

# The utopia of America: Time and Authenticity in Ángel Rama's critics

A utopia da América: tempo e autenticidade na crítica de Ángel Rama

Pedro Demenech

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8247-1460> 

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses Ángel Rama's critique of Latin American culture, mainly in the prologue to *La novela latinoamericana. Panoramas 1920-1980* (1982), the only collection of texts he published while still alive. In the prologue, Ángel retraces his steps across essays written between the sixties and the seventies, analyzing and scrutinizing his own intellectual and theoretical concerns. By reading the prologue, one realizes how time and authenticity were articulated to inaugurate an idea of America. Ángel then employs the principles of incompleteness and fugacity to interpret Latin American culture as an essay. Furthermore, he proposes a re-reading of Pedro Henríquez Ureña's *La utopía de América* (1925). Finally, he deals with the issue of temporality at a moment in history when the present seemed infinite.

## KEYWORDS

Latin America; Ángel Rama; Time.

## RESUMO

Este artigo trata de algumas questões presentes na crítica da cultura de Ángel Rama, professor, jornalista, editor, ficcionista e dramaturgo uruguaio para a América Latina, principalmente no prólogo de *La Novela en América Latina* (1982), a única coletânea de textos que publicou ainda vivo. Nesse prólogo, Ángel, ao haver recolhido alguns de seus textos escritos entre os anos 1960 e 1970, remontou um percurso no qual analisou e esmiuçou suas preocupações intelectuais e teóricas. Tornando possível perceber como o tempo e a autenticidade são articulados para fundar uma ideia de América. Depois, utiliza os princípios de inacabamento e provisoriidade para interpretar a cultura do continente como um ensaio. Adiante, fez uma releitura de Pedro Henríquez Ureña sobre a utopia da América. Por último, lidou com uma temporalidade situada entre o passado e o futuro num momento em que o presente parecia infinito.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

América Latina; Ángel Rama; Tempo.

During the sixties and seventies, Rama wrote a series of essays that were later published under the title *La novela latinoamericana. Panoramas 1920-1980*. To get right to the point, I quote an excerpt from its prologue (RAMA, 2008):<sup>1</sup>

we write in Nuestra América about the role of time, about *perishable time*, we write about the reader's urgency and the environment and the hour that we live or which lives in us, undoubtedly time writes us and disperses us, and transforms us into ashes (RAMA 2008, p. 17, self-translated).

This is the role of time which, in Rama's work, points to a place of writing. In fact, this 'reciprocous writing'—embodied in the idea that America 'writes' him as he writes about America—is followed by the exercise of reading, the urgency to give meaning to a continent oscillating between utopia and failure.

In other words, nostalgia and future aspirations are not enough: we must write the past and design the future. That is why José Martí's<sup>2</sup> (1853–1895) *Nuestra América* becomes, in Rama's hands, a Latin American cultural project, or, more precisely, a reflection on the continent's identity.

According to Aguiar and Vasconcelos, Rama's imbricated relationship with Latin America is like a novel taking place in another time—muffled by the violence of dictatorships, yet also containing the spark of transformation born in the post-World War II period, when different radical ideologies (Third Worldism, developmentalism and culturalism) were articulated on a continental scale by different groups of intellectuals (AGUIAR; VASCONCELOS 2001, p. 15–27).

Rama sees Latin America as a utopian territory, so he tattoos the rigor of these years on his own skin. In addition to supporting the Cuban Revolution, he resisted the Uruguayan military regime established in 1973, earning him the prize of almost 10 years in exile and, above all, an intellectual solitude that is sometimes misunderstood, as it resulted from the choice of maintaining critical independence.

1 - From now on, I refer to this work by means of the following denomination: *La novela...* It is worth pointing out that I did not use the first edition, from 1982 (published by Colcultura and organized by Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda).

2 - Cuban intellectual who worked as a journalist and lived part of his life in exile, mostly in New York. He was also politically active and left behind a body of work that is fundamental for thinking about the unity and modern concept of Latin America.

Rama embraced authenticity as a value of action, derived mostly from the irony ingrained in his criticism. For the most part, this choice is accompanied by the desire and effort to establish an authentic cultural experience, a particularity of modern consciousness which, according to Trilling, is linked to the possibility of restoring a lost connection between man and the organic world (TRILLING 2014). That attempt at reconnecting was present especially in his obsession to write about a tradition that, in the sixties and seventies, seemed to be not only threatened, but rather dissipated.

Thus, the construction of authenticity is expressed in Rama through values such as *organicity* and *tradition*, incorporated into his critical thought so as to ensure the existence of Latin America. However, it is not so much the the past, but rather the present, that is able to provide an authentic existence. Our stratum of time, by its very condition, inscribes both past and future. This is what allows the critic, as well as the novelistic characters he analyzes, to patiently survive a world constantly threatened by degradation:

... so many years of mistrusting the book's illusory and eternal pomp, I must be getting older as I patiently recompile five hundred years of Latin American culture for the Ayacucho Library ... when I agreed to put together in a volume what I wrote during this minimum lapse encompassing 1964 to 1981, in which I followed, step-by-step, the rise of the novel (RAMA 2008, p. 17, self-translation).

