

The Legacy of Guaraní in the Fiction of Gabriel Casaccia, Rubén Bareiro Saguier and Augusto Roa Bastos

Paraguay's situation is universally recognized as unique when compared to other bilingual nations in Latin America because it is the only country where more than half of the population speaks both the indigenous language, Guaraní and the language imposed by the conquest, Spanish. Although Spanish is Paraguay's official language and the only one taught in the nation's schools, Guaraní is simultaneously recognized as a national language that embodies the special character and unity of the Paraguayan nation.

According to the Paraguayan author and critic Rubén Bareiro Saguier, the strength of the country's indigenous language in its modern day society is due to several unique characteristics of Spain's colonization of Paraguay. These include the fact that under one of its first governors, Domingo Martínez de Irala, the miscegenation between Indian women and the Spanish conquerors and settlers was condoned and not considered illegitimate as in the other colonial provinces. Furthermore, the Indian mother was exclusively responsible for the education of her child and taught him in Guaraní. Finally, the Jesuits established missions in Paraguay to convert the Indians to Catholicism. The Jesuits chose to use only Guaraní as a means of communication because this best served their two principal goals: to isolate the Indians from poor moral examples among the Spanish and to help the Jesuits

wield their power more freely (Bareiro Saguier, "Colonialismo mental" 78-79).

This colonial legacy raises the question of how Guaraní impacts on contemporary Paraguayan literature. Guaraní popular poetry and myth has been passed down orally, since preserving these on paper would have run counter to the purposes of the Indians' religious indoctrination by the Spanish (Bareiro, "Colonialismo" 79). Furthermore, since Guaraní is not taught in the schools, most Paraguayans cannot write it at all (Bossong, 78). Paraguayan literature is written in Spanish. Nonetheless, there is a strong Guaraní presence within it which takes various forms.

Bareiro Saguier identifies two major trends that can be observed in contemporary Paraguayan literature. The first is a "costumbrista-like" use of Guaraní in which the Spanish language is peppered with occasional Guaraní words and phrases. The text does not truly integrate these expressions into the work in an aesthetically pleasing fashion. The second is the incorporation of what Bareiro calls the "emotional, mythical universe, the collective spirit of the spoken or sung word" in Guaraní into the literature written in Spanish ("El colonialismo" 85). Bareiro's two tendencies serve as an important departure point for the study of the ways in which Guaraní is used in the works of three of Paraguay's most important twentieth century authors: Gabriel Casaccia, Rubén Bareiro Saguier himself, and Augusto Roa Bastos. These three authors, rather than falling into either category of Bareiro's dichotomy, evolve from the purely folkloric use of Guaraní toward a fiction that evokes Guaraní language by means other than using its words in the text. This process, examined below, peaks in Roa Bastos's novel, *Yo el Supremo*, where allusion and metaphor constantly evoke Guaraní

myths and thus the original language to which these myths are linked.

According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically at 'taking off' from the linguistic ground on which it keeps on rolling" (210). By alluding to and often retelling Guaraní myths, Casaccia, Bareiro, and Roa Bastos are in essence incorporating an element of Guaraní language into their texts without using the actual language itself.

At first glance Gabriel Casaccia appears to clearly illustrate Bareiro's first major trend. One of Casaccia's first works is the collection of short stories titled *El Guajhú*, published in 1938. The most obvious way in which Guaraní is present in *El Guajhú* is in long stretches of Guaraní dialogue, which usually appear in boldface type and are accompanied by footnotes providing the Spanish translation. This technique proves difficult for the reader who finds himself constantly interrupting his place in the text to glance at the footnotes. Critics, such as Francisco Pérez-Maricevich, assert that such uses of Guaraní serve a purely folkloric purpose in Casaccia's work (35). However, a more detailed analysis of the way in which Guaraní appears in *El Guajhú* shows that Casaccia at times goes beyond this regionalist tendency of literary realism.

