 111). Andreev’s response was to and argue that artistic freedom gave him the right to manipulate or “distort” the facts as he saw fit (Woodward, 184).

Remembering Andreev after his death, Gorky recalls that Andreev’s “distortion of the truth made a very painful impression on me. I felt that Andreev had perverted and destroyed a beautiful incident which I had hoped might be the theme of an inspiring tale” (Woodward, 184). Elsewhere he described the act as equal to murder:

Leonid distorted both the meaning and the form of the event out of all recognition. In the actual brothel there was neither the agonizing and foul mockery nor any of those gruesome details with which Andreev so richly embellished the story. This distortion affected me very painfully... [I] could not help pointing out to Andreev the meaning of his action... was equivalent to committing murder on a mere whim... (cited in White, 48)

Some have suggested other possible sources for Andreev’s story, including Aleksander Kuprin’s story, *Second Captain Rybnikov* (*Shtabs-Kapitan Rybnikov*) which had been distributed in *Mir Bozhii* in January of 1906 (Woodward, 180). Critics Clarence Manning and Henry King suggest that the story recalls Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*, in which the underground man visits a brothel and gives the prostitute a lecture on the perils of her life (King, 33). It is possible that Andreev drew from all of

these sources, but given the amount of controversy and conversation between Gorky and Andreev over the matter, it is certain that the Rutenburg tale played a significant role in Andreev's inspiration.

In 1914, Andreev claimed that the story was the best of all he had written (Newcombe, 83) (Carlisle, 17-18).²⁰ Curiously, at the beginning of *Nombre falso*, in a note from the author written in 1994, Piglia describes the story as his best also. Considering that Andreev modifies an event from real life, and Piglia slightly modifies from Andreev, the pride they feel in what many would see as an un-original work is ironic, but also significant, for it reveals a common understanding between the two as to the rights of an author, and the freedom of artistic license.

Like Andreev, Piglia takes real-life facts and twists them, as in many instances in his seemingly-accurate *Homenaje a Roberto Arlt*. Dates, names, numbers and details are modified ever so slightly, so as to appear as though they are correct. But Piglia also takes fiction and changes it, plays with it to make it something which fits his own purpose. In this way he re-appropriates Andreev's text and adopts it for his own novella. Piglia's appropriation of Andreev's story echoes his epigraph at the beginning of the *Nombre falso*, "the only things we lose are the things we never had"; as mentioned before this is Borges' quote, which Piglia falsely attributes to Arlt. In his diary at the time of writing *Nombre falso*, Piglia explains why he uses this quote: "La frase no hace más que sintetizar lo que es para mí el 'tema' central de ese libro: las perdidas." "The phrase does nothing more than to synthesize what is to me the central 'theme' of the book: losses"

²⁰ *Visions* is a compilation of Andreev's photography and stories, translated and put together by his granddaughter, Olga Carlisle, giving the work a uniquely personal touch. She describes *The Dark* as her grandfather's favorite out of all his stories.

(Piglia, “Los Años Felices” 411). Piglia argues that stories or literature can only be “lost” since they are never really owned in the first place. “We will never know why we decide that certain stories are ours and we can tell them, while others (often better ones), which we imagine or live, are another’s and are lost” (Assumed Name, note from the author).

McCracken suggests that Piglia’s usage of the Russian pre-text is meant to enable Argentinian literature to fight back against Europeanism. “In effect, Piglia has barbarized a European text, enabling Argentine literature to assert itself with a vengeance against the hegemonic European model” (1075). However, in light of Andreev’s previous distortion of Rutenburg’s “text,” and Piglia’s fascination and admiration for Russian literature and theory, it seems unlikely that he is “barbarizing” the text to resist European influence. On the contrary, he is paying tribute to Andreev’s text and to the way in which it was written.

Dostoevsky’s quote about Gogol’s *Overcoat* reflects a thought similar to Piglia’s. Literature, rather than emerging from a void, is inspired, influenced, and crafted by real life events and by the works an author has read before, which become a part of their own literary memory. Dostoevsky draws on Gogol, Andreev on Dostoevsky, Arlt on Andreev and Dostoevsky, and Piglia on all of these and more. Piglia’s *Homenaje a Roberto Arlt* goes beyond honoring Arlt, he is also honoring Borges and Onetti, as Gnutzmann points out, as well as Andreev, Dostoevsky and all others who have “lent” him their stories. Andreev’s story is perfect to illustrate Piglia’s vision of communal and shared literature because of its own communal origins.

The Russian references found throughout *Nombre falso* are significant, for in attributing much of the writing to Arlt, they make the text believable, as Arlt was fascinated with Russian writers such as Dostoevsky and Andreev. Piglia himself shares

Arlt's admiration for Russian literature, and his views of art are influenced by Russian writers and thinkers. The connection to Andreev and the choice of *The Dark* for his appendix is clarified by looking at Andreev's own views on literature, and the inspiration for his story, making Piglia's "plagiarism" less "original." Rather, it is another sequence in the chain of literature, which is a sharing of ideas and stories, a communal rather than individual project.

CHAPTER 2

TURMOIL AND TRANSITION: PIGLIA'S ARGENTINA AND ANDREEV'S RUSSIA

In addition to Piglia's immersion in Russian literary theory literature and the commonalities between him and Andreev, another reason which may have attracted Piglia to Andreev's short story is the likeness between Piglia's Argentina and Andreev's Russia. While the two authors lived at different historical times, and in countries separated drastically in geography, the political climate of both countries as the authors grew up, and at the time of their writing, is surprisingly similar. Both countries were undergoing rapid changes in government and seeing a rise in revolutionary fervor, and both authors witnessed times of uncertainty, corruption and violence. Andreev's story about a bomb-throwing revolutionary seeking refuge in a brothel was thus not out of place with the events taking place in Piglia's own nation. In this chapter, I analyze Bosteels' political reading of Piglia's *Nombre falso*, and look at how this leads us back to the political and historical contexts of both Argentina and Russia.

Bosteels analysis of Piglia's *Nombre falso* differs from those of other theorists who focus on a purely literary interpretation of the text: he states "this fairly common reading, restricted to the intertextual effects of plagiarism, has been unable to account for the powerful critical and political strain of thought that traverses the pages of 'Homage to Roberto Arlt'" (Bosteels, 230). While he does not dispute the reality of the intertextual

approach to Piglia's appropriation of Andreev's story, he believes that to appreciate Piglia fully, the literary and the political aspects of the text ought to be examined side by side, arguing that "in this story two series of action and signification, the first literary and the second political, must be rigorously articulated, without separating them" (Bosteels, 230).

