

Rubén Darío of Nicaragua ranks as one of the greatest literary figures of the Spanish language. As innumerable critics have pointed out, his greatness rests on his revolutionary approach to language and to poetry. He is considered the central figure and greatest exponent of the modernist literary movement that overwhelmed the Hispanic world of letters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Darío's impact on his native country has been so deep that no government of Nicaragua, no matter what its political coloration, can fail to pay him homage.

It is not surprising, then, that the Sandinista movement which has ruled Nicaragua since it ousted the Somoza dynasty in 1979 has hastened to identify itself with Darío. The first book to be published by the new Ministry of Culture in the Popular Collection of Nicaraguan Literature series was *Nuestro Rubén Darío* (Our Rubén Darío).<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Education likewise quickly brought out a selection of Darío's poems entitled *Rubén Darío y su tiempo* (Rubén Darío and his Time).<sup>2</sup> A third book, *Textos Sociopolíticos de Rubén Darío* (Sociopolitical Texts of Rubén Darío), was published in early 1981.<sup>3</sup> These books are evidence both of an unprecedented Nicaraguan governmental cultural initiative and an effort by the Sandinistas to identify a cultural hero of international prominence with the revolutionary principles now reigning in Nicaragua.

The bare facts of Darío's life are not altogether helpful in a campaign to identify him with revolutionary principles. True, he was born (in 1867) in humble circumstances. It is also true that among his numerous literary works he touched on socialist and anti-imperialist themes. There are two problems, however. The first is doubt about his attachment to his homeland and to America.

Darío left Nicaragua as a teen-ager and began his climb to the peaks of literary success in the salons of Santiago and Buenos Aires. Although in 1916 he came home to die, he spent the greatest part of his career in France and Spain. Compared to Cuba's hero, José Martí, whose life of abnegation and commitment to independence fit comfortably within the ideology of the Cuban revolution, Darío appears to have spent little time worrying about national problems.

Second, after the first phase of his career when he did indeed deal intensively with Central American political questions, his fame depended fundamentally on his poems with their themes of beauty, love, and death and his lyrical use of the Spanish language. Rather than presenting popular or naturalistic scenes of his Nicaraguan childhood, his poems allude to Greek and Roman classics and Western European literature. There is little in his vast literary output to indicate he was a nationalist, a socialist, or a revolutionary (in the political not the literary sense). His opinions, I suspect, reflected political controversies of the day, and like many great nonpolitical writers of voluminous output, Darío expressed varying, often contradictory, views on issues. He does not appear to have committed himself to any political ideology.

How then can Darío be considered a hero in revolutionary Nicaragua? How can a government loudly committed to popular culture and egalitarianism and to breaking the bonds of cultural imperialism make Darío an object of veneration? Nicaragua's Minister of Culture Father Ernesto Cardenal, himself a poet of international standing, answers these questions, saying, "Darío was a true poet of the people. Many of his poems demonstrate his love of Nicaragua and his revolutionary

reputation depends as much on content as form."<sup>4</sup>

The books *Nuestro Rubén Darío* and *Rubén Darío y su tiempo* advance the same theme. At its most extreme the Sandinista interpretation insists the Somoza dynasty and its supporters deliberately concealed Darío's social concerns. "Never did the [Somoza] tyranny," one Sandinista writes, "mention the poet's social writing. This is the Rubén that they kept us from knowing...they only showed us...the superficial poetry of the Poet, hiding his anti-imperialist work, his call to the defense of the Latin race against Caliban, against the Yankee imperialism that was characteristic of [Darío]"<sup>5</sup>

In the outpouring of literature by journalists and social scientists on the phenomena of the fall of Somoza and the rise of Sandinismo, fully justified by the importance of these events to Latin America and the United States, there is a tendency to overlook the existence of a deep and systematic effort by the Sandinista government to alter Nicaragua's traditional cultural patterns. Contradictions such as the remaking of Darío in a revolutionary image are better understood when placed in the perspective of Nicaragua's cultural history. Thus a review of the cultural history of Nicaragua from 1936-1979 is a necessary preliminary to illuminate Sandinista cultural policy differences. By cultural policy I mean official and unofficial efforts of the government, semiautonomous agencies, and private groups to promote culture. Culture, for the purposes of this article, simply means the arts. The importance of literature in Nicaragua, especially poetry, as opposed to painting and other art forms leads to emphasis on the art of poetry.

#### Cultural Policy under Anastasio Somoza García

To those who believe that dictatorship is incompatible with cultural accomplishment it may come as a surprise that the Somoza dynasty promoted (or even permitted) cultural expression. Of course since December 1972, when an earthquake leveled the city of Managua, and especially since 1978, when the insurrection intensified, neither the government nor artists were able to give much attention to cultural matters.<sup>6</sup> But in the years of Anastasio Somoza García, who seized power in 1936, then dominated Nicaraguan politics until his assassination in 1956, there was a small cultural renaissance which stands in contrast to the cultural depression following the death of Darío in 1916.<sup>7</sup> Current Sandinista judgment of this movement is harsh. According to Jaime

Wheelock Román, "it was essentially a reactionary cultural movement which not only structured itself to idealize *somocismo* but it also attacked Darío and Sandino in the name of a pretentious veneration that was inspired by none other than the politics of Fascism and Nazism." Further, Wheelock writes, "in the realm of literature [the movement] was limited to making a pastiche of the decadent cultural movements of the United States and Europe from the 1920s."<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless Somoza García's patronage of the arts was not unlike that in other Latin American countries at the time, and Nicaragua's cultural performance—the country's artistic contributions—given the country's small population (1,109,000 in 1950 for example), its per capita income (about \$500 in 1950), and its literacy rate (no more than 30% in 1950), were, if not outstanding, certainly respectable.

#### Diplomatic Appointments

One way for a Latin American ruler to demonstrate his support for the arts is to appoint a literary figure to an important diplomatic post in Europe, particularly in Paris or Madrid, and to give him enough administrative and secretarial help so that the diplomatic duties do not interfere with the Muse. The first Somoza, Anastasio Somoza García (1936-1956) doubtless spent little time worrying about the vigor of Nicaraguan cultural life, but he did recognize leading literary lights in the traditional manner. Just as President José Santos Zelaya appointed Darío Minister to Spain so did President Somoza award José Coronel Urtecho (born in Granada, Nicaragua, in 1906) with a diplomatic post in Madrid that he might pursue his career in letters among Spanish and Latin American intellectuals in the tertulias of franquista Spain.

While a student in San Francisco, California, Coronel had become enamored of the poetry of Ezra Pound. Upon his return to Nicaragua in 1927 he became the co-founder (with Luis Alberto Cabrales) of the right-wing Vanguard Movement, an important vehicle for the introduction of the poetic style of Pound and other North American poets to Nicaragua. An essayist, short-story writer, historian, poet of great erudition and reputation in the Hispanic world, and above all a teacher, Coronel had a profound influence on Nicaraguan intellectual life. According to his most famous pupil, Ernesto Cardenal, Coronel "was the master of his generation [of poets] and he has been the master of all succeeding generations up to the present."<sup>9</sup> If Cardenal is correct (and I believe that he is), the generation gap between the

intellectuals of the 1930s and those of the 1980s is nowhere near as large as the political gap between Somocistas and Sandinistas.

Diplomatic service in Spain apparently satisfied both Somoza and Coronel. Coronel's stature undoubtedly diminished somewhat the "banana republic" image of Nicaragua and Coronel did write a number of works while in Spain. Among his accomplishments was the outline for his renowned first volume of *Reflexiones sobre la historia de Nicaragua* (Reflections on the History of Nicaragua), an apology for Spanish colonization worthy of Salvador de Madariaga.<sup>10</sup>

However, Coronel, who returned to Nicaragua in 1941 and served briefly as a deputy in the National Assembly, gradually grew disenchanted with Somoza and ultimately became a severe critic of the Somoza dynasty. Two of his sons were leaders in the Sandinista insurrection. Coronel is now a full-fledged Sandinista whose anti-United States and prorevolutionary barbs are as sharp as those of any Nicaraguan government spokesman. In an atmosphere where "Somocista" is the vilest of the epithets in the Sandinista repertory, it is comforting to know that Coronel, master of poets, Spanish apologist, and sometime supporter of Somoza, is forgiven and accepted.