Three stories in *El Guajhú* contain Guaraní in their titles: "El Guajhú," "La Pora," and "La amberé." The first of these stories chooses a Guaraní word meaning "the howl" as a symbol of man's conscience. According to Milagros Ezquerro, Guaraní is characterized by the metaphoric use of language (73-74). In "El Guajhú," Tomás's brother, Ceferino, dies. Tomás feels guilty because he hated his brother and often thought of killing him. This guilt is symbolized by the howl of

Ceferino's dog, Barcino, which Tomás constantly hears. Guaraní is not just a colorful element but the very center of the story. The Paraguayan protagonist's conscience is represented by a Guaraní word because Guaraní is essential to the Paraguayan spirit. Casaccia uses Guaraní, a language characterized by metaphor, to call attention to the metaphoric value of his story's title and its subsequent development.

Similarly, "La Pora" and "La amberé" are words that refer to Guaraní myths or beliefs which form the body of these two stories. "La Pora," as the accompanying footnote explains, is a ghost or evil vision and the story goes on to develop the tale of Fernando, who goes insane after seeing a ghost who claims to be that of his dead mother. "La amberé" is the Guaraní word for "the lizard." The story develops the popular superstition that if you kill a lizard it will bring you bad luck. Thus, the lizard both evokes Guaraní myth and at the same time becomes a metaphor for misfortune. Both of these stories incorporate what Bareiro termed the "emotional, mythical universe" of the Guaraní word, albeit in a somewhat obvious way, directly referring to the myths in question by using their Guaraní terms. Bareiro and Roa Bastos will further develop this tendency but, as we shall see, in a somewhat more subtle manner.

Casaccia makes a point of using boldface type and/or quotation marks whenever he uses a Guaraní expression. However, occasionally a Guaraní word appears without being set off in this manner and therefore this absence acquires a sudden significance. This occurs with a second mention of the word "guaripola," meaning "whisky" (Casaccia 47) in "El Guajhú" and several mentions of "la amberé" in the story of the same title (102). This is significant because heretofore, every time the narrator used a Guaraní term, such as every mention of the word

"guajhú," the quotation marks and/or boldface type were repeated. Thus, either consciously, or subconsciously, Guaraní penetrates the narrator's "voice" in Casaccia's fiction. This shows how much Guaraní is part of the Paraguayan spirit; as much as the author tries to set it apart from the Spanish, Guaraní infiltrates it and the two languages merge.

Casaccia's use of Guaraní changes radically in his subsequent work. For example, in the collection of short stories, *El Pozo*, originally published in 1947 and later included in *Cuentos completos*, of 1984, Casaccia significantly attenuates the use of Guaraní dialogue. Guaraní now only occasionally appears, and sometimes the meaning of the word is provided by its context in the sentence, rather than by an explicit translation in a footnote. For example, in "El sueño del revolucionario" we are told that Eusebio Escobar, the main character, placed "un vaso de 'tereré'" on a chair. The reader may not know the exact translation of "tereré" (cold tea), however, he understands that it is something to drink, and this is sufficient for the story's comprehension without the need to provide a disruptive footnote on the bottom of the page.

Most frequently, Guaraní appears thematically in the stories of *El Pozo*. For example, in "El ansia secreta," the protagonist is haunted by the thought of his aunt Carmen who used to mistreat him; we are told that she "solía hablar en guaraní" (Casaccia 182). The stranger, Benítez, who is a source of torment for the protagonist of "La soledad de Vogel" because he is convinced that Benítez wants to kill him, "no hablaba más que guaraní, lengua que Vogel chapurraba" (205). In both instances, the people who most affect the protagonists speak only Guaraní; the relationship between the language and the characters's innermost feelings is thus underscored.

