

RUBEN DARIO AS A FOCAL  
CULTURAL FIGURE IN NICARAGUA:  
The Ideological Uses of Cultural Capital\*

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Most of the critical commentary on Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío has been called forth and shaped by his being a seminal pan-Latin American and an international literary figure. Less known is the fact that for more than a century, Darío has been the focus of a much contested discourse concerning national cultural identity within Nicaragua itself. Comprehending this more limited and focused discourse requires carefully analyzing the changing cultural-political constructions that Darío's fellow Nicaraguans have placed upon his life and work, and especially the role of ideology in those constructs. Such analysis can also offer insight into the role of focal Latin American cultural figures in the negotiation of national cultural identity, especially during periods of dramatic political transformation, crisis, and reconstruction like the Somoza era (1936–1979) and the Sandinista Revolution (1961–1989).<sup>1</sup>

More broadly, such analysis may also shed light on the dialectical relationship between culture and ideology: on culture as a generative matrix for ideology; on the instrumental use of culture for overtly ideological purposes like regime legitimation or the delegitimation of rivals; on the ideological control of cultural processes (such as censorship); on the institutionalizing of ideologically skewed representations of cultural history through instruments like museums or school textbooks; and on the shaping of the cultural landscape through cultural preservation efforts, monuments, and public symbols.

Regardless of their politics, Darío's fellow countrymen have vener-

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1. Rather than compare Darío with analogous figures like José Martí, Jorge Luis Borges, or others in whose lives and work similar dynamics are evident, my intention here is limited to comprehending Darío in relation to a few aspects of the politics of culture within Nicaragua itself. My modest hope is that other scholars familiar with other cultural figures and national histories will pursue broader implications of my rather closely bounded observations. Similarly, it is not my aim to discuss Darío in relation to the still larger history of Modernismo. Readers interested in either of these larger issues might well begin by consulting Beverley and Zimmerman (1990, esp. 54–59).

ated him to the verge of deification. Although they have done so because he was indisputably a writer of the first rank who was justly acclaimed internationally, they had other reasons as well. Chief among them, I suggest, is that Rubén Darío embodies so much of the negotiable cultural capital of a small, poor country that has been wracked by internecine conflict since the colonial period and that by virtue of its geographical location became a perennial pawn in great power struggles.<sup>2</sup>

At the national level, Nicaragua has never been unified or stable enough to develop a secure sense of its own political or cultural identity. Factions have contended ceaselessly for the right to define it. On the geopolitical stage, the country has never been powerful or rich enough to make demands; all it can hope to do is negotiate cunningly. Thus the strength of the hand held by any faction or by the country in such contestations or negotiations depends on two fragile cards: moral suasion and cultural legitimacy. One of the few potentially plausible visages for the latter card is that of Rubén Darío.<sup>3</sup>

When Nicaraguan Vanguardista poet Luis Alberto Cabrales wrote during the mid-1960s about Darío's birth nearly a century earlier, there was no mistaking his mythic paradigm. Cabrales invoked the Christmas-time of 1866, when a "great peace" lay over Nicaragua, a peace like that reported in the gospels as a sign of an impending divine birth. Young Rosa Sarmiento de García Darío is on her way from cosmopolitan León to picturesque rural Metapa to await the arrival of her firstborn. Along the way she dreams of Jerusalem (which in her musings she confuses with León) and of Bethlehem-Metapa. Cabrales asks rhetorically, "What kind of child was this that was going to be born? What destiny, what star was guiding her toward Metapa?" Perhaps, he ventures, Rosa guessed that the awaited one would be "a prodigious child" (Cabrales 1964, 1-2). Ultimately, however, one must understand the dialectical relationship between the self-transcending struggle of that prodigious child—Félix Rubén Sarmiento García—to make himself into Rubén Darío and the subsequent struggle of his admirers, imitators, and idolizers to define and claim what "Rubén Darío" became as historical construct.

Notwithstanding the virtual deification of Darío within Nicaragua, little consensus has emerged on the meaning of his work beyond his

2. I am borrowing the term *cultural capital* from Pierre Bourdieu. See his essay "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John G. Richardson (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1986), 241-48. In Bourdieu's construction, cultural capital may include not only valued cultural artifacts like paintings and writings but also nonmaterial certifications of worth or competence such as academic credentials or literary recognition as well as hereditarily transmitted, consensually recognized (hence marketable) "culture" or "cultivation."

3. Another example is General Augusto César Sandino. A third contender promoted vigorously by the Sandinistas is Carlos Fonseca Amador. Pablo Antonio Cuadra and José Coronel Urtecho might also be mentioned.

unquestioned position as the country's most eminent man of letters, its cultural trump card. Since his death three-quarters of a century ago, various political and cultural factions have struggled to appropriate him as their cultural icon and legitimizing political symbol, seeking to gain ascendancy over internal rivals or legitimacy on the geopolitical stage.<sup>4</sup>

By all odds, the bitterest struggle among the claimants took place between the Somoza government and the emerging movement known as the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), later the Sandinista government. For each side, the possibility of claiming "el divino Rubén" as a warrant for its own cultural legitimacy seemed a most desirable prize. But because Darío's politics were neither as simple nor as categorical as the antagonists' agendas required, this prize could only be won by tailoring the complex data to specific ideological requirements. Rather than argue that Darío "properly" should be pegged at any specified point along any political spectrum (however defined), my purpose in this article is to try to comprehend the political-cultural dialectic that has emerged from his countrymen's repeated insistence on delimiting Darío's politics.<sup>5</sup>

In beginning to sort through the complexities of the case, it will be useful to review a few details concerning Darío's self-identification with Nicaragua. It will then be possible to perceive how his class position and aspirations, as well as the political influences on him during his formative years, affected that identification.

#### DARIO AND NICARAGUA

Regardless of their political persuasions, Darío's countrymen have had to face the troublesome paradox that Nicaragua's best-known writer spent virtually all his adult life living elsewhere and wrote vastly more about the elsewheres than he did about Nicaragua. Indeed, after Darío left for El Salvador when he was fifteen, he never spent more than a few months at a time in Nicaragua until he returned to die there at the age of forty-nine. He lived for short periods in Guatemala and Costa Rica, and for months or years at a time in El Salvador, Chile, France, Spain, and Argentina.<sup>6</sup> The center of his cultural universe—"la patria universal"—

4. In their discussion of some elements of this history, Beverley and Zimmerman employ the partly analogous term *ideological signifier* with reference to Darío (1990, 5).

5. Readers interested in mapping and comprehending Darío's politics, especially in relation to Modernismo, should consult such studies as Schulman (1968, n.d.), Achugar (1986), and Zavala (1987).

6. The details of Darío's sometimes frenetic travels are most readily available in Torres's chronology (1966, 511-34). One interesting result of Darío's traveling and living mostly outside Nicaragua has been that most critical scholarship on him treats his nationality as essentially inconsequential, preferring to interpret him as a generic or "pan-Latin American" figure. My intention here is to reverse that emphasis at least momentarily. I hope that the momentary reversal may in turn suggest that Darío's "Nicaraguanness" is not so inconsequential as has been supposed.

was not Nicaragua nor even Latin America but France. Paris was the “capital of capitals,” “a paradise” (Darío 1917b, 13; 1912, 147, 156), and Darío wrote far more about that city than about any other place.<sup>7</sup>

Although Darío said that “I always have had, on land or sea, the idea of Fatherland” (Darío 1917b, 17), one does not have to read much of his work to realize that he struggled throughout his life over his relationship to Nicaragua. In some respects, he was fighting to escape Nicaragua, especially its rustic provincialism and the financial insecurity and social marginality suffered by its writers. Trying to understand what Darío wrote about Nicaragua presents several major problems: most of it is found in occasional journalistic pieces rather than in the canonical belletristic works; and it is affectively ambivalent, laced with apparent ideological contradictions, and fragmented among Darío’s triple agendas of separating himself from Nicaragua, affirming his “Nicaraguanness,” and complaining that his country was denying him the recognition and honor he deserved.

Thus the search for substantial references to Nicaragua in Darío’s writings turns out to resemble gleaning, rather than mining, the rich lode hoped for in an author who has been worshipped by his countrymen for expressing powerfully who and what they believe themselves to be. Except for brief recapitulations of quotidian details of his early years offered in the opening chapters of his autobiography, Darío’s corpus offers few glimpses of his own life in Nicaragua.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Darío read Walt Whitman avidly and admired his lyrical celebrations of the United States is therefore paradoxical (Darío 1954, 603, 825).<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, for all the promise of its title, *El viaje a Nicaragua* yields little such material. A substantial portion of the work is drawn more or less undigested (in extensive quotations) from Thomas Gage, José Dolores Gámez, and other historians of Nicaragua. Comments on the indigenous or traditional culture of Nicaragua are brief and infrequent, despite Darío’s oft-quoted assertion that “if there is poetry in America, it is in old things” (Darío 1917b, 35–40, 131, 149–51).<sup>10</sup>

7. For example, nearly half the articles included in Darío’s *Escritos dispersos* focus on Paris (see Barcia 1977).

8. As María Salgado has argued, Darío alternately revealed and withheld autobiographical details, depending on their usefulness in constructing his public persona (Salgado 1989). This aspect will be discussed further.

9. On Darío and Whitman, see Peña (1984). Beverley and Zimmerman assert that Darío “aimed to be for Nicaragua and Latin America as a whole what Whitman had been for U.S. culture: the creator of a national voice in literature” (1990, 57). Although the analogy is suggestive, obvious differences between the careers and perspectives of the two writers, and their bodies of work, render it problematic as well.

10. The volume is in fact slight and relatively unrevealing of Darío’s personal sense of his own country. Of the 162 pages of the 1917 edition in *Obras completas*, one-quarter are blank and 20 consist of direct quotations from Gámez and others. Darío notes without elaboration in his autobiography that a mulatto maid and an Indian manservant told him traditional

Nor is Nicaragua often present as subject in Darío's poetry. Within a corpus that offers the nine-hundred-line "Canto a la Argentina" and shorter poems celebrating Chile, Brazil, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic, one finds little on Nicaragua (see Darío 1954, 905–36, 1050–51, 1178). Indeed, all of Darío's poetry contains fewer than thirty references to the country of his birth, about the same number as to Argentina and half as many as his invocations of ancient Greece (Harrison 1970). The most sustained treatment of *la patria* occurs in the fifty lines or so of the "Tríptico de Nicaragua" and the two hundred lines of "La cegua," a poetic rendering of a Nicaraguan popular legend (Darío 1954, 1187–89, 252–62). Otherwise, one must be content with gleaning scattered images, like those found in "Canción 'Mosquita'" and the love poem "Allá lejos" (Darío 1954, 778, 316; compare with 65, 100–101, 226, 802).<sup>11</sup>

Thus the fact that Darío was a prodigiously creative writer from a small, backward country at a time when larger Latin American countries were set on rapid, mostly European-style modernization necessarily enmeshed him in tortuous structural dilemmas. They included the question of what was to be gained and lost by identifying himself actively with such a country.<sup>12</sup> More specifically, Darío's political development and his attempt to come to terms with being Nicaraguan were complicated by his determination to rise above his social origins—those defined for him within Nicaragua by his family circumstances and in a wider orbit by his being Nicaraguan.

#### DARÍO'S SOCIAL ASPIRATIONS

When Darío arrived in El Salvador as a fifteen-year-old, he met President Rafael Zaldívar, who admired his precocious poetry and offered assistance and support. The young poet told the president that what he

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ghost stories (*cuentos de ánimas en pena*) during his childhood (Darío 1912, 17). To my knowledge, Darío's most substantial commentaries on Nicaraguan traditional culture are found in two brief articles: "Folklore de la América Central: representaciones y bailes populares de Nicaragua" (Darío 1896; also in Mapes 1938, 114–17) and "Estética de los primitivos nicaragüenses" (Darío 1892). The latter, a brief commentary on the Nicaraguan exhibit at the Exposición Histórico-Americana of 1892, at least shows that Darío had read the comments of Squier (1852) and other late-nineteenth-century investigators of Nicaraguan antiquities. On Nicaragua's exhibit at the Columbian Historical Exposition in Madrid in 1892, see Hough (1895, 339–65). The larger *modernista* versus *costumbrista* debate concerning national and regional culture is discussed in Beverley and Zimmerman (1990, 42–43).

11. But after assembling scattered references to "los indios" in Darío's poetry, Pablo Antonio Cuadra has argued that Darío, more than any other poet of his time, claimed his origins by proclaiming "the pride of being mestizo" (1983, 315). Similarly, Schulman interprets the pervasive "nostalgia for the tropics" in Darío's work as a "nostalgia of origins" that is effectively an identification with his country of birth (1968, 209ff.).