Rama was suspicious of the book's pretense of eternity, since he knew that he could disappear like the characters of the novels he studied. He embodied the task of rebuilding culture, or, even better, reorganizing it. Paradoxically, in this way Rama makes eternal a culture that is permanently losing its eternal quality. In fact, as he strives to rebuild culture, he is actually rebuilding his own work. That is why the prologue of *La novela...* gives us access to major theoretical questions as approached by Rama, helping outline some crucial issues.

In a compilation form, the historicity of his criticism stands out above all. Likewise, we investigate Rama's intellectual trajectory, dispersed among the magazines and newspapers to which he contributed. When dealing with such a collection, the concern must be to create an organicity for these dispersed writings, i.e., build a compilation.

Writings scattered in books and magazines here and there, without order, answering on demand; they do not come from ourselves, distance us from what we would like to do and, for this reason, we may never find propitious leisure (RAMA 2008, p. 17, self-translation).

The rationalizing urgency evoked above is integral to intellectual work in Latin America. It is present at the time of writing, which cannot be thought of if not as a product from both readers and literary thinkers. Thus, as a literary intellectual in the second half of the twentieth century, Rama builds upon newspaper criticism in order to build a culture (AGUILAR 2010). Since he has to actually approach his audience, part of his intellectual output is distributed among these means of communication. Thus, the disorder of his writings, which he recognizes, is more due to the unrelenting speed of the press than to the lack of an intellectual project.

*Order, demand, interior, idleness:* words that, read separately, seem to have no meaning in the context of Rama's life trajectory. Together, however, they could be thought as synonymous to his Latin American project. I say this because, even in these dispersed writings, the presence of a overarching will is evident, emanating from the critic's soul and leading Rama to draw nearer to America. Thus, these words become even clearer if we read them as part of

A selection, moreover, of those panoramic studies, which draws the general movements, and [also] seeks to unveil the internal processes of a genre, on an immense continent, full of millions of incommunicable men (RAMA 2008, p. 18, self-translation).

Rama's criticism is at the same time an *explanation* of a literary genre, the novel, and a *communication*, since he articulates letters to bring together cultural differences. His work seems to be nothing more and nothing less than the production of panoramas that open his readers' horizons. These readers may be incommunicable in relation to one another, and yet they live on the same continent, Latin America. Therefore, the *internal reading* of these Latin American novels brings us closer to their external processes of production. The very subtitle of *La novela...*, "Panoramas: 1920–1980," already indicates the extent of Rama's tradecraft in the period between the 1960s and 1970s, when the so-called Latin American boom placed it in the spotlight worldwide. That is why, in the book, Rama's Latin American narrative on the avant-garde outbreak does not reach beyond the eighties. I believe that at that point in history, the idea of a time that writes us as we write it, of which Rama spoke about, was even clearer. In fact, we can see how his texts

... answer to external demands ... for anthologies, magazines' special numbers, weeklies, because—we hardly have to insist on this point—the novel is the vulgar genre of the time, driven by the imaginary of others, in which the triumphant continental man came to be codified, forgetting that his greatest virtues lie in his *poetry* and his *essay*, the *old, real genres* (RAMA 2008, p. 18 – *my emphasis*, self-translation).

In justifying that his work is driven mainly by external demands, Rama touches on a point concerning Latin America's frail development of intellectual activity. In addition to the lack of public and minimally committed cultural development institutions, which began to take root in the 19th century, the Latin American intellectual has to contend with extensive work hours in non-related jobs.

In Europe, in countries such as France and England, since the late eighteenth century the novel has developed with institutional support—including public education policies that increased readership—and was also able to count on the

emergence of a sprawling publishing market. Its development was encouraged by the press, which in the second half of the nineteenth century had been consolidated by the book industry. In Latin America, however, this only happened after the 1920s. Thus, we realize that

... some of the novel's functions in Europe—as a representation (and domestication) of the new urban space—were carried out in the Latin American continent by forms that enjoyed less prestige in the old continent, such as the *chronicle*, generally linked to the journalistic milieu (RAMOS 2008, p. 99 – *author's emphasis*, self-translation).

However, since the Latin American novel reached its apex between the 1960s and 1970s, it is understandable why Rama devoted himself to studying it: in addition to responding to requests from magazines and newspapers, he had to earn money. Although we are discussing the prologue of a collection of essays about the novel, Rama's internal articulation in *La novela...* reveals issues external to his text. The organization of the essays by their own author also says something of himself.

Uncoincidentally, poetry and essay are defined as the “old real genres” of America. According to Rama, this reveals a virtue of the American past that still has a bearing on the present. These two genres, in fact, are associated with reflection and creation. The two traditions, according to the author, would have been weakened by the literary market's demands.

