

**“El bacilo de Carlos Marx,” or, Roberto Arlt, the Leninist**

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*¿Sabe que usted se parece a Lenin? — Los siete locos (1929)*

*Sí... pero Lenin sabía adónde iba. — Los lanzallamas (1931)*

The interwar period (1918-1939) saw the rise of an international movement for the promotion and the defense of proletarian literature and art. During this period, Argentine author Roberto Arlt (1900-1942) was involved with local communist and socialist politics and was part of the literary scene surrounding such politics in Buenos Aires. Although the post 1950s reception history of Arlt is characterized by critical narratives that see him distanced and even divorced from communist literary radicalism,<sup>1</sup> recent studies have recognized his roots in proletarian-centered leftism surrounding the interwar communist left in Argentina. Most importantly, Sylvia Sáitta’s biography of Arlt emphasizes his engagement with communism throughout the 1930s

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<sup>1</sup> The debate between Raúl Larra and David Viñas in the early 1950s represents a turning point in the reception history of Roberto Arlt. As Elsa Drucaroff argues, Viñas’s article on Arlt—published under the pseudonym Juan José Gorini—figures as the earliest attempt to salvage Arlt’s legacy. Raúl Larra, “Roberto Arlt es nuestro”, *Cuadernos de cultura* 6, no. May (1952). Juan José Gorini, “Arlt y los comunistas”, *Contorno* 1, no. 2 (1954). Elsa Drucaroff, *Roberto Arlt: Profeta del miedo* (Buenos Aires: Carálogos Editora, 1998), 394-95.

and argues that even if Arlt’s position within the Argentine cultural camp was “siempre incómoda”, he was “visto como un escritor comunista por sus contemporáneos”.<sup>2</sup> In *Ficciones del dinero* (2014), Alejandra Laera portrays Arlt as moving towards the communist movement in 1930, situating the move between the publication of *Los siete locos* (1929) and *Los lanzallamas* (1931) and as coinciding with the ouster of Hipólito Yrigoyen by José Félix Uriburu in the coup of 1930.<sup>3</sup>

Arlt’s legacy as a major contributor to Argentine literature has been recognized and remains undisputed among literary critics today. Although his roots in interwar communist radicalism have been acknowledged, the full implications of situating Arlt in such a way have not yet been explored. That is, his work has not been discussed in terms of forming a part of the communist interwar literary left and its quest for a socially viable form of identity that might shoulder the burden of representing the old left’s class-conscious revolutionary. As a result, the account that sees interwar literary radicalism in Argentina reduced to the antagonism between the Boedo and the Florida groups lingers on, and Arlt’s authorial image continues to be shaped by the aura of someone who exceeded the limits of both groups.<sup>4</sup> As such, Arlt is frequently cited by critics seeking to carve out intermediate spaces and groupings between socially-committed art and the vanguard,<sup>5</sup> and he is sometimes seen as forming part of the Latin American avant-garde.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Fernando Rosenberg discusses Arlt as an example

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<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Sáitta, *El escritor en el bosque de ladrillos: Una biografía de Roberto Arlt* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2000), 176, 270.

<sup>3</sup> Alejandra Laera, *Ficciones del dinero: Argentina, 1890-2001* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 314.

<sup>4</sup> Beatriz Sarlo describes Arlt as “extra-ordinario” and claims that “[d]urante muchos años Arlt fue inclasificable en la literatura Argentina”. “Roberto Arlt, excéntrico”. in *Los Siete Locos, Los Lanzallamas. Edición Crítica*, ed. Mario Goloboff (Madrid: Alicia XX, 2000), xix. More recently, Tavid Mulder argues that Arlt’s *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas* exceed the limits of the realism/modernism divide. While recognizing that the dichotomy between realism and modernism “is a false problem,” he nevertheless affirms the two categories by claiming that Arlt exceeded both instead of re-examining the validity of the two categories and how they are understood in opposition to one another. “Roberto Arlt’s Urban Montage: Forms of Combination in a Peripheral Metropolis,” *Mediations* 31, no. 1 (2017): 88.

<sup>5</sup> Arlt is central to Rocco Carbone’s definition of a third zone in between the socially committed realism of the Boedo group and the avant-garde experiments of the Florida Group. *Imperio de las obsesiones: Los Siete Locos de Roberto Arlt: Un grotexto* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2007). See also Rocco Carbone and Ana Ojeda Bär, “Con los botines de punta: La literatura de Roberto Mariani”, in *Roberto Mariani: Obra completa 1920-1930*, ed. Rocco Carbone and Ana Ojeda Bär (Buenos Aires: El 8vo. loco Ediciones, 2008), 5-16.

<sup>6</sup> Vicky Unruh, *Latin American Vanguards: The Art of Contentious Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 12. Arlt’s work has also been discussed in terms of expressionism. See Maryse Renaud, “*Los siete locos* y *Los lanzallamas*: audacia y candor del expresionismo”, in *Los siete locos, Los lanzallamas: Edición crítica*, ed. Gerardo Mario Goloboff (Madrid: Alicia XX, 2000), 693-94. Naomi Eva Lindstrom, “The World’s Illogic in Two Plays by Argentine Expressionists,” *Latin American Literary Review* 4, no. 8 (1976). Finally, Mulder

of geo-political forms of the avant-garde in Latin America, while Laura Juárez argues that despite Arlt's leftist sympathies, he moved closer to the positions of writers associated with the *Sur* journal, i.e., writers such as Macedonio Fernández and Jorge Luis Borges.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, I follow Sáitza and Laera in situating Arlt within the interwar communist literary left in Buenos Aires, and by extension, within the larger international trajectory of this left. By doing so, I argue for a new interpretation of Arlt's realism. This reading, then, contributes to a new understanding of radical realist aesthetics that emerged during the 1920s and 30s in Buenos Aires and situates itself in relation to communist political and literary praxis of the interwar years.

The following discussion advances two interrelated arguments that both go against the current critical consensus on Roberto Arlt's oeuvre. The former concerns a new reading of Arlt's *Los siete locos* (1929) and *Los lanzallamas* (1931) from the standpoint of Marxist value theory and value-form critique,<sup>8</sup> demonstrating how the materialism of Arlt's novels is grounded in labor. Hence, there is nothing fictitious about this materialism; nor do the novels represent this materialism as purely fictional. Instead, everything is grounded in labor, including money indexed as such by the clear separation between falsified money and "real" money in the novels. This reading goes

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discusses Arlt's aesthetics in terms of expressionism and montage, and he associates these formal qualities with modernism as opposed to realism (70-71). However, the formal innovations Mulder associates with modernism also characterize proletarian realism. In fact, rapid juxtapositions, sketches, montage, experiments with collective narratives, and so on, were central to proletarian realism. To name but one example of how the sketch (or montage) was central to proletarian aesthetics suffice it to cite American writer Mike Gold's manifesto for "Proletarian realism." Here Gold argued that the proper aesthetics of Proletarian Literature involved "[as] few words as possible," "[s]wift action, clear form, the direct line, cinema in words; this seems to be one of the principles of proletarian realism." "Proletarian Realism," *New Masses* 6, no. 4 (1930): 3-4. Gold's novel *Jews Without Money* (1930) makes ample use of these new techniques. The novel serves as the archetypical example of proletarian literature in American letters and Gold was well-known during this period inside and outside the US. For instance, the Argentine communist cultural magazine, *Actualidad*, edited by Elías Castelnuovo and to which Arlt frequently contributed, lists Gold as a contributor and published his writing. Finally, Roberto Mariani's *Cuentos de la oficina* (1925) offers an excellent example of the kind of proletarian realism Gold would later advocate for. A better known novel from Latin American letters is Patricia Galvão's *Parque industrial: Novela proletaria* (1933), a novel that also uses montage to create a collective narrative of working-class women in São Paulo, Brazil.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Juárez, *Roberto Arlt en los años treinta* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Simurg, 2010), 17-19. Fernando Rosenberg, *The Avant-Garde and Geopolitics in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Both approaches are rooted in a reading of Marx's *Capital* that emphasizes Marx's value theory of labor. For an overview of value-theory or crisis-theory see Anwar Sheik, "An Introduction to the History of Crisis Theories in U.S. Capitalism," in *U. S. Capitalism in Crisis* (New York: URPE, 1978). For an introduction to value-form theory in English see Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, and Josh Robinson, eds., *Marxism and the Critique of Value* (Chicago: MCMprime, 2014).

against the canonical interpretation of Arlt in the work of the Argentine literary critic and writer, Ricardo Piglia.<sup>9</sup> This essay historicizes Piglia’s reading and demonstrates to what extent his interpretation involves a creative re-writing of Arlt’s work. By examining the historical context of Piglia’s reading and its roots in the cultural politics of 1940s and 50s Argentina, I challenge Piglia’s stamp on Laera’s definition of Arlt’s *Los siete locos* as “money-fiction”.<sup>10</sup>