12. As many critics have pointed out, this dilemma was a part of a larger one central to Modernismo: the relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. See for example Beverley and Zimmerman (1990, 42–43).

wanted most was “a good social position” (Darío 1912, 54; compare with 65). In the years to come, such insistent social aspirations proved to be a major factor in alienating him from his homeland.

Never flagging in his social ambition, Darío subsequently found himself obliged to compromise considerably in pursuit of it and to bear the pain of having done so. In a striking image in his autobiography, Darío recalls the ominous dark cloud of volcanic ash hanging over the Nicaraguan port of Corinto as he sailed for Chile at the age of twenty, carrying his little valise of shabby clothing. It is at once a cloud of sadness, regret, nostalgia, and self-doubt. But the image also suggests somewhat forebodingly that his quest carried with it the risk of betraying his own country and culture (Darío 1912, 61–62).

When Darío disembarked in Chile, he asked (despite his penury) to be shown to the best hotel, as he had done earlier in San Salvador. Standing dejectedly to one side of the teeming station and clutching his poor little valise (symbolic of his miserable little store of marginally marketable cultural capital), he was delighted to be met by an elegantly attired man in a splendidly appointed coach. In the critical gaze of this gentleman (who was already acquainted with the youngster’s precocious poetry), Darío saw reflected all his own provincialism, his lack of style and sophistication: “That look took in my poor body of a skinny youth, my long hair, the bags under my eyes, my little Nicaraguan jacket, some tight pants that I had thought very elegant, my problematic shoes, and above all my valise” (Darío 1912, 66–67).

Like many a country boy come to the city—timid, self-conscious, lacking money, proper clothing, and social skills—Darío moved into a tiny room and began working assiduously to acculturate and polish himself. Through the good offices of his benefactor, Darío found a job as a journalist with *La Epoca*, which was housed in an opulent building adorned with paintings by Jean Antoine Watteau and copies of classical Greek statues. Two years later, Darío emerged elegantly dressed, sporting a stylish moustache, a dignified bearing, a broad acquaintance with the latest French writers, and a book that confirmed prodigious talent (Watland 1965, 94–100). Hence the Darío who returned home as a twenty-two-year-old was still technically a Nicaraguan, but he had initiated a painful and confusing dance around the question of his nationality and cultural identity that would continue throughout his life.<sup>13</sup>

Darío was quite candid about his preference for upper-class manners and lifestyles, and for what he considered to be the sophisticated and cosmopolitan culture of Europe. In his autobiography, he recalled living

13. As a Nicaraguan, Darío was as free as anyone else to dress elegantly or read modish French writers. The problem was his perception of his “Nicaraguanness” as a liability and his using a change in style and cultural allegiance to transcend it.

on herring and beer in Santiago as a young man “so I could dress elegantly, as befitted my aristocratic friendships” (Darío 1912, 71), and he repeatedly recited the names of the rich, powerful, and famous people with whom he had socialized (1912, 110). “It pleases me,” he said, “to see diamonds on white necks. I like people with elegant manners and fine words and noble ideas” (quoted in Watland 1965, 202). At another moment in *El viaje a Nicaragua*, Darío asserted that “Aristocracies everywhere are the maintainers of tradition and sustainers of culture” (Darío 1917b, 99). In yet another extended lyrical moment, he observed, “Today as always, money makes poetry, embellishes existence, brings culture and progress, beautifies villages, brings relative happiness to workers. Money well employed produces poems, makes imagination palpable, makes the stars dance . . .” (Darío 1917b, 153). At the end of his autobiography when he spoke of leaving Nicaragua to assume the post of minister to Spain in 1907, he expressed the belief that he would never have to return to his native land, where such an unfavorable situation had discouraged an anxious and talented youth (Darío 1912, 265). The elegant, gold-braided diplomatic uniform that he was entitled to wear on arriving in Spain could hardly have been a more appropriate metaphor.<sup>14</sup>

The bond between Darío and Nicaragua certainly was not strengthened by the fact that the response of successive Nicaraguan governments to his growing fame did little more than mirror his own ambivalence, despite his repeated attempts to garner their support.<sup>15</sup> The earliest promise of such support—a special legislative resolution that would have sent young Darío to Europe to be educated at state expense—vanished when he chose to read at a presidential reception some verses he later described as “red with anti-religious radicalism.” “My son,” the president responded, “if you now write thus against the religion of your parents and your country, what will happen if you go to Europe to learn worse things?” (Darío 1912, 44–45).

Following his first youthful sojourn in El Salvador, Darío briefly held a sinecure in the office of the secretary to the Nicaraguan president that allowed him leisure to write (Darío 1912, 59–60). Later, he was accorded rather grudging official recognition, serving variously as a Nicaraguan delegate to the Columbus quatercentenary celebration in Spain, Nicaraguan consul in Paris, a delegate to the Pan American conference in Rio de Janeiro, and a member of the commission on the Nicaraguan-Honduran border dispute (Darío 1912, 111, 244, 257, 261).

Yet such recognition was always more formal and sporadic than it was substantial or reliable. Although in 1885 the president of Nicaragua

14. See Watland (1965, 217). A photograph of Darío in the uniform also appears in Watland (1965), facing p. 145.

15. On the public lionization of Darío within Nicaragua, see Torres (1966, 350ff.).



*Illustration 1. Rubén Darío in diplomatic uniform while serving as the Nicaraguan envoy in Madrid, circa 1908. (Photo courtesy of the Columbus Memorial Library of the Organization of American States)*



ordered a volume of eighteen-year-old Darío's poems published at government expense, the poet was denied the governmental post he asked for several years later when he returned from Chile, having already published his epochal *Azul*.<sup>16</sup> In late 1892, Darío was still trying to secure salary payments for services he had rendered to the government as much as six years earlier (Darío 1912, 137), and in 1898 he tried again unsuccessfully to secure a diplomatic post. He complained to a friend from Madrid the next year, "What has Nicaragua done for me?" To another he confided that he was "more in touch with Holland or Norway than with my *país natal*" (Jirón Terán 1981, 52–53).

Nearly a decade later in 1907, when Darío returned to Nicaragua to make yet another attempt, the government declared him the guest of honor of the nation. The port of Corinto was filled with welcoming throngs, as were the stations through which his special train passed on its way to León, where the streets were decorated and banquets were held in his honor. But even after President José Santos Zelaya appointed Darío minister to Spain, the government delayed sending him any money for three months and never provided enough funds for him to live in customary ambassadorial style. The funds provided came more and more irregularly, and some of his plaintive letters to Zelaya went unanswered. After two years in such straits, Darío gave up and abandoned the post, selling books and furniture to pay his debts (Watland 1965, 219–21).<sup>17</sup>

Shabby official treatment of Darío continued throughout his life. In November 1915, while he lay in the throes of his final illness, his friend Dr. Luis Debayle was still trying to get Darío's back salary from U.S.-installed President Adolfo Díaz. Díaz refused but proffered a small monthly sum for medical treatment and arranged for a train to take Darío to León. As his death approached, the government—in an egregiously self-serving gesture—published a decree in the newspaper outlining the honors to be accorded him at his death. On reading it, Darío commented that he would have preferred to receive them sooner.

At Darío's death, the government declared a period of national mourning, mounted a lavish funeral, accorded him (somewhat inexplicably) honors as a war minister, and named an official commission to carry a message of condolence to his second wife. Through a rather bizarre chain of events, Darío's brain and other organs were removed for special preser-

16. Of the approximately 450 items of Darío's writings listed in the *Nicaraguan National Bibliography* through 1986, fewer than 40 were published in Nicaragua, and almost half of those belonged to a series of thirty-page pamphlets issued in 1943 for use in the public schools.

17. One must still bear in mind that Nicaragua was a poor country, that most Central American countries during the period had limited ambassadorial representation, and that in any case the Nicaraguan government could legitimately have been ambivalent about Darío in view of his well-known propensity for bohemian excess in his personal life. I am indebted to Charles Stansifer for these insights.

vation and study before being parceled out to his widow, Dr. Debayle, and the university. The rest of his mortal remains were solemnly interred in the cathedral in León.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever arguments were to be made subsequently about Darío's status as a passionate partisan of Nicaragua and whatever official stature he has gained since his death in 1916, the record is fairly clear concerning his own class and national identification and the official response to him during his lifetime. Darío lived most of his life outside Nicaragua, seeking an aristocratic social standing and cultivating upper-class manners that were ambiguously related to his personal origins and the national culture of Nicaragua. Although he yearned for official recognition and support, they were doled out to him in niggardly dribs and drabs until the final guiltily effusive outpouring at his death.

#### DARÍO'S POLITICAL FORMATION

As has often been noted, Darío spent his early years in León, the seat of liberal politics in Nicaragua, and wrote some of his earliest poems for local political meetings.<sup>19</sup> He experienced his first taste of anything approaching radical politics under the tutelage of a Polish professor, José Leonard, who spent a turbulent interval teaching at León's Instituto de Occidente (Darío 1912, 45–46).<sup>20</sup> Leonard had taken part in a failed uprising of Poles against Russia and in the Spanish revolution of 1868. His anti-Jesuit inaugural lecture at the institute provoked the Jesuit order to condemn him as "a dangerous radical and pernicious influence" and soon led to his resignation. Leonard's influence on fourteen-year-old Darío appears to have been substantial.<sup>21</sup> Darío began to write poems against the Jesuits and the Pope and to read nineteenth-century liberal French writers along with the romantic, anticlerical Ecuadorian rebel Juan Montalvo.<sup>22</sup> Darío's reading of Montalvo may in turn have led him to Victor Hugo, universally known and celebrated at the time for his championing of the oppressed. Hugo's poem *Les Raisons de Momotombo* had brought him some fame in

18. For an account of the process, see Torres (1966, 500–509). Official photographs of Darío on his deathbed, his brain, his splendid casket, his tomb, and the grandiose romantic statue of him erected in Managua can be found in Torres (1966, following pp. 481 and 496).

19. See "A los liberales," which refers to the members of the Liberal party as "soldiers of an idea" (Darío 1954, 30–31).

20. See Torres (1966, 38–40). A more extended discussion of this period may be found in Watland (1965, 44–52, 76, 98, 123, 130, 166, 200–201, 236).

21. Unfortunately, Edmund Urbanski's brief discussion of Leonard provides few details of this relationship (Urbanski 1974). Darío met Leonard again years later in San José (Darío 1912, 105–6).

22. See "El jesuita" and "Al Papa" (Darío 1954, 25 and 33). The latter refers to the Pope as "Santo Tirano."

Nicaragua, and he was cited far more often than any other writer in Darío's early poems.<sup>23</sup>

During his young manhood, Darío also enjoyed a series of friends and associates with oppositionist political commitments. At *La Epoca*, co-worker Manuel Rodríguez Mendoza was a political writer; and during the late 1880s in Valparaíso, Darío met Francisco Galleguillos Lorca, who had risen above his humble origins as a laborer and miner to become the "underworld doctor" of the area. When Darío accompanied Galleguillos on one of his clandestine nocturnal missions of mercy, however, he found himself more repulsed by the good doctor's underworld clients than attracted to them (Darío 1912, 82–83).<sup>24</sup>

The most powerful revolutionary Darío encountered was Cuban José Martí, whom he met on a trip to New York in 1893. Darío had already written effusively of Martí years before meeting him. Darío claimed that Martí wrote "more brilliantly than anyone in Spain or America . . . [His] every phrase . . . [is] golden or smells of roses . . . and his thought is a flash of lightning."<sup>25</sup> Similarly effusive but centered more on Martí's political significance was the essay Darío wrote when Martí died in 1895, in which he called Martí a "superman" committed to alleviating "the miseries and grief of the wounded and lost human flock." Darío viewed Martí as a veritable martyr who gave his life for his "dream of a free Cuba" but also for "the true future triumph of America." Darío proclaimed that Martí's blood therefore belonged to "a whole race" (Darío 1917a, 213–15).

Darío also became friends with the young Argentine poet and socialist Leopoldo Lugones (1874–1938), whom he admiringly called "a completely conscious revolutionary."<sup>26</sup> A half-dozen years later in Paris, Darío became a friend ("immediately," he said) of anti-U.S. Colombian novelist José María Vargas Vila (1860–1933), who had been forced to flee his homeland after taking part in a revolutionary movement in 1885. Darío called Vargas Vila "a singular and unmistakable poet, perhaps against his own will" (Darío 1912, 237). Later, when Vargas Vila was acting as Nicaragua's consul general in Madrid, the two served together on the Nicaraguan commission to mediate the border dispute with Honduras (Darío 1912, 261).