There were other Somoza diplomatic appointments from the intellectual realm. Andrés Vega Bolaños was Nicaraguan ambassador to Spain from 1944 to 1959. Vega Bolaños did not enjoy the reputation of Coronel as a writer, but as the country's leading historian, he coveted the Spanish post in order to do historical research. On the basis of his lengthy investigations in Spanish archives (with apparently few interruptions for diplomatic necessities) he wrote several books on Nicaraguan subjects and gathered documentation for the *Colección Somoza*, a 17-volume compilation of colonial documents dealing with Nicaragua. The collection is particularly valuable because few colonial documents in the Nicaraguan archives survived the ravages of neglect, fire, and earthquake. Vega Bolaños, who is now past 90 years of age and living in retirement near his native city of Masaya, correctly observed in the preface that the collection is "one of the most valuable contributions to Nicaraguan culture" of the Anastasio Somoza government.<sup>11</sup>

Three other intellectuals in Somoza's diplomatic service may be cited. One of the few great Nicaraguan men of letters of the generation between Darío and Coronel, Salomón de la Selva, was serving in his country's diplomatic service

when he died in Paris in 1959. Later, in the 1960s, Poet Carlos Martínez Rivas and Historian Carlos Molina Arguello served the Somoza government as diplomatic representatives in Spain and Italy. While these appointments do not add up to a cultural policy, it may be said that Anastasio Somoza García gave more to support intellectuals than he received from them in return.

### Cultural Institutions

Patronage of culture (in the sense of the dictator's support of intellectuals) characterized the early Somoza years. Cultural institutions, however, did not flourish. The National Museum, founded in the 1890s, was a derelict cared for by the penniless daughter of its founder. It had practically no government support during the entire Somoza dynasty. The Rubén Darío Museum in León, founded in the 1950s at great personal sacrifice by Edgardo Buitrago, received a pittance from the government. The National Library, which had enough European classics in the 1880s to inspire Rubén Darío in his illustrious career, suffered heavy damage in the earthquake of 1931 and was virtually abandoned in the next 40 years, failing in its daily battle against the creeping expansion of the Managua Central Market. From the day of its founding in 1896 the National Archives occupied a small room with a striking view of Lake Managua, atop the National Palace, but it was doomed to a spartan budget and ignorant political appointees ostensibly in charge of its precious material.

Education was clearly not a high priority item in the Somoza administration. The once proud Universidad de León, second oldest in Central America, had a smaller annual budget in 1940 than in 1900. Primary and secondary education fared no better. The Ministry of Education under Mariano Fiallos Gil and others, intellectual leaders whose humanism and apolitical approach saved them from the stain of collaborationism, fought gamely, but for the most part unsuccessfully, against the first Somoza's neglect of these institutions. Apart from a weak cultural extension service their chief success was the establishment of the periodical *Educación*, a magazine promoting the broad cultural heritage of Nicaragua. Published sporadically in the 1950s, it had brought 45 issues to light when the earthquake of 1972 silenced it.

A partial exception to Somoza's cultural neglect was the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (National School of Fine Arts), established in 1939. Never adequately funded, it began to

flourish only when Rodrigo Peñalba gave up his involvement in cosmopolitan painting centers in the United States, Mexico, and Europe in 1947 to return to Nicaragua as director of the school's painting and sculpture section.<sup>12</sup> Armando Morales, Nicaragua's best known, currently active painter, trained there in the 1940s.

#### Granada as Cultural Nucleus

In the absence of governmental support for education or cultural activities during the early years of the Somoza dynasty, a small but very significant private cultural nucleus began to develop in the city of Granada in the 1930s and especially in the 1940s. Granada's rise to cultural prominence came at the expense of León, Nicaragua's colonial capital, home of the Liberal Party establishment, seat of the university, and last resting place of Rubén Darío. The catalyst for the transition from León to Granada was the Jesuit secondary school Colegio Centro América, founded in Granada in 1921. In a magnificent setting overlooking Lake Nicaragua, Jesuit priests provided a classical Hispano-Catholic education. Although there was heavy emphasis on the Latin and Greek classics, Nicaragua's Indian origins also received scholarly attention. Indeed, the Colegio's spacious open patio, which contained dozens of indigenous stone idols gathered by North American minister E. George Squier a century earlier and by the school's instructors in the 1920s, was a daily reminder of the power and artistic dedication of Nicaragua's Indian ancestors.<sup>13</sup> As reflected in the writings and artistic accomplishments of the Colegio's graduates, teachers also emphasized appreciation of the arts and experimentation with all art forms.

Families named Cuadra, Pasos, Coronel, Zavala, Chamorro, Cardenal, and others of the Granadan conservative elite sent their children to the Colegio Centro América. Prominent early graduates were Coronel, Pablo Antonio Cuadra (another Nicaraguan poet of international stature) and Joaquín Zavala Urtecho, Nicaragua's leading caricaturist in the 1930s and later founder of the country's best-known scholarly periodical, *Revista del Pensamiento Centroamericano*. These three were the principal figures of the Vanguard Movement.<sup>14</sup> They profoundly influenced current Minister of Culture Ernesto Cardenal, a student at the Colegio in the early 1940s. Cardenal's first published poems appeared in the *Cuadernos del Taller San Lucas* (Notebooks of the San Lucas Workshop), founded by Cuadra in Granada in 1942. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro

Cardenal, who took over as editor of his family's newspaper *La Prensa* in 1950, also studied at the Colegio.

Although after his graduation José Coronel Urtecho had no formal connection with the school, it was he who influenced its students most. As a resident of Granada in the early 1940s, Coronel served as mentor for a remarkable generation of Granadan poets, who, besides Cuadra and Cardenal, include Carlos Martínez Rivas, Ernesto Mejía Sánchez, Guillermo Rothschuh Tablada, Fernando Silva, Ernesto Gutiérrez, and Joaquín Pasos. Most of these poets joined with historians and artists to form the Society of Catholic Writers and Artists of the San Lucas Workshop, focal point of Nicaraguan arts and criticism during its brief lifetime, 1942-1944.<sup>15</sup> During the 1940s Coronel and Cuadra were involved in the editing of the *Cuadernos* and a number of other publications where Hispanism, Nicaraguan-ness, reaction, and revolution vied for space.

Although the Colegio Central América slipped in influence after its transfer to Managua in 1967, its graduates form the heart of Nicaragua's current intellectual elite. Anastasio Somoza García saw little danger in this elitist cultural enclave, but a number of Granadan intellectuals helped eventually to undermine the dynasty. While at first they tended to tolerate Anastasio Somoza García, the increasing repressiveness of his regime and particularly that of Anastasio Somoza Debayle drove the members of the group into exile or opposition.

The only significant Nicaraguan poet outside the Granada circle in the era of Anastasio Somoza García and the only one of the Vanguard generation claimed by the Sandinistas as a revolutionary poet was Manolo Cuadra. Ironically, Cuadra was indeed a member of a distinguished Granadan family and was friendly with the Vanguard poets, but he separated himself from the Granadan tradition, identified with the common man, and lived as a soldier, worker, and adventurer. His poetry earns him the plaudits of Sandinista ideologues but his lifestyle left him with little or no influence on other literary figures.<sup>16</sup>

#### The Luís Somoza Debayle Period

Between 1956, the year Anastasio Somoza García was assassinated, and 1967 a new political climate evolved. After an initial repressive phase immediately following the assassination, the political philosophy and personal character of



KANSAS UNIVERSITY CARTOGRAPHIC SERVICE

Luís Somoza Debayle, son of Anastasio Somoza García, permitted the birth and survival of private cultural institutions. Luís Somoza, more moderate and more open than his father, was the dominant political figure until his fatal heart attack in 1967, whereupon his brother Anastasio Somoza Debayle, of a military background, took over. Prosperity generated by the rapidly expanding cotton industry was another important ingredient in the growth of cultural institutions.

