

METAPHOR AND AESTHETIC RESPONSE IN DÍAZ RODRÍGUEZ'S *ÍDOLOS ROTOS*

Unlike his better known *Sangre patricia*, Díaz Rodríguez's first novelistic endeavor, *Ídolos Rotos* has almost been ignored by scholars, receiving nearly none of their attention. In light of the truly *modernista* concerns put forth within the pages of this text one cannot help but wonder why this should be so. After all, a narrative whose main protagonist is an artist whose ideal of beauty as part of the totality of expression of his country's being is shattered to the point of the deepest of disillusionments (expressed by an apparent rejection of the *patria*), is very much in keeping with the kind of thematic preoccupation common to writers of this period.

Gonzalo Picón Febres' well known reading of the novel points to the satire of the society of Caracas, but ends emphasizing that "*Ídolos Rotos* huele a odio en todos sus capítulos, transciende a desprecio por Caracas, respira cruel venganza."¹ For him Alberto Soria is a character whose figure "llega a hacerse antipática por su vanidad, por su egoísmo, por su soberbia insana, por su pedantería insufrible..." (PF, 401), and he seen in the final words of the narrative, "FINIS PATRIÆ,"² an ending that "resulta completamente inmoral por su triste desenlace, porque contribuye a la disolución antes que a la unidad" (PF, 403). When seen in this manner, it is not surprising that the novel "no tuvo la resonancia ni el prestigio que eran de esperarse" (PF, 399). In his book on Díaz Rodríguez, Lowell Dunham presents some interesting material which shows how the novelist reacted to Picón Febres' criticism. In a letter to him he said that

Ni el crítico ni nadie tiene derecho a juzgar sino de sentimientos e ideas expresados en una obra. Si no, en cuanto el crítico se consagre a *suponer* como usted hace, y a *suponer con éxito* como usted dice, estos o aquellos sentimientos, estas o aquellas opiniones en un personaje y aun en el mismo autor de una novela, de hecho se coloca fuera del terreno de la crítica, y no hay libro que se le deshaga entre las manos, ni reputación de autor que no se desmorone, cometiendo así, ya no de modo probable sino de modo seguro, la más perfecta injusticia. En el caso presente la injusticia es flagrante.³

¹ Gonzalo Picón Febres, *Literatura venezolana en el siglo XIX* (Caracas: Fuentes para la historia de la literatura venezolana, 1972) 399-404. From now on I will cite in the text referring to PF. This text was originally published in 1906. (Caracas: Empresa El Cojo).

² Manuel Díaz Rodríguez, *Ídolos Rotos* (Paris: Garnier, 1901) 349. All future references to this novel will come from this edition, and all italics will be mine unless otherwise indicated.

³ I am reproducing this as presented in Lowell Dunham, *Manuel Díaz Rodríguez: Vida y obra* (México, De Andrea, 1959) 31. The letter originally appeared titled "Epístola ingenua" in *Sermones líricos* (Caracas: Talleres de "El Universal", 1918) 219-31.

If Picón Febres attacked Díaz Rodríguez's patriotism, Luis Monguió attacked his integrity: "si contrastamos esta actitud de su vida diaria con su actitud literaria, no puede dejar de llamarnos la atención la diferencia de tono que existe entre las dos: servidor de un régimen de logreros, predica el desinterés y el idealismo; funcionario de un gobierno de oligarcas, proclama su fe en la juventud y en la rebeldía; colaborador del más inculto y el más retrógrado de los espadones americanos, ensalza la curiosidad y la cultura."⁴ Díaz Rodríguez was not alive to defend himself from this reproach, but the statement quoted above would suffice to counter it: simple consideration of the notion of implied author makes it clear that this also is a statement that belongs outside the scope of literary criticism, and one that does not warrant labeling *Ídolos Rotos* as "su obra más cruda."⁵

There have been, to be sure, less vehemently outraged approaches to this novel, but it appears that they lack a firm footing on the text capable of doing it some justice by showing that its concern is not with a rejection of the ideal concept of *patria*. On the contrary, building and attempting to maintain this concept is precisely what Alberto Soria's problem, and his final statement, consist of. A persistent pattern in the handling of the novel is a short commentary which reiterates its controversial nature and/or focuses in on the neurotic nature of Alberto Soria or his adulterous relationship. Lydia D. Hazera's recent article reflects this pattern. Here she devotes all of two paragraphs to the novel and reveals not only a superficial reading, but an erroneous one as well: "Soria becomes so depressed by the hostile environment that he gives up all dreams of sculpting a native Venus and returns to Paris."⁶ This is simply not true, Soria sculpts the Venus criolla only to see it destroyed by the people of his country, and his return to Paris is, at best, Hazera's guess at what might take place after the novel's end.

What almost all the critics do agree upon is that with Díaz Rodríguez "la prosa modernista llegó a su apogeo en Venezuela"⁷ and that "cierto preciosismo musical y don pictórico es su gran aporte a nuestra prosa moderna [venezolana]."⁸ It is interesting to note what Díaz Rodríguez himself had to say about *modernismo*. He writes that "En medio a la general confusión individualista, contradictoria y anárquica del arte moderno, se pueden, a mi modo de ver, descubrir y determinar, como caracteres de lo que se ha venido llamando modernismo en arte y literatura,

⁴ Luis Monguió, "Manuel Díaz Rodríguez y el conflicto entre lo práctico y lo ideal", *Revista Iberoamericana* 11.21 (June 1946) 50.

⁵ Monguió, 50. This kind of statement is precisely what Wayne Booth was referring to when he said that it is "only by distinguishing between the author and his implied image that we can avoid pointless and unverifiable talk about such qualities as 'sincerity' or 'seriousness' in the author." [*The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) 75].

⁶ Lydia D. Hazera, "The Spanish American Modernist Novel and the Psychology of the Artistic Personality," *Hispanic Journal* 8.1 (1986): 77.

⁷ Max Henríquez Hureña, *Breve historia del modernismo* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1954) 287.