Darío continued to express elements of the liberal politics of his natal

23. Compare Darío's "Un recuerdo de Victor Hugo" (Mapes 1938, 13) with his poems "A Victor Hugo" and "Victor Hugo y la tumba" (Darío 1954, 208–12, 435–44).

24. For a fuller discussion of Darío's relation to Galleguillos, see Achugar (1986, 870–71).

25. See Silva Castro (1934, 201). This statement was originally published in *Revista de Artes y Letras* (1888), when Darío was barely twenty-one years old. For a more extensive comparative discussion of Darío and Martí, especially in relation to the issue of political commitment, see Schulman (1968). He argues that Darío's "capacity to identify himself with [the] problems, disgraces, and victories" of Central America is undeniable (1968, 205).

26. See "Un poeta socialista," in Mapes (1938, 102–8). The essay quotes one of Lugones's long revolutionary poems but focuses principally on its literary qualities rather than on its politics. See also Lugones's poem in honor of Darío (Darío 1954, xxxv–xxxvi).

León through his lifelong championing of reunification of the Central American states in his poetry and in such activities as editing *La Unión* in San Salvador.<sup>27</sup> Some of his essays went considerably beyond genteel liberal politics. “El canal por Nicaragua,” which Darío wrote at age nineteen, caustically denounced the selfishness, profiteering, wastefulness, and gaudy ostentatiousness of the principals of the Panama Canal project as well as the sickness and death suffered by local construction workers. Another 1895 essay on the same subject unsparingly condemned the arrogance of U.S. machinations in the enterprise.<sup>28</sup> Filibuster William Walker, he said, brought Nicaragua “only the barbarity of blue eyes, cruelty, and the rifle” (Darío 1912, 63). Following Spain’s defeat in 1898, Darío asked in “Los cisnes,”

Will we be given over to the cruel barbarians,  
Will so many millions of us be speaking English?  
Are there no more noblemen or brave *caballeros*?  
Shall we be silent now to cry later? (Darío 1954, 732)

In one of Darío’s most widely quoted poems, the Whitmanesque “A Roosevelt” written early in 1904, he contrasted “the future invader’s” arrogant pride, brutal power, and overweening confidence with the more ancient and vital culture, the passion, the deep faith, and vibrant dreams of *la América española* (Darío 1954, 720–21).<sup>29</sup> Following the U.S.-managed ouster of President Zelaya, which Darío perceived as the latest installment of filibuster imperialism, he wrote “El fin de Nicaragua,” excoriating his countrymen for giving in to “the masochism of the big stick” and reminding them that United Fruit’s profits were guaranteed by a “bloody fiesta of death.”<sup>30</sup> In “Panamericanismo,” Darío assailed U.S. efforts to assert its dominion over Latin America, and in “El triunfo de Calibán,” he fulminated against the barbarian Yankees who “eat, eat, calculate, drink whiskey, and make millions.”<sup>31</sup>

Viewed as a whole, however, the record of Darío’s expressed political views is much less clear than these stark examples suggest. Standing

27. See his early poems to Máximo Jérez (d. 1881), Nicaraguan minister to the United States, a lifelong champion of union (Darío 1954, 26, 67, 70, 75); see also other poems on Central American unification (1954, 65, 67, 68, 76, 87, 1003). On Darío’s work with *La Unión*, see Torres (1966, 144–61).

28. See “El canal por Nicaragua” in Silva Castro (1934, 19–29), originally published in *La Epoca* (Santiago), 6 Aug. 1886; and “El canal” in Mapes (1938), originally published in *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), 23 Apr. 1895. Darío returned to the theme of “*los canalizadores yankees de Nicaragua*” in his very angry 1898 essay “El triunfo de Calibán” (Mapes 1938, 160–62).

29. More extended is Darío’s essay “El arte de ser presidente de la república: Roosevelt” (Barcia 1977, 2:214–17), which characterizes Roosevelt as a “representative Yankee” and a “director of imperialistic appetites.”

30. See “El fin de Nicaragua” (Barcia 1977, 1:261–64), originally published in *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), 28 Sept. 1912.

31. See “Panamericanismo,” in Ministerio de Educación Pública (1964, 111–17); and “El triunfo de Calibán,” *El Tiempo* (Buenos Aires), 20 May 1989, as reprinted in Mapes (1938, 160).

in contrast to them is Darío's "Salutación a la águila," which he wrote in 1906 while a member of the Nicaraguan delegation to the Pan American conference in Rio de Janeiro (Torres 1966, 334–36). "Salutación" envisioned the northern eagle, bearing in its beak the olive branch of "a vast and fecund peace," joining in harmony with the Latin condor. Many commentators have suggested that the poem might have represented an evanescent feeling of Darío's, but it stands as a document of his political development nevertheless.<sup>32</sup> In essence, this poem rationalizes and justifies as a "necessary war" precisely the brutality that "A Roosevelt" had excoriated two years earlier. Whereas the earlier poem had counterposed the poets of the age of Netzahualcoyotl and the culture of the Incas to the "cult of Mammon" reigning in the North, "Salutación" reduced the cultural achievements of Mayan Palenque to no more than illustrious moments on the way to the "happy victory of the future" symbolized by the eagle. The poem ends expressing the hope that Latin America may receive the "magic influence" of the United States (Darío 1954, 804–7).

Other expressions of approval for the machinations of imperial powers can also be readily found in Darío's corpus. As late as 1911, aboard a steamer headed for France, he listened approvingly as Panama's consul in Havana praised the progressive U.S. role in the region. The consul reflected that "what Panama lost in romantic sovereignty it will gain in practical advantages and positive advances" (Barcia 1977, 1:175). Elsewhere, Darío's praise for the poets, beautiful women, and valiant warriors of "great and sovereign Britain" in his poem "God Save the Queen" made no mention of the social and political realities of that country's imperial past and present (Darío 1912, 168–71).

Hence the literary and political record that Darío left is a mixed one—as ambivalent as his relationship with his native country.<sup>33</sup> Such a record thus invited the kind of controversy that has ensued over his "real" political views and his "proper place" in Nicaraguan cultural history, even before his vital organs were distributed like relics and the rest of his body was laid to rest in the cathedral in León.

#### "NUESTRO RUBEN" BEFORE SOMOZA

Only two months after Darío's death, Nicaraguan poet Salomón de la Selva (1893–1958) published in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry: A Magazine of*

32. Octavio Paz observed that it would be "unjust" to characterize Darío's politics on the basis of a poem that arose from his "explainable and spontaneous enthusiasm" on the occasion of the Pan American conference at which he read the poem (Paz 1972, 53).

33. Appropriately enough, Beverley and Zimmerman read this dialectic as part of Darío's attempt to find a path for Latin American cultural development between U.S. hegemony and "oligarchic immobilism" (1990, 58–59). My interest here, however, is to highlight the contradictions that provided proof-texts for later ideological struggles over Darío (contradictions that are only apparent, if Beverley and Zimmerman are correct).

Verse a decidedly unpolemical article assessing Darío's esthetic, historical, and social significance.<sup>34</sup> Calling him the "Hispanic Keats," Selva asserted that Darío was a "universal poet" whose work was for "all of humanity." Selva eulogized Darío as "a prophet, an inspiration, the anointed leader of the people. For us he is the treasure of hope, the master of tomorrow . . . [who] united all the Latin American countries, awaking in them the sense of their true greatness."<sup>35</sup>

In Nicaragua it fell mainly to a Granada-based group of Nicaraguan writers calling themselves "*la vanguardia*" to define Darío's significance within Nicaraguan culture during the two decades between his death and the advent of the Somoza dynasty.<sup>36</sup> The Vanguardia, whose key members were José Coronel Urtecho (b. 1906) and Pablo Antonio Cuadra (b. 1912), conceived of their literary mission partly in terms of needing to provide a fresh, vital alternative to the florid and pompous effusions of a growing number of unimaginative Darío imitators.

But the Vanguardista agenda was not merely literary. Challenging the bourgeois and Philistine commercialism and anti-intellectualism of their mostly upper-class conservative families, the Vanguardistas struck insolently controversial and iconoclastic bohemian poses in their personal and public lives (such as shaving their heads and dressing like Indians). Such poses dramatized in a negative way what was expressed more positively in their literary search for new language and forms: their sense that the manifold stresses and contradictions of the past three-quarters of a century of turbulent economic, political, social, and cultural change demanded of Nicaraguan writers and intellectuals that they define and articulate an authentic and revitalized national cultural identity. In attempting to fulfill this goal, the Vanguardistas drew on a wide variety of resources—contemporary French poetry (Arthur Rimbaud, Guillaume Apollinaire), U.S. poetry (Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams), and Nicaraguan folklore and music.<sup>37</sup>

A key part of the Vanguardia's agenda was to rediscover the authentic Rubén Darío who had been masked by his effete imitators and by

34. See De la Selva (1916, 200–204). He and Thomas Walsh translated and published (in the year of Darío's death) the bilingual edition entitled *Eleven Poems of Rubén Darío* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916). For brief sketches of De la Selva, see White (1982, 23) and Beverley and Zimmerman (1990, 58–59).

35. Quoted by Mejía Sánchez from the Mexican journal *Romance*, issue dated 15 Feb. 1941 (Mejía Sánchez 1968, 175).

36. On *la vanguardia*, see White (1986, 8–9), Arellano (1982a, 57–74), and Beverley and Zimmerman (1990, 59–64).

37. A principal influence on their interest in U.S. poetry was José Coronel Urtecho, who had spent several years living in San Francisco in the early 1920s. See especially his chapter "Nueva poesía americana" in Coronel Urtecho (1953, 29–76); also "Fragmentos de *Panorama de la poesía norteamericana*" and "Anotaciones sobre literatura norteamericana," in Coronel Urtecho (1985, 115–58, 159–88).

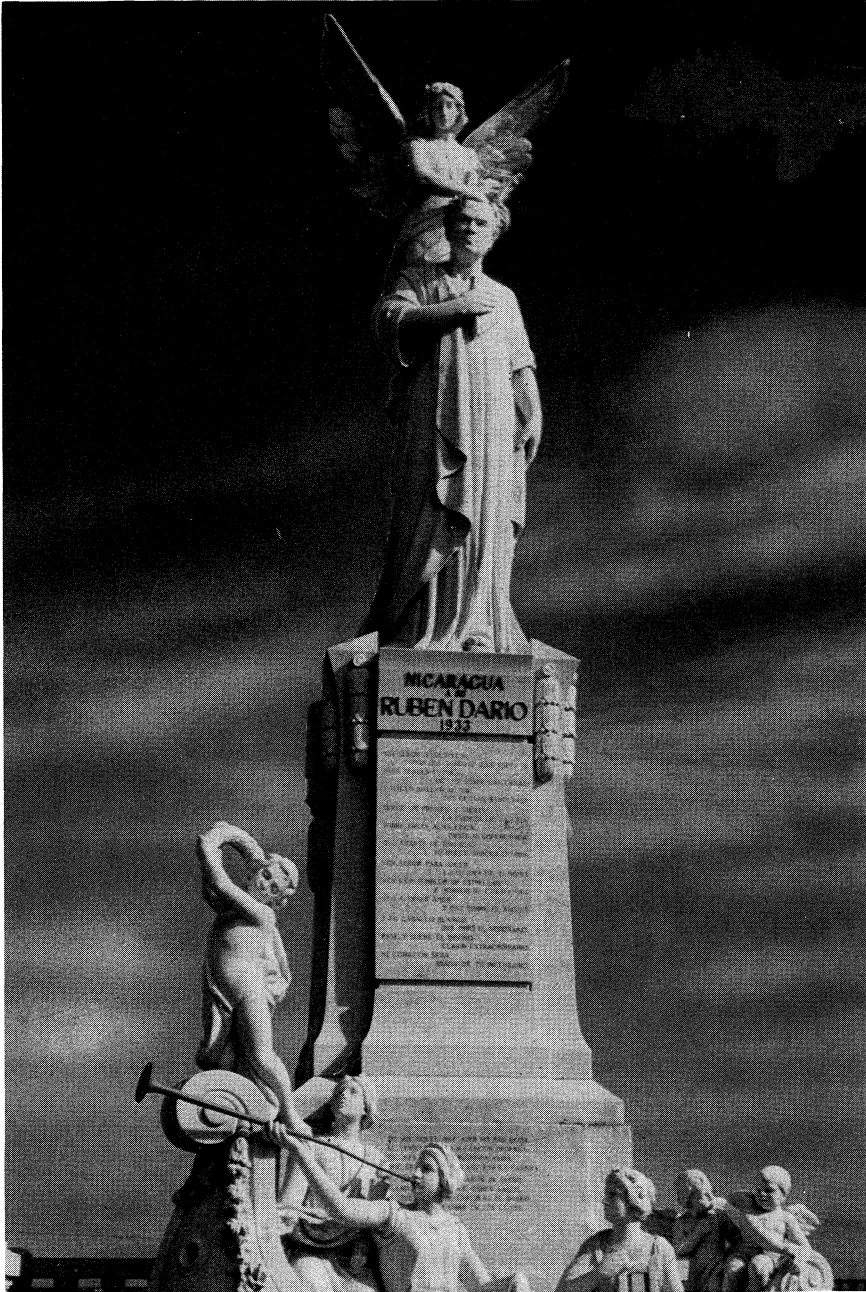
the gratuitous historical process of deification mounted and sustained (albeit willy-nilly) by the state. A prime example of this deification was the elaborate statue erected in Managua in 1933, which portrayed Darío in a flowing toga with a large angel perched on his right shoulder. Coronel Urtecho's ode to Rubén Darío, which announced the birth of the Vanguardia movement, took the grand Darío sarcophagus of marble and gold leaf in the cathedral at León as its focal image, ridiculing its grandiose pomposity. The theme of this ode (and a central feature of the Vanguardista agenda), as Ernesto Cardenal explained in the late 1940s, was "to divest Rubén of his anachronistic vestments, the moth-eaten mask of a prince in which he was presented in great military parades, in the name of that other sincere Rubén . . . , this intimate Rubén, without artifice, Rubén in his pajamas. . . . Beneath the fake gold leaf and phony gems existed the other true Darío, . . . [he of] 'the inner torture.'"<sup>38</sup>