Without necessarily refuting the novel, Rama extols the forgotten virtues of poetry and essay, admitting: “I think it pleases me more to linger on a book than on an author” (RAMA 2008, p. 18). As in a confession, Rama speaks of the pleasure of critical activity. After all, in its origins, both poetry and essay are genres that produce pleasure and demand reflection, i.e., explanation. Rama, in following this path, points, in the first person, to the reason for this explanatory act:

To go into a text to revise it and make it mine, to write from it more pages than those that compose the original text, to unfold a work ... adds to that fragment and transposes it into *another* intellectual discourse. Because criticism ... is always an autonomous creation (RAMA 2008, p. 18 – *author emphasis*, self-translation).

Criticism in this sense is not merely explanatory. On the contrary, as an intellectual discourse, it appears as an autonomous creation building upon what already exists. In this passage, Rama reveals the active role played by the critic in the construction of literature, something close to Perrone-Moisés' "critic-writer" (PERRONE-MOISÉS 2009). For Perrone-Moisés, this critic-writer, besides performing a dynamic valuation of the past, deals with poetics (as creation) by means of canonical forms that dialogue with tradition, novelty, influence and intertextuality.

The critic-writer resembles the intellectual writer. The difference between them is that, for Perrone-Moisés, the critic acts within the literary space while, for Gilman, the intellectual acts within the public space (PERRONE-MOISÉS 2009; GILMAN 2012).<sup>3</sup> Their respective roles are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary. In Rama, for example, both roles are present in Latin Americanism as a creative tool in the opposition to pre-established cultural models which claimed to be universal, but excluded Latin America. In this dialogue with literary works, he approaches the past and the present, in a literary space gaining meaning in the public context, as he is committed, precisely, to building Latin American culture. In this way, it is necessary to emphasize that in the course of his readings, Rama gave meaning to, selected and pointed out values pertinent to the development of what began resemble a literature, an invention stemming from the "pleasure of reading" (RAMA 2008, p. 19).

For Rama, literature is a personal taste defined by *sorcery*, *delusion* and *madness*, inaccurate and even exaggerated words that reveal a possible connection between critical activity and the attribution of values, both consequences of the passion for reading. Passion and value aggregate and exclude the inner makings of literature, since, according to Rama:

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2 - Cuban intellectual who worked as a journalist and lived part of his life in exile, mostly in New York. He was also politically active and left behind a body of work that is fundamental for thinking about the unity and modern concept of Latin America.

*The depth of a text is what we decide is profound. And not even that: it is impulse and enjoyment ... I know that I adhere to this prolonged knowledge, which ceaselessly searches and always finds something new to kindle the desire (RAMA 2008, p. 19 – my emphasis, self-translation).*

Subjectivity, one of the defining elements of individuality, also determines literary value, a movement that makes Rama's work endless. Passion as portrayed here would be synonymous with the search for novelty because, through this passion, Rama constantly revises the past to construct values, move the present, and provide a basis to what this present calls "new." Thus, little by little, the "new" gains form in the future. Explaining and penetrating the text's depths by means of impulse and enjoyment, so as to create something more consistent, in a way enhancing tradition, are the tasks that Rama assigned to himself.

Criticism, then, is to write further on the basis of pre-existing work, mainly to produce a discourse that pretends to be another. Hence the question of how the critic, more than adding elements to literature, creates an autonomous genre.

Thus, Rama wrote extensive, but not conclusive, essays on authors such as Júlio Cortázar, José María Arguedas, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Salvador Garmendia. Reading these authors, he accumulated enough material to write his "libros-ferrocarril," based on the compilation of previously published articles, revised and rewritten. He attributed this idea to his mother, who read only the Bible, a book where one could find the sum of *universal knowledge* necessary for explaining life (RAMA 2008).

As well as the five hundred years of Latin American culture, recompiled in the Ayacucho Library, Rama knows the culture of his present. All the abovementioned authors were consecrated by the Latin American boom, to which he opposed, declaring that this art would lose value if treated like merchandise. It should be noted that, for him, literature, besides aesthetic delight, is an instrument of political action and criticism.



... If I have never been able to bear the widespread vanity of those who are mere apprentices, it is because I have never been interested in the authors, their little stories and their ephemeral glories that obscure their deep selves. But the beauty, the pleasure of works of art [that appear] as if they had no author, as if they were written by History or Society or God—by all unknown [words with] capital letters—and were left here for our splendid rejoicing, written in eternity (RAMA 2008, p. 20, self-translation).

*History, Society, God and all the unknown capital words:* elements that write—and circumscribe—a “self” deep in eternity. These words seem to create asymmetrical and antithetical concepts, such as: author versus History, ephemeral glories versus Society, vanity versus Truth. However, they are the basis of Rama’s critique of culture.

Such words, equivalent to conceptual abstractions, give form and force to history, and history for Rama is fundamental. Thus art reaches its fullness out of mundane places such as fame, work, and ambition. In opposition to this, it should transform human experience through socio-cultural development, changing and improving the mundane society in which it was created.

