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La patria perdida o imaginada: translating teodoro torres in "el mexico de afuera"

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**LA PATRIA PERDIDA O IMAGINADA: TRANSLATING TEODORO TORRES
IN “EL MÉXICO DE AFUERA”**

by

ETHRIAM CASH BRAMMER

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2011

MAJOR: ENGLISH

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved son, Julián Amado; my inspirational daughter, Xiomara Sofía; and my brilliant and beautiful wife, Sandra, each of whom have sacrificed so much over the course of the last couple of years to support me as I completed this work.

¡Juntos, sí lo hicimos!

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**LA PATRIA PERDIDA O IMAGINADA: TRANSLATING TEODORO TORRES
IN “EL MÉXICO DE AFUERA”**

La patria perdida (1935) by acclaimed Mexican journalist Teodoro Torres (1888-1944) depicts many of the Mexican immigrant experiences Torres witnessed while in exile in the United States from 1914 to 1925, during the time of the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath. Though Torres began to pen this, his third novel, while still in exile in San Antonio, Texas, he did not pick it up again until 1931, long after he had returned to Mexico City and reestablished himself as a writer for some of that nation’s most important periodicals, such as *Excelsior*, *Revista de Revistas* and *México al Día* (McCann 10-11). Drawing from his own transmigrant experience, with the publication of *La patria perdida*, Torres is able to produce one of the few novels about one of the largest single waves of Mexican immigration to the United States in history, when more than 1 million people—or an estimated 10% of the entire country’s population—crossed the border into the United States (Cardozo 38). Subsequently, with the publication of *Golondrina* just six days before his death in 1944 (McCann 15), Torres is also one of the few authors to document one of the largest single returns—at times forcible—of Mexican immigrants during the repatriation which took place in the wake of the Great Depression (Cardozo 144).¹

However, despite the tremendous critical acclaim which Torres’s work received in Mexico, because they were written in Spanish, the existence of his novels, with only a few exceptions, has remained largely unknown in the United States;² and, therefore, its place in the canon of American and Mexican-American literature still remains largely undetermined. The

¹ According to Cardozo, at the height of the repatriation project in 1935, as many as 500,000 braceros were returned to Mexico (144).

² At least two reviews of *La patria perdida* were published in the United States after its release: one in the July, 1936, edition of *Revista Hispánica Moderna* (Englekirk 315-316) and another in the Autumn, 1944, edition of *Books Abroad* (Jones 235).

recent “recovery” or rediscovery of his work is one of the results of the Recovery of the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project, administered by Arte Público Press at the University of Houston.

Though regarded mostly for his work as a journalist, Teodoro Torres made a significant contribution to the body of Mexican Revolutionary literature. His first novel, *Pancho Villa: Una vida de romance y tragedia* (1925), garnered Torres comparisons to other important writers of the Mexican Revolution, such as Mariano Azuela, Martín Luis Guzmán and Rafael Muñoz (McCann 18); and, with them, Torres is sometimes categorized as one of the “action writers” of the Revolution. However, with the publication of *Golondrina*, Torres also occupies a place in the second major classification of the literature of the Mexican Revolution, which reflects on contemporary social conditions, beside the works of other writers such as Gregorio López y Fuentes, Mauricio Magdaleno, Xavier Icaza and Rubén Romero (McCann 19-20).

Nevertheless, *La patria perdida*, when read alongside other novels, like Daniel Venegas’s *Las aventuras de don Chipote, o, Cuando los pericos mamen* (1928) and Conrado Espinoza’s *El sol de Texas* (1926), seems to establish yet a third classification for literature of the Mexican Revolution: not the romance literature of the action novel, nor an addendum to a group of Modern Mexican novels which utilize realist techniques to examine contemporary social conditions in Mexico, but as part of a newly recovered body of binational Mexican-American literary patrimony which examines the social conditions of Mexican immigrants living in exile in the United States during the time of the Mexican Revolution.

Indeed, it is within this context that Torres’s novel seems to be most important as an early example of Mexican-American transmigrant literature,³ because it offers a significant

³ In *Hispanic Immigrant Literature*, Kanellos explains that the concept of a transmigrant differs from other understandings of immigrant populations which see immigrants as “giv[ing] up their land of origin in order to settle

counterpoint to the conclusions reached by both Venegas and Espinoza at the end of each of their novels, positing that Mexican immigrants would never be able to achieve the American Dream. Or, as Venegas describes it at the end of his satirical work: “[Don Chipote] llegó a la conclusión que los mexicanos se harán ricos en Estados Unidos: CUANDO LOS PERICOS MAMEN” (159).⁴

Through Torres’s protagonist, Luis Alfaro, the reader is able to catch a glimpse of the world of the Mexican elite who also fled the destruction during the Mexican Revolution. And *La patria perdida* offers the rare depiction of an educated and landed gentleman who, economically, is very much able to achieve the American Dream, but, along with his wife Ana María, still dreams of returning to Mexico, despite their material success in their new host country.

Torres constructs a novel that clearly shows the diversity of class and experience within an immigrant group often seen as monolithically poor and uneducated. In addition, Torres is also able to demonstrate that upper class standing still did not make Mexicans entirely immune to the effects of ethnic or racial discrimination, nor the struggles against acculturation and assimilation, experienced by Mexican immigrants living in the United States. Notwithstanding, perhaps the greatest contribution made by Torres’s novel is how it informs our understanding of “the dream of return to the homeland” (Kanellos, *Hispanic Immigrant Literature* 52-55), or what Pluecker describes as the “ideology of return” (114), while also expanding our understanding of the philosophy of “el México de afuera,” an ideology promoted by Ignacio E. Lozano through his newspaper *La Prensa* (Kanellos and Martell 37-39), where Torres was employed as a

permanently in the host country.” Rather, transmigrants “challenge the earlier concept of assimilation to the host culture...in favor of a model that goes beyond the limits of political and geographical borders, languages, and national allegiances” (17). In the case of Torres, he crossed back and forth over the U.S.-Mexico border at least two or three times before settling permanently once again in Mexico City (McCann 10).

⁴ “[Don Chipote] came to the conclusion that Mexicans will make it big in the United States...WHEN PARROTS BREAST-FEED.” (Venegas, *The Adventures of Don Chipote* 160).

journalist while living in exile in San Antonio (Somoza 663; Ocampo de Gómez and Prado Velázquez 379; McCann 7-8; Torres, *Periodismo* i).

Though written by Teodoro Torres, a member of the Mexican intellectual and social elite, and not a working class author like Venegas or Espinoza, *La patria perdida*, in many important ways, reveals a shared Mexican nationalism among the elite and working classes of Mexican immigrants in response to the racial and ethnic discrimination which they collectively experienced in the United States, despite the clash between the classes in their country of origin, as well as a certain degree of ethnic and national unity in their resistance to assimilation through the construction of similarly oppositional identities for Mexicans living in the United States after the Mexican Revolution.

About the Author

Though reported in numerous publications as having been born in 1891 (Somoza 663; González Peña 266; Ocampo de Gómez and Prado Velázquez 379), according to *Notes on the Works of Teodoro Torres* (1947), a master's thesis written by Betty McCann based on extensive research utilizing personal interviews with Teodoro Torres and his family members, Torres was born three years earlier, in Villa de Guadalupe, San Luis Potosí, Mexico, on January 4, 1888 (4).

As a child in the small desert pueblo, Torres spent most of his time reading. And his family nurtured his love for books by ordering classics from Europe to augment his large personal library (McCann 6), a background not unlike that of his protagonist in *La patria perdida*, Luis Alfaro, who gains the respect of his fellow European immigrant settlers thanks to his brief education abroad in Europe. Torres attended the local primary school and eventually enrolled in the Seminario Conciliar de San Luis Potosí (Peral 801).

On January 8, 1914, Torres married Soledad Torres, who bore the same family name as his own (McCann 6). McCann argues that some knowledge of the facts of Teodoro Torres's personal life is critical for a full understanding of his work as a novelist, because so much of his writing is based on autobiographical details. When describing Villa de Guadalupe at the time of Torres's childhood, in the introduction to her own work, McCann states, "It is not superfluous to include the description of this small Mexican town in biographical material for it played a very important part both in the life and in the work of Teodoro Torres. He has used it as the setting for his last and most important novel, *Golondrina*" (4). McCann also asserts that numerous scenes, characters and conflicts are drawn directly from Torres's own lived experience, including his own exile to the United States, which took place after the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution and only shortly after his marriage to Soledad Torres—the principal dramatic conflict and plot point of his novel *La patria perdida* (McCann 6-7). When discussing the Gonzalez family's departure from Mexico in *Golondrina*, McCann maintains, "The passage[,] according to the Torres family[,] is completely autobiographical" (7).

During his lifetime, Teodoro Torres seems to have been best recognized for his work as a journalist (McCann 13), writing for many of the most important periodicals in Mexico at the time. He has even been referred to as the "Father of Mexican Journalism" (Kanellos, "Cronistas and Satire" 6-7; Kanellos, *Hispanic Periodicals* 39), perhaps because he established the first formal school of journalism in Mexico (Somoza 663) and penned what may well have been the first known journalism textbook in his country as well. However, after reading that text, entitled *Periodismo* (1937), one might come to the conclusion that "Father of Mexican Journalism" is a title that Torres would have rejected for himself. In the introduction to this first Mexican textbook on journalism, he feels compelled to humbly assert, "No porque me suponga el [más]

capacitado le he puesto mano a este libro” (i).⁵ In this text, Torres also includes a thorough history of the Mexican journalistic tradition which he outlines in Chapter VII, “Historia del periodismo en México,”⁶ leading one to believe that he would lend the distinction of “Father of Mexican Journalism” to one of his predecessors, like Don Juan Ignacio Castorena y Ursúa, Don Juan Francisco Sahagún de Arevalo or Don Juan Antonio Alzate, who Torres claims all began producing the first regularly published gazettes in Mexico in the early eighteenth century (85-86). Nevertheless, when looking at the prominent position in which he less-than-humbly places himself among the pantheon of Mexican satirists, in his treatise *Humorismo y sátira* (1943), presented as his 351-page public address upon accepting his induction in the Spanish Royal Academy, one might more precisely refer to Torres as the father of “contemporary” or “modern” Mexican journalism.

In addition to being a journalist and a teacher of journalism, Torres was a novelist, a satirist, a historian and a news radio personality (McCann 15).⁷ And one of the most important turning points in his personal and professional life was when he was forced to leave Mexico with his wife Soledad in 1914 (McCann 6); he relocated to San Antonio, Texas, where he worked as a journalist for the Spanish-language newspaper *La Prensa* until returning permanently to Mexico City in 1925 (McCann 10).

While in Mexico, Torres worked for a number of the country’s most important newspapers, both before and after his exile in the United States. On the title page of *Periodismo*, Torres provides a brief history, according to which he served as editor-in-chief for *La Prensa*, editorialist at *Excelsior*, editorial director of the evening edition of *Excelsior*, editorial director of

⁵ “It is not because I imagine myself the most capable that I have put my hand to writing this book.”

⁶ “A History of Journalism in Mexico.”

⁷ A little documented fact is that Torres served as a regular commentator on a Mexican radio program from 1941 until his death in 1944 (McCann 15).

Revistas de Revistas and editorial director of *México al Día* (i). In addition, among his most important professional achievements, Torres was also inducted as a Mexican correspondent to the Spanish Royal Academy in 1941 (Somoza 663; Ocampo de Gómez and Prado Velázquez 379; House 288) and, in the following year, was elected chair of the Mexican Academy of Letters, “the official and ultimate consecration of a writer in Mexico” (McCann 15).⁸

Though Torres goes into painstaking detail in *Humorismo y sátira* to trace the history of the development of satire in the Western literary tradition, from Horace and Cicero through Quevedo and Molière, up to the work of contemporary Mexican satirists, like José Elizondo, as well as his own work, he provides few comments on his own writing process. It is only when reading *Periodismo* that one learns more about Torres’s own models and influences, such as Balzac, as well as his own perspectives on writing and what he thinks makes for quality writing, when he states: “Este arte de informar con originalidad y con claridad, de describir con exactitud y de difundir ideas con profundidad, solo se afina y se pule tomando contacto con la vida” (ii).⁹

Among his many books are the aforementioned four novels, which, in the realist tradition of Balzac, he seems to have crafted with the same clarity and exactitude of description as his works of non-fiction. Ironically, both *Pancho Villa* and *Como perros y gatos* (1924), which are set in Mexico, were published in the United States through Ignacio E. Lozano’s book press, Editora Lozana, while Torres was still living in exile in San Antonio (McCann 175); however, it was *La patria perdida*—a novel set primarily in the United States—that would be his first full-

⁸ Torres was inducted into the Spanish Royal Academy during the rise of Francisco Franco in Spain. Because of Torres’s avowed support of the Catholic Church, the armed forces and even former dictators, such as Porfirio Díaz, it is plausible that his induction into the Spanish Academy was to reward his possibly fascist political sympathies. Unfortunately, however, this line of inquiry goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

⁹ “This art of providing information with originality and clarity, crafting descriptions with exactitude, and disseminating ideas with depth can only be polished and perfected by having contact with real life.”

length work of fiction published in Mexico, underscoring the transnational nature of Torres's body of work.

Though still known principally as a journalist at the time—regularly writing as many as forty articles per month for *La Prensa* and, simultaneously, as a foreign correspondent for periodicals in Mexico—with the publication of the Revolutionary romance *Pancho Villa*, Torres began to establish himself as a novelist (McCann 11-12).

However, it wasn't until the publication of *La patria perdida* after his return to Mexico that Torres began to receive critical acclaim for his work in fiction. Says Torres:

Hace veinte años que vengo proclamando ideas en los periódicos, desde esa tribuna pomposa y oscura que se llama “la sección editorial” y todo [fue] clamar en el desierto. Mis otros libros, que tuvieron éxitos editoriales increíbles en estos raquíticos medios literarios mexicanos, pasaron inadvertidos para la crítica. [*La patria perdida*] me trajo esa oleada caliente de la aprobación “de los sabios y de los buenos.”¹⁰ (McCann 12)

Carlos González Peña, in his foundational study of Mexican literature, *Historia de la literatura mexicana* (1966), seems to concur with this assessment, when he writes, “Mas Teodoro Torres, antes que nada, era novelista; un curioso de almas y paisajes,”¹¹ but then notes that Torres's reputation as a novelist was “consecrated” in Mexico only after the publication of *La patria perdida* (266).

Indeed, the completion of the novel may never have taken place if it hadn't been for Torres's continued clashes with Mexico's changing ruling classes.

¹⁰ “For twenty years, I had been proclaiming my ideas in the newspapers, from that pompous and shadowy pulpit called the ‘editorial pages’ and it was all like crying in the desert. My other books, which had tremendous editorial success among the lesser Mexican media, went by without notice by the literary critics. [*La patria perdida*] brought me that warm surge of approval from the ‘good and wise’ men.”

¹¹ “But Teodoro Torres, more than anything, was a novelist, a surveyor of landscapes and souls.”

[I]n 1931 politics again caught up with Teodoro Torres. His constant opposition to the revolutionary regime (this, during the time of the Calles Decree) forced his resignation from the post of editor [of *Revistas de Revistas*], [and] from the newspaper world entirely...The enforced vacation from newspaper work gave Teodoro Torres at last some free time to devote to the novel he had started some years earlier...*La patria perdida*. (McCann 10-11).

Though the novel was read in the United States, the reviews of this story of immigration north of the border weren't nearly as kind as the healthy doses of praise and adulation he began to receive in his own country. "Though received in Mexico with superlatives as the novel of the year," writes Willis K. Jones, in his 1937 book review, published in *Books Abroad*, "it would be much improved by considerable and judicious cutting" (235). Nevertheless, a growing recognition of Torres's importance as a Mexican novelist within the United States can be seen in another review published in the same journal shortly after the publication of *Golondrina*. The reviewer, Roy Temple House, describes Torres's work as "ambitious" and "beautiful" and compares his writing to that of Ignacio Altamirano and Jorge Isaacs, while mourning the loss of the author, a personal friend, and praising him for "lov[ing] his profession as he did his family, and [being] one of the high-minded journalists who do much to lift the ethical average of that much-criticized fraternity" (288).

Suffering from the effects of diabetes for many years, Teodoro Torres died of uremic poisoning in Mexico City on September 26, 1944, just six days after the publication of what is considered to be his greatest novel, *Golondrina* (McCann 15-16).

About the Text

Though originally published in Mexico, the first half of *La patria perdida* takes place in the United States, primarily in and around Kansas City, Missouri,¹² making it the first known fictional work about the Mexican-American immigrant experience in the Midwest.

As previously noted, the beginning of the novel and the dramatic conflict which drives it are based, in part, on events of the life of the author.¹³ Torres's protagonist, Luis Alfaro, educated in Europe and trained at the Colegio Militar in Mexico City, takes his new bride, Ana María, to the United States after serving for four years in the Federal Army and not only watching his country being torn apart, but also witnessing the destruction of his childhood home and the death of his parents as a result of the Mexican Revolution (Torres, *La patria perdida* 12-14).¹⁴

After a brief stay in San Antonio, Texas, where Luis and Ana María find it difficult to integrate into the established Mexican-American and Mexican exile communities, they decide to relocate to Arley, just north of Kansas City, Missouri, in order to set up a farm, modeled after the hereditary haciendas left behind by both husband and wife in Mexico (Torres, *La patria perdida* 15-16). And it is, indeed, the fact that Luis and Ana María are able to retain such a significant portion of the wealth they had in Mexico, and reinvest those resources in the purchase of land and livestock, that places *La patria perdida* in such stark contrast to other early works of

¹² There is some confusion about the location of the fictional setting, Arley, because of contradictions within the novel itself. On pages 15-16, Torres explains that Luis Alfaro had purchased land "en el Estado de Missouri, casi en los límites de Kansas," or rather, "in the State of Missouri, almost on the border with Kansas." However, much later in the novel, in Chapter XI, Torres enumerates the various honorific societies present at the "fiestas patrias" celebration and includes the Benemérita Asociación Miguel Hidalgo, from "Arley, Kansas" (117). The real town of Arley is, of course, on the Missouri side of the Missouri-Kansas border, as described in the first chapter of the novel.

¹³ The autobiographical connections between Torres and this novel can best be seen through the character of Pepe Sarmiento, a friend of Alfaro, who is a journalist in San Antonio covering the Mexican Consulate as part of his regular beat.

¹⁴ As Alfaro started his commission in 1911, this would have placed their departure to the United States around 1914 or 1915, approximately the same that Torres left with his wife for the United States (Torres, *La patria perdida* 13-14; McCann 6).

Mexican-American immigrant fiction, including novels like Daniel Venegas' *The Adventures of Don Chipote: Or, When Parrots Breast-Feed* and Conrado Espinoza's *Under the Texas Sun*, which likewise document the experiences of Mexicans who fled north to the United States in order to escape the chaos created by the Mexican Revolution, but focus primarily on blue collar immigrant experiences.

Unlike *Don Chipote* and *Under the Texas Sun*, essentially working class cautionary tales warning Mexican compatriots against trying to find the American Dream north of the border, Teodoro Torres's novel depicts the life of a landed Mexican rancher and member of a social elite, who is successful economically in his transition to his new host community in the American heartland. Exposed to a much lower degree of racial discrimination than his working class counterparts Don Chipote, Quico García and Serapio Quijano, Luis Alfaro, who, it seems, looks more Western European than most of his Mexican compatriots, has many Italian, French and other European friends and neighbors, who respect him as an equal and regularly visit him at home.

In some ways, the Alfaros act as the social glue that holds their small frontier community together, uniting the various families, who represent diverse national and ethnic groups as well as social classes. In Chapter III, when all the neighbors come to visit and check on Ana María's health, the narrator notes that Alfaro's French neighbor, M. Martin, who served as a kind of administrative assistant or chamberlain in the French parliament and had contact with the world's most powerful people at the time before moving to the United States, only treats his fellow European immigrant settlers as equals out of respect for Luis when everyone is together at the Alfaros' home, stating, "El francés se inclinaba ante aquel capricho de Monsieur Alfaro,

como debió de haberse inclinado en otros tiempos ante los más insignificantes deseos de sus amos” (Torres, *La patria perdida* 42).¹⁵

Indeed, this equalizing and unifying effect that the Alfaros have among their circle of landed elite on the new American frontier can also be seen when Luis and Ana María’s adopted son, Luisito, returns from his boarding school in the northeast.

Desde la mañana habían llegado los Pantusa con sus hijos, Markowsky, su esposa y el francés Martín. Este se preparaba como para una fiesta diplomática, tratando de establecer categorías, pero Ana María se opuso: quería que desde el último de los hijos de los paisanos humildes hasta los que mayor representaban allí la “aristocracias” tuvieran el privilegio de estrechar la mano del príncipe que estaba por llegar.¹⁶ (Torres, *La patria perdida* 93)

However, though the Alfaros are able to unite the community on a number of different occasions throughout the novel, Torres makes sure to show that they always maintain a certain esteemed position in the eyes of the others, their European neighbors included.

To the extent that the Alfaros are esteemed and respected among their neighbors, they allow Torres to combat some of the existing and pervasive stereotypes plaguing the Mexican immigrant community. Not only are they successfully able to educate Luisito about the glorious history of Mexico—inculcating in him a certain degree of pride in his Mexican parents, despite the stereotypical images of Mexicans he is confronted with while away at school—but, they are also successful in convincing at least one of their neighbors that the United States is not the only

¹⁵ “The Frenchman acquiesced to Monsieur Alfaro’s caprice, as he would have acquiesced in previous times to his masters’ most insignificant whims.”

¹⁶ “The Pantusas with their children, Markowsky, his wife, and Martin, the Frenchman, had all been there since the morning. Martin was preparing for something like a formal gathering, trying to establish social hierarchies, but Ana María objected: she wanted everyone, from the least of the children from the humblest of families to those that best represented the local ‘aristocracy,’ to have the privilege to shake the hand of the prince who was about to arrive.”

“promised land” for European immigrants in search of opportunity, but that Mexico has just as much to offer industrious souls looking to make their fortune in the Americas.

In Chapter IX,¹⁷ when all their neighbors come to greet Luisito on the day he returns from school, the group of immigrant farmers begins to discuss various topics, from their children to their individual fortunes. During this conversation, Markowsky, a Polish immigrant, admits that he and his wife have been considering relocating to Mexico (Torres, *La patria perdida* 99-102). Markowsky has a number of questions for Alfaro, and although it takes Luis some time to do so, in the end, Markowsky is convinced that Mexico has just as much to offer him as the United States, concluding, “Pues créame usted que un buen día realizo los bienes que tengo aquí y me voy a México” (Torres, *La patria perdida* 102).¹⁸ Indeed, this seems to be one of the principal themes which Torres develops through his novel: Mexico is just as good—if not better—than the United States.

This perspective is developed in the first part of Torres’s novel exemplifying a familiar trope in the literature of Latino/a immigrant fiction: “el sueño del retorno” or “the dream of the return to the homeland.” As Kanellos explains in his most recent work, *Hispanic Immigrant Literature*:

Most Hispanic immigrant literature likewise promotes a return to the homeland and, in so doing, is antihegemonic and rejecting of the American Dream and of the melting pot. The ethos of Hispanic immigrant literature is based on the premise of return after what authors and community expect to be a temporary sojourn in the land where work is supposedly ubiquitous and dollars are plentiful and the economic and political instability of the homeland is unknown. Authors or their narrators (or both) dissuade readers from

¹⁷ Chapter X in the original text as a result of a typographical error.

¹⁸ “Well, mark my word, sir, that one fine day, I will sell everything I own here and I will move to México.”

investing in the American myth of creating a new life, a new self in the United States, where one is supposedly free to develop one's potential, climb the social ladder, and become independently wealthy. With equal conviction they discredit the idea of a melting pot in which all races and creeds are treated equally and have equal opportunity to attain the benefits the United States has to offer. (52)

La patria perdida is so notable as an example of early Latino/a immigrant literature, then, because it is clearly a novel which embraces the theme of "el sueño del retorno," despite the fact that its protagonist comes to the United States with considerable wealth; he is able to establish himself on the highest rungs of the social ladder; and, he could easily melt into the mixed ethnic pot of his primarily Western European frontier community. But he is still fixated on his return to Mexico. Unlike Don Chipote, the title character in Venegas's novel, Luis Alfaro does not have to sell most of his possessions just to pay for his passage to the United States; like Don Chipote, Alfaro is also forced to liquidate his assets, but they are considerable enough to pay for his passage, the passage of his wife and her maid, and still leave over enough to buy a significant amount of land and establish a profitable ranch in Missouri. Similarly, unlike the Garcías, in *El sol de Texas*, who experience racial discrimination throughout their stay in the United States, Luis and Ana María's white skin and the lightness of their features permit them to largely "pass" in American society and escape any explicit racial or ethnic discrimination, despite the fact that Ana María speaks little or no English. Of course, Ana María never bothers to learn English because she has no intention of staying in the United States; as a result, the entire first half the novel is built around Luis and Ana María's obsessive determination to return to the homeland.

From the opening of the novel to the close of the first half, Luis repeatedly vows to return to Mexico. He is even forced to promise Ana María, sick in a Kansas City hospital, that, if she

should die before they return, he will return her body to the place of her birth. “Quiero que me prometas,” says Ana María, “que si me muero, no me dejarás en esta tierra que no ha sido mala con nosotros, pero que no es la mía. Llévame a donde seguramente irás tú cuando yo te deje. A Morelia, a Pátzcuaro, a México, a donde yo sienta, después de muerta, que estás cerca de mí...”¹⁹ (Torres, *La patria perdida* 19).

Indeed, it is the death of Ana María—her heart seeming to succumb to the overwhelming emotions she feels at witnessing the very successful “fiestas patrias” event she was able to organize from her deathbed for the surrounding community, as well as her son’s return to school, where he will undoubtedly be confronted with more anti-Mexican stereotypes—that brings together two of the most important themes in Mexican immigrant literature, giving a sense of tragic pathos to this novel: “el sueño del retorno” and the construction of an imagined community known as “el México de afuera.”

Imagining Mexican Nationalism in “el México de afuera”

Both devoted newspaper men throughout their lives, Teodoro Torres and his boss Ignacio E. Lozano are among the clearest examples, within the post-Revolutionary Mexican exile community, of men who understood the power of the press as a means to construct the kinds of “imagined communities” described in Benedict Anderson’s groundbreaking work. In *Periodismo*, Torres writes explicitly about the ability of print to change the course of history, as well as its capacity for uniting a people, even making use of some of the same examples—like Benjamin Franklin—as Anderson does nearly five decades later. In Chapter III of his journalism text book, Torres crafts a history of the press similar to what one finds in Anderson, beginning

¹⁹ “I want you to promise me that if I die, you will not leave me in this country which has not been bad to us, but is not mine. Take me to where you will surely go once I leave you. To Morelia, to Pátzcuaro, to México, where I can feel you close to me, even after I have gone...”

with the ancient Greeks and Romans, moving chronologically through the development of Gutenberg's printing press, as well as the subsequent development of "print-as-commodity" (Anderson 37) in places like Holland and England; he then discusses the role of the printing press in both the French and American revolutions (Torres, *Periodismo* 29-31).

But it is in Chapter VI, entitled "Periódicos y periodistas extranjeros,"²⁰ that Torres discusses the relationship between the newspaper and nationalism in earnest. Torres begins with an outline of the career of French journalist Teofrasto Renaudot, whom he credits with being the "father of the modern periodical" (64). Discussing the development of the French periodical *Gazette*, Torres talks about the transformative power of the news for a nation and demonstrates how the French nobility and upper classes used print media for their own political ends, as he traces the expansion of the French press which would grow to include 120 newspapers in Paris alone and nearly 7,000 periodicals world-wide at the time of the publication of his book in 1937 (65-69). Torres argues that Renaudot and these subsequent developments helped to unify a global French community, make French the accepted international "lingua franca" and establish French journalistic practices as the model for the rest of the world (69). Torres then moves on to journalism in the United States, explaining that William Randolph Hearst had such an extensive network of periodicals that he was able to "impose certain ways of thinking" upon the millions of Americans who read his newspapers each day: "[Hearst] [p]osee 'una cadena' que liga a toda la Unión Americana, la apresa y le impone ciertos modos de pensar" (72).²¹

Later in his textbook on journalism, Torres discusses the development of print media in Mexico and the "zigzag inacabable"²² of the press whose "movimiento es el de un péndulo que

²⁰ "Foreign Newspapers and Journalists."

²¹ "[Hearst] owns a 'chain' that binds the entire United States, grasps hold of it and imposes certain ways of thinking upon it."

²² "Never-ending zigzag."

unas veces se adelanta hasta la libertad y otras regresa a la intransigencia y a la persecución”²³ (82). Not surprisingly, Torres argues that Porfirio Díaz—in his estimation—was one of the greatest supporters of the free press in Mexico, while he criticizes other historical figures, like Spanish viceroys José de Iturrigaray and Francisco Javier Venegas de Saavedra, for suppressing its freedoms as Mexico attempted to gain its independence from Spain (82). Torres describes how Venegas was forced to suspend all publication of periodicals in Mexico once leaflets began to appear which sympathized with and openly supported the insurrection (93-94). And finally, Torres demonstrates how the idea of Mexican nationalism was first formed and disseminated throughout the country through the publication of *El despertador americano*, founded in Guadalajara in 1811 by Mexico’s founding father, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (95-96).

After reading *Periodismo*, it seems quite clear that Torres understood print media’s ability to “invent nations where they do not exist,” as Anderson suggests in his own work *Imagined Communities* (6). Like Anderson, Torres seems to understand the bounded nature of the nation and the *limited* audience or readership which can be united through print (Anderson 7). Torres, likewise, seems to understand the *sovereign* nature of the nation he is attempting to address, while—contrary to Anderson’s assertions regarding the Enlightenment and revolutionary era in Europe—still attempting to preserve and maintain intact a Catholic, divinely-ordained and hierarchical dynastic realm (Anderson 7). And Torres also seems to understand that nations are, above all else, communities, or as Anderson explains, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship,” (Anderson 7) which is precisely why one discovers numerous passages in Torres’s novel which describe Alfaro as a benevolent master who is adored by all of

²³ “Movement is that of a pendulum which at times advances toward freedom and others retreats to intransigence and persecution.”

his workers and depict Ana María as one with her servants, even going to their homes and making sure that they have an equal opportunity to see her son, “the prince” (Torres, *La patria perdida* 93).

Torres even seems to understand the “sacredness of language” (Anderson 12-13) and its role in the construction of nationalism, especially for an exile community establishing an oppositional identity outside of Mexico’s political boundaries. In fact, in *Periodismo*, Torres dedicates an entire chapter to the “pureza de lenguaje,” or “purity of language,” in which he rails against the penetration of “pochismos”²⁴ into the Spanish language, much in the same way as he does in his novel *La patria perdida*:

[L]a cuestión capital en esto de la corrupción del idioma no está entre aquellas pobres gentes, merecedoras de todas las disculpas, sino entre nosotros que no tenemos ninguna para hablar pocho y texano, lejos de aquella influencia y obligados como estamos a mantener la pureza de la lengua materna.²⁵ (Torres, *Periodismo* 161)

Just as Anderson suggests in his work, Torres consciously uses his pen and his access to print media—utilizing both periodicals and the novel—as a way to unite an imagined exile community and establish an oppositional national identity, promoting “Nationalism-with-a-big-N” (Anderson 5) and an ideology known as “el México de afuera.”

“El México de afuera,” according to Kanellos and Martell, is “a Mexican colony existing outside of Mexico, in which it was the duty of the individual to maintain the Spanish language, keep the Catholic faith and insulate their children from what community leaders perceived as the

²⁴ “Pocho” is a term used to describe an assimilated Mexican or Mexican-American. Therefore, “pochismos” are the hybrid terms which are attributed to “pochos” who code-switch between English and Spanish.

²⁵ “The principal question in this issue about the corruption of our language does not rest upon those poor souls, deserving of all forgiveness, but rather upon ourselves who have no reason to speak ‘pocho’ and Texan, so distant from those influences and obliged as we are to maintain the purity of our mother tongue.”

low moral standards practiced by Anglo-Americans” (37). Or, as Gabriela Baeza Ventura explains in *La imagen de la mujer en la crónica del “México de afuera”* (2006):

[Es] una especie de comunidad imaginada...en la que se presenta a un México superior al que se dejó atrás. Este México no tiene la corrupción y el desorden propagados por la Revolución y es el que el inmigrante se lleva consigo cuando emigra a Estados Unidos. El inmigrante cree tener el poder de reestablecer en Estados Unidos este México que lleva dentro.²⁶ (21)

Given these two definitions of “el México de afuera,” it becomes clear how Torres’s novel exemplifies both of these theoretical frameworks for understanding *La patria perdida* and its contemporaries, like *Don Chipote* and *El Sol de Texas*.

As previously mentioned, Torres uses the character of Luisito to demonstrate the need for Mexican exiles to protect their children from assimilation and instill in them a sense of national pride, to the point where Luis and Ana María are actually able to subvert the normal acculturative trajectory for immigrants by adopting an Anglo-American boy and construct for him a—however challenged or incomplete—Mexican identity. In addition, following Kanellos and Martell’s definition, Torres routinely threads his novel with images drawn from the Catholic faith as well as depictions of his characters practicing their faith throughout the text. Finally, as one will read in the following chapter on the translation of *La patria perdida*, Torres crafts a bilingual text in order to criticize the perceived assault on the purity of the Spanish language represented by the mixing of English and Spanish, particularly among those whom Alfaro encounters while in San Antonio in Part of II of the novel.

²⁶ “It is a type of imagined community...in which a Mexico is constructed as being superior to the one left behind. This Mexico does not have the corruption or the disorder propagated by the Revolution, and it is the one which the immigrant carries with him when he immigrates to the United States. The immigrant believes that in the United States he has the ability to reestablish the Mexico which he holds inside.”

