

The appropriation of the words “America” and “American” to refer to the nation and people of the United States of America is more and more obviously resented by other people of the Americas. Simple, straightforward modifications of usage are proposed that can respond to these criticisms without totally abandoning historical terminology.

## A Rose by Any Other Name A Modest Yet Radical Proposal about “America”

John D. Studstill\*

Juliet: “Romeo, doff thy name; and for that name,  
which is no part of thee, take all myself.”

*Shakespeare*

For 200 years a name dilemma has added its weight to antagonisms that exist between various brands of Americans. To cite a recent expression of unhappiness from a Mexican sociologist:

It was not fortuitous therefore that American policy makers tended to use the name of the continent (“America”) as their own, providing us with a clue to the U.S. ideology of expansionism that was to become a major geopolitical project. If the Americans considered it their right to appropriate the term, it was not for semantic reasons. Perhaps they thought it their right because theirs was the first

successful independent process in the region.<sup>1</sup>

Notable in this quote is the author’s use of “American” in precisely the way that he wishes to condemn; this raises the very issue that he wishes to lay to rest—namely, that there were, and are, semantic reasons for the use of the term. Other scholars have confused the issue even more in attempting to justify current usage of the terms “America” and “American.” For example, “The United States is *in* the Americas, but America is *of* the Americas.”<sup>2</sup> I must confess that Langley’s distinction is lost on me and I would guess on most average citizens. Let us be straightforward and suggest that there are both linguistic and historical reasons for the

adoption of “America” to refer to the U.S. of A., just as there are similar reasons for referring to the United States of Mexico as “Mexico.” If so, then it is understandable that in the early days, once the name of the country had been chosen, citizens of the United States of America came to be known as “Americans” just as citizens of the United States of Mexico became “Mexicans.”

However, the question remains as to why the founding mothers and fathers deemed it appropriate to refer to the United States as being of “America” and not of “North America” only? Or, why not the “United States of the Western Atlantic?” As Valdés-Ugalde suggests, this usage may harbor the idea that these first 13 states would spread their newly independent and

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democratic system throughout the Americas. Did they think that it would spread by imitation or by force of arms? These are important historical questions the answers to which I can only sketch in lightly here. Mainly I will argue that it is now possible to modify current usage.

It seems most likely that simple ethnocentrism and a certain amount of linguistic inertia are at the heart of the failure to change usage in recent decades. During the nineteenth century, Manifest Destiny and an imperialist mentality expressed themselves in a more virulent form of ethnocentrism. Few U.S.-Americans concerned themselves with how

even Canadians have long resented the confiscation of a name that also belongs to them, but none has come up with an alternate terminology acceptable to all. William Stokes, in *Cultural Anti-Americanism in Latin America*, documents Latin American resentment in the expression “nuestra América,” used to distinguish their America from the United States.<sup>3</sup> Another writes that due to the imbalance of economic power, “it is not surprising that relations between Latin America and *Anglo-Saxon America* have been colored by frustration and resentment.”<sup>4</sup> (Emphasis added.)

It is not hard to understand these resentments when one recognizes both the

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Americans of other nations felt about our appropriation of their name. More recently, most U.S.-Americans have probably not felt a need to change their language because, though imperialist and ethnocentric attitudes have declined, most U.S.-Americans rarely came into sustained contact with people from other nations of the Americas until the last few decades. This terminology question becomes an issue most often when people marry, or work constantly with, Americans who are not U.S.-Americans and who bring it to their attention. The social sciences and creative literature are replete with evidence, however, that Latin Americans, other South Americans and

history of U.S. imperialism and the lack of respect in the North for Latin cultures. In fact, there is still a rather abysmal ignorance on the part of most U.S.-Americans about the history of the nations to the south beginning with Mexico, and about the history of U.S. involvement there. The historian Rippey reminds us, for example, how at the time of the U.S. invasion of Mexico in 1847, an event that led to the annexation of one-half of Mexico’s territory, “Men celebrated the Fourth of July by discussing such questions as the advisability of annexing Canada, Newfoundland, Cuba and Hawaii, and ‘Will Uncle Sam eventually rule the American continent?’”<sup>5</sup> How many

U.S.-Americans know that Latin Americans fought with the Thirteen Colonies against the British in the struggle for U.S. independence? The case of Francisco de Miranda who fought alongside the colonial revolutionaries in Florida is noteworthy.<sup>6</sup> Herrera reminds us that while in 1789 the United States had less than 4 million inhabitants, Latin America already had over 20 million; New York had a population of 12,000 but Mexico City had 90,000 and Havana 76,000.<sup>7</sup> How many recognize that U.S.-Americans, not Mexican-Americans, were the first illegal immigrants to Texas in the 1820s? For that matter, do we remember that these illegals and Mexicans fought together against General Santa Anna for Texan independence or that the first vice president of Texas was Lorenzo de Zavala, a Mexican writer.<sup>8</sup>

But there are other aspects of this history that also need emphasizing: Ulysses S. Grant, Abraham Lincoln and H.D. Thoreau all opposed the 1847 war. Lincoln attacked Polk saying, “The war with Mexico was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally started by the President.” Thoreau was jailed for his protests.<sup>9</sup> One may find most clearly an early proponent of a thesis parallel to that of the present article in the writings of Domingo Sarmiento, an Argentinian exile in Boston in 1847 and a friend of Horace Mann. In the conclusion of his *Conflicto y Armonía de las Razas en América* (Conflict and Harmony of the Races in the Americas), he wrote:

Let us not hamper, as many in effect propose, the forward march of the United States, but rather let us try to catch up with it. As all seas are “the ocean,” let the

whole hemisphere become “America.” Let us all be “United States.”<sup>10</sup>

While Sarmiento may be dated by his racist attitudes towards non-Euro-Americans, I do not believe he meant to promote U.S. imperialist domination, and he seems modern in advocating a pan-American and pluralistic unity beyond the narrow nationalistic and ethnocentric prejudices of his day—and ours. Another expression of solidarity worth remembering comes from the pen of Eduardo Frei, former president of Chile. He writes, “to our friends, the people of the United States, likewise a part of our Great America, with whom we wish a real association based on genuine equality.”<sup>11</sup> Recent events such as the signing of NAFTA mark, one may hope, a turn towards these sentiments and away from the policy of military interventionism that has characterized much of twentieth-century U.S. policy. Of course, implementing NAFTA in a spirit of equality, mutual respect and a concern for the prosperity of all classes is the key to continued progress.

Although new vocabulary by itself will not overturn ethnocentric and domineering attitudes, one may hope that as such attitudes do begin to change, modifications in terminology will support the process. U.S.-American sociologists have made reference at least since the 1950s to this general area of concern—though without proposing adequate solutions. In fact, the problem of national names is a favorite example in a number of basic U.S. sociology texts for illustrating the concept of ethnocentrism. Broom and Selznick, in the third edition of their popular textbook, define ethnocentrism as “the feeling that one’s own culture is

the best in all respects.”<sup>12</sup> They continue with the notion that “in its less virulent form ethnocentrism appears as a cultural nearsightedness,” something akin to nationalism or chauvinism of which almost everyone is somewhat guilty. They specifically recognize that Latin Americans resent our proprietary use of “America,” “a word that belongs to them as much as to us.” They note that this contributes to the creation of a repertoire of unflattering terms that Latins use for us, including Yankee and Gringo and some unprintable others. Finally, they admit that their own book, while trying to be sensitive to these problems, also “falls into ethnocen-

little change has occurred since Broom and Selznick’s invitation was made.

The Americans of these other nations refer to us as, and wish we would call ourselves, North Americans. Because we have been using the word Americans for over 200 years and there is no identifiable, easily used alternative, this form of self-identification will no doubt remain.<sup>14</sup>

But this statement needs some correction. “North American” is not a good replacement term since Mexico and Canada are also in North America. But is it so impossible to find a convenient alternative? Before making a proposal, it is important to remark that changing names

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tric terminology” in the use of “Americans” to refer to nationals of the U.S.A. They conclude with the following challenge:

From the standpoint of the “America” there is no convenient, neutral, all-purpose word that is the natural and readily understood private property of citizens of the United States of America. The reader is invited to think of one, and to think of another country in the same predicament.<sup>13</sup>

A statement discussing this same example in relation to ethnocentrism in a current sociology textbook demonstrates that

of nations to fit the shifts in political and cultural realities is hardly a problem unique to the Americas. Furthermore, new terminology is constantly needed in order to remain up-to-date and correct, politically or otherwise. In the U.S. a corporate executive was recently reported to have said something like, “I’m just getting used to Hanukkah and now I have to deal with Kwaanza.” This might seem somewhat humorous from the U.S.-Euro point of view, but not so much from the U.S.-Afro or the U.S.-Jewish perspective considering the ethnocentrism that it implies. Many nations of the ex-Soviet Union have just been through the throes of wrenching name changes and identity crises. There

was the question about whether the correct name of an ex-Soviet state should be "Ukraine" or "The Ukraine." This was settled in favor of "Ukraine" because the other usage suggests its old subordinate and provincial status.

The concept of ethnocentrism is very useful because it allows us to separate the vocabulary problem we are analyzing from the problem of U.S. imperialism. To condemn all U.S.-Americans as imperialists and racists for using the term "American" only serves to make many people angry and defensive; they feel this is unreasonable and exaggerated. This is understandable. What is more reasonable is to identify such usage as ethnocentric, but rather excusable from a linguistic point of view. Then one can cite with more conviction the truly imperialist military incursions and true racism that have characterized much of U.S. and, for that matter, world history. Mark Twain was a leading opponent of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines. Should he be condemned for using the expression "Spanish-American War?" One might as well condemn Mexicans for calling their country Mexico, since it imposes a name of Aztec origin on people of Mayan and other ancestry.

The major point that needs to be made, however, is that there are viable alternatives that can be adopted in response to Broom and Selznick's challenge and charge of ethnocentrism. It is time to do so to demonstrate rejection of both imperialism and ethnocentric language. The term "America" should be used to refer to North and South America together; a replacement for "America" of current usage is simply "U.S.-America." An alternative for "American" is no more difficult; United Statesian is a pos-

sibility, but probably less palatable than "U.S.-American." I have found these terms very easy to adopt, as I believe I have already illustrated in this article. These changes, however, make it necessary to also consider new terms for ethnic groups within the United States just at a time when we are moving away from race-based terms like "black, white, red and yellow." A full treatment of this issue would require another paper, but I will summarize quickly a few recommendations. I believe, it would be well to substitute U.S.-Euro for Euro-American, to substitute U.S.-Afro for African-American, U.S.-Asian for Asian-American, etc. It requires only a little more effort to say, "She's U.S.-Afro" (or when the context is clear, she's Afro) than "she's black" and less effort than to say "she's African-American." We've already dropped "he's a red man" or "she's yellow;" it's time to bid farewell to all these color terms. The term "Native American" is still valid in a generic sense applied to the Americas, but to refer specifically to "Native Americans" from the United States of America "U.S.-Native" seems preferable or even "U.S.-Indian," since some U.S.-Natives still prefer the old name. "Indian" continues to be ambiguous, however, and is becoming more problematic since there are now significant numbers of Asian Indians who are also "U.S.-Indians." Most U.S.-Natives, U.S.-Asians and U.S.-Latins still identify themselves by tribe or nation and can thus be best referred to more specifically as, for example, U.S.-Cheyenne, or U.S.-Chinese or U.S.-Cuban.

In a song like "God Bless America", or "America, the Beautiful," there is no need for change. Future generations may

happily think America refers to all nations of the Americas when they sing that, or they may simply recognize it as an archaic usage. Other historically imprinted terms will no doubt remain. The Spanish-American War of 1898 should be called the U.S.-Spanish War in the future, but such change is difficult to implement quickly. A current example of a name that has so far been kept for historical reasons and despite change in usage is "N.A.A.C.P." (for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in the U.S. Although most U.S.-Afros have dropped the use of the term "colored" in most contexts (and I believe "people of color" is also a term that should be on the way out), it remains in titles such as this. It seems advisable, however, to immediately change the name "Mexican-American War" of 1847 to the "U.S.-Mexican War."

The modification of names generally reflects a change in concepts, attitudes and even ideology. Adoption of new terms is one way to promote a new way of thinking, and, of course, that is what is being proposed here. Whether we U.S.-Americans like it or not, South, North and Central Americans will continue to resent our use of the term America in its old, restricted sense and will continue to remind us of how they feel, either overtly or covertly. Future generations will no doubt more readily adopt the changes; this essay is offered as encouragement to them. But no one can impose language changes of this type nor create them by decree. The French have tried desperately for years to counter the gradual infiltration of English terms into their language but this appears to be a losing battle. On the other hand, there is little danger of the French losing

the war. Without more drastic sociopolitical change, English is unlikely to conquer French the way French conquered the Germanic and Celtic dialects spoken in the British Isles before 1066. Is modern English not the bastard offspring of Norman/French and Anglo/Saxon come back to haunt its grandparent? What one may quickly conclude from reflections about the evolution of English and French is that whether or not the proposed changes in contemporary U.S. English are eventually adopted will depend on little understood forces, among which, of course, are relationships of power and dominance or equality and respect.

The larger question is whether these proposed linguistic changes will be reflected in changes in attitude, behavior and policy toward our neighbors. The twenty-first century is upon us and no longer can the United States pretend to dictate what kinds of government will prevail in the

Americas. It seems unlikely that the U.S. Marines will invade either Mexico, Cuba or Nicaragua again anytime soon. Neither will it be *a la mode* to foment coups d'états again in Guatemala or Chile. It is not even outside the realm of the possible that Mexicans would seek to get back the territory taken by the U.S. in the last century (witness the recreation of the state of Israel after two millennia). But if we in the U.S. cannot give back so readily land that was seized, at least we can give back names that have been expropriated.

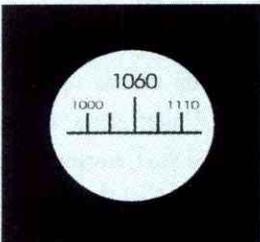
Though one must avoid carrying the Shakespearean metaphor too far, and while certainly many other Americans will not agree with Juliet that "tis but thy name, that is my enemy," still, we U.S.-Americans need not continue to refer to ourselves as the only "Americans." Our country, by less ethnocentric names may still smell about the same, but maybe to some neighbors it will smell a little less offensive. **MM**

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> José Luis Valdés-Ugalde, "Racism and Early U.S. Foreign Policy," *Voices of Mexico* 36 (Mexico City: July-September 1996), pp. 23-27.
- <sup>2</sup> L.D. Langley, *America and the Americas* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1989), p. xvi.
- <sup>3</sup> W.S. Stokes, "Cultural Anti-Americanism in Latin America," in G.L. Anderson, ed., *Issues and Conflicts: Studies in 20th Century American Diplomacy* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1959), p. 322.
- <sup>4</sup> Felipe Herrera, "Inter-American Economic Relations" in William Manger, ed., *The Two Americas* (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1965).
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted in William Manger, "1175 Years of Progress and Problems," in William Manger, ed., op. cit., p. 9.
- <sup>6</sup> J.A. Balseiro, *The Americas Look at Each Other*, Muna Muñoz Lee, trans. (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1969), p. 41.
- <sup>7</sup> Herrera, op. cit., p. 96.
- <sup>8</sup> Balseiro, op. cit., pp. 50-51.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- <sup>11</sup> Eduardo Frei Montalva, "Foreward," in William Manger, op. cit., p. x.
- <sup>12</sup> L. Broom and P. Selznick, *Principles of Sociology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 57.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- <sup>14</sup> G.J. Bryjak and M.P. Soroka, *Sociology: Cultural Diversity in a Changing World*, 2nd ed. (Needham, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, 1995), p. 57.

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# Politics Is Not an Entertainment Event

## Scenarios in the Clinton Case

Juan Pablo Córdoba Elias\*

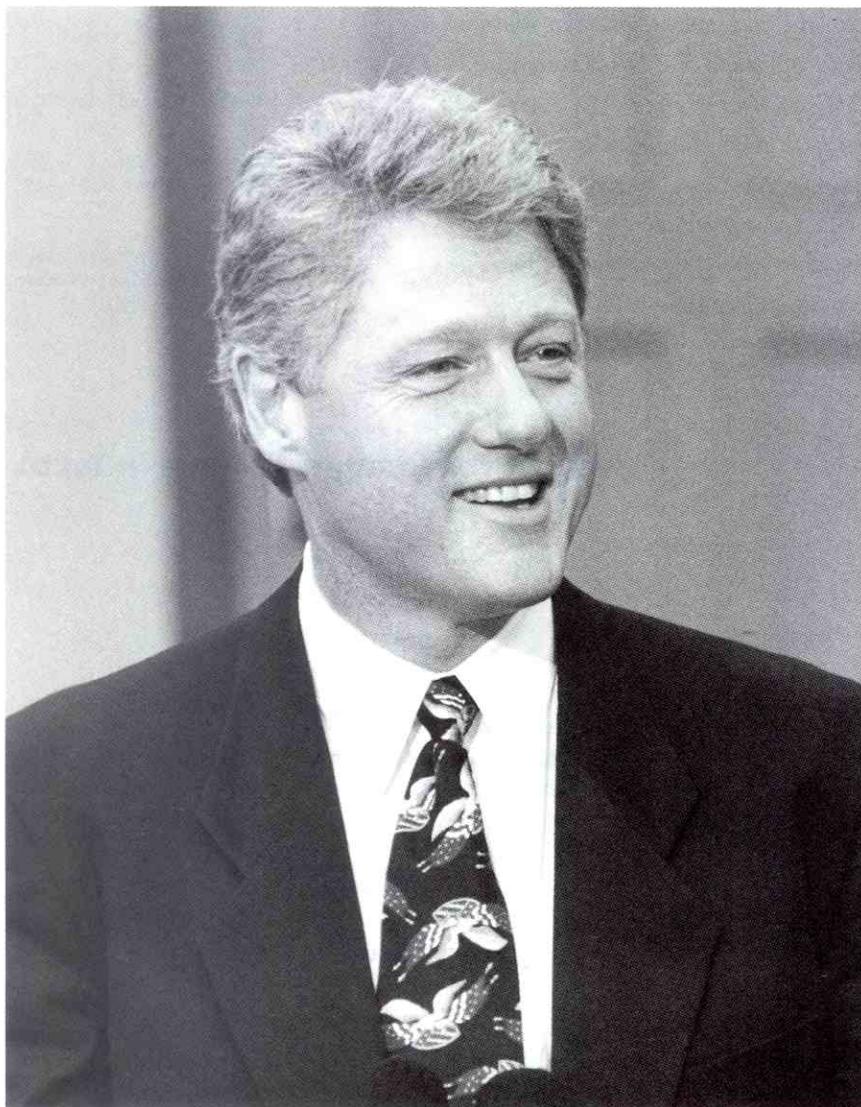
If men were angels, no government would be necessary.

If angels were to govern man, neither external nor internal controls in government would be necessary.

James Madison

**Federalist Papers**

No. 51 (1788)



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Oscar Amerringer writes that politics is the art of obtaining money from the rich and votes from the poor, on the pretext of protecting one from the other (Colin Bowles, *Wit's Dictionary*, 1984). Today we could add it is also the tactic of obtaining legitimacy from other people's work and credibility from the majority opinion, on the pretext of safeguarding each side's moral conscience.

In politics, no player can be greater than the game itself. On the other hand, the game is more attractive and explicit the greater the contenders' intelligence and skills—expressed in the results of the challenges—based on criteria used by the founders of the United States of America when they drafted the Constitution as the supreme law of the land and which as of 1790 was accepted by the 30 states that joined the union.

The rules are established before the game begins, and it is important that they

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be clear and few in number, but that they especially guarantee the players equal opportunities to win. Problems arise when the rules are undermined or modified in mid-game; they are subject to interpretation by those under whose jurisdiction they fall and when some of the players arbitrarily narrow the previously-agreed-on playing field where their adversary is acting.

Several lessons that bring together both irony and the seriousness of the sociopolitical effects of this situation can be noted in the political/media development of the events surrounding the U.S. chief executive in recent months.

The first lesson is framed by the end of the Cold War, which changed the socio-cultural landscape of U.S. society. This is particularly the case on two levels, which share a passion for the meticulous staging of entertainment for public consumption but at the same time seek objectives in different fields. On one level, the target consists of appropriating products by selling illusions: the film industry's market. On the other level, there is an attempt to appropriate consciences with the pretext of offering realities: the political market.

Whoever wins on the first level increases his particular collection of objects; whoever makes it on the second level boosts his or her collection of followers. But on the other hand, whoever has failed in the former, simply has made a bad business deal, but whoever loses in the latter affects the expectations of millions of people.

Lately U.S. cinema has fed off a web of apocalyptic visions in which the foreign enemy has been supplanted by aliens. Meanwhile, domestic politics, as a consequence of openly biased news-informational coverage in a good part of the

media, in cahoots with influential political circles (perhaps less creative in their arguments, but more dangerous with respect to the impact of their decisions) and given the absence of external enemies, has sought such an enemy, no matter what, on the home front.

The situation lacks historical originality. All great empires have succumbed before internal adversaries, falling apart from within. What Alexander Hamilton or James Madison were unable to anticipate, for obvious reasons, was the scale of technological development that places political work under daily public scrutiny. In short, what throughout recent months President Bill Clinton's detractors insist on denying is that people can go about their daily business, and even support or dissent from the relevance of the story, the cast, and the truthfulness of the script, but seem to resist denying the concrete evidence, that this entire synopsis that merges moral and legal virtualities is nothing more than a staged situation whose consequences might well crash into their lives.

#### POLITICAL SUBSTANCE AND PUBLIC OPINION: THE FACTS

To understand public support for the Clinton administration (in other words, the reasons that made for a political mood in which the public makes a distinction between approving the president's performance, regardless of whether they agree with his record, and his private life, or in any case, the effects of his pronouncements when confronted with frankly implausible news coverage) some clarifications are needed.