This Rubén, the "beloved enemy," provided vital inspiration and guidance. Pablo Antonio Cuadra recalled in an interview years later, "[We] owed [our] instinct to seek the universal to Rubén Darío. We wanted to see what was going on in the world, to assimilate it. . . . Deep down, we were followers of Rubén. We wanted to join the cosmopolitan with the national. . . . At the beginning, we attacked him a little, but that was very short-lived. We attacked the part of Rubén we considered evanescent and dangerous—things that were too precious and exotic. We wanted something more direct. . . . Later we realized that it was Rubén himself who was pushing us forward" (White 1986, 19).

What Darío was pushing the Vanguardistas toward, they felt, was a sense of the necessity of insisting on the worth and integrity of Latin American culture within the system of the world's cultures, a proud acceptance of the fact of *mestizaje*, and (to a lesser extent) a grounding of the creative process in native materials. The Vanguardistas' reading of Darío in these terms constituted the first formal effort to reconstruct Darío as a purifying and reorienting national hero. Thus the Vanguardistas sought to pierce the devitalizing public mantle draped around him by sycophantic politicians eager to post his cultural capital to their Philistine nationalistic accounts and by inferior writers who could do no more than imitate the obvious features of a modish style. The Vanguardistas' struggle, Cardenal explained, "was not against Darío, but against the falsifiers of Darío" (White 1986, 14).

For some Vanguardistas, admiration of Darío's literary brilliance and what they perceived as his fearless, temple-cleansing iconoclasm sharpened their critique of Nicaragua's political situation. Coronel Urtecho's ode appeared at the outset of General Augusto Sandino's guerrilla war

38. See *50 años del movimiento de vanguardia de Nicaragua*, special nos. 22–23 of *El Pez y la Serpiente* (Winter 1978–Summer 1979): 10–11.



*Illustration 2. Statue of Rubén Darío by Italian sculptor Mario Favilli. It was formally unveiled in Managua on 15 September 1933. (Photo courtesy of the Columbus Memorial Library of the Organization of American States)*



against the U.S. Marines, the campaign in which the first of the Somozas caught the eye of U.S. policymakers. "Yankee imitations," wrote Vanguardistas Joaquín Pasos and Joaquín Zavala in 1932, "are bastard and spurious, besides being unadaptable to our circumstances." Pasos wrote in another poem, "Yankees, get out," and José Román burlesqued the transformation of Managua under the U.S. military presence:

Many uniforms, chests with medals,  
The canal, the Yankees and the liberals, the conservatives  
and all politics, crazy illusions . . .  
Pasteurized milk and Club and Jazz Band  
and English spoken everywhere. . . .  
Managua, Managua now you are civilized.  
Your suit of khaki; your people, everything is foreign  
even your cathedral is imported.  
Soon we will see an English-speaking God in it. (White 1986, 28, 115, 199–20)<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, however, other elements in the Vanguardistas' view of the world seriously compromised their efforts to stimulate and guide a healthy cultural renaissance in Nicaragua and to develop an adequate conception of Darío's place within it. Mainly through the influence of Vanguardistas José Coronel Urtecho and Luis Alberto Cabrales, the group's subliminal anti-democratic elitism lapsed into an admiration for rising fascist movements in Western Europe, and thence into the delusion that emerging strongman Anastasio Somoza García might be usable as an instrument for building a tolerably progressive and stable nationalism in Nicaragua. Eventually sensing the unlikelihood of such a development, the Vanguardistas one after another dropped their support for Somoza, although Coronel Urtecho continued to work in the government into the 1950s.<sup>40</sup>

But whatever the Vanguardistas' degree of clarity and level of effort might have been otherwise, they would have availed little once Anastasio Somoza García became president in December 1936, when he formally assumed the power he had consolidated as head of the National Guard. As Somoza had previously demonstrated in the more politically urgent case of Sandino, he understood well the advantages of controlling the public image of venerated national cultural figures.

#### THE SOMOCISTA DARIO

Even before Anastasio Somoza assumed the presidency, the Nicaraguan government had gotten involved in reshaping Darío's image ac-

39. See also Pablo Antonio Cuadra's poem "Por los caminos van los campesinos," *ibid.*, 129.

40. See White (1986, 9) and Beverley and Zimmerman (1990, 61). In *Mea máxima culpa* (1975), Coronel Urtecho recanted his error in supporting Somoza. It should not be supposed that the Vanguardistas were ideologically of a single persuasion; as noted by many commentators (e.g., Beverley and Zimmerman 1990, 61), some supported the guerrilla war led by General Augusto C. Sandino.

ording to state requirements. In 1935 the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública published a slim volume of Darío's writing made up of selections from his autobiography and *El viaje a Nicaragua*. Its preface piously called Darío "[our] great national poet" and "a noble son of this land." But the volume's editor cut and recast Darío's work in a high-handed manner (Ministerio de Instrucción Pública 1935, 19).

Some of the editor's politically opportune changes substantially altered the import of the original texts. A number of lines were cut that could have caused offense to the United States, whose troops had only recently departed. For example, some three dozen lines were deleted in which Darío had commented caustically on New York City, citing the "omnipotence of the multimillionaires" and the "Mammonic madness of the vast capital of the check" (Darío 1917b, 2). A much longer cut removed all his criticism of the social and political distortions associated with building the canal (Ministerio de Instrucción Pública 1935, 11–13). Other excisions tidied up Nicaraguan history by denying the existence of certain political currents. For example, the editor struck Darío's observation that "Although the conditions of life [in Nicaragua] are so different from those that give rise to so many protests by workers in European and [North] American nations, one or another wavering wind of the socialist spirit has not ceased to blow there" (Darío 1917b, 46). Similarly, his reference to constraints on freedom of thought emanating from both church and state in early-nineteenth-century Nicaragua disappeared, as did his catalog of persons of intellectual and artistic promise whose potential had been wasted in the inhospitable conditions afforded by Nicaragua (Darío 1917b, 68).

Especially in *El viaje a Nicaragua* (1909), Darío had lamented the lack of conditions in Nicaragua that would support creative endeavors. Virtually none of those laments survived the editor's pencil. A phrase referring to the poverty of archival resources in Nicaragua (*los pobres archivos nicaragienses*), which might have been taken to imply governmental irresponsibility, was rewritten as "the paucity of archives in those times" (*lo poco de aquellos pobres archivos*), suggesting that such lacks were a general characteristic of the era for which no government should be held explicitly responsible (Ministerio de Instrucción Pública 1935, 59). Speaking of the difficulties found by Gámez and other historians in doing their research in Nicaragua, Darío said, "No one there has been able to dedicate himself to pure letters. . . . Particularly in Nicaragua there is an abundance of primary material . . . , but the environment is hostile, the conditions of existence are not propitious, and the best mental plant that sends up a triumph of shoots dries up quickly." He went on to assert that "freedom of thought did not exist" and to name a series of Nicaraguans of talent and promise who had failed to carry their work to completion, to publish, or to be recognized and honored in their homeland (Darío 1917b, 55, 68). None of this line of thought escaped the loyalist editor.

When Anastasio Somoza García assumed the presidency in 1936, he had personal as well as political reasons to take an interest in Darío's image: his wife, Salvadora Debayle Sacasa, was the daughter of Darío's oldest and most intimate friend, Dr. Luis Debayle. Darío and Debayle had played together as children, and Darío wrote poems to various members of the family. Debayle helped him repeatedly in his various relations with the government, and they remained close until Darío's death, after which Debayle conducted the autopsy.<sup>41</sup>

From the beginning, the Somoza government kept its guiding hand on the image of Darío.<sup>42</sup> As early as 1940, the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública published a forty-eight-page booklet, *Nicaragua: Land of Rubén Darío*, announced as the first in a series of readings for use in the public schools (Ministerio de Instrucción Pública 1940).<sup>43</sup> Another appeared in 1943 (Ministerio del Distrito Nacional 1943) but apparently no more until the late 1950s, when the government began to produce Darío anniversary booklets and volumes (Ministerio de Educación Pública 1957, 1959, 1964; Comisión Nacional 1967).<sup>44</sup>

The Somoza regime's celebration of Darío proceeded alongside its otherwise reactionary politics. In 1953 a special Darío issue of *Revista Nicaragüa* appeared, and two years later the Ministry of Foreign Relations published a Darío memorial issue of its public relations magazine, *Azul* (named after Darío's first major book). This issue reprinted Darío's poem dedicated to his friend Luis Debayle's daughter Salvadora, now President Somoza's wife. The next issue of *Azul* featured the state visit of Vice President Richard Nixon, and a later one carried a full-page photograph of the

41. This link was first pointed out to me in an interview in Managua with Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Gutiérrez, 3 Mar. 1988. For poems and other references to Debayle and his family, see Darío (1909, 89–94) and Darío (1954, 1144–48). In *El viaje a Nicaragua*, Darío called Debayle "one of the finest, noblest and purest souls I have ever known in my life" (Darío 1917b, 70). Compare with Watland (1965, 39, 216, 249–52). A photo of Darío with Dr. Debayle appears in Torres Bodet (1966, facing p. 128).

42. By 1940 Darío's son Dr. Rubén Darío Contreras was serving as Nicaraguan ambassador in Buenos Aires. See *Nicaragua: guía general ilustrada* (Managua: Talleres Gráficos Pérez, 1940), sec. 13, p. 20. The ambassador's name is given as Rubén Darío C. Darío's first son, Rubén Darío Contreras, was born 12 Nov. 1891. Another son, born to him and his common-law wife Francisca on 2 Oct. 1907, was named Rubén Darío Sánchez. See Watland (1965, 204).

43. The forty-eight-page booklet appears to have been a smaller version of one of sixty-eight pages published in 1935 by the Juan Sacasa administration. During the same period, Gustavo Alemán Bolaños produced a more ambitious series of sixteen booklets of twenty-five to thirty pages for the Universidad Central de Nicaragua: *Cuadernos de divulgación de la obra de Darío para la instrucción pública* (Managua: Editorial Atlántida, 1943–1944). Available bibliographical data do not reveal whether the project was sponsored in any way by the Somoza government, but Alemán Bolaños edited other government publications on Darío from the 1940s until his death in 1958. For examples, see Ministerio del Distrito Nacional (1943) and Ministerio de Educación Pública (1958).

44. Bibliographic data in the *Nicaraguan National Bibliography* do not elucidate whether the Comisión Nacional was a governmental entity, but it seems reasonable to suppose that it was.

brutal Guatemalan president Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, captioned as an "eminent and democratic statesman."<sup>45</sup>

In the 1960s, the Somoza government (headed since 1956 by Somoza García's elder son Luis Somoza Debayle) seized the centenary of Darío's birth as another opportunity to shape public understanding of the meaning of his life and work.<sup>46</sup> Especially revealing was President René Schick's address in 1966 on being inducted into the Academia Nicaragüense de la Lengua, which was directed by former Vanguardista Pablo Antonio Cuadra.<sup>47</sup> Long a Somoza functionary, Schick had been Somoza's personal secretary before being appointed education minister in 1956. More recently, Schick had been translating Luis Somoza's cold war rhetoric into acceptable legal terminology. Over his brother's objections, Luis handed Schick the presidency in 1963 via a rigged election.<sup>48</sup>

Schick's address focused on Darío's politics (Schick Gutiérrez 1966, 9). Following the requisite lyrical invocations of Darío as "maestro and modeler of our language, father of our culture, and eponymous hero of our nationality," Schick launched into his own argument (1966, 10). Its core was that Darío had comprehended human misery and was committed to national dignity and sovereignty, yet because of his aristocratic commitment to Pure Art, he was essentially apolitical and opposed to all direct challenge to established authority or order.