In *La novela en América Latina*, Rama drafted a series of panoramas, defined as “visualizations of a set, in which the author and his works are mere support beams for the will of tendential forces, which draw the ‘figure’ of an epoch” (RAMA 2008, p. 19–20). Drawing epochal figures, Rama’s work is a balancing act between personal desire and external demands. He justifies, therefore, that his essays on literary works differ from his panoramas, made in alternation with the critical activity.

In the prologue, Rama outlines a sort of panorama of his work, setting up an epochal figure in which he inserts his own trajectory. We could say that Rama is applying his mode of literary analysis to portray an image of himself. The idea of the essay, as presented by Lukács (2015), introduces a way for this reflection on an “image,” present in texts such as the prologue of *La novela...*, to be realized. This becomes

especially true in light of the fact that the book brings together different panoramas, linking them into a new unit. This occurs in the construction of this narrative where panoramas, work and life, independent of each other, are articulated to produce something new, in order to impress vigor and movement on Rama's intellectual journey.

The prologue, moreover, reveals the major characteristics of Rama's work, a continuous *work in progress*. We find something inconclusive by nature, for his work produces "questions [which] are directed to life, dispensing the mediation of literature and art" (LUKÁCS 2015, p. 34). The essay, like other writings accumulated by Rama, precedes any systematization and presents itself as two-way street in a continuous state of reformulation. According to Lukács, "both the one who judges and the one who is judged ... circumscribe a whole world in order to bring to eternity, precisely in its singularity, something that once existed." For this reason the essay "is a tribunal, but its essence, what determines its value, is not, as in the [judicial] system, the sentence, but the trial" (LUKÁCS 2015, p. 52). Rama's work is, in essence, unfinished, open, that is: a panorama that fecundates horizons while delimiting times.

## Culture as essay or fusion of new forms

The *principles* of incompleteness and provisionality allow Rama to interpret American culture also as an essay. In each new form something is added, becoming more deep and opening up the indecipherable horizons of a continent that, by its own history, is inconclusive as well singular and closed. Perhaps, Rama systematized the continent's contrasts in order to face the severity that life imposed on him. Or, because

This has to do with a tendency which—more than to myself—I attribute to the cultural environment where I graduated. Parodying Graham Greene, I could say that "Uruguay made me:" the critical spirit which developed there during a certain historical period, in which I had to live, was so dominant, that I

named a book dedicated to Uruguayan letters from 1939 to 1968 as *La Generación Crítica* (RAMA 2008, p. 21, self-translation).

This quote could not more accurately reflect a subject related to Rama and to my thesis. It is about *formation* and *being tied* to the so-called “critical spirit” of Uruguay which, in addition to modeling his identity, serves as a paradigm for interpreting American culture and society. His connection to the homeland is so strong that his contemporaries were

possessed by critical spirit ... written by the time, by the urgency with which society had become entangled in its self-examination, after a long and joyful and trusting period, until leaving no space for any other consideration (RAMA 2008, p. 21, self-translation).

Possessed by the critical spirit and written by the time: good definitions for someone who claimed that in America one writes about the role of time, perishable time, the urgency of the reader, the environment and the time we live. Thus, as a member of this “critical generation,” the bonds he established with this happy and confident society were fundamental.

Still in his youth, concerned with the course of society, scrutinizing its political problems, he concludes that “it is worthless to aspire to be outside, to dream of a vision, like the one men from [the year] 2000 will dream of, at their own risk. We will be fatally alienated from it, as has happened many times before” (RAMA 2008, p. 21, self-translation). Therefore, there is “no other way of reading literature than from our lives’ historical point of view, which, apart from any partisan or doctrinal restraint,” he designates as the point of view of a “culture that builds a people in the circumstances this people happened to find itself in” (RAMA 2008, p. 21, self-translation). This critical spirit develops further throughout the years, and the idea that “Uruguay made me” is translated into the following statement:

... now I can only say that I was born in a popular neighborhood of Spanish immigrant priests. In that place and in the nearby public school I was educated, in an open and alluvial society that had codified democracy, hopes and happiness (RAMA 2008, p. 21, self-translation).

Borrowing from an expression by José Luis Romero<sup>4</sup> in reference to Argentina, Rama speaks of an open and alluvial society, mentioning the immigration flow that changed the socio-cultural configuration of the Platine region between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Words like hope and happiness, and the achievement of democracy, attribute value to this society or, more precisely, to the epochal figure of Uruguay. Such is the importance of this moment that Rama states that

as with historical time, the country in which one is born, the family to which one belongs, the society in which one grows, it is about previous coordinates that, even when denied, do not fail to explain the fundamental components of a life and an intellectual task (RAMA 2008, p. 21–22, self-translation).

4 - About the expression "aluvional" (alluvial) see: Altamirano (2005).