Bosteels, similarly to Gnutzmann and Waisman, sees *Homenaje* as tribute to both Arlt and Borges, but beyond the argument that the story seeks to cross these two great Argentinian authors in one master text, Bosteels sees another pair hidden within the pages of the homage: Brecht and Mao. Both because of the fact that Piglia, at the time of writing *Nombre falso*, was an admirer of Chairman Mao, and because Bosteels sees similarities between the arguments in *Nombre falso* and Piglia's essays on Mao and Brecht, he believes that these two are just as important in interpreting *Homenaje* and *Luba* as are Arlt and Borges. Interestingly, Mao is never mentioned in the text, and Brecht only briefly, while multiple Russian Marxists, revolutionaries and anarchists are. Bosteels believes that Piglia omits the name of Mao in order to present the story in keeping with Arlt's pre-Mao times, suggesting that though Piglia names Lenin, Bakunin and Trotsky, Mao is the true force behind the arguments. "Could it be that Mao lies in wait, behind the very absence of his proper name, as the only one who will propose valid answers to the questions that these other revolutionaries have left unanswered?" (Bosteels, 240).

Piglia's views with respect to literature are distinctly Maoist, according to Bosteels, in their focus on the economics of art. Piglia's essay on Mao shortly before writing *Nombre falso* reflects a similar preoccupation with the exchange of money for an

author's work as his Arlt in *Homenaje*. "The aesthetic effect, the ideological signification, the mode of production, the forms of distribution and consumption, the materials and instruments of work, i.e., the whole literary system is determined by class interests, and class interests determine in each case what is art and for whom (or for what) it 'serves'" (Bosteels, 233). Not only should art be useful, but art criticism must also serve a purpose beyond its obvious literary interpretations. Elsewhere he states:

That criticism alone is valid which, dedicated to literature, generates a concept that can be used outside of literature. Those are the critics that I am interested in, that is, when one reads only about literature while reading them, but what they say about literature produces a concept that can be used to read social functionings, modalities of language, the structure of relationships (cited in Bosteels, 233).

The discussion of the usefulness of literature is woven into Piglia's *Homenaje*, in the words of his character, Roberto Arlt. In *Homenaje* after ideas for his novel, Arlt's notebook continues with musings on anarchy and revolution, introducing various Russian political figures. The revolutionary is a true modern hero, according to the notes, and Lenin is provided as an example of such a hero, a combination of Macbeth and Don Quijote (Piglia, 104). Then follows a rather lengthy note on Gorky's recollections of the Russian revolution. One particular event stands out to Arlt: Gorky describes how a group of peasants who stayed the night in the Romanov Winter Palace after the removal of the Tsar used the beautiful vases from the palace as urinals. Gorky expresses his disgust for the act, noting that there was no need to use the vases in such a way, as the plumbing and toilets were working well. He describes the act as the expression of a desire to destroy and desecrate beautiful objects.

Piglia's Arlt critiques Gorky for his inability to recognize what Arlt sees as the true significance of the event. "Ni se le pasa por la cabeza pensar que los campesinos actuaban sin saberlo como críticos de arte, es decir, *usaban* los jarrones de Sèvres. Para Gorki los jarrones de Sèvres son solo 'objetos bonitos', intocables, que todos deben 'reconocer' y 'respetar.'" (It does not even cross his mind that the peasants acted without knowing it as art critics, that is to say, *they used* the Sèvres vases. For Gorky, the Sèvres Vases are only 'beautiful objects', untouchable, which everyone ought to 'recognize' and 'respect') (Piglia, 105). Arlt sees Gorky's position as art for art's sake, calling it a crime, reflecting Piglia's view that beauty is "theft in its appropriation of a sum of social energy with the sole end of not serving any end" (Bosteels, 240).

As mentioned in the introduction, Piglia's Arlt, perhaps unfairly, perceives Gorky's stance on art as anti-utilitarian. Gorky, along with other Bolshevnik leaders and writers, did in fact believe in the necessity of practical and useful art, but, as in the case of the peasants in the palace, he does appear to draw lines at which uses are appropriate. Piglia's Arlt praises unrestrained utilitarianism with regards to art. He interprets the event as the peasants denying the universality of art, denying that beauty is more beautiful when it is least useful, and using the Romanov vases in order to understand their purpose (105).

Trotsky also appears in Arlt's notes, recollecting a similar situation to the palace vases in his autobiography. On a train trip, Trotsky notices a peasant soldier tearing up the velvet seats to make himself a pair of gaiters. "Cuando el soldado, el esclavo de ayer... arranca el terciopelo que cubre los asientos para hacerse una polainas, aun en un acto tan destructivo se manifiesta el despertar de la personalidad. El maltratado y

pisoteado campesino ruso... arranca el terciopelo, diciendose que él tambien tiene derecho a algo mejor.” (When the soldier, the slave of yesterday...tears up the velvet that covers the seats in order to make himself some gaiters, even in the midst of such a destructive act the awakening of an identity is manifest. The mistreated and downtrodden Russian peasant...tears off the velvet, telling himself that he too has the right to something better) (Piglia, 106). Rather than showing disdain as Gorky does, Trotsky sees the event on the train as the peasant recognizing his right to use the beauty in front of him, and Piglia’s Arlt views this account as a critique of Gorky’s theory of art.²¹ Trotsky reinforces Arlt’s ideas that beauty is only valuable when one can determine its function, its use (Piglia, 106). Bosteels argues that Piglia’s text, and his plagiarism, challenges the political left for its incomplete understanding of the functionality of art, not as something above the masses, something which should not be defended or protected against destruction by the people, but something which must serve a purpose other than beauty alone. Piglia viewed revolutionaries of the past as still dominated by an idealized view of art. “Piglia responds to this dilemma with the systematic application of plagiarism and false attribution, that is, with a practice that destroys the most obstinate of all ideologies of the literary: the cult of originality” (Bosteels, 241). Piglia believes that art ought to be useful for the common man, not simply the intellectual elite. Piglia’s text is itself complex, and seemingly inaccessible to the “masses.” His argument however, is not so much that art should be accessible in the sense that its original intent is understandable to an uneducated audience, but that the audience, whether educated or not, can use the art in whatever way they choose, much as the peasants in the Romanov palace “used” the

²¹ Trotsky himself even in Arlt’s notes does not connect this event to Gorky’s discussion of the palace vases. Arlt is the one who connects the two and places them in dialogue with each other.

beautiful vases (whose original intent was to decorate the palace) not out of necessity, but simply in answer to their desire.

While Bosteels links the political themes, in *Nombre falso* and the plagiarism of Andreev's text to the influence of Mao on Piglia, it is clear both from the Russian political references in the *Homenaje* itself and from the descriptions of Piglia's immersion in Russian literature and criticism in the previous chapter that Piglia is equally influenced by Russian thinkers and writers. Mao may be key to an understanding of Piglia's texts, but Mao drew on Russian revolutionary authorities such as Lenin and Trotsky. Bosteels is also correct to acknowledge the influence of Brecht on Piglia, but what he overlooks is the fact that Piglia, according to his theoretical works, appreciates Brecht's reliance on early Russian theorists, even after socialist realism dominated the discourse in the USSR.