Elaborating upon value-form critique as formulated in Moishe Postone’s *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (1993), the second argument presented in this article is based on an analysis of the standpoint of labor as that around which Arlt’s novels are organized. That is, in keeping with the interwar communist left, the novels are structured around the possibility of a class-conscious point of view even if they do not directly depict class-conscious proletarians and focus instead on the salaried masses and their inability to acquire class consciousness. To be clear, what is at stake in my discussion is *not* an argument for including Arlt in the Boedo group nor an argument that seeks to prove that Arlt wrote socialist realism. Instead, I aim for a renewed understanding of 1920s and 30s literary radicalism beyond both the existentialist-infused leftism of David Viñas and the *Contorno* intellectuals and the more postmodern readings offered by Piglia and critics, inspired by his rewriting of Arlt’s place within Argentine literary history.<sup>11</sup> Thus, I aim to supersede the narrow confines of Argentine letters and situate Arlt in the context of the international movement for a radically new realism, often simply termed “proletarian literature” or “proletarian realism” by its practitioners. Well-known contributors to proletarian realism include the German playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht and writer Anna Seghers, French writer André Malraux, American authors Richard Wright, Mike Gold, and John Dos Passos, Japanese writer Takiji Kobayashi, Korean writer Kang Kyeong-ae, Nordic writers Halldór Laxness and Ivar Lo-Johansson, and many others. Within Latin American literary studies, the most commonly-cited practitioners included Peruvian poet César Vallejo and cultural critic José Carlos Mariátegui, Brazilian authors Patrícia Galvão and Jorge

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<sup>9</sup> Ricardo Piglia, “Roberto Arlt: La ficción del dinero”, *Hispanérica* 3, no. 7 (1974). “Roberto Arlt: una crítica de la economía literaria,” *Los libros* 29 (1973).

<sup>10</sup> Discussed in more detail below, the distinction between *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas* is quite important to Laera’s reading of Arlt. For Laera, only *Los siete locos* is an example of “money-fiction,” 312-15.

<sup>11</sup> A notable exception can be found in Julio Prieto’s discussion of Arlt’s theatrical writings, in which Prieto associates Arlt’s work with Bertolt Brecht’s estrangement effect (g. Verfremdungseffekt). “Los dos “Saverios”: delirio, poder y espectáculo en Roberto Arlt”, *Iberoamericana* (2001-) 10, no. 38 (2010).

Amado, Ecuadorian writer Jorge Icaza, Chilean writers Nicomedes Guzmán and Volodia Teitelboim, Mexican writers Lorenzo Turrent Rozas and José Mancisidor, and in the plastic arts, Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera and David Álvaro Siqueiros.<sup>12</sup> Once the full implications of situating Arlt's *Los siete locos* and *Los Lanzallamas* within this trajectory are elaborated, the Arlt that emerges is quite in keeping with the communist interwar literary left and its quest for a literary but also politically effective representation of a revolutionary agent.

### *Interwar Communism Revisited*

Alongside reading Arlt as a contributor to interwar literary radicalism, this essay seeks to ground that reading in Marxist value-form theory and in the world-systems approach to the historical development of capitalism via cycles of accumulation.<sup>13</sup> For this approach, “periphery” is not synonymous with the notion that alternative modernities emerge through the interaction between local cultures and modernity as a social process.<sup>14</sup> Rather, periphery simply indicates specific locations within the world system that are peripheral in geographical and developmental terms to the centers of capital accumulation. The dynamic between centers and peripheries is continually in flux. And yet, once capitalism becomes not only formally but substantially global, and once every society on the planet has been integrated, however unevenly, into the world

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<sup>12</sup> While a detailed discussion of the Latin American proletarian-centered literary left is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is necessary to point out the lack of studies that treat committed literary realist aesthetics across national boundaries within Latin America and Latin American literary studies. While the Latin American avant-garde has received such attention, the proletarian-centered left has not been studied outside particular national literatures. For example, in a chapter devoted to three proletarian novels from different national traditions within Latin America, Bruce Dean Willis notes how these have never been studied in relation to one another even if they are well-known within their respective national literary traditions. See *Corporeality in Early Twentieth-Century Latin American Literature: Body Articulations* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 129-64. For a transnational study on the Latin American avant-garde see Unruh. See also an overview of the “boom” in studies on the Latin American avant-garde in Hubert Pöppel, “Nuevos estudios sobre las vanguardias en América Latina”, *Iberoamericana* (2001-) 9, no. 35 (2009).

<sup>13</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> The concept “alternative modernities” refers here to the discussion offered by Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, for example in “On Alternative Modernities” in *Alternative Modernities*, ed. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). In his contribution, Gaonkar presents modernity as an inescapable condition while also emphasizing the multiple ways in which specific cultures interact with that condition. Thus, as opposed to Fredric Jameson’s emphasis on modernity as singular, Gaonkar contributes to the growing field of studies devoted to the exploration of multiple forms of modernities.

market, the law of value mediates all social formations and economies.<sup>15</sup> This is much unlike earlier historical “cycles”—e.g., during the colonial period in Latin America—when a form of semi-feudalism still persisted in much of the region.<sup>16</sup>

Although the British Empire possessed hegemonic authority over capital accumulation during the long 19th century, this does not indicate the simplistic positing of England as the center of the world system and places like Argentina as peripheral. Instead, each location features a complex coexistence between development and underdevelopment; center and periphery. For instance, in the early 20th century, Buenos Aires was the outpost of the British Empire in Latin America and as such featured a highly developed bureaucratic center for British capitalism in Latin America. By the 1920s and the early 30s, the British Empire had suffered through the long crisis-ridden period of 1873-1896 and World War I (1914-1918). When considered in relation to Giovanni Arrighi’s cycles of accumulation, the period between 1870-1930 is marked by the overlapping of the British and the USA cycles of accumulation. While the USA would emerge as the undisputed leader in capital accumulation in the early 1940s, this was not necessarily clear during the interwar period (1918-1939). Instead, this period was a volatile time of overlapping accumulation regimes (see, in this regard, the crises of the late 1800s—reaching Argentina in 1890 with the collapse of the stock market<sup>17</sup>—as well as the world-wide crisis of 1929.)<sup>18</sup>

It was within the vacuum created by overlapping accumulation cycles that the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 took place. Unlike the revolutions Karl Marx and Frederick Engels predicted in their 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, both revolutions took place in societies that were characterized by the lack of industrialization and by semi-feudalist social relations. In this context there appeared a new generation of Marxist thinkers. This generation included Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky, Rudolf Hilferding, Otto Bauer, and Nikolai Bukharin. And, as Perry Anderson notes, although differing among themselves, these Marxists all

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<sup>15</sup> See Moishe Postone, “Critique and Historical Transformation,” *Historical Materialism* 12, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed treatment of the interplay between temporal and geographical axes of capital accumulation see David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital: New and Fully Updated Version* (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> For discussion of the collapse of the Argentine stock market in relationship to Argentine literature see Ericka Beckman, *Capital Fictions: The Literature of Latin America’s Export Age* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 83-120. Laera, 69-108.

<sup>18</sup> For a concise and informative treatment of the similarities and differences between the British- and USA-led accumulation cycles see Giovanni Arrighi, “The Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence,” *New Left Review* 20 (2003).

turned their attention to topics left underdeveloped in Marx's own work, such as finance, monopolization, imperialism, and political theory.<sup>19</sup> In doing so, they made significant advances on the first generation of Marxist thinkers, including Karl Kautsky, Franz Mehring, and others, and began reconsidering the political role played by industrial workers. Furthermore, the generation radicalized before World War I broke out saw the collapse of the Second International in 1916, the victory of the Russian Revolution in 1917, and the founding of the Third International or the Comintern in 1919. As World War I and the Russian Revolution came to an end, what would later come to be known as Western Marxism began to emerge in the works of Marxist intellectuals such as Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Karl Korsch, Ernst Bloch, and others.<sup>20</sup> This generation turned its attention to the subject/object dialectic in Marxist theory and, building upon what had become the dominant political theory of the day (Marxism-Leninism), posited a necessary mediation between the objective conditions and subjective categories such as commitment.

Above all, the interwar communist left was characterized by the introduction of class consciousness as a necessary mediation between the proletariat in its objective conditions and the political commitment of the proletariat as a subject. Of course, the formulation of this mediation took on different forms. For Lenin, the nationalism of the oppressed provided a pathway towards revolutionary consciousness, and in the late 1920s under the slogan of the national self-determination thesis, Lenin's approach became the official policy of the Comintern in Moscow. Other examples include Lukács's theorization of class consciousness as distinct from the empirically given and the standpoint of labor as the only point from which to achieve class consciousness. Problematic as Lukács's theorization may be, his account nevertheless assumes that moving from mere proletarian existence to class-conscious revolutionary activity is no easy transition. In fact, Lukács's concept of 'reification' assumes that consciousness is socially molded, thus making it quite difficult to theorize class consciousness.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Antonio Gramsci's contribution can also be understood in this context as well, i.e., as developing parallel to Lukács's work and in response to the Second

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<sup>19</sup> Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1979), 7-13.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>21</sup> For discussion on this aspect of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) see Neil Larsen, "Lukács *sans* Proletariat, or Can *History and Class Consciousness* Be Rehistoricized?," in *Georg Lukács: the Fundamental Dissonance of Existence: Aesthetics, Politics, Literature*, eds. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London: Continuum, 2011).