Prosperity and the breathing room in the more tolerant atmosphere of Luís Somoza permitted the Granada elite to take positive steps to defend and promote Nicaraguan culture. To be sure, there was still no government cultural policy; there was merely an attitude of permissiveness.

It was in the Luís Somoza period that the Banco Central de Nicaragua began to assume its role as guardian of the Nicaraguan heritage. Collecting

**A Selected List of Twentieth-Century Nicaraguan Poets, Artists, and Intellectuals\***

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birthplace</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Current Position</u>
Rubén Darío	Metapa**	1867-1916	
Azarcías H. Pallais	León	1886-1954	
Andrés Vega Bolaños	Masaya	1891-	Retired
Alfonso Cortés	León	1893-1969	
Salomón de la Selva	León	1893-1959	
José Coronel Urtecho	Granada	1906-	Writer
Manolo Cuadra Vega	Malacatoya +	1907-1957	
Mariano Fiallos Gil	León	1907-1964	
Rodrigo Peñalba	León	1908-1979	
Joaquín Zavala Urtecho	Granada	1910-1971	
Pablo Antonio Cuadra Cardenal	Managua ++	1912-	Director, <i>La Prensa</i>
Joaquín Pasos Argüello	Granada	1914-1949	
Enrique Fernández Morales	Granada	1919-	Retired
Carlos Molina Argüello	Granada	1921-	In Spain
Ernesto Mejía Sánchez	Masaya	1923-	Amb. to Argentina
Carlos Martínez Rivas	Guatemala +++	1924-	Agrar. Reform Inst.
Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal	Granada	1924-1978	
Ernesto Cardenal	Granada	1925-	Min. of Culture
Guillermo Rothschild Tablada	Juigalpa	1926-	Min. of Education
Fernando Silva	Granada	1927-	Min. of Culture
Armando Morales	Granada	1927-	In New Jersey
Ernesto Gutiérrez	Granada	1929-	Amb. to Brazil
Lizandro Chávez Alfaro	Bluefields	1929-	Min. of Culture
Mario Cajina Vega	Masaya	1929-	Writer
Luis Rocha Urtecho	Granada	1942-	<i>Nuevo Diario</i>
Sergio Ramírez Mercado	Masatepe	1942-	Government Junta
Francisco de Asís Fernández	Granada	1945-	Pres., ASTC #
Jorge Eduardo Arellano	Granada	1946-	Dir. Natl. Archives
Daisy Zamora	Managua	1950-	Min. of Culture
Julio Valle Castillo	Masaya	1952-	Min. of Culture

\* Selected because of their success as poets or artists, and prominence as leaders and promoters of Nicaraguan culture.

\*\* Now Ciudad Darío. Childhood in León.

+ Near Granada

++ Moved to Granada at age 4.

+++ Moved to Granada at early age.

# ASTC - Asociación Sandinista de Trabajadores de Cultura (Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers)

Nicaraguan imprints under the guise of information for prospective investors, the Banco Central library surreptitiously became, in effect, the national library. (The phenomenon of the Banco Central serving as a national library is not unique, for the practice is common in Central America.) The Bank quietly began other efforts to promote Nicaraguan culture, such as buying paintings and art objects. Acquisition in 1975 of the art collection of Enrique Fernández Morales, a member of the San Lucas group, made possible a comprehensive study, published by the bank a few years

later, of Nicaraguan painting and sculpture.<sup>17</sup> Jaime Incer's and Francisco Terán's comprehensive geography of Nicaragua inaugurated the bank's high quality publications series in 1964, the same year the bank's striking skyscraper opened in downtown Managua.<sup>18</sup> In 1974 the bank launched a periodical dealing broadly with Nicaraguan culture under the editorship of the indefatigable bibliographer, poet, historian, and critic, Jorge Eduardo Arellano, another Colegio Centro América graduate.<sup>19</sup> Independent scholars were hired to do research only remotely

related to economics. The Banco Central established the National Park of Masaya, created the National School of Ceramics, sponsored several archaeological investigations, and awarded scholarships for study abroad—all with the blessing of the dictator and with minimum political interference.

As José Coronel put it, "Finally we have an intelligent bank in Nicaragua. . . . For the first time in Nicaragua a bank set itself the task of publishing books of cultural importance and not simply banking reports and bulletins of information and propaganda."<sup>20</sup> By the 1970s, under the enlightened directorship of Roberto Incer Barquero, the Banco Central had become an informal ministry of culture.

There were, however, selection and censorship. Under the circumstances of dependency on the dictatorship it was not likely that the publications committee would directly challenge or antagonize the regime. One example of such censorship occurred when Luciano Cuadra submitted his translation of E. George Squier's classic travel account of Nicaragua, first published in English in 1851, to the Banco Central for publication. The publications committee insisted on suppressing a passage hostile to Bernabé Somoza, one of the president's ancestors. Rather than submit to the emasculation of his manuscript Cuadra withdrew it and submitted it to the publishing organ of the organization of Central American universities (Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana), which published it in 1970.<sup>21</sup>

Private banks also became a cultural force. The Banco de América, founded in 1952, and known as the "Conservative" bank because of its connections with the Granada conservative aristocracy, was especially active. It began to accumulate a library and to promote an ambitious publications series under the supervision of the Fondo de Promoción Cultural (Cultural Promotion Institute). Its library never compared to that of the Banco Central, but by 1979, when the Sandinista government nationalized the bank and killed the series, over 50 titles of historical documents, archaeological treatises, and Nicaraguan literature and history had been published. Like the Banco Central, the Banco de América hosted visiting foreign scholars, arranged scholarly conferences, and in general promoted Nicaraguan culture. It also gave donations to deserving cultural causes. Two other private banks, the Banco Nicaragüense (the "Liberal" bank) and the Banco Nacional de Vivienda (National Bank of Housing)

also occasionally published books on Nicaraguan history and culture, but these efforts to identify the Somoza regime with Nicaraguan culture were amateurish compared to the sophisticated accomplishments of the Banco Central and the Banco de América. The Banco Nicaragüense's subsidization of a gigantic mural by three Nicaraguan painters at the Nejapa Shopping Center did, however, win the acclaim of Nicaragua's cultural promoters.<sup>22</sup>

### The Universities

Despite enormous difficulties, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN), with headquarters in León and a new branch campus in the capital, began to show signs of intellectual leadership during the regime of Luís Somoza. Rectors Mariano Fiallos Gil (1957-1964), who convinced the government to grant the university autonomy in 1958, and Carlos Tünnerman Bernheim (1964-1974), although preoccupied with efforts to preserve the university's autonomy and financing and with protection of students and faculty from government repression, provided an additional forum for discussion of the arts.<sup>23</sup> Mariano Fiallos Oyanguren, son of Mariano Fiallos Gil, led the student fight for autonomy in the 1950s as a student at UNAN.<sup>24</sup> Then, upon his return from doctoral studies in the United States, he provided inspirational leadership, first as dean of humanities and after 1974 as rector. Not surprisingly, the greatest success was in poetry. Ernesto Gutiérrez, scholar, teacher, and poet in his own right, directed the university publication service and for 15 years edited *Cuadernos Universitarios*, which, among other things, collected the writings of Nicaragua's poets. Not the least of Gutiérrez's accomplishments was to persuade his mentor José Coronel Urtecho to allow a book of his poems to be published, *Pol-la D'ananta Katanta Paranta*, the preface of which is entitled, "At last: a Book of Poems by José Coronel."<sup>25</sup>

Anti-Somoza intellectuals were nourished in the university environment. Among the most important of them was Sergio Ramírez, whose editing of the student magazine *Ventana* (Window) attracted attention in the 1960s. The *Ventana* group, as a front for the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN, Sandinista National Liberation Front), foreshadowed the cultural policy of the Sandinista government. As explained by Ramírez, the *Ventana* front "counterposed a national culture against an imported, purist culture where the words, worker, blood,

and poverty were considered vulgar.”<sup>26</sup> Unlike other Nicaraguan intellectuals Ramírez, who is currently one of the three members of the Nicaraguan Government Junta of National Reconstruction, rose to a position of intellectual leadership as a short-story writer and novelist rather than as a poet.