Schick as president knew well that revising Darío's image had become all the more desirable now that the fledgling opposition of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (born five years earlier) was beginning to make its presence known even as its first military operations were being defeated (Bermann 1986, 251–58). In developing his argument, however, Schick had to tread a thin line for two reasons: because contradictory evidence could easily be found in Darío's corpus and because not

45. See *Azul* no. 36 (Jan. 1955):2–9; no. 37 (Feb. 1955); and no. 41 (Sept. 1955):5. On Castillo Armas, see LaFeber (1984, 120–27) and Schlesinger and Kinzer (1984, 113–14).

46. A sign of the slight liberalization of Nicaraguan politics following the assassination of Anastasio Somoza García in 1956 was the publication by the Ministerio de Educación of a collection of his journalistic pieces in 1964, which included the two anti-U.S. essays "El canal" and "Panamericanismo" as well as the anti-British "John Bull Forever" (Ministerio de Educación Pública 1964, 89–109, 111–18).

47. At his own induction into the academy in July 1945, Cuadra's speech (which focused on Darío) excoriated the English piracy and racist filibusterism that had so distorted Nicaraguan life as well as the Yankee imperialism that had intervened "openly, with fixed bayonets and with cynical will to dominate." Cuadra linked Darío with "the other Nicaraguan hero, the . . . mythological Augusto César Sandino." See "Introducción al 'Pensamiento vivo de Rubén Darío'" in Cuadra (1985, 125–43).

48. Even archconservative commentator Shirley Christian has noted that Schick was the "handpicked candidate" of President Luis Somoza Debayle (Christian 1986, 28). Compare with Woodward (1985, 222), Bermann (1986, 247), and Millett (1977, 226–27). To his credit, Schick tried to moderate some abuses by the National Guard and managed to protect convicted FSLN-founder Carlos Fonseca.

much could be gained by holding Darío out to be a simpleminded partisan of Somoza politics.

Schick's strategy was to try to play both ends against the middle. Hence he admitted Darío's "lasting concern for social and political problems" and even his condemnation of the exploitation of workers (1966, 12). Darío rejected "the ruling economic system, governed by merciless laws," Schick stated, without specifying the system to which he may have been referring (1966, 21). Rather surprisingly, Schick talked briefly of powerful German and Saxon nations that had "launched themselves on the world with their economic, military, and cultural might" (1966, 24–25). Quoting copiously from Darío's strictures against the social and political repercussions of the Panama Canal project, Schick recalled Darío's advice to Latin American governments to be cautious and firm "in the defense of our dignity and sovereignty" (1966, 27).

Had he stopped there, Schick's interpretation might have proved congenial to triumphant Sandinistas a dozen years later. But the most delicate and crucial part of the argument was yet to come. Cataloguing the contending current images of Darío—bohemian, ivory-tower aristocrat, intellectual caudillo singing the ideal of Central American union, Platonic philosopher, Jacobinic liberal exalting "breakers of chains" like Máximo Jérez and Simón Bolívar—Schick insisted that Darío had intended to "distance himself from all partisanship," "daily political events," and especially "militant politics" in order to be a pure artist (Schick Gutiérrez 1966, 11, 13–15). He quoted Darío as saying in 1894, "The poet should have as his only object ascension to his immortal sublime paradise: Art" (1966, 15). In the end, the only social and political role Schick was willing to grant to the poet was "to open avenues of hope and enthusiasm to people" (1966, 23).

Schick's mental agility was truly tested in confronting the historical fact of Darío's admiring relationships with such radicals as Martí, Lugones, and his old teacher José Leonard. Schick viewed the "belligerent influence" of Leonard not as a part of Darío's explicitly political formation but as a source of his "fundamental" Platonism (1966, 18). Schick interpreted Darío's relationship with Lugones as clear evidence of Darío's "invincible political skepticism," despite the admiration that the poet had expressed for Lugones (1966, 16). Schick denominated Lugones as "he of the red incandescences" and then interpreted the final image in Darío's "El tiempo" essay—red carnival dragons cast aside and bleached white in the sun—in politically symbolic terms, although in context the image clearly refers more broadly to the mutability of all aspects of one's life in the world.<sup>49</sup>

49. See Schick Gutiérrez (1966, 18) and Darío, "Un poeta socialista," in Mapes (1938, 108), originally published in *El Tiempo* (Buenos Aires), 12 May 1896.

More vexing for Schick was Darío's admiration for the universally admired Martí. Schick argued that Darío's reference to Martí as "giving his precious life for Humanity and for Art and for the true future triumph of America" and his assertion that "the blood of Martí did not belong to Cuba, it belonged to a whole race, to a whole continent" represented Darío's categorical "condemnation of intervention by the artistic genius in political torment." Schick argued, "Not even fighting for the freedom of a country seemed [to Darío] a sufficiently powerful motive to abandon the battles—less bloody but no less transcendent—of the spirit and of Art" (1966, 16). It was a tortuous reading nonetheless. Evidence abounds in Darío's essay that he in no way intended to condemn Martí for intervening or to suggest that the only proper plane of action for Martí (and by extension for all artists) was the transcendent one of Pure Art. Darío was clearly seeking to place Martí's illuminating example on the broadest possible political and cultural ground.

In sum, then, Schick argued that when Darío came to the "cross-roads . . . [between] social action and artistic duty," he refused to compromise and "proudly raised the flag of pure art" (1966, 17). But because a completely depoliticized Darío would be as useless a legitimizing hero to the *somocistas* as to the self-deluded bearers of red dragons and flags, Schick labored to show that Darío indeed possessed a "higher politics" that just happened to coincide with the policies of the Somoza government.

Arguing that Greek democracy "disgusted" Plato, Schick held that Darío's thought was "penetrated by a superior political concern" grounded in his "fundamental Platonism" (1966, 18). Fortunately for Somoza's Partido Liberal Nacionalista, the "divine Rubén" was "primordially a [Platonic] liberal" who "pleaded for a liberal Christian humanism," the "noble liberal tradition" that "one must construct men from inside." Even more to Schick's purpose, Darío was said to be unsympathetic to modern electoral democracies. Instead, he was committed to an "aristocratic ideal, made concrete in the eminent man, the only one who, by virtue of his spiritual energy, talent, and gift of rule is in a condition to assume the direction of the state" (1966, 25). According to Schick, Darío believed

that it should be those who are knowledgeable, experienced [*los entendidos*], those who are morally superior and capable who govern in public matters. . . . He found that the masses are not always capable of choosing the one who really, in terms of his merits, ought to assume public power. . . . What he was looking for was a formula of selection that would permit those who were best prepared to take over the direction of collective matters—a system that would eliminate demagoguery, mendacity, charlatanry, and ignoble calumny against the adversary. (Schick Gutiérrez 1966, 19)

Standing on that classic justification for autocracy, Schick reached for the fascist and Cold War rhetorics and also for the time-tested legitimizing code phrases of Latin America's liberal oligarchies. He asserted,

"Neither exploitation from above nor radicalism from below find acceptance [in Darío]. The insensitivity of the powerful and the blind ire of the oppressed can only provoke a universal explosion that will destroy the bases of our civilization. His doctrine . . . of unity and work, of peace and order still has force . . ." (Schick Gutiérrez 1966, 35).

Hence for the Somoza government to hang the medal of the Orden de Rubén Darío around the neck of some favored personage was an act of self-legitimation and co-optation. In another such act in 1969, the government named its grandiose new national theatre (a pet project of Somoza's U.S.-educated wife, Hope Portocarrero de Somoza) El Teatro Nacional Rubén Darío. Indeed, such behavior was not unlike the mounting of a lavish state funeral for Darío a half-century earlier, after thirty years of abusing and neglecting him during his lifetime.<sup>50</sup>

Naming the new theatre for "a penniless boy born in this remote corner of the Hispanic world" seemed merely poignant to the reporter for the *New York Times*. But the political and social irony of the theater's lavish opening night struck Nicaragua's radical students as outrageous. Carrying signs alluding to the country's high illiteracy rate and chanting "Viva Che!" and "Viva Fidel!," they gathered in front of the nearby national cathedral as lines of chauffeured Mercedes automobiles delivered the opening-night audience. Using the cathedral as a backdrop, the students presented their own play entitled "Oh, What a Wonderful Family," starring an abusive landlord, his drunken brother-in-law, and a pregnant unwed daughter searching for an abortion.<sup>51</sup>

#### DARIO AND THE SANDINISTAS

From the mid-1960s onward, the Somoza regime's efforts to co-opt and domesticate Darío's image for its own ends were increasingly at odds with those put forth with growing vigor by the FSLN. This effort was only part of the FSLN's larger campaign to reconsider the history of Nicaragua (including its cultural history) and place the resulting revisionist interpretations in the service of national transformation. Early in the FSLN's history, it became clear that rescuing and redefining Darío (along with other Nicaraguan cultural heroes such as the cacique Diriangén, Benjamín Zeledón, and Sandino) was to be a major item on the Sandinista political-cultural agenda.<sup>52</sup>

50. Exactly when the Somoza government created the Orden de Rubén Darío is uncertain. José Sansón-Terán, education minister in 1966, reported that when Schick held that post, he established an annual contest known as the "certámen dariano" (see Cabrales 1966, 4).

51. Juan de Onís, "Managua's 'Week of the Decade' Is Socially Hectic with Overtones of Protest," *New York Times*, 10 Dec. 1969, p. 15.

52. As early as 1974, for example, Jaime Wheelock Román had published *Raíces indígenas de la lucha anticolonialista en Nicaragua de Gil González a Joaquín Zavala (1523 a 1881)* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno).

The Somoza government's conferring of the Orden de Rubén Darío on its cultural favorites particularly galled young anti-Somoza Nicaraguans. In 1960, FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca charged that "The Somoza family has outraged the memory of our premier national poet" by bestowing medals carrying his name on "the worst people of America" (Fonseca 1985, 1:100).<sup>53</sup> Returning to Darío a decade later, Fonseca elaborated on the cultural politics of the matter, arguing that "ignorance of certain essential aspects" of Darío's work in Nicaragua was chargeable to the "reactionary tyranny" of the Somoza regime and to "North American cultural aggression."<sup>54</sup>

Inevitably, the approach of the Darío centenary of 1967 encouraged increased critical attention to social and political themes in Darío's writings. The Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua at León (UNAN) had become the main generative center of Nicaraguan student activism after Mariano Fiallos Gil became rector in 1957, and many student leaders of the period went underground with the FSLN. Yet a two-volume centennial collection of essays on Darío issued by the university in 1967 was surprisingly cautious in reevaluating him.<sup>55</sup> The volumes were edited by poet Ernesto Gutiérrez, whose anti-Somoza poem "Mi país es tan pequeño" had been published clandestinely some years earlier, and by university rector Carlos Tünnermann Bernheim, later ambassador to the United States for the Sandinista government. They nevertheless treated the issue of Darío's politics rather timidly and cursorily.<sup>56</sup> The most overtly political essay, written by Guillermo Rothschild, proclaimed Darío "a poet of great national ardor" and recounted his imprecations against U.S. imperialism in Latin America (UNAN 1967, 1:83–88). Former Vanguardista

53. It is not clear how extensively Fonseca (a voracious reader) was perusing Darío's writings during the formative years of the FSLN. Beverley and Zimmerman report that he studied Darío's poetry intensively from 1965 to mid-1966 under the tutelage of Darío biographer Edelberto Torres (Beverley and Zimmerman 1990, 30). But Fonseca's detailed "Cronología de la resistencia sandinista" (apparently completed about 1966) contains only two references to Darío and does not list his death among other important events cited for 1916 (Fonseca 1985, 2:91).

54. See "Noticia sobre Darío y Gorki," in Fonseca (1985, 1:422–23). No date of composition is given for the brief essay, originally published in *Casa de las Américas*, no. 117 (Nov. 1979):179–80. Internal evidence establishes that it was written in 1974 or later. Fonseca was killed in 1976.

55. Whisnant (1988) briefly discusses the redirection of the university under Fiallos. For a fuller discussion, see Ramírez (1971).