The evolutionary process of the use of Guaraní in Paraguayan

fiction can be clearly observed when we compare Casaccia's work to that of Rubén Bareiro Saguier, a more recent Paraguayan writer. Bareiro expands several of the techniques for incorporation of Guaraní already employed by Casaccia, while he introduces other more subtle methods of showing the Guaraní influence. In his collection of stories *Ojo por diente*, published in 1972, Guaraní words are frequently employed. Although they almost always appear italicized, no footnotes with direct translations are provided. Usually the meaning of the word is obvious from the context, or a translation is provided within the text itself through a Spanish repetition of the Guaraní term. To take one of numerous examples, in the story "Diente por diente," the narrator states: "Bueno, eso fue antes de lo que le cuento; los pogasú no llegaban hasta nuestro rincón, seguramente porque estaba muy lejos o porque somos pobres por aquí y los jefes no tienen gran cosa que sacarnos" (*Ojo* 24). A "pogasú" is a person of great importance; Bareiro indicates this by mentioning the "jefes" or leaders later on in the paragraph. The translation is built-in and thus does not appear to be a translation at all; it flows as a natural part of the text.

Bareiro often employs another technique based on repetition to convey the meaning of Guaraní words to the reader. In "Ronda nocturna," the author repeats the same word in different contexts. Through this repetition its meaning becomes clear, although the Guaraní is never actually translated into Spanish. Note the following uses of the word "pyragué," referring to the henchmen who torture the prisoners:

—El jefe le quiere hablar—El pyragué cojea ligeramente.

(*Ojo* 30)

.....

Los pyragués, que hasta entonces parecían estatuas, se mueven ligeramente en sus pedestales. (32)

.....
Los dos pyragués, el rengó a la derecha del jefe, el más alto a su izquierda. (34)

Bareiro attempts to capture the spirit of Guaraní myth in ways that are both similar and different from Casaccia's techniques. For example, the story "Pacto de sangre" makes explicit use of the myth of the "pora." Here the narrator and his friend Proní share the secret of having seen this evil vision:

Tomados de la mano, sentíamos chirriar las ramas y nuestros dientes—. . . de golpe mil víboras de fuego nos rodearon, el trueno nos alcanzó en plena carrera desesperada perseguidos por un caballo de dos cabezas que echaba fuego por los cuatro ojos, según me pareció a mí; por un enorme perro sin cabeza con una llamarada en el cuello tronzado según Proní . . . Nunca se lo contamos a nadie; el pora del monte "las ánimas" quedó como un gran secreto entre nosotros. (*Ojo* 89)

In "Pacto de sangre," the myth of the "pora" is symbolic of the friendship that binds Proní and the narrator, a friendship which in adulthood prevents one from killing the other when they are on opposite sides of the revolution. The myth is like their "blood pact"; sharing this mythical vision, the same childhood and heritage is a bond stronger than political alliances. The sharing of this myth thus becomes

symbolic of the Paraguayan spirit: brotherhood surpasses politics.

In "Pacto de sangre," Bareiro explains the myth upon which his story is based. In contrast, in "Aniversario," there is a more subtle mythical allusion which can only be perceived if the reader is already familiar with the Guaraní belief about man's souls. According to the Guaranís, man doesn't have one, but three souls, called "el huevo" ("the egg"), "la cáscara" ("the shell") and "la sombra" ("the shadow"). Thus, when the guitarist in "Aniversario" makes the following statement, he is actually referring to this myth in his use of the word "cáscara":

Mi guitarra también se puso un poco más vieja, más color de mano andariega o jugo de naco, de tanto sobarla y toquetearla y sacarle música y ordenarle alegría y hacerla llorar; no hay noche que la pobre no vomite el alma. Pero esto sólo pasa en la cáscara porque cuando me pongo a cantar—y mi guitarra conmigo—la gente dice que todavía "canta lindo el mozo" y las primas y las bordonas suenan como campana, salen del fondo de la caja y hacen llorar a las muchachas. (*Ojo* 71)

Thus, the guitarist claims that despite the fact that his guitar pours its soul out every night, his guitar still plays well. The guitar's ongoing capacity to sound good despite its overuse is due to the fact that it only regurgitates one of its souls, its shell or "cáscara." Since the Guaraní believe in two additional souls (the egg and the shadow) the guitar continues to have plenty of soul left and to sound excellent despite its age (Weldt-Basson, "Cases of Ambiguity" 44-45).