⁸ Mariano Picón Salas, *Estudios de literatura venezolana* (Madrid: EDIME, 1961) 150.

dos tendencias predominantes y constantes...la tendencia *a volver a la naturaleza y la tendencia al misticismo*.”⁹ The characteristics of the return to nature are *sencillez, ingenuidad* and *intensidad*, while the mysticism is “clara visión espiritual de las cosas y los seres;” he stresses, however, that “no es el médico, no es el sabio, sino el poeta o el artista quien sabe el alma de las cosas.”¹⁰ The structuring elements of the text offer the opportunity to see this to be reflected by *Ídolos Rotos*. Even a rapid and superficial reading makes apparent the abundance of vocabulary related to nature and, specifically, to plants; more careful consideration allows one to see that the entire novel is organized around a series of oppositions (such as, for example, the beautiful vs. the utilitarian, the artist vs. the politician, presence vs. absence.), which are ultimately unified by this particular natural language: it provides a cohesive medium for the whole, and the result is the construction of a metaphor which conveys meaning on a level beyond the literal, and which, as far as I have been able to ascertain, has gone unnoticed up to now.¹¹ This series of oppositions will articulate and construct a double vision of *patria*: that which it is in a physical sense, and that which it can be in an ideal sense. As we will see, both of these concepts of *patria* are incorporated within the metaphoric construct we will be analyzing, what we may term an organic structure.¹² As we relate the oppositions just mentioned to it we will see emerge a reading of *Ídolos Rotos* quite

⁹ Manuel Díaz Rodríguez, “Paréntesis modernista o ligero ensayo sobre el modernismo”, *Camino de perfección y otros ensayos; apuntación para una biografía espiritual de don Perfecto* (Caracas: Cecilio Acosta, 1942?) 91, 94.

¹⁰ Díaz Rodríguez, *Camino*, 101.

¹¹ Cedomil Goic, *Historia de la novela hispanoamericana* (Valparaíso, Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1972) points out that the descriptions of El Calvario, and particularly of the Plaza Bolívar in *Ídolos Rotos*, “son conducidas a la expansión alegórica o simbólica.” (140). Dunham states that “otra característica que se observa en la prosa de Díaz Rodríguez es el uso frecuente de metáforas y símiles” (59). Neither, however, take their observation further. Perhaps it should be mentioned here that, though we will not be dealing specifically with them here, at the level of metaphor there are several elements which belong to the animal/human realm and which usually function in the novel to modify elements of the vegetable world. See, for example, the description of the hills in the beginning (9) and of the bushes of the plaza (174), both of which show evidence of baldness, as well as the moment when the tree is described as having the blues (176).

¹² The concept of organic form can be traced (in the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition) to Coleridge, and it consists of a “Literary structure growing from an inner germinative principle, as a tree grows to fulfill the innate ideal structure of ‘tree’ rather than being some mechanical form imposed from without.” [*The Harper Handbook to Literature*, Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker and George Perkins ed., (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) 328.] In the opposition between organic (living, natural) and inorganic (mechanical, artificial) forms, the former has been generally favored on the grounds that they “grow from the meaning and embody it, while inorganic forms pre-exist and therefore act as a straight-jacket to meanings.” [*A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, Roger Fowler ed., (Boston: Ruthledge and Keagan Paul, 1973) 134.] It is enlightening to note Díaz Rodríguez’s own view on style, which resemble this ‘organic’ view of form. Style is for him “obra, en suma, de la naturaleza, aunque parezca venir de la más lejana entraña creadora, nace con la misma espontaneidad y la misma gracia de vida que el pájaro, la planta o la flor; pero su vida no pasará como la de estas frágiles criaturas en un vago lampo de belleza, antes bien se fijará para la eternidad, palpitando sobre la página, la tela, o el mármol, con la sangre inmaterial del estilo”; “el estilo es suprema flor que resume en su fragancia toda la recóndida fuerza de la individualidad” (*Camino*, 173).

different from that offered up to now by the critics; a reading, that is, which will show that while Díaz Rodríguez was—as has been said by those who have dealt with his work—a *modernista* writer in terms of style, the concerns that he expressed in this novel point to some problems that can be seen as factors which lead to there being such a thing as *modernismo*, and that its ending offers not disunion and a negative view but rather a positive alternative for a future with hope.

From the very beginning the discourse is articulated on the basis of the familiar theme of *civilización y barbarie*. Alberto's memories of his school days make this schism evident between him, gifted by "inteligencia clarísima and almost everyone else, characterized by the narrator as "incapaces de reflexión, descuidados del porvenir" people for whom "era ya imposible un desarrollo natural, harmónico y sereno. Condenados á la fatiga premadura, en ellos el *germen primordial*,...en cuyo regazo van las aptitudes y las energías de cada individuo, *había muerto ya...*" (13). In this description, where the reader obtains an understanding of Alberto through the characterization of 'the others,' we begin to see a contrast which will be maintained throughout the narrative, and a starting point for our development of the metaphoric structure. For if the *germen* had died in everyone else, in our protagonist it was only latent, "dormido" and "*del germen brotó, derramándose como savia invisible por todo el sér incontaminado de Alberto, una fuerza nueva que...le hacía buscar, casi á pesar suyo, en los seres y las cosas, la gracia y la armonía.*" (18) at the time that he, compared to a "flor sedienta" (18), drank the 'life-giving fluid' of the waters of the environment of Paris. The beautiful (grace and harmony), is given as a value a positive mark by the narrator, who presents it, to use Alberto's own words, as "algo vital" (115). Leaving his chosen field, "el estudio monótono y frío de las matemáticas" (16), Alberto began to express his artistic being in sculpture, and "en sus amores buscó y halló Alberto el *germen* de su primera obra de arte" (29), the *Fauno robador de Ninfas*, which earned him a certain degree of fame in Paris and even in his home country. The creative capacity and the appreciation of beauty is consistently seen as the *germen*, something alive which must be nourished in order to sprout and grow.

The Alberto who returns home after a 5 year stay in Paris has changed the way he perceives his homeland: "Le seducía la idea de volver á la patria. Y al pensar en la patria, no pensaba en la realidad sino en la imagen que de ella se había formado durante su austera vida estudiantil, imagen hermosea y engrandecida más tarde por los recuerdos y la ausencia." (32) However, Alberto has constructed his own concept of reality through his absence from it, and returning means confronting a reality which, as we will see, stands opposed to the dream he shared with others of "recoger...ideas, luz y energías, que más tarde irían á *sembrar como simiente* de bendición en el suelo de la patria." (26) Emazábel pronounces prophetic words when she says that "iremos a dar tal vez en una misma encrucijada obscura." (28) The ugly reality manifests itself immediately upon Alberto's return: on the one

hand the conflicts at home, between his father and Uribe (his sister Rosa's husband), coupled with the problems with Pedro, his brother; and on the other, the general attitude evident in the social circles of Caracas within which Alberto circulates: these are the main sources of what will be Alberto's conflict, which will eventually focus on the concept of *patria*. On a symbolic level, this concept is tied inextricably to an ideal of beauty, while in an immediate, physical sense it is linked to a new bourgeois ideology which has brought about a reality based on utilitarian, monetary values within the scope of which the beautiful ideal is not allowed to exist.