President Bill Clinton's socioeconomic strategy has three mainstays: reducing the

deficit, investing in social programs that benefit the population, and opening markets to place U.S. products abroad. The results speak for themselves: 14 million new jobs, the largest reduction in unemployment levels since the 1970s, the most significant declines in inflation in the past 30 years and policies that have managed to spur the highest sustained economic growth rate in the decade, backed by a reduction in the public deficit, which has gone from 290 billion dollars in 1993 to just 10 billion dollars in February 1998.

This has allowed not only for producing the first balanced budget in 30 years, but also favors the objective conditions for unprecedented public investment earmarked for assistance and social security programs, retirement funds, health insurance and especially for shoring up the educational system. These factors, plus the continual decline in crime rates in a general climate marked by peace and moderation in public discourse, rising above radical ideological stances, help us understand why there is a gap between the information proffered by the media and statistics provided by those in charge of surveying public opinion. Furthermore, if we base our judgments on the results of the polls, it seems clear that the U.S. public's perception is oriented toward making a priority of the key questions in the world of politics.

#### THE GAME OF POLITICAL INTERESTS MASKED IN LEGAL PHRASEOLOGY: IMPEACHMENT

To understand what is at stake as the basis for a process that brings together political realities and legal virtualities, it is necessary

to indicate the meaning of the deliberate vagueness in the wording of articles in the Constitution that define the division between jurisdictions, as well as the specificities in the attributes and limits of the different branches of the U.S. government.

Article II, section 4 of the U.S. Constitution states, "The president, vice-president, and all civil officers of the United States, shall be removed from office on impeachment for, and conviction of, treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors." In other words, the legal foundation for impeachment proceedings is established on the basis of the relation between evidence and facts, in strict accordance with the causal link that would turn a possible offense by the executive branch

into a danger to the institutionality of the political system or public order.

What is important to emphasize is that, beyond a careful reading of the constitution, the nature of the accusation should be put into context, unless we wish to argue that Bill Clinton has offended the American nation as a whole—to whom he has repeatedly offered his apologies—more than his own family, with everything they have had to specifically deal with, or unless we consider the institutional debacle of the presidency's image, with all the resulting collateral fractures within the system, added to the recurring chain of international financial crises incited by rumors of a possible resignation, to be a reasonable cost to pay for something that, in the

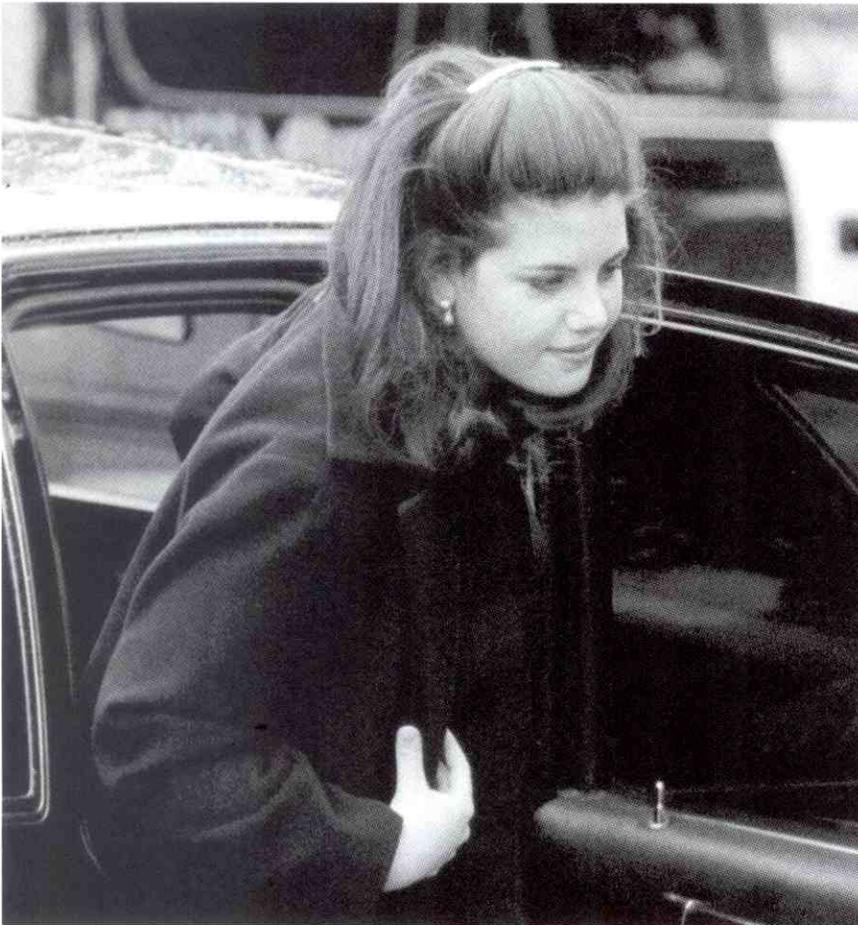
strictest sense, is only part of the president's private life.

When it is said that the president lied concerning having had sexual relations, what is not specified is that the vagueness of the terms in which the question was posed gives rise to ambiguity in possible answers. Any law student knows that the burden of proof lies with the accuser. If I make a charge, I must provide proof; if I question, I must define; this is the essence of the guarantees granted by the legal system to maintain equal conditions among parties.

Even if we were predisposed to justify the motives that led Kenneth Starr to publish a report that adds soap opera-like melodramas to descriptions more worthy of a pornographic lampoon than a legal document, we cannot fail to suspect that making a priority of a sexual scandal, when the objective of the formal accusation is to begin impeachment proceedings, only serves to hide the inconsistency of the legal argument and the inquisitorial character of a persecution that has taken several years and millions of taxpayers' dollars.

With respect to the alleged obstruction of justice, it is worth inquiring if the president's silence about all the facts takes on the character of evidence, or what is the same thing, if what was not presented can be used as evidence, or finally, if what has been fabricated by wild imaginations can be introduced as evidence.

Looking at the other side of the coin undoubtedly the president has been denied his right to a hearing. The timing with which the report was presented to the House of Representatives has also been manipulated with the aim of blocking a prompt response from the Oval Office staff. At the same time, this contributed to



Monica Lewinsky, main witness in the case.

creating a climate of suspense that keeps public opinion morbidly fascinated and sustains the ambitions of the president's political enemies. All this emanates from a case based on declarations of a witness whose credibility is openly in doubt. She is a perjurer opening the door to accusing another citizen of perjury, with a prior negotiation of immunity.

In brief, in the U.S. legal system, everyone is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Therein lies the seriousness encompassed by the negligent verbal and written pyrotechnics with which the legally unsubstantiated accusations are embellished, based on the deliberate oversight of this inherent principle of U.S. law, and on the other hand, the constant invasion of the privacy, the respect and dignity of a president and his family, which independently of their political qualities, continue to have rights as individuals.

FUTURE EVENTS:  
BETWEEN THE POSSIBLE  
AND THE PROBABLE

*The Political Sphere.* The legal process that could lead to impeachment proceedings began with the preliminary review conducted by the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, comprised of 21 Republicans and 16 Democrats. The expected procedure is for the committee to call witnesses and hold hearings, based on the argument of the need to clear up relevant aspects of the case, that function as vehicles for airing the advantages and disadvantages of continuing the tactic of weakening the presidential image in an effort to buttress an image with little moral credibility in the profile that the Demo-

cratic candidates will present leading up to the November elections, when part of the seats in the House of Representatives will be up for election.

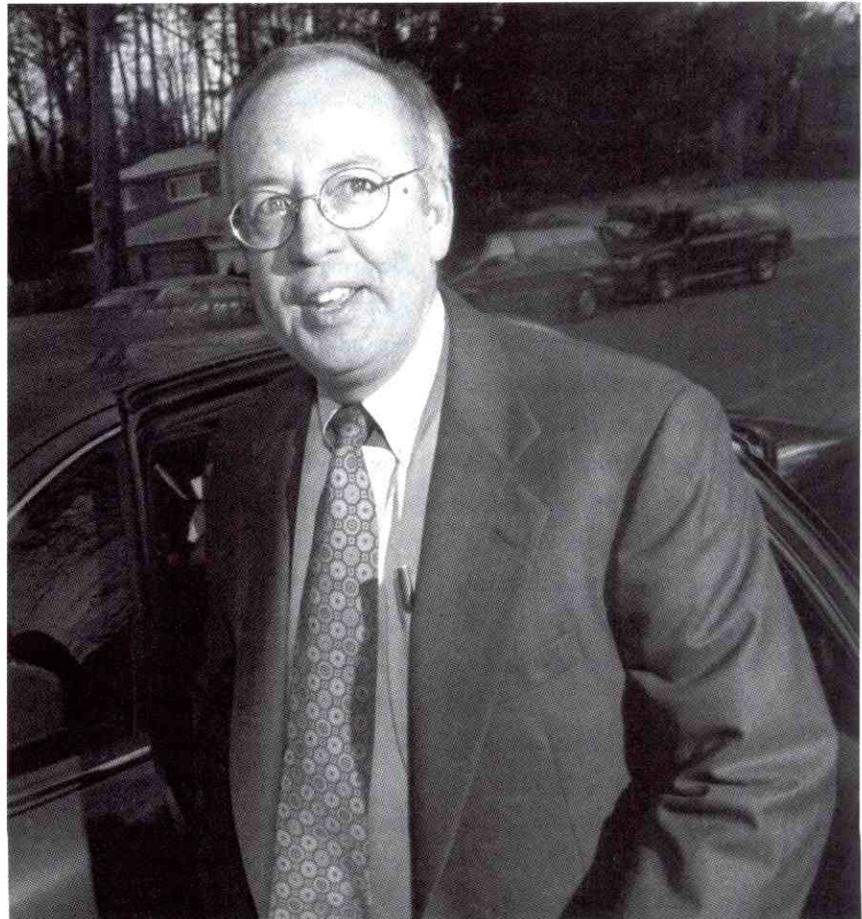
If this happens, after January a date will probably be chosen in which the case will be brought to a vote in the House, in which only a simple majority is required to approve an investigation. Later, the issue will be placed before the Senate, where the law stipulates that a two-thirds vote of the 100 senators is needed to depose a president.

In the past, 16 such impeachment proceedings have taken place: most of the accused have been judges. Only one—in May 1868—involved a president in office, Andrew Johnson, accused of obstructing

the reunification of the nation following the Civil War. The procedure made it through the House of Representatives, but when it was submitted to the Senate the president won by one vote.

A second reading would take into consideration the induced, but no less real, weakness of the presidential image, revealed as an inevitable breakdown of the institutional leadership and strength indispensable for controlling effective margins of negotiation, particularly in the framework of the most serious financial crisis in the era of the globalization of finance capital and the opening of the emerging economies.

Here the situation, in fact already present, could enter into a phase of continuous tension produced by the paradox fac-



Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr.

ing those legislators who call for the president's resignation or are harboring the idea of impeachment proceedings, but who have shown themselves incapable of creating the ideal mechanism for withdrawing support for the president without provoking adverse effects at the polls.

Using the argument of safeguarding national interests over and above partisan positions, Clinton will probably be urged to offer an apology to the House of Representatives, which would respond by censuring his behavior.

Another reading involves the scenario wherein, if the effects of the media campaigns on the issue result in a drop of public support for the chief executive—something that has basically not happened so far, but which could slowly take place as a result of the public being oversaturated with the question—are added to the narrow room for maneuver available to the president to carry out his governmental plans, could poison the political climate to the degree that Bill Clinton might decide to resign.

He might do this before submitting to a humiliating trial which, as he knows better than anyone else, would have no legal substance. This would set a precedent of unimaginable scope in terms of the political influence that the radical conservative interest networks are capable of exercising. Through running an irresponsible media campaign, they have organized and maneuvered the time frames in this gigantic theater of simulations.

*The Legal Framework.* Any public official can be subject to impeachment, except a member of either of the houses of Congress. Filing the charges is an exclusive prerogative of the House of Representatives and the trial that follows, a prerogative of

the Senate, where a two-thirds vote is needed to pass an impeachment motion.

It is important to emphasize that Vice President Al Gore, even though constitutionally the president of the Senate, would not preside in the event of an impeachment trial of Clinton. This function would fall to the president of the Supreme Court, William H. Rehnquist.

The line of presidential succession is the following: 1) Vice President Al Gore; 2) the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, (Republican); 3) the president pro tempore of the Senate—in this case, the logical candidates would be the majority leader and his alternate, Republican Senators Trent Lott and Don Nickles; 4) Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright; 5) Secretary of the Treasury Robert E. Rubin; 6) Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen; 7) Attorney General Janet Reno; 8) Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt; 9) Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman; 10) Secretary of Commerce William M. Daley; 11) Secretary of Labor Alexis M. Herman; 12) Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson; and 13) Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley.

In sum, if the political interests of those who insist on impeaching the president prevail, Al Gore would fulfill to the letter of the law amendment 25, section 1, which clearly states that if the president is removed from office, dies, or resigns, the vice president will occupy the post.

However, the way events have evolved leads to considering other possibilities beyond the legal sphere.

*The Options.* It should be remembered that Vice President Al Gore has a trial pending for illegal management of funds during the last presidential campaign. Attorney General Janet Reno has even

been strongly questioned for having refused to approve an independent prosecutor to investigate the case. Given the current situation, if the president resigned, there is nothing to guarantee that the same political group that has promoted impeachment of Clinton would be satisfied with his removal and would not seek to negotiate the vice presidency in case Gore becomes president.

If we consider the second scenario—a Republican Congress and vice president—the prognosis is not difficult: limitations on the presidency and a situation of un-governability.

But President Clinton can still play cards that have proven effective in the past. Let us examine three options that flow from a careful reading both of his statements as well as of those heading up his defense in the media.

The first option can be deduced from observing that during recent months, and taking into account the evolution of the scandal, the first lady's image has become marginal. With the exception of a television appearance in January supporting her husband and motivated by the suspect publicity already emerging at the beginning of the Lewinsky case, the defense of the president by his own wife resulted in a more than notable increase in the president's popularity. However, following that television appearance, Hillary Clinton has practically disappeared from public life.

It is worthwhile to recall that in her comments, the first lady denounced the scandal as a plot against her husband and named names: Jerry Falwell; the Republican senators from North Carolina, Jesse Helms and Lauch Faircloth; and of course, Kenneth Starr.

To assume that from late January to today this list has not gotten longer, or that the Oval Office's own investigations concerning the case have not continued, would be the height of naiveté. Most likely, the White House is preparing an offensive headed up mainly by Hillary Clinton. While she had previously been recognized for her intelligence and ability, discretion will now be added to these qualities. It is logical to conclude that there will be an increase in general sympathy for Clinton as a result of the dignity and character with which Hillary has faced the attacks on herself and her family.

The second option is derived from the presidential tactic of offering repeated apologies to the American people, producing an extremely conciliatory image by including Miss Lewinsky in them. If we

add the leaks that are beginning to take place concerning the questionable moral integrity of the private lives of some of the accusers, the most sensational of them involving the president of the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, everything seems to indicate that a meticulously compiled informational packet is ready and waiting for the right moment to be released.

This would free the president from any suspicions of vengefulness and, at the same time, would show the world the true motives and names of those who mounted and today sustain the campaign against him.

The third option has already been foreshadowed by the media silence following the U.S. reprisal for the terrorist acts against two of its embassies. This tactic

has the advantage of following in the footsteps of other U.S. presidents who built up a common front around them, on the pretext of safeguarding the interests that affect national security as a whole. It would not be strange, then, to expect military deployment in the not-too-distant future with the very objective of fabricating a climate of nationalist cohesion around the president.

These options may move forward simultaneously or in different ways and at different times. The fact is that, contrary to what some take for granted, and given the possibility that some of the players, thinking they were moving ahead, perhaps have only rushed matters or even gone overboard in their pressure to conclude the case, the signs indicate that this game still has a lot to offer in the future. **MM**

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REVISTA LATINOAMERICANA DE ECONOMÍA

Publicación trimestral del  
Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas  
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO

VOL. 29

113

abril-junio 1998

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# Michoacán

## Discovering the Familiar

Marcela Segura Coquet\*

Pottery is one of Michoacán state's outstanding craft traditions. Rooted hundreds of years in the past, it has managed to retain its essence down through the centuries. Certainly it has diversified, but techniques as old as burnished<sup>1</sup> and smoothed pottery continue to endure. From them have flowed new designs and styles that are the predecessors of contemporary pottery.

We would need a whole book to explain the wealth of Michoacán ceramics. The infinite number of techniques, processes, designs and finishes make an

excursion into this world of clay a journey without end.

In Michoacán today, a great variety of items are made at high, low and medium temperatures, from the household *comal* used for grilling tortillas to totally decorated pots or strange, shapeless ornaments. They all have the seal and creativity of hands from Michoacán.



Photos by Dante Barrera

Above: Green pineapple from San José de Gracia.  
Below: A pot from Capula, detail.

Working in clay seems simple, but it requires great ability and knowledge. It comes in infinite variety; colors and textures vary by region, and each item is shaped with varying techniques and processes. The same clay processed in different ways yields very different results. Firing time, temperature, drying time and even climatic conditions all have an influence on this ancient, malleable material.

Among the oldest techniques is the one used to make *cocuchas*—very large, elongated pots stained with soot from being placed directly on a wood fire—named for the community where they are produced, Cocucho. Other techniques give us the burnished squashes from Zinapécuaro and the

\* Public relations coordinator, State of Michoacán House of Crafts.

*chorreadas* from Patamban. Huáncito and Ichán also produce jugs of burnished and smoothed clay, with a different finish.

On the coast of Michoacán, almost unknown to outsiders, the beautiful local pottery has simple forms and a pure design. In some cases it is decorated with the unique natural dye exuded by the purple-bellied snail. Creativity comes to the fore in making ceramic replicas of flora and fauna using only natural materials native to the region.

Tzintzuntzan, one of Michoacán's oldest religious centers located on the edge of Lake Pátzcuaro, produces pottery in the classical pre-Hispanic style, with geometric designs and frets. Today, some craftsmen produce designs fired at high temperatures in a style rooted in their traditions.

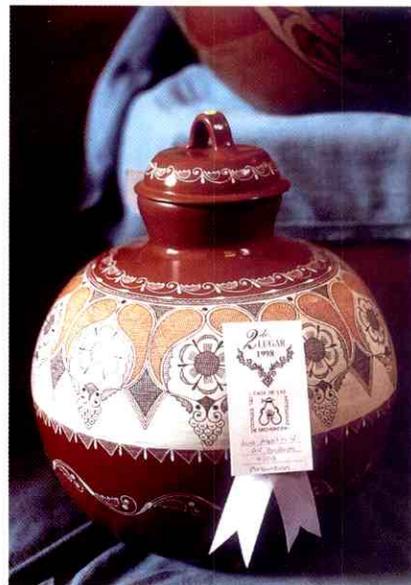
San José de Gracia is a community known for its green or yellow *vidriada* pineapples.<sup>2</sup> Decorated in innumerable ways, surrounded by flowers typical of Mexico such as the calla lily or the sunflower, particularly noteworthy in these pieces is the use of the technique called *pastillaje*, or decorating the piece with

small daubs of clay. In this process, the material's humidity is a basic factor: if it is very dry, the daubs crumble and if very humid, they change shape.

Santa Fé de la Laguna also produces *vidriada* pottery, but in black, and mainly punch bowls and incense burners, used frequently in ceremonies and festivities like the Day of the Dead. Candelabras for 7, 12 and up to 24 candles are a marvel to behold, covered with thousands of tiny flowers, frets and animals in relief.

Capula, only a few kilometers from Morelia, the state capital, produces sets of dishes and pots of different kinds. They are decorated with tiny dots of paint, thousands and thousands of dots that together take the form of brightly colored fish, flowers, animals and frets. At a distance the designs are perfect, but they are even more impressive when examined close up and in detail.

High temperature pottery is made in many communities today, such as Talpujahuá, Patamban, Morelia and Tzintzuntzan. What is incredible is that each place produces items that clearly identify the



Working in clay requires great ability and knowledge.



Cocuchas are made using one of the oldest techniques known.



Michoacan's world of clay is infinite in variety and techniques.



Polychromatic pottery from Ocumicho, a display of creativity and bright colors.

artist, the community and the region, and the design of which denotes the cultural heritage and experience spanning centuries. *Engobes*,<sup>3</sup> wax molds and other techniques make this pottery very special.

The polychromatic pottery of Ocumicho, a picturesque town far from the noise and concrete of the cities, stands out among relatively new designs and techniques. There, craftsmen make clay demons, religious figures and scenes of daily life. Their bright colors, creativity and innocence have been very well received by contemporary collectors. Particularly noteworthy are the "little hens of Ocumicho," which at first glance seem to be simple figures of little animals or demons dressed in costumes, but you lift up the clothing, you are surprised with erotic art!

All these objects are excellent examples of how innocence and a fertile imagination can combine to interpret the relationship between good and evil.

One of the communities that seems to have suspended the passage of time is Zipiajo, a small town which produces deep, round pots, sold individually or in

stacks. They can be used for storing rice or beans and are placed one on top of another. I call this a clay cupboard, because in addition to being attractive, they take up very little space. Here, we also find sets of griddles, from very large to tiny. Each griddle can be used to toast a different food: chili peppers, tortillas, grains of corn, lima and garbanzo beans, or even mamee pits, used by many women as mascara.

In Michoacán, artisans have given clay a language of its own to tell stories that only pottery can convey. **MM**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Burnishing consists of polishing by rolling the piece briskly while still fresh to close its pores and give it a natural sheen. See Gloria Cáceres, "Cerámica popular mexicana" in *Revista del CIDAP. Centro Interamericano de Artesanías y Artes Populares* 41-42 (November 1993).

<sup>2</sup> The *vidriado* technique consists of bathing an already fired piece with a lead-based enamel and firing it again to give it a shiny finish and make it more resistant and waterproof.

<sup>3</sup> The clay used to cover the unfired pot.



