

chapter 1

*Mafalda:  
From Hearth  
to Plaza*

¡Así es la cosa, Mafalda!

—Title of Quino's second volume  
of *Mafalda* comic strips

*Mafalda*, drawn by Quino (Joaquín Salvador Lavado), is undoubtedly the most famous comic strip to come out of Latin America (Quino's work is discussed in works by Trillo and Saccomanno, 160–62; Rivera, *passim*; and Fossati, 44–45). While scholars may argue that other strips are more intellectual, more socially committed, more creative in the elements they use, there can be no disputing the enormous success *Mafalda* has had (see the interview with Quino by Ciechanower on the strip's history and impact). Quino seems to have written on the premise of Tolstoy's famous dictum: If you write about your own village, you will write about the world. Mafalda and her family and friends are not only indisputably Argentine, but also as specifically petite bourgeoisie as they are urban Buenos Aires. This specificity has not prevented *Mafalda* from being translated into more than two dozen languages; curiously, English is the one major Western language into which the ten original cartoon collections have not been translated. Moreover, *Mafalda* remains in print, available at virtually any kiosk in Buenos Aires and in bookstores throughout the continent.

What is especially surprising about this is that Quino ceased drawing *Mafalda* in 1973. The first appearance of *Mafalda* was on March 15, 1962; the last strip appeared on June 25, 1973. Despite the fact that previously ungathered material has been issued (*Mafalda inédita* [Unpublished Ma-

falda]) and the characters have been used for a limited number of special projects (such as a UNESCO pamphlet on children's rights, *Declaración de los derechos del niño* [Declaration of the Rights of the Child]), the ten original volumes (which are often issued outside of Argentina in a twelve-volume format) appeared during a very short period, 1966–73, and therefore the strip is permanently anchored in a very chronologically specific segment of Buenos Aires social history. In 1993, twenty years after Quino left Argentina for Italy (he continues to reside in Milan) and sent *Mafalda* “on vacation” (personal interview in July 1973), Ediciones de la Flor, *Mafalda*'s original publisher, issued *Toda Mafalda* (The Complete Mafalda). In addition to previously ungathered or partially published material, the volume contains a series of commentaries by other cartoonists on the strip, including their own artistic tributes to *Mafalda*'s abiding presence in Argentine popular culture. Earlier samplers of *Mafalda* were also published, including a Spanish volume (with the customarily black-and-white strips inexplicably reproduced in garish luminescent colors) that includes a brief commentary by the Italian semiologist Umberto Eco (for more extensive early semiological examinations of *Mafalda*, see Cirne; Cañizal). Eco notes:

El universo de Mafalda es el de una América Latina en sus zonas metropolitanas más adelantadas; pero es en general, desde muchos puntos de vista, un universo latino y esto hace que Mafalda nos resulte mucho más comprensible que tantos personajes del comic estadounidenses; además, Mafalda es, en último análisis, un “héroe de nuestro tiempo,” y no se debe pensar que ésta sea una definición exagerada para el personajito de papel y tinta que Quino nos propone. (iii)<sup>1</sup>

Quino continues to draw single-panel and narrative strips, which he gathers in essentially early volumes, usually around a unifying theme like *A mí no me grite* (Don't Shout at Me [authoritarianism]), *Quinoterapia* (Quinotherapy [medicine]), or *Sí, cariño* (Yes, Sweetheart [love and matrimony, which for Quino are definitely not the same proposition]). In recent years, his strips have become increasingly characterized by black humor, and there is a recurring incursion of previously unexplored topics. For example, the war of the sexes has segued into gender issues that have included an opening toward homoerotic questions, a notable taboo-smashing for a widely popular Latin American cartoonist. However, no matter



Mafalda, the most famous comic strip in Latin America, is drawn by Quino (Joaquín Salvador Lavado). Copyright by Quino/Quipos, Milan; reprinted by permission.

what change of direction Quino's drawings take, he will always be known as the creator of *Mafalda*.