We can point to some traits that Rama inherits from this society. Influenced by his brother Carlos Rama, he speaks of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) as a milestone that educates him politically and intellectually, consolidating his preference for democracy. However, at this time of formation, the pleasure of reading is more significant than school education. In a 1978 interview with *El Universal in Caracas*, Rama said that

Since my childhood reading has been for me a kind of private happiness for which there were only a few substitutes. When I was twelve I used to go to the National Library to read, and the curious thing was that the readings were like work journeys. For hours I read what then—in my teenage years—were my preferred authors, from the Spanish literature ... In my youth, my readings were the great English and French literatures and my great passion, since then, became Spanish-American literature (RAMA *Apud* BLIXEN; BARROS-LÉMEZ 1986, p. 11).

From Uruguayan culture, childhood and trips to the National Library, came his contact with the “great” Western literature in Spanish, French and English. However, it is in his youth that Rama discovers his “passion” for Spanish-American literature, a passion that makes him, above all, a critic concerned with creation. During these years, in addition to being influenced by his brother, Rama develops a taste for reading, illustrative of the idea that literature has a social function traversed by the personal vision of those who conceptualize it. For the pleasure of reading, Rama embarks on criticism as a professional activity, conferring values to it that served to demarcate it within the epoch’s social experience.

One could speculate that Rama’s criticism was based on his popular origin, public education and, above all, the alluvial society around him, codified in democracy. With these components of his life and intellectual task, while theorizing and thinking about Latin American culture, he was producing another West, rich in possibilities, in the image of his Latin Americanism.

Rama presents a narrative of the past, adapted to the needs of the present, when thinking about who deserves citizenship and political participation. He mobilizes an hegemony of and subordination towards Latin America, establishing this other West which, although poorer and less developed, is also modern, due to incorporating different values that help it articulate with the non-Western America (indigenous, black), re-reading the past and building the future.

## The other West of the American Utopia

Going further into the discussion of the previous section, Rama suggests the possibility of another West, seeing America as a territory of utopia directed towards the future. We see an America that, before even having inherited a past, is nostalgically guided by the future. From this point of view, one thus needs to find out what America had inherited before inheriting the West.

Pedro Henríquez Ureña (1884–1946) is probably the one author who shaped the bases of the concept of a Latin American utopia. For him, this utopia ensures a belonging within the Latin American community and culture. In fact, as an architect of the modern concept of *Hispanic-American culture*, Henríquez Ureña wrote history based on the commonalities between Latin American cultures (DIÁZ-QUINONES 2010). This American utopia, then, would be a path towards unity. In his last two works, *Las corrientes literarias en la América Hispánica* (the original was published in English in 1945, then translated into Spanish in the same year) and *Historia de la cultura en la América Hispánica* (published posthumously in 1947), Latin American cultural unity is the horizon to be reached.

In order to discuss this question, I must refer to the development of Rama's argument in the prologue to *La novela en América Latina*, where he mentions his partnership with Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot (1928–2005)<sup>5</sup> to gather Henríquez Ureña's dispersed essays. Besides expressing admiration for Ureña, they mention being driven not only by admiration for the master, but also

5 - Colombian philosopher and essayist, trained at universities in Germany, where he was a student of Heidegger.

... the pleasure of following him in his reading; noting his discovery of the similarities between Balbuena's *El Bernardo* and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*; his analysis of the first Borges, still so far from fame; the evolution of his reading of the fathers and magical masters of his education, Rodó and Darío; the socialist and nationalistic impact that Pettorutti's paintings had over him. This dual reading favored a better understanding of Latin American culture, because it recovered, at the same time, the literary production and the structures of meaning born of a period (RAMA 2008, p. 23–24).

There is an intention to recover this literary production and its structures in order to analyze Henríquez Ureña's idea of Latin America, which, over the years, was consolidated by people who, like Rama, were committed to critical work on the continent. That is why the texts for *La utopía de América*, from the Ayacucho Library, prioritize the writings on Latin American culture.

In 1925, Henríquez Ureña publishes “La utopia de América”—from which the book’s title comes from—in the *Estudiantina* journal, La Plata. He outlines the characteristics of a past that is essential in the building of American civilization. The critique of the past gives access to the chains that move the continent’s new life, its character. Referring to the case of Mexico, Ureña discusses the “continuous struggle and occasional equilibrium between timeless traditions and new impulses,” saying that

[...] in spite of how much they tend to descivilize it, in spite of the astonishing commotions that shake and stir to the cements, in long stretches of its history, it possesses in its past and in its present something with which it can create or – perhaps more exactly – continue and to extend a life and a culture that is peculiar, unique and yours. (HENRÍQUEZ UREÑA 1989, p. 4, self-translation).

In Mexico, the important heritage of indigenous tradition precedes the arrival of the Spanish in America, and persisted even under the destructive forces of conquest. From this basis, a truly unique culture emerged in the country. From the meeting of two cultures, another one is born in which the autochthonous element, the mediator of the new culture, “is a reality, yet the autochthonous does not only correspond to the indigenous race ... but also to the peculiar character that everything Spanish has assumed in Mexico since the beginning of the colonial era” (HENRÍQUEZ UREÑA 1989, p. 4).