Capula produces sets of dishes and pots decorated with tiny dots of paint.

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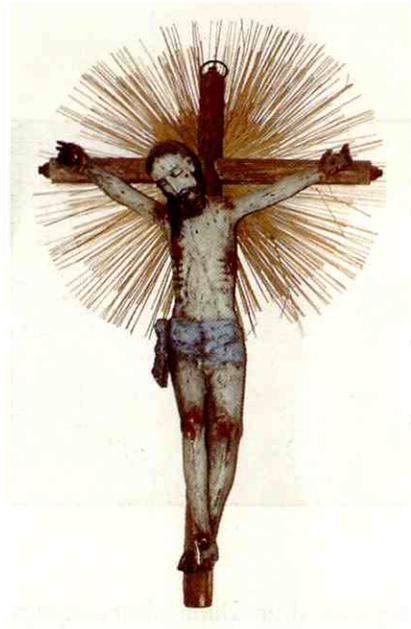
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Photos by Dante Barrera

## Cornstalk Paste and *Maque* Two Symbols of Survival

Many craft traditions in the world of Michoacán go back to pre-Hispanic times. Two notable cases are *maque*, or sumac lacquer, and cornstalk paste. The impeccable craftsmanship, mysticism and vitality their creators infused into the figures and objects made with these materials and techniques centuries ago still survive today.



Shortly before the Spanish arrived to Mexico, the Purépecha people had one of the most efficient and politically and socially best organized kingdoms in Mesoamerica.<sup>1</sup> The abundance and variety of natural resources allowed the Purépechas to make an infinite number of objects for religious and daily use, as well as trade. Periodically, the lords of the powerful Mexica empire carried out ferocious military campaigns to conquer them and take their riches, but they were never successful.

According to oral tradition,<sup>2</sup> the Purépechas used everything possible to fight their battles. The men—and if necessary, also the women and even the children—went to war taking their gods with them.<sup>3</sup> If luck was not with them, above all they had to prevent their gods falling into enemy hands. All this would have been impossible if the gods had been made of clay or carved out of stone or wood. That is why they were made with cornstalk paste, which was very light.

There is no proof that these figures ever existed, nor that the traditions have a basis in fact, but the Spaniards must have seen something on their arrival that



impressed them. During their campaign to spread the Gospel, the friars taught the indigenous peoples to make religious figures from the Catholic world—crucifixes, virgins and saints—using this

From before colonial times, *maque* objects like wooden trays and gourds, normally for daily use, were very sought after.

same technique and its novel materials. Despite the imposition of a new religion and the violence that often accompanied it, the indigenous people managed to preserve their profoundly mystical spirit and imbue these images with it to invoke a divine being.

The results can be seen in life-size figures of Christ made of cornstalk paste, some of which date from the sixteenth century, scattered in different towns in Michoacán. The images are of outstanding realism and beauty. Their fine texture looks like porcelain, but without its coldness, since they are covered with *maque*, or sumac lacquer, another technique dating from pre-Hispanic times, which consists of a covering of lime-leaved sage oil painted with natural pigments based on ground earth and local flowers applied with the fingers. This technique also waterproofs the surfaces, allowing the figures to withstand the passage of the centuries and conserve their original colors. From before colonial times, *maque* objects like wooden trays and gourds, normally for daily use, were very sought after. There are written records of references to the Spaniards' surprise at seeing the brightly



#### Previous page

**Above:** Seventeenth-century cornstalk paste crucifix.

**Below:** Platter with *maque* finish. Mario A. Gaspar, House of Eleven Patios, Pátzcuaro.

#### This page

**Above:** Cornstalk paste virgin before being painted with *maque*.

**Below and Right:** Gourds painted with *maque*, made by Don Mario A. Gaspar, House of Eleven Patios, Pátzcuaro.

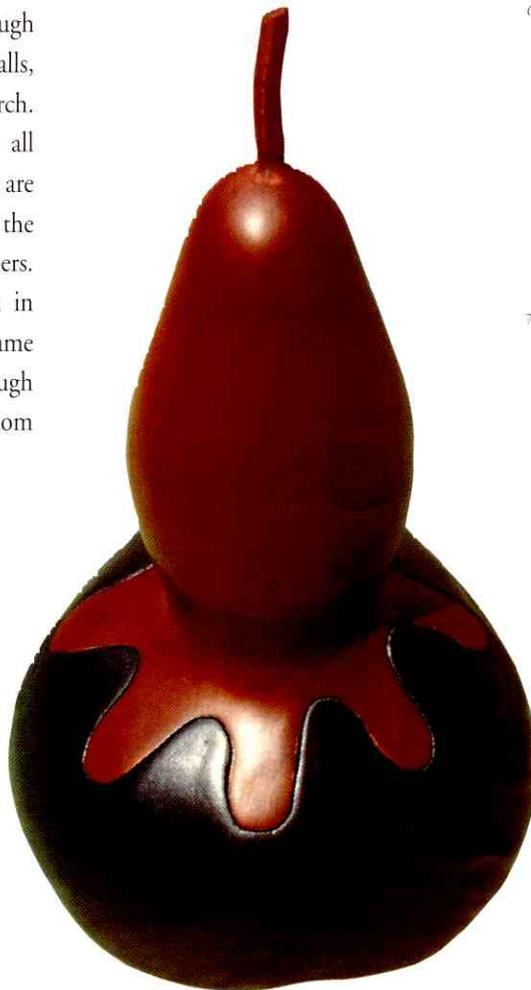
colored vessels in which the Aztec lords drank *chocoátl* (chocolate), gourds traded with the Purépecha region or brought as tribute.<sup>4</sup>

Myths and stories have arisen around the cornstalk paste Christ figures, which have become objects of veneration. Soledad Church in Tzintzuntzan<sup>5</sup> has a Christ dating from the sixteenth century; according to legend, it has grown. People say the proof is that its crystal and wood urn covering is now too small for it. The visitor can see that an addition has been made to the urn to accommodate the feet and that, on the other end, the figure's head bends toward its chest as though forced to.<sup>6</sup> This Christ is venerated and every Holy Week it is taken out of its urn, crucified and carried through the streets of the town until night falls, when a wake is held for it in the church. The ceremonies are very impressive: all night long the old-fashioned prayers are murmured and praises sung and the faithful carry thousands of lighted tapers.

Today, the craftsmen who work in cornstalk paste and *maque* use the same procedures their ancestors did. Although totally lost in some towns, the wisdom

passed down generation to generation is still practiced in Pátzcuaro.<sup>7</sup> The surprising thing about their work is that neither the passage of time nor modernity have brought the use of new materials in these figures and objects which need only the hands of their creator and the raw materials provided by nature in their area. But even more surprising is the power of artistic expression that, almost without intending to, Michoacán artisans of yesterday and today display. ■■■

Elsie Montiel  
Editor



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Purépecha kingdom covered part of what now the states of Colima, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, Mexico and Querétaro, totaling approximately 70,000 square kilometers, according to Carlos Romero Giordano's article "Un viaje hacia el pasado" in *Michoacán en sus manos, Guía México Desconocido* no. 36 (January 1998), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Much of the information in this article comes from an interview with Don Mario A. Gaspar, who now lives in Pátzcuaro and is one of the few craftsmen today who make figures in cornstalk paste and *maque*.

<sup>3</sup> Mesoamerican societies were theocratic. People lived and died according to the will of their gods, who ruled over all aspects of the universe and in whose hands the people placed their fate.

<sup>4</sup> Carlos Romero Giordano, "Tierra de Grandes Artífices" in *Michoacán en sus manos*, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Tzintzuntzan was the capital of the Purépecha kingdom before the Spanish arrived.

<sup>6</sup> And this is not the only known case. "With small images, very strange things happened. The Christ in San Francisco Church here [in Pátzcuaro] was straight and it moved. It pushed its hip out to one side and bent over. The beard almost reaches his chest. And the funny thing, or the strange thing, is that it didn't break anywhere. If I raise an arm on a figure, it breaks, but this one bent and there isn't a crack or anything. That's the mysterious thing about it, and it's made of cornstalk paste, too." Interview with Mario A. Gaspar (June 1988).

<sup>7</sup> In the city of Uruapan, there are also craftsmen who work in cornstalk paste, although with a different technique. According to Mario A. Gaspar, in Uruapan they use plaster, which makes the figure less resistant to humidity and more likely to crack or break.



Virgin made of cornstalk paste decorated with *maque*.

## The Miracle of Cornstalk Paste

Creating figures out of cornstalk paste is a laborious process requiring very precise knowledge of the material and the time needed between one step and the next. This only comes with experience. A single figure measuring 80 cm can take up to 18 months to complete and is usually only made on commission.

Today, private and public institutions are carrying out intense efforts to recover this technique, and that of *maqueado*, or sumac lacquering, where the tradition survives, like in the towns of Uruapan and Pátzcuaro in Mexico's state of Michoacán.

The first step in the process is to make a figure using peeled cornstalks, binding them together with cord and using a glue made by boiling prickly pear leaves. When the figure dries, the cord is removed. To give the figure the desired form, it is carved with a tiny wedge and then covered with a paste made from cornstalk pulp ground with wild orchid bulbs. The paste should be left to sit for several days in a clay pot; no metal recipients must be used. Later it is covered with cotton cloth and allowed to sit again; when it has exuded a layer of slime, it is uncovered. This process is very important since if it is not covered and uncovered at exactly the right time, the paste fills with worms or dries out and is useless.

To refine the figure and correct imperfections, the process is repeated; the leftover paste is ground twice more, making it finer and finer. By the third time, the paste is very fine. Its humidity level must be perfect; it can seem like it has spoiled with time, but it has not, and it is up to the artisan to know when it is just right. The finishing touches are made with this fine paste: the details on eyelids, nose, hands and feet, lips and the waves in the hair. The completely detailed figure must be left to dry thoroughly; otherwise it will rot and disintegrate. As it eliminates humidity, it becomes lighter; the finished, dry figure is very light, although it would not seem to be just by looking at it. To test whether it is ready, the craftsman weighs it in his hands.

Finally, the figure is lacquered with *maque*. The face and the hands are the most delicate part of the *maqueado* process because several layers are applied and that thickens the figure. The craftsman must take care that the expression is preserved and the nose, eyelids and fingers are not broken. When the figure is finished, he etches the date into it.

The result is always surprising, regardless of the level of technical perfection achieved; within every figure beats the heart of its creator and the memory of times past in which both —artisan and figure— were one.

**Source:** Explanations by craftsman Mario A. Gaspar Rodríguez, who has his workshop in the House of the Eleven Patios in the city of Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, and has been working almost 30 years in *maque* and cornstalk paste.

## A Timeless Craft

A trip to Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, necessarily includes a visit to the House of the Eleven Patios, a converted convent with exhibits of crafts from different parts of the state. On a quick tour, the *maqueados*, or sumac lacquered objects, could get lost among the abundance of other lacquered items. Often they are taken to be the same. However, the other kinds of lacquer began to be used with the influence of Asian art that came from trade between New Spain and China's *nao* vessels, while *maqueado* was already known in the land conquered by the Spaniards.

Today, the difference between them is marked. The lacquers have incorporated industrialized products: glues, varnishes and paints, and are applied with brushes. *Maque* work uses only natural products to cover wood with colors, and it can only be applied with the fingers.

*Maque* comes in five basic colors, obtained naturally and combined to create many others. Red is extracted from the cochineal grain; black from the soot formed under a griddle placed on the fire; yellow is made from the *cempasúchil* flower, species of marigold, or another plant known as "cow gut" that grows locally during the rainy season; for white there are many earth deposits to choose from and the good craftsman knows which is the best for dyeing; lastly, the indigo plant yields blue.

These colors and their combinations are made into a powder and applied on an oil base extracted from lime-leaved sage, which makes the wood waterproof and gives it its peculiar sheen. The colors cannot be applied simultaneously; the craftsman must wait for one to dry before applying another. Therefore, the more colors included on a piece, the longer it will take to finish. Twenty days, a month or two: it is never certain.

Painting the *maque* on by hand is the only way to know when a piece is finished and many applications are needed before the work is done.

But it is not only the technique that makes *maqueado* unlike any other art. Form, decoration, colors, texture and sheen express the harmony between artisan and his work, creating an irreplaceable, unique relationship between him and each piece he makes.

**Source:** Explanations by craftsman Mario A. Gaspar Rodríguez, who has his workshop in the House of the Eleven Patios in the city of Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, and has been working almost 30 years in *maque* and cornstalk paste.



Dante Barrera

# The Day of the Dead In the Lake Pátzcuaro Region



Reprinted courtesy of Alfredo Zalce

Alfredo Zalce, *Day of the Dead*, 104 x 122.5 cm, 1988 (oil on canvas).

Michoacán, where cultures merge, is one of the places with the greatest religious syncretism in Mexico, and therefore, with an immense wealth of ritual. Vasco de

Quiroga, sent to Michoacán after the conquistador Nuño de Guzmán was accused of gross cruelty to the Purépechas, was responsible for making it one of the places where the Christian gospel was most effec-

tively spread, and where it was also most completely combined with the rites and beliefs of the pre-Hispanic culture.

The ceremonies associated with the Day of the Dead in Michoacán, therefore,

although markedly Christian, also conserve much of the magical thinking of the pre-Hispanic world that says that the souls of the dead return on the nights of November 1 and 2 to receive offerings from the living. At this time of year, splendid offerings are placed on tombs, graced with the light from tapers and the intense orange-yellow of the *compasúchil* flower, a species of marigold. Voices raised in song and the peal of the decorated church bells can be heard when the darkness of night covers the souls of both living and dead. On the island of Janitzio, in addition, the lovers Mintzita and Taré, the Purépecha prince and princess who died before they could marry, are also remembered. Legend has it that they became the guardians of a treasure hidden in the depths of Lake Pátzcuaro surrounding the island.

November 1 is a day of celebration, mixed with a profound mysticism: a central part is the *teruscán*, organized pillaging in which boys run through town stealing ears of corn, squash, flowers and other products from fences and roofs. All this is later cooked by the adults in a kettle in the church atrium and distributed among the participants in the ritual. That night, a wake is held for the "little angels": as in the rest of Mexico, this consists of making an altar for *los muertos chiquitos*, children who have died. In Janitzio, their tombstones are adorned with flowers, toys and sweets in the hope that they will come back and consume the treats they liked the best.

In the community of Huecorio, this ceremony is carried out in people's homes beginning October 31, and the offerings to the children include toys from differ-

ent parts of the state, as well as the gifts they never received in life.

On November 2, the offering of the crops (*campen*) is made: a procession through the town collects donations, which are then taken to the church where the priest intones prayers for the dead.

In Pátzcuaro, the Day of the Dead has a more Christian than pagan connotation and most of the ceremonies take place in the churches: mass is celebrated and offerings are made and concerts given in the atria.

In Tzintzuntzan, the ancient capital of the Purépecha kingdom, the townspeople pass the night next to imposing pre-Hispanic and colonial buildings, common in



Sugar skulls are given as gifts on the Day of the Dead.

this region. In addition to floral arrangements and food, local crafts are included in the altar offerings, such as black *vidriado* dishes, white dishes, straw angels, fruit and carved wood. (This practice is also common in Ihuatzio, known for its straw

weaving.) Here, the women take charge, dressed in mourning, wrapped in their wide shawls, they keep order and arrange the offerings, singing through the night to Cutzi (the moon), praying for happiness for the living.

The ceremony in Janitzio, the most famous of the islands in Lake Pátzcuaro, is marked by the all-night singing in Purépecha; the candles are lit one by one, illuminating the embroidered tablecloths under the offerings, the nocturnal colors of the flowers and the tranquil figures of the living. The island of Jarácuaro, in contrast, is festive and noisy; dances to flute music under the great arches set inside the church symbolizing each of the town's neighbor-

hoods dominate the evening. Here, the whole town is decorated, but at dawn the offerings are removed from the tombs and taken into the church where praises are sung.

In Tzurumutaro, a town near Pátzcuaro, a unique ceremony is carried out: in the Agrarianism Museum, regional flowers and vegetables adorn an offering to General Lázaro Cárdenas, Mexico's president from 1934 to 1940, generally credited with the agrarian reform.

Participating in these ceremonies is a sacred duty to the dead. The ritual atmosphere and the profound respect for a ceremony to pray for peace for the souls of the departed and happiness for those still inhabiting this world are traditions that have not been lost in Michoacán and that demonstrate the immutability of magical-ritual thinking in this corner of our country. ■■■

**Taken from:** *Noche de muertos* (Morelia, Michoacán: Secretaría de Turismo del Estado de Michoacán, n. d.).

# Tlalpujahua

## A Corner of Michoacán

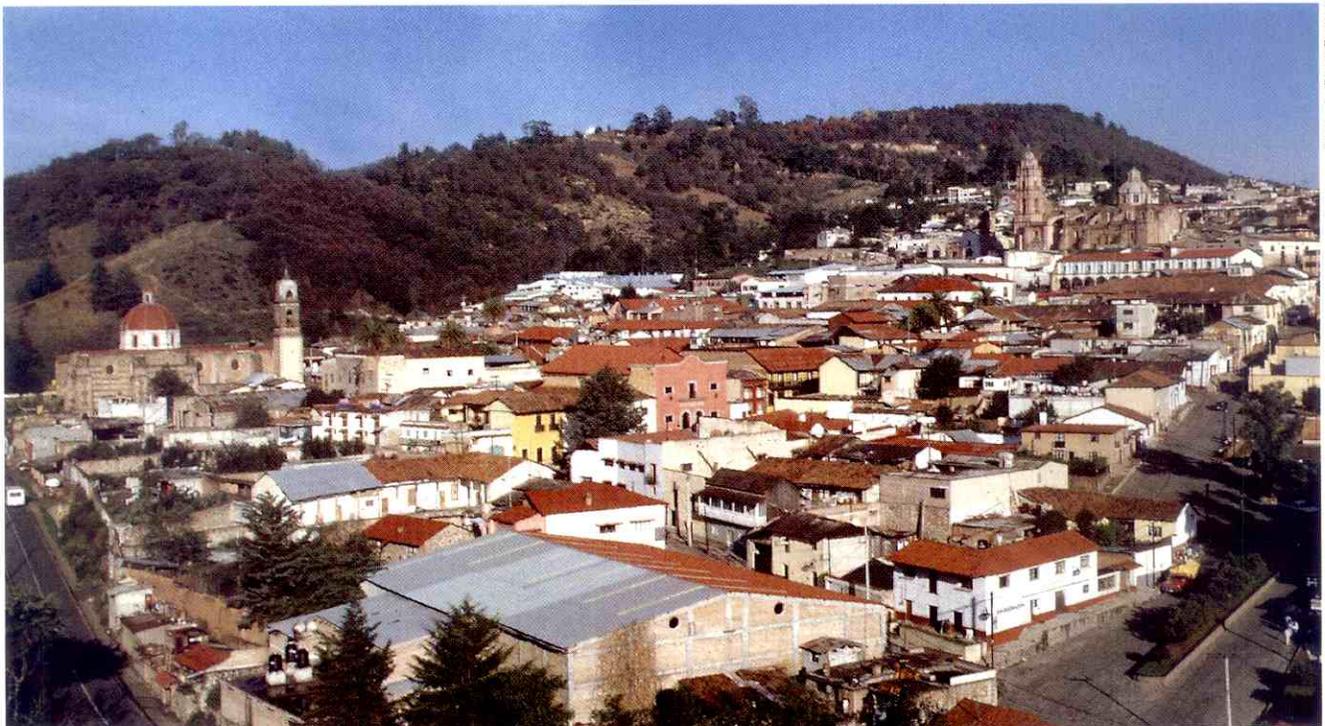
Visiting Tlalpujahua is like traveling in another time, moving to another rhythm and coming back with another way of looking at things. Originally a mining town, Tlalpujahua's architecture displays the different moments of splendor the riches of the earth has given it. History tells us of craft traditions kept alive, illustrious men and women, miracles and tragedies, all bridges to the past giving it a privileged position among the towns of Michoacán.

The name Tlalpujahua comes from the Mazahuatl words meaning "spongy land," or "place where there is ground



coal." Populated since pre-Hispanic times, the inhabitants did some mining before the conquest. But, it was with the arrival of the Spanish that full-blown mining operations began. Like in all the mining towns in Mexico, Tlalpujahua was built in the mountains. With no special plan, its cobblestone streets were lined by red-roofed buildings that lead willy-nilly up to the main parish house from where the horizon can be seen.

During the colonial period, great fortunes were made in mining and the town grew, both in size and in beauty. With abundance and the generosity of wealthy



Panoramic view of Tlalpujahua. The Our Lady of Carmen Church is at the top right.

Photos by Dante Barrera

miners came the construction of churches and public buildings. The San Francisco Convent, the Cofradía, the Church of Our Lord of the Mountain and the Parish House, among others, constructed from the sixteenth to the eighteenth cen-

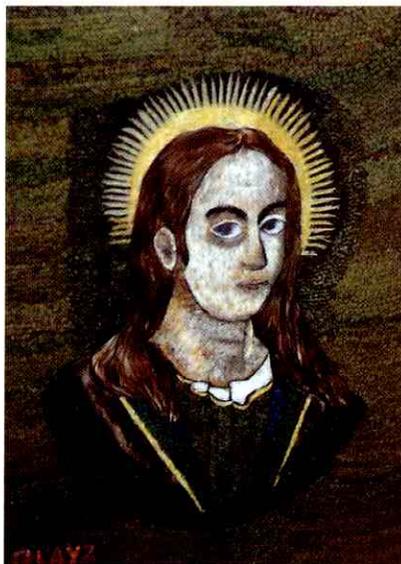


Our Lady of Carmen Parish Church, named for the town's patron saint.

turies, testify to the religious spirit behind the town's development.