In notes on a course about Bertolt Brecht, he describes Brecht as drawing from the best literary theory of the Soviet Union in the 20's: Yuri Tynyanov (1894-1943), Sergey Tretyakov (1892-1937), and Osip Brik (1888-1945). "Los escritos sobre literatura de Brecht deben ser leídos en el marco de la teoría literaria inaugurada por Tinianov y desarrollada por Bajtin, Mukarovski y Walter Benjamin" (Brecht's writings on literature must be read within the framework of the literary theory inaugurated by Tynyanov and developed by Bakhtin, Mukarovsky and Walter Benjamin) (*Formas Breves*, 87). He goes on to describe Brecht's introduction to the theory of *ostranenie* or defamiliarization, a technique he gets from the Russian formalists, and uses in his own works (88). Because of the connection between Piglia and Russia, not only within *Nombre falso* but in Piglia's diaries and theoretical writings, perhaps a closer look at Russian and Argentinian history

and politics will aid in understanding Piglia's work and the political themes Bosteels explores.

Russian revolutionary sentiment stretches back long before the Bolshevik Revolution. In the early 1800's, Western liberalism was increasingly communicated to the public through literature. Underground societies and revolutionary organizations were formed, and in 1825 the Decembrist insurrection against the government caused a stir throughout the country. Many of those who took part in the attempt to overthrow the government were exiled, but the movement to bring about reform was not yet over. The Decembrist uprising inspired nearly a century of revolutionary writing, dreaming and action, ultimately climaxing in Lenin's 1917 takeover (Yarmolinsky, 15-56).

Some of the revolutionaries advocated teaching the peasantry to read and working peacefully in society to bring about change, while others believed in taking more violent measures. Russian Populism, which idealized the Russian "people" or peasantry, was embraced by many Slavophiles and even some Westernists. It was promoted in the writings of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, who elevated the Russian peasant and advocated on his behalf (Yarmolinsky, 171). The Populists gained courage with the reforms of Tsar Alexander II and wanted to see even more radical changes in their nation. They went to the people to urge peasants to rise up and overthrow the oppressive tsarist government. The peasants remained largely unimpressed, and the attempt to stimulate a revolution through the peasants was unsuccessful. After their lack of success, some populists formed *Narodnaia Volia*, or the People's Will, which from the beginning advocated terror as a means to achieve their political ends. Bombs exploded frequently, causing anxiety among members of the government, leading to their taking severe measures against the terrorists.

Alexander II was targeted multiple times and finally assassinated in 1881 (Yarmolinsky, 260-281).

After the Tsar's assassination, the working class began to protest their labor conditions in a series of strikes. University students took part in their own political protests and revolutionary groups which had been suppressed by the police after Alexander's assassination began to reunite, leaning more and more towards Marxism. Though these groups at first seemed insignificant, their influence would only grow in the next few decades (Bartlett, 160). In 1897 various revolutionary groups united, forming the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries. The following year Marxist groups united to form the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party. The two parties however remained at odds with each other, splitting into the Menshevik and Bolshevik parties, and preparing the way for the October revolution (Yarmolinsky, 242).

Under Nicholas II, Alexander II's grandson and Russia's final Tsar, violent acts continued. In 1902 the Minister of the Interior was assassinated. One of the most influential terrorist acts took place in 1904, when Viacheslav von Plehve, the Minister of the Interior, famous for his cruelty and his persecution of revolutionaries, was assassinated (Zilliacus, 338-339). Demonstrations against the government and distribution of socialist revolutionary propaganda continued to increase. In 1905 a group of peaceful petitioners gathered on the square in front of the Tsar's winter palace, convinced that he would hear their requests and have compassion on the workers in their plight. Instead, thousands were killed or wounded as police opened fire on the protesters, including men, women and children. The day was named Bloody Sunday, and the attack sparked protests around the country, launching the first Russian Revolution (Zilliacus,

350-352). Though the government attempted to restore order by making certain concessions, it was unsuccessful. In response to the government's plans for a national assembly (which in reality excluded workers and certain religious minorities), outcry ensued, and thousands revolted through massive strikes (Halliday, 53-55). In October, a strike organized by Leon Trotsky finally got enough attention from the Tsar that he issued the "October Manifesto", which promised to provide a constitution and a division of power among a Duma, or national assembly. But the violence and uprising were far from over, and hundreds of peasants and revolutionaries were killed. Some estimate that over 4000 deaths were caused by revolutionary terrorism between 1906 and 1907 (Bartlett, 168).

Into this political climate of terrorism, violence and political instability, Andreev offered his story *The Dark*. Born in 1871, Andreev lived through a period of ever-increasing revolutionary activity, the assassination of the Tsar, the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. *The Dark*, written in 1907, in between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, depicts a young, virgin revolutionary who is fleeing from the police, trying to stay alive in order to carry out his mission, an assassination. The story is one obviously similar to real life events during Andreev's life-time, a period of frequent terrorist attacks and high-profile assassinations. As mentioned before, the story is also taken from specifics of Pyotr Rutenburg's life and terrorist activity, which Gorky related to Andreev.

Gorky introduced Andreev to fellow influential writers and supported him in his career. Gorky himself favored the Social Democrats and was affiliated at one time with the Bolsheviks. He financially supported various revolutionary groups and portrayed revolution and social change positively in his writing. He was acquainted with Lenin,

though opposed to violence, and went on to be a respected author during the early years of the Soviet Union.

Andreev, together with his friend Gorky, was part of various revolutionary gatherings of his time, and though he would later go on to condemn the Bolshevik revolution, he reacted to the 1905 revolution with anticipation, even opening his apartment for a meeting of the Marxist Party of Social Democrats, whose activity was still prohibited (Newcombe, 69). Andreev's apartment was raided and he was arrested, along with nine other members of the party. Andreev later took part in more revolutionary meetings and even delivered a speech about the revolution and the overthrow of the crown, causing him flee Russia to Finland in order to escape arrest (Newcombe, 70-71).

At the same time, some have noted that Andreev was at times skeptical of the effectiveness of revolution (Brown, 26). Some have argued that *The Dark* is a critique of the young revolutionary and his cause, both because of the tone with which he is described and because of Andreev's dismal ending, where the revolutionary gives up his terrorist mission in order to stay with the prostitute, only to be arrested in the last pages of story. Whether he was already disillusioned at the time of writing *The Dark* or only became so later, after the Bolshevik takeover, Andreev's relationship to the revolutionary movements in his native land was complicated, at times supportive and involved, at other times cynical and critical. He rejected the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, and returned to Finland, where he lived the final years of his life. Perhaps due to his skepticism of the revolution and his opposition to the Bolsheviks, he lost his popularity in Russia even before his death in 1919. *The Dark* was translated into Spanish in 1921, a year before it

would be translated into English, and Andreev's popularity in the Spanish-speaking world would continue years after his death. Forgotten in his own country, Andreev's art took new shape through the writings of Arlt and most notably, Piglia, in Argentina.