As Milagros Ezquerro points out, Guaraní is an agglutinative language; that is, a language formed by uniting terms (73-74). Bareiro thus captures the spirit of Guaraní by employing a number of compound words. This technique is later picked up and developed on a greater scale by Roa Bastos in *Yo el Supremo*. In *Ojo por diente* there are several examples in the story "Pacto de sangre." Here, the narrator, Rivero, calls attention to the technique when he speaks of the "Riverovyvy, la tierra de los Rivero, o mejor aun el equivalente de la forma contractiva guaraní, Rivero-tierra" (Bareiro, *Ojo* 84). He also mentions a "sillón-hamaca" (88) and says when recalling his flight from the "pora" with Proní: "El trueno-caballo, el perro-lluvia nos pisaba los talones" (103).

Although on occasion Bareiro sets the Guaraní apart from the Spanish by italicizing words, in general his techniques tend to blend the two languages and emphasize Paraguay's bilingual character. Guaraní isn't always translated although the meanings of Guaraní words are usually comprehensible. Spanish imitates Guaraní constructions and more subtly alludes to its myths. Guaraní words are still present in Bareiro, but are starting to disappear in favor of techniques that evoke Guaraní without using words from the language.

The perfection of this blending technique initiated by Bareiro is found in Paraguay's most important writer, Augusto Roa Bastos. His novel *Yo el Supremo*, published in 1974 frequently evokes Guaraní without using actual Guaraní vocabulary. However, this was not always the case. In his earlier works, such as the collection of short stories *El trueno entre las hojas* (1953), Roa Bastos scatters Guaraní dialogue throughout the text and offers translations of the Guaraní words in a glossary in the back of the book. This approach is reminiscent

of Casaccia's footnotes. Subsequent works, for example, the collection of stories titled *El baldío* (1966), rely mostly on indirect translations of the still ever-present Guaraní vocabulary, similar to the way in which Guaraní is incorporated in Bareiro's *Ojo por diente*. This process of evolution of the use of Guaraní culminates in *Yo el Supremo*, where the novelist constantly evokes the flavor of Guaraní language and culture but rarely does so by using actual Guaraní. Of course, there is the occasional presence of Guaraní words. However, the principal ways in which Roa Bastos evokes Guaraní are through the use of wordplay and compound words, as well as metaphoric language and allusions to Guaraní myths.

We have already noted that Guaraní is an agglutinative language. Thus, *Yo el Supremo* is flooded with expressions such as "memoria-juicio" (11), "palabras-mujidos" (12), "perros-monos" (21), and "gente-muchedumbre" (44). Spanish is made to imitate Guaraní.

Primarily, Roa Bastos uses the Spanish language in a symbolic, metaphorical sense in which certain words and episodes of the novel stand for their meanings within specific Guaraní myths. For example, in one episode of the novel an Indian chief explains the previously discussed Guaraní theory of three souls to El Supremo. He tells him that the shell, the egg, and the shadow help to maintain man's health, but that occasionally evil spirits rob and torture these souls causing man to become sick. The Indian chief says with regard to the recovery of these stolen souls "la sombra es más difícil que el huevo" (*Yo el Supremo* 209). The words "sombra" and "huevo" are written in Spanish and refer to the historical context of Spain's domination of Latin America. However, when the dictator speaks these words we also hear the Indian chief with his Guaraní mythological viewpoint. The egg, a tangible object, is

used to refer to something intangible, Spanish rule. As Milagro Ezquerro notes, this in itself is a tendency that also characterizes the Guaraní language (73-74). There are no Guaraní words here and yet the language and context of the paragraph are largely based on Guaraní myth which infuses the Spanish with its meaning (Weldt-Basson, *Augusto Roa Bastos* 64-65).