This tension is first seen in his exchanges with his brother. Not long after his return Alberto "se dió á saborear las dulzuras de la vuelta" thinking that he understood for the first time that "*Se parte únicamente para volver. Mucho del goce de un viaje está en el regreso*" (46, italics are Díaz Rodríguez's). However, his first venture out into the streets caused "una impresión tan viva, un desagrado tan profundo" (46) that he found himself compelled to return to the house. We can understand what Alberto himself professes not to in terms of *ausencia*, which "había en él poco á poco borrado la memoria de las proporciones" (47). The cure for this reaction caused by the shock of reality bursting the bubble of the illusion created by memory and the imagination, is provided by his books and his art. Pedro, who is present as Alberto unpacks them, understands neither.¹³ At the end of this brief scene "nada persistía en su espíritu de su inexplicable disgusto en la mañana" (53), but Díaz Rodríguez was successful in presenting to the reader the contrast between the brothers, one oriented toward appreciating the beautiful, the interior side of being, and the other more superficial and object oriented, as well as the very important and in a sense paradoxical manner in which absence affects our perception: that which is absent is made beautiful by our imagination, while the perception of reality destroys the ideal vision created by the mind. In fact, Alberto now explores his native city "con la impaciencia del extraño" (53): the dream is gone, and he has a reality to discover.

The contrast between the brothers which was first presented in aesthetic terms is further developed as the discourse articulates other clashing elements which may be expressed by the opposition of 'us' and 'them'. Just as in the beginning we had Alberto vs. almost all the others, we will now see Alberto and a select few vs. all the others. It is Alberto's father, don Pancho, who first voices concern with Pedro's involvement in politics, what he calls "una triste feria, la feria de las almas feas y

¹³ We're told by the narrator that he gave opinions on the books "con la voluble gracia de ese diletantismo ligero que, por sólo conocer *la fragancia y la flor* se aventura á decir cómo está hecha *la médula del árbol*" (49), and that he did not understand very well "la alegría y casi exaltación del hermano ante dos objetos...el uno era una cabeza de yeso...el otro, una acuarela pequeñita..." (50); later, "Alberto se deshizo en alabanza de la obra y del acuarelista, alabanzas cuyo álito fervoroso no entusiasmó el alma del oyente. Pedro no miraba en la tela sino un manojo de flores..." (52).

monstruosas" (79), what Pedro would later defend as the necessary means "para subir y ser alguien en mi tierra" (86). Alberto will feel "un sentimiento indefinible de tristeza y disgusto" seeing in Pedro "una peligrosa flexibilidad inaudita de ánimo, según la cual se acomodaba á las ideas y opiniones de su interlocutor, aunque éstas fuesen perfectamente contrarias á las suyas" (86). This, coupled with "las primeras crueles punzadas de alfiler del medio, revelado de pronto como enemigo, le obligaron á recogerse, casi á aislarse, en un círculo estrecho de pocas personas, de muy pocas, las más conformes con su alma." (86-87) Although this stab is first said to be the way in which people (them) "se fijaban en lo superficial" (87) of Alberto's being, he had already felt in the conversation with his father: "«Con todo eso, ni una palabra, buena ó indiferente, sobre su arte, sobre su gloria y su porvenir de artista.»" (82) The later assaults on his "vanidad de artista" (87) do no more than exacerbate the pain already felt then: his own father, rejecting him and his accomplishments, was one of 'them', just as his brother was. From this point on the reader is confronted with a world polarized between 'us' and 'them', and a world which is decidedly biased against 'them', even though 'they' rule and dominate in it.

According to Wolfgang Iser, "The text must *bring about* a standpoint from which the reader will be able to view things that would never have come into focus as long as his own habitual dispositions were determining his orientation;" as a tool to achieve this, four main perspectives are offered by a text, those of the narrator, the characters, the plot and the fictitious reader. These "provide guidelines originating from different starting points...continually shading into each other and devised in such a way that they all converge on a general meeting place...the meaning of the text;" further, "the reader's role is to occupy shifting vantage points that are geared to a prestructured activity and to fit the diverse perspectives into a gradually evolving pattern."¹⁴

The perspective of the narrator is sympathetic to Alberto and his friends, while it maintains a consistently ironic tone when referring to 'the others'. This is consonant with the point of view of Alberto and his friends, whose voices attack and condemn the situation that surrounds them. Other characters seldom speak, and their point of view is, much more than Alberto's, modulated by the voice of the narrator. As the reader picks up, consciously or unconsciously, the leads offered by these perspectives, he is also conditioned by the elements that make up the metaphor, through which life and growth is associated with beauty, while aridity, stunted growth and death are linked to the practical approach to life. The result of this process is that the reader finds himself consistently propelled toward one point of convergence: *Ídolos Rotos* makes evident that here politics run on the basis of profit and power, a business-like approach to the handling of the country which

¹⁴ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978) 35.

generates an interest in the physical, material aspects of life, and that this view leaves aesthetic considerations behind unless these are linked, like the statue to Sucre, to personal gain. This kind of situation can be interpreted as being the result of a new bourgeois ideology where profit and power are the primary values. As Ángel Rama sees it, unless “se comienza por establecer esta situación de rechazo de la creación artística por la estructura socioeconómica creada, será difícil entender a los poetas del período modernista. Persistirá entonces esa soterrada convicción de que ellos, por libre y suicida vocación, decidieron rehusarse al servicio de la comunidad y encerrarse en bloqueadas torres de marfil.”¹⁵ As we have already begun to see, the world of *Ídolos Rotos* is polarized between the artist and the vast majority of the people. The reader who has come this far in the narrative is already being forced by the text to stand on one side or the other of the fence as he organizes the structuring elements encountered to form a coherent whole, and this undoubtedly causes him to relate the situation portrayed to outside reality.

Around the figure of Mario Burgos, “*arbiter elegantiarum*” (88, italics are the author’s) the narrator builds a poignantly ironic portrayal of the “cabezas pulchras de elegantes” (88) worried about Alberto’s dress, his exterior rather than his interior being. It is easy to associate Burgos with *burgués*, and, further, to identify him with Rubén Darío’s *El rey burgués*: Admired by “los de su corte” who are but “simple parásitos...casi todos de cerebros lisos en los cuales nunca se extravió el grano de una idea” his prestige comes “en primer término [de] su riqueza, una de las más redondas y brillantes de la ciudad” (89). His opinion that Alberto’s “único mérito se reducía á «fabricar muñecos» más ó menos curiosos, trabajados más ó menos con arte” (89) is a statement of complete ignorance in terms of aesthetic appreciation, but the consequent rejection by the “círculo de gomosos” (89) that surrounds him is just “vulgar inquina” while to it is soon added “la inquina aun más profunda de invidiosos é incapaces contra lo que en él [Alberto] había de superioridad absoluta ó de absoluta diferencia: el artista y su gloria” (91).