International’s sociological understanding of the working-class in reformist terms, as well as the failed revolutions of 1919-20.

In the Latin American context, Mariátegui’s interwar Leninism took a different form.<sup>22</sup> Instead of a geographical or nationalist mediation (such as in the Leninist self-determination thesis), his conception of the Inka subject introduces a temporal or historical mediation between the class-in-itself and the class-for-itself. Mariátegui argued that the applicability of the national self-determination thesis was complicated by the particular socio-economic structures of the Andean region, and, of course, the fact that the local national bourgeoisie did not share a language, culture, or other forms of communal identity with the proletarian indigenous masses of the area.<sup>23</sup> Although Mariátegui’s position was at odds with that of the Third International, it is necessary to recognize the real specificity of Mariátegui’s Leninism. Even if Lenin argued for the national self-determination thesis, and even if Mariátegui’s opposition to this thesis might seem to place him at odds with Lenin, it is still important to accept the real breadth of the political landscape at the time and in particular in the Marxist-Leninist conception of the proletariat during the interwar period. Both Mariátegui’s analysis of the Inka subject as providing a pathway towards a revolutionary proletarian subject, and Lenin’s emphasis on national self-determination as a step towards genuine revolutionary struggle, are based on the non-mechanical conception of the proletariat that was central to the communist interwar left. Thus, Mariátegui’s congruences with the canon of Western Marxism should be recognized and even underscored, despite their simultaneous anchoring in different historical conditions specific to Peru.<sup>24</sup> As with Lenin before him, Mariátegui advocated for a revolutionary subject position as a merger between a pre-capitalist subject and the modern proletariat. Thus, the interwar communist left’s proletariat was an elastic subject position that encompassed both the temporal conception of Mariátegui’s pre-capitalist Inka subject/the proletariat and the

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<sup>22</sup> As Marc Becker points out, the Leninism of Mariátegui’s politics is best observed in Mariátegui’s draft for “the founding principles of the Peruvian Socialist Party” (1928). *Mariátegui and Latin American Marxist Theory* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1993), 38.

<sup>23</sup> See *El movimiento revolucionario latinoamericano. Conferencia Comunista Latino Americana*, Documentos de la Internacional Comunista (Buenos Aires: La Correspondencia Sudamericana, 1929), 279. Reprinted in José Carlos Mariátegui, “Ideología y política”, in *Mariátegui total (tomo I)*, ed. Sandro Mariátegui Chiappe (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1994), 197-99. For Becker’s discussion of Mariátegui’s stance see “Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America,” *Science and Society* 70, no. 4 (2006).

<sup>24</sup> For example, Perry Anderson does not include Mariátegui in his discussion of Western Marxism.



more nationalist proletarian subject of the national self-determination thesis. Of course, the two subject positions were not easily reconciled, hence Mariátegui's quarrel with the Communist Party in Argentina.

During the interwar period, the Argentine Communist Party was an important point of connection between the Latin American region and the Comintern, in particular after the founding of the South American Bureau in Buenos Aires. Along with the Caribbean Bureau in New York, most communication between Communist Parties in Latin America and the Comintern went through those Bureaus.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the Argentine Communist Party is often characterized as more orthodox and in line with the Comintern than other parties in Latin America. The Argentine Communist Party and its two most important leaders, Victorio Codovilla and Rodolfo Ghioldi, are often described as more dogmatic than Mariátegui.<sup>26</sup> Following a successful meeting of various labor leaders in Montevideo, Uruguay, Codovilla asked Mariátegui for papers on the topic of race in Latin America for the first Latin American Congress of the Comintern that was held in Buenos Aires in June, 1929.<sup>27</sup> Codovilla based this request on Mariátegui's submission of a paper featuring a socio-economic analysis of indigenous oppression in the region to the meeting in Montevideo. Following the request for papers from Codovilla, Mariátegui submitted three papers on the oppression of indigenous people in Peru in relation to race and imperialism.<sup>28</sup> In these

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<sup>25</sup> Manuel Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern, 1919-1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 27-33.

<sup>26</sup> The Communist Party in Buenos Aires, and in particular its two leaders Victorio Codovilla and Rodolfo Ghioldi, were known for their orthodox and somewhat dogmatic stances. For Sheldon B. Liss's brief account on Codovilla and Ghioldi see *Marxist Thought in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 51-59. For a more detailed discussion on Codovilla and Ghioldi see *Diccionario biográfico de la izquierda argentina: de los anarquistas a la "nueva izquierda" 1870-1976* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007), 136-42, 251-56. Michael Löwy and Michael Pearlman contrast the more specifically Latin American approaches to Marxism one finds in Mariátegui and Julio Antonio Mella, the founder of the Cuban Communist Party who was executed during his exile in Mexico, with that of Codovilla, whom they characterize as a Stalinist. "Introduction: Points of Reference for a History of Marxism in Latin America," in *Marxism in Latin America from 1909 to the Present: An Anthology* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992), xxiii.

<sup>27</sup> Originally, the plan for the meeting did not include a discussion of the topic of race and only listed the peasant-question as a topic. However, the topics of race and racial inequalities in Latin America were added to the program as a requirement that came from Jules Humbert-Droz, a delegate who represented the Comintern. See Becker, "Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America," 459-60; Francisca da Gamma, "La Internacional Comunista, Mariátegui y el 'descubrimiento' del indígena", *Anuario Mariáteguiano* 9, no. 9 (1997).

<sup>28</sup> The papers presented on behalf of Mariátegui at the Buenos Aires conference were reprinted as chapters in *Ideología y política* (1969) under the following titles: "El problema de las razas en la América Latina", "Punto de vista anti-imperialista" and "Antecedentes y desarrollo de la acción clasista". Mariátegui, 167-95, 96-99, 200-03.

papers, Mariátegui took a critical stance against the national self-determination thesis and as a result the Buenos Aires Congress resulted in deep divisions between Mariátegui and the Argentine Communist Party.<sup>29</sup>

Although Roberto Arlt never wrote a comprehensive theoretical account of class consciousness and its role for the revolutionary struggle, his work did, in effect, take part in this discussion. In fact, in his writing for *Bandera Roja*, the daily newspaper of the Argentine Communist Party, Arlt discusses the problem of consciousness for political organizing and the role that petit-bourgeois intellectuals and writers, such as himself, might take in that struggle. In 1932, Rodolfo Ghioldi recruited Arlt, along with Argentine writer Elías Castelnuovo,<sup>30</sup> to write columns for *Bandera Roja*. The recruitment of Arlt and Castelnuovo was part of the party’s attempt to reach out to intellectuals and writers. As Hernán Camarero notes, the Argentine Party encountered difficulties in attracting and retaining writers and intellectuals, most of whom remained fellow travelers and did not formally join the party. Camarero and José Aricó note that this was a result of the party’s emphasis on workerism. In short, intellectuals, writers, and artists were in danger of being “definidos bajo el peyorativo término de pequeñoburgueses, propensos a todo tipo de desviaciones”.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, both Castelnuovo and Arlt were labeled as such, and both ended up leaving *Bandera Roja*.

Arlt’s articles in *Bandera Roja* were published under the title “Roberto Arlt escribe...”, a title that recognizes the privileged place of Arlt in Argentine journalism at the time. Already, Arlt was well known for his writing for *El Mundo* and other periodicals so that his contribution to *Bandera Roja* lent the publication prestige.<sup>32</sup> However, Arlt’s relationship with the journal was short lived. After publishing two essays, Arlt wrote a column titled “El bacilo de Carlos Marx”. In this piece, Arlt discussed the importance of spreading the germs of Marx and noted how the disease of Marxism was already infecting the bourgeoisie and in particular its daughters; Arlt

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<sup>29</sup> For Aníbal Quijano’s account of Mariátegui’s debates with the Communist Party in Buenos Aires see “Reencuentro y debate”, in *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* by José Carlos Mariátegui (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2007), c-cix. See also Becker, *Mariátegui and Latin American Marxist Theory*, 48-49.

<sup>30</sup> Argentine writer Elías Castelnuovo is the writer most readily associated with the Argentine social novel and the Boedo group. See Leonardo Candiano and Lucas Peralta, *Boedo, orígenes de una literatura militante: Historia del primer movimiento cultural de la izquierda argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del CCC, 2007), 13-40.

<sup>31</sup> Hernán Camarero, *A la conquista de la clase obrera: Los comunistas y el mundo del trabajo en la Argentina, 1920-1935* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI), 265. José Aricó, “La polémica Arlt-Ghioldi: Arlt y los comunistas,” *La ciudad futura* 3: 22.

