

advocating any authoritarian imposition of cultural holism. Authoritarianism, or the stifling of dissent, as I wrote in the January Forum (107 [1992]: 151–52), is inconsistent with cultural holism; it belongs to the model of oppression. The holistic “political agenda” that I identified, “to diminish global animosities through intercultural understanding and respect,” rests on a willingness to listen to the opinions of all—including those of very different ideologies.

Alt points out, rightly, that tolerance and international cooperation are deeply rooted in Western thought. But so is the dualism of spirit-matter, mind-body, and intellectual capability–material circumstance that has socially privileged men over women and whites over people of color. And so is the propensity to see difference as absolute difference in value or as difference in rank on a scale. These habits of mind we can trace back to antiquity. What I see newly emerging are the conceptualization of human society as a global system, the appreciation of human diversity, and the recognition of the interdependence of the system’s unlike components.

The advocacy of a multiculturalist curriculum in the academy and the advocacy of sexual and racial equality in our society are political movements born of the holistic understanding of the world. Resistance to these movements naturally will arise from defenders of the old order who fear a reversal of established social hierarchies. Cultural holists, however, do not aim to reverse the order of dominance, because they reject the oppressive model itself. As Virginia Woolf wrote in 1929, in *A Room of One’s Own*, “All this pitting of sex against sex, of quality against quality; all this claiming of superiority and imputing of inferiority, belong to the private-school stage of human existence where there are ‘sides,’ and it is necessary for one side to beat another side, and of the utmost importance to walk up to a platform and receive from the hands of the Headmaster himself a highly ornamental pot.”

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Ricardo Piglia’s Reinvention of Roberto Arlt

To the Editor:

After reading Ellen McCracken’s “Metaplagiarism and the Critic’s Role as Detective: Ricardo Piglia’s Reinvention of Roberto Arlt” (106 [1991]: 1071–82), I wish to add information that, I believe, will aid in understanding the reception of Piglia’s work. What

McCracken presents as the major discovery of the essay, the relation between “Luba” and Andreev’s *Las tinieblas*, has already been widely discussed among Argentine critics. I know of at least three articles that explicitly point out this relation, which McCracken claims to have been “misread” (1081) and “largely undetected” (1072). I refer to Daniel Link’s “Sobre Gussmán, la realidad y sus parientes” (*Filología* 20 [1985]), Laura Vilariño’s “‘Homenaje a Roberto Arlt’: Escena de la lectura” (*Revista de letras* 1.1 [1987]: 95–102), and Analía Capdevila’s “Crítica y ficción en ‘Homenaje a Roberto Arlt’ ” (*Discusión* 1.1 [1989]: 75–80). I do not think these critics are the “postmodernist readers” of the sort that McCracken has in mind when she sublimates or fetishizes her own role as a critic. I do not believe either that “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt” supports a conspiratorial concept of literature, as she also seems to propose. Far from McCracken’s deceptive perspective, Piglia’s homage operates on a principle of redundancy and works effectively to make obvious the relation between “Luba” and *Las tinieblas*. From the beginning, “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt” lies, and it lies openly. On the first page, the list of Arlt’s supposedly uncompiled texts includes already compiled *aguafuertes*. On the second page, the list of his supposedly unpublished works gives rise to footnote 1, which is, in fact, a collage of quotations extracted from the published *aguafuertes* “Yo no tengo la culpa,” “¿Qué nombre le pondremos al pibe?” and “La inutilidad de los libros.” It seems clear, then, that from the beginning “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt” proposes itself as a recognizable recycled text whose main textual sources are the *aguafuertes* and Arlt’s letters and documents transcribed by Raúl Larra in *Roberto Arlt, el torturado* (Buenos Aires: Alpe, 1956). The intertextual chain is relatively transparent for Arlt’s readers, as is the almost automatic relation that the critic traditionally establishes between the author and Andreev. This shows that one of the “encyclopedias” or pre-texts that “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt” demands is Arlt’s works. Another is Piglia’s works themselves. In fact, McCracken’s epigraph (“¿Qué es robar un banco comparado con fundarlo?”), which she attributes to Piglia, is a quotation from Brecht’s *Happy End* that Piglia repeats every now and then in essays and interviews (*Crítica y ficción*, Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, 1990, 117). Perversely, McCracken’s essay starts with a false or misattributed quotation, and Piglia’s readers are already aware of the literary locus that this sign evokes (McCracken discusses one of its versions [1075]).