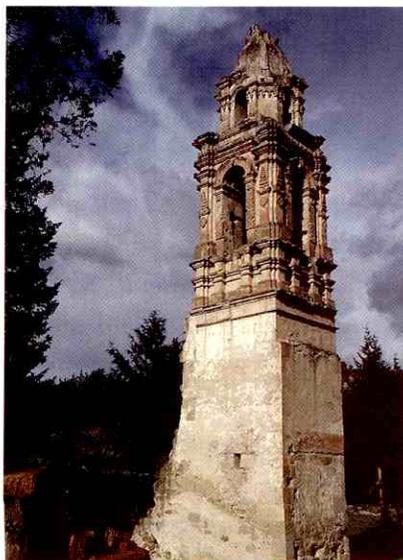
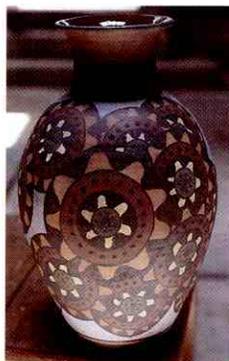
The war of independence momentarily put a stop to mining. The participation of the López Rayón brothers, natives of the town, with Miguel Hidalgo, would be a determining factor in the struggle, but the town suffered the consequences: it was razed several times. Today, the house of the López Rayón is a museum in their honor, complete with documents, maps, photographs, etchings and lithographs that take the visitor through local history.

Mining blossomed once more after 1822 with foreign and domestic investment. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Talpujahua went through what would be its last mining boom. The Dos Es-



**Above:** Feather art. Guillermo Olay's work is the pride of the town.

**Below:** Gustavo Bernal's clay work. A whole new way of looking at the world.



The bell tower of the old Our Lady of Carmen Church, left standing after the 1937 tragedy.

trellas mine, opened in 1899 and developed with French-English capital, would become the world's largest gold producer between 1908 and 1913. More than 5,000 miners worked its tunnels, and the town reaped the benefits of capital



Our Lady of Carmen at the main altar of the Talpujahua parish church.

investment and foreign technology: telegraph, telephone, electric lights and first-class schools.

The Dos Estrellas workers were among the most highly skilled technicians in the country. When mining activities fell off, many of them emigrated to Mexico City where their experience was crucial for starting up companies like La Compañía de Luz y Fuerza (electricity), Hornos de México (foundry) and Cobres de México (copper materials).

However, Talpujahua did not develop exclusively through mining. A celestial figure would watch over its inhabitants from its early history: Our Lady of Carmen, whose image is today in the Our Lady of Carmen Parish Church. She is attributed with many miracles and has

become a figure of solace and protection in moments of tragedy.

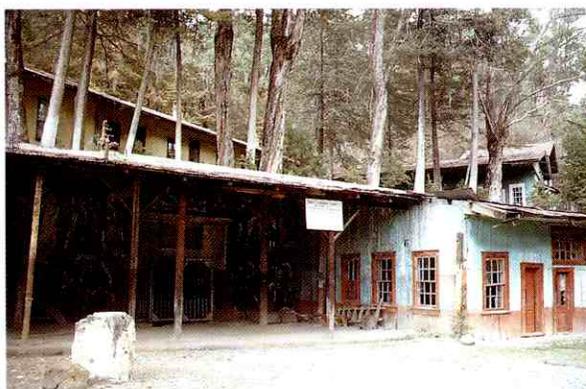
Her origins date back to the seventeenth century. Painted on an adobe wall with other images, she adorned a small chapel built next to a mining hacienda north of Tlalpujahuá. When the hacienda was demolished, the only things left standing were the walls of the chapel. While the other images were worn away by the wind and rain, it is said that the features of the virgin and the colors remained intact. Local inhabitants began to go to her at moments of sorrow or illness. Her presence would be a determining factor in overcoming the tragedy that befell the town in 1937.

For 15 years, the slag (called *lama* or *jale*) produced by the Dos Estrellas mine, with its traces of cyanide, was heaped in a glen 35 meters over the river that surrounds the town. The weight of the slag heap, the constant filtration of water and the heavy rain that fell through the night of May 27 finally caused an avalanche that would send the hill almost a kilometer downward. In less than 10 minutes it would plunge into the riverbed, completely cover two entire neighborhoods, burying houses, stores, animals and people under 30 meters of debris. Not a few people in the town remember that day.

One thing was clear amidst the desolation: the image of Our Lady of Carmen had survived. The slide crushed the nave of the Carmen neighborhood church and all that was left was the bell tower and her adobe wall. After cleaning up the mud and debris, the townspeople decided to take her up to the Tlalpujahuá Parish Church. They worked day and night,



Local architecture is typical of mining towns of the colonial period.



Part of the now-abandoned Dos Estrellas Mine offices.

pulling the more than six-ton block, protected by a wooden frame, up the steep streets.

Of all this history, the only things left are the mine's buildings, 1,000 kilometers of tunnels in the surrounding mountains and the townspeople's conviction that they should look to the future with the protection of their queen, Our Lady of Carmen.

Tlalpujahuá did not disappear with the death of mining. The great variety of crafts and arts practiced there, its industry and the countless fiestas and cultural activities organized year round testify to that.

The town offers the visitor a feast for the senses. Sauntering through its streets or its surrounding green mountains, walking through the ruins of the mine or looking at its colonial buildings would be enough. But there is much more.

High-temperature ceramics are fired here and exported to different countries of the world. Renowned craftsmen receive visitors, like master-potter Colín, whose work is distinguishable by its hand painting and special designs. Special surprises await the guests at young Gustavo Bernal Viera's workshop, where his clay work offers us a whole new way of looking at the world, perhaps handed down from his father, painter Gustavo Bernal Navarro.

In this same town live master craftsmen Gabriel Olay Olay and his son Guillermo Olay Barrientos, some of the only practitioners of feather art left, and among the best. Dating back to pre-Hispanic times, feather art creates beautiful paintings out of multi-colored bird feathers. Guillermo also creates paintings using thousands of tiny pieces of straw, only perceptible close up.

Carved wood, sculpted granite, silver-smithing, textiles, straw, lamps and other brass and iron objects are also part of Tlalpujahuá's craft production.

Outside the craft world but of interest to anyone who likes to decorate their Christmas tree with originality, is the Christmas tree ball factory that produces more than 300 different models and exports them to the whole world.

With little infrastructure for tourism, the town does offer visitors a few restaurants and hotels, like the Socobón restaurant, where patrons are waited on by the owner, and the Los Arcos Hotel, with a beautiful panoramic view of the town.

Only two hours from Mexico City by highway, Tlalpujahuá awaits anyone who wants to discover the other faces of Mexico. **MM**



Photos by Fulvio Eccardi

# A Howl Fading into Time

Edgar Anaya Rodríguez\*

Are there wolves in Mexico? Mexicans hardly have the time or the curiosity to even ask themselves the question. And if they did, they would not find an easy answer: yes, there are, and no, there are not. According to their original distribution, there should be wolves in Mexico; but the reality on the eve of the twenty-first century is that

there are none, because hunting has finished them off.

*Como boca de lobo* ("like the wolf's mouth") is an expression in Mexico describing a place that instills fear. Human beings have always said that wolves are bad, and condemned them to death without further ado. All we have to do is look at stories, fables, tales, cartoons and films down through the centuries. Saint Francis of Assisi says so; so does the hunter in Peter and the Wolf, set to music by Prokofiev; the characters in Aesop's fables, including

his creation, the wolf-man; Little Red Riding Hood, the Three Little Pigs and any sheep to be found in a short story. But the current dire straits of the Mexican wolf are no tall tale.

## WOLF, LUPUS, LOBO

From ancient times, both oral tradition and literature have made wolves symbols of evil and ferocity, as well as of courage and resistance. Anglo-Saxon kings and

\* Contributor to several tourism and cultural publications; author of the Reader's Digest book *Maravillas Naturales de México* (Natural Marvels of Mexico) (Mexico City: 1997).

nobles added the word “wolf” to their names, and the Apaches used it to honor their bravest warriors. Narrations in which she-wolves lovingly bring up human children also abound, like in the legend of Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, and in Rudyard Kipling’s *Book of the Jungle*.

#### A COLLAR TO IDENTIFY THEM

The Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus bailey*) is one of the 24 traditionally recognized sub-species of wolves in North America. Several hypotheses hold that these wolves evolved after the last Ice Age: the American wolves spread out and became isolat-

age of about 33 kilograms, and grow to between 60 and 80 cm high and 130 to 180 cm long. Their coloring is classified as dirty yellow, with black and grey shading. A short mane around their shoulders and a black collar-like ring around their throats distinguish them from others. In the wild, they seem to live between 7 and 8 years and, in contrast with the large packs characteristic of the other sub-species, they form small family groups.

#### A HOWL OF HOPE

There was a time when wolves were very common in Europe, most of Asia and North America. They were probably

Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango and further south to the Valley of Mexico. There are even records of sightings in the states of Puebla and Oaxaca.

Wolves must not have encountered grave difficulties in pre-Hispanic times. During the colonial period, however, with the introduction of cattle, their space and tranquility was noticeably affected. Their condition became critical in the mid-twentieth century. By the time we noticed, wolves had practically disappeared.

Taking into account that it had never been a particularly numerous species, its age-old bad reputation and the intense hunting it was subjected to by cattle ranchers who attributed “serious losses” in their herds to attacks by wolves, we can understand why their number dropped so drastically.

The last straw was called “1080” (sodium fluoroacetate), a very powerful poison, more effective than strychnine, and traps used in an intense extermination campaign requested by cattle ranchers in Mexico’s North and carried out by the federal government in the early 1950s. The result was indiscriminate slaughter, not only of wolves, but of carnivorous mammals in general. The majority of these mammal populations have never recovered—this is the case of the black bear which is in a situation similar to that of the wolf— or have even been completely wiped out, as in the case of the brown bear which disappeared in Mexico at the beginning of the 1960s. The effectiveness of this poison and its terrible consequences were due partly to the fact that the flesh of an animal which had been poisoned was also lethal, and therefore killed anything that ate it.



Hunting and government extermination policies made them almost extinct.

ed in their attempts to flee the ice. Their isolation lasted long enough for sub-species to evolve, but not enough for a completely new canidae species to develop.

Little is known about the characteristics of the Mexican wolf. It is smaller than the other sub-species of Canada and the United States. Adult males weigh an aver-

more geographically widespread than any other land mammal. In the fifteenth century, wolves could be seen in the cities of Paris and Tenochtitlan.

The original geographical distribution of the Mexican wolf ranged from the southern United States to central Mexico: its howl could be heard in the states of

Fifty years after this campaign, no one is certain if Mexican wolves still exist in the wild, or if they have been completely wiped out. Between 1978 and 1980, biologist Roy T. McBride did field research and was bold enough to estimate the polemical figure of 50 surviving wolves in northern Mexico.

The plight of wolves in the United States was the most dire on southern border states. The wolf had more enemies with more advantages: the cattlemen there arrived before they settled in northern Mexico and, in contrast to the rough terrain in Chihuahua and Durango that allowed wolves to hide, the United States had roads and resources, as well as expert exterminators. After an intense eradication campaign, the Mexican wolf sub-species was declared extinct in the United States. U.S. technicians had also trained the Mexican ones for the extermination campaign in northern Mexico.

A few years later, both Mexico and the United States developed plans to save the sub-species.

Today, the only known surviving Mexican wolves live in captivity—about 150 in both countries, but most in the United States. In Mexico, they can be found in zoos, like the Aragón and Chapultepec zoos in Mexico City, and in semi-captivity, in game preserves like La Michilía, in Durango, and San Cayetano, in the State of Mexico. The efforts that Mexico and the United States used to put into exterminating the Mexican wolf are today invested in researching and saving it: national and binational meetings among experts on the topic; exchange of animals in captivity (very few are identified as 100 percent pure wolf); the search for wolves in the wild, mainly in the Chihuahua and

Durango mountains; and campaigns by conservationist groups. However, the search has been fruitless until now.

The main problem wolves in captivity face today is their blood ties. Because there are so few of them, they are all related to each other to one degree or another, which is why new blood is needed. The hope of capturing or at least confirming that there are wolves living in the mountain ranges of northern Mexico endures.

While hunters see wolves as prize game and cattlemen see them as monstrous enemies of their property, naturalists see them as a fascinating species. And that is just as it should be: the wolf is the largest member of the canidae family in Mexico

Scientists who study animal behavior never cease to wonder at wolves' complex behavioral patterns: among others, the way they watch over the development of their young; the organization of their packs; the elaborate group hunting strategies; the healing techniques they use, including the consumption of certain herbs. Vast reaches of what was the Mexican wolf's original habitat have now stopped being suitable for their survival and that of other species: polluted rivers and lagoons, human settlements, logged forests, scarcer and scarcer sources of food and hunters.

Under these circumstances, it is difficult for any wild animal to survive. Only human beings are capable of destroying



Only a few Mexican wolves survive, all living in captivity.

and one of the most intelligent mammals alive. Like all carnivores, their role is fundamental in the delicate ecological balance of nature, among other reasons, to control the number of herbivores, which they feed on, and to contribute to weeding out weaker and sick animals, thus purifying other species.

themselves and decimating other species in the process. The Roman comic playwright Plautus understood this before the time of Christ and summed it up in a phrase that comes down to us complete with the stigma of evil always attributed to wolves. "Man is the wolf of Man." **MM**



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# Michoacán

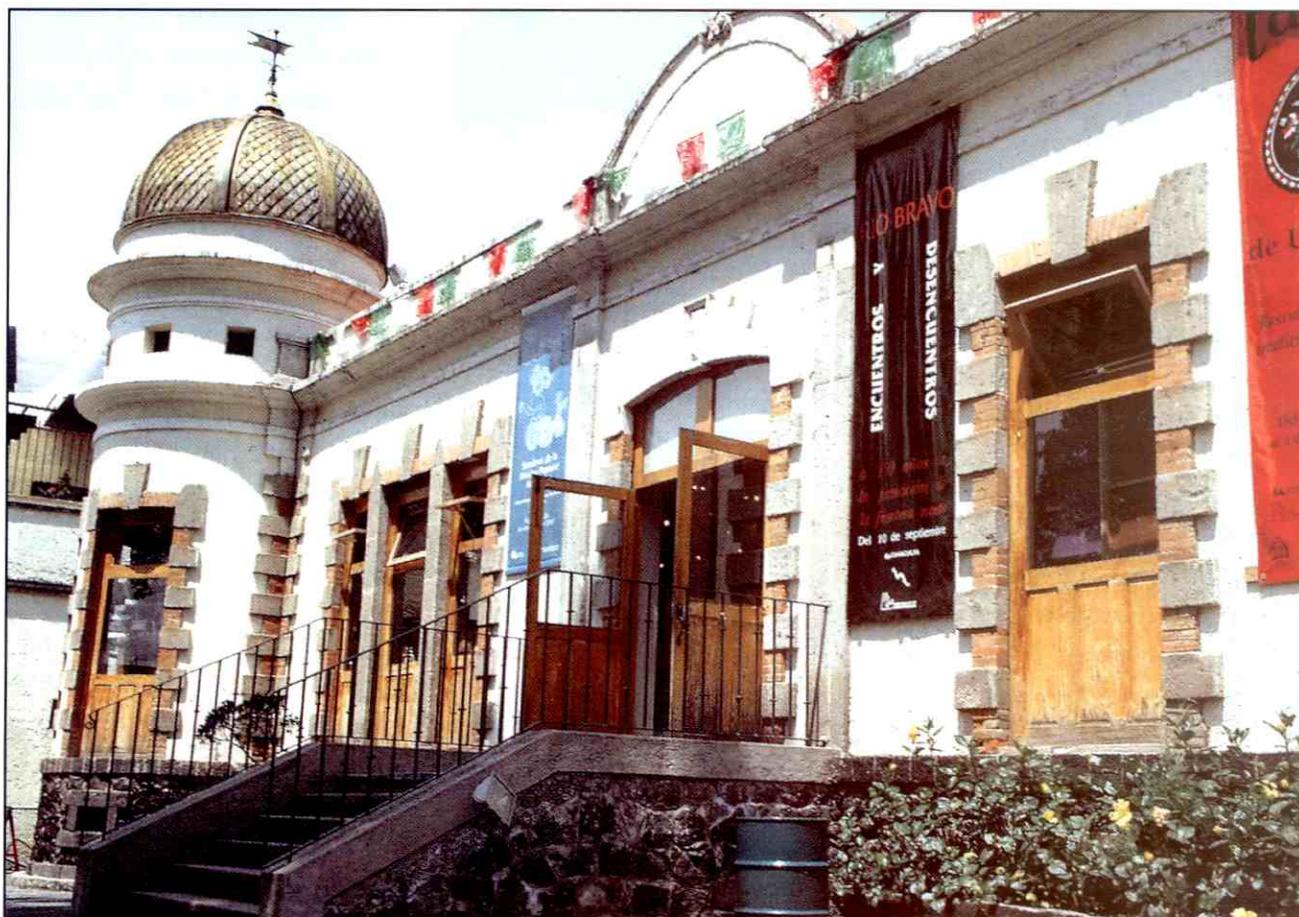
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# The National Folk Cultures Museum

*Sol Rubín de la Borbolla\**



Photos by Dario Barrera

The National Folk Cultures Museum was born in 1982 as part of the overall proposal by a generation of anthropologists and other social sciences scholars about what should be

understood by folk culture. The proposal highlights the need to “foster awareness of [folk culture] and recover the value placed on cultural achievements to promote respect for pluralism and strengthen national identity.” The proposition also included a different conception of museology from the traditional one.

That “school” of thought has given way to folk cultures having a place in academic and cultural milieus and the establishment of numerous museums on this model the world over, not only in Mexico.

The discussion about folk culture is ongoing. The most important ideas dis-

\* Director of the National Folk Cultures Museum.



cussed at the time our museum was set up continue to be valid today: a) it was not created to hold a collection and, although it has formed collections down through the years, the goal has always been that they permanently tour the country; b) it is open to creators and bearers of folk culture, who also participate in planning and presenting different activities; and c) in accordance with the theoretical underpinnings of the museum, one of its objectives is to reinforce the multicultural understanding of our nation, and today it is an open door to that cultural diversity.

Becoming a critical, educational, pleasurable and commercial space for urban and rural, indigenous and mestizo cultures, for the defense of age-old traditions and for making proposals of new cultural expressions has been the permanent challenge for the museum in its 16 years.

Music, theater, dance, gastronomy, folk arts, rites and traditions, literature and graphic arts are all expressions of peoples'

One of the museum's objectives is to reinforce the multicultural understanding of our nation, and today it is an open door to cultural diversity.



cultural creativity, and they are presented with an attempt to show their relationship with the dynamics of day-to-day life.

In general, a topic of national interest is selected and activities are organized to approach it from different angles in order to be both critical and pro-active. On some occasions, however, the topics deal with a particular aspect of a cultural manifestation or with a specific social group.

This year, the general topic was folk music. Around this theme, a large exhibit was mounted to show the history and development of a specific genre: the *son*. Smaller exhibits have complemented the large one, like, for example, photographs of indigenous musical bands and illustrating music on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border. The museum organized workshops for children to learn about and make musical instruments; classes in lute playing and dance were given to young people and adults. Several musical groups have performed and presented their recordings.

In addition, several exhibitions presented Mexico's wealth of textiles from different viewpoints: the use of natural dyes, brocade work and tradition as a source of inspiration for artists, photographers and set designers, like Luis Márquez Romay.

The part the black population plays in folk culture was the subject of an ethnographic focus. Craft techniques with long traditions were also exhibited, like lacquers from the state of Michoacán and cut paper from Papantla, Veracruz. Novel techniques, like *paquimé* ceramics from Mata Ortiz, Chihuahua, were also presented.

In an effort to keep popular traditions alive, the following activities were pro-

gramed: a contest of dressing Christ child figures; the Tamale Fair and the publication of a pamphlet on the February 2 Candelaria Fiesta; the Judas doll contest in Easter Week, the exhibition of Diego Rivera's Judas doll collection and the publication of a catalogue of it; the exhibition and publication of a pamphlet about the Holy Cross; the offerings and events to celebrate the Day of the Dead; a nativity scene competition and exhibit and performances of Christmas pageants.

Guided tours, particularly those programmed for school children, which include workshops for pre-schoolers to junior high school students, and weekend children's workshops allow them to learn through play about natural dyes, the technical principles of a loom, paper-making, paper cutting, Judas doll making, folk sculpture and piñata making.

The states of Mexico periodically send the museum their most representative artisans, foods and artistic activities for temporary shows. The facilities include a bookstore-gift shop with folk art and culture, a cafeteria and a specialized documentation center.

The museum is located in Coyoacán, one of Mexico City's traditional neighborhoods, where visitors flock to see its architecture, parks, beautiful little nooks and crannies and bookstores, to stroll along its plazas, buy crafts and enjoy a good meal. The museum occupies both remodeled houses and a new building for exhibition rooms and offices, and therefore combines several architectural styles, harmoniously united by patios and walkways. The grounds and facilities make it possible to carry out many kinds of activities, but since it is a museum, exhibition rooms are the center of the facilities:



The states of Mexico periodically send the museum their most representative artisans, foods and artistic activities for temporary shows.



A tree of life

today, the museum has five; next year, two more will be opened.

In 1999, we invite you to the following exhibitions: "Mexican Cooking," "Vernacular Architecture," "The Women Artisans of Cuetzalan," "Salt in Mexico" and "Mexican Ribaldry," among others.

The wealth of culture is immeasurable. Every day, men and women, as artisans, as artists, as bearers of tradition, forge and recreate the cultures that make up our country. The museum is only a window in Mexico City of that enormous diversity that can be found traveling through all of Mexico. **MM**

**National Folk Cultures Museum**

Avenida Hidalgo 289

Colonia del Carmen Coyoacán

Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Tuesday to Thursday

10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Friday to Sunday

Admission free.