Argentina has also had a complex political history. The decades following 1910 saw an increase in governmental instability and frequent changes of leadership, moving from one political party to another, from radical leadership to military takeover and dictatorship. Fears of Argentina's changing its neutral stance on the Nazis and joining the Allies contributed to the military coup of 1943, ending Ramón Castillo's regime (Lewis, 90-91). After several changes in leadership, Juan Perón, an army officer won the presidential election in 1946. Though not communist himself, Perón's government was influenced by the Soviet Union and resembled it in advanced state control and the promotion of industrialization and a state-structured redistribution of wealth from the wealthy to the working class. Like Stalin, Perón proposed a series of Five-Year Plans, a policy which in both nations increased production but also limited individual capital gain (Romero, 102). Many protested his move towards a state-controlled economy, and demonstrations followed. Perón responded by arresting the leaders, and violence ensued.

Strikes and tensions between the government and the military rose, and opposition groups at times grew violent. At one demonstration in 1953, as Perón was speaking, bombs exploded in the crowd, sparking an equally violent response from the regime. Perón's troops burned opposition locales such as the Jockey Club and the Socialist *Casa del Pueblo*. Perón lost popularity, and was overthrown in another military coup (Romero, 129-130).

Perón's influence in the Argentinian political sphere remained strong, even from exile, and in the 1958 elections, he declared his support for Arturo Frondizi, who was already gaining support from Peronist voters. With Perón's support, Frondizi easily won against his opponent. Frondizi sought to expand Argentina's economy by raising wages and starting new industries, but his plan led to increased problems in the economy, inflation soaring and industry collapsing. Massive strikes among unions erupted throughout the nation, and the military, aware of Frondizi's collaboration with Perón during the election, moved to eliminate Peronists from the government and to oppose unionists who protested the government. In 1962, Frondizi was arrested, and the military once again took over the government (Lewis, 119-122).

Strikes, protests and rebellions continued, as factions warred against one another. After several provisional leaders, Juan Carlos Onganía was placed as president in 1966. He immediately began to battle against Marxist and liberal forces, shutting down university councils, causing many faculty members to resign. In 1969, student protests turned violent, and police attacks increased (Romero 181). The military was losing support, and by 1971, they reluctantly admitted that Perón might be the only one who could restore order in the divided country (Lewis, 128-132). In 1973, Perón once again became the president of Argentina, only to pass away of a heart attack in 1974, leaving his wife Isabel to succeed him. His death left a void which was quickly filled with more and more political violence. Revolutionary and guerilla forces, the military and the police fought each other, in what had been escalating since the 1950's. Kidnappings and bank robberies added to the strikes and attacks. In 1975, the military launched another coup to

remove Isabel from office and establish a military dictatorship. By March, 1976, they had assumed power, beginning the darkest period of Argentina's history (Lewis, 134-143).

Ricardo Piglia was born just two years before the 1943 military coup, after which Perón first took power. He grew up amidst the constant changes in government, and the increasing political violence and instability. *Nombre falso* was written during 1975, in the midst of guerrilla warfare, revolutionary violence, political kidnappings, strikes and protests, at a time when Isabel Perón was already understood by many to be near the end of her power. Just like Andreev's story, Piglia's is written in the midst of changes, at a time when the future is unsure. Piglia's more hopeful ending perhaps reflects his own personal hope of a new future for Argentina, one which, sadly, would not come soon, as the 1976 military takeover would lead to even more violence and devastation than any government before it. But in 1975, Piglia conveyed a hopeful belief in the power of revolution, and adapted Andreev's story to embody that faith. As McCracken writes, "Piglia, writing at a different historical moment and for a different purpose, replaces Andreev's pessimistic closing with an optimistic one" (1079).

Piglia paints the revolution more positively than Andreev, removing Andreev's descriptions of revolutionaries "cubiertos de sangre...su vida es terriblemente corta...todos perecen en el patíbulo, en el presidio o se vuelven locos..." (covered in blood... their life terribly short...all perish at the gallows, in the jail or they go crazy...) (Andreev, 49). Instead, Piglia describes the women of the revolution, who victoriously proclaim the general strike (Piglia, 151). Piglia's appropriation of Andreev's text is clarified by a comparison of the two author's own political and historical contexts, but Piglia's ending of the story, where the revolutionary, rather than being arrested, escapes

with the prostitute, gives a more positive twist to the Andreev's more disillusioned view of revolution.

CHAPTER 3

AUTHOR IN THE BROTHEL: THE PROSTITUTE AS LITERATURE

Examining Ricardo Piglia's literary inheritance from Russia sheds light on why he may have chosen to "plagiarize" a Russian short story, and the historical similarities between Argentina and Russia clarify why Andreev's *The Dark* resonated with Piglia. Andreev's inspiration for *The Dark*, his borrowing and adapting from Rutenburg's own experience also make Piglia's choice of the story and his further adaptations understandable. But perhaps the most compelling reason he chose *The Dark* is that the plot of the story itself resonates with Piglia's understanding of the nature and source of literature, both in its form and in its content.

Both *The Dark* and *Nombre falso* tell the story of a revolutionary who hides out in a brothel to escape the police. One recurring theme in both stories is the contrast between ideas of "goodness" or "purity" and "badness" or "dirtiness," but Andreev and Piglia use these terms to refer to distinct concepts. For Andreev, the ideas of purity and impurity are related to morality, with the revolutionary's "purity" getting in the way of true goodness. The revolutionary self-identifies as being "pure" and "good," believing in the righteousness of his cause, but in so doing he has distanced himself from the very people he is supposedly trying to help, the lowly, the downtrodden, and the oppressed. The terms "purity" and "goodness" in the story seem to encapsulate a sort of innocence and lack of knowledge of the world and suffering mixed with sincerity and focus of purpose which

the revolutionary prides himself in. Andreev challenges a morality which separates one from the realities of a broken society, advocating a connection to reality rather than an idealized revolutionary fervor.

Piglia applies the concepts of “purity” and “impurity” to literature, changing the underlying meaning of the text. Rather than focusing on moral goodness, Piglia’s *Luba* questions the nature of literature and writing, and by Piglia’s definition, “pure” or “original” art or writing is undesirable, or maybe even impossible, while mixed or derivative or “soiled” texts are true literature. This conceptual shift between *The Dark* and *Luba* can only be understood when read in the context of the preceding text, *Homenaje a Roberto Arlt*. As McCracken notes, the page numbers in *Luba* continue from the ones in *Homenaje*, showing that both are connected in one larger text, and can only be read together (1079).