The Universidad Centro América (UCA), Nicaragua's first private university, began operations under Jesuit management in the Luis Somoza period. Appropriately, it was José Coronel who gave the inaugural address at UCA's opening in 1961.<sup>27</sup> UCA made a significant contribution to filling Nicaragua's official cultural policy void by beginning a program of library science and by establishing the Institute of Historical Studies. Professional librarians and bibliographers, now for the first time in positions in the nation's libraries, began to push for improvements. The Institute of Historical Studies inherited the historical archive of the Colegio Centro América and began to promote historical studies. One project, a plan to publish Nicaraguan colonial documents in the Colegio's possession, had been launched with great fanfare in 1950 at the First Congress of Nicaraguan Intellectuals, but was not finally completed until 1965, when the Institute sponsored its publication.<sup>28</sup> By 1972, when the earthquake destroyed its building (but not the contents), the Institute had accumulated a fine collection of Nicaraguan documents, newspapers, ministry and agency reports, and secondary works. UCA also launched a magazine of general culture, *Encuentro*. As a preserver and promoter of Nicaraguan culture UCA thus deserves to be recognized; however, as a crucible of a new generation of Nicaraguan intellectuals, it appears to have disappointed its founders. Not only did it fail to play the central role in Nicaraguan cultural life which had been played by the Colegio Centro América, it yielded overall intellectual leadership to UNAN.

#### Other Private Institutions

Other private institutions also attempted to fill the void. Beginning in August 1960, Joaquín Zavala Urtecho introduced the magazine *Revista Conservadora*, which was to become one of the most remarkable scholarly journals in Central America in its regularity and comprehensiveness. Later it became the *Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano* (Conservative Review of Central American Thought). Still later it dropped “Conservadora.” Although the title changes suggest efforts to shed a Granadan elitist

orientation and to become a Central American regional institution, those efforts were never completely successful. Partially dependent on wealthy patrons for the purchase of advertising space, it could not be otherwise. It remained basically Nicaraguan and, in the short run, politically non-threatening. In the long run it undermined the Somoza dynasty by reminding Nicaraguans of the cultural heritage the government was doing so little to protect. Limitations notwithstanding, no magazine in Central America has done more to encourage scholarly discussion of cultural issues. Until the earthquake of December 1972 destroyed its offices, the editorial staff never failed to produce an issue. Even the earthquake, which destroyed Joaquín Zavala's public relations business along with the *Revista* offices, failed to end the magazine. It renewed operations with the January 1975 issue.

Despite predictions of its demise from financial difficulties and an adverse political climate since July 1979, the *Revista* is still alive, and upon it rests Nicaragua's best hopes for cultural criticism independent of the Sandinista government. Joaquín Zavala's son, Xavier Zavala Cuadra, a graduate of the Colegio Centro América, is the current editor. Students of Nicaraguan and Central American history, regardless of political orientation, recognize the *Revista* as one of the greatest single periodical resources for the study of Central American history and culture published in the region. Publication of a comprehensive index of the *Revista* by the Banco Central library after the Sandinista victory is proof of general esteem.<sup>29</sup>

*La Prensa Literaria* is of comparable importance. Edited since the 1950s by Pablo Antonio Cuadra, it is the Sunday literary supplement to *La Prensa*, the famous newspaper founded by Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Zelaya in 1925, focal point of political opposition to the Somoza regime during the editorship of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal (1950-1978). Like the *Revista del Pensamiento Centroamericano*, *La Prensa Literaria* suffered a temporary lapse in publication following the 1972 earthquake, but it too recovered, emphasizing, as always, poetry. The Banco Central's comprehensive index to *La Prensa Literaria*, published in 1978, serves as a guide to a generation of new Nicaraguan poets and painters.<sup>30</sup>

Together with Luis Rocha Urtecho, another Granadan poet (born in 1942, son of Octavio Rocha, poet of the Vanguard generation), Cuadra also began publication in 1961 of *El Pez y La Serpiente* (The Fish and the Serpent), one of the finest



literary magazines of Central America. Granadan poets José Coronel, Ernesto Cardenal, Fernando Silva, and Ernesto Gutiérrez, have made up the editorial board from the beginning. The periodical *El Pez y La Serpiente* concentrated, of course, on poetry, but the publishing house of the same name, also directed by Cuadra, was an outlet for a wide range of books, including some critical of the Somoza regime. *El Pez* was financially dependent on advertisers and contributors.

Both Zavala and Cuadra were extraordinarily successful in persuading wealthy conservative families and prominent Managua business houses to part with surplus wealth for cultural purposes. So too was the Banco de América, with its Granadan connections. The conservative elite did not often contest the dynasty in the open political arena, although Pedro Joaquín Chamorro is of course a monumental exception, but they prided themselves on their substantial efforts to preserve the Nicaraguan cultural heritage.

### Colonia Dambach

In December 1972 the great Managua earthquake seriously damaged several cultural institutions including the National Museum, the National Library (which preserved only 7,600 out of approximately 80,000 volumes), and the two universities. In the aftermath of the earthquake and the preoccupation with providing food and basic shelter, few voices were heard in behalf of reconstruction of these institutions.

One man, Paul Dambach, a Swiss architect and builder who had come to Managua to rebuild the cathedral following the earthquake of 1931, saw the need to salvage cultural entities. He gave his Spanish-style apartment villa, Colonia Dambach, located on Candelaria Avenue near Lake Managua, to the government on condition that it be turned into a cultural complex. Thus was born the Centro Cultural Nacional, consisting of the National Museum, the National Library, the National Archives, the National Conservatory, and the National School of Art (successor to the National School of Fine Arts). It was inaugurated ceremoniously by Doña Hope Portocarrero de Somoza, wife of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, on her birthday June 28, 1977.<sup>31</sup> The event was, of course, not a turning point in cultural policy; it was, rather, one of the more cynical gestures in behalf of the arts by a government that had lost popular support. The institutions' budgets were as threadbare as before. They merely moved their poverty to genteel surroundings.

### Sandinista Cultural Policy

By the time the Sandinista victory was complete, in July 1979, plans had been laid for a transformation of cultural (as well as social and economic) policy. It is this cultural policy, with the ideology of anti-dependency and anti-imperialism like the social and economic policy, which holds the long-range promise of a radical transformation of Nicaraguan life. It is too significant to be overlooked in the preoccupation with political decisions and international pressures.

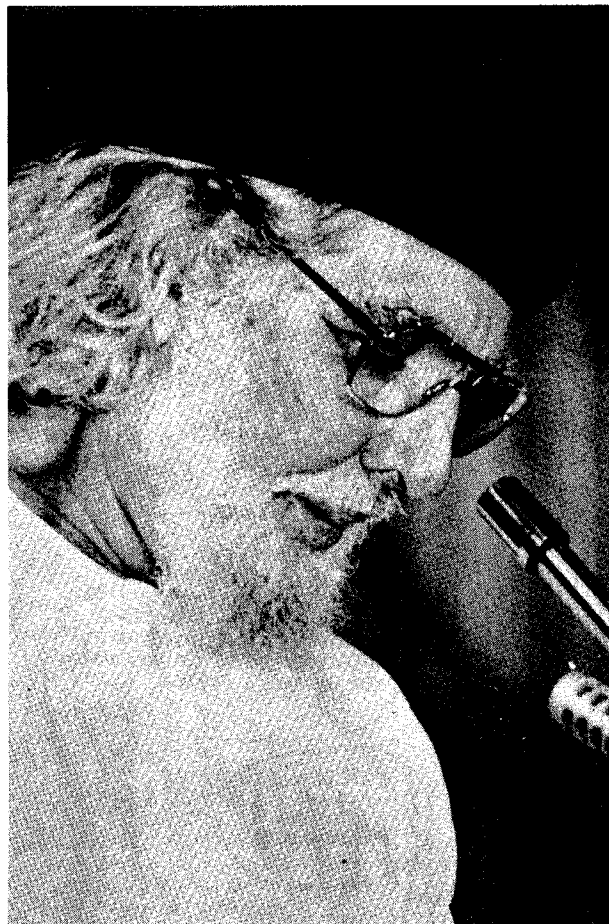
Nicaragua's cultural policy is concerned first with the fundamental education of all the Nicaraguan people. For that reason one of the priorities of the Sandinista revolution was the National Literacy Crusade, carried on with great success from March to August 1980, and currently being followed up by the Vice Ministry of Adult Education.<sup>32</sup> Second, the emphasis is on popular, or folk, culture, attempting to involve the masses in efforts to rescue folk art, songs, and literature, particularly that with indigenous roots, and to persuade Nicaraguans of all classes and educational levels to appreciate the artistic products of their own creation. (During the literacy crusade special brigades prepared by the Ministry of Culture—none too successfully to judge by the results—were given the task of locating and preserving examples of folk art for display in the museums then in formation.) Third, the Sandinista government is undertaking a full scale attack on Nicaragua's cultural dependency on the United States and Europe, which, according to Sandinistas, grew worse during the Somoza dynasty.

