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POLLAROLO GIGLIO, Giovanna, 2015, *De aventurero a letrado. El discurso de Pedro Dávalos y Lissón*, Lima, Universidad del Pacífico. 287 pp.

In *Love in the Times of Cholera* we read that “Florentino Ariza wrote everything with so much passion that even official documents seem to be about love.” In the same way, Giovanna Pollarolo leaves her literary stamp on a historical research study: one in which Pedro Dávalos pulsates in such a way that he almost seems like a character out of a novel conceived by her. The identification that she feels with her object of study is notable.

Starting with the epigraph by Julio Ramón Ribeyro: “[...] One could see five photographs lined up corresponding to five generations, from the great-great-great grandfather, the bookseller in the 18th century, to his father, a government employee in the 20th century, by way of three eminent and long-lived men of law whose lives spanned the whole of the 19th century. These three had been successful and maybe even without problems of conscience. They lived during an auspicious, paternal, and hierarchical period, when privileges were natural and wealth, a gift from heaven. They were order, the walking stick, the quadrille and the railroad”² (p. 8) – we can see the author’s intent to establish a link between history and literature in which, without doubt, Pedro Dávalos y Lissón appears as a character that captivated Giovanna Pollarolo, leading her to study the author’s “discourse.” This constitutes “a clear intent to construct a history for the nation centered on foundational historical events which are interwoven with apparently lateral romances and that, nevertheless, configure, in the light of erotic and loving language, the diversity of unions and disunions which allegorize the limitations of the bourgeois project” (p. 23).

In the introduction, the author laments our lack of knowledge about the Peruvian novel of the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th: “We did not produce a novel in the 19th century, and the first decades of the 20th century offered little to nothing of interest” (p. 13). Pollarolo states that these words are repeated time and again as indisputable truths, after affirmations such as “while in France Flaubert founded the modern novel, in Peru they continued to indulge in an already obsolete romanticism” (p. 13). All this until Giovanna Pollarolo got word and read a novel: *La ciudad de los Reyes* by Pedro Dávalos y Lissón, whose name only led her

2 All translations of quotations in this review are by *Apuntes*, except for the first one, which is from a previous English-language translation of *Love in the Times of Cholera*.

to a street in San Isidro. The description in the book she had in her hands provided little information about the “historian and literary writer born in Lima in 1863 and died in 1942” (p. 14). The works listed prompted her to think that this was more of a historian than a novelist. However, when she read *La ciudad de los Reyes*, set in the first period of the Aristocratic Republic, she was surprised by the variety of narrative plots which unfold in real as well as fictional spaces, and in which the Lima of the end of the 19th century is depicted in all its complexity. In the eyes of its characters, Lima is a frightened city, in crisis and with no way out. The president in power is one who represents Cáceres, and the young man that comes to save the country is none other than Piérola. Pollarolo read all the literary and historical works by this adventurer turned man of letters, and trying to understand the silence of which he was a victim, “the invisibility to which he was condemned” (p. 17) became her central concern.

What most drew my attention as I read this fluid, engaging, and interesting study is that it constructs, shapes Dávalos as a character as it unfolds. Thus, in the first chapter, his discourse is presented in a generational, biographical, and ideological context “in order to establish and understand his place in Peruvian letters and to suggest some hypotheses about his marginalization” (p. 25); and she delineates Dávalos as the following: a young soldier defending Lima; a student at San Marcos; a miner in the province of Huaylas, the Chilean city of Iquique, and Bolivia; a traveler who visited New York and Paris; a diplomat in Mexico, Havana, and New York; and an insurance agent.

In a country that had to be reconstructed (Peru was weakened, amputated, in pain), Dávalos defines his future in dramatic terms: he wanted to be one of the 13 on the Isla de Gallo, an adventurer; but not just any kind, one that was the equal of Pizarro, the conquistador. And for this reason, he leaves Lima.

Something that may explain why Dávalos was forgotten and overlooked is that he was, in reality, an outsider, who did not explicitly share the ideology of the so-called “hurt generation” (“*generación dolida*”). His work is different from that produced in the first half of the 20th century. Other critics consider him “a solitary man, separated early on from the blind brilliance of modernism, a mixture of an anarchist and an iconoclast, who scorned prefabricated truths, capillas, groups, academics, cultural associations [ateneos]” (p. 79).

In the second chapter, Giovanna emphasizes Dávalos’ politico-historical discourse and how he shaped himself into a historian: he started as a careful listener and a witness of important events that became historical facts, and

the protagonists of these events found in him the ideal person to narrate this story. Billinghamurst tells him: “Take note of my accounts and tomorrow, when you are a wealthy man, you will enrich our literature on war, preserving what I am telling you in a book” (p. 87). And Mariano Ignacio Prado asks him to do the following: “Take notes and write down all these things that I am telling you and on another day, I will continue to tell you, so that tomorrow you will contradict the people who want to falsify the truth” (p. 87). Dávalos feels that his mission is to tell the truth and tell it the way it happened. He believes in the *Patria Nueva* (“New Homeland”) that rises like a phoenix from the ashes of the War of the Pacific and this is another factor that over time leads to his invisibilization: Dávalos’ loyalty to Leguía. In this chapter, Dávalos’ character continues to be shaped and now he is also a historian, linked to the haciendas of the North, to the rubber boom, a sociologist.

In the third chapter, the narrator appears, the creator of fiction related to a national project with which Dávalos sympathizes. Giovanna Pollarolo classifies his work within what Sommers refers to as the foundational novel of the 19th century, whose principal characteristic is that it employs the structure of a romance with the purpose of setting the course to national reconciliation: “The metaphor of the marriage spills into a metonymy of national consolidation” (p. 167). Dávalos’s genre of choice is clearly the historical novel, which he uses as a supplement to history since it is based on documents and actual testimonies. Taking Pérez Galdós as a model, he feels that his mission is to entertain and teach; the pedagogical dimension is vital to him. It is not for nothing that he chooses historical personalities who played a decisive role in the destiny of the nation: San Martín, Bolívar, Pardo. Dávalos thus produces literature with a specific purpose: to write true history.

I think that Giovanna Pollarolo – who, like Dávalos, is imbued with the ideas of the founders of the historical method – Ranke, Michelet, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt – is sure that it is possible to gain a knowledge of the past, of true history, through the study of documents, and thinks that through them it is possible to narrate history. This is what our author does throughout her study: she configures, I would say creates, the Dávalos character, first as an adventurer (a young soldier defending Lima, a student at San Marcos, a miner, traveler to Paris, diplomat, an enticing insurance salesman, a rubber collector) and later as a man of letters (historian and novelist). In addition, and this is very important, she gives a voice to someone who was silenced and shines light on someone who was unjustly invisibilized. Finally, I am convinced that, at some time and in some way,

Giovanna Pollarolo will turn Dávalos into a character in one of her own stories. I look forward to that moment.

Martina Vinatea Recoba
Universidad del Pacífico, Lima
vinatea_rm@up.edu.pe