Henríquez Ureña, in this sense, differs from Rodó, both due to classicism and the idea of an American culture (since the American culture would be the fruit of a fusion between the pre-Colombian Aboriginal people and the Spanish people). While one distrusts this cultural fusion, the other exalts it. The colonial past provides a continuity, an order, which finds in Indigenous people a bridge between past and present. The native, as well as being an Indian integrated into Hispanic culture, is the guardian of Spanish things in America. According to Henríquez Ureña, the Mexican characteristic was

to be found, to a greater or lesser extent, throughout “our America,” if anything because four hundred years of Hispanic life had already imprinted it all over the continent.

The unity of its history, the unity of purpose in political life and intellectual life, makes our America an entity, one *magna patria*, a grouping of people destined to be increasingly united. If we had preserved that childish audacity with which our ancestors used to call Athens any city of America, I would not hesitate to compare ourselves with the politically disaggregated but spiritually united people of classical Greece and Renaissance Italy. But if I dare to compare ourselves with them, it is to learn, from their example, that disunity is disaster (HENRÍQUEZ UREÑA 1989, p. 5).

America, for Henríquez Ureña, is no more than a *great homeland* (a *magna patria*) of spiritually united peoples. As an entity, the continent is united by its common past, both Spanish and Indigenous. Thus, the continent must affirm its faith in its destiny as the future of civilization: the American utopia responsible for articulating the future to the nostalgia of a superior unity—previously imagined by Bolívar and Martí. From this intention, comes the desire to establish a canon beyond national traditions, accompanied by three other general premises.

These premises, according to Díaz-Quiñones, are: 1) *the elaboration of the national tradition*, marked by the strengthening of the National State (the Dominican Republic); 2) *the exile*—provoked by the United States’ occupation of the Dominican Republic (1916–1924) and by Trujillo’s dictatorship—that puts Don Pedro in touch with artistic, intellectual and political movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, allowing different traditions to be assimilated; 3) the link between *culture and order* that goes through Ureña’s work (DÍAZ-QUIÑONES 2010).

The culture and order pair appears in “La utopía de América” as civilization *versus* barbarism. In the establishment of order against anarchy, with every crisis of civilization in America, Henríquez Ureña exalts the spirit that fights, alone, against



the internal military force and the external economic power. That is why he reminds us of Bolívar who, in a moment of disappointment, said that if it was possible to return to chaos, the peoples of Latin America would go there.

Henríquez Ureña justifies his fear of fragmentation from a thesis according to which Central Africa, in ancient times, moved from organized social life and creative civilization to dissolution, becoming an easy prey to “foreign envy.” Here we find the limits of this Hispano-American culture: for Henríquez Ureña, Afro-American cultures were synonymous with barbarism. Although in America this possible dissolution was in the horizon—as can be seen in *Facundo’s* (by Sarmiento) struggle between light and chaos, civilization and barbarism—the strength of the sword is defeated by the will of the spirit. Besides Sarmiento, men of letters such as Alberdi, Hostos and Rodó were the true carriers of the people’s interests in Latin American development, even more than the liberators. In the case of the triumph of the spirit over barbarism, it would not be worth fearing an outside power, since all power is ephemeral.

6 - One version of this future land is in Hegel (HEGEL 1995).

The development of this American utopia does not lie in strength, but in the spiritual field that, from the earliest times, strived for the common good in order to achieve social justice and genuine freedom. Thus, Henríquez Ureña discusses the “classical idea” of utopia, stating that

utopia is not a vain game of puerile imaginations: it is one of the magnificent spiritual creations of the Mediterranean, our great ancestral sea. The Greek people gave to the Western world the restlessness of constant improvement. ... Look to the past and create history; look to the future and create utopias (HENRÍQUEZ UREÑA 1989, p. 6–7, self-translation).

The American utopia places America as the land of the future<sup>6</sup> Establishing an opposition between the East and the West, Henríquez Ureña believes that this utopia would not accomplished by laws or human will, but by human

effort. In this sense, the revival of the classical utopia by the Renaissance would have been a way of uniting politically disaggregated peoples.

The choice of Greece as a cultural model is not merely a meta-historical recourse. According to Díaz-Quiñones, it is an ideal of imaginative criticism that allows Henríquez Ureña to somehow construct a historical poetic, applying it to the reading of the Hispano-American tradition (DÍAZ-QUIÑONES 2010). This is how he seeks variety within unity, the national in local differences, and also an auratic character of art that preserves the old while still maintaining a belief in renewal.

Henríquez Ureña imagines the creation of the universal man, who harmoniously combines things of his homeland with foreign elements. This notion of universality, articulated by difference rather than exclusion, seeks to avoid the uniformity idealized by the "sterile imperialisms," establishing a harmony inclusive of the voices of different peoples.