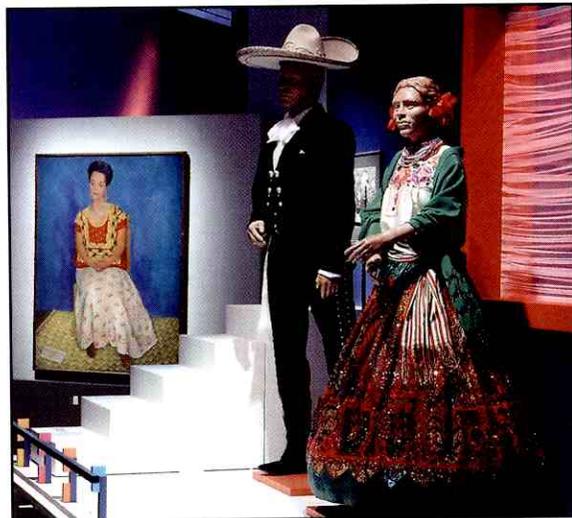


Jacques Lesnard

Claudia Fernández, *Nourishment*, 1996 (mixed media).

# Mexican Imagination in Quebec

Dianne Pearce\*



Jacques Lesnard

Charro and China Poblana costumes, Serfín Museum of Costume.

This year has five seasons in the province of Quebec: the fifth is the Season of Mexico. The Museum of Civilization in Quebec City, in collaboration with the Hamel-Bruneau House and the Charlevoix Museum, has produced a diverse program of exhibitions on Mexico. "Mexican Imagination" (May 20-February 14, 1999) at the Museum of Civilization is by far the largest and is accompanied by a mural installation by Rene Deruin entitled *Paradise. The Duality of the Baroque*. The Hamel-Bruneau House in Ste-Foy, mounted "*Talavera: Avant-Garde Tradition*" (May-August 1998), an exhibition of ceramics produced by 20 contemporary artists during their two-year residency at Talavera de la Reyna, a traditional ceramics studio in Cholula, Mexico. Also, the Charlevoix Museum is presenting two shows, "Mexican Toys and Miniatures" and "In the Earth as Well as the Water" (May 16 to November 1, 1998). The latter offers more than 20 large-scale paintings by Jorge Alfonso, a Oaxacan painter.

\* Artist living and working in Montreal.

Finally, an important retrospective of the work of Mexican film-maker Arturo Ripstein will be presented at the Museum of Civilization in Quebec and the National Film Board in Montreal.

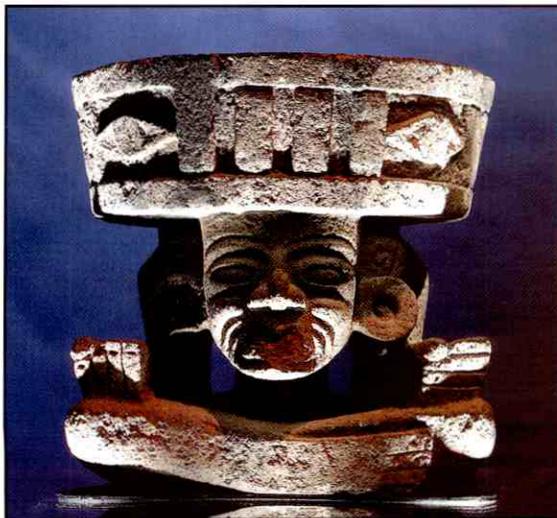
All of these three museums have organized an array of related events to highlight Mexican culture and educate the public about this geographically diverse country and its culturally varied people. The exhibition "Mexican Imagination" was launched amidst the musical works of Salvador Torre, a celebrated Mexican composer who was present at the opening. Also, ongoing educational workshops called "Dinner is served" are being offered to the public and, in September, to school children. Through observing, preparing and, most importantly, tasting, patrons both old and young can discover the importance and use of two traditional Mexican foods, corn and chocolate. Participants discover the myths surrounding the origin of these two foods, how to grow them and how to prepare them for present-day consumption. Concerts and a performance by the Folk

Ballet educate the public about Mexico, as do various lectures on the history of Mexico and its geography.

#### A BAROQUE PARADISE

Upon entering the museum, the mural by Rene Deruin is supposed to greet you, but you have to search for it. The piece, made up of painting, sculpture and print-making, loomed magnificently large and powerful, but too far away to see properly. High above my head and some 50 feet away, it merged with the architectural structure of the museum.

This obstacle was, I think, obvious to museum and artist alike: they had provided below a book on a podium containing large colour photographs of the mural. Indeed the mural warrants a closer look: sections of dark brown ceramic relief alternate with panels of warm-coloured paint and engraving. The panels of perhaps 10 feet by 10 feet, are laden with richly detailed bits of ceramic, formed and applied, to create a textured surface of light and dark



Jacques Lessard

Hehuetéotl, God of Fire, A.D. 1000 (stone).

reminiscent of the Mexican baroque churches of the eighteenth century. The baroque appears frequently in folk art and is often viewed as marginal, but it frees Deruin from the power of order: the abundance of motifs liberates him from conventions and norms.

Deruin's relationship with Mexico started about 40 years ago. He spends a good part of each year there and has exhibited widely, including his famed *Migrations* at the Modern Art Museum in Mexico City in 1993.

#### HYBRID IMAGINATIONS

The conceivers of "Mexican Imagination" (a collaboration between the Museum of Civilization and the National Folk Cultures Museum) hand us "an invitation to discover the other Mexico"—an invitation that does not prove disappointing. The exhibition breaks from the historical curatorial traditions and offers viewers a vision that tourists do not often "see": a diversified and complex culture

constantly in the process of merging thousands of years of tradition with the speedy changes of contemporary society. The curatorial thesis states that certain traditions and customs remain in the Mexican collective identity and perpetuate the ancient heritage while, at the very same time, present day norms influence them, sometimes even clashing with them. The result is a hybrid culture that remains elusive to Canadians. And is it not precisely this intangible quality that attracts us to Mexico? To convey the many dimensions of contemporary Mexican society laden with traditional references, the curators divide the exhibition into thematic rooms, including Architecture, Living, Food, Celebration, Religion, Baroque Style, Death, Mexico City, A Plural Nation and Contemporary Artists.

As you enter the introductory room, you are warmly welcomed by Huehue-téotl, god of fire. This rather foreboding stone bust dating from A.D. 1000 sits upon a structure reminiscent of a pyramid. As with all pre-Hispanic artwork, he is the product of the collective imagination, not

the result of a creative endeavour on the part of a particular artist. He is a symbol that represents the sun and, hence, life. He is the all-knowing, wise god whose deeply carved wrinkles have been intentionally carved so carefully upon his face.

But this is where the anthropology ends, for, mounted on the wall next to this god, is a series of black and white photographs called *Tarot Chilango* (1995-96) by contemporary photographer Raúl José Pérez. With a satirical stab, Pérez taps into the Mexican ability to laugh at oneself: he has re-interpreted a deck of tarot cards by replacing the traditional wizardly and wise characters with everyday *chilangos* (a term used for Mexicans born and raised in Mexico City) in staged settings. The Justice card shows a middle-aged upper class woman sitting cross-legged at her desk in a dark library. She looks up from her busy activity weighing two crumpled sheets of paper and motions to us in that familiar Mexican gesture formed by the thumb and index finger, "Just a moment!" On the Automobile card, a young working class hoodlum



Bill Vincent, *Macabre Dance with a Deconstructed Vase*, 18 pieces, 8" x 12" each, 1998.

Louise Leblanc

stands on a dirt road in front of his VW beetle whose headlights shine at us. He scowls while waving a long chain and grabbing his genitals to declare his contempt for us.

From here, visitors move into the first thematic room, Architecture, where they see photographs and a maquette of Chihuahua's Museum of Cultures of the North designed by architects Garduño and Maldonado. Indicative of the Mexican tendency to harmonise architecture with its natural surroundings, the sprawling museum remains low as if growing out of the flowing dry hills of the region. Next to these photographs is, paradoxically, an authentic and life-size coastal hut built inside the museum using traditional materials such as bamboo, adobe, straw and palm leaves.

The large circular area devoted to Celebration introduces us to Mexico's perplexing traditions. The area is divided into various sections each presenting a religious or secular tradition still celebrated today, for example the Dance of the *Chinelos*, the Tecuane Dance of the Jaguar, the Day of the Dead, Holy Week, and the Nine Days Before Christmas. Costumes and objects accompany each section, and a video tape at each station illustrates the ceremony in action. And what is Mexico without its three popular games which have risen to near-sacred veneration: soccer, the pre-Hispanic ball game and *las luchas* or the Worldwide Wrestling Federation? Wrestling, surprising as it may be, has actually been popular since the 1960s when René Cardona directed a series of cult movies about El Santo, the masked wrestler, scientist and superhero detective (*Santo and the Treasure of Dracula*, 1968, played very recently at

a midnight show, in the Fant-Asia Film Festival in Montreal.)

This exhibition would not be complete without the image of the dark-skinned Our Lady of Guadalupe watching over us. The legend of Guadalupe recounts how she miraculously appeared to the indigenous boy Juan Diego in 1592. Many fervently believe in this divine miracle while others think the Spaniards fabricated it in an attempt to convert the Aztec-Mexicas to Christianity. Nevertheless, the all-powerful female deity Tonantzin, whom the Aztecs had worshipped, was usurped by Guadalupe, and her temple subsequently razed to clear the area for the Guadalupe Basilica.

Death, too, is a phenomenon in Mexico that eludes non-Mexicans. The Day of the Dead, celebrated November 1-2, requires elaborate and colourful altars filled with fruit and tequila, incense and candles, cigarettes and candy skulls, and mounds of flowers to welcome back the spirits of loved ones who have passed away. Pre-Columbian civilizations did not fear death; rather, because their reli-

**Quebec's Season of Mexico  
depicts the "other"  
Mexico and succeeds  
in revealing the "cosmic race"  
as it is today, a hybrid  
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gion taught that both life and death were part of the "movement" necessary to continue the world, they welcomed death as natural.

The room called A Plural Nation offers a particular blend of tradition and modernity in which ancient accessories and traditional costumes clash and combine with modern clothing. The Serfin Museum of Costume has loaned outfits, headdresses, shawls and traditional dance apparel to present a spectacular, albeit incomplete, overview of the colourful and manifold costumes of Mexico, which would warrant an exhibition unto themselves. Next to this, ironically, is a glass cabinet containing various accessories (leather necklaces with beads, thick belts, wallets with chains, leather wrist bracelets, police boots, black T-shirts hailing favourite bands) worn today by young Mexicans whose underground style is influenced by local rock groups such as Café Tacuba.

The last theme, in what is probably one of the smallest rooms, is Contemporary Art. The artists in this section were invariably chosen due to the hybrid nature of their work to emphasise the theme of "Mexican Imagination." They are Franco Aceves, Ricardo Arguía, Cisco Jiménez, Jaime Goded, Claudia Fernández, Francis Alys, Betsabée Romero and Diego Toledo. Claudia Fernández's installation, *Nourishment* (1996) consists of a series of household objects painted blue with white dots splashed on them to imitate those blue-and-white enamelled metal cups and plates used for camping. These coated ordinary objects sit on the floor while a huge colour photo looms above them of a life-sized enamel spoon next to Fernández herself, her dark hair spread out and sporting a provocative miniskirt, vest and high heels in the same

blue and white spattered print. By likening herself to a metal camping spoon, she declares herself a mere object, nourishment for hungry eyes. Another piece worth mention is *Patriotic Stories* by Francis Alys, a Belgian artist who lives in Mexico, himself somewhat of a hybrid. *Patriotic Stories* is a video loop of a large plaza with a circle painted in it. A shepherd enters the picture frame followed by one lamb that he leads around the large circle. A second lamb enters the frame and follows behind the first. This process continues until the shepherd is followed by some 30 sheep all walking around the large circle. Finally, the shepherd leads them out of the picture frame. At first you laugh at the futility of the ritual. But it has an underlying tension as if on this windless day a magnetic force pulls each lamb methodically from its pasture to perform the pointless circular walk over pavement. Could this not be a metaphor for us, gullible human beings blindly following society's delusive paths?

#### THE QUEEN'S FAIENCE

The theme of the contemporary merging with the traditional is evident in the title and content of the show at the Hamel-Bruneau House, "*Talavera: Avant-Garde Tradition*," curated by Jaime Contreras Castro and previously exhibited at the Amparo Museum in Puebla. With the aid of the University of the Americas in Puebla, 20 artists from Mexico and elsewhere took up a two-year residence at the ceramic studio Talavera de la Reyna in Cholula, Puebla. There, the artists united with master potters to complete a project. By joining visions and sharing knowledge, the craftspeople provided technical know-how never

before practised by the artists, while the artists exposed the craftspeople to their varied aesthetic solutions. The process, difficult as it might be when old meets new, resulted in traditional ceramics invigorated by the dynamism of contemporary proposals. In the sixteenth century, a group of potters from Toledo, Spain, established themselves in Puebla, introducing their use of lead and tin enamel. You will recognise these ceramics by their blue color (made using copper oxides) on a white background. The exchange between the artists and craftspeople at Talavera de la Reyna has reinvigorated the expressive possibilities of the material. The Hamel-Bruneau House provides a video of the techniques used there. It should be noted that at this studio, they use white faience called *talavera*, so named because of its resemblance to that produced in the village of Talavera de la Reyna in Spain (called *de la Reyna* or "of the Queen" because this highly valuable product was protected at that time by Queen Isabel the Catholic).

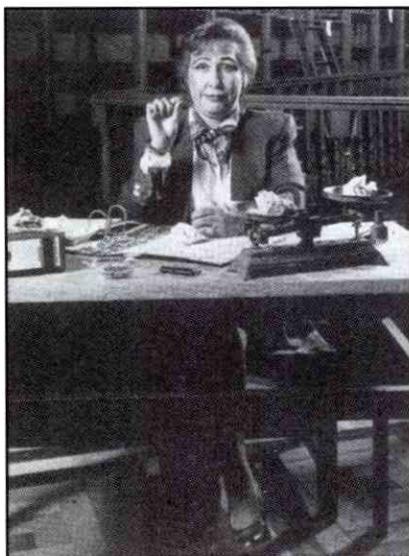
Probably one of the most successful pieces in the show is *Macabre Dance on a*

*Deconstructed Vase* by the Canadian printmaker Bill Vincent. Vincent broke a vase into 18 pieces and used each as a "canvas," or surface upon which to paint using ceramic glazes.

Each of the 18 pieces of the broken vase was mounted on an 8" x 12" rectangle of charred wood and then hung on the wall in three rows of six. At first glance, it is not obvious that these random pieces are from a broken vase; rather, each appears to have been sculpted independently before being painted. The blackened wood supports, for me, recall the vast amount of firewood required to stoke a kiln.

Another piece in this show is a sculpture by Luca Bray, *The Enchanted Forest* (1996). These two large, totem-like structures rose to six and a half feet and appeared to grow out of a ground of broken rocks. Bray achieves the meeting of art and craft. A closer look reveals that the sculptures are not reductive, but rather additive: they have been built up by affixing commercially-produced cups, bowls and saucers to ceramic cylinders. The placement of these objects follows no particular pattern, but is guided more by Bray's sense of aesthetics. Also, he has embellished the surface of the "trees" very much in a sculptural and painterly way: they have first been carved in relief and then painted with glazes.

Quebec's Season of Mexico depicts the "other" Mexico and succeeds in revealing the "cosmic race" (Beaucage) as it is today, as one of hybridization and trans-identity. These exhibitions offer museum-goers insight into the real Mexico, the one in which old and new meet to form a postmodern country of harmonious contradiction. **MM**



Raúl José Pérez, *Tarot Chilango: Justice*, 1995-96.

L. Pérez Falconi/O. Necoches

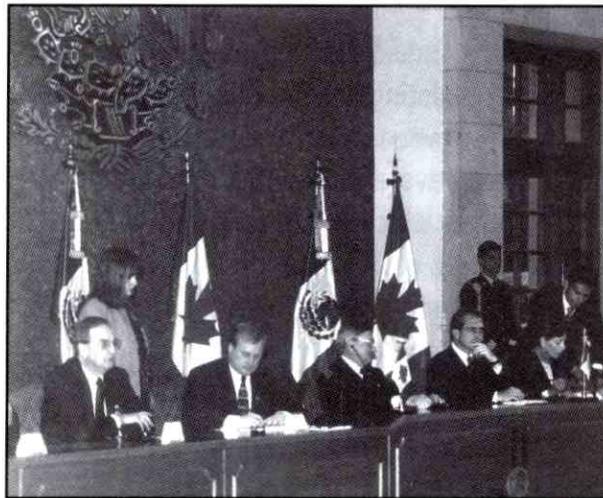
# Mexico-Canada A Growing Relationship

Carlos Rico\*

In examining relations between Mexico and Canada, I will attempt to explore some of their potential. The inevitable starting point is the acceptance of three points: in the first place, since formal relations were established in 1944, they were always cordial, based on affinities and sympathies that were—why not say so—open and explicit. In the second place, it was a relationship the substance of which did not measure up to the level of cordiality; that is, it was a cordial relationship with no concrete substance, with no content for public policy priorities for either government. Thirdly, we also had a series of interesting agreements that have become clear in different multilateral fora, although we never explored nor exploited them. When we look at the votes cast by Mexico and Canada in international bodies, enormous similarities in their interests and political choices emerge. There have been, then, many points of contact that nevertheless were not explored in any depth as part of either government's foreign policy.

Without exaggeration, from 1971, we have had at least a mechanism for contact on the highest level, the Mexico-

Canada Ministerial Commission, that has allowed for dialogue around different questions, although over the almost 30 years of its existence it has only met 12 times. In these conditions we came into the 1990s: seemingly bilateral relations would be relatively easy to broaden out; both sides were willing. The possibility of creating closer ties between Mexico and Canada and in general between Canada and Latin America had already been explored very interestingly in the academic world. But it was still a promise, a possibility that had not yet been brought about.



A meeting of the Mexico-Canada Ministerial Commission.

In the 1990s, several important events took place, the most significant of which was both countries entering into negotiations and signing the North American Free Trade Agreement. Obviously, it should be taken into account that one way or another a good part of what was

done was already foreshadowed in the bilateral Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Canada which, with the limited exception of the U.S.-Israeli free trade agreement a couple of years before, had broken down the main barrier to entering into this kind of negotiations: the U.S. insistence on the global nature of its international economic policies.

I remember a precedent which clearly shows the agreements between Canada and Mexico. It was in August 1971 when a new international economic order began

to develop due to then-President Nixon's policies. Among other things, Nixon decided to charge an additional 10 percent duty on all U.S. imports regardless of their origin. Immediately, Canada and Mexico—each by itself, never together—appealed to those in charge of U.S. economic policy, basically the secretary of the treasury, to argue that, since neither country was responsible for the U.S. economy's balance of payments deficit, and since their trade

was so centered on the U.S., an additional 10 percent duty, on their products would be very unfavorable for both economies. In contrast with other nations, they each requested an exception be made to that global economic policy although, it should be emphasized, never jointly.

\* General Director for North America, Foreign Relations Ministry.

Both nations had the same approach, but sometimes they were not even aware of it.

However, the U.S. response was clear: U.S. economic policy is global and has no regional exceptions. That was the general foreign policy rule of our main neighbor that the late 1980s agreement between Canada and the United States definitively did away with, opening up the possibility for what in the 1990s would be a new point of contact between Canada and Mexico: jointly negotiating with our main trade partner the new norms that would regulate the process of economic links with the North American community.

In the 1990s two other important changes came about. First, Canada joined not only the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1990 but also other multilateral bodies in which Mexico participated, where it would be almost impossible not to recognize similar positions. Since then, both countries deliberate and decide on the same agendas, the same draft resolutions, the same proposals by other countries around which they agree or not, but which puts them in the position of having to clearly state their opinion for or against questions central to hemispheric policy. Canada's membership in the OAS has been fundamental in recent years. For example, with regard to legislation about extraterritoriality approved by the U.S. Congress a few years ago, Canada and Mexico played an important role in forging the positions adopted by the OAS and the Interamerican Legal Commission.<sup>1</sup>

Not only did we agree, but we worked together. It was impossible not to, given the elemental fact that we were seated in

the same forum, at the same table, discussing with the same opponent.

The second important change also dates back to the beginning of the 1990s: Mexico's incorporation into the Asian Pacific Economic Coordination (APEC) in 1993, where something similar happened despite the fact that APEC is more flexible and less articulated, more a space for discussion than for decision-making. In this body, both countries have agreed on matters related to the Asian Pacific economies, although always limited to secondary non-political issues, due, above all, to the sensitivity of the representatives from the three Chinas.

At this point I would like to summarize the first part of this text: the foreign policy agendas of Mexico and Canada share many common views on topics that are important to both countries. This

**Based on the already existing cordial relations between our two countries, we have entered into a period in which we have begun to give those relations more real content in the economic plane as well as on the strictly foreign policy level.**

includes concerns from those linked to NAFTA to such transcendental questions as human rights in the framework of the inter-American system and the furthering of free trade in Asia. In the last analysis, both our countries are part of the Western Hemisphere side of the Pacific

Rim, which has a great impact. This was very clear when Canada hosted the APEC forum last year, which ended with the Vancouver summit where innumerable topics were discussed. The summit also demonstrated that both nations coincide at meetings which evaluate the environment, norms for maritime traffic, and many more topics that they had never sat down together to discuss before. This shows how important it is not only that Canada joined the OAS, but that Mexico joined APEC, both points of contact that strengthen the political links between the two countries.

The results of this new era of interaction in the 1990s are very clear. Several of the initiatives are well known: no one should be surprised that in the Western Hemisphere it has been Mexico and Canada who have emphasized the question of the Helms-Burton Act. Mexico and Canada were also the only two countries of this hemisphere that did not break relations with Cuba. Mexico, even though it was a member of the OAS in the 1960s did not break diplomatic relations with Cuba, and Canada, although it was not a member at that time, adopted a policy very similar to Mexico's.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, we never explored nor made more of this agreement as a possible road for joint foreign policy action. Today, however, as members of the same multilateral forum, not only do we agree on this policy, but we have broadened it out, we have made the most of it, seeking allies, and attained very important goals.