In the previous example the novel provides the context of the Guaraní myth to the reader so that the double meaning of the word "huevo" is clear. However, frequently the language of an entire segment will refer indirectly to Guaraní language and myth. For example, throughout the novel the dictator projects his concept of the ideal woman onto the North Star. He states: "Desde muy niño amé, a una deidad a quién llamé, la Estrella-del Norte" (Roa Bastos, *Yo el Supremo* 55). And later on: "Nunca he amado a nadie ... Salvo en sueños ... Visión-mujer. Astro-hembra... Blancura resplandeciente, larguísima cabellera de oro..." (299).

The choice of a star as a symbol of the ideal love is not arbitrary. The collection of Guaraní myths titled the *Pequeño Decameron Nivaculé* records the myth of "Las mujeres estrellas" (the women stars) and deals with a young man who falls in love with the Gemini constellation, which is personified as two women in the myth. The notion of the "astro-hembra" or "star-woman" subtly captures the spirit of Guaraní (Weldt-Basson, "La recreación").

A third example is Roa Bastos's allusion to the "hombres-pájaros" ("men-birds"). In the novel, *El Supremo* speaks of a "manga de golondrinas" which are really bird-soldiers although they are not directly referred to as such. *El Supremo* simply states:

A la tarde siguiente ... por el catalejo encañanado hacia el Chaco, vi avanzar una nube de extraña forma ... ¡Otra tormenta! ... De nuevo todo el país en pie de guerra ... Cuando me di cuenta estaba cayendo una manga de golondrinas que volaban a la deriva enloquecidamente. Ciegas las aves. Los balazos del agua de la tormenta les habían reventado los ojos ... (*Yo el Supremo* 424).

The idea of men-birds derives from the Guaraní myth called "Ajoclohahai, los hombres-pájaros," also registered in the *Pequeño Decameron Nivaclé* (Weldt-Basson, "La recreación"). Not coincidentally, they are associated with thunder storms. The legend states: "La gente antigua dice que estos ajoclohahai se encuentran hoy arriba, sobre el cielo. Hasta ahora creen en ellos. Se dice que son ellos los que envían las tormentas y los truenos. Los que mandan las lluvias" (Chase-Sardi 74).

In this instance, not only does Roa Bastos use the Guaraní belief in birds who are also men (here the birds are soldiers), but also mimics the association of the men-birds with storms. Moreover, all these elements are used metaphorically: the blind birds who fly without direction represent the feeling of the senselessness of their task on the part of the soldiers and the storm captures the fury and destruction of war.

The episode of the man-jaguar can be cited as a final example. In the novel, *El Supremo* narrates the celebration in honor of Manuel Godoy who received an honorific position in the Paraguayan government. During the tournament held in Godoy's honor, one of the horsemen, magically transformed into a creature half-man, half-jaguar, approaches the governor's daughter:

El hipocentauro con doble cabeza de hombre y jaguar frena de golpe ante el podio... La parte humana del fabuloso animal se inclina desde lo alto y deja caer la sortija en la falda de la hija del gobernador... El misterioso jefe de las tribus monteses más guerreras y feroces del alto Paraná está allí... La sortija en forma de una serpiente que se muerde la cola creció en la falda de la hija del gobernador... La hija del gobernador yacía sobre las alfombras... desangrándose. (Roa Bastos, *Yo el Supremo* 264)

This episode evokes the Guaraní "Canción de Beipuradarégi" which sings of "Esos jaguares de blancos/ tienen las mujeres expuestas a ser presas ya." Roa Bastos, who records this myth in his collection *Las culturas condenadas* explains that in the axe tradition, "la moza púber durante su iniciación se encuentra expuesta al peligro de ser devorada por un jaguar. Puede suceder que el jaguar rapte a la muchacha y la lleve hasta la tierra de los jaguares" (276-77).