<sup>32</sup> Both Drucaroff and Saítta discuss the importance of Arlt’s journalism and the name he had acquired for himself based on his journalism. Saítta, 68-92. Drucaroff, 340-41.

identified the movies as a site for spreading the germs of Marxism, especially amongst the female population.<sup>33</sup> Ghioldi responded to this piece with a harsh critique of Arlt's individualism and misguided understanding of the principles of Marxism. According to Ghioldi, Arlt had failed to understand the role of petty-bourgeois intellectuals as subordinated to the working class in the revolutionary struggle. To speak of spreading the germs of Marx, thus, was to misunderstand the primary role played by the working class in the revolutionary struggle.<sup>34</sup> Arlt responded, and citing *The ABC of Communism* (1919)<sup>35</sup>, posed a relatively simple question: What role should the intellectual assume if the vast majority of workers and peasants were not already committed communists?<sup>36</sup> To this question, Ghioldi never replied, and the debate was closed with an article titled "La cuestión Arlt" that included a short note on how Ghioldi was too busy to respond.<sup>37</sup>

Leaving aside Arlt's argument with Ghioldi, by extension the predictably raised issue is entirely in line with the more general sweep of the interwar communist left. Furthermore, the question provides an insight into Arlt's literary output during this period. Workerism such as it was practiced by the Argentine Party was only one face of interwar Communism, and it was accompanied by critiques and questions such as the one posed by Arlt. This question was central to the Leninist self-determination thesis as well as Mariátegui's formulation of modern Peruvian proletarians needing a myth for their struggle. Both Lenin and Mariátegui recognized the gap between the working class as an object of capitalist development and as the subject of revolutionary change, and each attempted to bridge that gap. In short, Mariátegui's myth and Lenin's nationalism of the oppressed were understood as critical mediating moments between the two positions. As Arlt recognized in his own defense against the criticism of Ghioldi, "[de] cien proletarios...90 ignoran quién es Carlos Marx...pero 90 pueden contestarle en qué estilo daba besos Rodolfo Valentino, y qué bigote usa José Mogica".<sup>38</sup> Clearly,

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<sup>33</sup> First published in *Bandera Roja* in 1932, the article is reprinted with an introduction by José Aricó in Roberto Arlt, "El bacilo de Carlos Marx", *La ciudad futura* 3 (1986): 23. As Valeria de los Ríos points out, the effect of cinema on women remained a topic of further journalistic writing for Arlt. See Valeria de los Ríos, "El cine y la invención de la vida moderna en las crónicas de Roberto Arlt," *MLN* 124, no. 2 (2009): 470-71.

<sup>34</sup> Reprinted in Rodolfo Ghioldi, "Sobre el bacilo de Marx", *La ciudad futura* 3 (1986): 23-24.

<sup>35</sup> Originally published in 1919, this introduction to the political doctrine of communism was written by Nikolai Bukharin and E.A. Preobrazhensky.

<sup>36</sup> Reprinted in Roberto Arlt, "Ghioldi y el bacilo de Marx", *La ciudad futura* 3 (1986): 25.

<sup>37</sup> Reprinted in "La cuestión Arlt", *La ciudad futura* 3 (1986): 25. See also Saítta, 161-8. Camarero, 270-3.

<sup>38</sup> Arlt, "Ghioldi y el bacilo de Marx", 25. See discussion on Rodolfo Valentino in de los Ríos, 468-69.

Mariátegui’s theoretical contributions to interwar Marxism were more substantial than Arlt’s attention to popular mass culture. However, both were concerned with the distance between what Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) termed the empirically-given consciousness of the working class and proletarian class consciousness. Furthermore, it is important to stress that Arlt was not alone in recognizing the power of popular culture and how such culture had the potential to mold the consciousness of the masses. In this context, his question was entirely legitimate and had been raised earlier by Marxist theorists, and would continue to be central to Marxist debates.

Indeed, popular and mass-produced cultural production was central to the interwar communist left. Beginning with Lukács’s work on reification, the Frankfurt school devoted considerable attention to the topic, resulting in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/1947).<sup>39</sup> In *The Salaried Masses* (1930), Siegfried Kracauer notes that the proletarianization of the professional classes, civil servants, and salaried employees is beyond dispute. Here, Kracauer draws on new work in sociology regarding the impoverished and proletarianized professional classes.<sup>40</sup> He goes on to examine various aspects of their existence in cities such as Berlin and documents how precarious this sector of the working class is as they are discarded by their employers in favor of younger, faster, and more adaptable workers. In contrast to industrial workers, Kracauer observes, the new masses of salaried employees are “spiritually homeless,” and fail to “find their way to their comrades, [as] the house of bourgeois ideas and feelings in which they used to live [...] collapse[s], its foundations eroded by economic development.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, in keeping with the interwar left, Kracauer emphasizes the difficulties posed by this new proletarianized group for traditional Marxism such as the one promoted by Ghioldi in his response to Arlt. That is, in Ghioldi’s account no attention is paid to the new emerging middle class of Buenos Aires nor is their role in the working-class struggle recognized. Instead, Ghioldi declares

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<sup>39</sup> De los Ríos also draws a parallel between Arlt’s discussion of popular culture and Adorno and Horkheimer’s writing on the culture industry, 471.

<sup>40</sup> In *The Salaried Masses*, Kracauer references Emil Lederer’s work. Emil Lederer was a pioneer in studying the middle classes. He published a summary on the topic with Jakob Marshak in 1926, which is the document Kracauer refers to in *The Salaried Masses*. In 1937, the study was published in English as “The New Middle Class” (New York: Columbia University, 1937).

<sup>41</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany* (London: Verso, 1998), 88.

that petit-bourgeois writers, artists, and intellectuals are subordinate to the working class in the revolutionary struggle.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast, Arlt's response to Ghioldi's article emphasizes that the role of the writer is to write about his/her own class. Thus,

Si, según la definición de Ghioldi, yo soy un literato "pequeñoburgués", en conciencia, no puedo tratar sino fenómenos y problemas que se relacionan con la clase pequeñoburguesa a quien las ruinas económicas, hacen evolucionar hacía el comunismo como lo demuestran Marx y Lenin y en su estudio de clases Engels.<sup>43</sup>

Citing the French naturalist writer Émile Zola, Arlt argued that according to Ghioldi's own definition of Arlt as a petit-bourgeois writer, he was effectively incapable of writing on topics other than those concerning the petit-bourgeoisie. Arlt rendered as contradictory Ghioldi's complaint that Arlt, in citing female movie-goers of Buenos Aires, ignored the more important issues facing working-class women:

Yo he hablado en mí artículo de "El bacilo de Carlos Marx" de un problema pequeñoburgués. Y he hablado por que lo conocía. Lo que a mí me parece que Ghioldi no conoce, volviendo a la "mujer que va al cine" es el público proletario femenino que concurre al cine ... al cine de aquí ... y al cine de Rio de Janeiro.<sup>44</sup>

After *Bandera Roja* closed the debate with the article "La cuestión Arlt," Arlt left the journal and distanced himself from the Communist Party, along with Elías Castelnuovo.<sup>45</sup> However, Arlt and Castelnuovo continued their work on *Actualidad*, a communist journal devoted to politics, culture, and the arts, edited by Castelnuovo, as well as their collaborative work on the union of proletarian writers in Argentina. Furthermore, the following period saw Arlt turn towards radical theatrical experiments with the Teatro del Pueblo in Buenos Aires. Thus, the debate with Ghioldi did not signal the end of Arlt's involvement with interwar leftist radicalism in Buenos Aires.<sup>46</sup>

It would be easy to cast Arlt as the winner of the debate with Ghioldi and to credit him with having had views too complex and unorthodox for the Argentine Communist Party,<sup>47</sup> and even as aligning him with later theoretical contributions on

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<sup>42</sup> Ghioldi, 23-24.

<sup>43</sup> Roberto Arlt, "Ghioldi y el bacilo de Marx", 25.

<sup>44</sup> "Ghioldi y el bacilo de Marx", 25.

<sup>45</sup> *Diccionario biográfico de la izquierda argentina*, 128.

<sup>46</sup> In fact, Alejandra Laera argues that the 30s saw increased radicalization on behalf of Arlt and she discusses several publications from the 30s that demonstrate quite well his political leanings during this period, 305-15.