The idea of literature as a lie, a counterfeit or something “dirty,” is repeated throughout *Homenaje*, either in the words or writings of Arlt, or Kostia. In contrast to Tolstoy’s belief in the power of literature to draw man towards the good and God, Piglia’s Arlt consistently describes writing as a transgressive act, not in a strictly moral sense, but in that it is compared to theft, crime, prostitution and murder. Arlt describes himself as ungenerous, an egoist who cares not for humanity, but his own happiness. This is his advantage over other authors, that he has no inhibitions when it comes to deceiving the public by providing what they think is original, but in reality is a falsification of falsifications of falsifications (91). In a footnote about the role of a critic, Piglia-the-narrator cites Freud describing the distortion of a text as a crime akin to murder (123). Kostia tells the narrator that for Arlt, beauty was literature which had been

distorted, and that the reason Arlt did not publish the final tale is because it was not dirty enough, not yet full of leftovers. “Él no lo quiso publicar, de eso puede estar seguro. ¿Y sabe por qué? Porque él no quería publicar nada hasta que no estaba sucio, destrozado, lleno de restos, de requechos: eso era la literatura para él. Buscaba eso: lo llamaba la belleza y no le importaba casi ninguna otra cosa en el mundo.” (He did not want to publish it, of that I can be sure. And do you know why? Because he did not want to publish anything until it was dirty, destroyed, torn to shreds, full of remains, of leftovers: for him that was literature. He searched for that: he called it beauty and hardly anything else in the world mattered to him) (Piglia, 122-124).

As discussed in chapter one, Arlt’s notebook in *Homenaje* details notes of a novel he is working on, distinct from his supposed project, *Luba*. Lettif, the protagonist, lives with a prostitute to protect her from the police, and with the help of Rinaldi, hatches a “perfect” crime, murdering her to claim her life insurance (94-95). He spends hours in the National Library, studying the best way to mix a lethal poison. He writes an article, titling it a “tribute to arsenic.” Rinaldi helps him to forge a prescription for the powder necessary to kill his woman. This sounds a bit like Piglia-the-narrator, who spends hours in the National Library studying Arlt’s works, and writes a “tribute” or homage to Roberto Arlt. Rinaldi has the same physical description as Kostia, who helps Piglia-the-narrator to get *Luba*, and there are hints in the text that Kostia has added his own work, just as Rinaldi does for Lettif.

The body of the prostitute is used both in Andreev and in Piglia to represent literature. In *Homenaje*, Piglia-the-narrator takes notes on the “Arltian” story he purchases from Kostia, and comments that the image of the prostitute is like a tale, which

circulates among men in exchange for money. He also references theorist Walter Benjamin's idea that anarchism and the brothel are the spaces of literature (125). In Andreev, the prostitute is described as a book, which educates the revolutionary, teaching him that it is shameful to be "good" (Andreev, 39).

The revolutionary represents the author, and is confronted by the prostitute for trying to remain distanced from the "impure" woman (or literature). Almost immediately upon entering the room, Luba asks him if he is a writer, and tells him she dislikes writers as "bad" people (Piglia, 135). In Andreev, the exchange occurs as well, though later in the text (Andreev, 16). Later, she reaffirms her belief that he is a writer, claiming that his behavior gives him away. Writers, according to her, are those who first show compassion, and then get angry because people refuse to bow down and worship them. She does not see his compassion as genuine, or his "goodness" as sincere, but rather as a hypocritical show to gain praise (Piglia, 140) (Andreev, 30-32).

She cannot understand what this man, clearly uninterested in sex, is doing in the brothel. When he shows pity for Luba, she slaps him, and accuses him of coming only to make fun of her. She calls him a "pure one" and he does not deny that he sees himself as good (Piglia, 139). In Andreev, he details his life to Luba, describing why he has become a revolutionary, for the sake of others, not for his own happiness. To the prostitute, he comes across as self-righteous (Andreev, 14). Andreev accents his "purity" by stating at various times that he is a virgin, and he tells Luba she is the only one he has seen in this way, and that he is ashamed to look at her bare arms (Andreev, 22). Piglia's Enrique also emphasizes his "goodness," saying he is only interested in the happiness of others, in a direct contradiction to Arlt's descriptions of his motive in writing (Piglia, 138, 90). Later

in the text, he is willing to sleep with her, and she is disgusted by the prospect, feeling he offers not out of interest, but only to sacrifice himself in order to make himself appear kind and compassionate towards her, a “ruined” woman. She mocks him, calling him the “good one,” and he admits that he sees himself as good, pointing out that she on the other hand is a prostitute (142).

While he despises her for being a prostitute, a “ruined” woman, she makes the shocking assertion that it is shameful to be “good,” to be “pure,” and asks him what right he has to be good when there is so much suffering and evil in the world. She confronts him with his own hypocrisy, persuading him to abandon his self-righteous pride, to give up his ideals of “goodness” and join in the pain and injustice she experiences. Both in Andreev and in Piglia, Luba convinces the revolutionary to stay with her, to give up his “purity” and “goodness” and become acquainted with her world. As proof of his transformation, Enrique toasts the health of the thieves, those crushed in life, the assassins, prostitutes and Luba, for all she has suffered (Piglia, 149). Andreev’s toast is even more elaborate, rejecting the light in exchange for the darkness, and including those dying of syphilis, the blind, the cowards, the rascals (Andreiev, 48). Bosteels reads *Luba* as an illustration of the transformation between the “pure” and the lowly. Enrique is pure, but is changed by Luba, just as writers need to be changed to be like the masses, rather than above them. It is thus a “critique rejecting the superiority of the lettered” (248).

Andreev has Luba wanting to leave the brothel, but Piglia actually allows her to do so (Andreiev, 49-51). Andreev’s Luba listens to stories of the revolutionary band, and when she hears there are women among them, she is inspired to join their cause. By then, however, Pyotr has already begun to abandon his former life, wanting to stay in the

brothel with her. In Piglia's version, Enrique also tells her he does not want to be good, and stays with her temporarily, but in the end invites her to escape with him to join the revolutionary cause, displaying that he is truly a changed man, who sees the prostitute as able to contribute to the revolution. The discussions of "goodness" and "purity" are adapted in Piglia to relate to the topic of interacting with literature, to being changed by it, and *Luba* is an analogy not just of what Piglia believes about writing, but an image of what he is in fact doing, entering into the space of literary "brothel," where ideas are mixed, twisted and used. Like Andreev, he turns the ideas of "goodness" and "purity" upside down, but appropriates and adapts the earlier story for his own purpose. Piglia critiques the arrogance of authors who deem themselves both above others in society, and above their writing, as Enrique sees himself above Luba. Piglia confronts the author who prides himself in his originality or the "purity" or uniqueness of his art with Luba's affirmation that he has no right to be "pure" while she is "dirty," or unoriginal, a falsification of other falsifications as Arlt suggests in his notes.