However, one of the clearest examples of the ideology of “el México de afuera” that can be found operating in *La patria perdida* appears at the end of Part I, when Luis Alfaro is encouraged to address the crowd gathered at his home to celebrate the “fiestas patrias” and delivers an impromptu speech, stating:

Estoy seguro de que [esta noche] ha sido tan intens[a], que les servirá para reencender a todas horas el culto de la patria. No olviden que tenemos la obligación de querer a México sobre todas las cosas, de honrarlo, de vivir de tal modo que conquistando el respeto para nosotros, lo conquistamos para él. Saquemos de esta aventura del exilio el provecho de ser más mexicanos que ninguno por haber vivido fuera de México. Aprovechemos las lecciones de dolor que nos ha dado el destierro, con la conciencia de que no hay patria como la nuestra, y con la esperanza de que al reintegrarnos a la casa paterna hallaremos en ella más calor y más cariño, no porque allá nos den todo eso sino porque lo llevaremos dentro y se hará el milagro de encender un fuego que vive latente, y que allá abajo nadie percibe.²⁷ (126)

In Alfaro’s improvised diatribe, one can see an intense nationalism being developed which posits that for having lived outside of Mexico, one actually becomes more Mexican and learns how better to appreciate Mexico as well as how to later better the nation itself as a result of the kind of transformative epiphany occurring during the community’s time spent in exile. Of course, as Baeza Ventura suggested earlier—and as it is echoed here by Torres, through the character of Luis Alfaro—what is most important in this construction of the ideology of “el

²⁷ “I am sure that [this evening] has been so intense that it will serve to forever reignite your love for our country. Do not forget that we have an obligation to love México above all else, to honor her, to live life in such a way that earning respect for ourselves is like earning respect for her. Let us learn from this experience in exile the lesson of becoming more Mexican than anyone else for having had to live beyond the borders of México. Let us take advantage of the lessons of pain and suffering that exile has taught us, knowing that there is no other country like our own, and with the hope that upon returning to our paternal home, we will find more warmth and affection there, not because they give us everything there, but because we carry it within ourselves, and it will cause the miracle of igniting the fire that lives hidden within us and that no one can see over there.”

México de afuera” is not the real Mexico which one has left behind, but the imagined Mexico which the exile “lleva dentro,” or carries within.

In the end, though Torres seems to develop many of the main themes that typify the ideology of “el México de afuera” in *La patria perdida*, it is with an understanding that this intensely nationalistic exile community which exists beyond the borders of Mexico clings to “una patria, más simbólica que real”²⁸ (90). And the tragedy of the end of the novel is felt most deeply when Luis Alfaro finally comes to the realization that the community which he held within his heart, the nation which inspired his dreams, no longer exists, and is a fading illusion brought on by his intense nostalgia or simply a figment of his imagination...

PROSE-TROTS & PALIMPSESTS: THE TRANSLATION OF *LA PATRIA PERDIDA*

²⁸ “A country, more symbolic than real.”

In his introduction to *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu* (1980), John Felstiner notes that there are very few examples of texts which cover the blow-by-blow, behind-the-scenes view of the making of a translation:

Usually, whatever goes toward the making of a verse translation gets left behind, becomes invisible, once the poem stands intact. The translator's own background, research, and process of composition do not appear in the finished work, any more than the scaffolding does around a finished building—or the welding torches, the lunch breaks, the labor disputes, the accidents, the delays for bad weather. (1)

Similarly, George Steiner writes, in *After Babel* (1998):

We know next to nothing of the genetic process which has gone into the translator's practice, of the prescriptive or purely empirical principles, devices, routines which have controlled his choice of this equivalent rather than that, of one stylistic level in preference to another. (273)

Indeed, this relative dearth of knowledge and awareness of the discourse and scholarship in the field of translation theory has led many people—including scholars in other fields—to innocently ask, when discussing my dissertation, “There's a *theory* of translation?” This question is often followed by quips like, “They're letting you do *a translation* for your dissertation?” or “Can't you just go to Google, Microsoft or Babylon and press the ‘translate’ button?”

It is for this reason that I wanted to use this portion of my dissertation to discuss the often dirty and ugly process of translation, exposing the unsightly palimpsest of my rendering of Teodoro Torres's *La patria perdida*, and exploring the choices and challenges I faced when attempting to bring the text over from the original Spanish (the source language) to English (the

target language), at all times attempting to approach, as closely as possible, the ideal of a good translation, which is both beautiful *and* faithful. For it is only through the production of more scholarship in this area that translators will be able to help promote a better understanding of and appreciation for the rich history of this ancient practice and field of inquiry, demonstrating that the craft of translation is, in many ways, the perfect marriage of praxis and theoria.

Faithfulness—with Beauty in the Balance

In *Introduction to Spanish Translation* (1992), Jack Child traces the development of translation theory in the Western world from ancient translators of Greek texts, like Horace and Cicero, and early Biblical translators, like St. Jerome, to issues raised in Spanish-to-English translation by contemporary translators. From the earliest days of literary translation, the principal challenges of the practice of taking a text “from one side to another”—or rather from a source language to a target language—have been well documented.²⁹ According to Child, Cicero was one of the first practitioners to “theorize” the field when writing, “a [word-for-word] translation would sound uncouth, while if [one] departed too much from the order or wording of the original [,] [one] would not be a good translator” (23).

Nevertheless, early Biblical translators, like St. Jerome, as well as the translators of other sacred texts, felt significant pressure not to deviate from their original source texts precisely because of the sacred value placed on the texts they were translating. In the worst cases, mistakes in translation were judged, and punished, for being blasphemous (Child 13), leading to a strong reluctance on behalf of early Biblical translators from taking any risks with their translations, resulting in very stilted word-for-word translations which were often difficult to

²⁹ The etymology of the word “translate,” as Child notes, comes from the Latin word “translatus” or “translatum,” which literally means to move an object from one place to another (8).

decipher in the target language because they deviated so little—even in grammar and syntax—from their originals.

However, it is said that, because literate Roman citizens were often bilingual or even multilingual—and able to read and understand both a translation’s source text and the eventual translation in the Latin target language—ancient Roman translators were under greater pressure from a more sophisticated readership, who could quickly catch errors in translation, but also encouraged translators to capture a sense of the original author’s style, voice and genius. In response to these audience expectations, Roman translators of Greek works were inspired to take greater liberties with the “free” translations they produced, “and thus moved [them] further away from the strict word-for-word limitations of early Biblical translation” (Child 24).

Mildred Larson, author of *Meaning-Based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence* (1984), acknowledges that a much wider span exists than the classical “literal” (word-for-word) versus “free” translation binary would suggest. In her book, Larson develops a translation spectrum which places totally word-for-word or “very literal” translations at one extreme. These are renderings so literal that the translation actually distorts the meaning for the target audience, or as Larson states, “the literal choice of lexical items makes the translation sound foreign,” (15) as with some early attempts at Biblical translation. An example of this kind of flawed or foreign translation from Torres’ *La patria perdida* would be attempting to render the term “tienda de raya” (21) as “store of ray” or “store of line.” In contemporary times, this is often the effect created by computer translation software, which produce mechanical word-for-word, or byte-for-byte, translations with little or no understanding of how nonsensical the data output is for the target audience inputting the source text.

Larson's spectrum moves from "very literal" to "modified literal," then makes an important shift to "near idiomatic" and "idiomatic" (17). An "idiomatic" translation at least sounds natural to the target audience, even if it isn't always linguistically precise; or, as Larson explains:

Idiomatic translations use the natural forms of the receptor language, both in the grammatical constructions and in the choice of lexical items. A truly **idiomatic translation** does not sound like a translation. It sounds like it was written originally in the receptor language. Therefore, a good translator will try to translate idiomatically. This is his goal. (16)

Returning to the example from Torres's novel, one might "near[ly] idiomatically" translate "tienda de raya" as "line store" or "ray store." The reference still doesn't make a lot of sense to the target audience, but at least the noun and adjective are in the right order; and, if we could imagine a store which sold lines or rays, this rendering might actually make sense given the appropriate context.

Like Larson, Childs argues that a "translator should generally aim for an idiomatic translation which reads as though it is not a translation, while at the same time conveying the full meaning of the [source language] original" (25). Indeed, "idiomatic" translation lies near the other extreme of Larson's spectrum, just before one reaches the "unduly free" translation, which is discouraged, because "free" translations take too much liberty with a source text and thus no longer represent the artistic vision, voice or meaning of the original source text. An example of what Larson describes as a proper "idiomatic" translation of the term "tienda de raya" would be something like "country store," which conveys accurately and understandably the meaning of the

term in Spanish but does not take undue liberties, even though the construction is quite different from the original.

However, I would argue that an idiomatic translation, though better than the “very literal,” can still fall short, and therefore should not be defined as the ideal translation. Sometimes, the most accurate translation requires more research to discover the most precise meaning of a word or phrase—or what is often referred to in the field as its “deep structure” (Larson 26) or “deep meaning” (Child 16-17). For example, though “country store” appears to be an adequately idiomatic translation of the term “tienda de raya,” it is still partially inaccurate at the semantic or “deep structure” level. A better linguistic equivalent, which retains the natural idiomatic quality of the previous option, would be to render “tienda de raya” as “company store,” the kind of store which was operated by large rail and mining companies in the 1920s and allowed their workers to purchase goods on store credit which would be charged against their wages, often leading employees into a type of indentured servitude, as inflated company store prices would often force workers to accumulate greater debts than they could ever repay given their low wages. This is what Torres is really referring to when using the term in Spanish. “Company store” reflects the “deep meaning” or “deep structure” of the term being used by Torres, and therefore, is the most accurate translation. And this example speaks to the possible dangers for a translator who is content with merely rendering a translation which sounds natural, or appears on the surface to be idiomatic, in the target language, without exercising the disciplined research necessary to achieve a translation which is both idiomatic (or “beautiful”) and accurate (or “faithful”).

This is why I find Jack Child’s “Beautiful-Faithful Matrix” more informative than Larson’s spectrum. When introducing his assessment tool, Child writes about what the French

call the “translator’s dilemma” of creating a translation so pleasing and beautiful that it begins to lose faithfulness to the meaning of the original source text, citing an anonymous French practitioner, “Translations are like lovers: the faithful are not beautiful and the beautiful are not faithful” (26). As a result, Childs develops a matrix comprising four quadrants labeled “beautiful-faithful,” “beautiful-unfaithful,” “ugly-faithful,” and “ugly-unfaithful,” positing that the ideal literary translation is actually both beautiful and faithful, but acknowledging that this ideal is often very difficult to achieve (26-27). Using this method of assessment, most published works of translation can be plotted somewhere on the border between beautiful-faithful and beautiful-unfaithful, or near the intersection of beautiful-faithful and ugly-faithful.

I strive for the ideal of “beautiful-faithful,” in the full knowledge that such a translation often involves a very arduous and, at times, tedious process which requires a great deal of work, dedication and—above all—time.

Getting Your Hands Dirty with the Translation Process

One example of the kind of scholarship both Steiner and Felstiner seem to be encouraging is the essay “Building a Translation, the Reconstruction Business: Poem 145 of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,” by Margaret Sayers Peden. In her essay, Sayers Peden uses one of her translations of Sor Juana’s sonnets to outline her own prose-trotting process:³⁰

I like to think of the original work as an ice cube. During the process of translation the cube is melted. While in its liquid state, every molecule changes place; none remains in

³⁰ Though individual techniques may vary from translator to translator, prose-trots general consist of creating a word-for-word, literal translation of a source text in the target language. Some translators construct trots which gloss each word, including a wide domain or “bundle” of meaning (Larson 55) from which the translator can later select a single equivalent. Others use trots prepared by colleagues or language specialists in order to translate texts when they are unfamiliar with the original source language of a given text. Sayers Peden, when discussing her own use of the prose-trot, explains that the “trot de-structs” the source text in “an act of pure violence...reducing it to an assemblage of words and lines that may convey minimal meaning, but no artistry” (15-16). It becomes the work of the translator to craft something beautiful from the rubble of the trot.

its original relationship to the others. Then begins the process of forming the work in a second language. Molecules escape, new molecules are poured in to fill the spaces, but the lines of molding and mending are virtually invisible. The work exists in the second language as a new ice cube—different, but to all appearances the same. (13)

However graceful and elegant a metaphor provided by Sayers Peden, when I think of the earliest pre-writing stages of the translation process, I can't help but to think about the greasy, dirty, hard grunt work of prose-trotting, which—unlike constructing an ice sculpture—is anything but elegant. Indeed, the prose-trot, for me, more closely resembles the work which Sayers Peden ascribes to the translator when doing the heavy-lifting of a builder in the reconstruction business: “One must do violence before one can make beauty; one must destroy before one can create” (13).

When reflecting on the dirty work of the prose-trot, I am often reminded of a potter throwing a slab of wet, sloppy clay on the wheel to begin the arduous process of eventually handcrafting a work of art which imitates the qualities of the original in form and aesthetics. Like Sayers Peden (14-15), I, too, always begin the translation process with a full prose-trot deconstruction of any given source text. To demonstrate this technique, I would like to focus on a sentence from Chapter IX,³¹ in which Luis Alfaro has finally been able to convince his Polish friend and neighbor, Markowsky, that there are just as many economic opportunities for European immigrants in Mexico as there are in the great “melting pot” of the United States (Torres, *La patria perdida* 102):

Con su voz grave declaró:

³¹ Due to a typographical error, this chapter appears as Chapter X in the original, with the real Chapter X marked as Chapter IX. However, these errors have been corrected in my subsequent translation.

—Pues créame usted que un buen día realizo los bienes que tengo aquí y me voy a México.

When rendering a complete prose-trot of this sentence, I ended up with a big, sloppy ball of clay, which looked something like this:

With his [grave / heavy / deep / weighty / ponderous / a grave tone / in a grave tone] voice [he] (declared):

“Well, [believe you me / you must believe me, sir, / you will have to believe me] that [one fine day] [I] [will realize my dreams / will take advantage of all the benefits / will convert all of the goods / will sell all of the things] [that I have here] and [I am going to Mexico / I will go to Mexico / I will move to Mexico / I am going to move to Mexico].”

As one can see, almost every word or phrase is treated in the prose-trot, placing as many plausible options for translation at the craftsman’s disposal as possible. Some minor issues have been addressed, such as some obvious grammatical and syntactical equivalencies, like the use of dashes for character dialogue in Spanish, which have been replaced by the quotation marks in English. However, for the most part, the structure of the original source text remains intact. For only after all the raw materials have been placed on the potter’s wheel, can the real pulling and trimming begin to take place.

In this case, one of the first issues to be addressed is the composition of this sentence in the Spanish original, where it sits on three lines as a result of the very common Spanish construction for dialogue.

[With his (grave / somber) voice / In a grave tone], he declared, “Well, mark my word, sir, that one fine day, I will sell everything I own here and I will [move / go] to Mexico.”

In addition, some of the options for translating certain words and phrases have been “trimmed,” narrowing the range of appropriate choices, after getting a feel for the author’s voice and tone as well as the context for the sentence within the broader text of the novel. And it is through this process of elimination that a translation really begins to take shape. Symmetries begin to emerge as additional hand carving takes place and the beautiful contours and nuances of voice and diction are revealed. Going round and round with the source and the trot, one eventually ends up with a final translation:

In a sombre tone, he declared, “Well, mark my word, sir, that one fine day, I will sell everything I own here and I will move to México.”

Readers might ask, “Why go through all the trouble? Why not just use a computer translation?” They might suggest that I “get with the times” or find quicker and more efficient strategies and practices. “Why use a potter’s wheel when there are modern molds or casts? Not only are you behind for modern, industrial times,” they might argue, “But we’re now in the post-industrial age. There are open source software packages online that can do this for free—and they’re a million times faster!”

For those who would privilege a speedy, byte-for-byte, machine translation (MT) above a finely-aged, handcrafted version, I offer you the follow three computer-generated translations for comparison:

With his deep voice said: - because believe me one day made the good I have here and go to Mexico. (Google Translate)

With his deep voice declared:-because believe me you a good day I make goods which I have here and I'm going to Mexico. (Microsoft Translator)

With his deep voice said: --because believe me you that a good day made the goods i have here and i am going to Mexico. (Babylon Online Translator)

In each case, the output is more or less “babble” or completely nonsensical. Only two of the three MTs are able to properly render even the very simplest clause, “voy a México,” as “i am going to Mexico” or “I’m going to Mexico.”

In all cases, the MT is not able to identify the basic construction of the sentence as a piece of dialogue, which, in English, requires quotation marks. Nor are any of the different software packages able to insert the implied subject for the conjugated Spanish verb “declaró,” which is absolutely necessary in English.

The computer translations also entirely miss the mark in a few instances, such as with the translation of the words “grave” and “bienes.” Arguably, “una voz grave” could be translated, in some circumstances, as “a deep voice,” as we see here in all three instances. It’s even an option in my original prose-trot. However, given the overall context of the novel, which repeatedly describes Markowsky as a person who is “serio,” “hosco” and “grave,” the adjective “grave,” in this case, isn’t describing so much the deep quality of Markowsky’s voice as he is speaking, but

rather his overall personality and demeanor, which is often described in my English translation as being “serious,” “grave” and “somber.”

Likewise, under certain circumstances, one might translate the word “bienes” as “goods” or “benefits” or “virtues”—things that are all “good.” But this is a complete mistranslation given the context of the discussion. What Markowsky is talking about is selling all of his *possessions* in order to relocate to Mexico, where Alfaro has convinced him he can purchase land and live a more fulfilling life than the one he has found in the United States. Though each MT has selected either “goods” or “good,” better options for bringing the “deep meaning” over into the English target language would include “possessions,” “property” or “assets.” However, for a more idiomatic rendering, I chose to translate the whole clause rather than just each individual word, bringing the clause over as “I will sell everything I own,” which is closer to what an English speaker in the United States might say.

Like applying a final glaze to a work of pottery before it is fired in the kiln, this kind of idiomatic rendering of entire phrases and clauses—along with other touches, such as the use of the more socio-historically appropriate spelling “sombre”³²—is the final step in an often dirty and time-consuming process of handcrafted translation. Likewise, because I primarily work in the area of historical translation, it is also extremely important to eliminate any contemporary equivalences for words or phrases which might be perceived as anachronistic, and opting instead for a translation which is more reflective of the time when the work was originally produced.

One example in this sentence would be the rendering of “Pues créame usted” as “Well, mark my word, sir,” in English. In American English, “mark my word” has fallen increasingly out of use and recalls the lexicon of a somewhat distant past. It also rings somewhat foreign to

³² I looked to Willa Cather as one model for historical equivalences representing a similar cultural milieu in the English target language. And, in *Oh, Pioneers!*, she uses this spelling (“sombre”) rather than the contemporary American English spelling, “somber.”

the American ear, as if imported from England. This also helps reinforce the actual “deep structure” of the dialogue, as it captures the positioning of the character Markwosky as still very much a foreigner. In addition, rendering “usted” as “sir” seems almost an obvious choice to the bilingual reader because of the exaggerated respect and deference being shown to Alfaro; however, this simple element was completely missed by the MTs, which either selected “you” as equivalent or didn’t translate the word at all. Not only does “sir” connote the elevated formality and esteem implied in the use of “usted,” but it also serves to reinforce the vision of Torres himself, who places Alfaro at the pinnacle of this frontier community, where he commands deep respect and admiration from everyone he comes into contact with, including his wealthy and successful European neighbors.

In the end, the careful selection of precise terms from the wide array of possible meanings in a well developed prose-trot enables a translator to render the “deep structure” of the literary work as a whole for the readers in the target language, in exactly the same way that the original author carefully chooses his or her own words to construct a narrative which attempts to deliver—with each simile, metaphor and twist of phrase—the message the author is trying to convey to his or her original audience.

Border Tongues & Rendering Torres’s Multilingual Textuality

One thing that most literary translators learn fairly early in their training is that a translator really doesn’t translate words at all; what a translator does is translate an author’s culture and world view, or as Child explains:

Each human being grows up in a culture in which s/he learns his or her language, and that language is conditioned and imbedded in that culture. The naming of things, thoughts,

and actions is accomplished with reference to the specific culture in which the child grows up. The specific language of a person's community, with all of its quirks, habits, style and nuances, are what give us our first language, and form the lens or filter through which we learn all subsequent languages.

This explains why translation should not be thought of so much as a transfer between languages, as a transfer between **cultures**. The two languages cannot be separated from their parent cultures without risk of losing meaning. By extension, the translator who works effectively with deep meaning below the surface features of two cultures must be bicultural as well as bilingual. (54)

As we can see with previous examples, the craft of translation actually has very little to do with the mere identification of a linguistically equivalent term in order to move one source word into the desired target language. In the end, the real work of a translator is found in the rendering of a word or phrase's "deep meaning" as well as recreating the author's own voice, diction and world view, in other words, communicating the author's culturally inscribed perspectives and the words he or she chooses to represent them for an audience in another language.

Within *La patria perdida* one can find a number of examples where some degree of the kind of biculturalism—as well as the bilingualism—that Childs recommends could be extremely useful when attempting to render a portion of the novel's "deep structure" or "deep meaning." In Chapter XI, the final chapter of Part I, Torres describes the gathering of various people from around the region to celebrate Mexican Independence Day. It is a bright and picturesque scene, full of local color and traditions, as well as specific cultural references to things like "lotería," a kind of Mexican bingo. Torres describes the joyous shouts and incomprehensible screams of the

players, attempting to capture the characters' own distinct accents: “‘butagó mi compañeró’; [‘]el qué te esperá en la esquiná’; ‘quien ha vistó el sol de noche’” (112).

A translator unfamiliar with the cultural reference might be tempted to render the quotation in a rather literal fashion: “my friend got drunk;” “the one waiting for you at the corner;” and “the one who has seen the sun at night.” These translations wouldn’t be inaccurate literally, but they would fail to capture the “deep structure” of the scene. The *lotería* players are excited, and their words are part playful banter and part commentary on what is actually transpiring as the game progresses. A cultural equivalent in contemporary American culture might be a spirited game of poker or dominos. And a more idiomatic translation of these three phrases, then, might be: “boo-yah, my friend;” “the guy’s waitin’ for you at the corner;” and “someone’s seein’ the sun at night.”

While these would certainly be more idiomatic renderings, capturing more of the lively spirit evoked in the original source text, they are still missing something very important in order to fully capture the “deep structure” of the scene: a concrete grounding in the culture or explicit references to the game of *lotería* itself. What the players are talking about, in this very passionate and spirited way, are three *lotería* cards which are revealed one after the other: the first card is #25, “el borracho,” or “the drunkard;” the second card is #2, “el diablito,” or “the little devil;” and, the third card is #46, “el sol,” or “the sun.” Armed with a knowledge of the specific cultural reference evoked by the scene, a translator can better arrive at the “deep structure,” rendering each phrase thusly: “my frie-end is two sheets to the wi-ind;” “the devil a-waitin’ at your do-oor step;” “who’s gonna see the sun a-shinin’ at night ti-ime.”

“Two sheets to the wind” is certainly a more idiomatic way of expressing the state of inebriation, and one which speaks to the cultural milieu of those playing the game; likewise, the

hyphenation and addition of extra vowels is an attempt to capture the rhythm of their unique form of speech which Torres creates by inserting additional accent marks where they wouldn't normally appear in the Spanish source language. In this case, "frie-end" and "wi-ind" also approximate the rhyme which Torres creates in two of the three phrases when matching words like "butagó" with "compañeró" and "esperá" with "esquiná." Furthermore, "the devil" helps to make explicit the reference to the lotería card where Torres only uses the pronoun "el" for an audience which might more readily understand the specific cultural reference, while "waiting at your doorstep" is a more idiomatic rendering in English than "waiting for you at the corner." Finally, outside this very specific reference to a popular table game in Mexico, the phrase "he who has seen the sun at night" seems nonsensical; however, within the context of the game of lotería, which is made explicit by the previous two translated phrases, "who's gonna see the sun a-shinin' at night-ti-ime" makes much more sense for the target audience, especially when one realizes that the game is being played at night, in anticipation of the celebration the following day.

Indeed, Child is right to assert that bilingualism and bilculturalism are both important tools for a translator to be able to move a text from one language to another. However, in the case of Torres, I would argue that it is actually necessary to be multilingual and multicultural, or rather be able to use—as Gloria Anzaldúa suggests in *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*—"a border tongue...neither *español ni inglés*, but both...a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages" (77) in order to properly translate the multilingual text created by Torres. That being said, it is ironic when one realizes that the very linguistic skills necessary to craft an accurate translation of his work are the result of the same kind of linguistic synthesis or hybridization which Torres is actually criticizing throughout his novel.

For example, Alfaro's Italian neighbor Pantusa code-switches between English, Italian and even Spanish: "Questo people, Señor, questo people..." (34). Pantusa's "jerga" or "gibberish" is an object of ridicule throughout the novel and his enthusiastic embrace of the American Dream stands in stark contrast to Alfaro's staunch resistance to the assimilation of American culture, making Pantusa—however affably portrayed—a target of criticism by the narrator for his own willingness to assimilate as well as encouraging his children to become part of the American "melting pot" (37).

However, the sharpest criticism from Torres's narrator is reserved for those who speak "Spanglish," like some of Alfaro's younger workers living at Bellavista, as well as his own son, Luistio: "A ver[,] **tell me the truth**, ¿ustedes no son **mexicans**, no es así?" (69) The linguistic hybridity, or what I refer to as the bilingual or even multilingual textuality, seen in this novel is such a conscious and deliberate aesthetic technique that Torres goes as far as bolding the English words in the original to bring additional reader attention to the cultural assimilation represented by the code-switching which the author mourns, criticizing it as a kind of assault on the Spanish language whose purity, he believes, must be preserved.

Echoing themes developed by other Mexican transmigrant authors at the time, like Venegas and Espinoza, Torres's critique of the perceived cultural assimilation of Mexican exiles in the United States is well developed in the second part of the novel, especially when Luis Alfaro travels to San Antonio in order to request permission to transport his wife's body to Mexico for burial. While in San Antonio, Alfaro reunites with his old friend Pepe Sarmiento, a Spanish-language newspaper reporter, whose back-story is very similar to that of the novel's author. Sarmiento and Alfaro discuss at length the issues of cultural hybridity and assimilation among the Mexican-American population in San Antonio and throughout the United States in

general. Alfaro then takes his leave from his friend and boards a train from San Antonio to the Laredo-Nuevo Laredo border, providing Alfaro a moment to reflect on what he sees going by while also giving Torres's narrator an opportunity to deliver this scathing critique of Tejano culture and its corrupted Spanglish dialect:

Es Texas, el centro perfecto del hibridismo. La lengua ha sufrido corruptelas, el acento, la manera de hablar tienen dejos y giros en que se han confundido el imperativo áspero del inglés y la suplicante cadencia mexicana, formando una confusa cantaleta que ha invadido toda la parte norte de nuestro país, víctima de la vecindad ribereña.³³ (207)

Understanding Torres's embrace of the tenants of the "el México de afuera" ideology, as well as his narrator's frequent critique of American assimilation, I have chosen to use the spelling "México," *con acento*, in this translation in order to reinforce the "deep structure" of the text, because that's the way Alfaro would pronounce it, as well as any of Torres's other characters who are striving to preserve what they understand to be Mexican cultural and linguistic purity. Anything else would permit the corruptive American cultural influence which Torres is railing against throughout his novel to overwhelm the author's own linguistic marking of place. Only cultural "vendidos" or assimilated foreigners, those targeted for criticism by Torres, would pronounce the word "Mexico." Similarly, wherever possible, other proper nouns, like the name of Ana María and places like Pátzcuaro, Michoacán," have also retained their accent marks, preserving the Spanish spelling, and resisting being brought over entirely into English, thus reinforcing one of the major themes and "deep structures" running through the novel.

³³ "Texas is the perfect center for cultural hybridism. The Spanish language has been corrupted. The accent, the manner of speaking has gained an new aftertaste and taken turns in which the harsh commands of English have become confused with the deferential cadence of Spanish, creating an unintelligible charivari which has invaded the entire northern region of our country, now a victim to our neighbors across the river."

As the reader will recall from the previous introduction, the whole idea of “el México de afuera” was to establish a Mexican exile community within the territory of the United States that would preserve traditional, pre-Revolutionary Mexican values and culture—including the purity of language. Therefore, Ana María’s death is to be read as a tragedy: her body—constructed as the perfect vessel of Mexican cultural preservation—slowly withers and dies, precisely because it has been corrupted internally, infected by a communicable disease resulting from her relocation to the United States and subsequent contact with assimilated American immigrants and their even more assimilated children. Her dying wish is to return to the “México” of her childhood, which will carry this tragic thread into the second part of the novel; because, as Luis Alfaro will soon discover, that “México” no longer exists, destroyed from within as a result of the constant clashes between revolutionary and federal forces. Of course, one of Ana María’s last acts while suffering on her deathbed is to host a lavish *fiestas patrias* celebration. And one of her greatest achievements as a woman, from Torres’s perspective and that of his narrator, is to convince her adopted blond-haired and blue-eyed son, Luisito, of the greatness of Mexican culture and instill in him a sense of pride for its history and language, an act of defiance in the face of the kind of assimilation embraced by characters like Pantusa and his children.

Therefore, though it requires the kind of multilingual talent recommended by Child to accurately translate the novel, one must be mindful that Torres has actually constructed this multilingual textuality in order to critique the very cultural synthesis and linguistic hybridity which is necessary to render its proper translation.

Ethics in Translation: Rendering the Distasteful or Disturbing

One significant advantage MTs have over human translators is that computers do not possess their own political, spiritual or ideological beliefs. As a result, their own cultural values cannot come into conflict with those of the authors whom they translate, nor do they ever struggle with internal ethical conflicts resulting from these kinds of moral dilemmas. This is an important issue to explore when discussing the translation of *La patria perdida*, because one of my biggest struggles when working on this translation, in the end, had nothing to do with the novel's length, the narrator's voice or the author's aesthetics, but had much more to do with the ethical conflicts which arose when having to render Torres's ethnic stereotypes and slurs, such as his stereotypical depictions of the Italians and French, and his use of terms like "judíos narigudos," (75) or "big-nosed Jews."

John Dryden's sixth commandment for translators states: Thou shalt "[m]ake the author appear as 'charming' as possible without violating his real character" (T.S. Steiner 28). But, I have to admit, as a Mexican-American of largely indigenous descent, it was very difficult for me, personally, to render Torres as a "charming" writer when having to translate sections of the novel, like the following harangue by Luis Alfaro's childhood German teacher, which resonates all too well with the old refrain "kill the Indian, save the man," which was used to inflict so much damage on indigenous communities by European colonizers throughout the Americas:

El problema de ustedes los mexicanos civilizados está en la redención del indio. Mientras lleven ese lastre de millones de parias arrastrando[,] México sera un país con la cabeza asomada a la civilización y el resto del cuerpo perdido en el breñal del

oscurantismo. Solo una disciplina férrea puede hacer el milagro de darles organización.³⁴
(12)

When attempting to translate passages like this one, I couldn't help but recall the various controversies surrounding the translation of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (1925). In "Irony's Echo," a chapter from Theo Hermans's book, *The Conference of the Tongues* (2007), the author addresses the question: "What happens when translators translate texts they strongly disagree with or disprove of, especially when ideological or moral values are at stake?" (4). Like the genocide which took place after European contact with the Americas, the holocaust under Hitler's rule is among the darkest periods in human history, and the texts which support and give voice to the ideologies driving these two genocidal episodes are often difficult to read, much less translate without interference from any kind of personal bias.

Nevertheless, various codes of ethics for translators do exist to help guide translators and interpreters when facing these types of moral dilemmas. In his book, Hermans cites the United Kingdom's National Register for Public Service Interpreters's Code of Conduct, which states that interpreters (and translators) should "act in an impartial and professional manner," and stipulates that they "shall interpret truthfully and faithfully what is said [or written], without addition, omission or alteration" (4). Hermans later admits, "The suspension of personal views and values is not always easy to achieve for translators or interpreters, even when they are in sympathy with what they translate [or interpret]" (4). Therefore, one can only imagine how difficult it is for a translator to act in an impartial manner and suspend one's personal beliefs and investments when translating something that they actually find disagreeable or offensive.

³⁴ "The problem with you civilized Mexicans lies in the redemption of the Indian. So long as you still carry this ballast of millions of pariahs holding you back, Mexico will be a country with its head looking up toward civilization and the rest of its body lost in the quagmire of obscurity. Only an iron-clad discipline can bring about the miracle of organizing you people."

Much of the controversy surrounding the first translations of *Mein Kampf* revolve precisely around this issue of the translator's ability or inability to suspend his or her own personal bias. On one extreme, Hermans cites an early Dutch edition of the text, which was officially authorized by the Nazi Party and translated by Steven Barends in 1939. "Barends was perfectly happy to act as Hitler's local helper," writes Hermans, saying that the translator even became a member of the infamous SS at the outbreak of World War II (1-2). His translation, no doubt, was used as propaganda to convince Dutch readers to adopt the views of the extreme right (Hermans 1), and it may have contributed to the eventual deportation of Jews from the Low Countries and the subsequent genocide which took place after their occupation by Hitler's forces in 1940.

Somewhere near the center of this spectrum for dealing with these sorts of ethical conflicts in translation, one can place the first English translations of Hitler's work, including an edition by E.T.S. Dugdale in 1933 and Alan Cranston in 1939. Both of these works were abridged versions and left out significant passages from the source text. Some scholars speculate that complete translations in English which more accurately rendered Hitler's ideology and world view may have helped to sooner reveal Hitler's true intentions to the English speaking world, potentially inspiring a prompter response and resistance to the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany and thus saving thousands of innocent lives. Whether or not this would have been the case, unfortunately, we will never know.

At the other far extreme of the spectrum, one finds translations which are produced with the express purpose of challenging or discrediting a text's original author. Hermans seems to suggest that this is the case with a "fully annotated" and "complete and unabridged" English translation of *Mein Kampf* which was published by Alvin Johnson in 1939, through the support

of a committee which included Pearl Buck, Theodore Dreiser, Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann and Eugene O'Neill, among others (2). The translator's personal bias is made explicit throughout the work through use of extensive annotations as well as an introduction which states:

Hitler is no artist in literary expression, but a rough-and-ready political pamphleteer often indifferent to grammar and syntax alike...*Mein Kampf* is a propagandistic essay by a violent partisan. As such it warps historical truth and sometimes ignores it completely. We have, therefore, felt it our duty to accompany the text with factual information which constitutes an extensive critique of the original. (Hermans 2)

However well-intentioned, the conflict of interest resulting from a translator taking on a project with the unambiguous intention of discrediting the author seems fairly obvious. Though certainly difficult at times, translators should strive to always maintain their professional objectivity and detachment when performing their work.