The “imbécil calumnia” (94) according to which Alberto, unable to produce anything but a mediocre work, had managed to get a real artist to produce it for him, was the work of “el célebre crítico Ramos y el académico Rincones” (93), and “fue acogida con placer, y con igual placer divulgada por aquellos á quienes Alberto parecía presuntuoso, á quienes Alberto era antipático y por los que...no sabían divisar, al través de su apariencia de hombre como cualquiera hombre, su alma de

¹⁵ Ángel Rama, *Rubén Darío y el modernismo (Circunstancia socioeconómica de un arte americano)* (Caracas: Ed. de la Biblioteca de la Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1970) 60. While agreeing with Rama’s thesis to some degree, Françoise Perus argues against his position on several grounds, pointing out that the socioeconomic cause that Rama sees as *the* cause is but one of several factors involved in the development of Latin American Modernism, and that it requires qualification as taking place within the scope of “la perspectiva del escritor cortesano venido a menos” and not from a “punto de vista ahistórico y socialmente determinado.” [*Literatura y sociedad en América Latina* (México: Siglo XXI Ed., 1976) 94.] In spite of the controversy, what is relevant to our study is pointing out that the socioeconomic factor was a significant one.

artista.” (94, sic)¹⁶ This is the moment of true disillusionment, when Alberto “en su tristeza profunda se sintió como abandonado de los hombres, como perdido sin esperanza en un desierto” (94). Appreciating art and beauty in his country “es promesa de dolor, desamparo y olvido” and his *patria* is not what he had thought upon his arrival:

Para él, entonces, la patria era como dos grandes brazos ávidos de estrecharle tiernos y amorosos y dos labios tendidos á besar su boca y su frente con amor inflamado de orgullo. Pero los brazos empezaban á ceñir su garganta como un dogal de hierro, y los labios á besarle humedecidos en un brebaje venenoso. «¿Por qué? ¿Por qué? ¿Acaso no era él de los buenos, de los buenos hijos de su país?» (95-96)

The idealized concept of *patria*, expressed in somewhat romantic terms, is destroyed here by the actual experience of the *patria*. It has become the cause of a death worse than physical, the death of the soul, filled with “muchas cosas muertas, como de innumerables *pétalos marchitos*, despojos de una antigua y blanca ilusión casi completamente *deshojada*” (95).

Conceptually the reader is asked to join two elements which are related in a real sense as well as in terms of metaphoric structure of *Ídolos Rotos*. Flowers and seeds are related to *tierra*, the physical element in which plants are rooted, which also metonymically stands for the *patria*. Alberto now plunges fully into the work he has already begun: the “estatua de una chicuela criolla” in which “quiso reproducir *en barro de la tierra* la belleza del tipo de raza más común en el pueblo de su país, belleza original, mezcla de oro y canela, obscura y fragante.” (84) This work is different from the others, and it resides in a room separate from the one where those marble and bronze are housed: this statue, unlike them, is the expression of the beauty of America. Alberto’s struggle with carrying the work to its end is presented in now familiar terms. He fears that, should he die, the ‘others’ could consider the unfinished statue as evidence that “el puro manantial de la inspiración artística” was exhausted, and feels that “su alma [era] como un *Sahara funesto* en donde los *gérmenes* de arte mueren abrasados al caer, sin que uno solo *arraigue* y eche *flores*.” (98) By contrast, in a later discussion with Amorós, Alberto maintains that “los silencios en arte son como en la naturaleza: los llena *el canto de los gérmenes*. Durante el solemne silencio periódico del exidio invernal, no sabe la naturaleza de muerte ni de ocios: trabaja, trabaja, y de antes acendra, al través de la promesa de

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that in terms of the reader this sentence results in a clear manipulation. The sympathetic view provided of Alberto has by now brought at least some readers to identify with his character. The fact that several groups of people are shown as gladly spreading the lie about him gives the reader yet another chance to choose his own stance. However, the reader who now can feel that Alberto is *antipático* or *presuntuoso* is associating himself with ‘them,’ the enemy of the ideological perspective of the novel and thus, presumably, would be among those who would spread the rumor, and clearly nobody would be on *that* side (See page 1 of this study for Picón Febres’ opinion of Alberto). What is more, those who do not agree with Alberto are *ignorant*, “no sabían divisar,” and what reader would identify with being ignorant?

la *hoja* y la sonrisa de la *flor*, toda la miel de los *frutos*.” (116)¹⁷

But the true moment of opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’ comes when the statue is finished. The first reaction that is given to us is that of Alberto’s friends of the “«círculo de intelectuales inconformes»” (163), Alfonzo, Emazábel, Sandoval and Romero. It is this last one, the disillusioned writer, who most clearly sums up their opinion of the statue:

—¡Admirable!...Y no podrán decirte exótico y descastado como tantas veces me han dicho á mí, porque escribo de literaturas extranjeras y en mi prosa llana aseguro no entender lo que quieren significar hasta hoy en literatura con criollismo, americanismo y otros ismos semejantes. No podrán decírtelo, porque *has magnificado con barro de la tierra la belleza criolla*. (163-164)

As always, the reader’s perception is shaped first by presenting the view endorsed by the narrator, that of the artist, which will later be contrasted with the other one. This view is presented as coming from another artist, a writer, and it is given not only as an aesthetic judgement to consider, but as a judgement which precludes the kind of criticism which would be aimed at an artist concerned more with imported values than with the development of truly homegrown ones. The figure of Romero is significant in terms of Díaz Rodríguez’s view of the Modernist artist (and he specifically mentions the poet) as he who has “clara visión espiritual de las cosas y de los seres.” As we will see, it is Romero who articulates some of the key insights that express the position of the artist (of which Alberto is but the central example) in the society portrayed by the novel.¹⁸

Convinced by Sandoval that since “*Aquí* nadie se mueve por ver una estatua ni un lienzo” and that “es necesario obligar, siquiera un día, á los dignos habitantes de nuestra muy culta ciudad á ennoblecerse los ojos” (172, italics are Díaz Rodríguez’s), the statue is displayed alongside Sandoval’s painting in a bar in the Plaza Bolívar. It is here in the plaza, the focal point of Caracas’ social exchange, where the full force of the two sides of the question, the ‘us’ who appreciate art for its beauty and ‘them’ who reject and ridicule it because they do not understand it, comes to bear. The physical description of the square provides a setting to which the reader will then be asked to relate the participants to the social exchanges. The ironic tone consistently maintained by the narrator when referring to ‘them’