Writings by leading Sandinista ideologues like Sergio Ramírez and Jaime Wheelock Román during the long campaign against the Somoza regime sketched cultural preferences and prejudices and foreshadowed elements of Sandinista cultural policy,<sup>33</sup> although after two years in power the Sandinista government still has devoted little energy to defining the concept of cultural dependency which it is attacking. Nevertheless, isolated statements by key Sandinista leaders indicate the outlines of a new, developing cultural policy. The government is against abstract art, scholarly or elitist literature, meaningless poetry, disco dancing and disco music, and in general cultural influences from the United States and Western Europe. United States, British, and Spanish cultural institutions are associated with imperialism and not admired. Sandinistas approve primitive painting, folk art, poetry workshops, popular theater, popular literature,

posters, and murals. The artistic accomplishments of the people of Mexico, Vietnam, Venezuela, North Korea, Yugoslavia, and Cuba, heretofore not frequently available in Nicaragua, are especially promoted. In the words of Bayardo Arce, one of the FSLN commanders most influential in cultural policy. "We place popular protest music against disco music... tasteless poetry aimed only at creating beautiful words against poetry of revolutionary content... opulent theater that nobody can stage against that which reflects the national reality." The intellectual leaders of Nicaragua, Arce insisted before the inaugural meeting of the Asociación Sandinista de Trabajadores de Cultura (Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers) in February 1980, must show the way to create the new man. They must show the way, he said, "to shed the cloak of deceit in which colonial and imperialist domination has held us for so many years." "It will be necessary," he continued, "to find a way in which every artistic and cultural manifestation contributes to the elimination of negative ideological values inherited from the period of domination and at the same time contribute to the exaltation, development, and study of the new values spawned by the revolution."<sup>34</sup> Another influential FSLN commander, Jaime Wheelock Román, in his 1974 book *Raíces indigenistas de la lucha anti-colonialista en Nicaragua* (Indigenous Roots of the Anti-Colonial Struggle in Nicaragua) pointed the way toward rescue of indigenous traditions as part of Sandinista cultural policy.<sup>35</sup>

### Ministry of Culture

To accomplish these ends, the Sandinista government created a Ministry of Culture (which now occupies Somoza Debayle's former rural retreat, "El Retiro," on Managua's outskirts) and appointed Father Ernesto Cardenal, one of the most admired intellectual figures in Nicaragua today (and perhaps even more admired in international intellectual circles) as minister.<sup>36</sup> Cardenal's stature as a poet and priest made him a particularly attractive spokesman for Nicaraguan intellectuals of conservative ideology. As a graduate of the Colegio Centro América and a respected member of the aristocratic Granadan clan which has attempted for years to preserve and promote Nicaraguan culture, Cardenal was the finest product of the Nicaraguan Hispano-Catholic educational tradition. Although he never took up arms, his support of the Sandinista cause was well known. His defiance of the Somoza regime, particularly in heavily publicized trips to Cuba in the 1970s, won him admiration in international as



Ernesto Cardenal, Nicaraguan Minister of Culture, speaking at Harvard, April 1981.

well as in Sandinista circles. His dedication to an ascetic life, as demonstrated by his years (1957-1959) in a Trappist monastery in Gethsemane, Kentucky and his years on his Solentiname Islands (Lake Nicaragua) retreat (1965-1977) where he founded a religious, artistic, contemplative community contributed to his appeal. His commitment to Nicaragua's indigenes, dating back to his schooling at the Colegio Centro América and manifested in his studies for the priesthood in Mexico and Colombia and in much of his poetry, matched the somewhat romanticized FSLN vision of a pristine Nicaraguan culture, free of colonial overlays. Furthermore, as a teacher of poetry, painting, and sculpture to the untutored *campesinos* of Solentiname, Cardenal had proved his commitment to popular or revolutionary culture. He was not an orator or political figure, but his life and career spoke eloquently for a new, popular Nicaraguan culture.

As a poet Cardenal is probably best known for his books *Marilyn Monroe y otros poemas* (Marilyn Monroe and other Poems), *El estrecho dudoso* (The Doubtful Strait), *Homenaje a los indios de America* (Homage to the Indians of America), *Salmos* (Psalms), and *La hora cero* (Zero Hour). In these works Cardenal avoids the abstract and subjective and treats specific events in concrete terms. This is the imagist poetry of Ezra Pound—or more particularly, exteriorist poetry, to use the term popularized by José Coronel. (“Exteriorism,” Cardenal explains, “is when the poet speaks to us of a Caterpillar tractor D4, or of the mahogany log...being towed by a tugboat called the Falcon...”<sup>37</sup>) In *La hora cero* Cardenal wrote of Sandino’s fight against the United States Marines. In *Poesía revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Poetry), sold clandestinely in Nicaragua during the Somoza Debayle regime, he exposed Somoza’s brutalities. Cardenal is also well known, along with Coronel, for his translations of North American poetry.

Cardenal’s off-and-on career as a sculptor, particularly of birds and animals, brought him additional international renown. His first exhibition outside Nicaragua occurred at the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C., in 1956. He exhibited often in Cuba from 1969 to 1977.

Selection of Cardenal as Minister of Culture was a dramatic departure from the past. Instead of subsidizing the poet of the hour by granting him a diplomatic appointment, the Sandinista government made him a central figure. No previous Nicaraguan poet had ever been given such a powerful role in cultural policy, and none was better suited by multiple talent and international reputation to exercise that role.

Cardenal’s speech in February 1980, “Anti-imperialist, Popular, National, Revolutionary Culture” is a clear indication of the Minister of Culture’s understanding of his role in the new Nicaragua. Nicaraguan culture must be revolutionary, he said, “because our cultural struggle must transform society where exploitation of man by man does not exist.” “Our culture must be anti-imperialist,” because in a world divided by imperialists into exploiters and exploited, Nicaragua’s place “as a liberated people is to fight against imperialist aggression.” Cardenal asserts that Nicaraguans must “define, develop, and discover our national identity and our national history” without forgetting the regions of the country. If Nicaraguan culture is revolutionary,

anti-imperialist, and national it must also be popular. In order to avoid “elitist culture,” imposed by the Somoza dynasty and the bourgeoisie, the true values and artistic talents of the Nicaraguan people must be carried to all corners of the country. A further modifier, “democratic,” was added by Cardenal in the speech; by democratic he said that he meant that Nicaraguans must not only be consumers of culture but also producers of culture.<sup>38</sup>

The Ministry of Culture’s far-flung empire is an indication of the tasks that it has assumed and the seriousness of the government’s commitment to the transformation of Nicaragua. The Patrimonio Cultural, charged with the preservation of archaeological and artistic objects, occupies the Casa Mántica, one of the few mansions in downtown Managua to survive the earthquake of 1972. (The Mántica family, formerly financial contributors to the *Revista del Pensamiento Centroamericano*, donated the building to the new government.) Offices of the new cultural magazine, *Nicaráuac*, repose on the third floor. The *Comisión de Historia*, which has the task of re-writing Nicaragua’s history books and composing the history of the insurrection, occupies a sprawling mansion, formerly the property of one of Somoza’s generals, in the beautiful Managua suburb Las Colinas. New museums have appeared in almost every department, the first and foremost of which is the Sandino Museum in the hero’s birthplace, Niquinohono. Old museums, like the Darío Museum in León, have received increased budgetary support.