Another point of agreement and common initiatives we explored in the summer of 1996 thanks to much closer contact is land mines. We had finished

reviewing the Convention on Conventional Weapons, including a protocol on mines that had left many countries unsatisfied. Canada took the initiative that same summer to organize a process to regulate the use of land mines, consulting us immediately. Mexico became part of the so-called Nucleus Group at the negotiations forum. Surprisingly, under the initiative and leadership of Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, in a little more than a year we managed to come up with a convention on the point. Not only that, but both countries also began to apply the spirit of the convention in practice. Canada and Mexico developed policies to support the victims of land mines in Central America. Mexico could not help with efforts to dig up the mines because it has no such technical unit in its armed forces: it simply has never produced mines and they are not part of our arsenal, nor do we have trained personnel in the field. But, we could collaborate with Canada on the project, which we did. Programs were developed for aiding the victims in Central America, a high priority area for both our countries. This is an example of how we have found spaces for joint action and initiatives not only on a hemispheric level, but globally.

The third example which clearly shows Mexico's and Canada's common interests is linked to the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA). It is interesting that there are several different lines of argument about how to achieve hemisphere-wide free trade. Some want to first establish free trade separately in South and North America and then mix the two. Neither Canada nor Mexico consider this the best way to cooperate, and we have both made efforts to open up a

space for North-South free trade in the Americas. The first free trade agreement that Mexico signed in the 1990s was with a South American country, Chile. And Canada is the second North American country to have a free trade agreement with Chile. What Canada and Mexico are both pursuing with Mercosur is very similar and can be summarized as bridge building between North and South in a free trade area, as well as making sure that the idea of two geographic blocs that may or may not be joined in a hemisphere-wide area does not become hegemonic.

Based on the already existing and deepening cordial relations between our two countries, we have thus entered into a period in which we have begun to give those relations much more real content in the economic plane as well as on the strictly foreign policy level. Politically, the relationship's content today is infinitely superior to what it was only a few years ago. At the end of this decade, I believe we are entering into a third stage of Mexico-Canada relations. I would like to direct a few remarks to this issue.

The first stage consisted simply of getting to know each other enough to be able to have relations. From a political point of view, Mexico's Foreign Relations Ministry did not have a special office dedicated specifically to Canada. And Canada was only rarely touched on in the North American division, where something urgent was always happening with regard to the other country in the area that impeded organizing permanent work regarding relations with Canada. The Mexican government then decided to establish a special office in charge of handling relations with Canada, respon-

sible for daily taking the question of Mexican-Canadian relations to high-level Mexican policy-makers. This first stage was one, I emphasize, of getting to know each other and setting up the internal mechanisms that would allow for dialogue.

The second stage was much richer and more interesting, but also more complex. It was a stage in which, although we had more points of contact, more differences also arose, a quite natural, normal development in any mature relationship, like the one we seek to build with Canada.

At the end of the 1990s, the third stage, we are in a situation in which we fundamentally continue to have agreements, as well as a greater ability to explore, broaden out and foster them. But we also must learn what it means to not agree on some issues. Far from being an obstacle, this is a sign of a mature relationship in which there are topics around which national interests and the readings each of our two countries have of the situation may and do differ.

What we are currently doing is to create the conditions wherein it is possible to treat these inevitabilities for what they are: factors which enrich our relations and should not taint what has already been built and is a fundamentally positive basis for relations between Mexico and Canada. ■■■

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The author is referring to the passage of the famous Helms-Burton Act, opposed by Mexico and Canada inside the OAS, which demanded that the United States rescind the law. [Editor's Note.]

<sup>2</sup>In the early 1960s, on the initiative of the United States, all the member states of the OAS except Mexico decided to break diplomatic relations with Cuba. [Editor's Note.]

# Ofunam

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RONALD ZOLLMAN, DIRECTOR ARTÍSTICO

Sábados 20:00 hrs./Domingos 12:00 hrs.

98  
OTOÑO  
99



I septiembre 19/20

Ronald Zollman  
Raphael Oleg, violín

*Blumine*  
MAHLER

Primer concierto para violín  
SZYMANOWSKI

Primera sinfonía *El Titán*  
MAHLER

2 septiembre 26/27

Ronald Zollman  
Jorge Federico Osorio, piano

Obertura *Euryanthe*  
WEBER

Décimocuarto concierto para piano  
MOZART

Sexta sinfonía *Pastoral*  
BEETHOVEN

ENSAYO ABIERTO  
Sábado 26, 10:00 a.m.  
Entrada libre

3 octubre 3/4

Carlos Miguel Prieto  
Juan Carlos Laguna, guitarra

Obertura para *El Barbero de Sevilla*  
ROSSINI

Concierto para guitarra  
PONCE

Sexta sinfonía *Patética*  
CHAIKOVSKI

4 octubre 10/11

Yoshimi Takeda  
Andrés Adorján, flauta

Obertura para *Don Giovanni*  
MOZART

Primer concierto para flauta  
MOZART

*Halil* para flauta y orquesta  
BERNSTEIN

Suite de *Romeo y Julieta*  
PROKOFIEV

5 octubre 17/18

Marco Parisotto  
Gregory Allen, piano

Obertura *La gran pascua rusa*  
RIMSKI-KORSAKOV

*Rapsodia sobre un tema de Paganini*  
RAJMANINOV

*Cuadros de una exposición*  
MUSSORGSKI-RAVEL

6 octubre 24/25

Horst Neumann  
Arturo Delmoni, violín

*Doña Diana*  
REZNICEK

Primer concierto para violín  
BRUCH

*El sueño y la presencia*  
GALINDO

*Till Eulenspiegel*  
STRAUSS

7 noviembre 7/8

Lan Shui  
Emanuel Abbuhl, oboe

Obertura *Oberon*  
WEBER

Concierto para oboe  
MOZART

Sinfonía No. 1  
TCHEREPNIN

*Fiestas Romanas*  
RESPIGHI

ENSAYO ABIERTO  
Sábado 7, 10:00 a.m.  
Entrada libre

8 noviembre 14/15

Gabriel Chmura  
Stefan Popov, violoncello

Obertura *Leonora* No. 3  
BEETHOVEN

Concierto para violoncello  
SCHUMANN

*Clepsidra*  
LAVISTA

Obertura *Romeo y Julieta*  
CHAIKOVSKI

9 noviembre 21/22

Anton Nanut

Séptima sinfonía  
*Leningrado*  
SHOSTAKOVICH

10 noviembre 28/29

Jérôme Kaltenbach  
Boris Petrushanski, piano

*Suite sinfónica*  
GUTIERREZ HERAS

Segundo concierto para piano  
PROKOFIEV

Tercera sinfonía  
BRAHMS

11 diciembre 5/6

Ronald Zollman  
Jeremy Menuhin, piano

XXXIV FESTIVAL DE MÚSICA  
JUDÍA "TUVIE MAIZEL"

*Ausencia de flores*  
CATAN

Vigésimocuarto concierto para piano  
MOZART

Séptima sinfonía  
BEETHOVEN

12 diciembre 12/13

Ronald Zollman  
Lourdes Ambriz, soprano  
Gabriela Thierry, mezzosoprano  
José Medina, tenor  
José Rosendo Flores, bajo

*Sinfonietta*  
JANACEK

*Réquiem*  
MOZART

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\$100.00 Primer piso  
\$80.00 Orquesta-coro  
\$50.00 Segundo piso

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\$560.00 Orquesta-coro  
\$350.00 Segundo piso

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# The House Loses<sup>1</sup>

Juan Villoro\*

Terrales was founded by people who were unprepared, people who ran out of gas in the mountains and didn't want to walk back under the desert sun. The only gathering place (though it would be more accurate to say "stopping off place," not "gathering place") was a broken down shed where truckers used to play poker. For some reason unknown to anyone, everyone there called three spades "Terrales." They were always bad luck.

Radio turned over his three losing cards. He didn't need to show the other two.

\* Mexican writer. His most recent novel is *Materia dispuesta* (Mexico City: Alfaguara, 1997). Drawings by Lydia Peña.

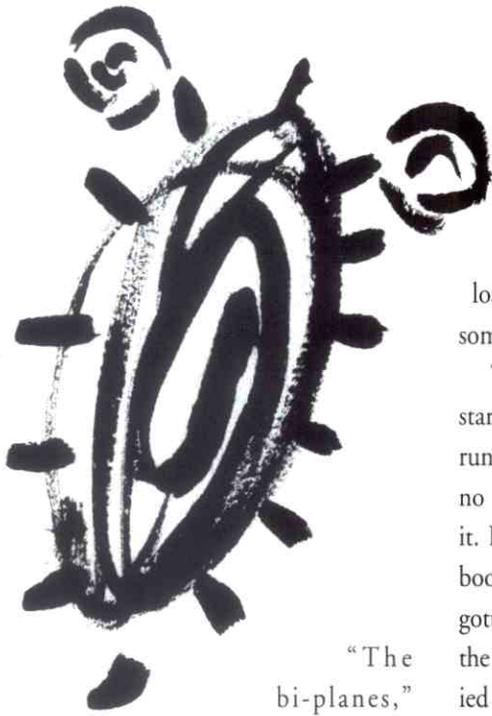
"How about a shot?" Guadalupe came close to the table.

La Polar's owner knew where the truckers were coming from; she had toured the North with Los Intrépidos, a musical group dressed like space cowboys. For a few years she got them gigs, stage managing (something she called "watching over the 'stend'") in all the towns along the border, and spent a while in Monterrey in a house with two parabolic antennas. Her moment of glory came in the United States when she lived with a Gringo who took her to see "The Nutcracker on Ice." Her "anticlimax" (she liked repeating the word that she had gotten from the changing fortunes of Los Intrépidos) also

came on "the Other Side": the Gringo dropped her off at the dentist and never came back for her, as though foreseeing the porcelain jackets that would "disfigure her laugh."

"What I need is heart," moaned a pitiful voice emanating from the lights and plastic bubbles of the jukebox.

Guadalupe touched Radio's shirt with her strong fingers, the same ones she had once used to poke around in his pants. He had a muddy memory of the morning he had come into La Polar for coffee; they had both been up all night, he at the Mountain Pass transmitter and she, waiting on tables. They looked at each other like sleepwalkers until a boom split the air.



“The bi-planes,” said Guadalupe. They looked out at the canyon and saw crop dusters spewing out sprays of pink-colored poison. Guadalupe pulled down his fly and caressed him with that proficiency born of opening bottles with one hand. Radio had seen a woman bite the umbilical cord of a newborn with her teeth. Guadalupe acted like that, with practical urgency. When he felt he was emptying himself toward the precipice, she said, “A mandrake will grow,” one of those strange things she learned with Los Intrépidos, or in Monterrey, or with the Gringo who took her to the ballet on ice. They did not repeat the encounter or talk about it. From then on, Radio supposed to himself that Guadalupe’s secrets were more important than just her city stories. The pink clouds of smoke, the cold air, the planes diving and the almost unbearable caress merged into a single word, “mandrake.” He never asked what she meant by it because he wanted it to continue to mean the unconnected things of that early morning.

“...and in the warehouse there were a thousand watermelons...” Guadalupe

spoke to no one in particular. She started a sentence in the back room and finished it at any one of the metal tables. “The house loses!” she exclaimed when she saw someone come in through the door.

The man had a red face; his fixed, staring eyes betrayed the fact that he had run the straightaway from Quemada with no break, and he hadn’t stopped hating it. He came forward, without lifting his boots up off the floor, as if he had forgotten how to walk. He stopped next to the picture of Saint Christopher; he studied “The Truck Driver’s Prayer”:

*Grant me, My Lord God, a steady hand  
and a vigilant eye,  
So that on my way I cause no harm to  
anyone.*

“This way.” Guadalupe took him by the arm.

“I’ve come from Zapata,” said the man.

In any county in the country you could find a town by that name. To produce that face and those slow-motion movements, this trucker’s Zapata must have been two sleepless nights away.

“Don’t you have a helper?” asked Guadalupe.

“Where’s the can?”

Guadalupe took him out back, through the hallway of moldy planks. Would she help him in everything, with those hard, hurt hands that repaired everything? Radio watched her unhurriedly when she came back into the room; the woman’s skinny body, her bloodshot eyes betrayed overwork, the hours breaking up blocks of ice to chill already cold beers, the nights handling drunks and vomit with no disgust whatever. What miracle or what tra-

gedy had put her there? What had happened to her somewhere else so that this seemed better?

“May I?” A hand with a skull ring pointed to the empty chair. “What’s the deal? Las Vegas rules or five-card stud?”

Even two chairs away, Radio could smell the sheepskin vest on the recent arrival. The man picked up his hand and drank down an Estrella that no one had offered him. He looked recovered, tensely aware. He must have had enough cocaine to go all the way to Zapata and back.

“Going to the border?” someone asked him.

“Where else?”

After a couple of uneventful games, the man looked at Radio.

“You work in Mountain Pass?”

“How do you know?”

“By that fucking little emblem,” he said, pointing to Radio’s sleeve: a microphone pierced by lightning. “I didn’t know you wore a uniform. We’ve talked lots of times. Your voice sounds louder over the mike.”

The shirt was one of those ridiculous gifts the truckers left him, with publicity for a Mississippi radio station. The red lightning bolts trimmed with yellow thread made you think of a comic book superhero.

There were five players at the table, but the trucker only introduced himself to Radio.

“Chuy Mendoza,” he said, holding out a fat hand.

“What you got in the rig?” asked another player.

Mendoza studied his cards, took a deep breath, touched his chest cautiously, as though he had a bite he had already scratched too often.

“Fine wood.”

Radio thought of protected trees, a clandestine sawmill, customs officials bribed to let the planks through to the Other Side.

He wasn't surprised when the other said, "You want to up the ante?"

Two players looked at their watches and got up. At the back of the room, Guadalupe polished the lead elephant she had saved from an accident. The landscape decorating the place also came from a crash. A beer truck had turned over nearby and she had kept a sheet of metal painted with an ice-bound bay. That's where the place got its name, La Polar. At the bottom of the painting, under an auroora borealis, there were lumpy shapes that could have been bears or igloos. Radio concentrated on that last part of the painting until he felt a hand on his forearm.

"How many?"

He asked for two cards. He was surprised at his own calm when he lost the hand. He pushed the bottle caps that took the place of chips.

"You start at seven, right?" Chuy Mendoza asked him. "We've got a half an hour left. If you want, I'll come back with you to Mountain Pass and we can keep the game going there, until we drop. I've got cards."

Again he spoke only to him. He knew his schedule, how he

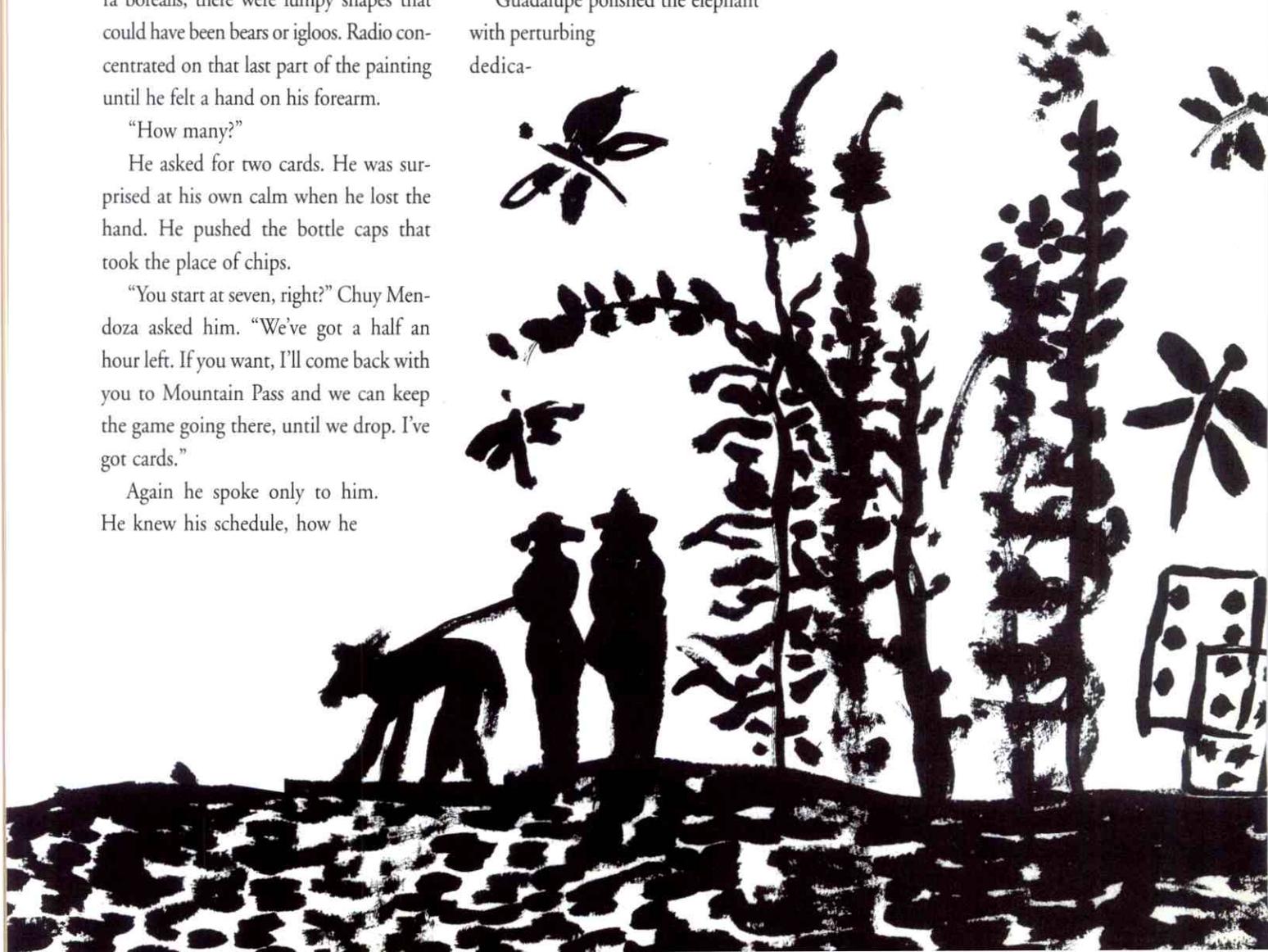
liked cards. He pressed his chest again, opening a button to scratch. Radio could see a necklace with a gold animal, the kind of jewelry Los Intrépidos would wear when they made it.

Then he looked at the peeling snake-skin boots, very expensive, very beaten up. The name Chuy Mendoza sounded fake, like some gunfighter in a movie by the Almada Brothers. The fine wood must be another fabrication. The only truth was that he wanted to stay awake all night. Maybe he needed to get to the border during the graveyard shift.

"I'm out," said the other player still at the table. This made Radio's answer easier.

Guadalupe polished the elephant with perturbing dedica-

tion. Radio would have preferred that the others stay around, with that indifference with which they listened to the Gringo who came in every Saturday to talk about nuclear war and proposed building a bomb shelter on the mountain. Now, everybody pretended to mind their own business, with annoying discretion. What did the trucker know about him? He knew his voice, the words that helped the rigs get through the fog. He had come in as though they had an appointment. Maybe he was in the know. Maybe their radio conversations had been a confused confession, a thousand times



interrupted, but a confession in the end. No, not even Guadalupe knew that. He was nothing more than a nocturnal microphone. He had even gotten used to thinking of himself as "Radio" and he was startled when Patricia shouted his name the first time they slept together.

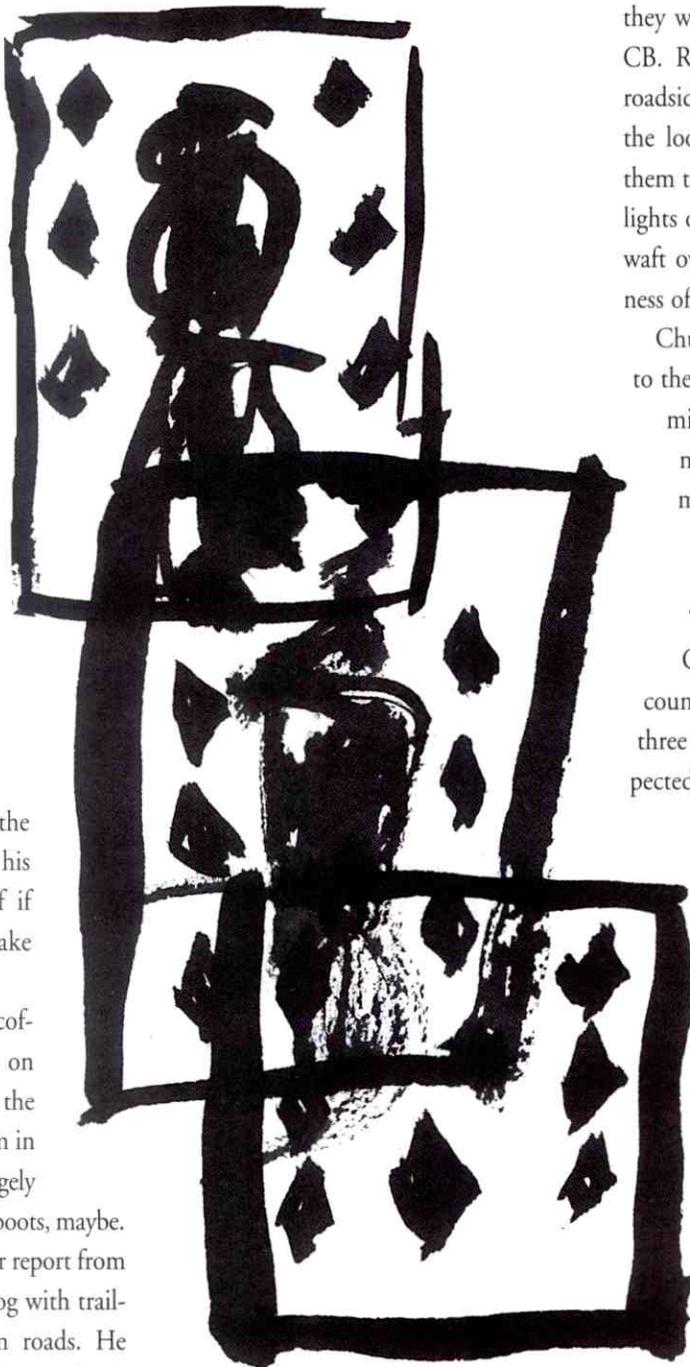
His shift started in fifteen minutes. He got up quickly, ignoring the imposing air of his adversary, who said, "I'm paying."