Nevertheless, as previously stated, this wasn't always easy for me when translating *La patria perdida*. At times, Torres seems to demonstrate a Social Darwinist understanding of Positivism which would be consistent with his political allegiance to Porfirio Díaz: Torres often emphasizes Luis and Ana María Alfaro's fair skin as well as their blonde hair and light-colored eyes, linking it with their superior social station; Torres likewise stresses the darkness of the skin and features of their workers, particularly characters like "El Cuervo" and Gabriela, who happily embrace their lowly stations as part of the natural order, subservient to the point that, at the end of Part I, Gabriela is described as actually curling up at the feet of her white mistress, "como...un perro fiel"³⁵ (129).

I must admit that it was very tempting to somehow alter, eliminate or simply soften some of the more offensive parts of the text. That being said, it would seem reasonable to ask, then, if

³⁵ "Like...a faithful dog."

I found sections of the novel so offensive, why did I choose to render the translation in the first place?

The short answer is because I believe in the mission of the Recovery Project. According to the description on their *Latinoteca* website:

Recovering the U.S. Literary Heritage Project will have and [sic] immediate and longterm impact on the teaching of language arts, literature and history at every level of the curriculum. The emergence of this recovered literature will broaden and enrich the c[u]rriculum across the Humanities, from the study of the Spanish language to the way we view history. Accessibility to and study of this literature will not only convey more accurately the creative life of U.S. Hispanics, but will also shed new light on the intellectual vigor and traditional values that have characterized Hispanics from the earliest moments of this country's making through contemporary times. Recovering the U.S. Literary Heritage Project is a national program to locate, identify, preserve and make accessible the literary contributions of U.S. Hispanics from colonial times through 1960 in what today comprises the fifty states of the Union.

The long answer is very similar in spirit. As the reader will recall from the previous introduction, *La patria perdida* is the first known fictional work about the Mexican-American immigrant experience in the Midwest. It is also historically significant and worthy of recovery because it is one of the few works of fiction which treat the large-scale repatriation of Mexican and Mexican-Americans in the wake of the Great Depression. In addition, Torres's novel provides an important contrast to other early works of Mexican-American immigrant fiction, like *Don Chipote* and *El sol de Texas*, through the depiction of the lives of the social elite, who were successful economically in their transition to the United States, but continued to long for their

homeland, or even attempted to recreate aspects of their country of origin now north of the border, as evidenced by Lozano's ideology of "el México de afuera."

In the end, even the often offensive depictions of indigenous people throughout the novel help inform one's understanding of elite Mexican thought at the time. Since the struggle for Mexican independence began in the early Nineteenth Century, the Mexican ruling class has demonstrated an ambivalence regarding the country's indigenous past. Like a one-armed embrace, which draws one near, while simultaneously maintaining an arm-length's distance, Mexico after independence has adopted the iconography and legend of its (pre-)historical indigenous population in order to construct an oppositional national identity which distances itself from the Spanish metropole, while, at the same time, victimizing the existing indigenous population with intense economic and political oppression and using them as a scapegoat for all of Mexico's socio-economic woes as well as their difficulties with becoming a fully modernized nation. Torres's novel exemplifies this ambivalence and the translation of his work helps one to better understand the historical development of this construction of Mexico's national identity.

Renata Wasserman, in her book *Exotic Nation*, demonstrates how this phenomenon was widespread throughout the Americas as the various nations of Latin America and the United States made use of their indigenous "nature" vis-à-vis European "civilization," only to later ignore the history and existence of their indigenous populations, imagining their new nations as having been blank slates before the arrival of European colonizers. Or as Wasserman explains:

Those who aimed to formulate a definition of national identity in the Americas had to develop the notion of the self so to speak from the point of view of the other, to incorporate an exotic identity into the definition of the self...[T]he successful assertion of a national self depends on acceptance beyond national borders (just as the successful

definition of psychological selfhood depends at least in part on acceptance by others), the European other's identification of the exotic with desire, with the complement, ensures initial recognition; that form of recognition, however, must be rejected in time. (15-16)

An example of this simultaneous acceptance and rejection of Mexico's exotic indigenous other can certainly be seen in *La patria perdida*. Though Torres quotes Alfaro's German teacher to express the perceived backwardness of Mexico's indigenous population in Part I, in the second part of the novel, when Alfaro returns to the State of Michoacán, Torres retells the myth of Eréndira, a Puripecha princess, who nobly resisted Spanish conquest to the very end.

Michoacán fué el último baluarte de la libertad de las razas indígenas...[U]na india joven y hermosa, walkyria de leyenda escandinava, soberbia como diosa, con nombre de princesa de cuento—se llamaba Eréndira, que quiere decir “sonriente”—...se refugió con su anciano padre Timas...después de pelear fieramente en Tzintzuntzn.

Sólo Eréndira escapó, y según los naturales de aquellos lugares, todavía se la ve algunas veces, cuando pelagra la patria, correr con la melena al aire por los montes, convocando a sus hermanos a morir por la libertad...³⁶ (281-282)

As one can see, Torres and other Mexican elite are more than willing to embrace Mexico's mythical indigenous past when used as a call to arms against Spanish oppression. However, at the very same Mexican intellectual and ruling classes continue to employ racial stereotypes, Positivism and Social Darwinism to create racialized color hierarchies in order to

³⁶ “Michoacán was the last bulwark of freedom for the indigenous people...A young and beautiful young woman, like the Valkyrie of Scandinavian legend, as magnificent as a goddess, with the name of a princess in a fairytale—she was known as Eréndira, which means “smiley”—...took refuge with her aged father Timas...after fighting ferociously in Tzintzuntzn.

“Only Eréndira was able to escape, and according to the natives from those parts, she can still be spotted occasionally, when our country is in danger, running through the mountains with her long hair blowing in the wind, calling upon on her brothers to die for their liberty.”

justify their own oppression of their country's indigenous population, thereby rationalizing their elite social status.

In the end, however imperfect and distasteful some of his ethnic and gender stereotypes and elitist attitudes may be, Torres writes about little documented experiences of Mexican immigrants and shows that these experiences and this community was much more heterogeneous than often presumed, thus, actually undermining many of the prevailing stereotypes which exist in the United States about Mexican immigrants themselves. Likewise, it is also important to note that, in the case of both the far right and far left, there is actually significant overlap in their construction of anti-American oppositional identities for Mexican immigrants living in exile in the United States. These two factions may have wanted to kill each other in Mexico, but they have a common enemy once they cross into foreign soil: the Americans. And the translation of works such as these help scholars and the non-Spanish reading public to be able to access these texts and come up with their own critical analyses for the first time.

“The Vodka is Good:” Or, Why Computers Can’t Translate, Yet...

One of the controversies currently raging in the field of translation is the role of MT technology and whether or not it will ever reach the level of sophistication necessary to supplant human translators.

For years, MTs have been the target of ridicule resulting from the limitations of such software packages to produce anything but nonsensical word-for-word translations. One famous example of this mockery can be seen in the persistent belief that a MT once rendered the Biblical passage, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,” as “The vodka is good, but the meat is rotten,” when translated into Russian, then translated back again (Hutchins n.p.).

In a journal article, entitled “‘The Whisky Was Invisible,’ Or Persistent Myths of MT,” longtime MT advocate John Hutchins does a thorough historical analysis of how this myth came into being and how artificial intelligence and MT technology have seen tremendous advances since the times when these “howlers” originated. Hutchins claims that the likely source of the “vodka is good” myth was a lecture given by E. H. Ullrich at the Institute of Electrical Engineers in 1956 (n.p.). As evidence, Hutchins cites a section of the Ullrich lecture:

Mechanical translation will surely come, and I welcome the attempts at it now being made...Perhaps the popular Press is the most attractive outlet for mechanical translations, because it does not really matter whether these are right or wrong, and amusing versions such as “the ghost wills but the meat is feeble” might make mechanical translation into a daily feature as indispensable as the cross-word puzzle. (n.p.)

Hutchins claims that the critique of MTs actually comes from a quip about the inadequacy of human translators, stating, “It is surely ironic that a joke by journalists about incompetent human translators should be used, in all seriousness, to show how poor computers can be in comparison with human translators” (n.p.).

Of course, there have been significant advances in all areas of computer technology since the 1950s. Therefore, I decided to conduct my own simple experiment using the fabled New Testament axiom. Taking the quote from Matthew’s Gospel, I used three different popular online translation packages to render the text into Russian; as a result, I received three different outputs from the three different MTs: “Дух бодр, но плоть слаба” (Google), “Дух готов, но плоть слаба” (Microsoft), and “В духе готов, но плоть является слабым” (Babylon). I then fed each of these three Russian translations back into each of the three machine translators, and the renderings in English are as follows:

- 1) Using the Russian translation provided by Google:
 - a. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. (Google)
 - b. The spirit of cheerful, but the flesh is weak. (Microsoft)
 - c. Prayed, but flesh is weak. (Babylon)
- 2) Using the Russian translation provided by Microsoft:
 - a. Spirit willing but flesh weak. (Google)
 - b. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. (Microsoft)
 - c. Spirit willing but flesh weak. (Babylon)
- 3) Using the Russian translation provided by Babylon:
 - a. In the spirit willing but the flesh is weak. (Google)
 - b. In the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. (Microsoft)
 - c. In the spirit of ready, but flesh is weak. (Babylon)

I found it interesting that in the case of Google and Microsoft, when asked to translate the text into Russian then back again, these two MTs were able to reproduce the original text—with the one exception of the original comma. This demonstrates significant improvement in previous MT technology. However, considerable weaknesses remain, even when rendering relatively simple sentences. Babylon seems to have the least accurate translations among the three. And it is interesting to note that Babylon does provide clients an opportunity to confer with a human translator through their website. This tacit acknowledgment of the persistent flaws in MT technology seems to echo the sentiment of Jack Child when writing:

Most advocates of MT have toned down the once exaggerated claims of the 1950's and 1960's, so that what is expected now is human-assisted machine translations. The human element comes in primarily at the post-editing stage, when a translator familiar with the

material examines the MT output for errors, ambiguities, or portions that sound unnatural. (190)

It seems only time will tell whether or not MT technology will develop to the point where machines can adequately render translations of straightforward texts, such as simple business correspondence. What does seem clear, however, is that MTs may never be able to translate the “deep structure” of more complex aspects of human language, such as metaphor, irony, double-entendre and word play. And even if, in some distant future, advances in artificial intelligence, computer learning and database technologies help MTs to reach this plateau, there will always be an important place for real human craftsmen and artisans; for, in the end, the craft of translation has very little to do with the mere identification of word-for-word equivalent terms to move one source text into a desired target language, but is more about capturing an author’s sense of voice, style and aesthetics.

This is particularly true in the case of literary texts, because these beautiful source texts are composed by human intelligences, and it is only through another human intelligence that they can be rendered, beautifully and faithfully, into any given target language. There may be a market for cheap, quickly-produced, machine-made ceramics; however, in the end, they are the handcrafted, hand-painted and hand-glazed works of art, fired in traditional kilns, demonstrating real brushstrokes, natural flaws and imperfections, which have the greatest individual beauty and charm.

Chapter I

The circumstances under which Luis Alfaro found himself when he received that letter could not have been more adverse.

At any other time, he would have placed it in his pocket or simply torn it up, somewhere between self-satisfied and conflicted, not giving it much **more** thought than that; however, it had come now to disrupt his life, which had grown calm after a brave struggle against his romantic and passionate instincts, ever desirous of new love affairs, intense pleasures, and in aberrant and constant conflict with his principles as an honorable man who, in spite of all of his foolishness, was able to hold his domestic tranquility intact. Ironically, the letter arrived at a particularly bitter time in his life, the least appropriate for receiving a missive such as this.

Ana María, his wife, slept a restless and feverish sleep in the adjacent bedroom. He had just left her a few minutes before, after suffering the anguishing scrutiny of her interrogating eyes and responding to the questions that she asked in an impatient voice, full of tears and supplications, and bereft of its sonorous melody due to the violence of her persistent cough.

“What did the doctor say? How sick am I? Am I going to die? Will I never see my son again?” the suffering woman implored, stretching out her feeble hands towards Luis.

Dr. Morris, with the frankness typical of rural physicians, had uttered that terrible word practically in the presence of the ailing woman during the visit that he had just concluded with her. Ana María could not penetrate the enigma of that foreign tongue, but from the seriousness on those shadowy faces, she could “translate” the meaning from the English of that sinister conversation, in which Dr. Morris spoke with the iciness of one who is accustomed to finding himself face-to-face with death, and who is also aware of the fact that his patient cannot understand what he is saying; and, in which Luis asked questions quickly and nervously as he ushered the doctor out of the room, fearful that Ana María, perceptive and erudite, would be able to discover the truth from the tone of that imprudent dialogue. Luis could not hold back the

question that leapt from his lips as he left the room with the doctor. Dr. Morris gave his diagnosis without mincing words.

“It’s T.B., and an aggressive form—” began Dr. Morris with terrifying laconism and making use of one of those abbreviations of which the North Americans are so fond as he referred to her tuberculosis.

“Bad?” Luis could scarcely make out the word, overwhelmed by the horrifying news.

“In imminent danger of dying? No. No one can predict how the disease, which almost always defies any prognosis, will progress. I must say, however, that you need to be very careful because of that awful fever.”

The malady introduced itself, insidiously and unexpectedly, as the result of a relapse from a spiteful influenza epidemic that had besieged the region and made easy prey of the poor lady. Ana María’s body, struggling to fight off the misfortunes of the past few years as well as the change in climate and in her way of life, had suddenly succumbed to the ferocious microbe that now, according to the doctor, who explained it in greater detail, had formed a large infectious abscess in her right lung.

Luis summoned all of his strength to appear calm when returning to his wife’s bedroom after escorting Dr. Morris to the covered porch where his mount was protected from the snow and where Luis bid the doctor farewell, begging him to send her medications as soon as possible.

“It’s nothing, dear,” he assured her, trying to console his wife, who remained under the impression that she was suffering from a terminal illness, something dreadfully fatal, which could have been nothing other than that cold feeling inside, that incurable disease, which in the brief span of a single morning—just the previous afternoon she was enjoying the gratifying

sensation of being free of any illness—would physically knock her back into the bed from which she had just risen.

Pale and beautiful, with a sweet and sudden resignation, Ana María took her husband's hand, struggling to form a smile with her colorless lips, saying, “‘Nothing?’ You're whiter than I am. I feel better than you think I do... Tell me the truth...”

Luis pretended to be angered by her suspicion which he called exaggerated. He tried to maintain a look of composure in order to lend some sincerity to his words and Ana María accepted, or appeared to accept, what her husband told her, and she promised to follow the doctor's orders: getting nothing but rest, avoiding any chills and remaining in bed until the fever subsides.

“Is it very cold outside?” asked Ana María later.

“Horrible,” responded Luis. “Look how I'm still trembling from just that short spell that I was out exposed to the wind and the snow.” He showed her how his hand shook with a slight tremor.

It wasn't the cold, however, which caused his irregular heart beat. And it wasn't only his pulse that had lost its steady rhythm, but rather his entire life, against which Destiny had plotted in order to inflict two equally disconcerting wounds. He trembled from the grave news that the doctor had given him and from what that letter might say which he held in his hands, still stunned, as he stared through the misty window panes at the great white plain, upon which the snow fell incessantly, monotonously.

He had removed it, among others, from the small tin mailbox hanging from a column which served as a support beam for the large porch in front of the house, upon his return from taking his leave from the doctor. He didn't open the bundle as he usually did, with that typical

secret and joyful anxiety before the mystery of those sealed envelopes which promise news from dear yet distant acquaintances. He had placed it on his wife's bed as he comforted her and tucked her in. Afterward, he instinctively carried it away, when tip-toeing out of her room, quietly, after Ana María, white as an Easter lily, had succumbed to a stupor of fever, full of fear and delirium.

Once in his own bedroom, he untied the bundle mechanically: business correspondence, newspapers, magazines. Suddenly, his attention was drawn to a blue envelope, inscribed with a woman's handwriting, elegant and refined, and quickly identified by his faithful memory. It was one of those letters that he never received any more; and, due to its unexpected nature, he did not find its arrival disturbing or unscrupulous, whereas before this type of correspondence required vigilance and skillful sleights of hand. And as if a voice stronger than his pain were calling to him from the depths of his misery, he forgot everything else in order to focus his attention on that letter. In one swift movement, he separated it from the others and examined it nervously, attempting to guess at what it said before even opening it.

Could it be? What did she want? What was Magdalena González doing in Kansas City? How did she get his address? And what could she be writing to him about?

It all felt like a cruel joke. A sinister pact between Life and Death to torment him. It was as if these two opposing forces that rule the world had made a date to show up at the same time, a most tranquil and fulfilling time, to crush his soul with the memory of past foolhardiness, and to torture his spirit with the frightening thought of the death of his wife and the presence, imaginary as well, of another woman who was calling him from the days of his impetuous youth and reminding him of a tumultuous and beautiful era in his life, now as distant and improbable as anything else that gets pushed back indefinitely by time.

The letter read: "I can just imagine your surprise and the face you will make when reading this letter and finding out that I am just one short step away from you. I'd rather not get into the details of my trip, because it would take a long time, but if your memory still serves you well, it'll be enough if you just remember—to justify my determination—the promise that you squeezed out of me, when listening to the lyrics of a song very much in vogue at the time, that I would never forget you and that I would never leave you, and my pledge that I would never abandon you, whether you wanted me to or not. As always, I'm respectful of your serious and formal life, and that's why, though I'm coming to you directly, I am maintaining a convenient distance, which is appropriate for a woman who wants a life which already belongs to another, but over which she still enjoys some rights.

"I'll wait for your reply, here, at 456 Grove St. And I imagine it'll come so fast and be so encouraging with respect to my being here so close to you, that I won't go through the trouble of tracking you down personally in this dreadful weather, and I'll spare you any difficulties that might result from any imprudence on my part, which is very natural, however, for a woman who comes to reunite with the one who showed her so many signs of his affection.

"I'll be waiting here for you, for a week, if it takes that long,

Your MAGDALENA."

It was a direct provocation. Possibly "blackmail:" a way to extort money out of him. When and under what circumstances had he gotten her to make such an imprudent vow? Perhaps it was during one of those moments of effusion in which so many things are said, but that no honorable woman would ever take seriously, and even less so after many years of absolute oblivion, after a total estrangement, capable of erasing even the most pure and

passionate infatuations, and not just any old fling, or one of those adventures which has left no lasting impression on the heart.

He read that disquieting letter many times after its initial unpleasant surprise. Under the painful impression of his reading and the feelings of remorse that filled him with fear and grief, he had just left his wife, who called for him at every moment with the insistence of a frightened child who demands the company of her parents. He went back and forth from his room to that of his wife. He left her alone when he saw that she was calm or asleep, and he returned to his own bedroom, beckoned by that ghastly letter, as if it were a person who needed attending to, interrogating, scolding for its intrusion.

He strained his ear trying to detect any sign of life around him. Nothing. Not a sound could be heard. Ana María was now quiet, giving in perhaps to her anxiety and fatigue.

The isolation of the house and that wide open prairie, completely covered in snow, now pressed upon his thoughts with the weight of the entire world.

It felt like the most solitary time ever in that house, the whole farm, so full of life during working hours, with the hustle and bustle of workers, and the women who came requesting advances and provisions. It felt like a black hole, a sanctuary of suffering, shrouded in a great white sheet. Its resounding wooden walls, which echoed the slightest sound, now choked off the air like a coffin. The old servant woman they had brought from México, and who was the only support and companion for the couple, would be found balled-up in some corner of the kitchen, protecting herself from the cold. On the farm that Luis had purchased with what remained of his fortune and had christened "Bellavista," the workers' dwellings were shut up tight and their occupants dared not go outside. The only living soul to cross such desolation, only moments before, had been Dr. Morris who was returning now to the town of Arley, which neighbored

Bellavista, from where he had departed that morning, summoned by Luis' anxious telephone call.

It had been three days since it began snowing harder than in the first months of winter and it looked to continue for some time to come. All activity had come to a standstill now on that little tract of land which in the spring and summer was beautiful, green with wheat fields and black with wet soil ready for sowing. Presently, everything was white, white as far as the eye could see: the trees, the houses, the plain that lost itself in the horizon, becoming confused with the grey of the clouds and the white line of snowfall.

Due to the scarce light that came in from outside and the sealing of the doors and windows (only Luis' room had its curtain drawn), it appeared as if night had already fallen; but, in fact, it was only a few hours past noon.

He read Magdalena's letter for the twentieth time. He tried to focus his thoughts and reconstruct the fragmented history of his love affair with that woman, to put his recollections in order.

He thought he had woken from a dream. A dream it all seemed to him now, those long years outside of México and that incredible life abroad to which he had adapted himself little by little, after the vehement protestations of his spirit, his customs, his character, from which this represented a complete change. Magdalena's voice, which he could hear so close to him now, reappearing remarkably fresh and sprightly after so many years of contemptuous and frivolous silence—Could this be one of those practical jokes that she enjoyed so much?—it suddenly came back to him, the past that was cut short when he left his homeland, and with it, a world of loves and recollections, within this brief span of time during which his last paramours returned from the deep darkness of oblivion to speak to him of her love, as if they had just seen each other.

That blue sheet of paper, with the overwhelming power of nostalgia, tore a hole in the present and turned back the diligent passage of time which had put a stop to his foolish capriciousness, thanks to the indiscretion of that woman who returned, happy and carefree, to probe the mystery of his sheltered life with her black and smiling eyes.

And it was through this breach that Luis saw all that he had left behind: his childhood and his adolescence as a rich young man living on the Umbroso Valley hacienda, in the state of Michoacán, which had been the Alfaros' estate for generations. The solicitous care of his mother who did not know how to say no to her son's wishes, which was why she helped him to overcome the objections of his father, Don Antonio, who did not want him to pursue a career in the military; his courtship with Ana María, a quick, simple and enchanting romance in the tranquil and idyllic environment of the haciendas in the Umbroso and Ramones valleys, the latter property belonging to Ana María's parents and neighboring that of the Alfaros; his years of study at the Colegio Militar, to which he had gone with a well-defined vocation, after having passed through colleges and universities in the United States and Europe, searching for the most appropriate course for the vehement impulses of his soul, the volubility of his authoritarian nature, and his disorganized mentality, until coming up with the idea to pursue a career in his own country's armed forces, recommended by that German professor who had told him with his dogmatic style: "The problem with you civilized Mexicans lies in the redemption of the Indian. So long as you still carry this ballast of millions of pariahs holding you back, Mexico will be a country with its head looking up toward civilization and the rest of its body lost in the quagmire of obscurity. Only an iron-clad discipline can bring about the miracle of organizing you people: the military discipline which is the foundation of all others, including that of the intellectual. You need the systems and methods that form strong character. Your Latin American countries

will never move forward until each village has a schoolteacher with medals on his chest who can teach you what you need to learn most: how to give orders and how to follow them.”

Luis could now recall the most minute details of those events that continued to cause successive changes in his life, so different from the lives of his ancestors. They had never known any horizon other than the one that they could see through the lush forests in the Umbroso Valley. And they all lay at rest in the hacienda’s graveyard or beneath the arches of the chapel next to the “casa grande” after having lived happily in that bit of paradise which had been passed down from generation to generation. He, on the other hand, had hardly enjoyed the bounties of that rich estate during his infrequent moments of quietude: when he was a child and spent time at his parents’ side; and during his courtship with Ana María, whom he had torn with his love from her verdant corner of Michoacán, where she lived with her father, a widower and an invalid, who refused to spend his last days in such a melancholy solitude, without Luis repaying the sacrifice that such a young, beautiful and wealthy woman had made, at such an early age, by isolating herself from the world in order to accompany him. Later, Luis’ life would falter as the result of a string of disturbances and madness, displeasures and disappointments, without any respite, save for the short time they spent enjoying their honeymoon in a little pueblo outside of Mexico City.

He had just been granted his commission as a lieutenant in the corps of engineers when the civil war erupted in 1911. He was deployed, leaving his wife alone in Mexico City with no more company than that of her father, Don Juan Segovia, who, if left back in Ramones, would have died of melancholy. Luis suffered the bitterness of having to see that his induction into military service coincided with the unleashing of the kind of lack of discipline which mocked the theories of his German professor for it was an uprising of an entire nation against the established

order. He witnessed the atrocities, the injustices, the resurrection of old discords and he felt the confusion of a true believer who watches the images of the gods that he worshipped and believed to be indestructible fall one by one.

In the four years of rebellion, fiercely fought by the federal army to which he belonged, he felt his life changing, recast in a new mold by the flames of a destructive blaze. Don Antonio and Doña Angela, his parents, had died of sorrow and disillusionment, fatigue and ruin, forced to move, at their age, from here to there, fleeing from their own servants who had risen up in arms against them. They destroyed the farm and profaned the hacienda which had previously been their sanctuary.

Don Juan had likewise succumbed to the bitterness and pain. He had been left all alone in the world with the exception of Ana María.

Ana María...

Her sonorous and beloved name brought Luis' thoughts back to the place where the ailing woman stirred. The memory of their courtship and marriage was the only positive thing that he could find in the recollection of memories from that painful period in his life. His life could be divided into two parts: the first, turbulent, chaotic, full of love affairs who were easily conquered with his money and confidence; his life as a student that would take him to Mexico City teeming with temptations which he would drink in with his mouth wide open; that life through which so many women like Magdalena González had passed, first met at some fiesta, loved briefly then lost in the vortex of pleasure in that sensual and sinful city that had made a new marital status out of the "love triangle;" his life as a passionate and sensual man who thought he was falling in love with every woman he saw and pledged his love to each one with the same profound sincerity, to return from the chance encounter with the same disillusionment of those who look deeply into

everyone's heart and discover that the love that they seek is not there to be found; his crazy life, in the end, would have led him into God-knows-what kind of dark abyss had Ana María not come to rescue him with her love and tenderness.

Ana María filled up the entire second part of his life. The free-spirited and headstrong young man came to life again during that period of love and misfortune. His wife's virtue and grace opened new horizons for him, sweetened his sorrows, and showed him the bitter yet soothing taste of sacrifice. In spite of the cataclysm which had robbed him of his military career, his dreams and almost entirely of their combined fortunes, for the hereditary haciendas of their parents had now become rebel lairs or were stripped bare by the assaults from the winning faction for having belonged to "reactionaries," he found himself possessed by an unusual determination, impelled by that disaster to take the same road as all of those pursued by the revolution. And one unforgettable morning, which displayed the radiant clarity typical of dawn in México, Ana María and Luis, full of confidence and faith, certain to return soon to their fatherland and be able to overcome any new obstacles, abandoned their home in Coyoacán, where they had spent the first two years of their marriage.

How many people found themselves caught in the middle since then...? And how hard had it been to adapt to their new surroundings! Their first stop was in San Antonio, once known as San Antonio de Bejar, the first destination for everyone fleeing the Mexican Revolution. They quickly learned to dislike that fiery hot, but cold-hearted, city in Texas. They found it to be full of political intrigue, spies, gossip about the revolution, and the uneasiness fomented by a desperate desire to peacefully return to México, while the upheaval continued and kept those who dreamed of that impossible return in an agonizing state of distress.

One had to make serious plans while waiting for the smoke to clear over there south of the Río Bravo. With what the two of them could cobble together from their beleaguered possessions, sold at whatever price they could get from a greedy attorney, Luis purchased some land in the state of Missouri, near the Kansas border, a few miles from the famous Kansas City and just a short distance away from Arley, which was their first point of contact with the hectic Yankee way of life.

All of his energies were wrapped up in his farm, Bellavista, which is what he called his new property, founded by him, worked by him, created by the strength his own two hands and his own wits which had transformed a few barren meadows—used as a refuge at some other time by the Indian tribes which the white men had annihilated—into something more productive.

Bellavista was the first thin thread which tied the displaced couple, who never stopped longing for their native land, to that foreign soil which had granted them a place to build a home: that land which allowed itself to be cultivated and provided a bounty from her womb to guarantee them a future, sustenance and tranquility. Thanks to Bellavista the United States was no longer the great country of stern looks and sad surroundings. Ever since they discovered in that farm some serenity from their topsy-turvy lives and some respite from their struggles, they felt at peace with their host country. It was not—nor could it ever be—their new fatherland; because, like mothers, there is no substitute for one's place of birth. But, there, in the solitude of the hacienda, the country would acquire the charm of a virgin island, without the din of the factories or the civilizing turmoil of its prideful and indifferent cities. The hacienda also furnished them with a corner to live in peace and maintained a friendly silence around those two foreigners who, aided by their mutual affection, continued to pray for an opportunity to return,

without the torturous anxieties from their first days abroad, but with the stubborn conviction that they would never give up on their dreams.

They had been happy there. They managed to fill their lives with new things, different perspectives and other cares. God had not wanted to give them children, but they shared their love among the family that they had formed with the people that worked on their lands, Mexicans all, and with little Luis, whom they had received from an orphanage in Kansas City, giving him a name and a home to live in. The little boy, a blonde-haired chap, who bore the seal of his Nordic origins in his blue eyes and fine, white skin, but had started life speaking another language than that of his parents and learning other customs, now went to school in Atlantic City, where his name was the object of much curiosity: Luis Alfaro y Segovia, ostentatious, like that of an “Old Conquistador,” as his classmate would say to tease him.

A gust of wind that entered whistling down the chimney and, fanning the flames out of the hearth, rustled Magdalena’s letter left abandoned on the table in the middle of the room.

The hallucination had disappeared; all that remained was the haunting reality of that moment.

All of his projects, all of his dreams after so many years of waiting, all seemed to come tumbling down in an instant. His restored life had been destroyed once again. His past had returned with a vengeance and made mocking gestures of fiendish revelry in the face of his measureless suffering. As if in a deluge of grief, he felt once more a power jolt of Fate. He pondered the bitter and deep solitude which awaited him, perhaps within a few months or within a few years, but always too soon for his desire to live with his good wife—the sweet and chaste one whose love did not wither but blossomed and rejuvenated itself with each passing day—to come to a—however remote and unimaginable—end.

However, his tortured thoughts' longing to escape from that prison of pain, proved as sad and futile as the flight of an injured bird.

Could that country doctor, filthy and ignorant, and capable of confusing the symptoms and pronouncing a misdiagnosis, have been wrong? He could call a specialist in Kansas City. He could take Ana María to the city, as soon as the pass had been cleared.

As a result of a natural train of thought, when thinking about Kansas City, he again remembered his forgotten lover. He didn't love her. His feelings for her weren't even deep enough to have left a strong impression. He was also suspicious of the faithfulness of a beautiful woman who loved flirtation and of this love that she hoped to resurrect from the ashes after so many years of inconstancy.

On the other hand, he knew Magdalena well and didn't think she was capable of causing a scandal. The threats in her letter were very much in line with her witty and carefree nature.

Luis had always thought that their amorous spell was completely behind him. When they went their own ways, long before he had ever left his country, at a time when the soldier was on leave from service and took advantage to put more or less of a definitive end to their relationship, it had been without dramatic scenes or tears of desperation.

"Will you ever be back?" she asked, just to say something.

"Of course I'll be back," Luis replied without knowing Life had other things in store for him, because shortly thereafter, he left his fatherland to go into exile.

And he never heard anything else from her again, until now that she was on her way, with the misfortune of being a happy visitor to a house where grief had abruptly entered just a short time before.

He wanted her to go far, far away... He didn't want to see her... He wouldn't see her...
The only thing that mattered to him now was Ana María.

From the adjacent room, his ailing wife beckoned him with her weak and exhausted voice, "Luis... Luis..."

He came running at his wife's call. She had the vague expression of those suffering from delirium. Her hands burned with a feverish heat. Within the whiteness of her face, her black eyes burned with a strange fire, swollen with madness, and in the darkness of her room, dimly lit by an electric night light, stood out against the marble whiteness of the beautiful countenance with fine, virginal and sweet features, and her hands that clung to those of her husband, as if searching for a lifeline on the slope which pushed her towards death.

"I thought I was about to die a moment ago," Ana María started to say, "But it was only a bad dream. I felt the sensation of leaving the earth and I sensed the horror of leaving you. I don't feel any worse, but I would like to ask you a favor... Don't be alarmed, my dear, and forgive me if I cause you any pain... I want you to promise me that if I die, you will not leave me in this country which has not been bad to us, but is not mine. Take me to where you will surely go once I leave you. To Morelia, to Pátzcuaro, to México, where I can feel you close to me, even after I have gone..."

Luis had to struggle to fight back the tears. Feigning sincerity and hopefulness, while stretching his hands out to his ailing wife and kneeling next to her bed to draw closer to her, he said, "I promise you whatever you want, even though none of the things that you are asking me really matter, because you are not dying. But you should be trying to calm down, like the doctor recommended... No more getting all worked up or getting so upset you rattle your nerves.

You'll see how you'll laugh about your deadly foreboding when the sun comes out and your health returns."

"You might be right," replied Ana María, "But, why do I feel such a strange chill inside, a chill that comes from deep down inside and fills me with grief?"

Luis reverted once again to the strategy that the weather afforded him. "It's that the temperature has fallen so drastically. Look at how I'm trembling from the cold."

And Luis had lost, before the enormity of the pain he was suffering, all feeling of his physical senses. He could have lain down on a pile of snow without feeling the frigid cold; but, he did, in effect, tremble from the cold, because he had just passed through a cold spell for his tormented heart...

Chapter II

The news that the “señora,” which is what the farm workers called Ana María, had taken ill spread quickly through all the humble homes that surrounded the Alfaros’ “bungalow.” They saw the doctor, well known among them for being the one who attended to their illnesses, leave. They saw the young man from the pharmacy in Arley arrive hurriedly a few hours later on the very same horse as the doctor, carrying a package wrapped in green paper. And now, at night, alarmed by such activity, they were hanging on every movement which took place inside the house of the “patrones” in whose bedrooms the lights had been on since the morning along with the comings and goings of shadows which bustled about ceaselessly.