For those of us who have written on the Mafalda character since the early years of her success (Foster 1974, 1980, 1989), it is not difficult to understand the basis of her enormous popularity. Working off the trope of "out of the mouth of babes," Quino endowed Mafalda with the right and the ability to say what others could not, either because they were constrained by their sense of adult-world propriety, because they were blinded by hypocrisy and self-righteousness, because they were disingenuous and self-interested, or simply because the burdens of everyday life had left them unable to perceive with acuity the world around them. Moreover, *Mafalda* was written during a time of military dictatorship in which there was considerable official censorship of social commentary and a general climate of repression (Samper Pizano, 9–11, provides a detailed correlation, partly tongue in cheek, partly in all seriousness, between the development of *Mafalda* and political events).

Ironically, Quino ceased to draw *Mafalda* with the brief return to institutional democracy in 1973, during which the ensuing explosion of opinion released by what turned out to be a transitory suspension of tyranny produced a lot of wrong-headed cultural commentary. (Hernández's *Para leer a Mafalda* is a particularly egregious example: "Mafalda no es una tira progresista, por el contrario, sus críticas se realizan dentro del límite tolerado por el sistema y no sólo no cuestionándolo, sino ayudando a mantener con tus tímidos comentarios la farsa conocida comúnmente como 'libertad de prensa'" [13].)<sup>2</sup> Quino, feeling that he was unjustly attacked by the right for criticizing national institutions and practices, and by the left for being a commercial success during the dictatorship and, therefore, guilty of reduplicating bourgeois ideologies, took the decision to abandon the strip and, indeed, to abandon the country (personal interview, July 1973). Argentina returned to military control, with worse repression, in 1976; although it is noteworthy that cartoon-based publications like *Humor registrado* (Registered Humor) and *Superhumor* served as trenchant forums for political commentary, virtually the only ones to survive a systematically brutal censorship between 1976 and 1980 (see Avellaneda, 235, on the January 11, 1988, edict banning *Humor registrado*).

One could well attribute much of the success of *Mafalda* to the themes of daily urban middle-class life as viewed through the lens of children's

perspectives. Adults, however, do appear in Quino's strip, unlike Charles Shultz's *Peanuts*, with which *Mafalda* is often superficially and distortedly compared, as if in order to legitimize its importance it requires affiliation with an American cartoon strip. Mafalda's father is an office worker, and her mother is a housekeeper (precisely at a time in which economic realities, much more than feminism, were beginning to make the traditional female homemaker a vanishing breed in Buenos Aires); she and her brother, who comes along midway through the strip's history, live with their parents in a residential high-rise in a neighborhood on the fringes of the Buenos Aires commercial core, probably Once, Almagro, or Flores. Quino, in the interview by Ciechanower, recalls how his strip began as part of a publicity campaign for household appliances directed at the middle class, and how when that campaign did not take off he converted *Mafalda* into a strip drawn for the middle-class readers of magazines like *Proceso*, the most "intellectual" news magazine of the period (Ciechanower, 63-64).

Mafalda and Guille(rmo) are surrounded by friends and playmates from similar backgrounds: Susana is from a bit more prosperous Creole family and always speaks with bourgeois pretentiousness; Manolito's father is a Spanish immigrant who owns a grocery store; Miguelito's grandfather was an Italian immigrant; Felipito is the paradigm of the boy next door and synthesizes Argentina neuroses. There are also adult neighbors, shopkeepers, schoolteachers, and assorted authority figures who are Mafalda's daily point of social reference. A strictly content analysis would show that Quino provides, in sociological terms, a masterfully complete image of Porteño urban barrio life in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, a period of considerable political and economic restructuring as a consequence of the agenda of military dictatorship that brought about a transition from the traditionally localist to the international marketplace, with often a strong clash between them.

The current neoliberalism of Argentina's economy and the concomitant internationalization of life in at least the middle-class sectors of Buenos Aires is, under democracy, a continuation of the policies of the juntas of the 1960s, with the only substantive difference being the disappearance of any attempt to mediate unchecked commercial expansion by the conventional moral codes the military sought to impose and maintain. Moreover, if there is anything archaic about *Mafalda*, the note of cultural nationalism in daily

life—the lament of the disappearance of the familiar under the onslaught of imported merchandise and its accompanying social values—seems very much a lost value in the current business climate. For example, the corner grocery store owned by Manolo’s father, which Manolo works in after the fashion of the family business, would likely have disappeared. But a detail such as this aside, much of Mafalda’s world of twenty-five years ago remains very much intact in Buenos Aires.