Just as Andreev modifies Gorky's tale of Pyotr Rutenburg in writing *The Dark*, Piglia is inspired by Andreev's tale, and makes modifications to redirect the text to question ideas of originality and authorship. As noted earlier, various critics have commented on this theme in *Homenaje*, but few have closely examined the way that Piglia's adaptations in *Luba* strengthen his argument. McCracken, who read an English translation of Andreev admits that the text has some slight changes, notably the ending, but describes the text as a theft, emphasizing the similarities over the changes. "A contemporary Latin American writer boldly steals from the bank of world literature. He copies an early twentieth-century European short story nearly line by line and leaves

dozens of textual clues to denounce his crime” (1071). Edgardo Berg also describes the adaptations as slight, calling *Luba* a translation and rewriting of Andreev (50). But there are more than slight changes to the text, and I believe the adaptations are both deliberate and significant in understanding the whole text. A side-by-side reading of Piglia’s text with a Spanish translation of Andreev’s may give insight into the nature of the “theft” and its purpose.

The first translation of *The Dark* into Spanish is Nicolas Tasin’s 1920 *Las tinieblas*.²² Both the title and the text follow closely to the original, and it is evident that this is the version that Piglia used. Curiously, it seems that Piglia chooses to use the title from a later translation,²³ *Luba*, and this deliberate choice to blend the title and text of two distinct translations emphasizes Piglia’s awareness of the transformative nature of translation.²⁴ He recognizes that any translation is already an interpretation and a change of the text, but rather than being bothered by this, Piglia embraces translations, even poor translations, viewing them as an enrichment of Argentinian literary language (Formas Breves 89-90).

Looking at Piglia’s *Luba* and Tasin’s translation side-by-side, it becomes evident that, though many details are the same, and much of the modification is probably only to

²² A 1953 Buenos Aires reprinting of Tasin’s 1920 Madrid edition is most likely the translation Piglia used. Tasin’s was the original translation of Andreev into Spanish.

²³ This translation is in a collection of short stories by Andreev and Tolstoy, but contains no information on the translator or year of publication. The translation is distinct from Tasin’s, and is published by La Biblioteca, Lima, 635, Buenos Aires, and titled *Andreev: Obras Completas, La Risa Roja* I examined three different copies of this book, but none of them provided clues for further publication information.

²⁴ A third translation, published in 1946, says this Spanish version is reviewed by Abel Casablanca. It is not clear if he is the translator or if he modified Tasin’s 1920 translation, but the wording is quite distinct from Tasin’s, a looser translation of Andreev’s text. The book is of interest to me because under the title “Las Tinieblas” (“The Dark”) there appears in parenthesis a second title, “Liuba.” Piglia may have read this version as well.

drastically shorten the text, there are some modifications that are more significant. First, Piglia omits any portions that would give away the Russian context of the story. In the first chapter, Andreev paints a picture of frequent bomb-throwing, common during his time in Russia (Andreiev, 107-108). Andreev also describes how the revolutionary carries an English passport and tries to speak in accented Russian to disguise his identity, but when he is tired, entering the brothel, he speaks correctly, and gives away that he is Russian (Andreiev, 12-13). Portions of the preface to *Luba* can be found in *Homenaje*, in two places, though the entire preface does not show up in Piglia's version of the story (Piglia, 107). Piglia removes most of background of the story, and adds in his own background, including snippets from Andreev, but mostly appropriating the story to his own times, situation and purpose.

Piglia also modernizes the language and removes words or episodes which would indicate the historical context of early 1900s. Talking about the lights, Piglia drops the word "electric," which would be unnatural in modern speech (Tasin, 14) (Piglia, 133). Andreev's revolutionary remembers a dead horse on the road after a terrorist attack, but Piglia, living in an era of motorized vehicles, ignores this incident. He changes somewhat archaic phrases and replaces them with more contemporary language. For example, Tasin's "beberé" (I will drink) (Andreiev, 15), becomes "voy a tomar" (Piglia, 134).

In addition, while Tasin (and Andreev before him) consistently uses verbs in the past tense, Piglia takes the majority of these and replaces them with the present tense. Rather than reproducing a story from the past, Piglia writes a text in the present, giving the impression of events taking place even now. By removing historically and

geographically specific references and contemporizing the language, Piglia's text becomes Argentinian, redesigned to serve a new purpose.

Piglia also modifies the revolutionary's character and personality. Andreev's bomb-thrower is young and inexperienced, nervous, emotional and, at times, violent. Piglia's on the other hand communicates a degree of confidence, ease and calm. In Andreev, the revolutionary often speaks with exclamation points, and Piglia turns these exclamations into calm assertions (Andreev, 16) (Piglia, 135). Where Andreev's hero shouts, Piglia's quietly states (Andreev, 37, 38) (Piglia, 143, 144). Andreev's revolutionary even grows so angry that he throws Luba against a wall, and points his revolver at her, causing her to cry (Andreev 25). In Piglia, Luba cries, but not because of any violence on his part (Piglia, 139). Later, after requesting sex, and being denied, he again is outraged and throws her against the chair, calling her crazy, dirty and drunk (Andreev, 34). In Piglia, Luba is shocked at his request, and moves away without looking at him, continuing their interactions without the drastic outbursts found in Andreev (Piglia, 139). Andreev's Pyotr is planning a deadly mission in two days, which may be the cause of his heightened emotion: he is trying to stay alive long enough to throw a bomb, an attack which will most likely cause his own death. Piglia's anarchist wants to live, and he seems to be less worried about his chances to do so.

Piglia also greatly sexualizes the text. Both stories take place in a brothel, but Andreev, perhaps due to the times, uses language and imagery which in today's context seem tame. Piglia intensifies the sensual references in the text. In Andreev, the virgin-revolutionary blushes at the sight of Luba's bared arms: Piglia's revolutionary views her naked body, apparently unfazed. When she "undresses" in Tasin, the young man turns his

head away, but in Piglia, he calmly watches. Piglia is much more explicit in his descriptions, giving colorful details of the prostitute's body, while Andreev's descriptions are more subdued. This may be due to historical and cultural values alone, but, if Luba serves as an image of literature, Piglia's elaboration may bring more force to his image, emphasizing the sexual appeal of the prostitute in order to emphasize the alluring effect of derivative or "unoriginal" literature, as well the violent or criminal aspects of writing, similar to Arlt's descriptions in *Homenaje* (Andreev, 17, 19, 29) (Piglia, 135, 137, 140).

The most obvious variation between the two texts is the ending. Piglia adds significantly, in his last several pages. After gathering Luba's friends in the room and toasting to their health, Luba is left alone with Enrique. She realizes he is going to leave. At this point Piglia-the-narrator inserts a footnote, which states: "La versión manuscrita se interrumpe acá. Lo que sigue corresponde a la copia mecanografiada por Kostia." (The hand-written version is interrupted here. What follows is from the copy typed by Kostia) (Piglia, 150). Here the narrator perhaps implies that Kostia himself finishes the story that Arlt left incomplete, further complicating the authorship of *Luba*.