<sup>47</sup> This is the argument that David Viñas makes in his article for *Contorno* under the pseudonym Gorini. In this article, he claims Arlt's spirit to be too individualistic, demonic, and aggressive for him to ever adhere to the dogmatic left of the Communist Party. Gorini, 8.

post-Fordist production. However, this would be a mistake since the quarrel features two sides of a debate that was central to interwar communism. To be sure, Ghioldi's account is in line with the classical Marxist tradition of the 19th century, a tradition that saw class struggle as forming a part of industrialization and factory production. Meanwhile, Arlt's defense reverberates with arguments made by interwar Marxist intellectuals. While interwar Marxist intellectuals, including Lenin, Luxemburg, Lukács, Gramsci, Mariátegui et al., certainly worked within the framework carved out by Marx and Engels and the interpretation of their work that guided the first generation of Marxist thinkers (Kautsky et al.), they also initiated a new tradition. This newer tradition focused on the question of how to raise class consciousness amongst the impoverished working-class masses, proletarianized petit-bourgeois white-collar workers, peasants, oppressed national and/or racial minorities, women, and many other groups that were not necessarily directly involved in industrial production. Arlt's literary output of the 1920s and the early 30s appears parallel to these developments and in direct relation to the socio-economic landscape of Buenos Aires at the time. This landscape was shaped by the place of Buenos Aires as a strategic and indeed vital point within the British Empire and as the locus of British command within the Latin American region.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Arlt was not alone in focusing on the newly emerging salaried masses of Buenos Aires in the 1920s and the early 30s. For instance, the Boedo writer Roberto Mariani (1893-1946) in his *Cuentos de la oficina* (1925) produces an account of the miserable working conditions of this class in Argentina at the time.<sup>49</sup> Alberto Pineta (1906-1971) deals with this social class in *Miseria de quinta edición: cuentos de la ciudad* (1928) while Josefina Marpons' *44 horas semanales* (1936) focuses on female department store

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<sup>48</sup> For a concise overview of the political and economic landscape of the 1930s in Argentina see Roy Hora, “The Impact of the Depression on Argentine Society,” in *The Great Depression in Latin America*, ed. Paulo Drinot and Alan Knight (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Although few studies have been devoted to Mariani's work, he is frequently invoked in discussions of other writers. See Candiano and Peralta, 226-31. Gabriela García Cedro, *Boedo y Florida: una antología crítica* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 2006), 482-83. Carbone and Ojeda Bär, 5-57. Esteban V. Da Ré, “Boedo, el problema del realismo y las operaciones de la crítica literaria: el caso de Cuentos de la oficina, de Roberto Mariani,” in *Escenario móvil: Cuestiones de representación*, ed. Susana Cella (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 2012), 163-78. Carla D. Benisz, “Roberto Mariani, en la encrucijada de la vanguardia,” in *Literatura y contrabegemonía en la Argentina moderna*, ed. Roberto Retamoso and María Fernanda Alle (Rosario: Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de Rosario, 2013). See also Paul R. Jordan, *The Author in the Office: Narrative Writing in Twentieth-Century Argentina and Uruguay* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2006). Christopher Towne Leland, *The Last Happy Men: The Generation of 1922, Fiction and the Argentine Reality* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

workers.<sup>50</sup> Yet another example is Aristóbulo Echegaray's poetry in *Poeta empleadillo* and *Versos del Emigrante*.<sup>51</sup>

Central to the narratives that have been associated with social literature (*la literatura social*) of the interwar period in Argentina is the proletarianized middle class of Buenos Aires. While Arlt did not belong to the Boedo group and did not publish his early works with presses associated with the group, he addressed the same socio-economic conditions as did his peers who were directly involved with the Boedo group, such as Mariani.<sup>52</sup> More importantly, Arlt's approach to this class is not at odds with the interwar communist left in Buenos Aires or elsewhere. In keeping with the workerism of the interwar left, the middle classes are not portrayed as agents of revolutionary change.<sup>53</sup> Instead, and as in Kracauer's discussion cited above and Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, they are portrayed as less likely to find unity in the struggle than workers—perhaps even incapable of such a commitment. Now, this is not to say that further work has not been done on the middle classes and their political activity. Instead, the point is to chart the historical context of Arlt's *Los siete locos* and *Los llanzallamas*. In short, Arlt—along with Lukács, Mariátegui, Gramsci, Lenin, et al.—is thoroughly embedded within a framework that Moishe Postone, in *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, characterizes as “traditional Marxism.”

#### *Roberto Arlt: The Fiction of Labor*

*Los siete locos* (1929) by Roberto Arlt opens with Remo Erdosain, a debt-collector who works for a sugar-company, marching the streets of Buenos Aires. Erdosain is in crisis mode at the beginning of *Los siete locos*, since he has been stealing

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<sup>50</sup> Little scholarship exists on Josefina Marpons. For discussion on her work see Adriana J. Bergero, *Intersecting Tango: Cultural Geographies of Buenos Aires, 1900-1930* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 180-82. David William Foster, *Social Realism in the Argentine Narrative* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 143-49. Francine Masiello, *Between Civilization and Barbarism: Women, Nation and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 183-87.

<sup>51</sup> Aristóbulo Echegaray is sometimes defined as a member of the Boedo group. Candiano and Peralta, 77-80.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 262-65.

<sup>53</sup> In his discussion on betrayal in Arlt's work, Ben Bollig notes how tied this theme in Arlt's literature is to the exploration of themes such as collective solidarity and class consciousness. Bollig charts a development from *El juguete rabioso* (1926) to *El criador de gorilas* (1936), noting that the development of betrayal serves as a means of individual advancement within society, often involving betraying friends and people of one's own class, and fosters the development of interracial solidarity against an oppressive boss in *El criador de gorilas*. “One or Several Betrayals? Or, When Is Betrayal Treason? Genet, Arlt and the Argentine Liberal Project,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 22, no. 4 (2003).

money from his employer who has found out about his scheme. As a debt-collector, Erdosain has been running a credit by delaying the delivery of payments he collects. This has led him to accumulate a debt of 600 pesos and 7 cents, money that he has spent on frivolous consumer goods, extravagant tips, gifts to beggars, prostitutes, and so on. While Erdosain had planned on using the money to invest in producing his inventions,<sup>54</sup> he has only spent 200 pesos on setting up a workshop in the home of a lumpen-proletarian family, whom he employs to produce one of his inventions, a galvanized metallic flower. In short, Erdosain has been playing the game of financialization and profiting from delaying payments. However, at the outset of the novel, when he has been found out, reality has returned with a vengeance since Erdosain’s employer demands payment at once. There is nothing fictional about Erdosain’s accumulation of his debt; he needs to pay back what he took or else he will go to prison. Like all financial bubbles, this one returns to point zero in a crash and the anguish Erdosain suffers in part of this crisis.<sup>55</sup> El Rufián Melancólico (the Melancholic Thug) pays Erdosain’s debt and thus bails him out with profits from his business of prostituting three women. Again, there is nothing fantastic about this scenario either; only real money, regardless of how that money is obtained, can repay Erdosain’s debt.

In *Los siete locos* and *Los llanzallamas*, it is quite clear that obtaining “real money” is rooted in labor. This labor is not the productive labor of industrialized production. Instead, labor is traced back to the prostitution that is the source of el Rufián Melancólico’s wealth and the plans that el Astrólogo (the Astrologer) has for his secret society. In both cases, women’s labor of selling their bodies forms the basis of wealth. In the case of el Rufián Melancólico it is a question of simply working as a low-class pimp, profiting from selling the bodies/labor of the women he runs, while in the case of el Astrólogo prostitution is the labor that forms the base of his plan for a future dystopian industrialist society. Or, as el Astrólogo explains to his followers: “La base más sólida de la parte económica de nuestra sociedad, son los prostíbulos”.<sup>56</sup> Although

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<sup>54</sup> It is well known that Arlt also worked as an inventor and purchased patents for his inventions. For discussion on Arlt’s inventions and his treatment of technology in his novels see Robert Scari, “Roberto Arlt: El periodista, el inventor, el polemista,” *Revista chilena de Literatura*, no. 22 (1983) and J. Andrew Brown, *Test Tube Envy: Science and Power in Argentine Narrative* (Bucknell: Rosemont Publishing, 2005), 97-124. See also Beatriz Sarlo’s discussion of Arlt and technology in *La imaginación técnica: Sueños modernos de la cultura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1992).

<sup>55</sup> Bergero, 309-10. Jaime Giordano, “Roberto Arlt o la metafísica del siervo”, *Atenea* 45 (1968): 75.

<sup>56</sup> Roberto Arlt, *Los siete locos*, ed. David Viñas, *Obras Tomo I: Novelas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 2008), 289.



prostitution is not productive labor in the strict sense of Marx's definition of the term,<sup>57</sup> it serves as an apt metaphor for the source of wealth within the traditional Marxist framework. The profession captures the condition of selling one's labor-power/body for a circumscribed time and of exploitation, in the Marxist sense of the laborer's work providing the basis for profit.<sup>58</sup> In Arlt's work, prostitution is not portrayed in the style of the naturalist novel of the turn of the century—as an example of the degeneration and corruption of urban city life. Instead, prostitution figures as an allegory for labor in capitalist society and, interestingly, women's bodily labor is squarely situated at the heart of both the petit-capitalist endeavor of el Rufián Melancólico and the large-scale plan for el Astrólogo's fascist society.<sup>59</sup>

In Arlt's *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, labor and the exploitation of labor forms the material basis of the society portrayed in the novels. Even if only expressed as an allegory, such grounding in labor is in keeping with traditional Marxism broadly construed. As Postone characterizes traditional Marxism, labor is central to the analysis:

Within this general framework, then, Marx's critical analysis of capitalism is primarily a critique of exploitation from the standpoint of labor: it demystifies capitalist society, first, by revealing labor to be the true source of social wealth, and second, by demonstrating that society rests upon a system of exploitation.<sup>60</sup>

Postone argues that traditional Marxism was hampered by a transhistorical understanding of labor that obfuscated the nature of labor under capitalism. Yet—and leaving aside Postone's critique of traditional Marxism for now—Postone's definition of "traditional Marxism" is useful for a fuller understanding of the degree to which Arlt's two novels are infused with the standpoint of labor. Furthermore, Postone's definition of traditional Marxism encompasses the two sides of the debate between Arlt and Ghioldi discussed above. Thus, against the claim that Arlt's position was difficult and at odds with the literary camp associated with interwar communism, Postone's definition of traditional Marxism reveals how embedded within this framework the debate was. Even if Arlt does not portray industrial workers and their awakening to

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<sup>57</sup> The definition of "productive labor" is not constant throughout Marx's work. For an overview of the use of this term in Marx, Ian Gough, "Marx's Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labor," *New Left Review* 76 (1972).