¹⁷ This particular episode is interesting in that Alberto, unable to stand with what is being said by Amorós, whom he call a “buho” just walks away silently. In *Ariel*, José Enrique Rodó writes that “Para un espíritu en que exista el amor instintivo de lo bello, hay, sin duda, cierto género de mortificación en resignarse a defenderle por medio de una serie de argumentos que se fundan en otra razón, en otro principio que el mismo irresponsable y desinteresado amor de la belleza, en la que halla su satisfacción uno de los impulsos fundamentales de la existencia racional. Infortunadamente este motivo superior pierde su imperio sobre un inmenso número de hombres a quienes es necesario enseñar el respeto a ese amor del cual no participan, revelándoles cuáles son las relaciones que lo vinculan a otros géneros de intereses humanos.” [eds. A. Nin Frias and J. D. Fitz-Gerald, (New York: Benj. H. Sanborn & Co., 1928) 46.]

¹⁸ In *Sangre Patricia* the poet is “la flor más alta” [(Caracas: Ed. Nueva Cádiz, 1902) 144.]

becomes evident at once and is maintained at a high level throughout. The description that follows poignantly shows the unkept state of the square, caused

ó por incuria del Municipio, ó por la escasez de sus rentas, a lo sumo bastantes para cubrir las necesidades y exigencias del gobernador, el cual debe de tenerlas considerables y cuantiosas, á juzgar por lo enorme de su vientre y el número de sus queridas, elevado al decir de la fama. *Tal vez por iguales motivos, algunos árboles, y de los más hermosos, languidecen y mueren: implacablemente abandonados á luchar solos con una multitud de parásitos de la peor especie, estos parásitos los han vencido, invadiendo sus troncos y ramas, abrazándose de su corteza, robándoles la savia, hasta impedirles dar nuevas hojas y flores.* Por fortuna, la fea y cruel invasión no se ha extendido á todas las plantas: *aún hay algunas ilesas.* En cierto lugar predominan los *jabillos*, en otros las *marías*; cerca de estas...abundan las *acacias*...Otras plantas existen sólo en ejemplares únicos. Así...un *apamate* sin hojas, de brazos raquíuticos, enfermo de murrias. No lejos del *apamate*, un *lechozo* endeble, abrumado por la exhuberancia de dos árboles vecinos, fijaba á menudo la atención de Romero. Este *creía adivinar una armonía profunda entre la salud y suerte de su patria y la salud y suerte de aquella planta enfermiza*, delicada como una hebra, de altura inferior a la de sus iguales en el bosque, de hojas raras amarillas, y de frutos escasos, pequeñitos, que caían muy antes de llegar a la madurez perfecta. (175-76)

Several interesting elements emerge in this rather long quote. The first is the irony and satire with which the narrator attributes the responsibility for the state of the *plaza* to two possible causes. Both are plausible, but the reader has already been conditioned by half the novel—this description is located almost exactly in the center of the 350 page text—and has been conditioned to see the politician as corrupt. At this point the reader is forced to make up his mind, either it's "escasez de rentas" due to the governor's thievery, or it's plain "incuria del Municipio." Both are regrettable and probably true, but the reader who chooses the former possibility is identifying with the ideology of *Ídolos Rotos*, he is being, to use Laclau's terminology, interpellated.¹⁹

The description of the trees themselves reflects the peculiar way in which Venezuelan **modernismo** focused on local aspects of nature in its descriptions of it.²⁰ At the same time these trees can be seen as fitting into the pattern of oppositions that have been structuring the metaphor that we are working with. Most of these sickly trees are being attacked by parasites, while a very small minority is not, and this helps to make the connection, within the context of our argument, between the artists, those in whom the fluid of life still flows, and the others around them, those in whom the *germen* has died; the specific parasite that attacks the trees is the politician whose only interests are material gain, getting rich and obtaining a position of power quickly and by whatever means necessary.²¹

¹⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London: NLB, 1977) 100-103.

²⁰ One of the characteristic traits of Venezuela narrative after Guzmán Blanco is "la descripción de las costumbres y de la naturaleza en Venezuela con sus colores propios." (Picón Febres, 213).

²¹ It should be noted that the type of metaphor we have been considering is not limited to *Ídolos Rotos*; *Sangre Patricia* has a metaphoric substratum whose terms resemble very much that of *Ídolos Rotos*. Referring to

Romero sees the trees as an expression of the condition of the country, "enfermiza," and it is not coincidental that he should be the one to make the connection between the *patria* and the trees in the *plaza*. His pessimism "tenía raíces hondas," and his life is described as being "condenada...á ser vana y estéril como una *tierra maldita* donde los gérmenes enferman y se pudren...Consideró como el fin más noble y justo que pudiera dar á su vida, el ser útil con toda su fuerza y entusiasmo á la patria." (176) His concern with the state of the educational system prompted his authorship of a book in which new European techniques were being offered as a concrete application to counter the "casi primitiva" education which was creating "toda una clase de hombre inútiles, *declassés*" (178, italics are the author's), stomped by the great competition in specific oversaturated fields. Semi-ignored by the critics and blocked by "el respetabilísimo y colosal engranaje de la Administración pública" (179), Romero saw himself obliged to take a job as an "humilde corrector de pruebas en una incolora revista oficial" (180). The people to be seen in the Plaza Bolívar, "literatos á medias y á medias políticos...pertenecían á la clase denunciada, en el libro de Romero sobre la educación, como una clase peligrosa de parásitos y de parias: doctores que...*vienen a dar, como en un refugio, en la política*...Detrás de los vivos laureles de un guerrillero afortunado, van ellos arrastrando sus pálidos laureles de doctores nulos ó indignos." (184-185) In the figure of Romero converges the image of the parasites of society, accused and unmasked directly but not fought, on the contrary, accepted, by a system itself parasitic, satisfied to allow individuals to feed on other members of society to further their personal gain. Sterile souls, the result of a sterile land that does not provide the elements necessary to nourish and foster the growth of the seeds inherent in all the individuals who inhabit it. Romero is not the only one who has seen shattered his efforts to bring his dream to fulfillment. Sandoval, for instance, is a painter, and the government "mató en flor sus esperanzas" (166), the result being that, rather than being able to offer "el casi intacto caudal de su experiencia, de sus luces, de sus ideas estéticas, ajenas y personales, originalísimas todas," he was forced to become a *retratista* (169) whose characters were "beocios y filisteos," uncultured and artistically not enclined subjects who could not perceive the subliminal representation of the "negra sordidez de su alma" (170) which constituted Sandoval's small revenge.²²