Finally, McCracken’s category “metaplagiarism” seems not only to violate but to obscure the basis of Piglia’s work, principally because the concept fails to

solve the main paradox built up by the text: why does Piglia, who considers Arlt to be one of the best Argentine writers, proclaim in his “homage” that Arlt is a “plagiarist”?

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Reply:

I thank María Eugenia Mudrovic for the important observations she makes about the dense intertextual network that overcodes Ricardo Piglia’s pair of stories. Her reading of the texts, so distinct from the one I present, raises interesting questions about the modes in which readers in different social situations actualize literary works. I must take issue with several of her points, however.

Mudrovic’s contention that Piglia’s appropriation of Andreev’s pre-text has been widely discussed among Argentine critics is inaccurate. A number of major Argentine critics and specialists in the field who read my article before publication did not dispute my claim that few had decoded the stories carefully enough to decipher Piglia’s elaborate literary crime. When I complimented Piglia on his ingenious deception, he remarked to me that very few had discovered it. Further, as I note in the article, the Library of Congress miscataloged the story as one of Arlt’s and passed this error on to libraries across the country; and major Arltian critics either wrote vaguely about the connection of “Luba” to Arlt’s work or attributed the story to him, as did one scholar—author of a book on Arlt—who wrote an elaborate article showing how the newly discovered “Luba” reflected the major themes in the rest of Arlt’s oeuvre.

It was in fact these widespread misreadings of Piglia’s texts that inspired me to write the essay. The three articles recently published in Argentina that Mudrovic cites do not efface the important literary problem that the numerous misinterpretations point to. Had these articles been available to me when I wrote the article, my argument would not have substantially changed. They demonstrate, however, difficulties that persist in international scholarly interchange in spite of the great

technological advances of “the information age.” None of the articles was indexed under “Piglia,” “Arlt,” “Andreev,” or “plagiarist” in the standard sources. Link’s essay may have been absent from these listings because it refers only briefly to Piglia’s stories; the other two articles appear to be published in first issues of new journals, and I have still not been able to obtain them. It would indeed be unfortunate if scholars were to cease working on important research projects on the chance that there might exist a few articles in inaccessible or obscure journals that would add information to the analysis. And the more important question remains: why is it not until the late 1980s, some ten years after the stories appeared, that a few scholars begin to publish essays that decode Piglia’s literary crime?

Mudrovic is correct that Piglia lies openly and that he uses redundancy in “Homenaje.” She reads the text univocally, however, by failing to account for the double code of entrapment and disclosure that operates in the stories. As I demonstrate, Piglia wishes to have it both ways and so adopts a double voice both to conceal and to reveal the deception. He wants to catch critics at their own game not only to engage in a playful post-modern gesture but to elaborate his fundamental critique of literature as private property. The proof of this double code exists in the texts themselves, as my article documents, as well as in the failure of numerous expert readers to detect the plagiarist.

Mudrovic’s thesis about the central paradox of the text misses Piglia’s point entirely. As I argue, it is an especially fitting homage to Arlt to have devised this elaborate metaplagiarism and to have subtly attributed plagiarism to Arlt himself, given the thematic connection of literature and crime in Arlt’s work and the critics’ view of Arlt as a “bad” and “unoriginal” writer. Both Piglia and Arlt question the linking of art to money under capitalism. By engaging in metaplagiarism, Piglia contests the proprietary logic that degrades art. Far from establishing a paradox, he presents a strong thesis that pays fitting tribute to Arlt and his work.

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