56. In choosing to represent Darío's writings by his poetry only, the editors inevitably omitted most of the more overtly political items. "A Roosevelt" was included nonetheless (UNAN 1967 1:130–31). In defense of the editors, one must note that although UNAN had been technically autonomous for ten years, it was still subject to intense surveillance and periodic repression by the Somoza regime. Although a year earlier Margarita Gómez Espinosa had published for the first time Darío's highly political essay "Las palabras y los actos de Mr. Roosevelt" (from the *Paris Journal*, 27 May 1910), her overall treatment of Darío is romantic and uncritical (Gómez Espinosa 1966, 320–24).



Pablo Antonio Cuadra was represented by an essay on Darío reprinted from his earlier book, *El nicaragüense*, which linked the poet to contemporary radical politics in Nicaragua by calling Sandino “el hijo de ‘A Roosevelt’” (UNAN 1967, 1:90–95).<sup>57</sup>

Not all the centennial reevaluation of Darío was as favorable as that derived from the fledgling FSLN, however, and by no means all the unfavorable criticism originated with Somocistas or other political reactionaries. Octavio Paz observed that Darío’s poetry lacked substance (“earth, people”) and that Darío “forgot or did not want to see the other half: the oligarchies, the oppression, this landscape of bones, broken crosses, and soiled uniforms that is Latin American history. He had enthusiasm; he lacked indignation” (Paz 1972, 55).<sup>58</sup>

Jean Franco also published an elaborate challenge during the centennial year. She characterized Darío’s life as “a stormy sea of marital adventures and passionate affairs interspersed with guilt-ridden remorse when he longed for the tranquil harbor of religion.” She viewed Darío’s interest in the “aesthetic possibilities of Indian legend and of folklore” as confined to Indians of the pre-Columbian era and essentially aristocratic and alienated. Compared with Martí, Darío’s resistance to entrenched authority was “ivory tower,” Franco charged. Moreover, his poems about working-class people (such as “¡Al trabajo!” exhorting workers to imitate the industriousness of the bee and the beaver) were “devoid of political content.” Like other Modernistas, Franco concluded, Darío “took the trappings of the literary and humanistic culture” of a cultivated minority and celebrated it as a “universal tradition” (Franco 1967, 22–34, 48).<sup>59</sup>

About the time of the Sandinista triumph in mid-1979, Darío began to be attacked even more severely by critics on the left. Françoise Pérus charged that although social protest is not entirely lacking in Darío, he conceived of the poet as essentially “cantor of the class in power” (Pérus 1976, 108). In Pérus’s view, Darío “was not able to overcome his profoundly elitist representation of the world” (1976, 111–12). Hence his liberalism was “a doctrinaire and abstract position, lacking in concrete content, that could scarcely supply him with the historical experience that was his to

57. A puzzling inclusion in view of the presumed need to snatch Darío from the smothering embrace of the rabidly anti-communist Somocistas was Stefan Baciu’s belligerently anti-Marxist response to the treatment of Darío in Francisc Pacurariu’s *Introduction to Latin American Literature* (Bucharest: 1965). Baciu found Pacurariu’s book politically objectionable because it judged Darío according to the Marxist-Leninist method, which he rejected as “one of the most reactionary that exists in the world.”

58. The essay dates from 1964.

59. Franco might have cited other pieces by Darío in addition to “¡Al trabajo!” that romanticized working-class life. Other examples are “Epístola a un labriego” and the paternalistic “El fardo” from *Azul*. Franco’s evaluation appears to be based solely on Darío’s poetry rather than on his journalistic writing, where other critics have found most evidence of his political insight and commitment.

live" (1976, 109). Darío could conceive of the poet in no other way than as official bard and thus looked no further than the possibility of "substituting some elites for others" who might treat their bards better (1976, 129, 112). Pérus charged (in Zimmerman's précis) that in Darío's work, "social contradictions are reduced to moral platitudes and, finally, to mere aesthetic oppositions. The cruder the reality, the greater is Darío's counter-valent demand for 'pure' poetry. And his best work institutes the most retrograde part of the ruling ideology" (Zimmerman 1982, 165–66; compare with Beverley and Zimmerman 1990, 55).

At about the same time, another critic posited an argument grounded in dependency theory. According to this perspective, the cultural values and practices of economic peripheries at once mirror and rationalize those of the dominant cultural metropole, which themselves issue from and serve dominant economic structures and regnant ideology. Arguing from this same perspective, Carlos Blanco Aguinaga was stringent in his criticism of Darío (1980).<sup>60</sup> Situating Modernist writers like Darío as intellectuals organic to the system of dependency in Latin America, Blanco Aguinaga focused on Darío's much-analyzed story "El rey burgués," a brief fable about a poet who has abandoned the unhealthy city and gone to live in the forest to seek ideal poetry. Hungry and in rags, the poet is brought before a king ensconced in his sumptuous palace and surrounded by courtesans and sycophants. Although the monarch prides himself on being an aficionado of the arts, as a "bourgeois king" rather than a "poet king" he fails to recognize this "rare species of man." Informed that the stranger is indeed a poet, the king commands "Speak, and you shall eat." The poet passionately declares that he wishes to write a poem that will serve as a "triumphal arch" to welcome a coming messiah "of all power and light," one who will usher in "the time of great revolutions." Oblivious to such a transcendent vision, the king sets him to grinding out silly and repetitive tunes on a music box. Eventually the "poor devil" of a poet dies in the freezing winter, his hand still on the crank, while inside the castle a gaggle of professors of rhetoric recite bad verse at a lavish banquet.

For Blanco Aguinaga, the central point of the story is that the problem with the king is not that he is a king but that he is a bourgeois imitation of a real king. If he were a real king, he would provide the refuge and support the poet asks for and requires (Blanco Aguinaga 1980, 525–27). Thus the organ-grinding poet in the story is the type of the poet in the real world in which Darío found himself. Finding that reality so inhospitable, Blanco Aguinaga argued, Darío invented an ideal realm of poetry (ruled by a "real king") in which he could "cause to be born what does not exist,

60. My intent here is not to test whether Blanco Aguinaga's reading is legitimate but to represent it as a critique to which the Sandinistas, because of their own politics, might be expected to have been especially sensitive.

making a rich metaphor of precious stones substitute for a vulgar reality" (1980, 529–30). In Blanco Aguinaga's view, that binary opposition between the real and the ideal was the primary contradiction that led Darío to serve the oligarchy in exchange for protection and support—to seek a place "at the banquet of the dominant classes."

Blanco Aguinaga observed that the pieces that Darío wrote for newspapers were especially rich in accounts of cultural expositions attended by the social elite, titillating cultural notices from European capitals, and tales of his own dealings with the nobility. Such rationalizing and justifying accounts reassured the Latin American oligarchy about their access to *la gran cultura* of Europe and thus "confirmed . . . [their] motivating ideology" (1980, 535–41). Blanco Aguinaga found the case made even more clearly in Darío's prose poem "God Save the Queen," which openly celebrates British imperial domination and accepts its contradictions "because above the vigor of your workers, the drudgery of your sailors and the unknown labor of your miners, you have artists who dress in silks of love, in the golds of glory, in lyrical pearls."

Blanco Aguinaga argued that in effect, in Darío's view "civilization and poetry come to be inseparable from prosperity and power" (1980, 542). Hence Darío reacted to the rising demands of workers at the turn of the century essentially like a member of the ruling class. In an article titled "La obra del populacho," he referred to a "wave of perversity" that had broken out among the "unconscious and rude masses" in Chile, who went "screaming through the streets, menacing, drunk, brutal, ferocious" until the government "had to employ arms" against them. Similarly, during his first visit in 1898 to Barcelona (historically a cauldron of working-class-based radical politics), Darío worried about "the deaf agitation of the social movement, which later would break out in red explosions" (Blanco Aguinaga 1980, 544; Darío 1955, 3:26–34; Darío 1912, 217).<sup>61</sup>

Thus when the Sandinistas turned their attention to Darío after the revolutionary triumph, they faced a double task: to reconstruct a Darío deformed by their predecessors in power and to defend him against emerging leftist critics of the 1960s and 1970s. Some steps were easy to take. The elite Teatro Nacional Rubén Darío was renamed Teatro Popular Rubén

61. More recently, feminist arguments against Darío and his contemporary Modernistas have been elaborated in Sternbach (1988) and Davies (1989). Concentrating on Modernist novels, Sternbach adduces substantial evidence that the patriarchal and essentially misogynist Modernistas excluded women as writers and admitted them as fictional characters only in the guise of "prostitutes, fallen women, femmes fatales . . . [or] young statuesque beauties," while holding themselves to be "emblem[s] of civilization and culture." Davies concludes that *Prosas profanas* "establishes an analogy between sexual and literary creation where man's sexual prowess is a metaphor for artistic endeavor and achievement." She argues that "the virgin and the beast are contained within one female figure which is exalted or debased, idolized or sacrificed by the poet at will" and that Darío subscribed to the "common misogynist beliefs of the day regarding women" (Davies 1989, 283–86).

Darío, and performances of popular music and dance replaced those by touring symphony orchestras and ballet companies. Other steps in reconstructing Darío's image were more difficult in that they required a broad reinterpretation of his life, politics, and published writings.

The earliest post-Somoza documents issued in the effort to assimilate Darío into the revolutionary project were Nicaraguan historian Jorge Arellano's *Nuestro Rubén Darío* and *Rubén Darío: textos sociopolíticos* and Carlos Tünnerman Bernheim's *Rubén Darío y su tiempo*, all issued in 1980. *Nuestro Rubén Darío* was published by the Biblioteca Nacional, which Arellano headed. It was a collection of poems, politically tame except for "A Roosevelt." By omitting the pro-U.S. poem "*Salutación a la águila*," the collection signaled that some manipulation of the Darío canon would likely be necessary to resituate the poet politically. *Rubén Darío: textos sociopolíticos* drew mainly on Darío's essays and journalistic work, including pieces that were to become favorites in the new discourse: "La insurrección en Cuba," "El triunfo de Calibán," "Las palabras y los actos de Mr. Roosevelt," and the story "D. Q.," a special favorite.<sup>62</sup>

"D. Q." depicts young Spanish troops in the Spanish-American war, hungry and desperate but "burning to fight," waiting eagerly to encounter Yankee troops and fantasizing about hoisting their flag over the capitol in Washington. Word comes, however, that the cause is lost. The conquering enemy presents himself in the form of "a great blond, limp-haired, bearded devil, an official of the United States, followed by an escort of blue-eyed hunters." All the Spaniards surrender their arms except for one nameless soldier known only as "D. Q.," the color-bearer. Older than most, solitary, and poetic, he is so confident of the "nobility of our race and the justice of our cause" that when it comes time to surrender the colors, he walks calmly to the edge of a bottomless abyss and hurls himself into it. The story may be read as a Modernist fantasy celebrating *hispanidad* (D. Q. as Don Quixote) or—the preferred Sandinista reading—as an anti-U.S. protest (the physical description of the U.S. official reveals that he is supposed to be Uncle Sam).<sup>63</sup>

More explicitly political yet was Tünnerman Bernheim's assertion in *Rubén Darío y su tiempo* (issued by the Ministry of Education in connection with its internationally heralded literacy campaign) that "to rediscover Rubén Darío will be one of our great cultural and pedagogical duties."<sup>64</sup> In the introduction, Darío biographer Edelberto Torres decried "the silence that ignorance tried to lay on his name like a heavy slab

62. I have seen only the fourth edition of *Nuestro Rubén Darío* (1984). "D. Q.," originally published in Buenos Aires in *Almanaque Peuser para el año 1899*, was reprinted in Ibáñez (1970, 142–45).

63. For a brief analysis of the story, see Palau de Nemes (1981).

64. See Tünnerman Bernheim (1980, 7). On the literacy campaign, see Hirshon (1983) and Miller (1985).

# AÑO DEL CENTENARIO DE AZUL

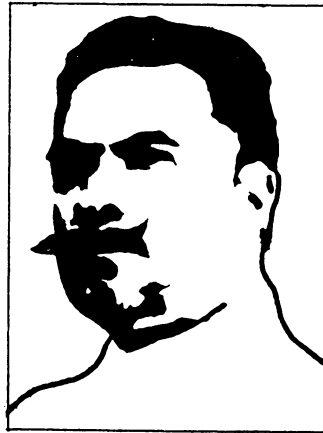
## EL MINISTERIO DE CULTURA

En el marco de la VII Jornada de la Independencia Cultural Rubén Darío, la celebración del Centenario de Azul y continuando con el rescate del arte popular, presenta:

Revista Nacional de Artistas Aficionados.

Selección de Danza y Música. Sábado 6 de Febrero, a las 7:30 de la noche.