Tulio Arco's family, the narrator says that "el círculo de miseria iba estrechándose cada vez más alrededor de los hombres aun puros, como el implacable círculo de una invasión de parásitos que amenazaran ceñir con sus abrazos mortales a los pocos árboles todavía enteros de una selva antiguamente lozana y gloriosa. Es cierto que en esos mismos árboles había ramas colaterales marchitas, ramas completamente secas, o pobres de hojas, lánguidas, inútiles, porque hasta ellas no subía la fuerza del tronco, y si alguna vez florecieron, sus flores no cuajaron. Así, en el linaje de los Arcos, había de esas ramas muertas y enfermizas. Pero la rama principal...se presentaba siempre, a la cita de la cosecha, con su carga de talento y virtudes. Y en Tulio, último brote de esa rama..." (18-19)

²² According to Pedro Díaz Seijas, "Provocar el filisteo será una de las intenciones que ya nos parecen candorosas del Modernismo." [*Historias y antología de la literatura venezolana*, 3rd ed. (Caracas: Jaime Villegas, 1960) 151]. Naive or not, it has a definite function here, but only for those who can see it.

The element which ties the politicians as parasites to this scene in the *plaza* is introduced at the beginning of the fourth part of the novel:

Cantaban las cigarras. De cada árbol, de cada arbusto brotaba el monótono canto anunciador del estío. Cerca y lejos, cada mancha de verdura, cada rama, cada hoja era un chirrido estridente, insostenible, como la nota más alta y gloriosa de una cuerda hecha de cristal que estuviese vibrando hasta romper de frenesí ó de júbilo...venían del oeste, de los raros follajes respetados aún por la incuria administrativa sobre el Calvario, colina antes revestida de flores y de lozana arboleda; venían de los cafetales...; *de todos los puntos del horizonte venían*; y en la ciudad misma, de cada patio ó corral lleno de árboles de sombra, de cada jardín, de cada plaza pública, surgía un coro idéntico, ensordecedor y penetrante...*Alberto...se imaginaba oír en aquel grito el grito de su tierra enferma de fiebre, torturada de sed, que clamaba á los cielos, implacablemente azules, por una gota de agua. La tierra tenía fiebre.* (255-56)

This image of a thirsty and feverish land taken over by the cicada is significant. As we have noticed, man seen as vegetation needs life giving fluid, an education which will teach how to appreciate beauty, so as not to dry up and shrivel. Instead what arrives is the cicada, an insect which, though not normally considered a pest, is responsible for the death of trees not only through its feeding on them but even more by the particular way it has of reproducing.²³ The cicada is in this context a perfect image of the politician, and the connection is made a little later, in the second description of the Plaza Bolívar:

Arriba, en cada rama, en cada hoja una cigarra. Y cada cigarra un chirrido estridente como la nota más alta de una cuerda hecha de cristal que estuviese vibrando hasta romper de frenesí ó de júbilo. Abajo...*una turba de politicastros venidos como las cigarras de todos los puntos del horizonte*, paseaban, bajo el rubor de los árboles, *pálidas lepras* que no sabían de rubor...En su mayor parte eran *senadores y diputados*, venidos á la capital, como las cigarras, de todos los puntos del horizonte...*Ahí llegaban armados de pasiones pequeñas, de intereses pequeños, de enormes apetitos.* (296-97)

It is not by accident that the description of the sound of the cicada is repeated almost verbatim in both passages, because it serves to reinforce for the reader the link and to help him make the connection necessary to see that those cicadas and these are one and the same, and that the empty and monotonous discourse of the "politicastro" is just like that of the cicada, unchanging.²⁴

²³ About the cicada, in *The Encyclopædia Britannica* 15th ed., (Chicago: Helen Hemingway Benton Publ., 1980) we find out that "Although not ordinarily considered a pest the females, if numerous, may damage your saplings during their egg laying" (Vol. II, 933), and that the periodical cicada is described as causing severe injury "to oaks, hickories and young fruit trees" as they lay their eggs in some 75 different kinds of trees. (Vol. 8, 1037). It should be noted, as it was pointed out to me, that the cicada is a quite common feature of Summer in Venezuela, and that in this respect its appearance here also corresponds to the characteristic tendency of Venezuelan Modernism to portray local nature.

²⁴ Dunham points out the fact that Díaz Rodríguez "repite la frase clave de la escena preparatoria" after having concluded the dramatic action and, he adds, "este ingenioso ardid falla muy pocas veces en lograr el efecto que el autor desea." (59) Dunham however never makes clear what this effect might be.

Among the many of this species that are presented to us, one stands out as being different, even though he is, without a doubt, one of 'them': Dieguez Torres. What makes him stand out is the fact that he is described as someone who could have easily been one of 'us'. Torres is "un inteligente;" "Con su talento claro y perspicaz reconocía y hasta loaba el mérito; mas, para los fines de su ambición, trataba de oscurecerlo...escritor capaz de pulchras, nobles concepciones de arte, su pluma la tenía pronta al servicio de mezquindades y vilezas...una de sus manos cultivaba y cogía flores de arte, la otra se empeñaba en remover y esparcir *infectos lodos*." (93) The reader almost can't help noticing, for it is unusual, that the way in which he is initially described is not ironic, and that Torres could have gone the other way, the way of Alberto, though capable of it, but he put his gift not to furthering and ideal of beauty, rather he used it to further his political aims in order to "satisfacer sus deseos de fortuna y de mando" (93).

It is precisely after an encounter with Dieguez Torres, now "el politicastro" that Romero articulates the sharp division that exists between the artists and the politicians: "—Ese hombre es un miserable. Todo puede temerse de él. Y por los dos le temo. Lo peor es que vivimos entre innumerables Dieguez Torres, son legión, y de ellos es la tierra. ¡La patria! eso no existe para nosotros. «...En una atmósfera llena de miseria y fealdad política no cabe una chispa de arte ni un fulgor de belleza.»" (193) Only now is the reader ready for the final sentence from 'them' on Alberto's statue and Sandoval's painting, which appears in an article that anonymously "debaja brotar la mala fe entre vaciedad y vaciedad *como un negro chorro de fango*." (195) The ideal of the *tierruca* (read: *patria*) which the artists have and want to share, but from which they are excluded, the very ideal that Alberto has expressed in his *barro*, is nothing but *fango* and *infectos lodos* in the hands of those who, not understanding it, reject it: thus reality turns the beautiful ideal into something ugly and repulsive.