Henríquez Ureña expected America and all its regions to preserve and improve their activities, especially the artistic ones. The continent would have a "double treasure," fruit of the Indigenous and Spanish traditions, fused into new chains. Here, we come back to the autochthonous, which synthesizes these two tendencies, preserving them in balance and harmony, and allowing America to continue producing those "magisterial men," symbols of our "modern life."

This, as already mentioned above, was elaborated more accurately in *Historia de la cultura en la América Hispánica*, in which Henríquez Ureña, besides praising these magisterial men, chooses the designation "Hispánica" instead of "Latina," commonly used at the time (HENRÍQUEZ UREÑA 1961). Believing to unite fragments of these differences under a common cultural history, he used the concept of Hispania, used by the Roman Empire to refer to what is now understood as Ibero-America (Spain and Portugal). Then, to achieve the American utopia, Henríquez Ureña sets up an archive that, besides being shown systematized in his posthumous works,

gives form to an editorial project. Weiberg took notice of Henríquez Ureña's participation in the creation of an American Library for the Fondo de Cultura Económica (WEINBERG 2014). Different authors integrated this collection while sharing the same historical and cultural scope, supported by a tradition that gives meaning to the whole. Henríquez Ureña used the history of culture to build this project and give order to the collection.

In that case, ethics and cultural policy promoted Hispanic-American values and highlighted American utopia. A reading of the continental cultural tradition was realized, promoting the expansion of the national horizons integrating these traditions. In this way, Henríquez Ureña created an *American cultural homeland*.

Throughout the twentieth century, this cultural homeland was cultivated and expanded, facing problems in the sixties and seventies, due to several *coups d'état* and the suspension of democracies in Latin America. Barbarism, once again, threatened the American Utopia and its spirit. Whenceforth, this idea of utopia is understood as the valorization of democracies and freedom.

Based on the discussion above, we now understand how Rama's critique of culture was in consonance with Henríquez Ureña's American utopia:

... while criticism does not constitute the works themselves, it does construct literature, understood as an organic *corpus* in which a culture, a nation, the people of a continent is expressed, since America itself remains an avant-garde intellectual project that awaits its concrete realization (RAMA 2008, p. 24, self-translation).

To build this organic *corpus*, Rama got inspiration from Antonio Candido. *La Novela...* was also dedicated to Candido. Inspired by the "literary system," Rama transposed the concept into Latin America. For him, as for Candido, Latin American literature would be an "organic aspect of civilization" (CANDIDO 2013, p. 25), forming the circuit between author, reader and market.<sup>7</sup>

7 - For a better analysis on the question of literary system: GAIO 2017; WAIZBORT 2007.

Garramuño and Amante, remarking Candido's influence on Latin American literary criticism, show that his ideas about the continent influenced several critics (GARRAMUÑO; AMANTE 2001). Formation, literature as a metropolitan derivation, and other concepts forged by Candido were appropriated, and even reformulated, by various critics—as in Rama's case. The way the Brazilian critic reflected on Brazilian literature has been incorporated into Latin American literary criticism at large.

American utopia and the literary system of Candido, concepts appropriated by Rama, form a *corpus* open to the future. In this way, the Uruguayan critic expresses one of the premises of the artistic avant-garde concerning America, understood as the place that expects concrete realization. However, this project becomes weaker over the years. In the 1920s, as we saw earlier, Latin America was conceptually understood as a "*magna pátria*," spiritualized and anti-imperialist. Still in the 1920s, in the context of artistic and literary vanguards, Latin Americanism was mobilized on a continental scale, something that had already been done in the nineteenth century, but only in an incipient way.

In these years, according to Funes, Latin America was thought of according to national terms (FUNES 2006). As Europe ceases to be the reference for Latin America and the United States gain power, becoming a threat to the continent's interests, Latin Americanism becomes politicized. The "critical spirit" developed during this period, from the 1940s and 1950s, is built on the larger agenda of anti-imperialism, detaching itself from national issues.

Aside from rescuing the sources of Latin American criticism—from Sanín Cano (1861-1956), Sílvio Romero (1858-1914), Alfonso Reyes (1899-1959) to Pedro Henríquez Ureña—Rama, following Candido, understood that the construction of literature would serve to reconnect the different cultural sources. According to Aguilar, in referring to criticism as an "avant-garde intellectual project," Rama establishes an ambiguous relationship with this project, since

... if when using the term “avant-garde” he seems to insert this attempt into the orbit of the broad modernist cycle, he adds a dissonant complementary note, since ... he used the term not to continue the cosmopolitan trend, but to think of temporalities heterogeneous in relation to one another, and to recover regional trends (AGUILAR 2001, p. 72, self-translation).