The doctor prescribed strong stimulant injections, which Luis himself administered to her, as well as an internal medical treatment in order to combat the fever and disinfect her lungs as much as possible. Her illness had grown worse over night. The chimney burned with an intense fire and Ana María would not stop complaining about a strange chill that made her shiver. Old Gabriela, her maid, now aware of the seriousness of her lady’s condition, did not want to rest. She came and went silently, wiping away her tears as she entered her mistress’ room, but crying openly when she found herself alone.

For Gabriela, her whole world revolved around her “señora.” She had held her in her arms when she was small, back on the hacienda in Ramones which she never would have left had “her little girl” not gotten married and wanted to take her to her home in Coyoacán to work as a cook. All her notions of space and time were built around that hacienda where she herself had been born, with its dark and imposing “casa grande,” full of antiquated refinements which made it seem like an enchanted castle; its gigantic granaries which housed the maize from the harvest; its pond where the masters hunted ducks and where the livestock would come down to drink in the evening; the hills populated with wild animals; the enormous pastures, walled with white

stones which corralled the bright and robust herds of cattle; the giant mule; the slender mares and neighing ponies; its cornfields, green in the summer, golden in the fall and dry and barren in the wintertime. Other than the dusty roads that they traveled to Pátzcuaro; the trip that they took by train to Mexico City; the other long excursion, also by train, to Veracruz; the horrible voyage by sea to Galveston; and the final leg she made anxious and absorbed in thought, without taking notice of the grandeur or of the civilization, and trailing behind her masters like a weary little lamb until finally making herself at home in Bellavista; other than all of this, she knew nothing, nor was there anything else she wanted to know. For Gabriela, wherever Ana María was, that was her world. Ramones, Pátzcuaro, Mexico City, they should have stayed “over there,” as she would say with a vague gesture raising her quivering fingers up to her myopic eyes and reaching out into the distance. “Over there...” “Who knows where?” But always within easy reach of an impeccable memory which contained all of the recollections of her life.

Though she instinctively understood the gravity of her mistress’ condition, she refused to accept the fact that she could die; this would have been like admitting that her whole world was crashing down and she would be left alone, among the ruins. She cried because she saw how Ana María suffered, because she could hear her calling out to her “little gringo” Luis, her little boy, inconsolably, as though she was afraid she would never see him again; and because, despite that infuriating cold and those white plains which offended the eyes, in a moment of delirium, the ailing woman believed she was seeing the sunny fields and dark, wet roads, lined with trees, of the towns in the land where she was born.

The farm workers arrived in the wee hours of the morning; for their convenience Luis had built a large storage room, immediately adjacent to the house, which was used as an office; a “company store;” and, where, at harvest time, they stored the wheat; during the winter, it served

as a school and a gathering place, a social hall and an improvised chapel for simple religious celebrations, without the solemnity of the liturgy. At night, during Holy Week or on December 12, the workers, trailed by their wives and their children, went to pray the rosary in front of an image of the crucifix or a portrait of the Virgin of Tepeyac.

Now they came drawn by the certainty that something serious was happening in the “patrones” house. Because they never set foot inside, out of respect and due to the custom, remaining out in the warehouse which functioned as a mediator between the masters and their servants, they gathered there silently and circumspect, speaking sparingly about their concerns upon seeing each other together.

All of them belonged to what in México was known as the lowest class of people: old hacienda cowherds, peons, who did the most menial tasks, workers from the city, farm workers who always worked far away from the city and in whom the idea of leaving their country was ignited, inspired by the news of all those who had gone before them and told fabulous stories about that far off Timbuktu where they offered jobs that paid more per day than they could make in a week working on the hacienda, in a currency which was worth twice as much as the money in México and whose real purchasing power was tremendous because things cost a tenth of what they cost in the company store which were always provided.

They had lost the typical character which corresponded to the different jobs that they did back in their homeland. Apolonio Vallejo, whose falsetto voice stood in contrast to his corpulent body and grave demeanor, had been a “corporal” on a cattle farm in central México; and, ever since he was a child, he wore a leather coat, adorned with fringe made of the same material, trousers painted onto his legs, leather chaps and heavy shoes which were always complemented by a couple of giant spurs which cut tracks into the earth. That other strapping young man, with

a drooping mustache and wobbly sea legs, who spoke very softly and very slowly, always looking down at the ground, as if choosing his words very carefully, had been a baker and had never worn any other clothes than his baggy undergarments and a coarse cotton shirt; a “guaripa” (his invaluable cowboy hat); his huarache sandals, which were not always in good shape; and his hemp cloth “cotense,” which, when tied around his waist, disguised his—sometimes indecent—lack of clothing. They had Aniceto Meléndez thrown onto the pile, but everyone knew him as “El Cuervo,” “The Crow,” a nickname that referred to the darkness of his skin.

There was no lack of “lettered” men either. Justo Compeán, who brightened up the gatherings with his stories and good counsel, had been a rural school teacher and at times served as an auxiliary justice of the peace, without giving up his work in the fields to do so, alternating those duties with those of his country station, responsible for taking the rolls of peons on the ranches where they worked, and doing a headcount and completing an official census when the occasion called for it. He had been accustomed to dressing a little bit nicer—only a very little bit—than the peons whom he supervised, adjudicated or served, depending on the circumstances. Rather than the rough “huicholes” worn by the campesinos, he wore a straw hat which was the same size and shape as the others but which was more finely manufactured; he wore more colorful and well tailored clothes, shoes, and when the occasion called for it, a watch and tie. Compeán represented the intellectual class among the illiterate masses. Others had been miners, the kind with serapes from Saltillo, embroidered huaraches and twill trousers; people who worked in different industries, wearing embarrassing and threadbare hand-me-down clothes and felt sombreros, everything purchased from the second-hand stores; and chauffeurs from the city, already accustomed to the exigencies of refined civilization, who, on Sundays and holidays, are indistinguishable from the clerks and gentleman belonging to the middle class.

Now, contact with another way of life had eliminated their differences: the school teacher and the Indian from the fields of Xochimilco dressed in the same way, each wrapped up in their denim “over-alls,” their cowboy hats, their brightly colored shirts and their work shoes. If the change in country had not exercised any influence over them spiritually—because Mexicans do not have any intimate contact with the other populations in the United States—materially, the American style of democracy, which allows its egalitarian weight to be felt over the economic life of its hundred-million inhabitants, had erased the differences which mark the very varied ascending hierarchy in México, and it had integrated them with the army of manual laborers, with the great, dark masses with its precise and mathematical act of leveling which standardizes all possibilities and grants the same demands and desires to the entire population of that septenariouly great nation.

Some had come to the gathering with their wives and children. The women demonstrated a real and sincere concern. Despite their poorly manufactured sombreros, which appeared to flatten them and impose upon them a kind of servitude to an elegance which they could not truly integrate, and which actually tarnished their charm rather than giving it to them; and in spite of the fact that some women dressed in silk and wore jewelry, which only those of a higher social class had the right to wear in their country of origin, they continued to be humble women, campesinas who worked in the fields and endured the suffering, the loneliness, the hunger, the long journeys and the abandonment of those who accompanied their “Johnnies” on their campaigns, those who, in spite of what they democracies had to say, continued to recognize the hierarchy of “those on top” and the obligations of marriage and family.

And with respect to Ana María, not only did they recognize her superiority but also her sweetness and the nobility of her virtuous heart. There was no problem that the “señora” could

not solve nor was there any sadness that she could not console. She was accustomed to going from house to house in order to stay in contact with those who worked on the farm, distributing books and teaching the little children their ABCs.

Luis Alfaro could have had all of the workers that he wanted on his farm, but what he lamented the most was being obliged to turn back those who came so often asking for a place to stay. Bellavista's reputation and that of its benevolent owners quickly spread far and wide. From time to time, the "patron" would receive illegible letters from people begging him as a favor to be permitted to move there where there were no cruel foremen nor irascible masters, who, at the slightest sign of difficulty, would whip out their rifles in order to terrorize people and sometimes even to kill.

Recently, as a result of the crisis which took aim at the United States, an endless caravan of Mexicans who were returning to their country passed by Bellavista and stopped there hoping to find work on that prosperous farm.

It was no surprise, then, that the entire "rancho" would come to see what was happening, guessing, with the dreadful uneasiness of one who fears the worst when sensing adversity, that it was so and that it fell upon the good lady, whose kindness illuminated their poor lives, in need of motherly love, with rays of love and charity.

Vallejo smoked cigarette after cigarette, asserting sententiously, "I told you she shouldn't have gone out after she got sick, not until this awful spell of weather has passed."

"Until it had passed..." Compeán, the school teacher, repeated ironically, as he stared exasperatedly into the grey sky as if he missed the burning July sun and rejected the inactivity which winter thrusts upon them. "It's not so easy to be holed up inside for a whole month or however long it takes for this darned snow to go away."

“And what if it’s not her who’s sick? What if it’s the master?” argued “El Cuervo” with his faint voice.

This supposition lent a new shade of darkness to the seriousness on the workers’ faces. They hadn’t considered such a possibility. The material loss of their security would be an entirely different kind of misfortune: it would mean leaving Bellavista or waiting for new owners; and losing their “señora” as well; and no longer feeling that this bountiful land which provided their sustenance, was an extension of their own fatherland, which remained down south, a place where they professed the same faith, where they spoke the same language, and where the coldness of foreign gold, which at times makes its hardness felt, was diminished by the friendly acceptance of those who paid it out to them and infused it with the warmth that is provided by the brotherhood of the Mexican community and the equality of the soul.

“No, no, it’s not the master,” assured Balbina, Compeán’s wife. “He was one of the people who was bustling about last night. I was watching carefully to see if I could figure out whose shadows were going back and forth in front of the dining room window, and I was able to make out Don Luis’.”

The other ladies gathered together to sigh and state in a chorus of protest, “That’s the last thing we need, for our succor to be taken away from us.”

“God would never allow it.”

“But I just saw her this Saturday, with her angelic little face, a little pale, but looking to still be in good health...”

The sound of the door opening in the back of the house, right in front of where the workers’ store room was located, put an end to all their discussion and made everyone there turn their heads.

It was Gabriela, who came to give them the news. With a great deal of effort, because her tired legs were no longer capable of any gracefulness, she walked across the patio sinking up to her ankles in the extraordinarily white mattress formed by the snow. She closed her eyes in order for them to adjust and make out the door to the warehouse which served as her point of reference and permitted her to follow the wooden walkway which connected the two places. She left a bitter trail and bore the tired expression of one who has not slept all night.

The workers came up to the door and asked, “What’s going on? What’s happening? Who’s sick?”

“The misses,” exclaimed the maid with a cry.

But then, regaining her composure, and as if embarrassed by such a public display of grief, she added, “The master assures me that her illness is nothing to worry about, and he asked me to tell you all to forgive him for not being able to come himself, because he has to give our lady her medicine right now; but he appreciates you all for coming; and, if he needs anything from you, he’ll be sure to let you know.”

Another eruption of crying interrupted the old woman’s remarks. The visitors could not reconcile the assurances that Luis gave them with the maid’s despair.

“If the lady’s not that sick, then why are you crying, Doña Gabriela?” asked disconcertedly Balbina, a robust and deeply-rooted campesina who appeared to share her husband’s intellectual superiority.

“Well... my dear,” replied Gabriela between sobs. “It’s just that when one gets old, everything makes you cry and you can’t see anything else but sadness all around you. And it makes me so sad to see my master so down in the mouth and the missus raving about her little white boy and for her home back in México. And it also makes me feel God-knows-what to see

all of us here like lost souls, on these white prairies, that look like death shrouds and to see my poor girl all alone, without anyone but her husband by her side. We must be the ones who appear so spoiled and ill-mannered to her by surrounding her bed with people whenever she gets sick!”

The women wiped away their tears with handkerchiefs. The men had become leaden, with that instinctive Mexican reaction to sorrow, their old acquaintance; and, as if putting on a mask of resignation that came over their faces anytime there was suffering, so frequent in their lives, provided them with the shield of stoicism and made them cold and invulnerable.

“She’ll get better. You’ll see,” said Compeán just to break the silence and console the old woman.

“Oh, yeah, sure,” chimed in “El Cuervo” deliberately, and then, like someone who is about to pronounce a judgment, he looked up, consulting the heavens, and exclaimed, “It’s March and before we know it the clouds will open, the sun will come out, the snow will disappear and we will all go back to work. That’ll lift the missus’ spirits and she’ll start to feel better. What she’s got—I’ve seen it all before—it’s the kind of thing that makes song birds die in their cages. She likes the outdoors, the open air, bathing in the river and running around from here to there... She needs the sunshine,” concluded Meléndez sighing heavily and as if wanting to scold the sun for its parsimoniousness.

The young man’s words of optimism worked like magic in the simple souls of those people who would bend to the most contrary emotions at the slightest blowing wind. The promise of sun was happy news. When it came out, it would effectively put an end to the sadness resulting from the long months of being locked inside and everything would become joyful again.

They rose from their seats and said goodbye to Gabriela.

“Tell the master,” ordered Vallejo, “to see how we can be of service to him.”

“Yes, yes, please, tell him,” the others agreed.

Above the exit door, an image of the Most Holy Redeemer stretched out his arms in the ultimate expression of suffering.

The women genuflected before the image and crossed themselves devotedly.

One of the women suggested, “We should say a Hail Mary for our lady’s good health.”

The large group kneeling around Vallejo’s wife, who was speaking, mumbled, with a monotonous intonation, the Christian supplications.

An air of sadness blew once more over the gathering. The anxiety which poured out from the ailing woman’s room, now extended to the improvised chapel of the field workers, whose prayerful attitude revealed the danger which loomed over the Alfaro’s home.

Chapter III

The first rays of sunlight pulled a shout out of Ana María, which sounded like a salute to life.

She sat up in her bed galvanized by that magical apparition.

“Look... Look at it, finally,” she exclaimed with all the strength her poor lungs could muster, calling to Luis who was speaking to the doctor in the adjacent room.

Dr. Morris continued to visit his patient daily during that long week of anxiety and sadness when everything appeared to conspire to aggravate her malady.

“We must lift her fallen spirits,” was the constant preoccupation for the doctor, who, otherwise, began to doubt the diagnosis he had made on the first day. Her fever had yet to break, and she remained in the same debilitated state. But her cough wasn’t as persistent as before; and, the more it dissipated, the more difficult it became to detect the presence of the infectious abscess which he thought he had discovered during his first examination of her. Without abandoning the notion that this was a case of tuberculosis, he thought it prudent to wait for a more precise clinical examination, with better instruments than the ones he had, in order to confirm or disprove his judgment. He believed that it could have been a nervous breakdown aggravated by the exhaustion which was carried over from her previous illness and sustained by everything that came together at the same difficult time to consume her body: the absence of her son, the snow that confined the ailing woman to her house and appeared to be attempting to bury her alive, and the bitterness of living in exile, which was always present, but was always exacerbated under such circumstances and concentrated in the drop of sadness which caused her glass run over.

Confiding in the virtues of the sun, which arrives like the harbinger of spring to places where winter is a continuous snowfall, the doctor had placed all of his hopes, like “El Cuervo,” on the therapeutic qualities of that astral body which gives life to the world. He concentrated on continuing to fight her fever and improving his patient’s depleted economy, until it was possible to transport her to Kansas City.

The first atmospheric signs demonstrating a change had been seen on the previous day. The clouds marched across the leaden sky like an army which has received orders to abandon its position in order to take up the fight at another far off battlefield. The wind blew more violently than before and the snowflakes were rarer and fell in smaller quantities.

Dr. Morris had left Arley in the wee hours of the morning. And, with his knowledge of a man from the fields, who learns many things from experience, he predicted that the last assault of winter would end very soon.

He arrived later, in very good spirits—something rare for him due to his almost mournful, Saxon nature—and, for the first time, he had a few sincere words of encouragement for the ailing woman. He spoke to her using his limited repertoire of Spanish which he learned from the Mexican farm workers from among his clientele, assuring her that she would soon be able to get out of bed.

“Do you think I’m doing better?” asked Ana María full of hope.

“Oh, sí...”

And the good doctor, the sun, showed up a short while later. The first of its morning rays had come to shine, almost horizontally, on the ailing woman’s bed.

Through the semi-opaque window one could see the divine spectacle of lethargic Nature drawing her new breath of life. The sun cast a rose-tinted hue upon the immense whiteness of the panorama. It had ceased to snow, and only a few stragglers, running in frenzied flight to the north, caused the curvature of the heavens to appear even bluer, due to the contrast. The trees, still bending under their wintery cargo, balanced their limbs blown by the wind, as if attempting to liberate themselves from the snow. The smoke that billowed out of the chimneys

of the houses surrounding the Alfaro's home also rose happily up to the sun, up through the blue sky, looking for it in order to lose itself within it.

A sparrow which had protected itself from the snow in the gables of the house, rehearsed a quiet tune.

Ana María cried out to her husband once more. She also called to the doctor with a previously unknown, childish glee, "The sun is shining... come see."

The two men rushed quickly to her side. The doctor wore a big and uncommon smile on his typically solemn face. Luis also smiled for the first time, after those endless days of agony, and he began to contemplate the appearance of that star as if he had never seen it before. Ana María continued to sit up in bed in order to better feel the sunlight which came to visit her.

Her husband turned to her full of hope, with the same joyous and surprised look on his face as those who witnessed the miraculous resurrections performed by Jesus must have had.

He did not dare ask any questions so as not to break the spell of that moment so full of hope. But Ana María entrusted herself with confirming the presupposition of the doctor, who had already spoken to Luis about the influence that a change in temperature and scenery could have on the patient's mental state.

"I feel much better. This lovely little sunbeam which surrounds me is really good for me."

Dr. Morris approached her in order to examine her after warming his hands in the fire burning in the chimney, for the cold was as intense as it had ever been, and the warmth that Ana María believed she felt was a mere illusion.

He had recognized it only a few hours before, but he noticed a marked change in her face, pallid and exsanguinous back then, and now illuminated by a faint touch of carmine, and the doctor could not resist the temptation to examine this miracle from up close.

Her body felt, in effect, the relief that her mind had received. It was a good sign. Perhaps it was the beginning of an actual improvement, but the doctor did not dare tell Luis that this was the case when he solicited his opinion.

“We have to wait and see, amigo. We have to wait until they examine her in Kansas City. I still have my doubts; and, hopefully, the x-rays will dispel them for me.”

“But such a sudden and delightful change isn’t enough for you to completely reject your prognosis?”

“Oh, no, you don’t understand the kind of influence a piece of good news, a cheery perspective, inclined to optimism, can have on a situation like this one. One might say that all of the symptoms of the malady have flown away like birds of the night stricken by the sunlight, but her disease continues its devastating and silent work in the cavities where it continues to work nonstop.”

Hope, however, is a stubborn goddess, who does not leave so easily once we have let her in. Ana María and Luis now secretly and blindly believed in the clear miracle which occurred with the sudden change in Nature.

Meanwhile, the sun, free of any obstacles, for the clouds had completely removed themselves from the horizon, rose magnificently toward its zenith. The doctor had stayed longer than he ordinarily did in Bellavista, in order to enjoy the sublime spectacle, and he made plans with Luis to transport the ailing woman, as soon as it was possible for cars to drive on the roads.

Like every day, the workers began to leave their homes and make their way to the “patron’s” house to learn about the señora’s health. But this time, they did not congregate sadly and respectfully in the granary. They noticed that Luis and the doctor had moved the comfortable porch chairs, which were stored away during the season of inclement weather, from the interior of the house; and now, like a certain sign that spring had sprung, they restored them to the place where the men, during the hot summer afternoons would go to catch their breath and chat for a while. They had observed the jovial and tranquil disposition of those two men, who were most interested in the ailing woman’s health, and granted themselves the liberty of violating the rules for that loathsome season in honor of the event.

Luis confirmed for them what they had already come to believe: the señora had notably improved, and she was very happy now that it was no longer snowing.

“God bless you...” repeated like an echo everyone who heard the joyous news, and then they hastily went off to deliver the news to their homes.

Gabriela had also left her little hole and leapt with joy despite her rheumatic legs as soon as she saw that Ana María was feeling better.

“I told you, my dear,” she shouted gleefully, using the familiar address with her mistress as she was apt to do only during the most intimate and joyous of occasions. “I told you that Our Lady of San Juan would grant you this miracle.”

Ana María stared at the sun and snow covered plain as if drunk in a daze.

Like all who have found themselves on Death’s door and discovered a way to escape, she could now taste the ineffable sweetness of life. For the first time, it appeared to her as though her youth had slowly and wanly passed her by, as though she had wasted it in a digression, in an

anxiety-ridden abeyance, far from the places she loved, far from her native winds, and far from everything she could call her heart and her soul.

Her love for Luis filled her heart and her life, without a doubt. But how much sweeter would it have been to have loved one another within the happy confines of where they had met, over there, where the air is always warm and does not get too hot in the summer nor too cold in the winter, back in those places where she could have lived out so happily her finest moments?

So many years hidden away, buried, at the end of world! How she longed to get up and go back to México, to pass by her home in the Umbroso Valley, even though it no longer belonged to her, to go back to live her former life!

The countryside began to spring back to life. Among the whiteness of the snow, small black spots could be seen moving in the distance. Through the gaps left by the window curtains, Ana María could see a man on horseback. And now everything filled her with joy, like a little girl.

She called Luis again to give him the news. “Look, they’re already coming to visit us,” she said pointing to the man on horseback who continued to draw nearer.

Alfaro went to the window to get a better look.

“It’s Pantusa, our neighbor,” he said. “He must be coming to inquire about your health. He has sent a number of messages with his workers.”

Pantusa—Cesare Pantusa, an Italian who had become a naturalized American—was the Alfaro’s neighbor and friend. Like them, he owned a small plot of farmland where he grew wheat and maize, the only two crops cultivated in that region. He maintained generally cordial relations with them. Due to their racial affinity, he felt closer to the Mexican couple than to his new national brethren.

Whenever he could, he spoke ill of those people with their Southern loquaciousness, in a gibberish that mixed three different languages: Spanish, English and his own, butchering all three.

“Questo people, Señor, questo people...”

However, he was 100% “American” whenever he found himself among people from that country and talked to them about the problems in their country. Deeply rooted in the New World, he never considered returning to his village near Venice, from whence Misfortune had cast him out.

Like all European immigrants, he had fought fiercely to make his fortune. And now that he had his own piece of land, money in the bank, and children who tied him to his new homeland, with heart and soul, he embraced this marvelous country which continued to allow itself to be conquered by those who in Europe, with the same amount of effort, could scarcely earn a crumb of their daily bread. Luis Alfaro spent his leisure time listening to him recount stories about his adventures, his trials, his tribulations, which was no more than the mere repetition of so many tales constantly revised and developed on the burning hot beaches, on the ardent farmlands, in the city of feverish activity, in the unending construction of the Yankee republic. Through his conversations with the Italian, the wave of European immigration rose up as if conjured up by a spell, coming in search of the golden fleece and realizing the miracle of hard work while achieving every immigrant’s fortune, the fabulous wealth riches of that North America, the giant alchemist, who turns the sweat of one’s brow and the beating of one’s chest into solid gold. Listening to Pantusa speak, one could guessed at, more than truly understand, his colorful tale. He had arrived in New York aboard an enormous transatlantic superliner with its hulls overflowing with poor people joined together in their quest for the almighty dollar, which

they expected to be paving the streets or flowing abundantly from the bountiful bosom of the Statue of Liberty. He was dismayed by his dramatic stories, which related the difficult steps taken by that miserable multitude to pass through the sieve of U.S. Immigration on Ellis Island, where many of those who did not have the required documents for admission had to remain and then return to their wretched countries of origin after having spent everything they owned, including what they had made by selling their modest home furnishings and humble abodes.

Pantusa had entered the United States on better footing. He came alone, fleeing from his paternal home where his elderly parents still lived thanks to the help of their other children. He worked menial jobs, which helped build his character, along with his compatriots in Little Italy, which reminded him of the large cities in his country because of the throng of “macaronis”—as the Americans contemptuously referred to them—all living there. Just about anyone would have thought that the commercial districts of Milan or Pisa had been transported across the blue waters of the Adriatic or over the gentle waves of the Tyrrhenian; the only difference was that the buildings were much taller, life was more hectic—due to the contagiousness of the North American lifestyle—and the environment much more dreary. Here, everyone had gold fever: Latin indolence, or the “dolce far niente,” had been abandoned; the moonlit serenades, the songs and the love affairs had all come to an end. Banks, saving money, dreams of making a million, of owning a shiny, new automobile, of making a fortune any way one could, fighting with your fists like Dempsey or singing operas like Caruso, were the obsessions of those men, who, until the time of riches arrived, lived in poverty, as they had back in their homelands, in buildings like pigeon coops, where thousands of families were crammed in, minding their stores full of articles brought back from Italy, managing their own restaurants, which were always full of Italians,

their barbershops, all of the services used by the community, which was the first step in beginning the uphill ascent towards riches.

Cesare went to all of the barbershops, restaurants, stores selling “works of art,” and any establishment that might be willing to hire him. That’s how he spent his early years—coming to the United States when he was fifteen years old—until he decided to leave that watering hole and go west where work in agriculture offered the best prospects. In California, he worked alongside one of his own compatriots who had decided to help him. He owned large vineyards and extensive fields where he grew vegetables for people living in the city of Los Angeles.

There, he learned to work and save his money. After four years, at the age of twenty-two, and after having passed every one of the three-hundred and sixty-five days of each one of them in the fields first, and then supervising the workers, he was able to put together a few thousand dollars, with which he could now embark on his own adventure. They told him that one could easily purchase half the state for very little money in Missouri, so he went to Kansas City, to a location adjacent to Bellavista, where the cultivation of wheat had become very intense.

Sow and reap: that was all the work that the lands in his new community required. The fields gave of themselves freely; the snowfall prepared the land by keeping it moist, until it was time for planting. In just a few years, Pantusa, the pauper, had made his fortune and married a girl, the daughter of two German parents from Arley.

They had three children, Yolanda, Catalina and Humberto, who resembled the classic North American stereotypes, from the graceful and shapely girl, with a confident stride and an independent and headstrong character; to the athletic boy, trained in the idolizing worship of the United States, “the greatest nation on earth,” the type of guy who carries in his eyes and in his

demeanor the pride of belonging to a race of people who believe themselves to be superior to all the other people on earth. They were the product of the “melting pot” which is not able to melt away everything belonging to the foreign immigrants, because foremost among the laws of society are those of nature, which keep men bound with the chains of nostalgia and affection for the land where they were born, and is only able to produce a “pure” specimen after a second generation. They now belong to the group of those who attended schools where they are taught a history filled with legendary heroes, and where they develop their bodies and souls with gymnastics which build muscles, and with Yankee conventionalisms which instill a sense of pride in their new race, the pure product of the famous “melting pot”...

Sometimes, when Pantusa went to the Alfaro's house with his whole family, Luis's watchful spirit could observe up close the phenomenon of the formation of the North American nationality in that mass of differing aspirations, led, finally, by the laws of nature, towards “North Americanization.” Pantusa still retained the bad taste in his mouth of a Latin man transplanted to the great power plant know as the United States, of the European who from time to time complains about the inability to live a simple and monotonous life and about the customs, which could be excessively Puritan at times, and too liberal at others. Through Mrs. Pantusa was revealed the Saxon who considered all Americans to be upstarts and social climbers, and the German who could not forget the recent defeat suffered by her countrymen in the last war. And from the cadence of explosions of an English which flowed as smooth and sweet as a fine chianti from Pantusa's lips, as well as the guttural shouts from the “frau,” who railed against Mr. Wilson and against the newspapers which mocked the Kaiser's soldiers depicting them as cruel and cowardly and generally worthless, the United States emerged very poorly drawn during those colorful discussions which the couple had with Luis, and which Ana María listened to silent and

smiling, removed to a certain degree from the significance of all that international gibberish, for she guessed at more than she actually understood of what her guests were saying.

“They should go to Italy to see art and palaces and monumental and sumptuary riches,” said Pantusa.

“Germany would still give them a lot to do. Revenge is on its way and we just might see our former enemies defeated and our territories reclaimed... Ah! If only the Americans had not entered the war...”

And upon saying this, Pantusa’s wife, spat ire upon all humanity, burning more brightly than usual.

They all went silent, however, in sudden and mutual agreement to respect the children’s own feelings for their country, when they all arrived with Luis, Jr., to join the gathering. The children spoke intensely and with genuine satisfaction about the latest heroic exploits of Babe Ruth, the famous baseball player, who earned thousands of dollars throwing a ball; about the prowess of the boxers who charged millions per exhibition; and about the progress of the American navy, which would occupy second place in the world rankings when compared to the other world powers, but which, in the exalted imaginations of those children, was indisputably first rate, one of a kind, invincible.

Upon witnessing their enthusiasm and the sincere manifestation of their pride, which was capped off by the noble and gallant appearance of those strong, beautiful and cultured children, the Pantusas appeared bashful and rectified their previous judgments in silence. Upon lowering their eyes, confusedly, they appeared to be saying, “In the end, the kids are right. It has to be, actually, a great country to have given us the fortune we enjoy and molded these children into its robust stock.”

They also went silent, or rather they abstained from grumbling, when they found themselves at the Alfaros' house among their other neighbors, also farmers, who owned land in the same region: an unmarried and long in the tooth Frenchman, M. Martin, and a Polish couple, the Markowskys, who only visited out of courtesy, recognizing the intellectual and social superiority of Luis and his wife, whom they regarded with an excessive amount of respect.

Pantusa did not trust the Frenchman or the Poles. M. Martin was more communicative than the latter, but he kept their relationship at an almost diplomatic distance, displaying a ridiculous and exaggerated courtesy which irritated the Italian and his wife. Before the Alfaros had taken up residence at Bellavista, the other neighbors rarely maintained any contact between themselves. The new settlers, affable and attractive, enhanced the social life among that small group of landowners, who had such different tendencies and characteristics.

Pantusa now demonstrated his warm regard for the Alfaros by coming in person to inquire about the señora's health as soon as the skies had cleared. This gesture was even more significant when one takes into account that no one knew with certainty the gravity of her illness. The Italian became aware, because Dr. Morris, on his frequent visits, passed by his house, located on the road to Arley. And he made him aware of the condition of Alfaro's wife, without telling him the whole truth.

Luis went outside to welcome the Italian, who was dismounting in front of his house.

"Oh, berry culd," exclaimed the recent arrival, blowing big puffs of air, as he greeted Dr. Morris and Luis with his customary effusion.

"And de lil' signora? Mrs. Pantusa would 'ave liked to-a come sooner to see 'er, but neither of dem seems to be a feeling berry well. Can anyone see 'er? Can anyone speak to 'er? I bring 'er so many warm regards on-a de part of Victoria, who promised to 'ave a long visit with

‘er as soon as there is a way to take out-a de ‘Ford.’ She badly wanted to sit and chat with Mrs. Alfaro, after dose terrible weeks of being all a cooped up when even de mailman stopped coming for a few days, and dey didn’t even ‘ave de comfort of a ‘earing regularly from de childrens, who were also constantly complaining about a deir schools in Indiana, which were ‘alf a covered in de snow.”

And he talked and talked, without stopping, without letting anyone else get a word in edgewise, or even taking notice of Dr. Morris’ mocking smile or acknowledging Luis’s attempts to answer his endless string of questions.

He never had better prospects than he did now, continued the Italian. It was barely April and they could already count on good weather. He began thinking about preparing his fields, which would yield a good harvest of corn for him, before planting wheat around August or September. They never had such a great opportunity. And now, with the fabulous prices they were able to get on grains...

“We’re going to be-a rich, Mr. Alfaro, we’re going to be-a rich,” he concluded finally, laughing out loud. And then, obliged and embarrassed for having prevented himself from receiving the news that he came to hear with his all of chattering on and on, he insisted, “And de lil’ signora? Mrs. Alfaro?”

He was comforted to know that she was improving even though she was still confined to her bed. He was sorry that he couldn’t see her to personally deliver the messages that he had brought for her, but he was sure that they would all get together soon for a festive dinner to celebrate her recovery and the changing of the seasons.

Luis agreed to everything he said, with the secret hope of one who, caught up in the optimism of the moment, arranges things his own way and is determined to dispel the terrors of the day before.

The scenery had changed in that way looking at it all in the new and radiant light of that day and in the presence of a friend who spoke so confidently about the future!

The arrival of the other neighbors helped to dispel the rest of his worries. Markowsky and M. Martin appeared on the horse paths wearing heavy coats. Everyone knew that they all wanted to celebrate that beautiful morning, the harbinger of a lovely season to come, as if it was a fiesta. They joined the group after tying their horses to the porch in front of the house. Markowsky was a very serious man who was getting on in age. Pain and disillusionment had left him with deep tracks on his face, and his rubicund countenance, covered with a grayish beard, rarely revealed his emotions. The only thing that showed he was alive were his large, expressive eyes, but they were frequently hidden behind his continuous blinking, which always ended with him looking down at the ground.

The Frenchman, small, fair, with a triangular and expressive face, moved like Patusa but was more elegant and debonair. It was said that he had been a chamberlain and held offices which placed him in contact with people in high society, and this is why he adopted an attitude of respectful elegance when seen at any gathering, however modest it might be. However, at the same time, he manifested a pronounced disdain for those who, in his judgment, belonged to a social class inferior to those he had met during his time as a lackey.

Markowsy, a man of few words, of the brawny farm worker type, with clumsy movements, felt the Frenchman's stern gaze looking down on him when they went to eat together at the Alfaro's house. When they saw each other out on the farm, M. Martin acted like a

completely different person. He treated Markowsky as if they were equals, like great men who do not show contempt for their inferiors outside of a rigid social environment.

He spoke to Pantusa with less arrogance because the Italian, with his loquaciousness, had become friends with Luis, who showed a strong preference for him. The Frenchman acquiesced to Monsieur Alfaro's caprice, as he would have acquiesced in previous times to his masters' most insignificant whims.

They brought out chairs for themselves in order to move the gathering to the porch. As soon as the Frenchman discovered that the lady of the house was sleeping—for Gabriela had brought them the news—he begged for everyone to lower their voices as not to disturb her. Luis assured them that there was no need to worry because his wife's bedroom was far from where they were located.

