

LATIN AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

FRANCISCO BILBAO: REVOLUCIONARIO DE AMÉRICA. By ALBERTO J. VARONA.
(Buenos Aires: Ediciones Excelsior, 1973. Pp. 457.)

THREE CHILEAN THINKERS. By SOLOMON LIPP (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1975. Pp. 164. \$5.95.)

The appearance of Alberto J. Varona's *Francisco Bilbao: Revolucionario de América* and Solomon Lipp's *Three Chilean Thinkers* provides an occasion for discussing some aspects of research in the field of Latin American thought or intellectual history. This field has attracted the interest of scholars in a wide range of disciplines, including literature, linguistics, history, political science, sociology, and philosophy. It is a fruitful and challenging field for anyone with an interdisciplinary turn of mind who is desirous of understanding the complexity of Latin American cultural and political life. Before we discuss some of the problems and the kinds of intellectual history involved, we must first focus upon the Latin American phenomenon known as the *pensador*. I suppose that W. Rex Crawford's attempt to define the term is as good as any, when he said that it "includes men who have tried to interpret the whole social reality that lay about them, seeking its roots in the past and looking with grave concern for their country and for America into an unknown future."¹ In an essay on the Chilean thinker, José Victorino Lastarria, published some years ago, I spelled out in some detail the nature of the *pensador*.² If we attempt to equate him with "intellectual," then we encounter the problem of defining that term. Irving Kristol once suggested a definition of an intellectual as "a man who speaks with general authority about a subject on which he has no particular competence," and he found the archetypical intellectual to be the so-called man of letters.³ Charles Kadushin suggested several definitions of intellectual, in the course of which he pointed out that "intellectuals might be those whose major occupation requires them to deal with high-quality abstract ideas."⁴

In general, Latin American *pensadores* share certain characteristics. They are, for the most part, men of ideas, though professionally they may be poets, novelists, artists, critics, historians, political scientists, sociologists, moralists, essayists, etc. If they are "philosophers," they generally are more akin to the French eighteenth-century *philosophe* than to the nineteenth-century German *Philosoph*. With very few exceptions, they are not system-builders, though they may, in some instances, have been influenced by such thinkers. The performance of the *pensador* is often that of the generalist rather than the specialist. He not infrequently assumes the role of mentor to youth. He is, to say the least, often enamored of the spoken and written word, and he may be a person of broad cultural background. The *pensador* entered the Latin American scene after independence, and he believed, in Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes' words,

that "it required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time at peril of being judged not to have lived."⁵ He would agree with Ralph Waldo Emerson's observation that in a scholar, thought "can never ripen into truth" without action.⁶

If we follow Crane Brinton's sketch of the varieties of intellectual history, we may say that those who would venture into a detailed or systematic analysis of the work of a Latin American pensador might concern themselves with the kinds of intellectual history associated with such names as Arthur Lovejoy; James Harvey Robinson or Charles Beard or Max Weber; and Arnold Toynbee. In other words, we are talking about a blend of the "history of ideas," the sociology of knowledge, and the philosophy of history. If we think of Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being*; of Robinson's *The New History* or *The Human Comedy*; of Beard's *The Idea of National Interest*; of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; and of Toynbee's *A Study of History*, we will have an idea of the general milieu in which the intellectual historian operates. Since such research involves semantic analysis, the intellectual historian must constantly hone his concepts. He must have a fine sense of words, including the metaphorical and affective uses of language. He must be sensitive to levels of meaning. He must walk cautiously through the mine fields of high-order abstractions, for he can neither avoid nor exorcise them. He must subject such complexities as "Marxism," "Liberalism," "Socialism," or "Deomocracy" to merciless analysis. And he must be sufficiently humble to realize, as someone once said, that it is easier to die for "justice" than to define it.