Con la participación de la música, la danza, el canto y la pintura de todo el país.



### PRECIOS

1er. Balcón .....	C\$35,000.00
Platea .....	C\$25,000.00
2do. Balcón .....	C\$15,000.00
3er. Balcón .....	C\$10,000.00

Boletos a la venta en la taquilla del Teatro Popular Rubén Darío, de 9:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.

## MINISTERIO DE CULTURA DE NICARAGUA

*Illustration 3. Newspaper advertisement for a performance in the Teatro Popular Rubén Darío in Managua during the Sandinista era.*

without an epitaph." The rediscovered Darío, however, is "a man integrated with his era" enough to write,

Tremble, tremble, tyrants in your royal chairs.  
Not one stone upon another of all the Bastilles  
Will remain tomorrow.

"To clear away *somocismo* . . . the cruelty and alienation of sovereignty . . . , all those calamities we have suffered, is the duty that will be realized," Torres asserted. Illiterate Nicaraguans previously unable to read a single "strophe of Rubén or a declaration of Sandino" will now read both in *Rubén Darío y su tiempo* and the pocket-sized *Ideario político de Augusto C. Sandino*, also published by the Ministry of Education. "Rubén and Sandino have much to do in Nicaragua," Torres said, "the one, guide of its culture, and the other, captain of its liberties, are sufficient to make of Nicaragua . . . the great country that both loved. Rubén sang to it in verse, and Sandino defended it with arms that sounded like Homeric hexameters" (Torres 1966, 10–11).

The revisionist effort gathered further force at the opening in January 1982 of the national Rubén Darío celebration, when Minister of Culture Ernesto Cardenal proclaimed categorically that Darío was an anti-imperialist and a "revolutionary" who "anticipated the [Sandinista] revolution in his song" (Ministerio de Cultura 1982, 233–38).<sup>65</sup> Cardenal argued that Sandino, who was an intellectual despite his being a mere artisan, was influenced by Darío and became in turn the teacher of Fonseca.<sup>66</sup> Asserting direct political descent from Darío through Sandino to the contemporary FSLN, Cardenal proclaimed, "This revolution was a dream of Darío. And a decision of Sandino. And a strategy of Carlos Fonseca." A week later, the Sandinista newspaper *Barricada* published "12 proposiciones para rescatar a Rubén Darío," which claimed that the task facing the Sandinistas was no less than to "debureaucratize, popularize, nationalize, reedit, humanize [and] liberate" the poet (Rothschuh Tablada 1982, 2–3).

The opening of a tiny Darío museum in León concluded the Darío celebration early the following February. On that occasion, Comandante Carlos Núñez noted that in the rescue effort he and others had had to work hard to give Darío "the place he deserves, within a new vision and a new thought" (Ministerio de Cultura 1982, 99–106). In Núñez's speech, the ragged poet's prediction in "*El rey burgués*" about the coming of a messiah is quoted as if it had issued directly from Darío himself rather than from a character in a work of fiction—and (more important) as if it

65. Also including ten pages of extracts from Darío was the anthology *Pensamiento antimperialista en Nicaragua: antología* (Managua: Instituto de Estudio del Sandinismo, 1982).

66. It may be that Sandino was much influenced by Darío, but Sergio Ramírez's two-volume edition of Sandino's writings contains only two minor references to Darío (Ramírez, ed., 1984, 1:87, 2:198).

had specifically prophesied the Sandinista Revolution. "In this new revolutionary time, we are receiving," Núñez said, the poems that Darío envisioned as "triumphal arches" of a new cultural and political order in which art will be understood as "a weapon of the Revolution" (Ministerio de Cultura 1982, 103–4). Connecting the few happy years that Darío spent in León when growing up with the few agonized months he spent there thirty years later, just before his death, Núñez referred to León as the city where the poet "always lived and developed himself," where he "studied, lived, and died." Selecting phrases from a few pieces like "A Roosevelt," the comandante thus projected a visionary and revolutionary Darío who was "Nicaraguan to the marrow of his bones." Hence, Núñez announced, the government had declared Darío a Héroe Nacional de la Cultura and his birthday as the national Día de Independencia Cultural. "We are placing him," Núñez said, "on the altar of the country, beside our General of Free Men Augusto César Sandino." At the close of the ceremony, the newly renamed Orden de Independencia Cultural "Rubén Darío" was presented to several honorees, including Darío biographer Edelberto Torres, former Vanguardista José Coronel Urtecho, the young martyred poet Fernando Gordillo, musicians Salvador Cardenal and Ernesto Mejía Godoy, and culture minister Ernesto Cardenal.<sup>67</sup>

Historian Jorge Arellano also played a leading role in the Sandinista effort to rescue and reconstruct Darío after 1979. In mid-July of 1982, Arellano confidently asserted that "The popular Sandinista revolution has recovered . . . [and] revealed the progressive, revolutionary Darío who was hidden, buried before July 19, 1979" (Arellano 1982b). Arellano quoted from the portions of Darío's writings that had become favorites of those who preferred his more progressive side ("A Roosevelt" and a few other poems, the essay "El triunfo de Calibán," and the newspaper articles he had written against Roosevelt). Arellano thus projected a Darío "open to the precursors of modern social thought, including the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels" (1982b, 104).<sup>68</sup> Simultaneously, the Ministerio de Cultura issued a new anthology of Darío's essays

67. The Orden de Rubén Darío was created by Decreto no. 927 of 21 Jan. 1982, which also referred to it as La Orden de la Independencia Cultural "Rubén Darío." See *Nicaráuac* 3, no. 7 (June 1982):99. A brief document catalogs the Sandinista government's various efforts to commemorate the poet's birth (conferences, poetry readings, dramatic performances, and awarding of the Orden de Independencia "Rubén Darío"). See "Jornada Cultural 'Rubén Darío' 1982," *Nicaráuac* 3 (June 1982):63. This document is followed by José Emilio Balladares's vigorous defense of Darío's *nicaraguanidad* (pp. 89–98).

68. Arellano refers to (but does not cite or provide a source for) "a dialogue" that Darío wrote in 1892 in which he "announced the socialist future of humanity" (Arellano 1982b, 104). I have so far been unable to locate such a piece. No such title appears in the *Obras completas*, Silva Castro's *Obras desconocidas*, or Mapes's *Escritos inéditos*. Presumably the dialogue is in prose rather than poetry because no such piece appeared among Arellano's selections in *Nuestro Rubén Darío* (1980).

edited by Arellano (Arellano 1982c). Although the essays were not altered textually, they were selected to emphasize favored themes like anti-imperialism and nationalism.

In constructing an anthology of brief extracts from Darío the following year, however, Arellano exercised less editorial restraint and responsibility (Arellano 1983). The extracts, which ranged in length from a half-dozen lines to a page, were drawn widely from Darío's poetry and prose works. No exact sources were indicated, however, and the extracts were categorized under thematic titles supplied by the editor: "Pan y trabajo," "Los innumerables mendigos," "William Walker: conquistador nórdico," and "La amenaza del imperialismo yanqui." Favoring some portions of Darío's work that had been excluded from the student anthologies of the Somoza era (such as Darío's reference to the vague blowing of the socialist spirit in Nicaragua), the anthology was clearly intended to bring the poet's politics into line with Sandinista ideology.

One example will illustrate the danger inherent in such extracting. Three of Arellano's excerpts—"Un tirano que hay que combatir," "La ira y odio al capitalista," and "La buena nueva del socialismo," can be traced to an article entitled "Dinamita," published in a Buenos Aires newspaper in 1893 (Mapes 1938, 24–28). Several years before Arellano's anthology appeared, Carlos Blanco Aguinaga had noted the essayist's extraordinary familiarity with fin de siècle political theorists and raised the possibility that Darío may have been persuaded to sign an article written by some "ruling class ideologue" who wanted to use the rising young poet's fame to legitimize his own reactionary political views (Blanco Aguinaga 1980, 546).<sup>69</sup> Regardless of whether Darío wrote the piece or not, in extracting and titling the selections from it, Arellano stood them on their head ideologically.

The original essay is unmistakably a warning against rising militancy among the working class and a crude satire on the array of political ideologies that were fueling it, rather than a celebration of either. The essays begins, "The hungry of Europe bring us [in Latin America] their contagion of wrath stored up for centuries. All of Europe is mined with socialist decay . . . [and] anarchism shows its face everywhere." The writer continues, "The enemy is the worker, who has some savings; the landlord, who has houses . . . ; the noblewoman, who has diamonds; the

69. Richard O'Keeffe reports that the article originally appeared in Buenos Aires in *La Tribuna*, not under Darío's name but under the pseudonym "Des Esseintes" (O'Keeffe 1984). Although it probably would be impossible to prove conclusively that Darío did or did not write the piece, its prose style seems uncharacteristically tight, single-cadenced, and angry. It also employs the strident tone of narrowly sectarian political propaganda and displays a wide-ranging familiarity with nineteenth-century political theorists, citing Bebel, Becker, Büchner, Cabet, Darwin, DeAmicés, Engels, Feuerbach, Hauptmann, Kelmich, Kobold, La-Salle, Marx, "Pourier" (presumably Fourier), Schlenker, St. Simon, and De Waldow. Neither characteristic is evident elsewhere in Darío's writings. In any case, the piece's arguments run counter to much that Darío demonstrably did write.



judge, who has authority; the king, who has a crown; the believer, who has God. God too is the enemy. The pseudo-anarchists imported [to Latin America] have written in their threatening papers . . . , 'neither God nor country.' Engels already had said . . . , 'The time will come when there will be no other religion than socialism.' Those philosophers . . . preach to the ignorant and closed-minded masses the death of beliefs and of religious ideals. The *philosophy of appetites* broadcasts itself like a pestilent wind" (Mapes 1938, 25). As the "rage of anarchy" has spread, the writer continued, workers have become discontented with their lot: "One has to be rich at all costs, and given that we cannot be, let us destroy the property of others [and] level the heads of humanity with fire and blood. Let us seek to gorge ourselves and be happy in this life, for beyond it there is nothing" (Mapes 1938, 25). To the writer of the essay, conventional historical and ideological distinctions are unimportant: "Socialists, anarchists, communists—all are one. The use of more or less soap is all that distinguishes them. They are [all] sons of Cain."

In Arellano's anthology, the italicized portion of the following quotation—removed from its original rhetorical context and thus stripped of its ironic tone—appears as Darío's apologia for Marxism under the title "Un tirano que hay que combatir": "Country? They have none. *These days their country (that of the socialists, anarchists, communists) is the world. Karl Marx in founding the International erases frontiers, and wherever a bourgeois is seen, a proprietor, one recognizes a tyrant who has to be combated*" (Arellano 1983, 35, parenthetical material added to the original).

The original essay became even more bitingly satirical in presenting the beliefs and actions of socialists and their ilk: "Morals don't exist, classes don't exist, property doesn't exist, justice doesn't exist, God doesn't exist. And if it exists, dynamite it!" (Mapes 1938, 26). Even the physiognomy of such misguided people is grotesque: grim eyes, oversized jawbones, and "markedly zoological features." According to the original essay, the "orators of the tavern are going to infect the good worker . . . by making him dream of an anarchist utopia that will come with the absolute triumph of the messiah named Democracy." The author subsequently launches into a lengthy satire of the blacksmith, the shoemaker, and the carpenter who sally forth deluded by such nonsense. Irony and satire build insistently as references to "shirtless crowds" [*turbas*] of "dynamiters and strikers" pile one on the other. Yet this caricature of deluded workers, completely decontextualized and placed under Arellano's title "La ira y odio al capitalista" as one of Darío's "sociopolitical texts," appears to ratify and celebrate precisely the objects of satire and rejection in the original essay.<sup>70</sup>

70. Arellano's decontextualizing of the extract he titles "La buena nueva del socialismo" is similarly misleading, and for the same reasons. Also, the essayist's original reference to "the convenient logic of Engels" (*la lógica acomodaticia*) becomes merely "Engels's logic" (Arellano

Another major contributor to the post-1979 effort to reconstruct Darío was Vice President Sergio Ramírez, himself a novelist.<sup>71</sup> Ramírez was scathing in his contempt for the ethereal, bohemian, depoliticized Darío, the poet who wrote verses on the fans of opulent women. In his view, this Darío had been bequeathed to the nation by the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, who had dressed in swallowtail coats when bearing the poet's casket through the streets and when signing the infamous Chamorro-Bryan treaty granting the United States the right to build the canal through Nicaragua, the one that "Rubén had feared so much." Ramírez also complained that the Somoza regime had "abused" the figure of Darío by "lowering him to a provincial symbol celebrated in tacky literary contests and the crowning of muses in country clubs" (White 1986, 82).<sup>72</sup> How could such a bourgeoisie not falsify Darío, teaching in the schools only "his sonorities and Oriental tales"? Such deception, Ramírez observed, resulted from "the perfidy, the absolute cultural incapacity of a backward and atrophied bourgeoisie" (especially that of the Somoza epoch), which presented "the real substance of [Darío's] poetry as the casual delirium of a dreamer."