Twenty-four Popular Centers of Culture (for cultural activities of all kinds) have been established. Some 90 theater groups are functioning. Forty poetry workshops and six dance workshops are scattered throughout the poor barrios of the cities. The sculpture foundry, formerly at Colonia Dambach, is under reconstruction at Villa San Jacinto, one of the poorest neighborhoods of Managua. A workshop for graphic arts is also under construction in the same place. Exhibits of primitive painting, which is especially favored in a popular cultural revolution, are given prime gallery space in Managua and elsewhere. The sections of the ministry which have overall supervision of literature and poetry are located in El Retiro. Ernesto Gutiérrez, Daisy Zamora, and Julio Valle—all poets of considerable intellectual stature and reputation—have high posts in the ministry. Offices for the Popular Culture Brigades are located in the stables at El Retiro. In short

there is ample physical evidence of a popular cultural revolution under way in Nicaragua.

Artists in the new Nicaragua are better organized than they were in the old. To be sure such groups as the Academia Nicaragüense de la Lengua (Nicaraguan Language Academy) and the Academia de Geografía and Historia de Nicaragua (Nicaraguan Geography and History Academy) continue to function. But their connection—by chronology if nothing else—with the Somoza period makes them suspect as elitist. Compared to similar institutions in other countries, they were certainly small and ineffective anyway.

In the new Nicaragua there is strong pressure for artists to participate in the Asociación Sandinista de Trabajadores de Cultura (Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers), which had a preliminary meeting in February 1980 and an organizational meeting in July 1980.<sup>39</sup> At the February meeting Sandinistas Bayardo Arce, Sergio Ramírez, and Ernesto Cardenal spoke to the assembled artists of their responsibilities to promote the new, revolutionary society. Artists echoed these sentiments in their speeches. Inclusion of the name Sandinista in the title of the organization would appear to be a limitation on academic freedom, but the majority apparently saw no threat to their independence. At the July meeting Poet/Artist Francisco de Asís Fernández, son of Enrique Fernández Morales, was elected president of the organization amid revolutionary cries, "No more elitism," and "Down with literary gleanings." In view of the fact that his father had an honored place in the Society of Catholic Writers and Artists of the San Lucas Workshop, Francisco de Asís Fernández has an unusual personal opportunity to bridge the cultural gap between the old and new Nicaragua. While the academies are branded as elitist and the new Association is by definition Sandinista and therefore "revolutionary," it remains to be seen which is the more independent of government direction.

### Poetry Workshops

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the popular cultural revolution—and the most appropriate for a land of poets—are the poetry workshops. Poetry workshops are not new, but elsewhere they are usually connected with universities. In Nicaragua the Ministry of Culture has fostered the creation of 40 to 50 poetry workshops in poor barrios, army posts, and factories. The most famous workshop is in the Indian barrio, Monimbó, in Masaya. Symbolically it focuses attention both on the spon-

taneous Monimbó uprising in February 1978 against Somoza's National Guard and on the government's commitment to indigenism.<sup>40</sup>

Poet Mayra Jiménez coordinates the workshops. She explains that their intent is to get individuals to write clearly, simply, directly, concretely—along the lines of the exteriorist poetry so identified with José Coronel and Ernesto Cardenal—and not necessarily to create poets.<sup>41</sup> Workshop leaders hand out a set of rules adapted from Ezra Pound's guide to the writing of poetry: Verses should not rhyme, descriptions should be specific, and clichés should be avoided. The annual Leonel Rugama poetry prize of \$500, restricted to young poets, is an incentive to participants to polish their work and see it in print. Additionally, an admitted purpose of the workshops is to advance the cause of the Sandinista revolution. Cardenal does not view poetry as merely entertainment. "Poetry can be useful," he said in 1972, it can "build a country, create a new man, change society, make the future Nicaragua." "Literature for literature's sake," according to Cardenal, "is worthless... poetry also must be political, not political propaganda but political poetry."<sup>42</sup>

In Nicaragua, where poetry is taken very seriously, the workshops have become a controversial subject. The country's top-ranking poets and many government spokesmen (not a few of whom are amateur poets) have strongly supported the workshop idea. But other intellectuals have criticized them for fostering an expression too direct and shorn of imagery; for excessive emphasis on revolutionary themes; for presenting exteriorism as the preferred form of poetical expression; and, in general, for stimulating much bad poetry. And in answer to Francisco de Asís Fernández's criticism that only revolutionary themes are encouraged, Minister Cardenal responded, "On the contrary young poets are taught that their poetry can be on any kind of theme, and many poems are written on intimate themes, of love, of childhood memories, landscape descriptions, etc." As for bad poetry Cardenal responds that the "purpose of the workshops is to give to the people indispensable tools so that they can create their own poetry and among amateur poets there will be some good ones and some not so good."<sup>43</sup>

The less subtle view of Sergio Ramírez corresponds more closely with the fervent revolutionary atmosphere of contemporary Nicaragua. He says that the workshops "have produced creative works much more important than the dilettantist

elitists have produced in all the history of our national culture."<sup>44</sup> Coronel Urtecho, founder of his own distinguished poetry workshop in Granada in the 1940s, is even more ecstatic. He believes that the workshops are the "most interesting thing going on in the cultural field in our country, in Latin America, and perhaps in the world.... It is like being in a mine and we are about to see if there is gold."<sup>45</sup>

By July 1981 four issues of the Ministry of Culture's new cultural magazine *Nicaráuac*, edited by Xavier Argüello, Jr., had been published. As Cardenal explained in the first issue, *Nicaráuac*, indigenous name for Nicaragua, was chosen both to emphasize Nicaragua's proud Indian heritage and to establish a link with Indian cultures in all America.<sup>46</sup> The emphasis, however, was on poetry of the insurrection. No fewer than 37 poets, ranging from the Granadan poets of the older generation to many whose careers were ended by death in the insurrection, were represented in the first issue.

The beneficiary of government support, *Nicaráuac* must carry the government's cultural message to intellectuals at home and abroad, and the political situation in Nicaragua in mid-1981 demands that this message be a Sandinista message. The editorial board consists of three poets from the Ministry of Culture (Ernesto Cardenal, Daisy Zamora, and Lizandro Chávez Alfaro), one member of the governing junta (Sergio Ramírez), and one member of the nine-man directorate of the FSLN (Bayardo Arce). Although it is early to make a judgment, it appears to be less independent politically than the *Revista del Pensamiento Centroamericano* was in Somoza's time. As an agent of Nicaragua's cultural policy, it cannot at the same time be independently critical of it.

#### Activity of Cultural Institutions

What has happened to the old institutional support for cultural activity? The Centro Cultural Nacional, still known to the man on the street and to taxi drivers as Colonia Dambach, continues to function. The National Archive is under new vigorous leadership in the person of Jorge Eduardo Arellano (born in Granada in 1946 and educated at the Colegio Centro América), whose reputation as a historian and bibliographer give credibility to the institution. His Granadan origins, incidentally, provide an additional link between the old cultural policy and the new. Not surprisingly every exhibit space in the National Archive is given over to a display of Sandino letters and memorabilia. One encouraging sign of life is

the appearance after many years' lapse of the *Boletín del Archivo* (Archive Bulletin).

The National Library, alas, still awaits an awakening as a cultural institution. It has never recovered from the earthquake of 1972, which destroyed most of its meager collection. Short of books, short of staff, short of space, it can only hope that the Sandinista government responds to its great needs.

At the National Museum the staff is the same as before but the hope is new, due to the Ministry of Culture's sympathy and government financial support in the form of short courses on museum curatorship by Mexican experts. Additional signs of renewal come from the Conservatory and the National School of Art. Still, limited space, sparse funds, and an avowed Sandinista regionalist policy will doubtless curtail dreams of expansion of the Centro Cultural.