<sup>58</sup> In fact, when Erdosain asks el Rufián Melancólico whether basing the future society on the exploitation of female sexuality is moral, el Rufián Melancólico compares prostitution to industrial labor. Arlt, *Los siete locos*, 195.

<sup>59</sup> For a study on the fascist ideology of el Astrólogo see José Amicola, *Astrología y fascismo en la obra de Roberto Arlt* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 1994). Beatriz Pastor Bodmer, *Roberto Arlt y la rebelión alienada* (Gaithersburg: Ediciones Hispamérica, 1980), 98-108.

<sup>60</sup> Postone, 8.

class consciousness, his analysis of Erdosain’s anxious-ridden existence as an employee is grounded in the standpoint of labor.

In Arlt, no distinction is made between productive and unproductive labor nor is the precise nature of value under capitalism explained in economic terms. Instead, “real money” is rooted in prostitution and debt-collection (labor) while stealing and inventing schemes for quick gains are portrayed as fantasies or illusions. One such illusion is el Astrólogo’s secret society that Erdosain falls for. Another one is Erdosain’s fraud that allows him to subtract money from circulation by delaying delivering payments for the debts he collects. The difference that Erdosain extracts from circulation suggests that he can create wealth from nothing, i.e., creates the illusion that he has committed the perfect “poetic” crime of creating value/money without production, without any new input into the economy. And yet, *Los siete locos* begins with the realization that Erdosain’s scheme no longer works as he has been found out and needs to pay back the money he owes. From the standpoint of Marxian value-theory, this is a textbook example for the way finance works under capitalism: “Marxian value theory [...] understands finance [...] as nonproductive. Finance is rather the struggle over extant profits and a claim on future productive labor.”<sup>61</sup> As no such labor is forthcoming in Erdosain’s scheme (or, at least is forestalled as his production of the metallic flower is halted by a lack of funds to continue the production), crisis is imminent. Since no new value has been generated, Erdosain’s only hope is to replace the stolen money and pay his debt.

Thus, even if the Arltian scenario allows for the creation of a bubble and momentary growth without productive investment, this bubble is brought to a reckoning with the reality principle of capitalism: the law of value. Value, of course, is an abstraction—and as such “immaterial”—based on the time socially necessary for the production of a given product, and yet, as Sohn-Rethel reminds us, this abstraction forms the real material basis for the accumulation of capital.<sup>62</sup> For Marxist value-theory, “the total labor inputs for the entire economy [...] must equal total output prices,” and “the total of surplus value must equal total real profit.”<sup>63</sup> This account is based on the very real and material foundations of the capitalist world system, and consequently, money is not without its foundation either. In short, and as Marx’s lengthy discussion on coats and linen in chapter one of *Capital* demonstrates, there is nothing peculiar or

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<sup>61</sup> Joshua Clover, “Value Theory Crisis,” *PMLA* 127, no. 1 (2012): 110.

<sup>62</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

<sup>63</sup> Clover, 108.

enigmatic about the role played by money as the universal equivalent measuring the value of commodities.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to the value-theoretical understanding of the workings of the capitalist world system, Argentine writer and literary critic Ricardo Piglia emphasizes how money has no material foundation. According to Piglia, the falsifying or printing of money is the moment when capitalism expresses its poetic nature, its fictitious aspects. In the early 1970s, he published articles on Roberto Arlt, where he stressed this aspect of Arlt's novels. Piglia's reading of Arlt has dominated his reception history and continues to be influential, most recently in Laera's *Ficciones del dinero*.<sup>65</sup> However, this reading is rooted in a complex process of re-evaluating Arlt's contribution to Argentine literary history, most significantly the early interventions of the *Contorno* intellectuals in the 1950s.<sup>66</sup> Although the origin of Piglia's reading of Arlt can be found in the work of Argentine literary critic David Viñas,<sup>67</sup> Piglia is to be credited for completing the project of reinventing Arlt in the early 1970s. At the outset of what Giovanni Arrighi terms the signal crisis of the USA-led accumulation cycle around 1970, Piglia wrote what has become the canonical interpretation of Arlt, and in Laera's *Ficciones del dinero* this account is extended to Argentine finance fiction at large. In Arrighi's account the signal crises of each cycle point towards "a deeper underlying systemic crisis, which the switch to high finance none the less forestalls for the time being." Two such crises are the 1870 signal crisis of the British-led accumulation cycle, and the 1970 signal crisis of the USA-led cycle. The signal crises involve a turn to finance, and as Arrighi notes this transformation may involve "a 'wonderful moment' of renewed wealth and power for its promoters and organizers."<sup>68</sup> These periods of financialization signal the onset of the autumn of the accumulation cycle.<sup>69</sup> During these periods, finance and speculation may yield spectacular growth and may seem unhinged and independent of the "real"

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<sup>64</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Vol. 1*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 139-63.

<sup>65</sup> Ben Bollig also argues that "Roberto Arlt sees money as a form of falsification and alchemy at the time of the liberal state's weakness and collapse." "Theories of Money in Argentine Crime Fiction," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* XCIV, no. 3 (2017): 524.

<sup>66</sup> For an overview of the role played by the *Contorno* intellectuals within Argentine letters see Sebastián Carassai, "The Formation of a Post-Peronist Generation: Intellectuals and Politics in Argentina through the Lens of 'Contorno' (1953-1959)," *The Americas* 67, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>67</sup> For example, in David Viñas, *Grotesco, inmigración y fracaso: Armando Discépolo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 1973), 111-17. *De Sarmiento a Cortázar: Literatura argentina y realidad política* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, 1971), 67-73.

<sup>68</sup> Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, 215.

<sup>69</sup> Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 246.

economy. However, as the onset of the terminal crisis suggests, in 1929 for the British cycle and 2008 for the USA-led cycle, reality is bound to return with a vengeance once the financial wonder falls to pieces. As will become clear, this context is not coincidental and directly informs Piglia’s reading of Arlt’s fiction and his claim that money is portrayed in this work as poetic and thus free of any real material foundation.

In two articles from 1973-74, Piglia points out the centrality of money in Arlt’s fiction and how money is associated with lies, falsification, and stealing. Making money, “hacer dinero,” is falsifying it, and herein lies the power of fiction in Arlt:

Hacer dinero: Arlt toma esa frase como esencia de la sociedad y la interpreta literalmente. Hacer dinero quiere decir fabricarlo: la falsificación es la estrategia central de la contra economía arltiana. El falsificador es un artista, el poeta del capitalismo. La falsificación es un arte de la época de la reproducción mecánica.<sup>70</sup>

While Piglia notes how productive labor is the only source of value under capitalism, he nevertheless also posits “el dinero, signo del oro, obligado a circular sin reposo, no es más que la ficción, el simulacro—o como diría Marx: el enigma—del valor.” In this sense, Piglia merges structuralist linguistic theory with the Marxist analysis. The consequence is “la falsificación aparece como la metáfora misma del trabajo productivo”.<sup>71</sup> In Piglia’s creative reading of Arlt, stealing and falsifying become the methods of obtaining money, and by extension surplus value. However, in *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, there are definite limits to falsification, invention, stealing, and financial speculation. In fact, everything operates around *real* money. Not only does Erdosain have to pay back his debt with such money, but Barsut is also immediately arrested once he attempts to use the fake bills that el Astrólogo gives him. The only one to escape any consequences is el Astrólogo, who along with Hipólita disappears with Barsut’s *real* money. Behind the backs of Erdosain, Barsut, el Astrólogo, and everyone else involved with the secret society, the real abstraction of capitalism is relentlessly at work.<sup>72</sup> No matter how much Erdosain attempts to escape the logic that structures his life as a low-paid proletarianized debt-collector, it always pulls him back down.

According to Laera, the distinction between what is real and falsified is only introduced in *Los lanzallamas* and is not elaborated in *Los siete locos*. In this sense, *Los siete locos* is an example of money-fiction while in *Los lanzallamas* “los elementos de la ficción del

<sup>70</sup> Ricardo Piglia, *La Argentina en pedazos* (Ediciones de la Urraca, 1993), 124.