For Ramírez, therefore, the task of the revolution was to rescue Darío from such fraud and allow him to "speak for his people" (Ramírez 1984, 99–100).<sup>73</sup> When the Sandinista government conferred the Orden de Independencia Cultural "Rubén Darío" on novelist Julio Cortázar in 1984, Ramírez called Darío a "cultural hero [and] prophet in his [own] country . . . who felt and understood the struggle of his people," as had his spiritual and political brothers Bolívar, Martí, and Sandino. That Darío, Ramírez recalled, was the one who loved children and fathered them with a "campesina concubine" (Francisca), the Darío who was honored at a banquet by stevedores in Valparaíso and whose carriage was pulled by the working people of León when he returned in 1907 (Ramírez 1984, 96, 99).

Writing six months later, Nicaraguan poet Julio Valle-Castillo further elaborated this effort at political rehabilitation (Valle-Castillo 1984). Valle-Castillo admitted Darío's moments of apolitical detachment, quoting

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1983, 37). Space limitations do not allow tracing and comparing Arellano's five dozen quotations with their sources, none of which are given.

71. In 1981 Ramírez reissued a collection of Nicaraguan short stories that he had edited in 1976, which included Darío's "El rey burgués" (Ramírez 1986, 39–60). The anthology also included Darío's stories "El fardo" and "Betún y sangre." Ramírez's decision to retain "El rey burgués" in the 1981 and 1986 editions suggests that he was either unaware of or unperplexed by Aguinaga's interpretation of it.

72. For an earlier and more extensive statement of the same kind, see Ramírez's essay, "El profeta en su tierra" in Ramírez (1983, 189–202).

73. Ramírez is particularly skillful in presenting the political contradictions within Darío's writing as an inevitable result of the historical circumstances in which he and other Modernistas lived and worked, necessarily withdrawing into an ivory tower in order "to defend . . . their position as creator[s] in that epoch of capital accumulation . . . of crude and brutal colonialism, rude conquests, and hungry masses" (Ramírez 1984a, 98).

his words, "I detest life and the times into which I was born." Valle-Castillo argued nevertheless that Darío's aestheticism was not a sign of his co-optation (as Blanco Aguinaga contended) but a calculated gesture of opposition to the crass vulgarity of the bourgeoisie. The ubiquitous swan, which for Blanco Aguinaga concentrated all of Darío's sycophancy and co-opted aestheticism into a single image, was interpreted by Valle-Castillo as an "anti-imperialist symbol" (Valle-Castillo 1984, 155–56).<sup>74</sup> He characterized José Martí as not merely one of Darío's literary heroes but as the poet's political "father and teacher" (1984, 157–58). Surveying the record of Darío's "personal political participation," Valle-Castillo went so far as to suggest that Darío was actually involved in clandestine sales of arms—an involvement, Valle-Castillo asserted, that would help account for Darío's whereabouts during an obscure period of his life (September 1882 to July 1883, when Darío was in fact only fifteen and sixteen).<sup>75</sup>

Whatever their character or effect, the Sandinistas' efforts to rescue and reconstruct Nicaragua's national poet were brought to a forced close by their defeat in the elections of early 1990. Yet that turning point in Nicaraguan cultural and political history has by no means terminated the struggle over Darío's image. As had occurred at previous historical junctures, the struggle was only reactivated.

During the final days of the electoral contest, former Sandinista partisan Jorge Arellano, a major contributor to the effort to transform Darío into a proto-Sandinista writer, leveled several charges on the front page of *La Prensa* against the Sandinista government and its efforts to "absorb, bureaucratize, and control culture." The government had defaulted on its promise to honor Darío by issuing editions of his works; the Orden de Rubén Darío had been bestowed only on "foreigners in solidarity with official politics"; and former culture minister Ernesto Cardenal's "standardizing" poetry workshops had prohibited the writing of "Darían" poetry, choosing instead to turn out a "series of little Cardenals" scribbling formulaic "exteriorist" poetry.

In the same issue of *La Prensa*, another writer lamented the sorry

74. Angel Rama made essentially the same argument more than fifteen years earlier. See Rama (1967, 34).

75. The "little-known letter" that Valle-Castillo cites as evidence appears to stop short of proving any such involvement, however. It merely refers vaguely to a "promise" made by Darío to the letter's recipient and shows that he knew some details of a voyage by one Colindres to New York to buy arms. Valle-Castillo presumably encountered the letter in "Diez cartas desconocidas de Rubén Darío," *Cuadernos de Bibliografía Nicaragüense* 2 (July 1981):41–57. The letter in question was written by Darío (in Puntarenas) to Vicente Navas in Managua and was dated 2 Oct. 1882 (when Darío was fifteen years old). An editorial note says the published copy was made from an original in the possession of one of Navas's descendants. Torres's discussion of this period of Darío's life does not refer to any such incident (Torres 1966, 60–77). During this period, Darío was under strict supervision in a boarding school in San Salvador as a result of some of his bohemian excesses.

state into which the government had allowed the Teatro Nacional Rubén Darío to fall physically and culturally as a result of its revolutionary “popularization” of culture. Juxtaposing a photograph of the theater with that of the grandiose Somoza-period Darío statue, the writer seemed unwittingly to echo René Schick’s insistence that Darío forswore all party politics in favor of Pure Art. The writer also took the Sandinistas to task for holding party meetings in the theater, allowing those who came to cultural performances to enter in short pants and sandals, and adorning the entrance with a gigantic likeness of Sandino rather than Darío. Predicting that the Sandinistas would be ousted in the elections, the writer foresaw the tantalizing possibility of finally making proper amends to the nation’s premier poet, presumably by banishing in one stroke Sandino, sandals, short pants, and Sandinista culture.<sup>76</sup>

Fortunately for Sandinista and Somocista partisans, Darío’s life and work have offered a tantalizing array of data for opposing exegetical agendas, sufficiently diverse and contradictory to admit a variety of interpretations. Commenting on Darío’s “sovereign indifference to political coherence,” Octavio Paz suggested that Darío ultimately “was not a political thinker. [Neither] in his public nor in his private life was he a model of rigor” (Paz 1972, 53). Thus the same profusion of contradictory biographical and literary data that precludes neat political readings of his life and work also makes him available to any camp willing to edit him selectively and whose ideology is untroubled by the reductionism that inevitably results. Hence has arisen Darío as Somocista liberal-nationalist-elitist and also Darío as Sandinista anti-imperialist-nationalist-proletarian.

In their feuding over Darío, Somocistas and Sandinistas alike extrapolated too facilely from the mere fact of his corporeal unity to an assumption of an intellectual-historical-political unity. Any assertion that Darío is or was any particular thing tacitly posits the existence of a unified Rubén Darío who can be discovered and authenticated by appropriate reference to the documentable details of his life and works. This assumption has proved to be problematic.

In a recent analysis of the autobiographical element in Darío’s writing, María Salgado has argued that “‘Rubén Darío’ was a fictional poetic being who ended up displacing another personage—this one historical—named Félix Rubén García Sarmiento” (Salgado 1989, 339). Salgado distinguishes meticulously between the historical personage Félix Rubén García Sarmiento and the historical self-construct that is the poet Rubén Darío, and she details the process by which the former constructed the latter (especially in his autobiographically based writings). On this basis, Salgado offers potentially clarifying insight into the political roles of cul-

76. The two articles appeared in *La Prensa*, 18 Jan. 1990, pp. 1 and 13.

tural figures like Darío. Her analysis suggests that the contested reconstructions engaged in by the Somocistas and Sandinistas were in one sense merely extensions of a dissociative-constructive process begun by García Sarmiento–Darío himself. Examining closely a number of texts “in which the poet establishes an autobiographical pact with the reader,” Salgado explicates the dialectical process by which the mythical construct (the hero-poet Rubén Darío) was established and projected, and through which the reader’s sympathy is engaged and her or his belief in the fiction is elicited and sustained.

### CONCLUSION

Within Nicaragua, the struggle over Darío has been but one episode in a long history of conflicted negotiation over national cultural identity. This history stretches from ethnocidal conquest in the sixteenth century, through liberal modernization and emergent nationalism during the nineteenth century, to nationalist guerrilla insurgency in the opening decades of the twentieth century, through a half-century of dictatorship, and thence to revolution and counterrevolution.

Nor has Darío been the only cultural object of contention. Others who have been struggled over include the rebel General Augusto Sandino, Vanguardista writers Pablo Antonio Cuadra and José Coronel Urtecho, and the martyred *La Prensa* editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro. But none of them have been as important, as vigorously and perennially fought over as the “niño prodigioso” of Metapa. And in a tiny nation that since the days of “el divino Rubén” has envisioned itself becoming a nation of poets, perhaps the best metaphor for the long struggles by ideologically opposed partisans to possess him as ideological and cultural legitimizer is the pious and macabre parceling out of parts of Rubén Darío’s corpse.

My intention in examining this contested discourse has not been to determine what Darío’s politics actually were or were not. I have sought rather to explore the dialectical relationship between culture and ideology as it inheres in the struggles to possess him. The most dramatic episode of that struggle has highlighted some salient aspects of the dialectic: the instrumental (regime-challenging or -legitimizing) use of culture, especially of concentrations of cultural capital like that aggregated around an internationally celebrated cultural figure; the ideological control of cultural processes (through editorial manipulation, for example); and the institutional privileging of selective versions of cultural history via public symbols and ceremonies.

Regardless of their ideological stances, Darío’s partisans have seldom proved able either to tolerate or to process the complex nuances and



Illustration 4. Currency issued by the Sandinista government, part of a series bearing images chosen to celebrate the revolutionary struggle. This five-hundred-córdoba bill is dated 1985 on its face and displays the Teatro Popular Rubén Darío on the back.

contradictions of his thinking and work.<sup>77</sup> When all is said and done, the political perspectives congenial to the Somocistas can in fact be located in Darío's works, but then so can those favored by the Sandinistas. Moreover, each array can be demonstrated without employing the exclusionary editorial manipulations of which both groups have been guilty.

Fortunately, polar readings are not entirely without merit. Each contributes in some ways to a fuller understanding of Darío. But the nuancing needed is unlikely to emerge from such ultimately crude readings, even when considered comparatively. What the ideologically opposed Darío partisans needed to comprehend was the reality of a nonunitary Darío, one of multiple motivations, multiple perspectives, multiple roles,

77. In a forthcoming essay, Ivan Schulman examines the movement of recent criticism toward comprehending Modernismo as "a heterogeneous art with dialogic voices instead of the monolithic expression." See Schulman (n.d., ms. p. 1), quoted by permission of the author.

and multiple voices—even, one might argue, multiple and sometimes contradictory identities.<sup>78</sup>

The critical point for purposes of this analysis is that the cultural capital potentially usable by whatever political faction was attached to the idealized (thus inescapably dehistoricized and denationalized) construct known as Rubén Darío. But that capital could be mobilized only by assuming the internal coherence of the construct and its congruence with (indeed, its indistinguishability from) the historical and historically engaged Nicaraguan named García Sarmiento, who was claimably Nicaraguan and who made his living mostly as a journalist. While “Rubén Darío” was considerably more likely to express himself on the transcendent aesthetic glories of Paris than on the dilemma of tiny Nicaragua caught in the gears of great power politics, García Sarmiento (writing under the nom de plume Rubén Darío) was about as likely to comment on either subject.<sup>79</sup> In any case, it is finally the dialectical relationship between the two that must be understood rather than the reductionist “reality” of one or the other. Comprehending that dialectic at least prevents us from misunderstanding and misrepresenting the operation of historically situated cultural processes as they have been misread and misrepresented by the partisans examined here.

78. With somewhat different analytical aims, Beverley and Zimmerman have recently referred to Darío’s “multivalent cosmopolitanism” (1990, 57).

79. The point here is to note the differing degrees of probability. It is not to argue that no conscious oppositional politics exist in Darío’s poetry. For example, in examining his lyrical poems, Zavala finds ample evidence—not only in overt theme or statement but also in the resonance of images and the tenor of metaphors—that Darío is anti-imperialist, anti-militarist, and pacifist (Zavala 1987, esp. 181, 190). I am grateful to Ivan Schulman for this reference. Schulman himself notes that Darío’s direct criticism of the regnant social order is more abundant in his prose than in his poetry (n.d., ms. p. 17).

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