As the revolution breaks out, what is stressed is the selfishness and avidity of the "histriones de política" who "proseguirían en su perpetua farsa carnavalesca, seguirían representando, no los intereses de ningún pueblo, sino sus propios intereses,...lucro y política en su jerigonza infame eran sinónimos." (304) With this immediate background, and that of the previous 300 pages, the suggestion is made by Alfonzo that "Quien como Soria tiene un ideal artístico, debe salvarlo y salvarse, huyendo." (311) Alberto is inclined toward the words of his friend, and the reader who has truly been interpellated by the text could not but agree. However, he does not emigrate, he merely leaves Caracas for fear of repression due to his brother's involvement in the revolution. As Alberto leaves the city, the image of the sunset stimulates him once again to feel the sickness of the land:

En la sombra cesaron por último los cantos de cigarras. La noche borró, en lo alto de bucares y acacias, el rubor de la fiebre. Pero la fiebre seguía. Su rubor, aun más violento que en la cima de los árboles, rompió de nuevo á relampaguear en la sombra nocturna, incendiando los aires, royendo los flancos del Ávila, en las coronas de llamas

de la loza. Las terribles coronas de fuego se dilataban, crecían cada vez más, avivadas por los vientos de la altura. *Mientras Alberto admiraba el incendio de la roza, en su espíritu se abría la flor de un símbolo...* Las purpúreas coronas de llamas de la roza eran las únicas dignas del dios de aquellas comarcas, un dios indígena, semibárbaro y guerrero, cruel y voluptuoso, un dios que fuera al mismo tiempo el dios de la Voluptuosidad, la Codicia y la Sangre. (317-18)

An image, this one, that once again integrates completely in the metaphoric whole that Díaz Rodríguez has set up in *Ídolos Rotos* and which the reader has to reconstruct. The *roza*, the fields ready to be seeded, are on fire, dry, sterile, unable to give life to the seed that Alberto, and a few others like him, had dreamt of planting there.

The final blow, the destruction of the statues that name the novel, is significant in that it is perpetrated by the *populacho*, the members of the revolutionary army that were assigned as their quarters the School of Fine Arts, "el único rincón de su tierra consagrado al estudio del arte" (341) where the copies of the *Fauno* and the *Ninfa*, and the original of the Venus criolla had been housed for safekeeping. It is this last work that which Alberto is most worried about, since the others "al fin son copias" (342), while it is the original nature of the Venus criolla that makes it important. When he is finally allowed to enter the school, the soldier, one of the "tipos del pueblo" that constituted the body of the revolutionary army, tells him that "—La cuestión es que loj muchachoj han...desarreglao un poco esos muñecos. Como cuando uno viene de campaña no lo licencian á uno ái mismo..." (345, ellipsis is Díaz Rodríguez's).²⁵ The destruction, which Romero sees as "la epopeya de la Sangre y la Lujuria" has affected almost all the statues housed in the hall, violated by the soldiers "entre una frenética explosión de erotismo bestial" (346). Alberto's works were also affected, but in a peculiar way:

La estatua del Fauno era, en efecto, la sola estatua respetada de la chusma. Con su alma de plebe, oscura y supersticiosa, la soldadesca vió, á través de la frente bicorne y de los labios irónicos del semidiós de los campos, un demonio truhán y vengativo.

Pero sobre la Ninfa y la Venus criolla parecía haberse encarnizado la furia de espasmos y caricias bestiales de los bárbaros en celo. Sobre todo la Venus criolla era una sola ruina triste... (346-47)

Though superstitious fear is attributed for saving the Fauno, the reader who has caught his essence can see that the members of the revolutionary army saw themselves in it, and that by destroying it they would have been destroying themselves, in a sense. Because the Fauno, as it did earlier, stands for 'them,' the

²⁵ When seen alongside the refined and stylistically elaborate language that has traditionally been given as evidence of Díaz Rodríguez's *modernismo*, this significantly short example of popular language can be seen as representing an implicit valorization of low aesthetic form which goes hand in hand with a low measure of aesthetic appreciation.

others, those who don't understand or appreciate anything that is not themselves in a practical, physical sense,²⁶ while the Venus, also an expression of them, contains the beautiful ideal that Alberto has incorporated in it, and for this reason it is the most viciously attacked of the statues.²⁷ Alberto's final statement is more than the rejection of the *patria* that it appears to be. Cedomil Goic says that "El *Finis Patriae* con que la novela concluye certifica, doblemente, la ignorancia de lo real tanto como la vanidad del artista y su ensueño de una patria mejor."²⁸ But Soria's statement is just exactly the opposite of this, it is a statement provoked by his *awareness*, not ignorance, of reality and of the rejection of him, and of others like him, *by* the *patria*. The "FINIS PATRIÆ" pronounced by Alberto at the end is given as anticipating the "FINIS PATRIÆ" of the barbarians who are destroying it in a physical sense and represents the attempt by civilization to recreate the idealized concept of homeland that his physical presence in the country has made impossible for him to hold on to. Just as his father had to die in order for him to truly feel free, the *patria*, the *fatherland*, has to die, in a physical sense, for him to feel free to recreate it in terms of the future expression of a dream.²⁹ The absence, leaving the homeland, allows the artist to maintain an ideal and further it in spite of the opposition faced at all levels within its physical bounds, just as while he was absent he had the respect of his compatriots, which he lost upon his return.³⁰

The *modernista* preoccupation with a cosmopolite view has been studied

²⁶ The earlier apparition of the Fauno took place when Alberto and his friends gathered to discuss a strategy by which they could put into action their ideals of beauty for the purpose of building "la patria nueva." Twice the *Fauno robador de ninfas* is mentioned, at the beginning and at the end of their meeting, and both times it is stressed that "se reía, se reía, con su eterna sonrisa burlona" (212). As Romero senses, "—El Fauno se ríe de nosotros," he is laughing because he is one of 'them.' The *populacho* that later destroys the statues is literally a "violador de ninfas," and, in a particular way, through the Venus criolla, of its own beauty. They are agents of destruction of what is theirs, though by sparing the Fauno in which they recognize themselves they do not self-destruct. The Fauno is also the other members of 'them' that we have seen throughout, the self-interested bourgeois and politicians who are destroying the country in their own fashion.