Enrique offers to give Luba all the money in his wallet, telling her she can leave this life, marry a farmer and raise rabbits, starting a new life with the money. He admits the money is false, an echo of Arlt's descriptions of his own literature being counterfeit money. "Es plata falsa, pero eso no importa: nadie va a notar la diferencia. Son perfectos: los hizo el más grande falsificador de Sudamerica." (It is false silver, but that doesn't matter: no one is going to notice the difference. They [the bills] are perfect: they were made by the greatest counterfeiter in all of South America) (Piglia, 150).²⁵ McCracken

²⁵ There are a few similarities between *Luba* and Russian author Isaac Babel's short story *My First Fee* (*Moi pervyi gonorar*, 1922). Both involve a prostitute and young man, and both involve a type of

identifies this as an auto-reference, as Piglia congratulating himself on his well-hidden falsification of Andreev's text (1080). It could also be a self-reference by Arlt, or by Kostia, depending on who finishes the text.

Andreev's text ends with the police arriving in the morning, arresting the revolutionary, and possibly Luba as well. By this time, Pyotr does not seem to care, having lost sight of his vision during the night, and the assassination he at first was so anxious to carry out goes unfinished. In Piglia's adaptation, Enrique realizes that his revolutionary friends are in fact not "pure" as he once thought, but rather do what they do so that the world might become pure and good. "Son como vos y como yo. Como el hombre ese que se va a casar con vos y que se levanta con el sol para ordeñar las vacas. Ahora me di cuenta que no son puros: lo que hacen es luchar para que el mundo pueda ser puro y Bueno como un niño recién parido." (They are like you and me. Like the man who is going to marry you and wake up with the sun to milk the cows. Just now I realized that they are not pure: what they do is to fight so that the world might be pure and good like a new-born child) (151). Luba, who initially scorns him for his "purity," now is inspired by his mission, and begs to go with him. Enrique agrees that she should go with him: "Porque, ¿Quién va a hacer la revolución social sino las prostitutas, los estafadores, los desdichados, los asesinos, los fraudulentos, toda la canalla que sufre abajo sin esperanza alguna?" (For who is going to bring about the social revolution if not the prostitutes, the swindlers, the unhappy, the assassins, the frauds—all the riffraff that suffer below without hope of any kind?) (152). His confidence in his own self-purity has

counterfeiting, though in Babel's tale, the counterfeit is not the money, but the false stories the young man tells in exchange for the prostitutes favors. Due to his wide reading and fascination with Russian literature, it is possible that Piglia did not overlook Babel's work. However, I have not found any conclusive evidence that he had read or was influenced by this story.

been replaced with a realization that revolution will only happen through ordinary, even lowly and sinful people (152).

Pyotr escapes into the night, along with the prostitute, who discloses her true name, Beatriz Sanchez. As they leave the brothel, the city is shining, and the night is ending. The last word of Piglia's text is "amanecer" which can mean both dawn and also awakening. Andreev's darkness dissipates into the light of day (Piglia, 153). Just as Arlt's notes say, if you change the writing, you change the destiny (98). This is precisely what Piglia, through all his adaptations to the text does: he changes the destiny of Enrique and Luba, the destiny of both the literature and the author.

The most mysterious distinction between *The Dark* and *Luba* comes just before Luba and Enrique exit the brothel. As they walk through the main hall, they see a man and woman dancing in the violet light of the room. The man is short and fat, and the woman is dressed in light blue. She waves at Luba, and tells her goodbye. Luba returns the farewell, calling her "Maria del Carmen" (152-153). It is not the couple's absence from Andreev's story which makes their appearance surprising. It is their repeated presence throughout other parts of *Homenaje* and the whole collection of short stories in *Nombre falso*.

The fat man, the woman in the blue dress, and Piglia himself are characters who appear multiple times in the book. Piglia inserts himself into a number of stories in the collection, but conceals this somewhat in the first few instances, by using his alias Emilio Renzi, formed from his middle and second last names.²⁶ Renzi is the protagonist in *El fin del viaje* (The End of the Ride), a journalist who reappears to cover the murder of the

²⁶ Piglia's full name is Ricardo Emilio Piglia Renzi.

prostitute in *La loca y el relato del crimen* (The Madwoman and the Crime). While traveling in *El fin del viaje*, he encounters a woman wearing a low-cut, light-blue dress (Assumed Name, 26). In *El precio del amor* (The Price of Love), the woman wears a light blue dress, and is visited by her former lover, a thief (82). In *Homenaje a Roberto Arlt*, the narrator shares Piglia's name, though this fact is kept hidden until after Kostia publishes the story (Piglia, 128).

In *La caja de vidrio* (The Glass Box), the protagonist's roommate Rinaldi, is a fat man, who wears a striped shirt and silk suspenders, who breathes with difficulty, gasps when he talks, and drinks large mugs of beer (Assumed Name, 57-59). In *La loca y el relato del crimen*, Rinaldi and Renzi meet at the police station after a prostitute is murdered. The man responsible for the crime, Almada, is described as "Fat, diffused, melancholy, the fil-a-fil Nile-green suit floating on his body..." (Assumed Name, 67). He approaches a beggar woman and asks her name, before giving her money. She gives her name as "Echevarne Angelica Ines" (68).

In *Homenaje*, Rinaldi is a character from Arlt's notebook. Rinaldi is described as "Fat, gasping, the fil-à-fil Nile-green stained with coffee, chalk, and lipstick" (Assumed Name, 97). In the plot sketches for Arlt's novel, Rinaldi passes a beggar and asks her name before giving her money. She answers, "Echevarre, Maria del Carmen" (Piglia 99-100). Piglia-the-narrator tracks down Kostia, and lo and behold, he fits the same description as Rinaldi: fat, asthmatic, breathing and talking with gasps. He spends his time sitting in the violet light of the Ramos bar, surrounded by beer mugs, accompanied by a woman wearing a low-cut light blue dress (Piglia, 116-117).

Before writing *Nombre Falso*, Piglia writes down ideas for the story in his diary. While he has not finalized all the details, he knows one of the stories will be an encounter with Arlt. A journalist will find a notebook with letters and novel notes. He will also come across a man named Rinaldi. When he changed Arlt's friend to Kostia is not sure, but that the two share the same description and represent the same role is evident from the various stories with identical descriptions (*Los Años Felices*, 369).