What is particularly singular about *Mafalda*, what gives it a dimension that demands an analysis transcending a content analysis of surface details, is the way in which Quino has achieved a cultural product that models the inscription of children into the adult world. That is, without ever insinuating any sense of the “innocence” of the young, *Mafalda* demonstrates the interaction between fully socialized subjects (the adults) and those that are still on the margins of social institutions in their status as a general social class of children. This is why comparisons between *Mafalda* and *Peanuts* are especially inappropriate: Schultz believes in a prelapsarian innocence for children, and those children in his strips who reveal an adult loss of innocence (paradigmatically Lucy) are portrayed as cynical and materialistic, thereby establishing a sharp and essentially fundamentalist dividing line between two social hemispheres. By contrast, Quino ends up portraying the transitions between fully institutionally inscribed subjectivities and those in the process of becoming inscribed, along with all the ruptures, contradictions, reversals, and ambiguities of a world that cannot be easily segregated, as can Schultz’s, into those who are innocent and those who have lost their innocence. In the process, Quino represents, through the figure of Mafalda and her companions, the complex processes by which one acquires an adult worldview in Argentina society. This is accomplished via her gaze, which defamiliarizes the world, and, in the process, denaturalizes the world controlled by adults. The acquisition of the world controlled by adults involves necessarily the interiorizing of an ideology that makes it seem to be natural and, therefore, not susceptible to criticism. This is even more so when that world is framed by authoritarianism in general and military tyranny specifically, as it was during the years of *Mafalda*’s production.

What I would like to discuss in this essay is how that adult worldview is formed in terms of a relationship with the city. Although other spaces

appear in Quino's strips, there is a juxtaposition between the home, the space in which the child necessarily spends a major portion of youth, and, in addition to subcategories like school, commercial establishments, and the like, the broad sweep of the city outside the home. Significantly, the city in *Mafalda* is synthesized into two interrelated spaces: the street and the plaza. Streets tend to function in the citizens' imagination as limitless extensions of the city, even though they are necessarily more restricted for children, who are cautioned to stay close to home. But the plaza is a specifically "safe zone" of urban life, marked off by streets and set aside from the intense, often dangerous movement that takes place in streets. In both cases, these points of reference are unique in *Mafalda*. In the first place, Buenos Aires is particularly a city of plazas, which complement the many broad swaths of parks that enhance the livability of that city (see Armus on the history of the creation of the Buenos Aires plazas). In contrast to mid- and lower Manhattan, with its one mammoth Central Park and a scattering of tiny slices of greenery that are often more fillers in the geometry of urban design than specific set-asides (for example, Bryant Park, which fills up the back of the New York Public Library; Battery Park, which rounds off the tip of the island; or Union Square, which fills in the intersection of Madison and Fifth Avenues and Broadway), one cannot go for more than a dozen blocks in Buenos Aires in any direction without running into green spaces, which, to be sure, abound particularly in the middle- and upper-middle-class areas of the city.

Like the streets of Buenos Aires, the parks are relatively safe in terms of personal security, which is why in *Mafalda*, as in real life, both green spaces and sidewalks figure prominently as places where Mafalda and her friends congregate to observe and comment on the world going by. Schultz's children, on the other hand, congregate in their own houses and backyards, or in school yards; they are never seen out in the street or in public thoroughfares, reflecting the relative insecurity of these spaces in American life, even in the idyllic world *Peanuts* evokes. Charlie Brown's world may be free of crime and violence, but the world of the children who are his readers is not, and therefore the utilization of such spaces by children can hardly be suggested by the strip. Indeed, even the way in which Schultz's children, born of the suburban fifties, move alone outside the home may be problematic for many of today's parents, who are only confident if their

children, when outside the home, are safely sequestered in a shopping mall (a post-1950s cultural institution that, by the way, also never appears in *Peanuts*).

Shopping malls did not exist when Quino began drawing Mafalda, although their forerunner, the British-style walk-through arcade (a *galería*) already existed and was, in fact, a common component of the ground floor of buildings erected in the 1960s. In any event, Mafalda and friends spend as much time out of doors as they do at home, and both street and plaza appear as frequent meeting places for them. And, as often as not, these meeting places are a counterspace to the home: a place where one can be free of the inevitable restraints of the hearth; a place where things occur that are not explicitly accounted for at home; a place where there is interaction between children that is free of the impediment of controlling adults; and, above all else, a place where there is a process of assessment and interpretation of what is said at home and what is discovered to be the facts of a considerably, but, of course, not completely, unconstrained world as it is modeled by the urban cityscape.