<sup>71</sup> “Roberto Arlt: La ficción del dinero”, *Hispanamérica* 3, no. 7 (1974): 27.

<sup>72</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

*dinero son absorbidos por la ficción política*”.<sup>73</sup> For Laera, subsuming money-fiction under a political fiction corresponds with Arlt’s turn toward communism in the 1930s and coincides with the 1930 coup in Argentina. At this juncture, Arlt politicizes his fiction, and while the ending of *Los lanzallamas* may recall the ending of *Los siete locos*, this is not the case in Laera’s reading: “Claro que este final no implica un retorno a la ficción del dinero, sino, por el contrario, la inflexión necesaria para *plantear la ficción política en todas sus dimensiones*”.<sup>74</sup> Separating the two novels is also central to Rocco Carbone’s definition of *Los siete locos* as a grotesque text: “*Los lanzallamas* rechaza el desafío de *Los siete locos*, que consiste en mantener de mantra constante (a todo nivel) y coherente lo inacabado de su diseño”. For Carbone, *Los siete locos* remains open-ended in contrast to “la clausura de *Los lanzallamas*”.<sup>75</sup> Of course, the plot of the two novels, what Rosenberg and Carbone describe as a “diptych”—a two-sided artwork attached at a hinge—features a plot that is brought to an end with Erdosain’s suicide at the end of *Los lanzallamas*.<sup>76</sup> However, this does not indicate that the novelistic universe of *Los siete locos* is any different from the one in *Los lanzallamas*.

After Erdosain realizes that el Astrólogo and Hipólita have left him behind and stolen the real money, leaving him to face Barsut and the emptiness of el Astrólogo’s plan for a secret society, he is left with no further outlets and ends his life after confessing the whole story to the unnamed narrator of the novels. As such, the sequel includes a “closure” to the plot that *Los siete locos* introduces and elaborates. However, nothing in *Los siete locos* is incompatible with *Los lanzallamas*. The sequel merely elaborates the consequences of Erdosain’s actions and political choices. In short, Erdosain’s desire to escape his lot in life as a wage-laborer comes to an end as he understands the falseness of el Astrólogo’s promise. However, the logic of Erdosain’s belief in el Astrólogo is not different from his attempt to defraud the sugar-company. In both cases, Erdosain seeks to secure himself a different position within the capitalist production process and to become a capitalist-inventor-producer. As a member of a class of white-collar employees—what Kracauer in an obvious spin on the word proletariat terms the “salarit” in *The Salaried Masses*—Erdosain lives from paycheck to paycheck. Erdosain seeks to free himself from wage-labor and the toil of treading the streets of Buenos Aires in the never-ending cycle of the laborer’s formula CMC, forever

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<sup>73</sup> Laera, 305.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>75</sup> Rocco Carbone, “Un acercamiento a ‘Los siete locos’: Su separación de ‘Los Lanzallamas’”, *Hispanamérica* 34, no. 102 (2005): 27.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 15. Rosenberg, 50.

without the prime that signifies profits in Marx’s formula for the circulation of capital in MCM. However, Erdosain only does so in order to become a member of the exploiting classes as opposed the exploited. Erdosain’s engagement with el Astrólogo simply replicates the scenario portrayed in the early part of *Los siete locos*. El Astrólogo’s promise to Erdosain is not at odds with his attempt to defraud the sugar company so that he can become a manufacturer and exploit the labor of the Espila family.

*Los lanzallamas* develops the brutality of the political program Erdosain adheres to throughout both novels. The monstrosity unleashed in Erdosain by el Astrólogo, the real and senseless violence that lurks behind the spectacle, is demonstrated quite well in Erdosain’s murder of the Bizca, a 14-year-old cross-eyed proletarian girl to whom he proposes. In *Los lanzallamas*, the girl is handed over to him by the girl’s mother who is lured by Erdosain’s display of the money he and el Astrólogo have stolen from Barsut.<sup>77</sup> For Laera, the murder is one example of the political underpinnings introduced in *Los lanzallamas*.<sup>78</sup> However, the murder is foreshadowed in *Los siete locos* with Erdosain’s dismissal of Luciana, who is a member of the Espila family. Luciana shows an interest in Erdosain’s undertakings and has taken it upon herself to study “como es un alto horno y el transformador de Bessemer”, and “metalurgia”.<sup>79</sup> She expresses her admiration for Erdosain and his inventions and tries to impress him with her knowledge of various subjects. However, Erdosain pushes her away, telling her that he has no interest in her, thus precluding any possibility of equality between them. Instead of uniting with them, as Luciana assumes is his pretension, Erdosain’s only desire is to lord over them, whether as an employer or a charitable person pitying them from afar. The two relationships demonstrate how he is careful to separate himself from the lumpen proletariat, whom he perceives as below him and labors to rise above. That is, while Erdosain’s desire to leave behind his life as a wage laborer (CMC) is clear and legitimate, he does not seek to dissolve the conditions that make it necessary for workers to lead such an existence, and he merely wants to switch tracks and become a member of the manufacturing capitalist class, or live by the rule of MCM’, and this is what el Astrólogo’s plan for the secret society promises him.

The need to separate the novels is quite apparent in Laera and Carbone’s discussion. While Laera does so without aesthetic judgment and posits one as an example of money-fiction and the other as political-fiction, Carbone prefers the former

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<sup>77</sup> Arlt, *Los lanzallamas*, 412-17, 622-26.

<sup>78</sup> Laera, 312.

<sup>79</sup> Arlt, *Los siete locos*, 326.

to the latter. And yet, the scenario at the end of *Los lanzallamas* is set up on the first few pages of *Los siete locos*. As such, both novels are examples of what Laera terms political fiction, i.e., fiction in which all illusions, fantasies, and mysteries are subsumed under the rule of the “real” economy and a political paradigm. This political paradigm, as I have argued, is that of traditional Marxism and is best expressed in the ways in which both novels are organized around the standpoint of labor. Although Erdosain does not possess class-consciousness nor understand the functions of the system he seeks to cheat, the novels treat his case from the standpoint of labor. Labor is central to el Astrólogo’s secret society, the capitalist endeavor of el Rufián Melancólico, Erdosain’s project of manufacturing the metallic rose exploiting the labor of the Espila family for this purpose, and so on. Without new labor, there is no new value; without new value, there is no new money in the Arltian universe. The reading that proposes otherwise has to radically reinvent Arlt by either reading *Los siete locos* against or to the exclusion of *Los lanzallamas* (Laera, Carbone), or more creatively rewrite his work from scratch (Piglia).

The linguistically informed Marxist rewriting of Arlt is completed in Piglia’s “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt”. In his short story collection, Piglia includes a long scholarly essay that introduces a recently discovered short story by Arlt. As critics have noted, the story was initially listed in library systems as belonging to Arlt and at least one critic dealt with it as if it were Arlt’s.<sup>80</sup> It is now a well-known fact that Piglia reprinted an altered version of an old story by the Russian author Leónidas Andreiev, whose more famous title *The Seven Hanged* (1908), or *Los siete ahorcados* in the Spanish translation, served as an inspiration for Arlt’s *Los siete locos*.<sup>81</sup> While critics have recognized Piglia’s playful and artistic engagement with Arlt’s legacy, most analyze the story “as containing many themes that preoccupy Arlt.”<sup>82</sup> For instance, Gnutzmann, who points out how the preoccupation with stealing and falsifying is not coherently formulated in Arlt, but

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<sup>80</sup> Both Ellen McCracken and Bruno Bosteels point to Aden W. Hayes’s essay “La revolución y el prostíbulo: ‘Luba’ de Roberto Arlt”, published in *Ideologies and Literature* (1987). See McCracken, “Metaplagiarism and the Critic’s Role as Detective: Ricardo Piglia’s Reinvention of Roberto Arlt,” *PMLA* (1991): 82. Bosteels, “In the Shadow of Mao: Ricardo Piglia’s ‘Homenaje a Roberto Arlt,’” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 255-56.

<sup>81</sup> *The Seven Hanged* (1908) was published as *Los siete ahorcados* in Spanish. The novel circulated in Buenos Aires and as Stasys Goštautas points out, Arlt expressed his admiration for the novel in one of his *Aguafuertes*. Stasys Goštautas, *Buenos Aires y Arlt (Dostoievsky, Martínez Estrada y Escalabrini Ortiz)* (Madrid: Insula, 1977), 87.