In sum, Roa Bastos uses less Guaraní language than Cassacia in *El Guajhú*, and yet manages to capture more of the essence of Guaraní through his references to compound mythical beings such as the men-birds, the women-stars, and the man-jaguar, which mimics Guaraní's agglutinative character. The impact of Guaraní on *Yo el Supremo* is indeed tremendous; Guaraní allusions are omnipresent and the author does not concern himself with their intelligibility to the reader, since most of these passages can be understood on a dual level. If the reader doesn't capture the Guaraní connection he can still read and understand a dimension of the text.

It is indeed clear that the colonization of Paraguay did not lead to the eradication of Guaraní. Paraguay is still a bilingual nation whose literature unequivocally reflects the cultural importance of Guaraní. Casaccia, Bareiro Saguier, Roa Bastos and many other Paraguayan writers write in Spanish, but their Spanish constantly evokes Guaraní and represents a perpetual search for ways to do so that maintain aesthetic quality for the reader and comprehensibility for the non-Guaraní speaking public.

The three cases of the use of Guaraní examined here show how three different authors approach the problem of incorporating Guaraní into their fiction written in Spanish. The ways in which these authors have chosen to address this issue show a progressive reduction of the use of Guaraní vocabulary in favor of the use of techniques that communicate the flavor of Guaraní. Whereas Guaraní is used primarily as symbol and theme in fiction of Gabriel Casaccia, the presence of Guaraní in the works of Rubén Bareiro Saguier and Augusto Roa Bastos is found in the form of compound words that mimic Guaraní's agglutinative form, or Guaraní myths that communicate the spirit of the Guaraní Indians, since myth and language are inextricably intertwined. It is clear however, that for none of these authors was the omission of Guaraní a viable option. Guaraní, regardless of the problems it poses for the international reader of Paraguayan fiction, is an indispensable element of Paraguayan identity and thus holds an indisputable place in its nation's literature.

Helene C. Weldt-Basson
Fordham University

WORKS CITED

- Bareiro Saguier, Rubén. "Colonialismo mental en el bilingüismo paraguayo." *Escritura* 1.1 (1976): 76-85.
- . "Estratos de la lengua guaraní en la escritura de Augusto Roa Bastos." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 19 (1984): 35-45.
- . *Ojo por diente*. Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1972.
- Bosson, George. "Augusto Roa Bastos y la lengua guaraní. El escritor latinoamericano en un país bilingüe." *Augusto Roa Bastos: Actas del Coloquio Franco-Alemán*. (Düsseldorf. 1-3 de junio de 1982). Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1984. 77-87.
- Casaccia, Gabriel. *Cuentos completos*. Asunción: Edición de Homenaje/El Lector, n.d. 1984.
- Chase-Sardi, Miguel. *Pequeño Decameron Nivaclé*. Asunción: NAPA, 1981.
- Ezquerro, Milagros. Introduction. *Yo el Supremo*. By Augusto Roa Bastos. Madrid: Cátedra, 1983. 7-77.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1963.
- Pérez-Maricevich, Francisco. "El cuento paraguayo." *Cuentos completos*. By Gabriel Casaccia. Asunción: Edición de Homenaje/El Lector, n.d. 29-37.
- Roa Bastos, Augusto, ed. *Las culturas condenadas*. 2nd ed. Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1980.
- . *Yo el Supremo*. 9th ed. Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1979.
- Weldt-Basson, Helene C. *Augusto Roa Bastos's I The Supreme: A Dialogic Perspective*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1993.

- . "Cases of Ambiguity in Rubén Bareiro Saguier's *Ojo por diente*." *Hispanófila* 106 (1992): 41-57.
- . "La recreación del mito en *Yo el Supremo* de Augusto Roa Bastos." *Proyecciones sobre la novela*. Ed. Linda Gould Levine and Ellen Marson. (forthcoming in Ediciones del Norte).