Therefore, there is an element of subversiveness in *Mafalda* that is one of its unique characteristics and a basis of its popularity at different times in Argentine social history. Of course, by comparison to the leftist demands for an aggressively subversive, iconoclastic culture, and by comparison to right-wing interpretations of what constitutes subversion/perversion, *Mafalda* is hardly a threat. However, the way in which Quino came to believe that he was the unfair victim of denunciations from both sides is perhaps a rather eloquent index of the fact that *Mafalda* was articulating a form of critical commentary that had little interest in conforming to the dogmatic agenda of either stance. Instead, it was aimed toward the loosely structured sense of discontent and frustration of the millions of readers who had little direct stake in either the rigors of a revolutionary culture or the draconian principles of moral renewal.

One particularly significant rhetorical strategy employed by Quino is Mafalda's walks through the city. In four or five panels we see Mafalda contemplating the world around her: the so-called natural world, the built environment, the display of commercial activity, human interrelationships, the emergence of some new phenomenon in the urban mosaic. As Mafalda walks along, she comments to herself in ways that are alternately pithy, bemused, ironic, and at times almost cynical (in the English sense of

nonidealistic, rather than the Spanish sense of immoral) about what she sees. Often there is only one final comment that makes a conclusively interpretive statement, a comment that is spoken to herself or, at times, to one of her friends she happens to meet. Mafalda is not the only one to engage in this sort of commentary. On occasion we see her as the addressee of a comment, sincere (by Felipe or Miguelito, for example) or dramatically ironic (typically by Susanita, but also by the protocapitalist, Manolito), coming from one of the other characters. In these cases, Mafalda is a witness, and the exactness of what is said creates a sense of understanding between Mafalda, who is here the receptor of others' comments, and her friends. This is even the case when Mafalda's look of perplexity or dumb-foundedness reveals the incorrectness, the deviant nonsharedness, of Susanita's comments, which are frequently parallel to those of adults, her parents included, that Mafalda finds so baffling. There are even those occasions in which some adult, usually Mafalda's father, who, contrary to one reading of the codes of Argentine masculinity, is often as uncomfortable as his daughter with the demands of the establishment. That is, although there is an allowance for nonconformity for the man who feels that a decadent or sold-out establishment violates his masculinity (the case of the betrayed macho of many tangos or even of the military man who attributes to himself a legitimate right to reshape the establishment in a more authoritarian, masculinist image), there also exists a deviance from the masculinist imperative to accept things the way they are, to go along, to get along, to conform to the rules of the *barra* (gang). It is this latter deviance that the military saw in "hippies," "communists," and "faggots," and toward which Quino's dreamy-eyed Felipe or often childlike Papá de Mafalda incline.

Furthering the disruption of a conventional social semiotic of conformity, Mafalda's outspokenness contrasts sharply with the outspokenness of Susanita. Susanita is unreserved in her critical commentary, but with the license extended to women by the masculinist voice irately dissatisfied with the lack of rigor and order in society, of those who make pronouncements of the sort that "we need a strong hand around here." This is, to be sure, a reactionary voice, since it compares lived experience with some sort of abstract norm of a time when things were better, more comprehensible, more structured. Susanita's critical stance contrasts with Mafalda's, but not so much because the latter's comments do not likewise refer to an image of

a lost better world (this is especially true when Quino has her evoke the sort of leftist cultural nationalism common in the 1960s, whereby import substitution could only be understood as the loss of what was authentically Argentine). Rather, the difference lies in how Susanita repeats received wisdom and therefore can only echo what adults say (even if what she is echoing is being said by adults outside the strips, such as the voice of authority and bourgeois propriety being spoken at the time by the official discourse of the military junta), as opposed to how what Mafalda articulates strives in some sense to be a counterpoint to received wisdom, an original interpretation that has not been uttered previously. This is why, even when Mafalda may actually point toward something that could be called traditional, such as the appointments of pre-1960s barrio life, she does so in a way that is refreshingly different from official discourse. The fact that Quino accomplishes this with the wit and humor appropriate to a *comic strip* is one of *Mafalda's* guarantees of popularity.