To do effective work in Latin American intellectual history, with special attention to the life and work of individual pensadores, a scholar cannot afford to be parochial or too highly specialized, for well balanced intellects are required. Researchers in this area should not only have a long historical perspective, but they would profit by keeping abreast of the current scene. Even an article or a review in such magazines as *The New York Review of Books* or *The New Republic* or *Saturday Review* or *Foreign Affairs* or *Partisan Review* may provide a suggestion, a bibliographical item, a point of view, or even a happy phrase. Some of the writings of Crane Brinton, Peter Gay, Frank Manuel, Henry Steele Commager, H. Stuart Hughes, George Lichtheim, Richard Hofstadter, Edmund Wilson, Jacques Barzun, or Walter Lippman may be useful even though they may not deal with the Latin American scene. For the intellectual historian, everything is grist for his mill. Even his nonprofessional reading can enter into his craft.

Anyone who attempts to write a monograph on a Latin American pensador must show the interrelationship among his life, his writings, and his historical epoch. This is especially true of Francisco Bilbao. In some cases, e.g., Las-tarria, the relationship of the pensador to literary history must be considered. In general, when dealing with nineteenth-century Latin American thinkers, we must consider any of the three stages of liberal thought through which so many of them passed, namely, continental rationalism or the Enlightenment; Romanticism, especially Social Romanticism; and Positivism. One must consider the pensador in relation to the Spanish Black Legend, and his concept of the Latin American independence movement. A number of questions should be faced:

What were the sources of ideas found in the works of a pensador, and how did he treat his sources? How did his contemporaries regard him, especially those of some intellectual standing with no particular ideological axe to grind? What was the impact of the pensador upon the society of his time, and how does he look to us now in the light of subsequent history?

Alberto J. Varona's *Francisco Bilbao: Revolucionario de América* is a somewhat revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation titled *Vida y pensamiento de Francisco Bilbao. Estudio de sus ensayos y trabajos periodísticos*, done at the University of Miami in 1970, and the latter appears on the title page of the book. Special attention is given to the formative years of the nineteenth-century Chilean pensador, to his lesser known essays published in Peru, Ecuador, and France, and to his journalistic work in Argentina. Varona attempts to contribute to the reevaluation of Bilbao, a process that was begun in Chile in 1872 with the work of Eduardo de la Barra. Admittedly, this book of over 450 pages is longer on the historical, narrative, and descriptive side than it is in the area of critical analysis. The book is divided into three parts: the life of Bilbao (1823–65); the essays (i.e., those published in Chile, Peru, Ecuador, France, and Argentina); and Bilbao's journalistic writings in Argentina, very few of which may be found in his *Obras completas*. Bilbao's journalistic contributions in the Argentine daily press between 1857 and 1860 are studied here for the first time. The basic facts of Bilbao's life are presented in this book, and though Varona is not entirely uncritical of the author of *Sociabilidad chilena*, he is, on the whole, quite favorable to his subject. One may say, therefore, that he is rather close in his estimate to that of Eduardo de la Barra, Luis Alberto Sánchez, or Pablo Neruda. The author is careful to point out that his "*revolucionario de América*" was a revolutionary in ideas, and did not advocate physical violence. We are reminded that for all his anti-Catholicism, Bilbao was a deeply religious spirit, an admirer of Jesus. Bilbao's writings belong more to the area of political-social thought than to the strictly literary, and they may be included in the "essay of ideas." The book by Varona concludes with an extensive bibliography.

The format of *Three Chilean Thinkers* is similar to that of Professor Lipp's *Three Argentine Thinkers* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969). In each case, the monograph begins with a chapter on the historical setting, followed by a chapter devoted to each of the thinkers. Argentina was represented by José Ingenieros, Alejandro Korn, and Francisco Romero; Chile is represented by Francisco Bilbao, Valentín Letelier, and Enrique Molina.

The three thinkers selected are representative of three important stages in the intellectual history of Chile: Bilbao typifies the Romantic epoch; Letelier, the era of Positivism; and Molina, the reaction against Positivism. Though it is difficult to compare a forty-one-page chapter with a 450-page book, nevertheless the treatment of Bilbao by Lipp and Varona invites some comparison. In general, while both authors admit that Bilbao's place in the intellectual history of Chile has been undergoing reevaluation, Lipp's estimate of Bilbao is more critical than that of Varona. Both treatments identify the sources of and influences upon Bilbao's thought; both have noted the religious quality in Bilbao's rationalism; and both have observed the dualistic thinking that marks the writings of Bilbao.