At the financial institutions the Sandinista approach appears to have lowered morale among employees dedicated to cultural pursuits. Librarians at the Banco Central library fear that its possessions, painstakingly collected in the time of Anastasio Somoza Debayle (no thanks to him), will be dissipated, perhaps taken over by the Ministry of Culture. Nevertheless, it continues to turn out scholarly work and detailed bibliographies in its *Boletín*. That the directors of the *Boletín* see fit to give ample space to Sandino history and bibliography is to be expected, but it has not ceased to accommodate poetry, criticism, and articles on painting and sculpture. The Banco de América, now nationalized, maintains that its cultural promotion section still has a job to do, but some of its leading proponents are living abroad and the remainder face an uncertain future. In an era of centralized cultural planning and promotion what cultural role can a government financial institution have?

Universities also have a reduced cultural role in the new Nicaragua. The more active the Ministry of Culture is in the promotion of the arts, the less active must be the universities, UNAN and UCA, although they cling to pre-Sandinista activities in publication and cultural extension. While in the Somoza era university autonomy offered a refuge for intellectuals, today the intellectuals are in the government, particularly in the Ministry of Culture. The role of the universities, as delineated by Sandinista spokesmen, is not to offer independent criticism and least of all to produce a cultural elite; it is to produce professionals and

technocrats for the purpose of raising production and enhancing the quality of life.<sup>47</sup>

### Newspapers

In Nicaragua, where the cultural activities of libraries, museums, and universities have traditionally suffered from government neglect, newspapers have played a vital role in promoting the arts. The Sandinista government is much more active in the arts than any previous government, but the newspapers continue their cultural function as in the old days. *La Prensa's* literary supplement, *La Prensa Literaria*, which has become identified with the poet Pablo Antonio Cuadra, spans the old and new regimes. Although reduced in size because of the desertion of personnel and the increased editorial burdens assumed by Cuadra following the assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal in January 1978, *La Prensa Literaria* is still the leading independent voice of critics of the arts in Nicaragua.

The *Nuevo Amanecer Cultural* (New Cultural Dawn) is the *Nuevo Diario's* literary supplement, founded soon after the *Nuevo Diario* split from *La Prensa* in March 1980. While *La Prensa* is critical of the Sandinista government *Nuevo Diario* is a strong government advocate. *Nuevo Amanecer* is similar to *La Prensa Literaria*, which is not surprising since the editor of *Nuevo Diario* is Xavier Chamorro Cardenal, brother of Pedro Joaquín, and the "coordinator" of *Nuevo Amanecer* is Luis Rocha, long-time literary collaborator of Pablo Antonio Cuadra. Poets José Coronel and Fernando Silva and novelist Lizandro Chávez Alfaro make up the editorial board.

The third newspaper in Managua, *Barricada*, is the government organ. It is edited by still another member of *La Prensa's* Chamorro family, Carlos Chamorro, youngest son of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal. *Barricada* also has a literary supplement, called *Barricada Cultural: Ventana*. Because of its official connections, *Ventana* is a better source of information than the other two literary supplements on the activities of the Ministry of Culture. Instead of merely promoting the government's cultural policy, however, it has opened its pages to dissent, especially on the poetry workshops. Several staff members of the ministry, including two women poets, are on the editorial board. All members of the editorial board are published poets.

No Central American capital city has such extensive newspaper coverage of the arts. No Central American capital city has a more extensive network of intellectuals working for cultural

promotion and criticism. This is not a result of Sandinista cultural policy, but a spillover of the Somoza era custom of periodicals' coverage of the arts, carefully nurtured in good times and bad by Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal and Pablo Antonio Cuadra Cardenal and their poetry circle. To be sure, except for *La Prensa Literaria* and the *Revista del Pensamiento Centroamericano*, all cultural promotion is done in the name of Sandinismo.

### Poet-Diplomats

The Sandinista government made great efforts to persuade Pablo Antonio Cuadra, Nicaragua's third-ranking poet (after Ernesto Cardenal and José Coronel Urtecho) to accept the diplomatic assignment to Madrid, which according to tradition was reserved for one of Nicaragua's leading intellectuals. Cuadra refused, citing his duty to *La Prensa* and his wish to maintain its independent voice. The government had passed over Coronel because of his age (75) and because he had once served the Somoza regime. Cardenal was needed to head the Ministry of Culture. Still the government did not break with the tradition; it merely moved one step down the rankings. The appointment went to Ernesto Mejía Sánchez, also a distinguished poet and critic, and although a Masayan by birth he was a Granadan by choice.<sup>48</sup> He had been one of the members of the San Lucas Workshop. After additional education in Mexico and Spain he became a professor of Hispanic letters at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Among the poets to spring from the San Lucas Workshop, Mejía Sánchez is considered the most intellectual and the master word craftsman, and it was he who edited *Rubén Darío y su tiempo*.

Sandinista recognition of Nicaragua's poets is not the same as in the old days. While intellectuals accepted Somoza's appointments because they needed support, none of the current top four Nicaraguan poets needed subsidization. Rather, the Sandinista regime appeared to crave the active support of the poets.

### Conclusion

In view of the economic problems that the government of Nicaragua has faced since July 1979, it is startling that so many financial resources have been put into cultural infrastructure. During the Somoza regime promotion and preservation of Nicaragua's cultural heritage depended almost exclusively on the private sector. Now there is a Ministry of Culture which has attacked the problem of Nicaragua's cultural impoverishment with revolutionary vigor and substantial financial resources. That decisions have been made favorable

to education, particularly literacy education and more broadly to cultural promotion, is an indication of the faith of the Sandinistas in their longevity and their determination to effect a permanent change on Nicaraguan society.

Leaders of the cultural campaign of the Sandinista government grew up, of course, during the Somoza dynasty. Having survived cruelty and repression and having witnessed the neglect of cultural institutions of that time they are now dedicated to the establishment of a new Sandinista cultural order. Most are resolved that the new order shall be both Christian, reflecting the depth of their Jesuit schooling, and Marxist, reflecting what they perceive as needed for survival and dignity in the United States' orbit.

The Nicaraguan political system, whether Somocista or Sandinista, discourages dissent. In its quest for preservation the Sandinista government demands that cultural workers play a social role—in other words, support the Sandinista revolution. With a near monopoly of the instruments of cultural promotion and with public revolutionary passion behind them, intellectuals in the Ministry of Culture may be more of a threat

to independent thought and criticism than was the Somoza dynasty's policy of neglect.

The fresh interpretation of Darío and other Nicaraguan cultural figures inspired by the Sandinista victory has many positive aspects. Doubtless it is an exaggeration to claim that the Somoza regime concealed the social and political thoughts of Darío. Experience with the reinterpretation of Martí following the Cuban revolution of 1959, however, suggests that new perspectives often reveal new truths about old masters.<sup>49</sup> Darío remains an enigmatic figure, particularly in his attitude toward his homeland.

Perhaps Augusto César Sandino, guerrilla fighter against the U.S. Marines from 1927 to 1933, martyred victim of the Somozas, and inspiration of the Sandinistas who came to power in Nicaragua in mid-1979, is an incomplete hero. Darío, titan of Spanish letters and Nicaraguan by birth, must therefore be molded to satisfy a Sandinista longing for an intellectual Nicaraguan hero. That Darío is no Martí is no matter. He can be tailored to fit the need. The new Nicaragua needs him.

(August 1981)

## NOTES

1. Mejía Sánchez, Ernesto, intro., *Nuestro Rubén Darío* (Managua: Ministerio de Cultura, 1980). All translations are by the author.

2. Torres, Edelberto, *Rubén Darío y su tiempo* (Managua: Ministerio de Educación, 1980).

3. Arellano, Jorge Eduardo, ed., *Textos sociopolíticos de Rubén Darío* (Managua: Ministerio de Cultura, 1981).

4. Interview, Ernesto Cardenal, Managua, September 1980.

5. Bernardino Rodríguez, "Darío, Comandante en Jefe de nuestro idioma nacional," *Nuevo Dairio* (Managua) March 13, 1981.