But M. Martin would not stop lamenting. "What a disgrace! But we had no idea..." said the Frenchman throwing back his hands with exaggeration. "And you all know," he continued, "how discouraged one feels to leave the house in this kind of weather. As soon as we found out, we should have come to see our dear friends and done anything they needed, right, Markowsky?"

He concluded with a grandiose sign of reverence, placing his hand over his chest.

Markowsky could do nothing but agree, with leaden gravity. In this way, he shared a certain similarity to Dr. Morris, who, almost lying down in his large chair, with his feet up on balustrade of the porch, now stared out at the landscape with an air of boredom for his feelings of admiration would not allow him to give too much time to any one spectacle.

For the first time, at the end of the last snowfall, the regular circle of friends who attended the Alfaros' gatherings were all finally back together. They were the ones who almost

always sat at the table belonging to the owners of Bellavista or attended the little fiestas that they hosted there. The only thing missing were the women: the robust German, Mrs. Pantusa; Mrs. Markowsky, the Pole, as sombre and sullen as her husband; and Ana María, whose charming youth and graceful carriage always imposed her superiority.

After a bit of conversation, the Frenchman gave his customary lesson on good manners, saying that it was not polite to prolong their visit, declining Luis's offer to have lunch with them, for it would not be long before "the dear señora" would be demanding her husband's presence.

The gathering broke up soon after. Pantusa and Markowsky promised to return with their wives as soon as Alfaro's wife was in a condition to receive their attention. Alfaro promised to keep them abreast of everything and vaguely made them aware of their probable trip to Kansas City, in search of better medical care.

It was almost noon.

The sun's heat began to melt the snow, and here and there, in the most prominent places, the black stains of wet earth began to show. The houses' red roofs quickly liberated themselves from their white loads. The water poured down the drains, creating a sound that, despite its monotonousness, filled one's heart with joy after the profound silence of the previous days.

Ana María was sleeping peacefully when Luis went inside to see her after bidding farewell to his friends. Sitting against the headboard of her bed, Gabriela attended to the ailing woman with a maternal love.

"Has she been sleeping long?"

"Since about ten o'clock."

The maid had closed the curtains. The bedroom appeared to be shrouded in darkness. Standing out from the shadows was the aristocratic face of a woman who no longer looked to

Luis like an angel who wants to fly, but rather like a supernatural being who comes down to earth and rests after its long sidereal journey.

Would they see a miracle?

Kansas City took the form of a cruel sphinx.

What would it say to him when he went inquiring about his loved one's life and trying to dispel the danger threatened by his inopportune lover?

He went back out into the light, in an instinctive desire to free his heart from its uncertainty just as the sky had cleared itself of the clouds.

Chapter IV

Breathing heavily and with a clatter of iron and glass, the train arrived at Kansas City's Union Station, a fabulous train depot where numerous rail lines which cut across the entire Yankee republic converge.

Beneath the immense glass-covered archways, which allowed the last rays of afternoon sunlight to pass through and light up the spectacle of feverish activity of a population which travels from one part of the country to another on a daily basis, the new arrivals moved with the same deliberate severity that sets the North Americans apart.

The human anthill, spilling out of the elegant rail cars which still gasped for air as if to catch its breath long enough to continue its journey, became confused with the swarm of people who were waiting outside: taxi drivers, dressed in olive colored uniforms, persistently offering their services; hotel agents who proclaimed the superiority of their establishments; gruff and circumspect police officers who insolently examined the passengers as if there must have been some delinquent among them; and, one person or another who was looking with avid eyes for someone who just arrived. The overwhelming majority of travelers passed by without paying any attention to the people who greeted each other after extended absences, nor to the solicitations of those who offered their services to them, nor to anything which was not the precise reason why they were forced to travel God-knows how many thousands of miles, and with a fixed stare on their faces, headed straight toward someone with briefcase in hand, as if they saw them from afar and as if consumed in thought.

Within this multitude that arrived, like the current of a river which flows to the sea, one could see the indifference of that conglomeration of people who live in that Anglo-Saxon country, where each individual appears to be all alone among the thousands of people surrounding him, and turns into a void everything around him which is not his primary objective.

In our Latin countries, made up of people who love their countries, for whom such journeys abroad represent pain and suffering, the train stations are filled with the emotions of people saying goodbye and the joy of those who have returned. One enters them feeling a little

bit of the anxiety floating in the air which was left by those who saw a loved one depart or those who await loved ones with eyes full of longing. With very few exceptions, we only travel out of grave necessity, and wherever we go, we leave behind deep attachments: the moment of our departure or that of our return are moments of intense emotions.

One sees nothing of that here: traveling is a way of life in the Yankee republic, made up of intense traffic, feverish activity, rapid changes in life and an endless hustle and bustle. Those who were now arriving would soon be leaving for one of any number of pigeon coops which provide lodging for the enormous transient population in each city, to conduct business, to sell their wares, to continue on their eternal voyage through the streets and city squares, just a continuation of the parallels of the railroad tracks those productive pathways their endless forward movement.

As soon as the station became less crowded, an ambulance that Luis had ordered to be prepared drove up to the last Pullman railcar in which the ailing woman from Bellavista had arrived. Ana María, like anyone who has enjoyed a long period of good health and does not want to accept the condition of being incurably sick, stubbornly fought to maintain her healthy appearance. Her recovery had intensified after the change in the weather. A few days of sun and warm air were enough to completely change her point of view and give her the strength she needed to get out of bed. And when she was able to get out of bed, after a few weeks, once the doctor assured her that she would be well enough to make the trip, they left the farm and went to Kansas City, she, with her obstinate desire for a speedy and complete recovery, and he, with his heart full of uncertainty, searching for the last word from science about that evil traitor who would suddenly force them to alter all of their life's plans.

To demonstrate her strength, Ana María stepped down from the railcar and boarded the ambulance without any assistance from anyone. Her strength, however, gave out on her and she was forced to brace herself on her husband's shoulders in order to take her seat. The nurses who were there to receive her insisted that she lay down. This upset her. The excitement and positive energy that accompanied her during her journey suddenly disappeared. Till then she had been possessed by a childlike glee. Everything on the way excited her, as if it were the first time she had ever traveled. A windmill moving its arms, a little farm house in the fields hidden among the groves of trees, a few farmhands working hunched over the ground, all of these things made her burst with exclamations of joy, which caused Luis to look at her with a paternal complacency, concealing his inner sadness which now soured his fleeting optimism.

Presently, as the ambulance gently rolled along towards the hospital, fear and anxiety returned to take control of her as well. She had never been in a hospital before and the mere word alone made her feel suspicious. The din of that enormous city, its incessant movement, which was like a mockery of her own inability to move, vexed her as well. Through the windows of the ambulance she could see, from her stretcher, the spectacle of the restless stirring of the city, which she had always found distasteful. Always distancing herself from heavily populated civic centers, she felt an aversion to them. And since all she could do was think about things from her homeland because of her recent desire to return to México, everything she saw made it appear more beautiful to her, contrasted by the distance, and by her fear of never again seeing it, the object of her nostalgia and of her unbearable yearning to return. She also looked upon that environment of hubristic North American superiority, which manifests itself in the slightest details, with that secret animosity which was being engendered in her own people, that hostility towards other people and a hatred of neighboring countries. Kansas City appeared to

her, like all the other big cities in North America, to be made of iron, cold, noisy and as hard as that metal, formed from iron casts, with the pounding of a Cyclops' hammer. A giant forge which never ceased to operate so as to continue to raise up to the sky the Tower of Babel of those enormous edifices; in order to manufacture millions of vehicles which parade through the congested streets, in an uninterrupted line without a solution of continuity; in order to replenish the fabulous consumption of the thousands of machines which can be seen everywhere straining to assist individuals with the most menial tasks, even with sweeping the streets and with kitchen chores, as if to give men and women the opportunity to dedicate more time to business, to their jobs, to the wild pursuit of money and a livelihood.

That din made her feel dizzy. From the neighborhood theatres emanated the raucous music of the electric player pianos. The trolley cars filled the streets with deafening noises. The automobiles stunned her with the shrillness of their horns. She closed her eyes in disgust and did not open them again until the quieting, distant sound indicated to her that they were now far from the commercial center. Her perspective had now completely changed. The streets which led them to the city's limits where the hospital was located appeared to be quiet, tranquil. It was getting dark, and men and women, after leaving work, rested from their daily chores and enjoyed the fresh breeze on the porches of their homes. The mere presence of those people gave her the impression of another world and another way of living very different from what she had known in her homeland.

All the activity, like all the noise, was concentrated in the city's commercial center. That's where the cinemas, theatres, social halls, restaurants, romantic couples looking for a happy and well-lit place, amusement, anything and everything associated with mirth and merriment were located. Anyone hoping to indulge in all of those things had to go to find them

far away from the rigid, impenetrable solitude of their homes. Those who stayed home at those hours tacitly renounced any form of entertainment or enjoyed themselves quietly, methodically, close to the hearth where thick logs burned in the winter and fans buzzed in the summertime. The phonograph, the radio, or the watering of the plants and the tending of gardens occupied the quiet hours of rest, if one can truly call “rest” that continual upkeep of the house, that work in the garden, that excessive attention to all of the domestic duties in which people embroil themselves when returning from work until their beds finally beckon them.

Ana María’s ill will for anything that wasn’t Mexican prevented her from seeing in all of its beauty, the quiet serenity, the order, the symmetry, the cleanliness of that section of the city which represented, in reality, the soul, the character, the physiognomy of the American people.

Just like those smooth and well-lit streets; just like those geometrical gardens, where the manicured and intensely green grass looked like brilliant tapestries; just like those houses all produced from the same mold, furnished in almost exactly the same way, with identical interiors, implacably arranged and sparkling with cleanliness and monotony; just like this were the lives of those who inhabited them: peaceful, upstanding, perfectly level, bound to a carpenter’s square and an unchanging routine. She imagined those men and women doing exactly the same thing every day, in the same methodical routine as always: wake up at a certain time, go straight to work, eat when the factory whistles blow, leave work on the same signal, go to church on Sunday morning to sing the same songs and pray the same prayers, have a little bit of fun in the afternoon or at night with a drive in the car and make money, always making money, amassing a fortune by way of big businesses or through disciplined savings, adding a little or a lot to the country’s tremendous wealth by managing their own haciendas, whose state of prosperity fills

them with this sense of tranquility and appearance of wellbeing which could be seen in their homes, in their personas, in their proud, hard stares...

The ailing woman smiled, bitterly, at this idea.

What kind of life was this? Wasn't her people's way of living better, the lifestyle of her untamed race, which, like Christ, had faith in what tomorrow would bring, and was concerned only with the tasks at hand? At any rate, how different one community was from the other, and how eloquently the outward appearances of their existence spoke about that different way of life! While here, at this hour, everyone went in search of the warmth and tranquility of their homes, back in her own country, in México, the young ladies would be getting ready to sneak out through the window in order to talk to their boyfriends or to go to the "plaza de armas" and take a stroll around the garden which emits an intoxicating mixture of aromas. The moon would be shining in all its splendor over those dark and sleepy pueblos through their dense groves of trees, but which tremble with passion and life within the mystery of the shadows...

Here, wealth exacts a life full of sadness, calm and regulated, like one of those boarders subjected to strict regulations; there, blissful and dizzying poverty compensate for the privations and the challenges for survival, the discomforts and the hardships, with an intense joie de vivre.

Which was better? This one or that one?

She wanted to go back to México at any cost...

The hospital did not have the dreadful appearance of those that she had seen in México. Rather than the darkness of the big buildings with shadowy hallways and large rooms that gave off an odor of death, she encountered a spacious edifice where everything was white, clean and full of light. The nurses, blonde and beautiful young ladies dressed in white, starched uniforms, passed through the spacious garden in front of the building, waiting their turn. The stretcher on

which they transported her entered the elevator without the slightest movement and exited from it, on the sixth floor, sweetly, on its rubber wheels, without feeling the connection which was perfectly established with the hallway.

They placed her in a white room where everything was made of marble, mosaics, linens, and snowy white enamels. A smiling nurse with an upturned nose and plump German face, believing she could speak Spanish, wanted to welcome her with a few unintelligible words which Luis translated gratefully.

All of this encouraged the ailing woman and her husband. The influence of the cordial environment in that establishment, which appeared to be made to give life and looked as though no one could possibly ever die there, had its effect on the troubled couple.

Through the room's window the panorama of the city could be seen perfectly clearly, though night had already fallen, thanks to the fantastic lighting which sprang forth everywhere. The tall buildings, with many floors, were like enormous cubes filled with little pin-pricks of light.

The automobiles crossed by like fireflies hastily along the wide avenues brightened by the glow of countless crystal lamps. The main streets of the commercial district blinked rhythmically with the multicolored light of the electric signs which shed their light on the vast human swarm in perpetual motion.

From a distance, for as far as the eye could see, millions of tiny lights displayed the presence of the tranquil abodes where the happy people lived, the owners of all of those riches...

Chapter V

With Ana María now in the hospital, Luis left to find a place to stay. He began to walk under the bright lights, where the large hotels, the hustle and bustle, the noise, the beating heart

of the city could be found. He felt a strange sense of curiosity, a desire that he had never felt before to become lost in the multitude where he might possibly find the only person who was of any interest to him among the millions of bodies that swirled around him: the enigmatic Magdalena, the one who sent him the threats in that letter which had arrived at his house at the same time as that bout of misery which still continued.

At times he felt a secret sense of remorse upon thinking that it was anything other than his desire to prevent a scandal which led him to his cheerful acquaintance. He knew deep down in his heart that she had awakened God-knows how many restlessly dormant feelings, the impulsiveness of his crazed youth longing to catch glimpse of his past—oh, so beautiful and seductive!—through that window which Magdalena’s provocative indiscretion had opened for him. They were not enough to overcome his profound and disconsolate misfortunes, nor the faithfulness and devotion—still quite firm—that he held for the love of his life. It wasn’t his fault. Between his raucous past and the present, a number of long years of silent waiting had passed, a catalepsy that he thought was forgetfulness, the taste for a life that had run its sweet, silent course. He could now see how this trivial incident was enough to cause him to lust for—with an alarming inquietude which not even he himself wanted to admit, because he considered it a sin, an indignity in such a situation—a tiny bit, perhaps, of what he had left behind, without needing to know exactly what it was—what did he know?—about that jocund life of his youth, which had been suddenly cut short, like one of those songs that can be heard at night and come to a end when we want to hear them the most.

Magdalena was little more than the incident which jarred his memory and caused him to passionately crave the joys of his lost youth. He didn’t lust after her. He was curious, of course, to hear from her lips the many things he was grateful to hear. But, how could he speak to her in

friendly and happy tones about old times if he had resolved to be dry and laconic in order to put an abrupt end to any kind of that liberated woman's wild pursuits?

It could not happen, nor should it happen, any other way. He didn't even feel the strong sentimental impulses which would cause him to waver in his resolve. Not love, which he had never felt for her, nor lust, nor even gratitude or a sense of obligation of any other kind rose up to force it to happen. His meeting with her, in the end, wouldn't be difficult at all.

Considering everything, it worried him a little bit and it produced a certain emotion within him. It was such a rare thing for him to see old acquaintances since he left México, living tucked away as he was in that little corner where his only contact was with the men who worked in his fields! His friends and brothers-at-arms, the politicians who had taken flight from their country at the same time that he did, the people from his station in life, from his world, never reared their heads around his Bellavista retreat. He had gone only once to San Antonio, the metropolis of the exile community, as they called it, and he had to cut his stay short, disillusioned. It was such a sad sight...

The disputes which caused their fatherland to burn with fury and passion persisted on foreign land. The refugees looked at each other with suspicion. They formed cliques, on every street corner, which represented each one of the warring factions. Some were "reactionaries," these here were Carrancistas, and the ones over there were Villistas. Once, a well-intentioned group of people wanted to start a club or social center where Mexicans of all persuasions could come together in order to ease the burden of their forced expulsion from their country, and after the enthusiasm of the first few days, and the first few fiestas, came the inevitable separation, the rupture and its failure. Everyone clung to his own side. And it appeared as though the people had been injected with some kind of disunity virus.

Even those within the same group looked at each other with suspicion, accusing each other of the losses suffered or anticipating all the plotting of a fight for future and problematical control.

And because they were all so preoccupied with those conflicts, no one could recall the happy things which were suspended on the day that the civil war erupted in México. They did not gather together, like the Israelites living in exile in a harsh Babylon, to remember their lost fatherland.

The oblivion of Bellavista was more pleasant than the disquieting aspirations of those exiles who were so bitter and brokenhearted from waiting.

That giddy little girl, whom he would see at any moment now was more significant to him—What Fate!—than his old friends, not for what she herself could be, what she could have been, but rather for what she could bring to him with her trivial words, with her blathering and frivolous anecdotes, with her memories and recollections, of everything that he had left behind and longed with all his soul to see once again.

Grove Street... Where could it be?

He took out his watch to see what time it was. Nine-thirty. It wasn't an appropriate time to pay a visit. And besides, he wanted to prove to himself that he wasn't in any hurry to see Magdalena. It now appeared as if nothing was more important to him than that woman and that he had made that trip with the sole objective of meeting with her. He hadn't realized that—momentarily freed from his obligation of caring for his wife, and wandering aimlessly through a city which presented him with the temptation to see an old flame, though without lust or bad intention—for a brief moment, he had been transformed again into that spontaneous and weak

young man from a bygone era. It's a mistake to think that anyone can free himself forever from the habits and impulses of his careless youth!

The theatres were beginning to be vacated by the crowds that had arrived earlier. With nothing else to entertain himself, for he was not really tempted by the one which offered him its interior, whose great big electric marquees attracted the attention of the masses with the promise of continuously changing spectacles, Alfaro stopped to watch the departure of those who had surely just seen a "good show" and exited en masse from the glittering theatre. In every young woman's contours he thought he saw Magdalena and—the strangest thing!—his first impulse was to avoid the encounter. The illusion lasted only a short time because, from up close, none of them had the grace, confidence, dark eyes and skin of his friend. The North American women had never appeared as cold to him as they did now, so incapable of the dynamic conversations between Latin men and women, who even in the commotion of the streets leave a wake of fiery glances.

Whenever he found himself mixed up with the Yankee multitudes, he felt as though he was enveloped by an infinite solitude. Mexican and Latin, he felt more like a foreigner than anyone else in those cosmopolitan cities where no one takes notice of anyone else. José Juan Tablada, a great, sensitive and romantic Mexican poet, had also experienced the same isolation when in the populated desert of New York and he expressed it in this magnificent verse:

So close to my eyes, so far from my life...
...women who stroll down Fifth Avenue

There weren't as many Mexicans in Kansas City, of course. In the towns along the border, in the cities in Texas, especially San Antonio, one could be sure to find friendly faces all around—at least in terms of color and expression—and even though those encounters at times resulted in profound disillusionment—for it has been a long time since the Mexican soul has left

those bodies of seductive, mestizo beauty, and now they cannot be found in those women who possess them, nor the tastes nor sweet and loving temperaments of the women from the land of Anahuac—nevertheless, it is a sight for sore eyes, tired of looking at hardships and frailties, to be able to delight in something familiar.

Vexed from watching the parade of theatre-philes, Alfaro continued to walk down the streets of the commercial district. The shop windows, transformed into a museum of the riches of this country's industriousness, provided a pleasant distraction. As a result, the former officer of the Mexican army's march was extremely slow. Anyone else in a hurry would have traveled the same distance, many times over, in the same amount of time.

While turning a corner, Luis' attention was attracted to a couple who, still seen from behind, appeared to have that *je ne sais pas* which is unmistakable for two elegant women from his own country. He quickened his pace in order to look at them more closely. The chatty duo was in no hurry either and was likewise killing time by browsing the various boutiques. As a result, it was easy for Luis to catch up to them. When he drew even with the two women, they were both staring with feminine yearning at the opulent dresses which were artfully displayed. Before seeing her face, Alfaro recognized the voice that he had heard so many times before. He felt a strange coldness coursing through his veins; but, at the same time, it seemed like the most natural thing in the world, this coincidence which, within just a few hours of his arrival in the big city, presented him with the encounter that he was both dreading and hoping for at the same time.

He pretended to not have seen his friend and drew nearer to her with his gaze fixed upon the elegant garments in the storefront window.

She, on the other hand, without trying to hide it, turned red with joy and emotion as soon as she saw Luis. She ran up to him with outstretched arms...

“You... You...” was all that she could say.

Unnerved and unable to find his traditional, refined manners, Alfaro removed his sombrero in order to greet her confusedly. “Magdalena... Pardon me... I didn’t see you... Miss,” he continued, directing his words to his friend’s companion.

Luis’ discretion cast a bit of a chill over the effusions of Magdalena, who began to make introductions.

“Don Luis Alfaro,” she said to her friend pointing to the man to whom she was referring. “Miss Alicia Curiel.”

There was moment of awkward silence which Luis finally broke when realizing that he should say something.

“I just arrived in town and I had intended on looking for you tomorrow. But, from this moment forth, I am at your service,” he said without forsaking his air of respectful formality.

“Much obliged,” replied Magdalena who had now recovered her composure and regretted her overjoyed salutation.

Magdalena was a magnificent dark-skinned woman over thirty years old, in the plenitude of her life. Tall, shapely, with a lightly tanned face, small mouth and dark eyes, she admirably represented the image of the strong and jovial Mexican woman, capable of living many youthful years. Her companion had curly blonde hair and all the airs of a young Mexican woman who had lived in the United States for a long time or was born there, and only retains the appearance of one belonging to her former nationality in addition to the few customs which her family still practices at home.

Miss Curiel realized that there was one person too many, and that she was that one person; so, with the frankness which is typical of the region, she expressed her desire to retire for the evening.

Magdalena and Luis tried to object, the latter stating that the one who really should be leaving was he. But Alicia, who knew little in the way of manners or refinement, stuck her hand out to them with the unwavering determination to leave, assuring them, in passing, that the electric trolley which stopped at the corner would let her off at the doorstep of her house.

“Should we expect you for dinner?” she asked Magdalena as she took her leave.

“Tell them not to wait for me, missy. Because now that you’ve made up your mind to leave us all alone, we’re going to take advantage of the opportunity to get all caught up. And it seems to me that we would be better off doing it at a restaurant than anywhere else.”

As soon as Alicia had left, Magdalena and Luis looked at each other for a long time, as if examining one another, inch by inch, and attempting to find, one in the other, all the things that they must have been through in their lives during such an extended hiatus.

The young lady smiled bitterly, then finally said, “But, my Goodness, how you’ve changed...”

“Older?” asked Luis, smiling as well.

“No, sadder,” replied Magdalena, then added, “Or rather, is it that I upset you with that imprudent letter that I sent you, and now you’re cross with me?”

Luis shook his head no; and, not wanting to give any more explanations in such a visible place, he proposed to Magdalena that they should go inside a restaurant. There was no danger that they would be seen by anyone they knew; but, he was taking into consideration that, even under those circumstances, he owed his wife his unwavering respect, and it was not in his best

interests to remain, in such an ostensible manner, in that spot with a woman who was not his wife. Looking at Magdalena, he felt he needed to regain his scruples; and he began to notice, with a mixture of sadness and joy, that his heart no longer responded to the calls of a frivolous life.

They began walking to the nearest restaurant. It did not matter to them where they went, knowing that there wasn't much difference between the very finest and the most humble of North American restaurants. What mattered to them was finding a quiet spot where they could clarify a few things.

They went into the "Delmónico" which provided them with no more comforts than those that one enjoys when in a hurry to grab a quick snack. The most private spot available were a few seats, which looked like those in a Pullman car, which separated its occupants into groups, but it left them visible to anyone who passed in front of them.

Neither one of them felt like eating. They ordered a light dish in order to secure the right to occupy the seats. A vague uneasiness came over them, the kind that people feel after not seeing each other for a long time, after having seen each other very much, then suddenly cross each other's path and know that they are going to part once again, perhaps once and for all.

The brief moments of their encounter had been sufficient to leave them with that disconsolate impression.

Magdalena persisted with her question and wanted to provide a few explanations.

"Forgive me for writing to you in that tone," she began to say. "I naively thought that you were the same man you used to be, that you would have remembered how I am, and that you would have understood the joke contained within my little threat. I came to the United States to see my sister Marta. She just got married, I didn't know if you knew, to a doctor now practicing

in San Antonio. That's where I ran into Pepe Sarmiento, a friend of both of ours and our companion during those unforgettable nights of "art and ecstasy" as Mora the painter used to call them, when we used to all get together to "drink the nectar of youth from a golden cup," like one of the others disciples used to say. Sarmiento—please keep this a secret—gave me your address and I who—whether you believe it or not—have a burning memory of you, came to Kansas City—so cold yet so hot. I wrote you all of those foolish things imagining that you would come running, not because you believed that I really had some kind of emergency, but because you have never declined an invitation from me before... But, since a number of days and weeks went by without you coming around, I began to wonder... honestly, if you were now a formal man, serious, perhaps even tied down with children. And if it wasn't for the fact that they've made my time so enjoyable in the house where I'm staying—because I'm happier here than in my sister's house, where it seems that they're worried that someone might tell her husband what kind of person I am, because he takes me for a Goody Two-shoes, and because I was clinging to the slim hope that you might eventually show up—I would have left a long time ago, without creating all the commotion I promised you."

Facing the trivial nature of their tryst, Luis felt disgusted and a bitter disappointment as well. He had no other choice than to admit that his vanity had given the issue more attention than it was worth. Magdalena—he should have remembered—was not capable of loving anyone. However, at the same time, he began to realize that the young lady was suffering from a similar disillusionment. She had imagined that the handsome officer would enthusiastically embrace her insinuation. But, unlike her happy-go-lucky companion of old, she found herself in front of a taciturn man, who forced himself in vain to smile and act friendly, with the same kind

of energy as those who want to go to sleep and want to free themselves at all costs from the burden which holds them back.

Beneath the resplendent light of the restaurant lamps, Luis and Magdalena stared at each other without any reservations. She noticed that he had a lot of grey hair and an air of fatigue on his face. And he observed that Magdalena, still young and beautiful, carried in her eyes a hidden sadness, the weariness of those who have lived life in the fast lane.

“But I can see that I have made a terrible mistake,” the young lady continued. “The years don’t go by in vain. And the years that have gone by since we stopped seeing each other have taken their toll... You’re no longer the Luis I once knew. You’re more serious, like all those gringos with whom you’ve spent so much time.”

Luis objected. He had not been Yankified. Because he thought that he needed to explain the reason for his sadness, he told his friend about the misfortunes that he had encountered. He told her about the suffering that had suddenly fallen upon his house, about the threat of death that his wife had upon her, about their overwhelming desire—which had suddenly gripped them both—to return to México, about the pain that the idea of not being able to return together was causing him, and about the regret he felt for having been away from the fatherland for so long, wasting his youth in such isolation, which, now he could see, had killed their sense of joy.

Now sure that he was not going to hurt any of his friend’s intimate feelings, he confessed to her that he had wanted to see her because through her he would be able to revisit his youth. And as the formality of the first few moments had been broken, he spoke to her with friendly warmth. Free of any suspicions with respect to Magdalena’s intentions, he drew closer to her, without passion, but with sympathy, with that affection that we feel for those who were with us during the ineffable hours of absolute and profound joy, at the beginning of our lives...

“Tell me, dear traveler, who comes from yonder...” he felt inspired to speak to her in the verse of another poet who had just come to mind.

And Magdalena, having reconciled with him and feeling sympathy for his suffering, began to tell him everything that he wanted to know, things that in the end also came as a disappointment and more bad news.

“Almost everyone from your generation scattered at the same time that you did. Others are dead. Some murdered. If you went back to México right now, you wouldn’t even recognize it. That’s how much it’s changed! Considering everything, and even though I have just as many friends now as I did when you were there, to me, it seems sadder than before. It’s such a shame to be there to witness the complete transformation of an entire society, to have been from another generation and to get along with new people, not caring if they’re young or happy. I would’ve preferred to have left with all of you guys, to live in exile...”

“That’s nonsense!”

“Why?”

“Because to abandon your fatherland like we did is like having your roots completely pulled out of the ground, to totally change the course of your existence. After listening to you... and after seeing you, I think that we are going to pay dearly for the kind of hubris that sent us into exile. It’s as if we have buried ourselves alive, and we would like to, at a given moment, return to the world in order to go and live among people who no longer know or understand us.”

“C’mon, my friend,” Magdalena said, trying to change the conversation in order to lift her friend’s spirits. “We’re exaggerating things because of the disappointment of seeing each other and not being how we thought we would be. There’s no need to for us to believe that the world has gone completely grey just because that’s how it looks to us in a moment of sadness.

When you go back, if you finally do go back, you'll still be able to find many reasons to be happy. You'll have luxuriant days. You'll enjoy the scenery that adorned your happiest moments. You'll have many friends..."

"Friends? Listen to what I am about to tell you. Many of the friends that I had are living just like me, in a strange land, for the same reason that I am. I saw them once and it seemed as if our souls had left all of us and we carry it painfully in the places to which we would like to return. We are no longer there but it seems like we are absent here as well. That's why we don't get together nor do we try to live our old lives. We know that something is missing in all of us. We are like those demigods, in one of Jules Lemaitre's allegories, who in a world of darkness and living like shadows, recovered their memory one day and their human capacity to think and to live and to feel so weak and so sad that they ask to be killed all over again. And speaking of our friends, who stayed back in México? Do you mind if I ask? What have you heard about Carlos Alvarez?"

"I don't know. No one has heard from him."

"And what about Rafael del Castillo?"

"Don't remind me... Poor thing. He died in a train wreck. Out of necessity, he became—who could tell him not to, all heart and soul, romantic and nervous!—the Paymaster of the Forces and he was ambushed by the brutal tragedy that gets us all down there, in our homeland..."

"And what can you tell me about Antonio del Moral?" Luis asked, this time with a certain hint of irony.

“I know why you’re asking. He left ‘our camp.’ He’s now a prominent figure in the Revolutionary government. And those who have seen him say that he doesn’t acknowledge any of his old friends anymore.”

“You see, those who didn’t leave are either dead or they are no longer one of us,” exclaimed the officer with infinite melancholy.

“So, you don’t think you’ll be going back again?” asked the young woman, forgetting, or seeming to have forgotten, the enthusiasm with which her friend had spoken to her about returning.

Luis leapt from his chair as if he had been shocked by a bolt of electricity.

“Not going back?” he shouted, getting carried away, and attracting the attention of the phlegmatic patrons who were eating at the circular table in the center of the restaurant sitting on tall stools. “Not going back! What vexes me most is this irony of Fate that, together with the anguished awakening of my soul and this torturous desire to return, I have been sent this obstacle which keeps us here. If it was not for my wife’s illness, I would already be on my way.”

“Well, if I were you, I’d stay here for good.”

“Is that so? Tell me why. Does this look better to you than México? Would you like to live in eternal isolation, without the warmth that formed your sense of friendship, your customs, your memories—what do I know—and feel like you’re leading an empty, futile, and meaningless life, without any purpose at all?”

“Look at you, what a coincidence... It’s as if you were talking about my life when you paint that picture. That’s how I’ve felt for a very long time. And I thought forgetting about all of that, living in a place like one of these—where, precisely because we are so different, it seems as though one would end up being born in a whole new world and could start a whole new

existence—one's soul would be rejuvenated as well and the thing that has been leaving us little by little, the happiness—that thing which has now completely left you and me both, and that, because it is gone, we have been barely able to recognize each other—would return.”

After all that, the amorous young man of yesteryear and she who would have been a giddy young woman both understood that they were ascribing to the eternal panorama of life, like everyone since the time of creation, dark tints which cannot be seen except through the opaque prism of disillusionment through which they now saw everything. She came from that world whose memory filled the heart of the former soldier with bitterness and hope; Luis lived in the treacherous tumult which had awoken in the heart of the young lady the illusions of one who is ambitious, like the seafaring Spaniard who gave thanks to God for having granted him “something novel” when he spotted the Florida coast, another world and another way of life that could have cured her tedium. And facing the shared disillusion which was created by each one's own desire, they sat with fallen spirits, like two strangers who cross paths in the middle of the road and realize, one from the other, that what they were searching for, the enchanted castle that they were running towards, was but a desolate ruin...

That painful realization left them speechless and uninterested in learning more. They felt that the more they tried to share the details, the more it would add to their disappointment.

In a sudden reaction, they both went silent. Neither one of them wanted to accept the cruel judgment against the dreams which burned inside them. Distrust ended up shutting their mouths, with a personal discretion which works like a defense against the harshness of reality. They guarded their emotions as if they were a treasure and they were standing in front of a crook who ambushes them under the cover of night. Their conversation had served to provide them

with the suggestion that they part and go their own ways, to tell them that their proud and careless youth was now gone forever.

“Would you like to accompany me to my house?” asked Magdalena finally breaking that painful silence.

Luis tried—forcedly, out of courtesy and with a vague sense of compassion, with an infinite desire to relive the past just for one moment—to prolong the visit, but he couldn’t say a word. Not only due to the sense of nobility that inspired him to act appropriately, but also because he felt as though his disenchantment weighed like a dead weight on his soul. That bitter and inevitably sombre moment was underscored with a silence that was more eloquent than any soliloquy.

And when they reached the house where his friend was staying, in a distant neighborhood shrouded in an impenetrable darkness at that time of night, the former lovers said goodbye without excessive emotion or reproaches, frightened by their coldness, unable to see, in the dark, the look on the other’s face, like two shadows who pass each other in the darkness...

Chapter VI

Even though it had been anticipated, the diagnosis that they made at the hospital in Kansas City regarding Ana María's illness was no less devastating for Luis Alfaro. It was, as the doctor in Arley had foreseen, a perfectly pronounced pulmonary phthisis whose rapid progress, in just a matter of weeks, confirmed its malignant nature.

The physician who attended to the ailing woman, with that brutal honesty which is so typical of North American doctors, didn't want to get any of their hopes up. There were a few treatments that in particular cases had produced surprising results, but he did not want to make any guarantees in light of the gravity of the patient's condition. He would not dare, due to her weakened condition, apply one of the most effective treatments. It consisted of insufflating the affected lung in order to enlarge it until it became almost lodged, motionless, within the thoracic cavity. This treatment is often able to cure very advanced cases; on other occasions, it is able to achieve a notable improvement that, combined with a hygienic lifestyle, a good deal of sunshine, fresh air and a tranquil spirit, can make the patient's life longer and less painful.