<sup>82</sup> McCracken, 1079.

rather worked out by a strain of Argentine criticism on Arlt,<sup>83</sup> nevertheless notes how Piglia is careful to introduce “temas que el lector arltiano reconoce en seguida”.<sup>84</sup>

“Homenaje a Roberto Arlt” includes many of the themes that have been associated with Arlt, and Piglia draws attention to them in the introduction. McCracken observes that Piglia’s version of Andreiev’s short story follows the original, except that Piglia omits passages, adds a reference to a South American falsifier and, most importantly, changes the ending of the story. The original version of the Russian story is clouded with the tragic optimism that characterized socially committed literature in Buenos Aires and elsewhere.<sup>85</sup> A revolutionary who is a part of a terrorist group is about to carry out an important attack. Secret agents follow him, and he finds a hiding place in a brothel where he plans on resting before advancing the attack. However, during his stay with a prostitute, Luba, “the revolutionary abandons the cause and enters police custody with Luba.” In contrast, “in Piglia’s ending Luba joins the protagonist’s radical group” and together they flee the brothel. As McCracken notes, Piglia takes the transformation of Luba’s consciousness from Andreiev’s story but differs from the original where Luba’s “change in consciousness comes too late, after her arrest.” Piglia, thus, introduces an optimistic and open-ended conclusion that sees the couple flee and escape arrest. While McCracken points out how Piglia is “writing at a different historical moment and for a different purpose,” she nevertheless claims that both “[the] modified ending and the few other instances where Piglia adds to Andreiev’s text all develop Arltian themes.”<sup>86</sup>

The inclusion of the flight demonstrates to what extent Piglia’s reading of Arlt is a rewriting of his work. In Arlt, there are no individual outlets, no lines of flight, nor heterotopias in which the subject can take refuge. No matter how much Erdosain tries to escape his lot in life, he is always brought back, and the only escape he makes is ending his life by committing suicide. This is quite unlike Piglia’s rewriting of Andreiev’s story. In fact, Andreiev’s original ending is much closer to Arlt’s writing. While Arlt could perhaps have written Andreiev’s story, he could not have fathomed the flight that

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<sup>83</sup> Rita Gnutzmann cites Mario Goloboff’s “La primera novela de Roberto Arlt” and Noe Jitrik’s “Entre el dinero y el ser”. Rita Gnutzmann, “Homenaje a Arlt, Borges y Onetti de Ricardo Piglia”, *Revista iberoamericana* LVIII, no. 159 (1992): 439.

<sup>84</sup> Gnutzmann is here referencing the work as a whole, which includes copious notes for the story, or a novel on the theme, as well as the story itself, 443.

<sup>85</sup> Hunter Bivens uses the title of Vsevolod Vishnevsky’s 1933 drama about the Russian Revolution, *Optimistic Tragedy*, to characterize this aspect of committed literature in his discussion on the German Popular Front novel, Hunter Bivens, *Epic and Exile: Novels of the German Popular Front, 1933-1945* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 14, 239.

<sup>86</sup> McCracken, 1079.



replaces the collective struggle and the historical mission of the proletariat in Piglia's rewrite. The flight only becomes possible within the linguistically turned Marxism of Piglia's rewrite of Arlt/Andreiev. Only by understanding value in discursive terms, and as unhinged from any conception of the real economy or reality, can Piglia's rewrite of Andreiev's story be understood as Arlt's. Furthermore, only as such is it possible to read *Los siete locos* as postulating the post-structuralist understanding of value as nothing but discursive.<sup>87</sup>

In contrast, the reading presented here has argued that the novelistic universe of *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas* is grounded in labor. By rooting value in labor, Arlt's writing is in keeping with the traditional Marxist framework of interwar leftist literature and politics. In turning his attention to the salaried masses of Buenos Aires and considering their disposition towards radical politics, it is clear that Erdosain only possesses false-consciousness. His desire for a radical change seems true enough; however, his methods for changing his place within the society in which he moves are limited to elevating only himself and do not involve uniting with his comrades in a collective struggle. And yet, in order to portray Erdosain's false-consciousness, the novels work around the standpoint of labor or, in other words, a definition of class consciousness as equal to the standpoint of labor. This standpoint is operative in both novels and reveals not only Erdosain's attempts for quick enrichment (limited by the workings of the real economy) but also the limits of politics based on similar schemes. In both cases, Erdosain fails to understand the reality principle of capitalism: the law of value. However, this failure is not replicated in Arlt's portrayal of Erdosain's failure.<sup>88</sup> Instead, Arlt's portrayal continually points to the real grounding of money (or any other commodity) in labor and the non-enigmatic and almost boring character of money as the universal equivalent of exchange.

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<sup>87</sup> Indeed, it is important to recall how the post-structuralist understanding of value as discursive appeared in tandem with the turn to financialization within the world economy. As Joshua Clover points out, the "linguistic understanding of political economy found purchase for a wealth of reasons, many of which have a grounding in actual conditions." "Value Theory Crisis," *PMLA* 127, no. 1 (2012): 107.

<sup>88</sup> In the late 1970s and the early 80s, a few studies were devoted to the exploring false-consciousness in Arlt's novels. In these studies, there is a tendency to conflate Erdosain's lack of class consciousness with the novel itself. See Diana Guerrero, *Roberto Arlt: El habitante solitario* (Buenos Aires: Granica Editor, 1972), 184-85; Pastor Bodmer, 111.

*Conclusion: “but ... Lenin knew where he was going”*

Arlt and Piglia both wrote during periods of crisis not only in Argentine economic history, but also in the history of the world-system. While Arlt wrote on the eve of the terminal crisis of the British-led accumulation cycle in 1929, Piglia wrote at the outset of the signal crisis of the USA-led accumulation cycle in the early 1970s, or, during the onset of “autumn” in which finance appeared to generate extraordinary profits without any productive investment. In this context, a linguistically oriented Marxism moved away from Marx’s understanding of value as the material basis for the capitalist production system as a whole. Thus, Piglia’s reading and creative re-writing of Arlt as the prophet of the poetics of capital suggests an alignment with the reign of finance capital and speculation from the 1970s onwards. However, it is time to reconsider Piglia’s reading of Arlt as postulating the discursive power of money *avant la lettre*. The theoretical account that posits money as simply fictitious, based on fantastical lies and theft—indeed, poetry—is not the one that Arlt’s novels are premised upon nor are such economic principles portrayed in the novels. First, Erdosain comes to an understanding that his scheme of defrauding the sugar company has transformed him into a low-life thief in *Los siete locos*, and then, second, his naive and even romantic commitment to el Astrólogo undergoes a reckoning with reality in *Los lanzallamas*, leading to Erdosain’s suicide. In each case, there is nothing fictitious or discursive about profits, money, quick riches, and so on, as all are traced back to labor. In this way, the law of value, or the real abstraction of capitalism as Sohn-Rethel put it, is relentlessly at work and none of Erdosain’s schemes evade this principle.

To read *Los lanzallamas* against *Los siete locos* implies a reading of Arlt’s realism that ignores how indebted it is to the traditional Marxist frameworks—a framework in which materialism is grounded in labor. Erdosain is portrayed in terms of the traditional Marxist emphasis on the working-class as the subject of the coming revolution. As a low-paid debt collector who dreams of a different life, Erdosain pursues only his individual advancement. Instead of joining a collective struggle, Erdosain naively believes in el Astrólogo’s plan for a future dystopic society that will offer him a place as an inventor-capitalist. That Erdosain could hypothetically join a different kind of a political project is regularly registered throughout both novels. One such instance is found in the concluding lines of *Los siete locos* and the opening segment of *Los lanzallamas*. *Los siete locos* breaks off during a conversation between Erdosain and el Astrólogo. In this conversation, Erdosain compares el Astrólogo to Lenin and says,

naively indeed, “¿Sabe que usted se parece a Lenin?”<sup>89</sup> *Los lanzallamas* picks up where *Los siete locos* leaves off with el Astrólogo murmuring to himself a response to Erdosain’s comment: “Sí...pero Lenin sabía adónde iba”.<sup>90</sup> That Lenin connects the two novels suggests how the hinge that connects the two novels—the diptych—is interwar Marxism-Leninism. By removing this context and its intellectual framework, the two parts are no longer connected, and the novels can be forced apart. However, this reading overlooks how the same logic governs Erdosain’s attempt to defraud the sugar-company and his participation in el Astrólogo’s secret society. In both cases, Erdosain believes that he can change his role within the capitalist production system and become a capitalist inventor and manufacturer. The two novels demonstrate how this is an illusion and as a political project leads Erdosain only to death.

To argue that Arlt participated in the intellectual context that surrounded the communist left in Buenos Aires in the 1920s and the 30s is not to argue for a return to this left. Nor does it claim that Arlt belonged to the Boedo group or that he wrote socialist realism. Instead, the argument developed here points out aspects of his work that do not align with the post-structuralist reading of his work represented here by Piglia’s creative reading/rewriting of Arlt, and its afterlife in more recent criticism. The autumn of the current accumulation cycle has run its course, and with it, the speculative financial schemes of neoliberal economics have been proven unsustainable. As a result, the appearance of an unhinged—indeed poetic—growth under neoliberal rule has been shattered. If reality returned with the 2001 financial crash in Argentina and the 2008 crisis in Europe, the USA, and elsewhere, it is about time that we adjust the analytical framework and accept that the linguistic understanding of political economy is no longer tenable. Nor is such an understanding applicable to the traditional Marxism of Arlt’s *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*.

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<sup>89</sup> Arlt, *Los siete locos*, 382.

<sup>90</sup> *Los lanzallamas*, 389.

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