These terms, in line with Rama’s thought, become even when Latin American critics, forgetting their masters, give way to tendencies such as New Criticism, French structuralism, or even claim independence from universal culture, to which Rama inevitably belongs, in the name of Marxist thought. Against this deliberate forgetfulness, he writes:

I confess that this was one of the reasons I founded the Ayacucho Library: the disconcerting spectacle of an intellectual continent claiming its identity and originality, not to mention the splendid works that had accumulated in the same American land, patiently rearranged by the critical thinking of our predecessors (RAMA 2008, p. 24, self-translation).

This rearticulation of Latin American critical thinking is a way of responding to heterogeneous temporalities and regional tendencies, which Aguilar sees as a dissonance in the cosmopolitan exaltation opened by the modernist cycle in the nineteenth century (AGUILAR 2001). In other words, I would say that Rama works with Borges’ idea that an author creates his pioneers. For this reason, this Latin Americanism, forged in the Ayacucho Library, rearticulates from the inside, that is, from the continent, the history and the production of critical thinking.

## Conclusion

Rama modifies the conceptions of both past and future. Claiming identity and originality, he keeps working with the value of “American lands.” According to this perspective, the Spanish-American modernism of the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries, due to its valuing of European culture, would be less of a pioneer of the idea of Latin America than the avant-garde Latin Americanism developed in the 1920s.

This point will later become explicit in the claims that the Latin American narrative of the sixties and seventies would be a processes of “perfect spontaneous generation” and “mimetically dependent on European vanguards.” These statements would disregard an internal process regarding the renewing character of the literature that, from the avant-garde period, was connected to an international process of autonomization, when some of its artistic mechanisms were conceived. According to Rama, when the narrative captivates a significant number of readers, it is necessary to explain to them that the process of “poetic evolution of the continent” is not just the “conception of novelty and/or foreignism.” The process as a whole must be qualified. This is how, when we arrive “in the age of massification and its tools of communication, the critical task is more difficult and at the same time the most necessary” (RAMA 2008, p. 25). At the time marked by mass communication’s tools, critics should be committed to presenting the complexity of these phenomena. After all, according to Rama,

There is no society that suddenly enters into economic development (which never announces its arrival), where the values set by the previous elites are not flooded and the improvised *best sellers* are not a big success, prized by the instruments of diffusion. And it is in these societies and in these revolting times that the restructuring of literatures is most urgent, [a restructuring] which, flowing from the transformations that have taken place, seeks to establish values, orders, hierarchies, such as those that shine in the distant past and are but the consequence of a wide and patient critical attention (RAMA 2008, p. 25).

Rama, as a critic-writer and intellectual-writer, scrutinizes these valuation processes, an outcome primarily of *desarrollos económicos*. What is at issue here is less the definition of processes than the way he interprets them. Reflecting on social experience, Rama understands that both the denial of previous

values and the restructuring of society and, consequently, of literature, happen through instruments of cultural diffusion. This mediation, by the way, makes a clean slate of a previous effort to establish parameters of analysis.

*Value, order and hierarchy*, in this context, make no sense because the present seems, more and more, to be infinite. The remote past is lost in the absence of a wide and patient attention. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain balance or, according to Rama, to understand Martí's lesson: "we are children of someone and parents of someone, we belong to the process always transformative, we come from and we go to, even if we think about the future, a selective lesson from the past makes us richer [...]" (RAMA 2008, p. 24, self-translation).

Belief in something generated from the outside or spontaneously is like denying the accumulation of the American experience, which would anticipate unannounced paths of development that deny history itself. This is the "hard task:" to think about the future based on selected lessons from the past. Only thus, in contemporary Latin America, could the stagnation of critical spirit and Latin Americanism be prevented. Rama states that there are two criticisms: one academic, based on a sedimented perspective, and another that feeds from the urgency of social transformation. It must be understood that what Rama named as an *organic corpus* is also a way of narrating history.

With this *corpus* it is possible to revive the past, to think about the future and to crossover the present. These, in fact, are the functions of the American utopia. Although it awaits its realization, in the face of the loss of value, order and hierarchy, it is this American utopia that rearticulates mechanisms, guaranteeing possibilities to face a world that deviates the critical spirit from its course. The critic's hardest task, then, is to provide meaning to this utopia by making something of that critical spirit endure and prevail.

In conclusion, the American Utopia gave Rama a real possibility—on a critical level—to formulate answers to the

preestablished models of developmentalist modernism which, based on Europe and the United States, placed Latin America on a lower level. With no intention of exhausting this subject, I suppose it is clear now how Rama interprets culture, especially in Latin America. The bonds with the West, the valuation of the past and the projection of the future are mechanisms that allow him to construct a unified conceptual vocabulary that re-articulates America from the inside, avoiding exclusion or interpretative imbalance.

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## AGRADECIMENTOS E INFORMAÇÕES

**Pedro Demenech** 

p\_demenech@yahoo.com.br

Graduate scholarship holder, FAPERJ Nota 10

Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro - Brazil

Translate to English: Augusto Bruno de Carvalho Dias Leite (UFES) and Lorena Lopes da Costa (UFOPA). [including quotations from Ángel Rama]

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