Ana María, unaware of her real situation, now displayed that tendency of those who are suffering from a terrible illness: believing they are getting better and hoping for a cure with blind faith. Her husband's words of consolation, which gave her a version quite different from the dreadful and real one provided by the doctor, had filled her with joy.

And in reality, it appeared as if the influence of that resplendent sanitarium, full of cleanliness and light, would have been enough to take away the slightest fear of death. That morning, on the third day of their stay in Kansas City, during which there was time for retrospection, was a magnificent May morning. From the hospital's top floor, where the fatally ill woman's room was located, one could see the city with the radiant clarity of a spring day.

Kansas City, like all North American cities, which look as if they were all founded yesterday, because of their constant renovation, and with its buildings and houses regularly spruced up with a fresh coat of paint each year, has the inviting and comforting qualities of things that are new. Its vast neighborhoods— hidden among the groves and sprawling out indolently across smooth hilltops, as if arranged by engineers expert in better displaying the views—give one the feeling of peace and well-being from the homes designed for happy lives.

Reclining in a hospital chair, Ana María now looked with pleasure at the evocative view. She wanted to live, and intense life was precisely what she saw outside...! The fresh morning air carried the aromas of the distant forests, from the lavish woodlands which enveloped the city in a loving embrace. The window through which the air and sun passed, looked out to the south, and the dreamy woman's gaze stretched over that verdant expanse, wanting to discover what remained in the open horizon inundated with light, the "México" of her dreams, to which she was now certain she would return.

At the sight of his wife's persistent illusion, Luis felt, suddenly, the desire not to delay their departure for one moment, so that she could see her country one last time. It was a crime to continue to deceive her up to the point of allowing her to die on foreign soil, when all that remained of her life was consumed by concentrating on the hope of returning.

He made the proposition brusquely, as if linking it to the thoughts that could be seen in the blissful somnolence of the ailing woman, who on various occasions had already manifested her preference for that place which occupied the same location as the longing in her heart.

"What would you say if, as soon as you're better, which will be very soon, we left from right here and went back to México?" asked Luis.

She rejected the idea with visible repugnance.

“No,” she replied, “I don’t want to go back as an invalid. In order to enjoy all the things that are waiting for me there, I want all my health, my strength, my full and complete life back again.”

“That’s precisely what I’m suggesting to you. I said, ‘as soon as you’re better.’”

Luis didn’t want to give rise to the slightest suspicion. It appeared to him as though his wife’s acute sensitivity might be able to deduce the true intention behind his offer.

Ana María, upset at having had to consider the difficulty which forced her to remain in the United States against her will, sighed mournfully and showed signs of suddenly losing the enthusiasm that she had enjoyed. This kind of volubility was typical of her condition and Luis was growing accustomed to it.

“No, I don’t want for us to take the trip yet,” she continued to speak with the pouting face of a disconsolate child. “I’ll tell you when it should be, when I feel like I have my strength back again. It shouldn’t be long. Besides, how could we leave now that Luisito is getting out of school and is coming to stay with us for vacation?”

“That’s true. I hadn’t thought of that,” admitted Luis.

“The poor boy doesn’t have anyone but us in this whole wide world...! I’m so anxious to see him... It’s been so long since he’s written to us. I think that these long absences undermine all my labors as a mother and they make him indifferent to them. It already shows: because he’s only with us four months out of the year and the rest of the year he’s away at school, and because he wasn’t with us at the time when a child’s heart and mind awakens, to him, we’re not what all parents should be for their children.”

“Don’t say that. The boy loves us.”

“Yes, he loves us; but, in his own way, with his slightly cold and pragmatic temperament. Not as I had imagined: I had hoped that our own child, yours and mine, the one we never had, would have loved us... like I love him, the one who I gave all the affection that I had saved up for the other one...”

In fact, the Alfaro's adoptive son was another victim of those two lost and aimless souls who hoped to improvise a home, without realizing that it is the only thing that one should establish definitively, forever holding fast and indentifying with that which should be the future base and connection, the foundation our very existence. When adopting a child of a different blood and a different temperament, which could not be modified by the environment, because by continuing to live in his own country, the people of his own race made him accept and prefer everything that was contrary and adverse to the home that had given him shelter: language, customs, tendencies, historic events and even a prejudice against the very same people who had assumed the role of his parents. When adopting that boy, they had not realized that they had deposited their affection in a living being from that country where they thought they would stay only a short while before returning, from a land they didn't love, to which they could not dedicate their entire lives.

And the land, that, perhaps for being the material from which we are made of, also has a soul, and is sweet and fierce, loving and disdainful; the land, which is the cradle that rocks us and the mother that shelters us when sleeping our last sleep, that land suddenly rejected them, withholding from them the love of a son who was theirs and could not be someone who did not love her.

When he was four years old, Luis, the younger, was removed from a Catholic orphanage (which required, in accordance with the policies of the establishment, a substantial donation in

addition to the strict legal requirements for an adoption). He had blond hair and was as handsome as one of those angels that adorn the vault of a cathedral. Ana María enjoyed a very special kind of motherhood, teaching him how to speak Spanish which the little boy learned very quickly, with the facility that children of his age have for acquiring languages, especially if they have to live with people who cannot communicate except in the new tongue. After just two years—and without any other company than that of his newly acquired parents, whom he soon learned to love, and that of Gabriela, the servant, who adored her “little gringo” and held for him that sort of devotion that all Indians have for a white man with blue eyes, and that of the farm workers’ children— Luis had become a little Mexican in terms of his way of speaking, his gestures, his games and even his religious devotions. He never forgot his English, because a few American children who lived nearby would regularly come to play with him, the children of Pantusa, the Italian, among them.

When he found himself among the children of the farm workers, they approached him with guarded timidity but tempted by the irresistible spirit of sociability which all children possess. At the time, Luisillo accepted them grudgingly, like one who has to make concessions, but without descending to the sincere camaraderie of other occasions, which he only shared with those of his class standing. Now contained within that six year-old cherub were the atavistic antagonisms of two races which were instinctively suspicious of and repulsed by one another...!

As soon as the boy reached eight years of age, his parents considered sending him to a school in the northern region of the country. Up until that moment, his only teachers had been Luis and Ana María, who first taught him the alphabet; then, precisely when a child’s soul starts to acquire ideas and his mind begins to reason, the little blond Anglo-Saxon boy returned to live

exclusively among individuals of his own race, who spoke his own language, who practiced the customs that had been imparted to him from the cradle.

And little by little, without him even feeling it, the love that captured his heart for a brief moment while living at Bellavista began to wane.

On one particular occasion, during one of the times when he spent his vacation on the farm with his parents, Luisito asked them a question, while they were eating, and in a Spanish in which English supplied the forgotten words for a language that was slipping from his memory with the same facility with which he had learned it, “A ver, tell me the truth, ustedes, you’re not Mexicanos, are you?”

Ana María laughed out loud, but not Luis, who, in that question recognized the one that the North Americans—misinformed with regard to all things about México, and who have not seen any other example of our people than the ones in offensive movies and in stories where the Mexicans appear in the “attire” (in their own words) of the ancient inhabitants of the Aztec empire—had asked him, many times.

He answered the boy’s question with one of his own, allowing the pain caused by that innocent offense, inherited or learned from hateful lips, to be seen on his face.

“Why would you ask such a question? Don’t you remember all the times that we told you that we were Mexican, that México is our homeland and that our country is the most beautiful in the world and that this is why we are so proud of our nationality?”

And for the hundredth time, he began to teach the most interesting and self-interested of the lessons which comprised the course on Mexican culture which the Alfaros attempted to impart to the soul of their adoptive son.

“México,” Luis said once again, with an enthusiasm which was not feigned, and which was like responding to a need to remind himself, like when the one giving the lesson is gratified by giving it. “México is a beautiful country where the air is warm, the sky always blue, the mountains magnificent and awe-inspiring, the fields covered with flowers and life is easy, pleasant and tranquil. The cities aren’t as luxurious as those here in the United States, but they have a charm that you could search for in vain in those human anthills, with names like New York or Chicago, and which the Mexicans build in order to form the history, the legend, the gentleness of the climate and the joyous and passionate character of the people. They also have palaces over there, beautiful women—just like your mother—theatres, promenades, children, just as handsome and well-dressed as you... There are also poor people as well, very, very poor people, to be sure, who live in dark huts. And there are large sad and deserted regions, that one day will have to be converted again into grand, populated and prosperous centers, because the land is rich and fertile... Why, then, would you ask if we were Mexicans? Why would you think that a man like me and a woman like your mother could not be Mexicans?”

The little boy sat there mute, confused, his eyes open wide, looking back and forth from Luis to Ana María, demonstrating the kind of distrust one has when he cannot hide his feelings, and cannot believe what they were affirming.

He could not reconcile that description with the one that he had inferred from the cruel jokes told by a number of his classmates, who could not accept that he lived in a house with a bunch of Mexicans and that they would call themselves his parents. When he vehemently assured them that the proprietors of Bellavista, the ones who had adopted him, were a wealthy couple, an elegant gentleman and a beautiful lady, who had travelled throughout Europe and were highly respected and well regarded in the region where they were from, the pranksters,

giving a turn to the vicious cycle, made an exception, “Well, then these people must not be Mexicans...”

That was the origin of the question that the boy had dared to ask; that was the origin of his confusion, now compounded by the preference that his father showed for that strange and mysterious land, which he made appear superior to or more beautiful than the United States, which truly was “the greatest country in the world,” as they assured him, repeating it ad nauseam, in the school where he was being educated.

Luis was ten years old when he asked that question; he was now twelve, and because he was an intelligent and precocious child, he reasoned like a boy beyond his years. He was now in full possession of the complex problem of his life; and, even though he continued to love his guardians and he knew that he owed them his respect and gratitude, he was not able to superimpose those feelings onto the pride he had for his own race, stirred at all times by the ultra-nationalistic education that he had received and which was always putting into his head ideas contrary to those of his adoptive parents.

From then on his letters became less frequent and less effusive than during his first years away at school. It took him a great deal of effort to write in Spanish and he knew that his words betrayed how he truly felt.

Ana María and Luis—she less than he—were not able to understand the intensity of the battle that the young boy endured. In this way, they had the blindness of real parents who mistake their children’s hearts for their own, and not by the force of disappointment, nor through an examination of the factual evidence, will they ever admit that those who owe their lives to them do not care about them with the same love that they received. They thought that they were all idiosyncrasies of the personality of the boy, whom, because they did not know him since

birth, they still didn't understand. When they complained, as Ana María had been complaining right now, it was in the hope of finding some consolation, discovering acceptable explanations and granting pleas for forgiveness which would be immediately conceded.

The little boy did not know about his mother's illness; therefore, there was no reason to blame him for his lack of concern. They did not want to tell him anything so as not to worry him. Moreover, perhaps he had written to Bellavista during the last few days and the letter was on its way, forwarded from the ranch.

They had remained silent for a long time, absorbed in their thoughts. Ana María was sad once again, after a stretch of being in the good mood that the morning had brought to her. Luis felt physically overwhelmed by everything that had occurred, by the bitter realities that he had experienced over the course of those days full of darkness. His ruminations and those events traveled along the same path: that of a fatalism which drove him to an abyss of melancholy. After meeting with Magdalena, he distrusted anything that had once given him the strength to endure all the pain, and the doctor's prognosis crushed his rosier illusions as with a rock.

The doctor entered the room to ascertain from the nurse detailed information regarding the changes in temperature she had recorded and was holding in her hands. He was young and blond, with the inexpressive face of a serious and methodical man. He greeted them with a simple "good morning" and began to read the information carefully. Even though Luis already knew what he thought, he could not stop staring at him attentively.

Ana María, under the impression that she was not seriously ill, did not seem very concerned by those visits any more. Rather, she demonstrated the dissatisfaction of certain patients who blame their doctor for their slow recovery and grow weary of his presence.

The young professional's face revealed nothing. It had the same coldness as the instruments which he used to cure his patients. Through Luis, he asked if they had already administered the injection to the patient and how she was feeling. They told him that she had not experienced any setbacks nor any visible improvements, with which he appeared satisfied and unceremoniously exited the room.

Day after day went by with the same monotony. Luis did not leave his wife's side, in part because he did not want to lose a single moment of the life that she had left, and because he also felt an aversion to that city which did not know how to provide him with any measure of consolation.

Ana María complained a number of times about his assiduousness and told him to go out and enjoy himself, to take a stroll around the city.

"You're giving me the impression that I'm dying," she told him.

Luis lovingly assured her that she was the only thing in the world that mattered to him and that it made him happy to be with her.

Letters from the ranch arrived from Compeán, the administrator, who provided an account of all the work that was being done. He declared that the harvest promised even greater production than all of their estimates.

After a number of weeks, Luis had a long discussion with the director of the hospital and with the head physician in order to ascertain their thoughts after observing the course the disease had taken. The doctor's opinion had not changed: to the contrary, considering the resistance of the disease to the powerful and modern treatments applied, he concluded that it was useless for Ana María to remain in the hospital any longer.

They could continue to attend to her at the hacienda and the fresh air of the countryside would prove to be better for her condition.

He arranged, then, for their return to Bellavista, which Ana María gladly accepted, perceiving it as real evidence of her improvement. She continued to dream of seeing her son and of being where, in spite of everything, she had lived happily.

And as it happened whenever she was happy, she gained new strength for that journey which, unbeknownst to her, would be her last.

Chapter VII

The land surrounding Bellavista—once covered with snow, and still withered and sorrowful even in the spring, lashed by the last assaults of winter—had been completely transformed and was now a glory of green and luxuriant verdure. The air that was frozen only two months before, now gives a warm embrace which takes one's breath away. Nature demonstrates the vibrant splendor of the land which since the dawn of time has done little more than adorn itself with wild vegetation and for only brief periods was forced to yield the crops that the work of human hands demands of her.

From Bellvista, perched on top of a small peak formed by the undulating curves of the land, one can perfectly see the vast prairie, which becomes lost in the horizon where it loses its contours.

From there, one can see the clearing of the road, paved in asphalt for long stretches, which leads to the town of Arley, where other sections are merely leveled, those whose sole purpose is to connect the most insignificant towns and small congregations of fieldworkers, like Bellavista; but, where everything pulsates with life for as far as the eye can see, being constantly crossed by indefatigable automobiles, the ranchers' beasts of burden from a country where the machine has replaced the use of animals, and is accelerating the world's activities, increasing their speed and the workers' stamina.

On that great plain, they appeared more or less distant from one another, but always demonstrating an alert vigilance and testifying to the bustling restlessness of the cities, small towns and roads. The open space available for future generations was immense; the small villages had yet to alter the desert-like appearance of the endless expanse in which were lost the small, comfortable, wooden "cottages," with grey roofs and green walls, which appeared to have

been placed there merely to claim a property and secure a domain, a possession that in the future might later be disputed by the impetuous flow of immigrants who continued to knock on the doors of North America in spite of the recent restrictions to entry.

Little black cars crawled along the roads carrying products to nearby markets and supplying the towns spread out strategically upon the endless prairie. The vehicles helped everyone: transporting even large animals, fruitful cattle, noisy pigs, all manner of beast which, in previous eras, moved along trails at a sluggish pace. They fulfilled an important commercial function, quickly transferring the produce from the fields to the markets. Every Sunday, the Fords deviated from their rural activities to drive the family to town, to church, to religious observances and practices. Those small engines flew with all the might of their gasoline-powered horses, with their cargo dressed in their Sunday's best, inundating the highways. The area took on a special animation at that time. Blond Germans, with long flowing locks of hemp-colored hair, dark-skinned Italians, big-nosed Jews, North Americans of every extraction—momentarily reunited by necessity in order to make that weekly journey—represented all of the peoples of the world in a dominical procession into town. Those who knew each other shouted greetings back and forth as they regarded those who they didn't know with supreme indifference. Those who did not go out on Sunday, because they had to stay back to take care of their homes, watched the caravan, sitting on their porches, reading from time to time from the Bible or from voluminous weekly newspaper editions.

Here, as with all American highways, one could not travel more than a mile without seeing some sign of life: a hereditary estate, with aspirations to becoming a small country mansion; a faraway farm house, a little off in the distance, with its own road, but still connected to the "high road" (the "Camino Real"); a gas station, attending to the needs of the travelers; or, a

small country store with food and drink; and, all along the long stretches, where all of this was missing, there were billboards which popped up at every turn as if wanting to surprise their way into the minds of each traveler who saw them with those brightly colored pictures and their inventive and insinuating slogans which proclaimed the quality of the thousands of products manufactured in this country.

There were many Mexican homes along those highways. They looked more modest than those owned by the people from this country. They also appeared to be more isolated. They bore typical details which, from miles away, spoke to two things: the origin and the relative poverty of their occupants.

Images of the Virgin of Guadalupe; Mexican flags bearing the three colors that warm the hearts of those born south of the border; a guitar hung from the walls; bowls from Olinalá; red and grey pitchers from Guadalajara; all of this, arranged in the most visible of places, attested to the fact that an immigrant from the neighboring country lived there. The unmistakable seal of the Mexican people confirmed this as well: the men, with black hair and dark skin; the women, serene, with melancholic eyes, nostalgic for God-knows-what, for something that they were unable to find despite always being wide open, as if searching for a thousand different things which always assumed various forms and different desires, but which in reality were all one and the same: the fatherland, that florid and beautiful place, or even dry and desolate land, but which was their own; the farm which was grey and half-dead, but full of memories; the poverty enjoyed among fleeting moments of happiness, now cherished more than ever before; and perhaps even deprivation and death, things they may have even longed for whenever the acrimoniousness of the owners of this country reminded them that they were begrudgingly admitted foreigners.

That entire panorama could be seen perfectly from Bellavista. Luis Alfaro's farm was located atop one of the more or less elevated locations in the region. The home of the settlers—all of whom were Mexicans—were brightly decorated, distinct from the rest, from the houses of their fellow compatriots who worked without the motivation of finding themselves in a pleasant community and under the vigilant and paternal care of a Mexican man who had resolved to support his own people while working for his own benefit.

Oh, how different Bellavista appeared in the month of July than it did during the wintertime! Now so sunny and full of life!

The “casa grande,” which is what the Mexican settlers called the Alfaros' house, was located near the edge of the road, though still protected from curious stares and from the vexing proximity of the passersby by a large garden, in which Ana María's nurturing hands had copiously planted roses, carnations, vines which rose all the way to the rooftop forming masses of flowering foliage, providing shade, protecting, embracing the house. In the meadows, plants of Mexican origin, calling attention to their exoticism, dazzled the eyes and gave color to the landscape and perfumed the surroundings.

The house was comfortable and spacious, as if built for people who are accustomed to living well. In front of the house, and forming a projecting pavilion, was the living room where the proprietors welcomed their friends and spent their leisure time. Through a large door one would pass to the dining room, luxuriously furnished and supplied with everything necessary to provide the “comforts” which are indispensable in places where both summers and winters are equally harsh: fireplaces where the logs that provide their warmth burn happily during the winter time, and fans that cool the air when it sets the atmosphere to boil, burning like a fiery oven, in the spring and summertime. Immediately behind it is the kitchen, resplendent with enamel,

sparkling white with oil-based paint, as imposing as a laboratory on account of the electric stoves, the refrigeration machines, and all the complex implements which simplified the operation of cooking and forced Gabriela to forsake her lagging braziers, her pregnant pitchers, her smoky and dirty combustibles, for those which, in spite of it all, she sighed, because she could not continue to perform those delicacies nor keep those silent, crafty chores from the machines that cooled liquids or brought them to a boil “as if they had the devil in ‘em,” and which altered the classical appearance of the kitchen: the black walls from soot from an open fire where the living flames rose up, from morning to night, to cook the beans and other foods taken from the earth...

A long hallway—in which invisible closets saved space and made the house more accommodating—divided the house into two sections. On the other side, opposite the previously mentioned rooms, there were three lavishly furnished bedrooms in a row, filled with all manner of dainty conveniences. Two of the rooms were for the owners of the house, and the other, carefully arranged and decorated with children’s drawings and corresponding down to its slightest detail to the spoiled person to whom it was designated: it was little Luis’ room. In back of the house, a spacious porch protected with fine wire screens and removable glass windows served as a room to sleep in on very hot days and as a “pendant” to the side porch. Even on the most grueling days, a fresh breeze blew; and, as a result, it was the preferred place to gather or to rest during the summertime.

In the back, the servants’ quarters, the garages that housed the delivery trucks and the family automobile could all be found, leaving a large space which served as a patio. There were also the large storehouses that we have already seen, now emptied of the yield from the harvest,

and, as we already know, during this season alternatively served as the school house, the chapel, the social hall, in addition to being the hacienda store.

The settlers' homes were all lined up on either side of the stately mansion, as if to protect it. They were all composed of two small parts: the kitchen and a room for their farm implements and all other necessary hygienic functions. They extended as far back as the pens and stables. And closing off that protective wall, the fence which enclosed the entire community of Mexicans, there was a play ground, complete with modern gymnasium equipment, trampolines and slide through whose smooth channels the little ones would slide, causing them to scream with joy.

Cultivated fields and wild groves surrounded the happy estate. They were presently on the verge of yielding the spring wheat harvest, which is what they call the one in the first months of the year, and the fields were a choppy sea of amber waves of grain.

It cost Luis no small amount of work to make those lands, which were quasi-abandoned when he took possession of them, productive. He had cleared for planting the greater part of the lands which now made up the farm, and the costly irrigation work connecting to a canal which passed by a mile and a half away were the result of his efforts.

The first few years, because of his inexperience and lack of hard working people, the results had been quite mediocre, but it had been three years that it was all "sowing and singing," that is, sowing and reaping. Each harvest represented many thousands of dollars. Fortune began to smile once more on the hacienda owner who had never attended to his hacienda in México but who now, obligated by the circumstances, had become a very practical man, and to whom success had returned in wellbeing all the steadfastness, intelligence and enthusiasm that he had placed in his successful agricultural enterprise.

At present, there was an unusual amount of activity on the farm due to the masters' imminent return. Everyone was occupied with chores that had been suspended as a result of the lack of direction.

Luis Alfaro was at the center of the commotion. He wanted to confound, push back, his suffering. He had ordered them to complete all of the preparations for the harvest well in advance.

Under Vallejo's direction, the workers oiled the machines; they prepared the trucks for their deliveries; they cleaned out the storerooms which would receive the golden grain, and they readied the presses which would make bales out of the hay. And as they came and went in a cheerful buzz, they gleefully realized what awaited them when joy reigned once again in the masters' house.

Luis had let all his workers know that his wife would be returning "feeling much better." He did not want to tell anyone the truth. He was hoping that the suggestion of the good people who so loved Ana María might serve to create an atmosphere of optimism, which was so necessary to keep her spirits up.

Alfaro had shared another delightful bit of news: this year, they would have the best celebration ever to commemorate the anniversary of México's independence, a party which was never missed at Bellavista and which was like a dream for the workers.

It was Ana María's burning passion, an idea that had entered her mind with the obsession of a sick child's whimsy. Now certain that she would return to México, the fiesta would be like a grand farewell party from that parcel of friendly land which had so graciously hosted them, as well as from their fellow countrymen who helped them with their work and provided them with their cherished companionship.

They still had not resolved the serious problem of selling all their goods, of separating themselves from all those good people who, after discovering their masters' plans, on second thought, might not be as enthusiastic about the symbolic celebration. Of course, with his wife's deteriorating health, Luis did not consider that return, over the realization of which had fallen the shadow of death; but, at times, when removed from the reality of the situation, and when trusting in a miracle, and praying for it, with a desperation close to insanity, as if confounded by his sorrow, he felt the same longing for a return to México, regardless of whatever that near and dark future might hold, and shared Ana María's desire, embracing that farewell party which she wanted so badly.

The doctors had recommended that he not oppose her wishes, and give her whatever she wanted, and they had no choice but to face that extraordinary situation, raising that joyous fanfare in the midst of the sadness which cut his soul into pieces.

Two sturdy, young men wearing big, black hats and red bandannas around their necks—who removed from the garage a palisade which still had the traces of faded paper decorations and other implements for different usages, but with the same materials they would construct an altar which would form a kiosk for the musicians during the celebration—spoke so enthusiastically about the proposed independence day celebration. Those thingamajigs—which “the master” Don Luis wanted to see so that he could make a note of what they had and what they were missing—coming out into the open after having been stored away for so long, were the first happy notes of the season. The young men talked about the “sixteenth,” a number which required no more explanation to understand that this was the day of the sweet and sentimental explosion of an essentially loving people, who adore their country, willing to make any manner of sacrifice, disposed to being completely carried away when anyone speaks its name. Those

young men who had been born on foreign soil did not feel they had lost their right to love México even though they understood that they had an obligation to their new country. Alfaro had promised them a grand celebration and they looked forward to it with great anticipation.

A nonagenarian gentleman approached the young men, dragging his feet, clearing his throat, and making a visor with his hand in order to protect his bloodshot, blinking, little eyes from the sun's rays. It was Don Máximo, the head of a large family of field workers. He had left México when Don Benito Juárez was president and had not returned since, but he retained a memory so vivid of the people and things from his era that listening to him speak was like going back in time.

He reached the young men asking, with the authoritarian and assertive airs of an elderly person, "Who are you guys?"

The good man could scarcely make out objects and people from a short distance; and, because his memory was failing him, he needed to identify those he found in his company, especially young people.

"It's us, Don Masimo, Pancho and me, Enrique, the son of Don Victoriano, the guy who lives in number 22."

"So, what's going on?" he continued to interrogate them, indiscreetly, not really caring much about knowing with whom he was speaking.

"Nothing. I was telling this guy what all the big fuss on the ranch was about, that we're going to have the best Independence Day party ever."

The old man, who had taken a seat on a bench near the garage, joyously seeking out the sun, in spite of the fact it was burning hot at that time, pressed his lips into a smile which appeared to be an ironic grin and revealed his toothless gums.

“Best ever, eh?” he repeated with his shrill voice, and went back to laughing silently, lowering his head and moving to the rhythm of his laughter, whistling from time to time to take a breath.

“Sure, why would you doubt it, Don Masimo?” insisted Enrique, putting what he was carrying in his hand to one side in order to support his affirmation. “Don’t you think that good ol’ Don Luis can do it?”

“Well, now,” retorted the old man. “If good ol’ Don Luis is involved, that’s a completely different story and you can just forget what I said. Now that’s a real man, not like all those other silver tongued devils who come out to these parts from time to time trying to make us believe that they’re really big shots back in their own country just because they’re wearing a hat and trousers when they get here...”

“You got that right,” agreed Enrique, “He can do it. Now that the missus is feeling better, we’re gonna get our reward. Everybody’s walking around with their feet off the ground. We’re going to need money to buy flags, books of speeches, decorations for our houses, flowers for the altars for our heroes. You see? I’m telling you,” he added winking at his friend mischievously, “This celebration will be better than the ones they have down in México.”

Don Máximo got to his feet as quickly as his stiff legs would let him. He struck the ground with his cane and shouted with a real sense of rage, “But, you listen here, you nitwit, do you realize what you’re saying? You, who couldn’t even find México on a map!”

The young men knew that this was the old man’s weak spot and intentionally had moved the conversation to talking to him about something that was better here than over there. In part just to be mean and in part to listen to that old man talk about his homeland which he recalled with the melancholy of one who had been expelled from paradise, of a defeated man who could

no longer do anything to resist the fate which had tied him down to a foreign land and knew that, there, he would have to die. The young people in the area never missed an opportunity to pester him so that he would repeat the same story they had heard a thousand times, about his military campaigns, his adventures, his travels around half of México, in the columns of the army of the Liberal Party, under the command of General Escobedo.

He had been in the Battle of Santa Gertrudis and the siege of Queretaro. They had inducted him into military service at a very young age, on one of the occasions when the Republican army passed by “his spot,” a ranch in Tamaulipas, near the city of Victoria. He had been under the command of many leaders, but he only remembered Escobedo, as if all the other service he had done under officers of a lesser caliber were of no importance. He had met Benito Juárez and Maximilian I, and even though he was a true Juarista, he spoke of the Emperor with a great deal of respect. He saw him stand before the firing squad, at the Cerro de las Campanas, serene and resolute, as if he were going to inspect his troops in formation at the base of the hill in order to witness the execution.

“He was a brave one that lil’ ‘white guy,’” he was accustomed to saying in honor of the hapless Hapsburg who had paid with his life for the mistaken belief that he had been called to bring happiness to the country.

He talked about the military campaigns in which he participated with a wonder and enthusiasm which was easily transmitted to his listeners. He peppered his stories with interesting anecdotes. Once, in a particular town on the border, as the French were retreating, fleeing toward the middle of the country, pursued by the Liberal Army, and the empire on the verge of total collapse, they had ordered him to climb up to the roof of a house with some other soldiers in order to defend the plaza, threatened once again by the imperial forces which had just withdrawn

from it; but, now, having encountered a respectable band of enemy forces which were attempting to cut off their pass, they went back searching for a way out. The “traitors” (which is what Don Máximo called the French) were approaching, performing recognizance. And the sergeant in command ordered: “Make ready!” an operation which, during his time, consisted of taking a cartridge of gunpowder between one’s teeth and tearing open the paper cover to pour the powder into the mouth of the rifle; “Prime and load!” with whatever one had at hand to make the charge, then load the ball, then fill the barrel once more with any kind of paper or whatever was available, prime the pan with powder, inspect the flintlock that had to make the spark when the trigger was pulled, and wait for the order to “Fire!” The enemy retreated without advancing further and they laid their rifles down to rest without having had to discharge their deadly rounds. Just a few moments later the foreign troops were spotted assuming a hostile posture once more. The sergeant again gave the order to “make ready” and Don Máximo, without realizing what he was doing, because he was so drunk, reloaded his rifle. The enemy twice repeated the back and forth movement of advancing and retreating; and, upon the sergeant’s third order the barrel of the “chinaco’s” rifle was stuffed all the way up to its muzzle.

The French finally went on the attack. So the sergeant gave the order to fire and the Republican soldier’s firearm was blown to pieces, taking part of its owner’s face along with it. The old man was still fond of showing off those “glorious” battle scars, which he never felt embarrassed about, because back in his early days, he drank as much as he fought. The soldiers went into battle after drinking their ration of aguardiente and gunpowder. At times they didn’t even know who they were fighting against nor how their military action ended up; but, if they were ordered to scale a wall, they would go up using their bare hands and tear their nails to pieces and they wouldn’t even ask for—nor did they receive—a place to stay.

“That’s the way we were back then,” asserted that former soldier of Escobedo, who believed that no army in the world could go toe-to-toe with the Mexicans. “And if we can ‘lick’ them French, who’re the best soldiers in the world, who’s gonna mess with us? Just let ‘em come to México, them gringos, who think they’re such big shots and they’ll see what’ll happen to ‘em...”

In this way, Don Máximo was like the majority of his fellow countrymen, whose patriotism, so easily aroused with just a few war stories or a speech full of tricolored rhetoric, enveloped his countrymen with legendary prestige, unblemished virtue, unwavering valor, absolute greatness, with the faith of blindly patriotic people who do not question personalities... and submit to the first person who beckons to them with a clarion call... in order to rise to the top with their assistance.

This old man had lived during times when acts of pure heroism were performed in México; he was happy, like all old people, talking about his past. He would always begin by recounting his adventures during the war and he would always end up telling his entire life’s story. A sad, colorless life, if one were to take away the colorful tales of his exploits as a soldier; a life of suffering endured with a quasi-stoic resignation, in that the one who lives it, doesn’t realize it, believing that is the way life is and it could be no different. The lives of an entire people who come carrying the burden of centuries of violence, injustice, poverty, inequality, all cast upon them by their own people as much as by the foreigners.

He had been born in the arid lands of Tamaulipas, which are very much like all northern parts of the country, where only small stretches, in relatively small oases, are fertile and readily provide sustenance in that immense, barren expanse.

His ranch, during the times of his remote childhood was as desolate and sad as it is now, as it has always been, as the ranches in México have been for all eternity: a few houses with “thatched” palm roofs, with walls of stone stacked without rhyme or reason and without hint of mortar or even the mud which the birds use to build their nests. The wind, the cold, the rain, all the terrible elements that assault the wretched lives born under such conditions pass through the cracks in the hut, but, in this way, invigorate the lives of those who live in spite of these conditions, those who solely as a result of this “trial by fire,”—as those robust campesinos pridefully call such a harsh test for the strong men for who do not know what it means to be tired, hungry, thirsty, or even suffer the cruelty of the farm owners and the riff-raff and poor people of their time—they could arrive, just like him, like Don Máximo, at ninety years old, after having endured for the greater part of his life working like beasts of burden.

He never attended any school nor did he learn his letters in any classroom. When he was eight years old, they gave him the job as a “poke” on one of the goat farms on the Hacienda de Santa Engracia, a grueling job which consisted of bringing up the rear of the thousands of heads of rowdy beasts, which are very given to scattering themselves about, but which he had to keep together by way of a warning shot at the limits of his range, where he puts his eye he puts his “bullet”. They paid him three pesos a month and a ration of food, which his parents received, and from which he only got to see a plain corn tortilla for his daily ration, the clothes on his body, the huaraches which somewhat protected his feet from the harsh wilderness of the mountainside, the blanket which served him as both coat and pillow, as protection from the rain, as a tent for camping or as a shade to defend himself from the sun during the long siestas, at the time when the sun fell plumb down on the mountain and the livestock also went in search of

relief in the scarce shade provided by the meager shrubs growing in the crags, where the animals, at great pains scavenged for the grass that keeps them alive.

He grew up on the mountain and, as far as he could remember, when recounting the vicissitudes of his life, there were no better years than those when he lived in intimate contact with nature, far away from civilization, with no more company than his parents and a shepherd and shepherdess on the hacienda, and with no other aspiration than not losing a goat and being able to go down, two or three times a year, to the village, where the stores that sold food and clothing, the music in the plaza, and the bells that called everyone to mass, all seemed like something from another planet to him.