By inserting Kostia/Rinaldi and Maria del Carmen at the end of *Luba*, Piglia has not only brought Russia into Argentinian literature, but now inserts Argentina into Russian literature, creating a truly inter textual work. That Kostia is both a fictional and a supposed real-life character, and that Maria del Carmen resembles both a beggar from one of Piglia's stories and from one of Arlt's, makes Piglia's "plagiarism" far more complicated than simply appropriating a translation of Andreev's.

Piglia's idea of literature is similar to the body of a prostitute which has been shared, "dirtied", used, and which can conform to different purposes for different situations. Contrary to McCracken's assertion that *Luba* is private property (1079), *Luba* is public property, available to be used by any man. Piglia attributes this same availability to literature, acknowledging not only the validity of "plagiarism" but its inevitability.

When Piglia-the-narrator says Arlt was a great writer, Kostia laughs, and says that he should read *Escritor Fracasado* (*Failed Writer*, 1933), the best thing Arlt wrote in his whole life. It is a story about someone who can't write anything original, who steals without knowing it himself. Kostia states that all Argentinian authors and all Argentinian literature is like that, false, a falsification of other falsifications. The image of the Argentinian author is the man who is unable to write without stealing, forging or copying.

And in this, Kostia sees a form of greatness. The reason he believes Arlt was great was because he was able to see a style in borrowing from poorly-translated Dostoevsky novels (Piglia, 119). The idea of “dirtying” texts, rather than preserving their “originality” connects back with Piglia’s thought on the utilitarian nature of art. Rather than focusing on an idealized view of beauty as something “clean” to be left untouched, Piglia advocates using literature (desecrating the palace vases or tearing up the velvet seats) to serve the revolution, to serve the masses. Piglia’s literary utilitarianism is less about economic gain, as Arlt’s is, and more about the right of the author (and of the people) to “use” literature in the way he may choose, to adapt it, as he does in *Luba*, and as Andreev does before him, to communicate his own message.

In *Formas Breves*, a work of literary theory mixed with fiction, Piglia describes the effect of literature on memory and life, revealed in one of the most famous scenes in the history of philosophy. Nietzsche watches a coachman beat a fallen horse, runs towards the horse and kisses him. Piglia says this took place on the third of January, 1888, and that from this date on, Nietzsche began to lose his reason. But what he finds incredible is that this scene is repeated from Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, where Raskolnikov dreams of a horse who is beaten until it is killed. Raskolnikov runs to the horse, hugs and kisses him. Piglia wonders that no one has noticed Nietzsche’s acting out a scene from literature, and describes the effect as false memory produced by reading (Formas Breves, 86).

Piglia describes a kind of inside-out relationship between reality and fiction: fiction can be formed from reality, but reality can also pattern itself after fiction, as the result of literary memories stored even in the subconscious. If each reader is affected so

strongly by what is read, it would be almost impossible to produce anything truly original, and thus the idea of original or individual authorship is an illusion. *Luba* and the entirety of *Nombre falso* emphasize Piglia's theory, not only in the ideas discussed throughout the book of theft and falsification, but in the very way in which Piglia produces the work, mixing and matching reality with fiction, borrowing from other authors and intertwining various characters or themes.

Gnutzmann, while not entirely uncovering *Luba*'s origins, correctly understands that the theme (or at least one theme) of *Homenaje* is the impossibility of a text have a single author. Each text is a rewriting of one or several previous texts (446). McCracken agrees that "'Luba' is not Arlt's or Kostia's or even Andreev's. Piglia has created a new text that is, in a sense, jointly rather than individually owned" (1080). Piglia's work advocates a communal understanding of literary production, an intertwining of real life with fiction, and a relationship between authors and works which is not confined to one historical time or geographical setting.

CONCLUSION

Reading *Nombre falso* in light of its Russian influences gives the reader a greater appreciation for Piglia's playful text, and clarifies his motives in borrowing from Andreev and infusing his work with multiple references to Russian literary and historical figures. Piglia's creative novella remains somewhat elusive even after delving into its Russian pre-text, but understanding Piglia's ties to Russian literature, theory and politics, does give insight into one important idea Piglia communicates through his tale: literature is a communal project.

Homenaje references many different authors and figures both real and fictional, weaving them into the text. Andreev's story is borrowed and adapted, drawing the reader into dialogue with all the potential authors of the text: Rutenburg, Andreev, Arlt, Kostia and Piglia himself. Kostia/Rinaldi and the woman in the light blue dress appear repeatedly throughout the entire collection, connecting the stories through various unique but overlapping relationships. By "stealing" and "dirtying" stories from real life and fiction and blending them together, Piglia shows that writing is and ought to be a collective practice.

Piglia's mysterious text also challenges readers to read and interpret literature communally. McCracken sees the text as calling for a post-modern reader who will establish a text's meaning. "Piglia demonstrates potently that despite an author's self-denunciation and truth telling, readers establish a text's meaning; even after years of

working with modernist and postmodernist texts, they may not discover the intertextuality, reading to a certain degree monologically” (1072). But perhaps what he truly is demonstrating is not that readers establish a text’s meaning, but how easily they can *misinterpret* the meaning of the text. Thus, a community is not only necessary for writing a text, but also for accurately understanding it.

Piglia invites his reader to join in the communal process of writing, reading and writing again. Even as he appears to bring closure to the long search and final discovery in *Nombre falso*, Piglia opens a loophole of unfinished searching, nudging readers to take active part in the text. After Kostia has published Arlt’s story, Martina, Arlt’s old friend and landlord comes to the narrator with a box found in Arlt’s collapsed workshop. Piglia-the-narrator finds inside the reason Kostia published under his own name.

The box contains a few bills of money, samples of Arlt’s rubber stocking, a paper covered in chemical formulas, an article of Arlt’s on the economy, a copy of Andreev’s *The Dark*, and the missing pages from Arlt’s notebook, numbered 41-75. They contain the tale *Luba*, but Piglia-the-narrator realizes that the story is incomplete. Mixing and matching between the notebook pages and Kostia’s typed copy, he puts together what he calls the final version of the text (Piglia, 129-130). Most likely, the reason Kostia chooses to publish Arlt’s work as his own is that he is the author of the story’s end, and thus feels himself an, if not *the*, author of the story. Ironically, in choosing a title for his book, Piglia uses Kostia’s title, *Nombre falso*, not just for the final story which includes *Homenaje* and *Luba*, but for the entire collection of short stories.

What is most curious about Arlt’s metal box is not what it contains, but what it does not. When Piglia-the-narrator first finds Arlt’s notebook, he says that pages 41-77

have been torn out of the notebook (Piglia, 94). The metal box from Martina contains only pages 41-75, leaving unanswered the location of pages 76 and 77. The search remains unfinished, and readers are left to discover or to imagine the contents of Arlt's missing pages. Piglia, rather than completing a project to compile Arlt's final works, opens the door to new writing possibilities, presenting his readers with an unfinished story, inviting them to join in the communal activity of contributing their own versions, adaptations and stories to the global project of literature.

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