For example, there is a strip from volume 6 (Lavado, *Toda Mafalda*, 356) in which we see Susanita talking, in turn, to Felipe, to a cat, and to Miguelito as they walk down a street. The top two-thirds of each panel is covered by a tiny illegible script that represents Susanita's monologue. All three of her interlocutors are dizzy from the onslaught of Susanita's speech; the cat is stretched out flat as though it has been run over. In the fourth and final panel, Susanita laments to Mafalda: "¿Te conté que mi problema de incomunicación es no poder incomunicarme?"<sup>3</sup> The effect of the strip is to give a graphic representation of the overwhelming nature of the communicated discourses of society, of the way in which one and all are crushed by/under the weight of the society spokespersons' mass of text—both spoken and written, in ways both multiple and overdetermined. Susanita has constructed her identity as an enthusiastic collaborator of these discourses, and she feels it her duty to generously communicate them to one and all. It is only when she sees that they numb rather than convince that she has a fleeting moment of self-reflection, which never lasts from one strip to the next.

Susanita's diatribes and ready clichés serve to highlight the perceptiveness of Mafalda's comments. In one of the strips that feature Mafalda's excursions in the street (Lavado, *Toda Mafalda*, 9:527), she hears the sounds of colliding vehicles, represented by the onomatopoeic script "¡YIIIIIIIIIIK! ¡CRASH!" As Mafalda stops to view the crash, represented



of urban space. *Mafalda* is filled with strips that engage in this sort of commentary. Quino seems to have been particularly interested in this topic in the early years of the strip, when, under the effects of the military coup of 1966, a stagnant economy dictated the deterioration of the metropolitan infrastructure, whereby the prosperous Buenos Aires of the early 1960s was quite noticeably down at the heel. In volume 3, *Mafalda*, in one of her many incursions into the street, overhears two old friends greeting each other, apparently after several years' separation (Lavado, *Toda Mafalda*, 3:203). As one of them utters the cliché "¡Es que el mundo es un pañuelo!"<sup>5</sup> *Mafalda* is left to muse (again, typically, as she walks), "Habr  que quejarse al lavadero entonces."<sup>6</sup> The idea of the world as a soiled handkerchief is undeniably vivid in signaling the omnipresence of urban grime. In the same volume, there is a strip in which *Mafalda's* mother is fitting her for summer clothes for the family's year-end vacation (one of the collection's many indicators of the very different economic circumstances in Argentina thirty years ago: the family can afford a summer vacation, but store-bought summer clothes, if available at all, are outside their reach). *Mafalda* is standing on a cushion as her mother fits her, and she can see the expanse of the urban landscape outside the room's window.

Urban apartment dwellers, if they are fortunate enough to have any kind of view other than air shafts (called *pozos* [wells]), usually have a view of apartments similar to their own. One counts oneself lucky to look out on a plaza or a park, and only the most expensive apartments have anything near a sweeping view of the cityscape. Against the modest view of *Mafalda's* apartment, her mother describes the Arcadian beauty of the countryside where they will vacation. When *Mafalda* asks her who made such splendors, her mother answers, as one might expect, with the attribution to God's handiwork, whereupon *Mafalda* looks out the window at the smoke curling up from the buildings (this was before trash burning was banned in city buildings in the 1970s) and observes wryly that the construction of the city must have been awarded to a different contractor.

One of the most brilliant strips dealing with the urban landscape and *Mafalda's* consciousness as a lens for the discovery and interpretation of Argentine social reality also involves the vacation motif. In the strip, *Mafalda* and her family are returning home from the annual summer vacation. As her parents doze, *Mafalda* stares out the window of the moving train. Since the trains connecting Buenos Aires to surrounding areas nec-

essarily pass through slums, which customarily take root alongside the tracks as fillers around industrial areas served by the cargo component of the rails, Mafalda looks out the window at a typical shantytown, a *villa miseria*,<sup>7</sup> with its poorly clad and malnourished inhabitants (Lavado, *Toda Mafalda*, 2:124).