He got married on the mountain to a young girl who was a shepherd's daughter, and when he got older, he left his rustic life behind and took up residence at the hacienda. The war took him from his shack and exposed him to new forms of suffering. It robbed him of his sincerity and the sweetness of his character, without making him feel tougher. From the master of the hacienda he moved to the quartermaster. An eternal servitude from which he had never escaped and without which he felt uneasy and lost...

"There around 72, now an old man with grown children," said Don Máximo, "I got this crazy idea to go to the United States. We were completely starving. We went ten years without a good harvest and people were dying from pure hunger. There were some people who were living on just leaves and cactus, until the hole in their bellies just wiped 'em out. Seeing all this and knowing that they paid good to work in the cotton fields, which were being harvested at that time, I went on foot from my home all the way to the border, with my children, my wife and my things. The trip took fourteen days and we nearly didn't make it, because the whole way no one would even give us a jug of water. But after, everything was different. We were soon living in

a little town in Zapata County, outside of Laredo, and there we patched ourselves up, that is, we began to get our own, and we learned what it felt like to eat regularly and dress normally. Little by little, we went further and further, sometimes suffering mistreatment, other times finding good farmers, but always living well, because, though it may be bad for us to say it, we have always been trustworthy and hard workers, and wherever we've gone, they have appreciate us for that reason.”

“Until we finally came to find ourselves with Don Luis. But, of course, I wasn't working any more by then. I was being taken care of by my children and grandchildren, them boys, your friends, who don't know where México is either and think that this can even compare to that over there.”

The old man continued to love his country with an irrational passion. He had been expelled from his country due to starvation, and even he admitted that, with the change, he was able to gain greater security, wellbeing and a higher standard of living for his family. His grandchildren could now understand the gringos' “gibberish,” as he would say, trying to communicate that they now spoke English, using his very own expression. His granddaughters dressed like señoritas and they grabbed the attention of the proud inhabitants of their new country, because they were lovely, possessing that striking beauty of women who have the blood of two strong races, Spanish and Indian, coursing their veins. However, in spite of everything, he continued to believe that only “down there” did they have people who were worthy of appreciation, models of valor and intelligence, attractive panoramas, melodious music and “something,” in the end, that he couldn't explain, but that was a part of the Mexican himself, away from which he will languish and live the sorrowful life of exile.

He still had fond memories of all of his masters, as he referred to all who had employed him, and every era of his life was connected to some form of servitude. He also pined for those he had left behind in México. He would always say, “Oh, master Don Joaquín...he was a good man. Master Don Juan had his little temper, but you could get anything you wanted out of him. In Corpus Christi, where we worked for seven years, I was the only one that the ‘mister’ liked. And now we’re here with master Don Luis...”

Chapter VIII

The master Don Luis and his wife walked up, interrupting the discussion between the veteran of the wars for independence and the young men who enjoyed listening to him speak.

With her husband right behind her, the ailing woman had gone outside for the first time—after such a long time of absence and confinement—to view her home, her garden, her most cherished little nooks, as well as the familiar faces of the good people who looked at her with such love and respect.

The sight of all of these things, and being in the company of all of those sincere and kindhearted souls lifted her spirits once again. Gabriela, from the kitchen window, watched her mistress' vacillating gait with a bemused grin. She believed, like everyone else, that the worst had passed and her road to a certain recovery would now begin.

Even Alfaro himself began to think, for brief moments, that the miracle he sometimes dreamt about would actually take place. It gave him the spirit to trust in the rectitude of Ana María, who, for her part, animated and almost giddy, could only think about her recovery, Little Luis's return, and everyone's trip back to their homeland.

Her project and the preparations for the fiesta provided another element of distraction and source of joy. No one in the world could dissuade her from her noble enterprise. Nothing whatsoever—she argued with anyone who attempted to object to any of her ideas—would deprive her settlers of that celebration, of the festival marked on the calendar of her illusions, her melancholic nostalgia, with the brilliant colors of fantasy. Because of her, because of the fiesta, Ana María said, they felt more Mexican, that is, people with a fatherland—more symbolic than real—to call their own, because, from up close, it appeared to be heartless, but, from afar, it smiled at them with the divine seduction of nostalgia.

Bolstered by those illusions, she went back and forth, trying to organize the tiniest details in order to welcome home her son and prepare the fiesta. Luis followed her everywhere, with the persistence of a shadow, fearful that she wouldn't have the strength or that the treacherous lump would strike her down at any moment.

His loving supervision annoyed the young señora. The disease had filled her with suspicion and distrust. In midst of her optimism, she perceived something amiss in her husband's attitude. Why was he watching her so carefully all the time? Wasn't she on the verge of a complete recovery of her health? Why was it that she seemed to find, in the depths of Luis's expression, a secret sense of anguish, similar to the one he had when she was at death's doorstep.

Alfaro indulged her every whim and went to great lengths, at her request, to maintain the appearance of an exaggerated tenderness due to her illness.

"Leave me alone. Just leave me alone. I can get around all by myself now," protested the young woman, drawing enough strength not to let her languor keep her from walking around with a vigor which she did not truly possess. Pale and thin, she was only a shadow of what she had once been. The women in the community, with the indiscretion typical of their sex, alarmed her with their own fears. Precisely to liberate her from all of that clamoring, Luis followed her everywhere, with his overburdened heart, as if in a funeral procession.

To draw the contrast more clearly, everything was green and full of life in contrast to his heartache. The warm air from the first days of summer brought emanations from the distant fields in full bloom. With the kiss of the burning sun, the sap of the virgin soil rose to the surface causing fecund nature to bloom everywhere. Just as, in wintertime, the plain, white with snow, gave the impression of death, so now everything proclaimed a glorious resurrection.

Ana María felt the effects of the change in her spirit; however, her fatigued body could not answer the resounding call of life. Nevertheless, all of those activities, through which she instinctively clung onto the outside world, permitted her to consort with the radiant mystery of universal rejuvenation.

And that's how she went from place to place, visiting everything that she wasn't able to see during her absence. She mingled with the groups of workers and their wives who, in their affectionate gruffness, could not hide their curiosity, somewhat saddened by the spectacle of that poor woman who in such a short a time could lose the richness of the glorious fullness of her life.

Don Máximo perceived, with his own big, blind eyes, the presence of the ailing woman, whom he venerated because no one had ever spoken as kindly to him as the "little missus" of Bellavista, as he called her.

"Good morning, little missus," he said removing his hat and straining to better see the object of his devotion. "It's so beautiful around here now, isn't it?"

"Here I am, Don Máximo," she replied with a sweet smile. "I'm here feeling all better now and ready to talk to you, sir, about all your battles and adventures... When shall we get started?"

"Whenever you'd like, my lady. I was right in the middle of explaining to these young men the very story of my heyday and all the things about our beloved México that these poor 'agringados' don't know nothing about. Ain't that right, my lady? This boy don't know México. He don't know all the good things about México."

It was like touching an open wound, which is why Luis interrupted the conversation in order to take her away from there.

"One of these days, you can come and tell us all about it, Don Máximo."

They went on, under the burning, hot rays of the sun which, for Ana María, as for Don Máximo, provided the warmth that their bodies no longer knew how to produce.

The new guest entered the workers' houses, affectionately admonishing the women who failed to keep them clean, flattering the ones who had everything in order and dressed up their children, and who were a special object of her affection.

"Here comes Luis," Jorgito said to a very dark-skinned young man who looked at her with dark eyes filled with astonishment. "Prepare to have a really fine time. And tell your mother to go tell them how to fix up your dress for the fiesta."

The main objective for the widespread visits to the farm workers' homes was to prepare them for the celebration. They needed to find "artists" among the young people, make plastic pictures, organize the choirs and not allow a living soul to go without an important responsibility.

"Leave this task to me," Luis implored, knowing how much that Herculean effort was going to exhaust the poor woman.

But she, in turn, pleaded with such sweetness that he had no other choice than allow her to do what she wanted, as with a child who, lying sick in bed, asks for his favorite toy.

He wouldn't have to wait long, however, for her to throw in the towel. Before she could finish her tour of the vast spaces on the farm, it was necessary to carry her back to her bed, stricken by extreme exhaustion and a loss of spirit that she still courageously attempted to conceal. And she wanted to see everything! Now, through her bedroom window, she stared sadly at the places she was not able to go: the enclosures where the incubators reproduced with scientific regularity and flocks of chicks of all sizes voraciously pecked at the ground; the pens

which housed the herds of cattle... And the rosebushes which just now were asking for a great deal of attention...!

A lifetime of work and order held up forcefully by a body which was quickly falling to pieces...!

Chapter IX

The arrival of the young student at his parents' farm was a grand affair.

Oh! How much was going on there now, the whole farm took part in the exaltation in which its owners lived, in that affectation which was the result of the sick woman's desire to give it a completely extraordinary character, to make it solemn, grandiose. Luis did not know if this was because the exiled woman's spirit was suffering from a lifetime's worth of distress, agitated by such conflicting desires, by so many hopes and fears, or because she might really feel blessed and might really have need of those explosions of joy building up as a result of her obsessive thoughts of returning to her country.

It was necessary for Luis to put his foot down in order to convince her that she could not go, as she wanted, to the train station in Arley in order to welcome the young man.

Luis left by himself. As if he were going on a journey full of danger, and as if the young man's safety was completely depending on him, the pampered woman told him, "Take good care of him for me..."

For her part, she dedicated herself to lending a cheerful spirit to the reception which she, her friends, their workers, everyone who knew him, was going to give her son.

The Pantusas with their children, Markowsky, his wife, and Martin, the Frenchman, had all been there since the morning. Martin was preparing for something like a formal gathering, trying to establish social hierarchies, but Ana María objected: she wanted everyone, from the least of the children from the humblest of families to those that best represented the local "aristocracy," to have the privilege to shake the hand of the prince who was about to arrive.

Standing on the porch, propped up by her enthusiasm and surrounded by her friends—from the very stout German woman, Pantusa, who always preferred to be seated, to the

extremely svelte Mrs. Markowsky and some of the wives of the farmhands—it appeared, in fact, as if they were anticipating the arrival of a person of noble lineage, one of those extraordinary men who have the clamorous trumpeting sounds of fame traveling before them.

All work had been suspended that day, and everyone who passed by on the highway paused curiously upon seeing the reason for all of the commotion. The Mexican children, dressed in the finest clothes in their closet, fought like crazy trying to escape through the fence around the house to go exploring along the roadside, and be among the first to witness the solemn procession, the arrival of the “little patrón.” The journey to Arley took only fifteen minutes; and, if the train arrived on time, it wouldn’t be long before the car could be seen coming up the road.

The workers formed groups here and there. Pantusa, the Italian, who could-never keep quiet or stand still for long, intermingled with the workers, speaking to them in his mixed tongue, determined to perfect his “Ee-spang-yol.” The Frenchman solicitously attended to Señora Alfaro, more through gestures than actual words, because he suffered from an absolute ignorance of her language, which also happened to be the case with the Polish and German women as well. When Luis, who served as interpreter for his wife and friends, was missing from the parties, the conversations were always only half-understood, with the help of the few words that one or another knew of the other’s language, resorting to an expressive and, at times, agonizing form of miming, but now sufficiently practiced so that everyone could be satisfied with the result of their visits, and they would demonstrate their tremendous desire to communicate with one another, to “chat,” to talk about all of the things that had happened to them over the course of time that they hadn’t seen each other.

Markowsky spoke only when Alfaro was present, for he was the reserved, hermetic type; and, feeling no need to speak, he kept his mouth shut.

Amparito, Compean's wife, the one from Vallejo, (a young lady who worked as a school teacher when there was enough time, space and children), and other girls from the farm, sitting on the porch steps, spoke to each other softly, out of respect and diffidence, not daring to take part in the conversation between the ladies.

From a distance, Pantusa's children could be seen gathering wild flowers, perhaps as a way to separate themselves from the Mexican children, with whom they did not mix.

When Luis' car became visible along the grey strip of highway and the aristocratic figure of the blond, fair-skinned youngster could be seen, the multitude which had gathered in the house burst into shouts of joy. The boy, upon seeing that unusual display felt ill-at-ease. His cheeks turned red. Luis lifted him out of the car in his arms, as if he was a new born, and placed him standing on solid ground after giving him a kiss.

Ana María was extremely pale, now knowing how to give rein to her emotions and the joy she felt. The boy ran to her, taking no notice of all of the hands which were attending to him. But he stopped in his tracks when reaching her side, stupefied, confused, and demonstrating the insurmountable fear of someone who has just seen a ghost. They obliged the ailing woman to sit down, because, before everyone's eyes, she was losing the strength which had kept her up on her feet.

The boy let loose a flood of tears, screaming, "Oh, mother, mother..."

Those simple words, uttered in English, produced a strange stupor among the Mexican community. It was the same barrier as always, which created distance between the two groups of people with the slightest detail.

Some of the workers looked around among themselves as if to say, “He’s changed.”

The new arrival, sobbing convulsively in his mother’s lap, where he hid to avoid looking at her, felt the weight of a dreadful sadness come over him. They had told him that she had taken ill, but he had never imagined that the beautiful woman, of whom he was so proud, could ever end up like this, and that she could have been turned into something else, just a shadow of that energetic, elegant, aristocratic woman he had left behind when he went away. The thought of that beautiful, that distinguished, that strong and caring young woman, was a comfort and an argument against the thoughtless and cruel enemies of his affection, and they were also the guarantee of her protection, her delightful company in the future. Instinctively, he noted that he was losing her comfort and support. His father’s love seemed to lack the same warmth, the same devotion and the same tenderness of Ana María’s, who—if he had indeed forgotten anything due to his long absence, which cools even the greatest of loves—now liberated from the cold environment of his school, would quickly regain the stature of his real mother who had eased his underprivileged childhood with her kisses and affection.

Ana María, because of her Fate and because of the feebleness that deprived her of her extraordinary brilliance, did not understand the cause behind her son’s disconsolateness nor could she see the torment which passed through his soul nor the kind of impression that this spectacle had on the people from the settlement.

With the heroic might which all mothers possess, she drew strength from her frailty in order to caress and console her son.

He watched her speak, with his eyes wide open, still unable to clearly understand the words which tumbled out of her beloved mouth.

Luis’ friends approached to greet him, speaking to him in English.

The young scholar felt a tremendous comfort when hearing that familiar accent which was like an echo of what he had just been hearing at school.

With the volubility typical of children, he jumped to his feet; and, with his eyes still full of tears and his mouth glowing with smiles, he spoke warmly to his friends.

Little by little, the settlers took their leave, as if sensing the coldness of the environment. The children spoke among themselves, in English, forgetting all about the people surrounding them. Ana María tried in vain to overcome her frailty in order to attend to her son and she concentrated on watching him, a weak smile breaking across her face, happy, in spite of everything, and once again having no other thoughts than those regarding the recent arrival.

Luis Alfaro looked upon that scene with a heavy heart. It turned out to be more difficult for him than for anyone else. He again felt the weight of his misfortune in all of its intensity: his wife, at Death's doorstep; his son, far from being the kind of companion that would have been one born from his love and his own people; his home, the one that he loved, threatened with imminent ruin; and his distant fatherland, on the verge of being lost in a fog of nostalgia...

Those foreign friends who gathered around him with such good intentions attempting to understand him could not even begin to comprehend the scope of his tragedy, nor could they lighten the load of his existence, which they imaged was just as simple and easy as their very own lives, devoid of all the sentimental complications and the inadaptability which the Mexican suffered, a son of a singular land and incapable of loving any homeland other than his own.

Pantusa, the verbose man, who did not know how to keep quiet for very long, shook him from his deep contemplation, and removed from the perplexing situation in which they had found themselves those who thought they were going to a fiesta but suddenly found themselves in the midst of that chilly scene.

“Don’t you think that it would be good for ‘la signora’ to retire to her room? We could accompany her inside the house.”

Ana María objected. For her, the only thing that made her feel better was the presence of that strapping young man, with bright eyes and an angelic face, who spoke with increasing excitement to his friends, for it was as if upon seeing them his fear of not finding friendly souls who would help make his short stay at the farm enjoyable had suddenly disappeared.

“We’re fine right here,” Ana María assured them. “Have them bring over some chairs so we can all take our places here, which is the coolest spot.”

Little by little, the gathering grew more animated. The children spoke enthusiastically about their schools, talking about their athletic prowess, embellishing their scholastic achievements and promising to be very happy when they returned.

The children monopolized the conversation. The Markowskys, mute, as always, though visibly satisfied with the youthful clamor, listened delightedly, with their arms crossed. M. Martin gravely fixated on the most insignificant things. The Pantusas breathed an air of satisfaction through every pore realizing how much their children were admired. Ana María, now that the overwhelming emotions of the first few moments had passed, regained her strength in order to stroke the blonde hair of her little boy, who every now and again would make an effort to reciprocate with a smile.

Only Luis Alfaro gazed into the distance and passed his hand through his thick head of hair, trying to brighten his own ruminations.

As always happens with those who for the first time are paid a visit from Suffering—that obstinate guest which, when he arrives, spreads out as if to make himself at home indefinitely—Luis could do nothing more than contemplate what the future held in store. He could not come

to terms with the darkness on the horizon. Now, with his son present, he discovered a new reason for his disconsolateness, another complication whose magnitude he had failed to calculate when examining it from a distance.

What would become of that boy? Did he have the right to hold on to him and impose his legal paternity upon him without having been able to provide him with an understanding soul, without having been able to conquer him through the patient labor of drawing closer to him over time, and having permitted them to change him while he was away, making him sullen and distrustful, cold and full of precaution?

“But children are prone to changing so many times...” Luis thought hopefully. “If I could only take him to México, he would forget all about those things and all those people and their prejudices; he would learn the language and he would become what we always wanted him to be: the son who carries on a name now close to becoming extinct; my best friend for life.”

This idea buoyed the exile, who, with his volatile spirit, had become accustomed to going from the darkest despair to the most extreme optimism. And at that moment, as a result of the hope that his thoughts had inspired in him, he forgot about his wife’s illness as well.

He attempted to liven up the assembly by asking his neighbors a thousand questions related to their work. They were all prospering with their agricultural enterprises. The earth produced harvests like clockwork and they increased their wealth with a kind of monotonous regularity. Only Pantusa, with his unrelenting activity, went looking for new opportunities in the city. He had a number of projects. He now had the capital necessary to tackle them and he was destined to become a millionaire, a multimillionaire, who, once placed on the path to success, does not stop until his hand grows tired of accumulating so much money or Death comes to put

an end to the easy task of augmenting his amassed fortune through hard work, constancy and faith in the prosperity of a country where the miraculous acts of modern King Midases unfold.

Quiet old Markowsky, who seemed to have wanted to say something for some time, finally worked up the courage to do so.

“There is something that I would like to ask you, Señor Alfaro.”

“Anything you like.”

“Well, as a matter of fact... for a very long time, Mrs. Markowsky and I have been thinking that... well, we would like to ask you for some information, that is, we would like to see if it would be possible for us to go to Mexico and establish ourselves there...”

The children appeared antsy during that meeting of serious adults. Ana María held Luisito in her arms; but he, though courteously and affectionately trying to reciprocate her cooing, could not conceal his desire to enjoy the company of his friends.

“Do you want to go play with the other children?” his father asked him before responding to the Pole’s question.

With a boisterous scream, now forgetting all of his tears and sorrows, little Luis walked down the porch steps and became lost among his friends in the grove of trees near the house, leaving a wake of laughter and happy voices behind him.

Alfaro was preparing to answer Markowsky’s question when he noticed that Ana María had lost all interest in the gathering as soon as her son had left.

The woman followed the rowdy path of the group of young people with her eyes; and, unable to conceal her thoughts, she suggested to her female neighbors that they take a stroll through the grove as well.

They happily agreed. Only the four men remained behind and Luis finally responded to the Pole, who waited attentively.

“Go to work in México?” exclaimed Luis with the effusion that he always placed on his words when he spoke about his country. “That’s a wonderful idea! I can’t think of a better place in the world to quickly amass your fortune and, at the same time, enjoy the incomparable blessings of its singular climate, its hospitable natural environment, its people who are so easy to win over and its way of life, which, in the end, seems to have been made in order to be profoundly savored, like a glass of fine wine.”

The retired military man then gave the fiery praise which customarily accompanied his memories of his fatherland. It was the Promised Land. Even in the places that appeared to be most barren, the “haciendas” where cultivation of the earth would not produce any fruits, they were provided for by the mountains where abundant flocks grazed, by textile plants which grew with God’s blessing and for many years have supplied the finest raw materials to thousands of industries in Europe. Where luxuriant nature was lacking, the land bare of flora and fauna, there were the mines that likewise provided the world with the largest quantities of silver, gold and all manner of precious metals. It required very little effort to prosper, to make a fortune. There was nothing lacking for a full and prosperous life.

Markowsky, though visibly confused by the nature of the question that he was about to ask, could not help it, hoping to get an explanation for something which seemed to be completely incongruous to him.

“Why is it, then, Señor Alfaro, that there are so many poor people in your country? Why is it that there is this type of Mexican who goes to the United States and appears to have suffered

all manner of misfortune and has never enjoyed the kind of blessings that you assure us that God has abundantly bestowed upon your land?"

"My country, Mr. Markowsky, like all young nations, finds itself in an agonizing period of growth, a bewildering adolescence, in which its children can't even recognize the opportunity that their very own land offers them. For a century, we have been living in a constant state of revolution and those who foment them snatch the fruits from the branches, but do nothing to cultivate, to nurture, the trunk of the tree which provides such rich foliage. And the trunk is made up of those neglected groups of people for whom the abundance does not exist that the foreigners and only a handful of natives—who are better informed, or privileged by receiving a superior education—are able to see and enjoy, most of them as a result of family lineage, and occasionally due to some fructiferous and conscious effort. A long time must pass before our people, those workers who you and everyone else who has never been to México assume come from an impoverished and wretched country, are swept away by that impetuous current."

He knew that Markowsky wanted to be convinced. He counted among the few foreigners who did not consider the United States to be the Promised Land. His dour and introverted nature did not jibe with the fickleness of the Yankee spirit. He was one of those who searches for a little corner to live in and the United States seemed to be too big, too wide open, for him. He believed that, after some time, there would be such a huge mass of immigrants in that country, that it was sure to bother him. For him, "México" was something as exotic as its name, a spot forgotten by the rest of the planet, a mystical place where a man could still live all alone, isolated, without meddlesome people watching his every move or compulsory relationships with neighbors, like the one with the excessively formal M. Martin, or the one with the notoriously gregarious Pantusa. Luis's character, his affability, his kindness, his courteousness, served as a

magnificent indicator for him. It must have been a delight to live in a place where the upper classes were like Luis Alfaro and his wife and where the lower classes knew humility and had the gentleness of the workers who came, from time to time, looking for a job, like one who is soliciting some indescribable favor.

In a sombre tone, he declared, "Well, mark my word, sir, that one fine day, I will sell everything I own here and I will move to México."

The Italian and the Frenchman directed strange glances at him which contained compassion, derision and irony. They would not dare to openly express their feelings in front of Luis because they would have offended him; however, without much effort, it became clear that they considered the Pole's decision to be absolutely absurd. They were convinced that there was no better place to live in the world than the United States and that all the stories published in the newspapers about the atrocities that were being committed in Mexico were no less than completely true. Arriving at the border with Mexico and putting one's life in danger, or exposing oneself to having his watch stolen, was one and the same. People like Luis were the exception. His European education had redeemed him from the original sin of being born Mexican. Mexico was little more than a large, peon-producing country, where the people sadly wandered through inextricable jungles and lived in miserable shacks with no desire other than to immigrate to the United States or start a revolution. On the other hand, what a life they lived, those who had the privilege to be able to call themselves American citizens! "American citizen" was the title of the modern nobility or, at least, if one must talk about things democratically, the greatest pride and the highest aspiration of those who wish to get out from the vegetative state of their depleted European countries or their convulsive nations in Spanish America. And it was interesting: while a good portion of the Mexican population fought to flee their country and beg

for entry into the United States, a European, well established in the miraculous Promised Land of the machines and millionaires, wanted to exchange this marvel for that sadness, full of danger and uncertainty. Could anyone ever forgive such an appalling heresy?

Luis realized what was happening to his visitors' good cheer; and, even though he felt compelled, as always, to charge out in defense of his country, with the fervent love which made those battles so incredibly pleasing to him, because they provided him with a topic that awakened his pride for his people, he reckoned he would never be able to convince those men who were already prisoners to the dogmatism of the United States, a country of fixed beliefs, prejudices and misunderstandings rooted in the fundamental absurdity that nothing compares to the land of Uncle Sam and that everything else should be measured against the slide-rule of its material well-being, including the happiness and spirituality of other nations. He also understood that it was a superhuman feat to want to liberate from the weight of a smear campaign that poor, slandered, coveted and exploited country, whose life full of political upheavals and foreign assaults has admirably served to lend it an international reputation for being maladjusted and irredeemable.

From the deepest part of the small grove where only children's laughter could be heard, suddenly there came a strange rumbling. Shouts of pain and children's cries could be heard. One of the workers, who had followed the group at a distance to watch the children play, came running to deliver the horrifying news.

“Señor, señor, your wife has taken ill.”

In an instant the men went where the voices were coming from.

Ana María, held over the grass in Mrs. Pantusa's arms, looked as if she were dead. A yellowish pallor covered her fine countenance as she painfully opened her eyes. Luisito clung

onto her filled with a terrified anguish. The screams heard all the way up to the farm house were coming from him. The other children, pale and horrified, looked upon that scene. Groups of farm workers, who demonstrated signs of great desperation upon learning about what was happening, were coming from everywhere. The ailing woman gently stroked her son's hair with her pallid, feeble hand.

Alfaro was nearly as pale as Ana María. He approached her with a paralyzing sense of anxiety and took her frigid hand between his own. She recovered some of her faculties. And she had a smile for her husband which appeared to encourage him. She was the victim of a momentary syncope resulting from the day's emotion as well as the energy she had exerted to be with her son. Everyone prepared to carry her to the house, but Luis took her in his arms and gently lifted her up, without any effort; and, for the first time, he realized how little substance was left in that body which appeared to evaporate like a perfume or slowly wither away like a flower under the midday sun...

Chapter X

The resilience of that frail little body was admirable. Even though she grew progressively more exhausted, Ana María, without surrendering to her affliction, without ever admitting that it could be fatal, recovered from each relapse more spirited and resolute, guaranteeing that the danger, if there ever was any, had passed. This time, after her spell brought on by the surge of emotions from her son's arrival, and which kept her in bed for the next two weeks, she got back on her feet as a result of her phenomenal determination and a miracle of hope and faith. Emaciated, almost sallow, she clearly demonstrated that she was now nearing the end of her struggle. The doctor, who every time he came over to examine her could scarcely conceal the incertitude which all doctors feel when confronting hopeless cases, that manifestation of human impotence when facing the inevitable, reluctantly prescribed her medicines and didn't even trouble himself to attempt to console Luis. With rural stoicism and forbearance, he pressed his lips together; he pulled down his hat tightly; he left the ailing woman's room without saying a word; he bid Luis adieu with a simple gesture, and he mounted his rickety little cart.

For her own part, Ana María, extremely content with the presence of her son, devised future plans, as if she had a long life ahead of her. Principal among them were the arrangements for the Mexican Independence Day celebration, which would be observed in just a few days, as well as their own return to México. Even though she could scarcely leave her bedroom, from there, she planned and gave orders, which were enthusiastically seconded by her little one, who had quickly grown accustomed to seeing her sick, to his new life style, to his treatment by the many farm workers, to everything, with that divine conformity and enchanting adaptability which constitutes one of the privileges of the happy age of childhood.

Without disappearing completely, the anti-Mexican misgivings which he had learned at school became attenuated. For the first time, he took an interest in the history of his parents' country. As if recounting a bedtime story, Ana María told him about Miguel Hidalgo's valor, about his resolution to challenge the might of the Spanish who had subjugated México for three centuries, about José María Morelos's fearlessness, about Nicolás Bravo's nobility, about the great battles in which the insurgents had emerged triumphant, whose picturesque sketches dazzled the boy's imagination when looking at the full color illustrations in *México a través de los Siglos* where he saw Indians covering the muzzles of the canons with their own sombreros or laying waste the elegant royal troops with their spears. He compared Hidalgo to George Washington, discovered their similarities, and México regained some degree of respect in his mind. In him awoke an enthusiasm as innocent as that belonging to many of the very same Mexicans who, in a foreign land, feel the birth of the idea of the fatherland upon hearing it spoken about it with a love and devotion never witnessed nor felt when they lived in their native land.

So he assisted, with the fickleness of a seasonal Mexican, in the arrangements for the fiesta. He was charged with notifying those who had been given some kind of commission as part of the plans that Ana María was elaborating and calling the ones who would perform the physical labor in the arrangement of the hall. The day of the celebration was approaching very quickly. It was already early September and there were only a couple of weeks left to get everything in order. The old tools and grain that were housed in the large storage room had now been cleared. Its wooden walls were being adorned with thick, tricolored, paper streamers and a multitude of red, white and green flags, which lifted the spirits of all the Mexicans. At one extreme, they built an improvised stage where the most solemn rites of the fiesta would have

their place and where the music, the Patriotic Committee and other members of the leadership would be placed. Grand portraits of their national heroes had been brought from San Antonio and were being hastily framed in order to adorn the walls of that spacious hall.

Ana María was insistent that this celebration would be “like no other,” and her husband, melancholy, allowed her to do it, imagining and feeling in his heart of hearts the reason behind that fit of patriotism that she had never shown before and that was now being displayed enveloped in the uncontainable and obsessive desire to draw nearer, even if only in spirit, to the land might never see again.

Her bedroom window looked out precisely onto the hall where the fiesta would take place; and, in order to better direct the preparations, she moved her chair closer to that spot, from which she watched over most of the details. Her son, passing back and forth like a shuttle, from her window to the hall and from the hall to her window, told her about anything that she was not able to see. She was prevented from personally directing the various tasks, as she would have liked to. She swore that if they had allowed her to, she would have been able to do it, but the truth was that she could scarcely move from her seat and it was only with a great deal of effort that she was able to get out of bed each morning. Nevertheless, she showed no lack of enthusiasm nor did she experience the hours of melancholy that she had felt during the first few days of her illness. For her, the fiesta was like medicine. Without explaining it or giving any reasons why, she was certain that, once her whim had been satisfied and the settlers were content with the powerful memory that it would leave them, she could embark upon her return voyage without any further obstacles or delays.

Nearly all the work on the farm which did not have anything to do with the famous preparations had come to a standstill. Settlers of both sexes, of all ages and conditions

demonstrated the same desire to lend a degree of solemnity to the grand celebration. The women sewed outfits for their children; the men provided a hand to build the improvised structures, and all the men and women who had any artistic ability rehearsed in order to showcase it during the brilliant fiesta. Some would play instruments or sing, while others would recite poems, and a considerable number of the settlers had memorized speeches drawn from books that provided the same material year after year.

And the one who put that machine of energy and enthusiasm into motion was a woman on her deathbed. The settlers forgot about the circumstances, in part because they did not understand the devastating nature of their lady's illness, and in part because the current of their enthusiasm—now bursting loose and running free—did not give pause for observations. “México,” with its seductive name, its beautiful and rugged terrain, its obsessive memory, filled their hearts with passion and was their hope and enticement; the prize for all of their hard work, for those who were close to returning; the reason behind the bitter sweetness for those who felt their lives were tangled up in the realities that bound them to this foreign land; and, the source of the biting pain for those who knew that their beloved México was nothing more for them than a memory which was drowning in the impossible, the recollection of a great love that would never be fulfilled. But it was something so powerful and imperative for everyone that it imposed its worship, devotion and love on them like an unyielding commandment.

The poor ailing woman felt all those emotions at the same time. The same suffering and exaltations passed through her soul that all the people from her country endured, all those who yearned to go back, those who had said “adiós” to their beloved homeland, from the depths of their souls, because they knew that they would never see it again, those who wandered about,

following a cycle of sorrow, orbiting around their unreachable goal. She suffered for all of them, and, for all of them, she prayed.

On those cool autumn nights, after the rumblings of the people who worked on the arrangements for the festivities had died down, and a sweet veil of shadows and silence descended upon the countryside, the ailing woman had them move her chair closer to the window through which passed the strong emanations of the earth bursting with fruits and flowers. There, the stars twinkled above inviting her to dream. And she forgot about everything. She refocused her attention on her hopes; and, as if by an act of some gentle spell cast by the powerful suggestion of her desire, she caught a glimpse of what she so loved and lived in a world filled with all the things now left behind, the unfulfilled desires, all the things that had once slipped through her hands and became rebellious and turned against her.

She saw herself again on her ranch in Valle Umbroso, just as she had left it, with the same people, the same faces and the same maternal and emotional attachments. No one had died nor had the time of destruction taken its toll on its people or things. She returned, almost triumphantly, after such an extended absence and everyone greeted her with open arms and all their hearts were pounding. Gabriela, her maid—who, at the time, looked at her in silence, with the pitiful and abysmal eyes of a little beast that senses the danger and smells the tragedy—was not there, in the corner, watching over her and sustaining her with her constant and sorrowful gaze, but rather joined all the people under the arches of the “casa grande” gathered to see her get out of her carriage, big as an ocean liner—everything there was so big, goodness gracious!—and loud as a train of war, pulled by five horses panting after running full gallop all the way from the train station to the farm. Simón, the ever sullen and sombre stable boy, at that very moment, displayed an imperceptible smile of happiness. Everyone called out to her: “My girl, my girl...”

And she ran into the house after kissing her parents, and she recognized every nook, every piece of furniture, the flowers in the garden, the water in the fountain, the alcove with the Virgin Mary where everything was as it had always been, the chapel where a damp wind blew and where the same canopy of angels and saints on the altars welcomed her with a subtle gesture that she understood. She then visited the stables and corrals, a train of faithful dogs following behind her and joyfully leaping around her. Then she passed by the servants' quarters where the same warm and grateful smiles awaited her. And she asked about everybody because she remembered everyone and nothing escaped her, not even the names of the children, nor the details of people's engagement, nor anyone's birthday.