The door had swollen with the rain; he had to push it with his shoulder. He asked himself if the squeaking would wake Patricia or the little girl.

He found a thermos of coffee on the table; he turned on the light at the booth and the mike. The man followed him in with steps that vibrated strangely on the wood. The snakeskin boots, maybe.

He listened to the weather report from San Vicente Piedra: dense fog with trailers parked along mountain roads. He thought of the intruder's endurance (suddenly he seemed like an intruder). How long before the coke wore off? Did he have more with him? He saw his shiny fingernails, with their black half-moons. Under the light of the bare bulb, his eyes looked yellowish; his eyelashes were stiff, like scrub brush bristles. He scratched his chest again. Radio imagined desert insect bites,



bites of animals that pierced the skin to deposit their eggs, stingers that injected slow poisons. Maybe in a couple of hours Chuy Mendoza would faint away over the bottle caps he had put on the table.

Truckers rarely had northern accents; they talked another way over the air, as if

they wanted to prove something on the CB. Radio guided a truck toward the roadside at kilometer 140 and another to the lookout at kilometer 167. He told them to spend the night there with their lights on. Once in a while a song would waft over the airwaves, the infinite sadness of the Bukis.

Chuy Mendoza paid close attention to the messages coming from the transmitter, as though he were watching a movie backwards. How many times must he have spoken to him?

"You come around here much?"

"Whenever necessary. Your turn."

"How much are we betting?"

Chuy brought out some dollars, counted them parsimoniously and left three bills on the table. Radio had expected a higher bet.

In a pool of silence, as they looked at their cards as though each one had two messages, something creaked in the bedroom. Maybe Patricia was having a nightmare. The woman's dreams reached them like squeaks in the wood.

Radio served coffee, more to warm up his hands on the zinc cup than because he wanted something to drink.

"You got a shot?" Chuy Mendoza put down five dia-

monds.

He looked in the cupboard. The bottle was behind two bags of flour. He served it in a glass that had held a votive candle.

The man drank it quickly.

"Pure shit!" he said in praise. He rubbed the cross on the bottom of the glass.

A rig that identified itself as Mary Jane wanted to cross no matter what. The driver talked like he cleaned his teeth with diesel fuel: he *had* to get to the border before dawn.

"Those bastards have a date with their girlfriend," said Chuy.

Radio was familiar with the smugglers' shifts, too. The girlfriends carried army regulation .45s, wore leather boots, strong aftershave, dark glasses and accepted bribes on a fixed schedule. If the prospective boyfriend arrived late, lots of things could happen to him, but none of them got him to the Other Side.

Disappointed girlfriends were the best police: they took their revenge by slashing seat covers and letting the air out of tires in their quest for heavy drugs.

In the mountains everybody talked about the altar, the suitor, the inevitable altar boy and customs as a negotiable courtship. There was a curious respect in this symbolism: the men bribed were not whores; they might be girlfriends who were bitches-from-Hell, but never whores.

Mary Jane finally stopped when he got very high up. They could hear the metallic snore of the gearshift that seemed to drop down from sixth into fifth. The rig went off onto the gravel shoulder of the 236. It was as though something had swallowed him up there: absolute silence with the CB on, and then the melody of a harmonica, a pitiful sound, of rails lost in the night.

"The girlfriend won't be getting her serenade," said Chuy Mendoza, like anyone would have. From the time he walked into La Polar he had done nothing more interesting than win with astounding consistency. His fingernails drummed the table. Radio poured the rest of the liquor.

They went through a period of low, non-matching cards, in which two of a kind seemed like a victory.

"Misery won out over poverty," said Chuy, as he lost a hand. "Where do you get this shit?"

Guadalupe got the liquor in metal drums and poured it into bottles with a funnel. The man was fascinated by the bad taste of the stuff.

The light in the room made it impossible to see out. On clear days, Nuevo Terrales seemed very close, but the curves in the road made it about 10 hours away. As a child, Radio had watched broken-down tractor-trailers drive by. He remembered his surprise at the first refrigerator truck that went in to bring out strawberries from the Bajío. The mountains had been the same; the only things that changed were what went through them. Now the light craft airfield on the other side of the border, the weather station, the radio shack, the rigs' nocturnal ramblings (there were hardly any cars on this road bereft of cities) all depended on radar and invisible waves. Radio didn't know the owners of the weather station; he didn't even know who paid him to keep watch over the nocturnal crossings. A pick-up truck, never driven by the same man, brought him bills tied together with a rubber band. Sometimes dollars were mixed in with pesos and they had a trace of perfume, as though they had come from the girlfriends from customs. Every once in a while they raised the rate, showing that there was some kind of order, that someone was interested in the landing strips and the transportation of the merchandise. Nobody in Terrales knew how much money traveled the narrow highways where the fir trees made green

tunnels. Guadalupe thought they were dealing in fortunes, but she liked to imagine the worst: the truth was always worse. The drug traffickers were the lifeblood of the town and the Mountain Pass station. "The sultans of swing move everything; we're their hired help," she said of her far-off benefactors with equal parts hatred and admiration.

Radio won a pair of hands; maybe that was the only system for games of chance: not concentrating, letting your attention wander.

"I'm going to piss." Chuy got up to break the winning streak.

Radio went out with him. They pissed toward the edge; the smell of the ceders in the fog wafted toward them. The streams of piss fell as though into a bottomless chasm. Could the mandrake be something that only existed in very low places?

A call from a rig took Radio back to the booth. Maybe the other guy used the opportunity to bring out a line of cocaine. In any case, when he came back into the room he looked just as alert and tired as before.

"What's your limit?" He put a finger on the star on a bottle top. "You want to up the ante three zeros?"

In La Polar, a proposal like that would have stopped all conversation. But here, with your head full of badly shuffled cards and rigs dotted along the shoulders of the highway (their lights blinking like a lost constellation), that amount began to seem possible. Chuy Mendoza considered it with quiet care, as though he were examining a motor that he didn't want to take apart yet.

Radio watched the hands that picked up the cards. He became physically aware,

as though a second weariness pressed on the back of his neck, that Mendoza knew about his discovery and had come to play for it. That was the only possible explanation for the bet. The wooden rooms, the badger skin nailed on a wall, the kerosene lamp on the kitchen table next to a cereal box and two non-matching spoons, the old-fashioned microphone (a World War II relic that surprisingly still worked), the gasoline drums next to the door with the chicken wire all made a single hand like the one the visitor was proposing absurd. From that moment on, it was also logical.

"We still have two hours left." That's what Chuy had come for, for the fog to close them in until sunrise. The speaker emitted the static that meant the others were sleeping. Radio asked himself if the other guy was acting alone or if he had been sent. Maybe a pair of distant hands, with impossibly luxurious rings described by Guadalupe, had found a way of getting to him. It would have been easier to send him one of the debt collectors that traveled the mountains, who could bury him in any ravine. Why condition the recovery to a hand of cards? Only then, with uncomfortable surprise, did he realize he could still win. If he did, how would Mendoza pay him? The snakeskin boots and the gold animal spoke of better days, but the sheepskin vest, the weariness kept at bay with coke or bennies, the broken nails, suggested a cornered destiny. Maybe he had planned the meeting for months; maybe he went up and down the mountains talking to Radio, the insects staining his windshield a thousand times; his left forearm marked by the unending La Quemada straight-away; he kept his appointments at the

customs checks, became one with his weariness until from his obstinate crossing came the way to get at what the radio shack hid, the secret of the hills where the gas stations ended.

Radio studied Chuy Mendoza's voice; when the Thorton had turned over, another rig was behind it, and he stopped it with the stock phrase, "We've got a stranger." Then he put on a slicker, took a dark lantern to go out into the storm and search for the remains of the Thorton. Meanwhile, somebody was waiting a few kilometers away, at the "deer curve." But how did he know that alongside the broken bodies of the driver and his helper was the metal box? Maybe it took him a while to make the connection; he also found out much later that the Quemada dog track had lost a fortune (the money they sent to the Other Side to buy dogs with). When he asked Guadalupe, she added dirty details: the real business was in dog fights. For some reason, he felt relieved that the metal box came from a game of chance; the greyhounds had run for that; those unknown fighting dogs had cut each other to ribbons for that. However, he opened it only once and didn't count the bills. He searched for a way of talking about the money to Patricia. He didn't find one. He kept the box in the shed, 200 meters from the radio shack. His father had spend his last years there, doing nothing but smoke marihuana and look at the horizon. "This room is little on the inside and enormous on the outside," he used to say, meaning the vastness that surrounded it. The window dominated the valley, the small craft airfield, the highway with its dotted line where he had waited for the return of an out-of-date car, the Valiant that would close the circle.

Radio could barely remember the years when his parents had a bungalow with two rooms for rent in Terrales. Only very rarely did a traveler decide to spend the night there. Strictly speaking, the only thing left to him from that time was an obsessive scene in his head. He had gone over it so many times, adding exact, harmful details that came to him with growing realism, as though he had witnessed it at different ages. The bungalow was a fuzzy background, but the kitchen light was on. The bald guy was wearing a basketball T-shirt; it was summer and a circle of sweat covered his swollen belly. He must have been about 50; his chest was covered with grey hair; on the back of his hands, his hair was still red. He smiled relentlessly at nothing, as though stupidity were a gift that should be shared. He stayed with them three days, an eternity in that place of transience. He killed time making little men out of match sticks. Maybe he knew his mother from before; in any case in the memory, the guy became a guest with no reason to be there, who twisted matches all day long until that night in the kitchen came. The most outstanding thing was his physical decline: the whitish arms, the asthmatic breathing, the bald spot shining with sweat, the idiot smile; and yet he had been able to lay his mother out on the kitchen table. Unbearable slowly, Radio remembered the hands with red hair taking off her panties, her legs up in the air, the absurd high heels on the man's neck, and that face full of the indescribable surrender. It wasn't the dispassionate contact, the unburdening of two lonely people in the mountains, the uncomplicated help of Guadalupe, but an uncommunicable joy, as though his

mother's young body hoped for nothing else than to be penetrated on that table. Maybe something was wrong with the memory; maybe Radio ruined it on purpose to make her later running away worse; in any case, the head that turned to see him was real; the eyes that opened suddenly were real: his mother discovered him in the hallway and that was what decided her to leave. She would not have been able to stand the witness of her best night on the mountain growing up with her. The next day she left the house with a leather suitcase. The man was waiting for her next to the Valiant. He came up to her and tried to take her by the waist. She shook him off and got into the car.

Enough years had gone by for Radio to be able to review the scene coldly: Why hadn't they turned off the kitchen light? Everything had an overexposed tone: the too-white skin, the shining sweat, the flower printed dress, the shoes rimmed with mud, the match stick man that fell to the floor, the table with a nail about to fall out. If the nail had fallen out, his father would have awakened and saved himself the next 20 years with a shotgun with one round for everybody, his gaze fixed on the highway.

On the wall of the shed there was a picture of her smiling, a little bit like the way the bald man did. It was a retouched color portrait: the eyes were so black, they were blue, and the cheeks the color of raspberries. His memory of the kitchen looked like that photo.

When Radio would go to the shed for some tool, he would glance at the portrait. It seemed unbelievable that this woman, younger than he was

now and retouched with fake colors, could have lived there. He had eaten of that body.

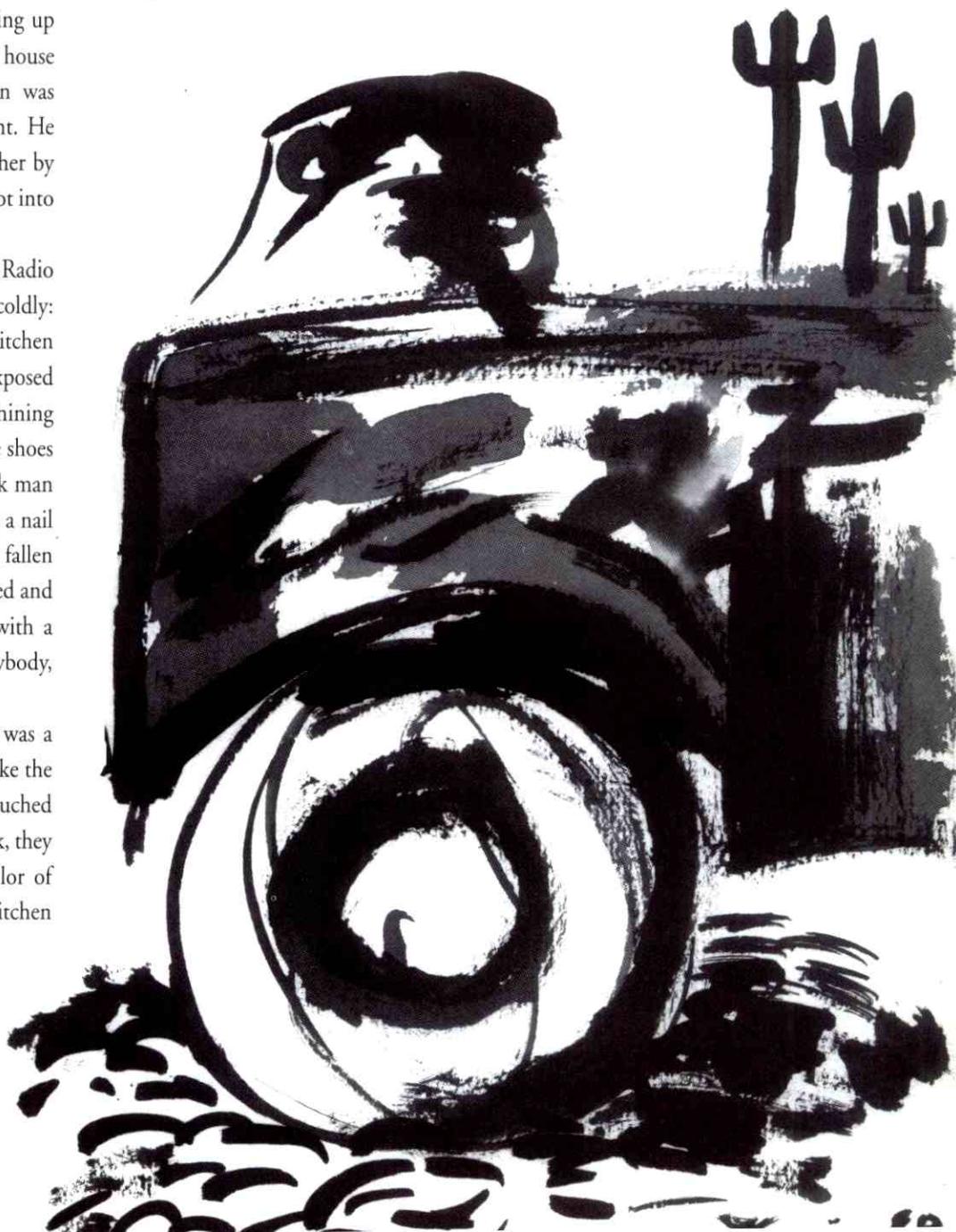
His father died in his sleep, facing the window, the "big" part of his house. Sometimes, Radio imagined that he had died with the shotgun on his knee. Then he got rid of that obvious thought. He died placidly, as though such a long wait had been another way of getting revenge.

◆ ◆ ◆

They heard steps, Patricia's feet on the wood.

The woman leaned in the doorway, uncomfortably, her face softly swollen with sleep, her hair in her eyes.

"It's really cold!" She always said that and then walked around barefoot as though she didn't know she was in Mountain Pass.





She was wearing a light blue slip that barely covered her. She took a few steps and curled up on a stool. Radio saw her toes, where the skin changed color and became very white.

He went for a blanket into the room where the little girl was sleeping. In the shadows, he could see a soft drink bottle. The pillow smelled of eucalyptus compresses. The first contact he had with Patricia had been the beautiful little girl who smiled through the chicken wire door informing him that her car “was broke.”

From the first night she slept with him and shouted his name and became the only person that didn't call him

Radio, Patricia left him hot words in his ear, “Come on.” But she stayed where she was and got a job in the fiberglass plant, 15 kilometers from Terrales. Radio had seen the smoke rising in the distance. Guadalupe said the job poisoned you, and little crystal slivers formed in your lungs. Patricia worked with a surgeon's mask over her mouth spraying substances with a hose. He liked to imagine her behind the clouds of spray. Somehow, she looked at things as though through a vaporous substance, a wire mesh, a filter that allowed her to be where she didn't want to be.

The accident with the Thorton happened a few weeks after Patricia began to

make the house inhabitable and to say she wanted them to leave. He agreed, thinking of a sand oval, perfectly illuminated, where fast dogs decided your luck and then, as though something totally unrelated, thinking of the bills he hadn't counted. He rejected the idea of using the money, not knowing quite how; slowly something just took him over and prevented him from telling Patricia. Everything took on the form of a bitter secret. Patricia wanted so badly to go away that the box hidden in the shed became the hope he betrayed without her knowing it.

Radio spread the blanket over Patricia. He watched her smile as though

she were dreaming something good and non-transferrable. He went back to the game. He almost felt relief when he picked up the three spades. "Terrales," he said to himself. He asked for two cards. With slow monotony, he matched every bet Mendoza made. He lost the hand and looked over at the window caressed by the fog. The CB produced a wordless hiss. How many nights had he stayed up next to a thermos of coffee, squashing crumbs on the table, memorizing batting averages, dealing out the cards for solitaire? Somebody had to stay awake so the others could go through. It was that simple. That was the meaning of the murmuring of the loudspeaker, and his eyes on a window where the only thing visible was dark vapor.

After hours of silence, the first voice sounded strange on the loudspeaker. "You got a rig up there?"

Chuy Mendoza scratched his chest. Radio looked him in the eyes. Chuy nodded his head no.

"No," he said "Why?"

He recognized the voice. They were calling him from the weather station.

"There's a guy off the route. He went through Terrales. Any strangers?"

"Nothing."

The man dealt the cards, not thanking him for the lie. Was somebody watching him? Was somebody waiting for him to come down with the box? His yellowish eyes bored into Radio.

"How much is left?" He pointed to his bottle caps, an overwhelming advantage.

What was worse, losing the valley, the neon lights, the open life he could go down to with Patricia, or her never knowing about the whole treasure in the metal box? It was like he was betting the woman's

dream. When she opened her eyes, she would come back into the poor room, to the things she thought to leave behind and yet improved.

He had to go for a bag of bottle caps with holes in them that had been used as washers for nails. It would have been easier to just give them to him, but the ritual continued and he lost one game after another, until they didn't need to add the scores up anymore.

"Where have you got it?" asked Chuy Mendoza.

The grayish light licked the window. In a few minutes the rigs would turn on their motors and ask for signals to be able to go back on the road.

They went out into the cool air. They took the packed dirt path that led to the shed.

Radio pushed the door and breathed in the dust. He looked out the window. The fog was rising. He saw the distant highway, its dotted line.

The box was under the portrait of his mother, next to the shotgun. Was it loaded? It seemed odd not to know.

"Here," he said taking off the blanket the box was wrapped in, opening the top. "I didn't even count it." The bills looked stiff, scratchy, as though they had been printed during the night.

The man left the shack indifferently, like a collector of lost boxes in the mountains. After a few minutes, Radio heard the rig's motor.

He looked at the photo on the wall, the wine-colored sweater, the weak body he had eaten of, the young woman he wouldn't recognize when she came back to Terrales, because she was going to come back, maybe only for a

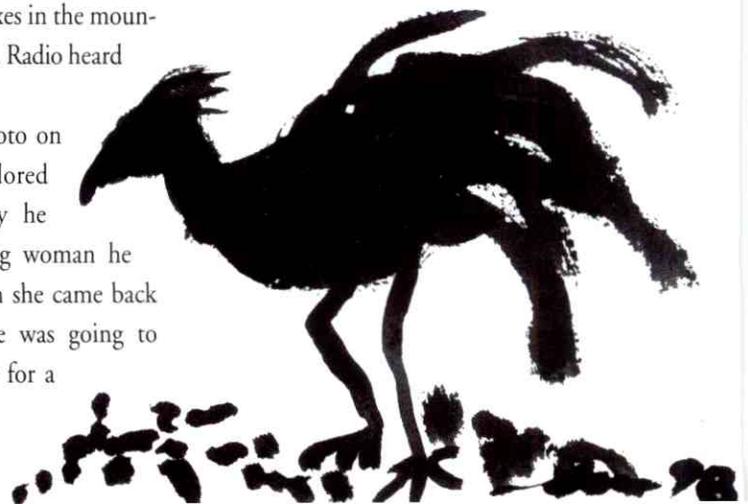
few minutes, enough to verify a part of her life, or, like so many others, to show that you could stop at this lost point on the map.

He went to the window. The land lay as though its vastness were an opportunity. The lights of the landing strip went out one by one, like gold beads. He put his fingers to his nose; they had a metallic smell from pushing bottle caps so much.

The shed was the last lookout point on the mountain. He asked himself what would happen if someone, somewhere, could see him standing there. Would they know why he was there? Would they understand what a match stick man and three spades meant? Would they imagine Patricia's mouth, abandoned to what changed during her dream? Would they feel the same way he did? Would they think that he had lost or won something? Would they understand what began when people ran out of gas? **MM**

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> This is the title story of a book of short stories soon to be published by Alfaguara.