This discovery is significant for Mafalda, and we witness her wide-eyed reaction. Undoubtedly, she has heard or read one of the favorite slogans of the military and its supporters that challenged the views of left-wing critics of the period: “In this country, no one dies of hunger.” Such a slogan, based on the premise of Argentina’s unique Latin American status because of its inexhaustible prosperity, is just the sort of thing Susanita might typically echo. And, indirectly evoking Argentina’s legendary prosperity, which made it one of the first countries in Latin America to have television (beginning in the mid-1950s), Mafalda had settled in to see the countryside through the rounded square of the train window as though watching a television screen as they appeared at that time: “Mirar por la ventanilla del tren es como ver al país por television.”<sup>8</sup> However, after viewing the “program” of the shantytown, she revises her comment: “¡Lástima que la televisión tenga mejores programas que el país!”<sup>9</sup> There is a play on words involved here: *programa* as the entertainment productions of television and the word as it refers to official economic policy, which, as is always the case of right-wing military governments, serves to emphasize class differences. Mafalda’s family may have continued to be beneficiaries of the strong middle class that existed in Argentina at mid-century, but many of Quino’s readers knew that the underpinning of that class was to become increasingly precarious, as in fact the past thirty years of Argentine economic history has demonstrated. Finally, there is considerable irony in Mafalda’s last comment, since it was common for artists and intellectuals of the period to have signed on to the emerging critical denunciation of television, often characterized as depending for its programming on foreign, mostly U.S., imports. There was, to be sure, excellent local programming, such as Juan Carlos Gené’s famous dramas for television, *Cosa juzgada* (Case Closed [published under the same title]). In the absence of any official support for cultural production, and a policy of moral and political censorship, the paradigm for foreign programming discouraged critical experimentation within whatever commercial parameters might have been available to it.

The motif of the train window as a view on a social reality unavailable to Mafalda during her excursions through the city's streets or through her apartment window is repeated the following year in volume 3 (Lavado, *Toda Mafalda*, 3:208). This time, the poverty Mafalda sees is not the marginal urban slum, but rather the extremely limited circumstances of non-city dwellers, which can be taken, in part, as a commentary on how Buenos Aires is a black hole that sucks in whatever resources and wealth the country possesses. Mafalda comments ecstatically on the idyllic setting of the farmland and marvels at the image of cows grazing in the field, until she sees the shack inhabited by the farmhand's family. She remarks, "¡Oh! . . . ¡Y esa pobre gente! . . . ¡Qué ranchito miserable! . . ." <sup>10</sup> The final panel moves back inside the train, as we see Mafalda being admonished by an older adult, and her father looks on with chagrin. The older man, with the stereotypic visage of a flinty-hearted banker, wags his finger at Mafalda and informs her, "Pintoresco, nena, 'pintoresco.'" <sup>11</sup> The interplay between "miserable" and "pintoresco" marks the difference between the child's honest assessment of economic circumstances in the agricultural sector and the businessman's disingenuousness motivated by interests higher than those of critical analysis. The fact that he lectures Mafalda underscores how Mafalda must learn a lesson about social reality, one that leaves her in the final panel with a dumbfounded expression on her face.

Quino, like many creative talents of his generation, was concerned with the importation of foreign products and customs endorsed by the military and its commercial backers, an importation that took place through the medium of television and allied forums. Although the late 1960s had a relatively small import sector compared to the massive flooding of foreign imports on the marketplace under the neoliberal economic policies of the 1990s, given the traditional features of Argentine life fostered by the cultural nationalism of Peronismo in the late 1940s and early 1950s and its attendant policy of encouraging local industry and the parallel but very different resistance to foreign business by the left of the period, any foreign products assumed an iconic status of major proportions. Quino ties this to the question of schooling, the process of preparing the individual for civic and economic life, in the form of a frustrated homework assignment.

Felipe, who is constantly beset by attacks of hysteria, surely a form of nonconforming masculine behavior that signals his inadequate assimilation to his world, meets Mafalda in passing on the street. Mafalda asks him

if he has done his school assignment, a composition on national independence (Lavado, *Toda Mafalda*, 7:386). Felipe replies that he hasn't yet and that he decided to go out for a walk to see if something would inspire him. But, as the strip places the two children in a wide-angle shot of the city, he says he hasn't had any good ideas yet. The wide-angle view, reinforced by Mafalda's wide-eyed amazement, captures the cityscape dotted with foreign names, either foreign products or imitations of foreign products: "Boutique Petty," "Shopping Center," "Grill Trattoria 'Il Buon Pranzo,'" "Beautiful 'Velvet-Skin' Night-Cream," plus seven other examples. Notably, not all the designations are English based: *boutique* is a French word, and *Petty* appears to be an English variation of French *petit(e)*; *grill* is English, but *Trattoria 'Il Buon Pranzo'* evokes Italian, which has historically been the second language of Buenos Aires since the onset of massive Italian immigration in the 1880s; *velvet-skin* and *night-cream*, on the other hand, reveal the often solecistic use (because of the misplaced hyphen) of foreign words and phrases in such advertising.