6. The crisis facing cultural institutions in Nicaragua following the 1972 earthquake is described in Richard Severo, "The Cultural Life of Nicaragua Slow to Recover from Quake," *New York Times*, February 4, 1973.

7. Three Nicaraguan poets, Alfonso Cortés, Azarías H. Pallais, and Salomón de la Selva, known as "Los tres grandes," were active in the 1916-1927 period but they worked separately and had little immediate impact on Nicaraguan cultural life: thus the cultural depression.

8. Jaime Wheelock Román, ed., *Obras*, by Leonel Rugama (Managua: Secretaría Nacional de Propaganda y Educación Política, Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, 1980), p. v.

9. Ernesto Cardenal, ed., *Poesía nueva de Nicaragua* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Carlos Lohlé, 1974), p. 55.

10. José Coronel Urtecho, *Reflexiones sobre la historia de Nicaragua*, vol. I (Managua: Instituto Histórico Centroamericano, 1962).

11. Andrés Vega Bolaños, ed., *Colección Somoza: documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 17 vols. (Madrid: Imprenta Viuda de Galo Saez, 1954-1957), p. vii.

12. Jorge Eduardo Arellano, *Pintura y escultura en Nicaragua* (Managua: Banco Central de Nicaragua, 1978), p. 39.

13. The collection of idols is described in Jorge Eduardo Arellano, "La Colección 'Squier-Zapatera,'" *Boletín Nicaragüense de Bibliografía y Documentación*, nos. 32-33, 35 (November 1979-February 1980; March-April 1980). Regrettably, there is no study of the Colegio Centro América itself.

14. The entire issue of No. 22-23 (Winter, 1978-Summer, 1979) of *El Pez y La Serpiente* is devoted to the Vanguard Movement.

15. Pablo Antonio Cuadra, prologue of Ernesto Cardenal, *Antología* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Carlos Lohlé, 1971), p. 11; Ernesto Mejía Sánchez captures the atmosphere of Coronel's literary circle in his "Tríptico de Coronel," *Cuadernos Universitarios: Homenaje a José Coronel*



Urtecho al cumplir 70 años de edad, no. 16 (March 1976), pp. 138-81.

16. Manuel S. Cruz, "Estampas literarias: Manolo Cuadra," *La Prensa Literaria* (Managua), May 17, 1981; Bridget Aldaraca, et al., eds., *Nicaragua in Revolution: The Poets Speak* (Minneapolis: Marxist Educational Press, 1980), pp. 290-91.

17. Jorge Eduardo Arellano, "Colección de arte nicaragüense del Banco Central de Nicaragua," *Boletín Nicaragüense de Bibliografía y Documentación*, no. 23 (May-June 1978), pp. 11-18; Arellano, *Pintura y escultura en Nicaragua* (Managua: Banco Central de Nicaragua, 1978).

18. Jaime Incer and Francisco Terán, *Geografía de Nicaragua* (Managua: Banco Central de Nicaragua, 1964).

19. The *Boletín Nicaragüense de Bibliografía y Documentación*.

20. José Coronel Urtecho, *3 conferencias a la empresa privada* (Managua: Ediciones El Pez y La Serpiente, 1974), p. 75.

21. E. George Squier, *Nicaragua, sus gentes y paisajes*, translated by Luciano Cuadra (San José: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1970).

22. José Coronel Urtecho, *3 conferencias a la empresa privada*, p. 79; Jorge Eduardo Arellano, "La pintura en Nicaragua," *Boletín Nicaragüense de Bibliografía y Documentación*, no. 39 (January-February 1981), pp. 41-42.

23. Sergio Ramírez, a member of the Nicaraguan Government Junta of National Reconstruction, has written a biography of Mariano Fiallos Gil: *Mariano Fiallos, biografía* (Leon: Editorial Universitaria, 1971).

24. Miguel de Castilla Urbina, ed., *Universidad y sociedad en Nicaragua*, 2 vols. (León: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, 1980), I, p. 75.

25. José Coronel Urtecho, *Pol-la D'amanta Katanta Paranta: Imitaciones y traducciones* (León: Editorial Universitaria, 1970).

26. Speech by Ramírez reported in *Barricada* (Managua), July 20, 1980.

27. *Revista Conservadora* (Managua), no. 9 (June 1961), pp. 1-5.

28. Federico Argüello Solórzano, and Carlos Molina Argüello, eds., *Monumenta Centroamericanae Historicae: colección de documentos y materiales para el estudio de la historia y de la vida de los pueblos de la América Central* (Managua: Instituto Centroamericano de Historia, Universidad Centro América, 1965). Argüello and Molina, Jesuit historians at the Colegio Centro América, had joined with Ernesto Mejía Sánchez to form a historical branch of the Taller San Lucas in the 1940s. Carlos Molina Argüello, *Misiones nicaragüenses en los archivos europeos* (Mexico City: Pan American Institute of Geography and History, 1957), pp. 42-43.

29. Antonio Acevedo Espinoza, comp., *Indice temático de la "Revista del Pensamiento Centroamericano"*: No. 1, Agosto 1960-No. 161, Diciembre 1978 (Managua: Banco Central de Nicaragua, 1980).

30. René Rodríguez Masís and Antonio Acevedo Espinoza, comps., *Indice selectivo de La Prensa Literaria* (Managua: Banco Central de Nicaragua, 1978).

31. Roberto Parrales Sánchez, *Centro Cultural Nacional* (Managua: Secretaría de Información y Prensa de la Presidencia de la República, 1977).

32. Charles L. Stansifer, "The Nicaraguan National Literacy Crusade" [CLS-1-'81], *AUFS Reports*, no. 6 (1981).

33. For example, Jaime Wheelock Román, *Imperialismo y dictadura: crisis de una formación social* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1975).

34. Bayardo Arce, "El difícil terreno de la lucha: el ideológico," *Nicaráuac*, no. 1 (May-June 1980), pp. 153-56.

35. Jaime Wheelock Román, *Raíces indigenistas de la lucha anticolonialista en Nicaragua* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1974).

36. The sketch of Cardenal's career draws primarily on the excellent dissertation by Paul W. Borgeson, Jr., "The Poetry of Ernesto Cardenal" (Vanderbilt University, 1977), and on several studies by Jorge Eduardo Arellano, particularly his "Ernesto Cardenal: de Granada a Gethsemany, 1925-1957," *Boletín Nicaragüense de Bibliografía y Documentación*, no. 31 (September-October 1979), pp. 25-41. Cardenal's Cuban experiences are related in his *En Cuba* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Carlos Lohlé, 1972).

37. Ernesto Cardenal, ed., *Poesía nicaragüense* (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1973), p. viii.

38. Ernesto Cardenal, "Cultura revolucionaria, popular, nacional, antimperialista," *Nicaráuac*, no. 1 (May-June 1980), pp. 163-68.

39. Principal speeches at the first meeting are reprinted in *Nicaráuac*, no. 1 (May-June 1980); a full report of the second meeting is in *Barricada* (Managua), July 20, 1980.

40. Alan Riding, "On the Ashes of War, the Arts Flower in Nicaragua," *New York Times*, August 1, 1980.

41. Ivonne Jiménez, "Un nuevo despertar poético," *Universidad* (San José, Costa Rica), August 8-14, 1980.

42. Ernesto Cardenal, ed., *Poesía nicaragüense* (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1973), pp. vii & 11.

43. *Barricada*, April 9, 1981; *Nuevo Amanecer Cultural* (Managua), March 15, 1981.

44. *Barricada*, July 19, 1980.

45. *Barricada Cultural: Ventana* (Managua), March 28, 1981.

46. *Nicaráuac*, no. 1 (May-June 1980), p. 6.



47. *Acerca de la coyuntura actual y nuestras tareas* (Managua: Comisión Política Universitaria, 1980). This collection of speeches by Sandinista leaders is a clear statement of the role expected of universities in the new Nicaragua.

48. Subsequently, Mejía Sánchez was transferred to Argentina.

49. John M. Kirk, "From 'inadaptado sublime' to 'líder revolucionario': Some Further Thoughts on the Presentation of José Martí," *Latin American Research Review*, XV, no. 3 (1980), pp. 127-47.