Then, suddenly, without transition, transported by the magical powers of the mind, she traveled to Pátzcuaro, where she also had a house as full of memories as the hacienda. Everyone she knew in the village came out to greet her, as if her return was a major event that everyone had been waiting for, for a very long time, and that had finally arrived. And she faithfully toured all of her most beloved places and she diligently went and saw everyone she loved, everyone she held dear, without missing anyone. And during that romantic pilgrimage along the road of her youth, along the white path of the happy dawn of her life, she saw and heard fresh and fragrant recollections parade by, as if they had happened just yesterday, with the kind of exactitude that only an infirm imagination, heightened by illness, could produce. She even believed that she could feel the cold of the iron bars around her windows, on which she used to prop herself up in order to peer down the dark alley where Luis came calling at night, step by step, to have one of the sweetest conversations from their joy-filled happy courtship.

The moon peered through the tall, thick trees which hid the walls of the houses, and through the same gap it appeared to her as if it was watching her. From a distance, little lights

shone faintly from the stores which, surrounding the main plaza, served more than merely the needs of commerce but also for the gatherings of the notable figures from the pueblo. From a pond close to the lake came the croak of the frogs; and, in the distance, the whistle of a train that was growing more distant could be heard...

Everything was just as it had been before...

Luis came to pull her away from those hallucinations, fearing that the air, which was growing cooler as the night went on, would be bad for her. She returned ruefully back to reality. And at that moment, she abandoned her optimism and cried disconsolately. The fall from her castle of dreams to the harsh reality of the moment in which she lived was too abrupt.

Nighttime proved to be dreadful for her. But, with the light of each morning, the hope was reborn that instilled her with the energy to continue to ride the whirlwind of enthusiasm that let her heightened imagination run wild each day.

Chapter XI

Bellavista was buzzing with enthusiasm. The tranquil farm had been transformed into a center of happiness. The pilgrims arrived in grand caravans from the neighboring regions, from all nearby location from where the trip was possible given the means of those who knew about the fiesta. The farm owner's boundless generosity and the settlers' hospitality, characteristic of people from this community, heightened due to the celebration, facilitated the accommodations—in that relatively small space—for the avalanche of Mexicans, who arrived using every means imaginable.

These were the kind of people, all of them, who were accustomed to traveling long distances, going from one side of the country to the other, in order to celebrate the feast days of the saints of their devotions. Traveling by train, to Mexico City, to the Villa de Guadalupe, to visit a dark-skinned virgin, was no small feat when considering the sacrifice involved. Many had made the pilgrimage from their northern border towns down to San Juan de los Lagos, in the State of Jalisco, at the slow trot of a donkey train which carried the women, traveling for weeks and weeks, under the sun and through the rain, camping out in the desert, enduring all manner of privations, but filled with joy and satisfaction because of that which was for them, in the end, a fiesta, for it removed them from the monotony of their daily lives and momentarily altered the grey appearance of their perilous horizon.

It was an extraordinary, sumptuous celebration, all the same, this one they were now being offered in a place where they knew that a commemoration was awaiting them in which all their different devotions would be joined together as one. To remember "México," in a grand reunion of Mexicans, exclusively, on a parcel of land that—because it belonged to a Mexican—felt like it was their own, and far from the apparatus of the refined, foreign civilization that

excluded them, with just its size and its deafening noise, they, who were so sad and poor. To remember “México” under those circumstances was to feel, with a great peace in their hearts, the caress of a distant recollection, in which everything that was good and pleasing down south was included.

From there came the extraordinary excitement. Luis Alfaro hoped to thoroughly please his fellow countrymen and he allowed them to work at will. And that’s how it was possible for the night of celebration to don all of the colors of a grand, authentic and picturesque Mexican spectacle, with all the characteristics of their native fiestas, in which the light from the oil lamps stood out against the dense shadows, and the whistling fireworks traced the dark blue sky, sprinkled with stars, with their fleeting trail of sparks. There was the aroma of fried foods; the strumming of guitars, the urgent calls from improvised vendors; the elaborate screams of those who proclaim to have “lotería,” which by comparison were at times ingenious and other times incomprehensible, but always in the funniest voice that anyone could ask for: “my friend is two sheets to the wind;” “the devil a-waitin’ at your door step;” “whose gonna see the sun a-shinin’ at night time” (just like that, over emphasizing their accents with each syllable); the shouts of joy and explosions full of threats; and the rumor-mill and the commotion of a multitude which was enjoying itself in its own way, motley in appearance, but feeling, with all intensity, down in the depths of their souls, the joy of living and the pride of coming from a country full of legends, heroism and generosity...

What Bellavista had lost in terms of its trapping as a rural farm, it gained in its outward Mexican appearance. It was completely surrounded by the vehicles the visitors had used to arrive. It looked like a cross between a small Bedouin village and a bivouac. Rambling wrecks, old jalopies that sounded like a slithering rattlesnake, an occasional luxury car belonging to one

of the handful of wealthy Mexicans who lived in the area, horses and mules that wandered around everywhere, swarms of curious children, army tents which Luis had ordered to be erected in order to provide lodgings for his guests, who came in droves, without even being invited, all of this, in a picturesque confusion, lent a new look to Bellavista.

Some of the settlers stood watch in order to prevent any intrusions into the masters' home. They made it clear that the masters didn't want to be disturbed. Inside, there was an ailing woman who relished the goings-on, but whose delicate condition had to be taken into consideration.

On the "playground," quite a distance away from the house, areas were being prepared to sell food and knick-knacks from México.

The recent arrivals moved about somewhat apprehensively when learning that there was someone sick in the house. After parking their vehicles, accommodating their passengers and taking a look around the farm, they quietly scattered themselves throughout the verdant pasture. They formed groups here and there. Many people did not know each other, but it didn't take long for friendships to form, due to that solicitousness of fellow countrymen who find themselves in a foreign land and want to know where others are from, why they came, how they are faring, what they do for work, and how much they make.

"An' whereabouts're you from?" asked one man—now up in his years, his skin made dark by the sun and leathery by his toils and tribulations—of another man, who was his polar opposite: a strapping young man, full of health, judging from his chubby and pinkish cheeks, despite his deep, dark complexion.

"Who, me? Uh... from a long ways away, ya know. All the way from the State of Guanajuato. From Cuerámaro..."

The former smiled slyly, “You call that far away? I came from Guerrero, Zumpango del Río, Guerrero.”

“From the hot country...”

“From right smack dab in the middle of the desert, where there’re scorpions an’ coconuts an’ wild animals an’ monkeys an’ parrots. All mountains an’ rivers an’ tall trees that grow by the grace of God until they come crashin’ down with old age.”

“You came from all the way over there?” replied the young man, looking his interlocutor up and down, as if contemplating the madness of abandoning such abundance in order to go to this barrenness. “So why d’ya come?”

“Same as everybody else. Times got tough and they told us that, here, you could sweep up money with a broom. I found the brooms alright, but not the money. I’m a street-sweeper in Arley. An’ you, what do you do?”

“I work in a restaurant in Kansas City.”

“Well, well, well! Things mus’ be goin’ pretty good for you then. Waist-deep in water and up to your chin in pasture... An’ you must already know pretty good all that gringo gibber-jabber.”

“Well, yeah, I can speak English, but don’t you go thinkin’ that it was so easy for me. People move from job to job in this country. And the only law that matters is one’s own. The food doesn’t even taste any good around here either. Too oily, too many slimy herbs, too much refrigerated meat. No reason to beat around the bush: our palates were made for other things.”

“Our palates and everything else,” the old man concluded sententiously, as he walked away, without saying goodbye to his new friend, and in search of another one who he could ask the same questions that he had just hurled at the one he was leaving behind.

There were a number of foreigners sitting on the neighboring hills amused by the excitement seen on the farm. They were sure to be happy on the night of the fiesta, and they enjoyed with great anticipation—and that melancholic cheerfulness typical of the Mexican people—the warm reception which was being prepared for them.

Meanwhile, on the farm, they were putting the finishing touches on the décor for the hall and on the numbers for the program. There would be a solemn procession, with torches, standards, portraits of the heroes of the Independence and the retinue of officials who would preside over the ceremony. Luis' European friends, who were curious to see a Mexican fiesta, had been invited, and they considered it their duty to attend that homage to their friend's country.

Vallejo's wife, Balbina, tutored by Amparito, the school teacher, in the literary and historical details which the old rancher woman knew nothing about, would not stop, despite her 200 pound frame, getting involved with everything. She had guests in her house, just like all the farmers, among whom a large number of the concurrence of visitors were distributed; and, along with those obligations, taking care of her children and organizing the celebration, she spent many days hard at work, but because of everything else, she still hadn't given up.

As the hours passed and he noticed the anguishing incongruity of the moment, Luis felt alarmed, disquieted. The least appropriate thing for his wife's illness, which required peace and quiet, was that fiesta in which surely there would be no lack of eruptions of joy, at times barbaric, from a group of people who do not know how to express themselves in any other way. But she was the one who had pledged herself to such a foolhardy celebration. And how could he tell her no? But now that he could see the event closely, he had to admit that he had been too rash and irrational. At least, for his tormented spirit, there was no worse torture than that of a celebration next to an open grave.

Ana María continued to be in good spirits, though progressively weaker. She was in that state, common among people in her condition, in which one's soul burns like a fire while one's body is being consumed. She had already agreed, after much pleading on Luis' part, that she would not attend the fiesta. She was resigned to watching it from her bedroom window, to hear the sounds, to observe everyone else's happiness. What mattered most to her was not to show weakness, not to succumb to the disease, nor to return definitively to her bed, which she feared with the instinctive distrust of one who suffers from an incurable disease.

Clinging onto the window, which had now completely become her life's vantage point, she anxiously looked upon the activities of her workers and guests. They had all received instructions not to overwhelm her with questions or conversations. They greeted her respectfully or walked by her, looking back at her, with their characteristic deference.

In order for her to witness the beginning of the celebration, Gabriela, her maid—who never left her side, not even for a moment—and the “foreign” women, as she called them—even though she was the more foreign than anyone in the United States—all helped to move her to the back of the house, to the porch, where she could perfectly see the large open area which, forming a small plaza, was located in front of the workers' houses. The throng of people who were to arrive in solemn procession, would gather there, next to the hall where the farmer we all know would erect his “altar of patriotism.”

From there the efforts of Vallejo and Luis to organize that blessed parade could be seen. The most distinguished among the settlers wore black—despite being unaccustomed to the heat—not forsaking that funeral-like appearance, which for them represented elegant attire. Luis was somewhat contrary, despite his grand disposition to make an exception in his life as a refined gentleman and do everything to host that ceremony which on no other occasion would

have been observed with the same solemnity. His European friends, who seemed convinced they would be witnessing strange and unexpected things, had an air of avid curiosity, a thirst for exoticisms, which made Luis smile inside. Surely, in not one of their countries of origin were they accustomed to donning such lugubrious dress on their national holiday. The Yankees—and that's what they were now, through naturalization and everything else—did not like the long speeches or the weighty and solemn tributes. The parades through the streets during their grandest celebrations had a comical aspect to it, picturesque organizations participated, with their lodges wearing the strangest costumes: their "Elks" clothed in oriental garb, topped off with little red hats; their "Lions" in Levite frock-coats; and the multitudes, distinguishing themselves by the negligence of their appearance, like the blissful abandon with which they observed the solemn occasion. All of it ingenuous in its spectacle, in its diversion, but exceeding in its annoyances and insipid ability to do silly things; to discharge fireworks in order to produce small panics; to throw flour at those walking by, as in the masquerades in the European carnivals; to make loud noises with multicolored cardboard horns which also serve to tickle the beards of the first person unlucky enough to come across the prankster.

In contrast, our compatriots maintained a religious devotion. Nothing in the world could have caused them to depart from the ritual pomp with which they marched in columns of two, raising the standards with the insignia of the organization to which they belonged: the "Benito Juarez Society;" the "Orden de Amigos del Pueblo;" the "Meritorious Miguel Hidalgo Association," from Arley; the "Kansas Honorific Society;" the "Young Women of the Mexican Blue Cross;" and many others, like those which brought together Mexicans throughout the United States in mutual aid societies, were indispensable for their quality of life from the moment they set foot on foreign soil. Without these mutual aid societies, they would die of

sadness watching their neighbors attending the meetings, participating in the festivities, wearing large tricolored ribbons with shiny medals across their chests, which thus proudly exhibited the emblem of their organizations. The idea of this association does not imply, however, an absolute necessity for protection from the mutual aid society, which at times was worth very little, except during the difficult time of death, which requires organizing wakes, processions, sumptuous coffins and impotent funeral supplications. Becoming a member of a Mexican mutual aid society meant something; it was an escape from the anonymity of the farm and offered a chance to enjoy one of the privileges offered by that bewildering emigration.

Counting men, women and children, the patriotic column comprised nearly two hundred people. The parade proceeded in the following order: first, the school children, dressed in white, carrying flowers in their hands and tricolored sashes across their chests; then, the members of the Board of the Patriotic Committee, which had ceded the place of honor to Luis Alfaro and his friends; in the middle came the band which, as soon as they began to march, adopted a fiery and military air; and then, in a ball of confusion, the remainder of those in attendance, men and women who were falling all over each other to arrive first, without paying much attention to the banners which showed the group to which they belonged.

It was no small task getting everyone into the hall. On the platform, which had been erected like a stage, the celebration's dignitaries took their places; the President of the Patriotic Committee, who was none other than Compeán, having a small table in front him, with a bell and a few books, which had no real purpose but were indispensable as decoration. Everyone that could went up to the "altar of patriotism" in spite of the protests from those who attempted to maintain some sense of order. With some difficulty one could pass through that narrow space which, from a distance, was a tumultuous scene in which the black of the ceremonial dress, the

white of the school uniforms, the gold of the banners, the joyous and exultant red, white and green of the Mexican flags and the dark, sweaty faces of the Mexicans next to the white faces of the Americanized Europeans all stood in stark contrast to one another.

Below, in what could be referred to as the hall's "pit," there was a riot in order to take possession of the seats that crunched and collided into one another. There were not enough chairs for everyone, and when all the confusion had subsided, one could see many of the guests spilling over into the aisles, leaning against the walls, standing on the tips of their toes and obstructing the entryway in tight human bunches. Every family had brought their children and the children began to complain about the heat and the overcrowding.

After much clanging of his bell, Compeán was able to get the crowd to quiet down.

The program began. It was comprised of thirty-six acts, in which musical numbers alternated with recitations, speeches and evocative Mexican songs that generated a much higher level of enthusiasm than all the lectures.

Compeán, the president of the committee and master of ceremonies, introduced each act in a solemn voice; Amparito, the school teacher, brought the children up to the stage. A special commission, made up of the most presentable young men on the farm, was responsible for escorting the adult speakers to that place of tribulations, the selfsame stage, where everyone was sweating and stumbled over the words of the piece they had learned by heart, always about the same theme: the memory of a distant land; the bravery of its heroes, "who gave us our country and our freedom;" the recounting of military campaigns which took on epic dimensions; and, the pledges to die for liberty.

The band played fiery and bellicose music during the interludes, traditional compositions that were like the soul of an older age, the very soul of many of the older people, who had

listened to them in their youth and felt they were now reliving their entire lives under those crude but brilliant circumstances. Despite the vigilance of the fiesta's organizers, they could not prevent the circulation of strong spirits, hidden God-knows-where, and smuggled in for sale; and in nearly everyone's fiery eyes the flame of inebriation could be seen. The speeches—which never stopped expressing nostalgia for a beloved and far-off country and offering like a bright and seductive lure the return to an idyllic land, where everything would be lovely when they made it back—contributed to warming up the environment, speeding up the rhythm of their hearts and rocking their spirits in a sweet dream.

México! That word reverberated on everyone's lips and captivated their every thought. A deep passion, swelling like a wound, suddenly burst forth in everyone's consciousness, where it had been lying dormant for a very long time: it grew like an overwhelming swoon, like an epiphany and a revelation all in one. Because for many of those poor farm workers who only knew of misery and tyranny, of the exploitation by the "patrones" and the greed of the politicians in own their country, the fatherland appeared to them, there, beyond its borders, like a mother they had never really known, whom they had never seen, and who, in this way, from afar, could be envisioned with the nebulous and sweet contours of a goddess full of promise. When they returned, it would be completely different. They now knew how to look upon her. They now knew how to love her. When they returned, after the grueling struggle of exile, more terrible and painful than the misery they experienced in their native land, but more fruitful, they would return armed with new weapons: they would not suffer from the crushing affliction of poverty which forced them to live bent over the earth, unable to ever lift up their heads. They would take some savings with them; they would be dressed differently; others would take notice of them and, in this way, they could dedicate themselves to the contemplation of the beautiful things they had

passed by unwittingly; they would enjoy owning a piece of land of their own, which, because they had lived in another place which was more grim and inhospitable, now, for no other reason, was as smooth and comfortable as something made to fit their bodies, like a gentle caress on a forehead burning with fever.

Don Máximo, the veteran of the wars lauded in those speeches, the Dean of the Émigrés, at that very moment, suffered a recurrence of his customary exaltations, stirred by numerous libations, and struck the ground with his cane. With the obstinacy of a child who wants a piece of candy, he shouted, “C’mon! Play me a jarabe!” without giving a hoot about the interruption he was causing during the ritornello.

As the party went on, the environment grew hotter and hotter. The entire room was like one giant heart which was becoming overwhelmed by the weight of such tremendous enthusiasm. Everyone’s chests swelled as if they were ready to explode. There was an unusual hardness in their eyes. The lips of some were trembling and there were many heads covered in hair through which the emotion continued to pass like wind through the trees.

The wishes of the old man, Don Máximo, were quickly granted, when a man and woman in the traditional costume of the ‘charro’ and ‘china poblana’ took the stage in order to dance the jarabe, the Mexican national dance, in whose songs and movements were sung the recollections of an errant people. The handsome couple was made up by a dark and strapping young man and a sweet, dark-eyed young girl with a curvaceous figure. Every color of the rainbow danced in the serape from Saltillo which the young man wore over his shoulders; in his blouse made of drilling cloth, on the back of which could be see the crest of México, just as brilliant and colorful; in the “castor,” the sequined skirt that drew circles quickly around the china poblana’s fine legs; in the red, white and green ribbons that tied down her braided black hair; in shoes of

the very same colors, which encased her small and playful feet, like jubilant little birds; and, in all the enthusiasm and desire that sprang forth, like flames, from that sensual, deliberate dance, like all dances from tropical regions, where there is nothing more than humble solicitations and flirtations from a man and dismissals from an elusive young woman who draws near then retreats in order to make her pursuer's burning love for her grow even stronger.

The charro and the china poblana, on that stage and in that fiery and evocative reunion, served as a symbol: they were México, the very "patria" itself. No one has truly seen those dances nor has felt what they can inspire if they have never heard them and seen them on foreign soil. Each step in the dance—which contains exchanges and subtleties, like a poem composed of different rhythms and varying cadences—provokes a new jubilation, born in the people's ingenuous heart, a laughter which springs forth from a primal bliss, an impassioned groan, a sneer, an irony; running the whole gamut of emotions of a simple spirit which every once in a while awakens with a wild passion for life. Panoramas can be seen; regions present themselves with their distinctive colors and smells; and it is like a book of joy in which each generation writes its own chapter, with poets and rhapsodies from each era, which come, each one, with a new understanding of life and love.

And that entire mixture of emotions, of strong and precise evocations, needs to be contrasted with the gloomy life of the exile to shine in all its blinding light. When the notes of the national anthem or the restless motifs of a regional dance are heard during a Mexican fiesta, memories come gushing out—from the very movements of the Saltillo serapes or from the china poblana's red skirts—like a flood, causing a great deal of damage...

Some of the guests, those who were inebriated, frantically clapped their hands and belted out cacophonous cheers, but the majority of the men, unmoved and with a rigid control of

emotions on their earth-colored faces, followed the evolutions of the dance with watchful eyes, red with an anguish which made them glisten and brought them to the verge of tears. A tall, almost giant-like individual with sharp features—who had been a Revolutionary with Villa and had, among his greatest defeats, that of watching disappear and losing forever the grand bivouac parties, where the “Adelitas” chased away their sorrows and weariness with the same dances—appeared as though he was about to throw himself at the young lady, in a hopeless rapture as if longing to recuperate, in his own way, what he had lost, with the swipe of his hand. The women—enveloped in the sensual caress of the music, which at times possessed the infinite sadness of a farewell, a renunciation—cried in silence, in a resigned acceptance of their ever contrary Fate, which has eternally deprived them of that which they love most.

Don Máximo was almost mesmerized. His little grey, nearly blind eyes stared at that scene as if he were seeing a ghost... the ghost of his very distant, almost forgotten, past, the specter of his life’s history seemingly unable to throw off the weight of those sixty years of living in a foreign land and that now, with the evocation of that familiar and maternal music, like a song from the cradle, became whole and necessary again, wringing out his heart with the sharp and piercing emotions that beset a man who defined his entire life in a moment knowing that he lost it without ever having lived it, for not even in his youth had he experienced the happiness of those dazzling fiestas. In his mind, clouded by ignorance and time, he heard the confused and mocking curse of Destiny say to him, “These are things from your country. It is your own nation that offers itself to you in song and dance. The land that you never saw during those joyous and colorful galas. You knew only hunger and poverty, dark horizons, and the hardness in which love and affection could not even grow. Now that you have lost everything: your energy, your strength, your memory and your will, she comes to offer herself to you, like a temptation...”

The old man began to cry...

And being, as he was, the chief of the tribe, a man of experience, whose legend continued to inspire the enthusiasm of those who had heard of his adventures in war, many people began to imitate him, upon seeing him cry.

The soldier of Pancho Villa clapped in rhythm with the music and the tears fell upon his rugged hands and were shattered by the brusque motion.

Satisfied with their theatrical triumph, the china poblana and the charro danced intoxicatingly. Then the orchestra had exhausted every rendition of the jarabe; however, because it appeared as if no one wanted to break the spell of that indescribable time, the musicians started all over again. The young lady, red with enthusiasm and fatigue, found even greater gracefulness for her movements in the heat of the climate of adoration which surrounded her. The young man—without any expression on his face, which would become sombre in a few moments—was firmly resolved to die before giving into to exhaustion.

Few had reflected on the strange figures that had appeared in that scene full of bright Mexican colors. Little Luis had been drawing closer and closer to his father, partly because he felt protected in the midst of that escalation of excitement and partly because there he found himself closer to the dancing that had captivated him so. Luis Alfaro, without realizing it and breaking with protocol, embraced the boy as if anything was permissible during that moment of effusion. The schoolboy observed the scene with a confused look on his face, but his confusion was minor in comparison to that of the other “foreigners” at the gathering. They were completely disconcerted because they could not comprehend such elation. They began to feel perturbed. It was all very peculiar for them: the music, the decorations, the very celebration itself. Each one understood love for one’s country in his own way: for the Italian, it was

Mediterranean passion, verbose exaggerations of beauty, legend and history in order to bedazzle the listener; for the Frenchman, it was a deeply rooted pride and concept of racial superiority that placed France above all other countries in the world; for the Pole, it was a sense of melancholy, which encapsulated the misfortunes of his people, subjected for centuries to the whims of the powers which had conquered them; and, for everyone else, their homeland was, there and now, from a distance, a sad memory, the recollection of a mother which one leaves behind in order to go in search of one's fortune and for whom one feels the pain that she wasn't rich enough to maintain us within that estate which would be preferred if it could provide the things offered by the new country, doled out with the native form of affection—hard work. Did they remember their homeland? Certainly. But only due to the obligation imposed by their love for their mother and the hidden vein of racial pride which responds, when confronting threats and injustice, with the mysterious, impulsive and momentary power of instinct. The Italian spoke fondly of his knowledge of Mussolini's prowess; applauding, as if they were his very own, the great singers of his people, or singing the praises of the thousands of beauties in the country of Italy. The Frenchman thought of his origins, his nationality, as if it was a certificate of individual superiority: to be French was to be a citizen of the world, just like a Roman in ancient times. But the French, the Italians, the Germans, all the European immigrants who formed that strange North American nationality placed their new country, sincerely or not, above all other admirations. In the case of an assault, they would defend her against their own brothers. Did the German-Americans not go to fight against the Central Powers in the Great War? And the same is true when celebrating some event related to their country of origin, which—when paying homage to the great men or important events of their new country—it is with the same tranquil

gesture, drawn from Saxon frigidity, with which they celebrate all of their joys, both public and private.

But this unhealthy love of the Mexicans who, when recalling their homeland, get so carried away by the memory of an overwhelming passion, the memory of a distant or lost goodness, they could not understand it. They could not comprehend it.

They would never be able to understand it, for the simple reason that a Mexican has never stopped being one; because of all the immigrants who lived on American soil, only he completely maintained his devotion, his love, his connection to his native land. Only he has not melted—nor will he ever melt—into the “melting pot” of which Uncle Sam was so proud; only he felt indifferent to that grand, hostile country which has always rejected him, which if it has provided him the day’s wages he was looking for, perhaps, did so with the haughty expression of one who gives to charity; however, he would never grant him access to his way of life, nor would he ever recognize him as a social entity nor accept him to the extent to which he has embraced the other foreigners. From this providential divorce—for México, which needs its children more than any other country, has found its salvation in the barrier which Yankee egotism has erected against Mexican immigration—has grown that phenomenon of the magic beacon, by which the greater the distance separating the children from their mother, the brighter her image becomes.

Now at the end of the program and as if those present at the fiesta were still not satisfied with the orgy of emotions which they had just enjoyed, someone, instinctively wanting to hear something new, original, from the patriotic “patrones” who had inspired those speeches, said, “We want to hear something from Don Luis!”

The invited speaker was inclined to refuse, but it seemed exceptionally cruel to him, an unspeakable egotism, a disruption during such a beautiful evening, to allow his hidden sorrows to prevail, which spoiled the emotions and the memories for him and only him.

He spoke without rhyme or reason, like someone who allows himself to be carried away by the current which springs forth from his soul; and, without even realizing it, his voice took on the emotional timbre of a farewell; and, before his eyes, he saw a picture of the backdrop of his new life.

“Don’t ever erase from your memories,” he said to his settlers and his guests, “the recollection of this evening. I am sure that it has been so intense that it will serve to forever reignite your love for our country. Do not forget that we have an obligation to love México above all else, to honor her, to live life in such a way that earning respect for ourselves is like earning respect for her. Let us learn from this experience in exile the lesson of becoming more Mexican than anyone else for having had to live beyond the borders of México. Let us take advantage of the lessons of pain and suffering that exile has taught us, knowing that there is no other country like our own, and with the hope that upon returning to our paternal home, we will find more warmth and affection there, not because they give us everything there, but because we carry it within ourselves, and it will cause the miracle of igniting the fire that lives hidden within us and that no one can see over there. México is going to appear completely different to us when we return. One cannot live so many years away from that which one loves most, from that which is most holy, most dear, without feeling as though many bonds have been broken, without breaking and resisting many things that seem so natural. But we must also better appreciate many other things of which we did not understand how valuable they were until we had lost them. We will praise the weather, the skies, the divine panoramas, the places ‘where we hid

memories which are flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood;’ and, along with them, we will exalt, with the asperity of a rose bush which protects its flowers with its thorns, the new appearances, the new customs, for which they will attempt to accuse us of being a misfit for living in our own home. México will have strange reservations for us. It will have changed to such a degree that, at times, we will not even recognize it. It has been our Fate to live in a time of transition, of vertiginous movements, of transformations so radical that it will inevitably appear as though it is not the same to us, because we hold, very deeply in our hearts, the image of what we have left behind. And when confronted with the strange looks we cast around us, someone will inevitably suspect that it is contempt or scorn that we are feeling...

“But no. It will be nothing more than the fact that we will not be able to understand those we left behind; and, they, suddenly, will not be able to understand us. But this will only be momentary and ours will prevail in the end. ‘Ours’ will be the love of work, of discipline, of order, and a disdain for anything which runs contrary to this strict notion of responsibility, full of sacrifice and obligation, dry and cold, void of all happiness, perhaps, but more humane and patriotic than that which controls our lives down south. We have paid dearly for this lesson. We have all lost something here. For some of you, that which is sweetest and worth the most. For others, the jovial, Mexican way of life. Only now do we understand that life is about responsibility, because we have witnessed this battle of all of the world’s people of the earth in which each individual is a soldier with the strict obligation to guard a position, a struggle which leaves no room for any other happiness than that of feeling that we march to the rhythm of the fight for the betterment of humanity, which begins with an individual’s wellbeing, with that of one’s family, with the decorum of those who depend on us, with the pride of knowing that we are centers of action from which radiates the movement that transforms work and ideas into vital and

constructive forces; and that we have not been, nor will we ever be, parasites who wait for a distant force, divine intervention, the government, the politicians, for everything.”

The guests were hanging on the speaker’s every word, and their enthusiasm, quelled for a moment, was converted into a reverent attentiveness. Luis’s words had been like a clarion call which had stopped the dispersion; and, throughout the hall, which had been previously turned upside down, not a single sound could be heard during his pause. Everyone leaned forward so that they wouldn’t miss a single syllable. Don Máximo made a hearing aid out of his hand, placing it behind the ear that heard the best. And even though he could not exactly make out or understand precisely what the “master” said, due to his deafness and the wine he drank, since it must have been something very interesting and definitive and undeniable, according to him, he went to great lengths to “listen” to the improvised speech.

Luis recognized the change; and, without regretting the course he had taken, somewhat far afield from the spirit of the fiesta, wanted his listeners to return to the carefree jubilee of their evening of nostalgia and joy.

“But, be that as it may,” he said, overcoming his pain, which forecast something else on the distant horizon. “How sweet it will be to return after such a difficult fight! One word captures and explains it all: to return from exile! To live with our people! To work for the good of our homeland! This ‘viva’ that I now utter, in the memory of that other famous ‘grito,’ the call for independence, will not be, when we set foot on our native soil, an empty threat or a barbarous explosion of raging warriors, but rather a filial and affectionate salutation which synthesizes a conscious and purified love and expresses the sentiments of all of those who, for having seen it from a distance, now know their country better. Viva México!”

With those magical words, the smoldering heaping blaze burned with greater ferocity than ever before. Men and women, on their feet, with their faces contorted with emotion, repeated those words with all of the strength in their lungs. The band played the national anthem and a burning martial wind blew through the hall, inflamed with pledges of love for their homeland, which filled their hearts with extreme happiness.

The applause and exclamations fell silent. The official celebration was now coming to an end. The guests started to break up in order to go enjoy the informal fiesta prepared on the outskirts of the farm.

* * *

From her bed, where she had been taken long before by her maid and her friends, who had also withdrawn to the house where they were going to spend the night, Ana María listened to the sounds of the fiesta, with Gabriela at her feet, like a faithful dog. It felt like the dream that she had at her fingertips for so long was about to be broken, without being fulfilled, the dream of the fiesta which she longed for with the stubborn desire of one who prays for a miraculous cure...

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ABSTRACT***LA PATRIA PERDIDA* O IMAGINADA: TRANSLATING TEODORO TORRES
IN “EL MÉXICO DE AFUERA”**

by

ETHRIAM CASH BRAMMER**December 2011****Advisor:** Dr. Renata Wasserman**Major:** English**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

One recent result of the Recovery of the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project has been the “rediscovery” of the novel *La patria perdida* (1935), written by acclaimed Mexican journalist Teodoro Torres while in exile in the United States. This novel is a kind of Mexican-American Horacio Alger tale, detailing the success story of Luis Alfaro, who is eventually able to create a utopian Mexican-American hacienda, called Buenavista, outside of Kansas City, Missouri.

Due to a number of important thematic inversions, *La patria perdida* stands in stark contrast to other early works of Mexican-American immigrant fiction, including novels like Daniel Venegas’s *The Adventures of Don Chipote: Or, When Parrots Breast-Feed* (1928) and Conrado Espinoza’s *Under the Texas Sun* (1926), which likewise document the experiences of Mexicans who fled north to the United States in order to escape the chaos created by the Mexican Revolution. However, unlike *Don Chipote* and *Under the Texas Sun*, which are essentially working class cautionary tales, warning Mexican compatriots against trying to find the American Dream north of the border, Teodoro Torres’s novel depicts the life of Luis Alfaro,

a landed Mexican rancher, who is very successful in his transition to his new community in the American Heartland.

Exposed to a much diminished degree of racial discrimination as compared to his working class counterparts, Don Chipote, Quico García and Serapio Quijano, Luis Alfaro has many Italian, French and other Western European friends and neighbors, who struggle with similar concerns about the assimilation of their middle class children growing up in the United States.

After Luis' wife Ana María becomes critically ill, her nostalgia for her place of birth inspires Luis to return to Mexico, only to discover that post-Revolutionary Mexico is vastly different from the Mexico which he and his wife had so adored. And unlike the protagonists in *Don Chipote* and *Under the Texas Sun*, who return to Mexico only after concluding that the racial discrimination they face will never allow them to achieve the American Dream, Luis eventually returns to the United States, reestablishing himself as the “patrón” of the Buenavista hacienda in order to create a kind of Mexican patriarchal utopia à la Ignacio E. Lozano's concept of “el México de Afuera.”

My doctoral dissertation will include a translation of Teodoro Torres's novel *La patria perdida*, accompanied by a scholarly introduction which will help the reader situate the text in its proper socio-historical context in addition to an introduction which discusses the theoretical principles used to address many important obstacles faced when rendering a translation of Torres's Spanish-language source text into the English target language which is both faithful and beautiful.

Because Luis Alfaro is part of the landed bourgeoisie, his narrated experience creates a context to explore different class assumptions within the Mexican-American immigrant

community as well as documenting the heterogeneous composition of the community itself. Likewise, the fact that much of the narrative takes place in Missouri, rather than the American Southwest, means that *La patria perdida*, first published in 1935, is one of the first works of fiction to document Mexican-American immigrant experiences in the Midwest.

Finally, because the novel concludes with Alfaro's successful transition to the United States or "el México de Afuera," Teodoro Torres's *La patria perdida* is an interesting work to explore the construction of national identity formation, as well as post-national and border theory within a critical framework, like that provided by Benedict Anderson in his work, *Imagined Communities*.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Ethriam Cash Brammer is a Chicano writer and scholar from El Cetnro, California.

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