Numerous strips make use of language play, such as the one cited above regarding the car crash. Particularly entertaining are those that revolve around school, since the education establishment is an official institution for the formation of citizens, and its ideology—or the interpretation of its ideology—can be useful for understanding the social dynamic. For example, there is a strip in volume 5 in which Mafalda is standing before the class alongside the teacher's desk in a traditional authoritarian testing situation (Lavado, *Toda Mafalda*, 5:303). She is conjugating the verb *confiar*. When she has finished doing so successfully, she turns to the teacher and startles her by saying, "¡Qué manga de ingenuos! ¿No?"<sup>12</sup> Not only is this sort of comment inappropriate for this testing situation—verb forms rather than the description of national character—but it involves a form of interpretation, an impertinent type of negative criticism, that is impossible in a traditional teaching environment, especially in 1969, when the volume was published and Argentina remained under military dictatorship. Mafalda's pithy comment may be read as less an attack on Argentine naïveté than on an educational philosophy that creates a learning environment in which such things cannot be said, precisely because the strip assumes that its readers has no confidence in the political system under which they are living and likely even less in self-interested military leaders who have no reason to believe their own ideological slogans. In effect, the verb *confiar*,

despite Mafalda's perfect conjugation of it, is totally deponent in the society she inhabits.

In contrast, Susanita's endorsement of the status quo is illustrated in a strip from volume 7 (Lavado, *Toda Mafalda*, 7:378). The teacher, using a less authoritarian technique, calls on students to give the tense forms of various verbs. After receiving two successful responses from other students, she asks Susanita for the future perfect form of the verb *amar*. Susanita, with the beatific glow of one who has absolutely no doubt about the correctness of her reply, answers "¡Hijitos!"<sup>13</sup> What is particularly symptomatic about her reply in terms of evoking an establishment code is not that she dreams of having children, which is, after all, not in itself categorically patriarchal. Rather, it is the use of the diminutive, an inflection that invests the word with superficial romantic emotion, thereby making it resonate with the language of establishment commonplaces.

Schoolhouse images and the underlying ideology of language use are, to be sure, metonyms of urban reality, since it is that context which underlies the response of teachers and students as the actual stuff of their daily experiences outside the institutional confines. In closing I would like to refer to a strip from volume 6 that gives an interpretive opportunity to Mafalda's often bewildered and befuddled father, his reactions to the world around him *and* to his daughter's attempts to understand that world, as he faces the urban jungle (Lavado, *Toda Mafalda*, 6:246). The first four panels of the strip show Mafalda's father getting ready to leave for work. In each panel he executes one step of his morning routine, which is ad-campaign perfect: "Una afeitada perfecta." "Una camisa impecable." "Un café delicioso." "Un rubio excelente."<sup>14</sup> However, in the final panel, as he tremblingly opens the door of his apartment building, we contemplate with him through the glass panels of the entryway the frenetic everyday swarm of the city he is about to join. Before stepping across the threshold, from the secure domain of the perfection guaranteed by advertising into the real-life jungle of the streets, he says to himself: "Y aquí es donde la cosa deja de ser como en los avisos."<sup>15</sup>

It is this sort of perception about the difference between masquerade—whether derived from conventional wisdom, official ideology, or advertising fantasies—and the material reality of the world that drives the humor of *Mafalda*. Although I have chosen not to do so here, one could scour the ten volumes of strips, approximately two thousand of them, and construct

a sociologically accurate image of urban life in Buenos Aires for both the half dozen years in which they were drawn and, in many aspects, for the quarter of a century since Quino stopped drawing them. The palpable urban reality of the *Mafalda* strips is indeed striking and, when joined with the clever and often biting humor in which Quino frames the process of its discovery by Mafalda and her companions, and through them also certain adults' rediscovery of the world, it is one of the features of the work that has guaranteed its abiding popularity.