Varona offers some observations on Bilbao's prose style. In its sympathy for Bilbao, Varona's book is somewhat reminiscent of the *Historia de Francisco Bilbao: su vida i sus obras* by Pedro Pablo Figueroa, published in 1894. Lipp seems to detach himself more from his subject, and has his eye on the relevance to contemporary concerns of some of the questions raised by Bilbao, among which is the desirability of direct, participatory democracy as contrasted with representative democracy, and the responsibility of the people for the actions of their government.

Lipp points to Bilbao's confused use of certain abstractions and to some of his unrealistic positions. He calls attention to some sweeping generalizations, inconsistencies, and to Bilbao's tendency to discuss "freedom," "sovereignty," and "rationalism" in absolute terms. Lipp does admit, however, that lately Bilbao "seems to be winning battles which he lost while he was alive." Bilbao's attraction for the Chilean Left can scarcely be denied, just as Diego Portales has been appropriately resurrected by the current Chilean Junta.

With Valentín Letelier (1852–1919), we come to the second half of the nineteenth century and the enthronement of science. The growth of the Chilean middle class is accompanied by increasing secularization of life, the rise of the Radical party, and the philosophy appropriate to a developing society, namely, Positivism. In Chile, orthodox positivism, which followed Comte's Religion of Humanity, was associated with the Lagarrigue brothers; a heterodox wing of Positivism, which rejected Comte's religiosity and despotic base, was stimulated by Lastarria, whose pupil, Valentín Letelier, became its chief exponent. Lipp calls attention to the influences upon Letelier of Herbert Spencer, Stuart Mill, Comte, and Buckle. He notes Letelier's effort to establish a philosophy of history on the basis of universal laws; his attempts to apply the scientific method to the social sciences; his contribution to a philosophy of education; and his interest in the education of women. Letelier receives high marks from Lipp, who praises him not only for his contributions to Chile's intellectual history, but also for his leadership in the struggle to democratize the political process.

Enrique Molina (1871–1964) underwent the influence of the positivists, especially Herbert Spencer, Stuart Mill, and Darwin, but developed into an eclectic thinker. Science had to be humanized through an infusion of values. Democracy for Molina meant neither license nor absolute equality. Instincts had to be kept under control by reason. Molina had great faith in the power of education, and had studied educational systems in the United States and Europe. He did much to popularize the ideas of Lester Ward and William James. In religious matters, he opposed dogmatism and favored a policy of tolerance. Yet, as Lipp points out, his reasonableness was no match for the antirational tendencies that were prominent in his lifetime. The idea of progress was to confront its most formidable opponent—irrational man. And the wreckage has cluttered up the pages of history.

The literature on Latin American thought and the essay continues to grow. There have been books of a survey nature, such as those of W. Rex Crawford, Martin S. Stabb, Miguel Jorrín and John D. Martz, and Harold Eugene Davis. Patrick Romanell contributed a volume on Mexico. A number of well-

known interpretative essays or volumes dealing with the history of ideas have been written by Latin American writers or scholars, many of them now available in English translation. Studies in some depth of individual pensadores are a pressing need in the field of Latin American intellectual history. For this reason, apart from their other merits, the volumes by Lipp and Varona are welcome.

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NOTES

1. *A Century of Latin American Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 4.
2. See my "José Victorino Lastarria: un intelectual comprometido en la América Latina," *Revista chilena de historia y geografía*, núm. 140 (Año 1972), pp. 153–93.
3. See his "American Intellectuals and Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 45, no. 4 (July 1967): 594.
4. See his *The American Intellectual Elite* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1974), p. 5.
5. Cited from Holmes' Memorial Day Address delivered 30 May 1884, at Keene, New Hampshire. See *The Mind and Faith of Justice Holmes*, Selected and Edited with Introduction and Commentary by Max Lerner (New York: Random House, 1943), p. 10.
6. See Emerson's Phi Beta Kappa oration on "The American Scholar," delivered at Harvard in 1837.