²⁷ There is a striking symbolic parallel between *Ídolos Rotos* and an image out of Rubén Darío's earlier "Palabras Liminares" to *Prosas Profanas*, where "La gritería de trescientas ocas no te impedirá, silvano, tocar tu encantadora flauta, con tal de que tu amigo el ruyseñor esté contento con tu melodía. Cuando él no esté para escucharte, cierra los ojos y toca para los habitantes de tu reino interior." [(Madrid: Mundo Latino, 1917) 10.] Clearly, the laughing *Fauno* corresponds to the "ocas" ('them'), while the Venus criolla is the tune of "silvano" the artist; the "ruyseñor" are the ideal receptors, Alberto's friends ('us') both in and out of the novelistic context.

²⁸ Goic, 139.

²⁹ Perhaps too obvious to mention is the etymological link between *patria* and *padre*. Like *patrio*, it is a cultism derived "de patrius, 'relativo al padre'," which probably passed to Spanish from Italian in the later XVI century. [Joan Corominas, *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico* (Madrid: Gredos, 1981) Vol. IV, 335.]

³⁰ The idea of maintaining a beautiful ideal through absence is also developed in *Sangre Patricia*. Borja explains that his reason for not visiting Spain was not a question "de falta de amor, sino de exceso... Como todo hombre en la vida, así el viajero en sus viajes debe tener siempre una reserva de ilusión, siquiera sea una sola ilusión intacta. *Debe abstenerse de conocer algo de lo que se figure más hermoso.*" (84-85, italics mine).

extensively, and there is no doubt that it is a recurring theme of the period.³¹ In *Ídolos Rotos* it is a concern as well, for it is in the city, Paris in particular, where we see that Alberto's creative and artistic side flowers. It is in the city where the full impact of nature is felt (through its absence) and where, through the exchange of ideas that takes place, this can be translated to the artistic creation of beauty. What cannot be done, and this is reiterated in *Ídolos Rotos*, is moving and transplanting one culture, such as the French, to another. The many references to the way in which Alberto is misunderstood because of how he dresses, the many characters who are shown as misinterpreting the meaning of another culture, the actual attacks against Parisian culture as misleading and noxious to the culture of America attest to this: those who look for the latest fashion in Paris without seeing the aspects of that culture can, if properly integrated, lead to an enrichment of their own are misinterpreting the very essence of what a cosmopolite view entails for Latin American modernists.³²

The impossibility of transplanting a foreign culture to America is represented symbolically by the scene in Rosa's garden, as she shows her brother the results of her work in it. Amidst the beauty of roses and other flowers that grow to full bloom, there are some that do not:

...Se me olvidaba decirte que las camelias, aunque seguí muy fielmente las instrucciones que me dabas en tus cartas a papá, se malograron. Logré sólo una mata, y esa ha dado una flor, tan feúca y tan ruin, que me dan tentaciones de romperla. Ven y la verás. Por aquí...De este lado...¿La ves? Es una limosna de planta con una lástima de flor. *La flor no es sino la caricatura de como son en Europa, según dicen.* (35-36)

The direct insertion of another culture, its transplant, so to speak, cannot take place. It is interesting to note that José Martí in his essay *Nuestra América* addresses the problem in similar terms: "Injértese en nuestras repúblicas el mundo: *pero el*

³¹ An overview of the subject may be found in Luis Monguió, "De la problemática del modernismo: la crítica y el «cosmopolitanismo»,» in ed. Lily Litvak *El Modernismo* (Madrid: Taurus, 1981) 157-169.

³² Emázabel is given the role of criticizing the effect of cosmopolitanism and the culture of Paris on Latin America. In fact, he says, a whole book about "los daños cada vez mayores del cosmopolitanismo" (201) could be titled Paris; the negative influence "en el desarrollo y costumbres de aquellos pueblos" consists of the creation of "lechuguinos y damisela «inconformes»" who reject their own for that which is foreign. The erroneous interpretation of the foreign ways results, in his opinion, in a process of destruction of individuals: "Almas de simples, casi bastas é inocentes, París las devolvía monstruosas...Hombres públicos honestos, libres de mácula hasta el instante de embriagarse con la espléndida visión de París, regresaban con ásperos apetitos de lobos..." (203). However, "tal vez el mayor de los daños de Cosmópolis, o de París" is done to the intellectual, the scientist and the artist, since "casi fatalmente, con el nivel intelectual crecía el desapego al terruño." (204) His mentality shaped by Europe, he returned to his country to meet a situation "hostil á sus ideas, gustos é ideales" which caused him to be "en medio de sus compatriotas, como extranjero que hablase una lengua incomprensible." This definite attack on cosmopolite ideals has its counterpart precisely in what happens to Alberto, for he was able to apply his knowledge and gift, certainly shaped by his experiences abroad, to produce an expression of American beauty.

tronco ha de ser el de nuestras repúblicas."³³ The general ideology of *Ídolos Rotos* fits in with Martí's argument that an understanding and an expression in terms of 'lo americano' is what will bring about real changes. Alberto, who began by copying a European model of aesthetics, grew to produce the beauty of America in his Venus criolla; but the problem remains the fact that this sincerely American contribution is not appreciated. To avoid the destruction of the ideal, and in order to preserve it, he who carries it needs to leave the medium that the ideal is an expression of. Alberto is not, as Lydia Hazera would have it, "but another abulic hero, defeated by his own lack of inner resources to adapt to reality;"³⁴ on the contrary, he was able to adapt his ability to express his dream in terms of reality, but even this was rejected by a whole community unable to incorporate that expression into itself.

The final words of the first edition of *Ídolos Rotos*, beyond the "Finis Patriæ," are, actually, "Caracas-Paris, 1989-1900" (349). This creates an interesting link between the two capital cities which, while it could be interpreted as the autor's actualization of an ideology of disunion such as Picón Febres saw in the novel,³⁵ it is also readable as a statement of union of the two. Keeping in mind the reading we have just done of *Ídolos Rotos*, it seems clear that this link does not refer to the transplant of French culture to Venezuela, nor to the outright rejection of Venezuela, the *patria*, for France. Rather, what it points to for this reader is an expression of a cosmopolitanism which, by the insertion of foreign elements into an American base and with a focus on an original and appropriate development for America, can give rise to a society in which the contribution of the artists and the appreciation of beauty as an ideal do have a place of their own.

David P. Russi

Northwestern University

³³ José Martí, "Nuestra América," in Andrés Sorel ed., *Antología* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1975) 94. Italics are mine.

³⁴ Hazera, 77.

³⁵ According to Luis Beltrán Guerrero, Díaz Rodríguez was on his honeymoon between 1899-1901, when the novel was published in Paris. [*Modernismo y modernistas* (Caracas: Academia Menor de la Historia, 1978) 46.]