# In Memoriam

## An Apostle of Mexican Public Health

Salvador Zubirán Anchondo  
(1898-1998)



Reprinted courtesy of Martha Zubirán

Six months before his hundredth birthday, Dr. Salvador Zubirán Anchondo died of heart failure. Only a few months earlier he had been honored by two institutions: the Ministry of Health, which emphasized his impressive medical career and particularly his work as

founder and director of the National Nutrition Institute, which today bears his name; and the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in recognition of his 1946-1948 term as rector. At the latter ceremony, the current rector, Francisco Barnés de Castro, declared 1998 the Year of Zubirán.

Salvador Zubirán was born in a little town in the state of Chihuahua in 1898. By 1923 he had finished his medical studies at the UNAM and was beginning a graduate course at Harvard University, which, 40 years later, in 1963, gave him the Hospital Peter Bent Brigham Medal.

In 1937, he began his career as a civil servant—which he continued all his working life, alternating as a clinician, researcher and teacher—when he was appointed to head up the Department of Children's Social Assistance and the Public Assistance Office. In 1942, in recognition of his work and his important participation in the 1938 brigades to eradicate leprosy under the auspices of President Lázaro Cárdenas, he was named Vice Minister of Public Assistance. In the same period, he promoted and supported concrete activities for the reception and aid to exiles from the Spanish Civil War, for many of whom he found posts in the UNAM.

His work as a civil servant proved essential for the development of public health policies in Mexico. Not only did he found institutions to promote public health, but he also emphasized its human side: the care patients received and, above all, that they be given quality care regardless of their economic status.

In 1946, Zubirán became the rector of the UNAM, a post he would hold for only two years. During that time, the paperwork was begun for completing the legal transfer of the land and initiating the construction of University City and a fund raising drive was begun for 10 million pesos to buy the UNAM laboratory and office equipment. He also proposed an increase in tuition and instituted the practice of admission exams, but the higher student fees sparked sharp discussions and he decided to resign in 1948.

Zubirán continued to work in the public sector. The next few years would bring with them a series of distinctions. In 1946, thanks to his efforts, the Hospital of Nutritional Diseases was founded. In 1970, this became the National Nutrition Institute (INN), which in 1986 by presidential decree, completed its name with that of its founder. In 1947, he was elected president of the National Academy of Medicine and in 1966, he was named professor emeritus of the UNAM. Two years later he was awarded the National Prize for Sciences. In 1970, he inaugurated the INN, today known as one of the centers where much of Mexico's medical research is done and where thousands of patients are cared for practically free of charge. In 1979, the UNAM made Zubirán a doctor *honoris causa*, as had the Universities of Yucatán, the State of Mexico and Puebla. The Mexican Senate awarded him the Belisario Domínguez medal in 1986. In 1995, he received the Prize of Medical Merit. In April of 1998, a bronze bust of him was placed in the Patio of Illustrious Doctors in the Health Ministry.

As an expert on nutrition, Zubirán was convinced that without bettering working people's nutrition from birth, there could be no effective social development. Today, the INN occupies the fourth place in scientific research in Mexico, following only the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the Autonomous Metropolitan University and the National Polytechnical Institute. However, according to a study by the National Science and Technology Council, the INN is the leader in terms of the importance and impact of its scientific research.

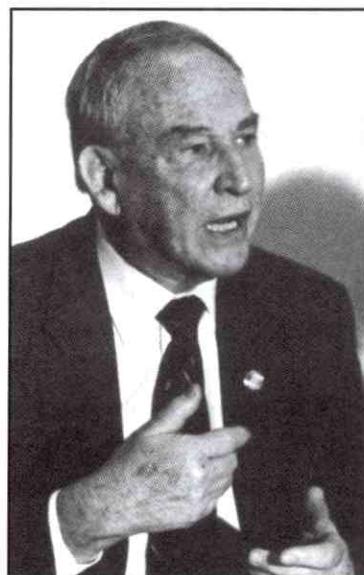
The INN has only 168 hospital beds, 400 doctors and researchers and about 150 medical residents. Despite this, it offers the highest quality, specialized clinical attention

and, above all, is an important training hospital. Its patient care, promoted by Dr. Zubirán, is a model followed by other public health institutions, emphasizing holistic treatment with quality and respect for patients' feelings.

Dr. Salvador Zubirán was recognized as Mexico's most prominent clinician of the century, one of the most valuable contributors to the development of social medicine that the country has produced and a pillar of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. ■■

## A Fighter for Democracy

José Angel Conchello  
(1923-1998)



Luis Humberto González/SILVA

José Angel Conchello was a polemical man, widely recognized as a firm defender of democracy, the nation and the rights of Mexican workers. Though he stirred all kinds of controversy and contradictory opin-

ions, he was one of the country's most respected legislators, not only because of his honesty, coherence and ability to dialogue, but the also because he knew how to intelligently balance political differences both within his own National Action Party (PAN) and in partisan and general national debate.

Trained as a lawyer and well versed in economics and national politics, from the beginning of his political career he questioned any government decision that he thought could have a negative impact on citizens' rights or national sovereignty.

During his first term as a federal deputy in 1967, he analyzed public spending under the Díaz Ordaz administration, finding considerable differences between the budget authorized by Congress and what was actually spent. In 1972, when elected president of the PAN National Executive Committee, he worked to organize the party and establish a political line oriented to denunciation and democracy, which made him enemies among the more right-wing of his fellow party members. He reappeared in national politics as a federal deputy in 1973 and he would have another term beginning in 1985. He was the PAN candidate for the gubernatorial seat of the state of Nuevo León in the 1979 elections, which he lost to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate, despite the denunciations of electoral fraud that he later reiterated in his review of the campaign.

From 1987 to 1993, he headed up the PAN regional leadership in Mexico City, where he carried out heated debates with other party leaders. He was also one of the leaders of what was called the Democratic Doctrine Forum, a democratic current inside the PAN that opposed alleged secret negotiations with the PRI,<sup>1</sup> although he did not approve the group's later split from the party. He was a representative and coordinator of the first elected Mexico City Assembly of Representatives and twice elected senator.

During his first term as senator in 1992, he wrote a tract fervently opposing the North American Free Trade Agreement (*El TLC, un callejón sin salida* [NAFTA, A Dead End]), arguing that it was "economic surrender."

As a senator in the 57th Congress he participated in five commissions: as president of the third section of the

Foreign Relations Commission (Latin America and the Caribbean); secretary of the Mexico City Federal District Commission; and a member of the Jurisdictional Social Assistance, Law of the Seas and Fishing Commissions. He combined his legislative duties with his law practice, which led him to act as director of the National Association of Advertisers (ANA) from 1962 to 1989.

Under his leadership, the ANA coined such polemical slogans as "We want no more taxes; we want more honesty," and, on the question of the privatization of the Mexican Social Security Institute, "Public property: sale prohibited."

In the current legislative session he presented six important bills, and worked on a transitory article for the Retirement Savings Plan Law.<sup>2</sup> He defended workers' rights, opposing the privatization of the Mexican Social Security Institute and modifications in its systems; he debated the imminent danger of the United States obtaining control over the oil reserves discovered in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico, and in 1997 attained a Foreign Ministry announcement of Senate participation in the negotiations to delimit maritime boundaries in the gulf.

José Angel Conchello, also the author of works denouncing national public policy, like *Agonía y esperanza* (Agony and Hope), *El trigo y la cizaña* (Wheat and Darnel) and *Devaluación 82* (Devaluation, 82), died August 4 in an automobile accident.

His funeral was attended by President Zedillo, distinguished members of all the nation's political parties and important figures in Mexico's political and cultural spheres. ■■

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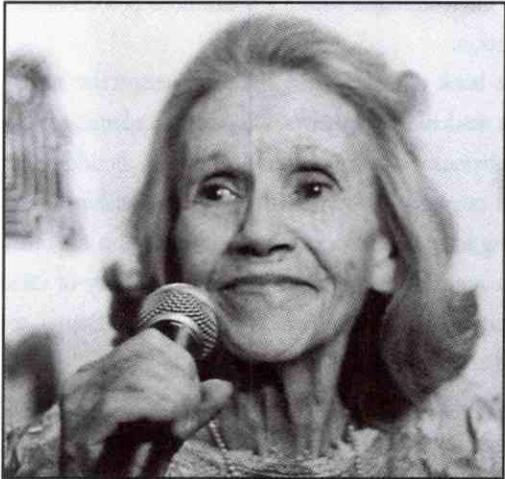
## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In alleged secret negotiations between the PRI and the PAN, called *concertaciones*, the ruling party supposedly opened up power positions to the PAN (granting them gubernatorial seats, city halls and deputyships, etc.) in exchange for its vote in the Chamber of Deputies in fundamental matters of legislation. [Editor's Note.]

<sup>2</sup> The Retirement Savings Plan Law regulates contributions for pensions and retirement for Mexico's public employees. [Editor's Note.]

## A Unique, Disquieting and Polemical Writer

Elena Garro  
(1917-1998)



Luis Humberto González/SILVA

After her death, Elena Garro's words have renewed power and poetry. In life, she always considered herself a woman unrecognized in Mexican intellectual circles, possibly because of her break-up with Octavio Paz and her resulting self-imposed exile, or perhaps because of her controversial opinions about Mexican politics—particularly when she fought openly with the 1968 student movement leaders—or because of the polemical, explosive, tormented personality she built, or because she was a different kind of woman, who liked cats, tap dancing and had discovered early in life the pleasures of writing.

Without a doubt, Elena Garro is one of the most important Mexican women writers of the twentieth century. Rafael Tovar y de Teresa, the president of the National Council for Culture and the Arts, said at her funeral, "Mexico has lost its most important contemporary woman writer." Other writers and dramatists made similar comments, recognizing in her a unique, disquieting and original writer.

Elena Garro lived out her last days in Cuernavaca, Morelos, practically immobilized in an armchair where

she had to sleep because her emphysema allowed for no changes of position. She had not always led such a sedentary life. She was very active and her complete works are vast. She was a passionate woman, who had two known loves: she married Octavio Paz at the age of 20 and had a love affair with Argentinian writer Adolfo Bioy Casares, whom she left after watching him buy some very expensive shirts, one after another, and thinking that they would undoubtedly look better on Paz, who was still her husband. She traveled tirelessly and constantly changed addresses, living in the United States, Spain and France.

Garro was born in the city of Puebla in 1917. She obtained her Masters degree in literature and was the choreographer of the UNAM theater, managed by Julio Bracho. She worked as a journalist in Mexico, the United States and Europe and as a script writer. Her plays, like *La señora en su balcón* (The Lady on Her Balcony), have been translated and staged abroad, as have her books of prose. Her first and most important novel, *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (Memories of the Future), which won the Villaurrutia Prize in 1963, was adapted for film. Her *Felipe Angeles* (1979) has been described as the most important play written about the Mexican Revolution.

Among her many works are two books of short stories, *La semana de colores* (The Week of Colors) and *Andamos huyendo Lola* (We're Running Away, Lola), and a vast number of short stories written for periodicals collected in more than 19 anthologies, as well as many plays, including, to name a few, *Un hogar sólido y otras piezas en un acto* (A Solid Home and Other One Act Plays), *El árbol* (The Tree) and *El rey mago* (The Wise Man). She also published many essays in magazines, such as "En contra de una escandalosa novela" ("Against a Scandalous Novel"), about Carlos Fuentes' *La región más transparente* (The Most Transparent Region), and "Roberto Fernández Retamar, poeta entrevisto e imprevisto" (Roberto Fernández Retamar, A Glimpse of an Unexpected Poet). Elena Garro died in her sleep, as she had wanted to. She was practically alone, accompanied only by her 16 playful cats and her daughter Helena Paz, her constant companion. ■■

Astrid Velasco Montante  
Staff writer

# Reviews

## Mito, identidad y rito

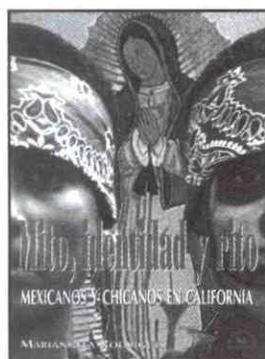
### Mexicanos y Chicanos en California

(Myth, Identity and Rites. Mexicans and Chicanos in California)

Mariángela Rodríguez

CIESAS/Porrúa

Mexico City, 1998, 277 pp.



The ideal reader of *Mito, identidad y rito. Mexicanos y Chicanos en California* could well be a Mexican interested in the variety and innovative nature of Chicano reritualization as a means of accounting for “the contradictory process of identity, as far as what is altered and what is maintained, within the process of going from being Mexican to being Chicano.” (All the quotes from this book are my translation). That is to say, claims to identity that, as Chicano critic Rafael Pérez-Torres has put it, are “involved in an endless project of becoming, rather than being, Chicana/o.”

This book is an attempt to describe from an anthropological perspective the rites—as anthropologist and author Mariángela Rodríguez calls them—Chicanos have appropriated, recreated through an imperative need to establish their identity in what she refers to as “a search for symbolic reunification when confronted with the fact of the fragmented nature of the life experience offered by the United States.”

Rodríguez uses reference material that goes from graphics and interviews to poetry, lyrics, performance, folk art and a variety of everyday expressions, including program contents and newspaper

ads, thereby underscoring how personal and collective experiences, popular and mass culture and their creative expressions are closely interconnected within a continuous process of deliberate (re)creation.

The book offers Mexican readers a perspective rarely found outside academic bookshelves. Despite its academic nature—it is quite obviously a doctoral thesis—there is an additional slant, since it targets a Mexican readership, a readership interested in knowing more about Mexicans *del otro lado*, “on the other side,” an aim suggested by the joint distribution policy of CIESAS and well-known publishing house Miguel Angel Porrúa to reach beyond academic circles.

The author introduces an interesting personal perspective at the beginning: what it’s like to be a Colombian-born Mexican citizen, a female anthropologist working on her doctoral thesis in the U.S., who finds herself placed on the sidelines, since she cannot claim her identity either as a Colombian, a Mexican, a Chicana or a Latina. To the repeated question of why she, a non-Chicana and non-native-born Mexican has embarked on research focused on Chicano identity, she responds emotionally, “I remember the lump in my throat when I thought that my 22 years in Mexico, all my studies and life as an adult woman, including a Mexican child and Mexican nationality were worthless,” to which she adds that “the feeling of not belonging anywhere was devastating.” By situating her multiple selves and the site of her discourse, she identifies with a broader project of *chicanidad* that in turn accounts for her own project, perspective and writing.

The text is supplemented by a series of color photographs of a number of murals and other Chicano expressions in Los Angeles. The conclusion inserts a useful summary of the central issues raised and ends with a bibliography. The six main sections help contextualize the three epicenters of her thesis: the Cinco de Mayo celebration, *La Quebradita* and the *Calpulli*, which she sustains are all a synthesis of civil/political, popular culture/mass media and rural religious/urban secular expressions, that is, ritualistic needs that find an outlet in new forms in new social formations.

In dealing with the Cinco de Mayo celebration, for instance, and its specific characteristics in Los Angeles, Mariángela Rodríguez refers to this event in terms of a reconfiguration of its function, context and what it originally celebrated. She sustains that as an antiinterventionist victory, it becomes an important date, far more so than independence day, celebrated in Mexico as *El Grito* on September 15.

She sustains that the *Fiesta Broadway* is “an initiation ritual to the knowledge of other Latin American cultural aspects unknown to some audiences, such as dance, music and food,” in which the *fiestas pueblerinas* (small town fiestas) are transculturally reenacted and transformed.

She suggests, for instance, that “the musical phenomenon” of *La Quebradita*, in its several forms and expressions, “not only creolizes different rhythms in terms of the different ways it is danced, but the music itself is a synthesis of multiple traditions in contemporary versions that follow a process from marginality to the objectification of marginality.”

For Rodríguez, the *indianización* or nativism of Chicanos—which, she states, becomes “a passport to chicanoness which, seen in greater depth, erases *mestizaje*”—is a means of recovering a pre-Hispanic origin as an identity marker. It is part of a “cultural revitalization” phenomenon intent on creating a new and better culture, in addition to a cultural unity as opposed to the fragmentation of the U.S. which they experience. She illustrates this by means of the San Bernardino *Calpulli*.

Although *Mito, identidad y rito. Mexicanos y Chicanos en California* is descriptive in essence, it also tacitly asks many questions, at a time when, given our present historical context and the effects of NAFTA and globalization, among other issues, a more conscious approach is necessary vis-à-vis the variety of possibilities and meanings of *mexicanidades* in the plural, not merely what they signify but also what they can come to mean through (re)creation.

True, problematization itself of the monolithic conception of *mexicanidad* in the singular, together with its nationalistic implications, is nothing new. Yet, this book becomes an attempt to lay this bare before a Mexican readership, a readership that—due to a long-standing and generalized queaziness in dealing with the reality of Mexicans in the U.S., of Chicanos, because of complex historical, geographical, nationalistic and cultural resistances to accepting them beyond the hegemonically-determined status of betrayers, *malinchistas*—has continually ignored their interesting

specificity as a culture and their continued process of hybrid identity-creation.

Claire Joysmith

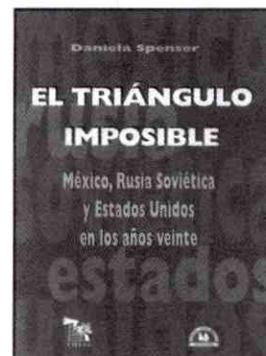
Researcher at CISAN

**El triángulo imposible  
México, Rusia Soviética y Estados Unidos  
en los años veinte**

(The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia  
And the United States in the 1920s)

Daniela Spencer

CIESAS, Mexico City, 1998, 269 pp.



Daniela Spencer’s book, *El triángulo imposible: México, Rusia Soviética y Estados Unidos en los años veinte* (The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia and the United States in the 1920s), is a novel contribution to clarifying the events relating to two of the most important social revolutions of the twentieth century, the Bolshevik and the Mexican Revolutions, as well as the role the United States played in each.

With rigorous use of archival materials, the author chronologically delineates the vicissitudes of Soviet policy toward Mexico, trapped between the ideological interests of the Comintern and the state interests of its diplomacy. At the same time, she recounts the difficult balances that the Mexican revolutionary leaders had to strike between the demands of their internal policies, leftist sympathies and the challenges of the relationship with the United States.

The book also expands on the contradictions between those groups in U.S. society who already saw social change in Latin America as an extension of the “Bolshevik plague” and those who,

like Ambassador Morrow, understood the specificity of revolutions in the region as a consequence of endogenous structures and nationalism.

Needless to say, the policies and strategies that were embryonic in the 1920s would become the basis for the policies of these actors when faced with the social changes in Latin America during the Cold War.

Spencer divides her book chronologically into three parts: "The Meeting of Two Revolutions" covers 1917 to 1923; "Diplomatic Disagreements," the second part, analyzes the period from 1924 to 1927; and "Toward the Clash," the third section, probes the period from 1928 to 1930, when relations between Mexico and the Soviet Union were broken. This exposition in blocks describes the policies of each actor, starting with the United States, followed by the Soviet Union and finally Mexico.

Noteworthy in U.S. policy toward the U.S.S.R. is its early opposition to the Bolsheviks, motivated by domestic considerations but above all due to an "ideological allergy" to socialist positions. The author considers that this is due to the all-pervasive presence of ideology in the U.S. at the time. Both actors presented themselves as alternative models for "the salvation of humanity." Later, this position would become more subtle when economic interests began to be relevant in the expanding Russian market at the end of the 1920s.

Initial U.S. policy was equally opposed to what was happening in Mexico. On the one hand, an attempt was made to link the two revolutions ideologically, and, on the other, the revolutionary nationalism of two Mexican leaders was considered unacceptable, particularly that of Venustiano Carranza.

This line of thinking changed with the recognition of Alvaro Obregón in 1923 due to the Bucareli Accords and Mexico's concessions in the area of oil production, foreign debt payments and the non-retroactive application of Article 27 of the Constitution. We agree with Spencer in that, beyond justifications and plotting, the basis for U.S. policy was the desire not to legitimize a precedent of nationalist policy and to create a dam to contain the Mexican example in Latin America.

Spencer argues that from Mexico's point of view, Obregón's decision to establish relations with the Soviet Union was a tactic to make up for the contention stirred up by the Bucareli Accords and to satisfy many defenders of the socialist nations among what she calls "the radical intellectual elite," including people of the standing of José Vasconcelos, Jesús Silva Herzog, Díaz Soto y

Gama and De Negri, among others. Another factor that influenced the decision was the process of moderation the Bolshevik Revolution went through in 1923 with the advent of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the non-class-confrontation policy implemented by the Comintern.

However, the radicalization of Soviet policy, including calls to subversion in Mexico starting in 1928, together with the increasingly moderate line of Plutarco Elías Calles in the last two years of his presidential administration, laid the basis for greater distancing of the two revolutions, leading to a definitive break in 1930. Spencer's book goes into these central hypotheses in a very accessible way, with anecdotes making for easy reading.

The book also has undeniable methodological value for students of twentieth-century postrevolutionary experiences in Latin America. It would be interesting, for example, to study the similarities and differences between the Mexican revolutionaries, on the one hand, and the Cubans and Sandinistas, on the other, vis-à-vis the United States and the Soviet Union. It would also be useful to identify the causes for which the U.S.S.R. took a different position in each case, while the United States adopted a similar confrontational stance. Finally, it would be worthwhile to compare the failures and achievements of socialism in the U.S.S.R., revolutionary nationalism in Mexico, the Sandinista Revolution and Cuban communism.

Another question which is enriched methodologically and theoretically by this book is the current study of Mexico's foreign policy and its relations with the United States. Just as the author does, it is imperative to link up the actions of Mexican foreign policy with the complexities of its domestic situation and with the rise of different groups who claim to represent "national interests." It is also worthwhile differentiating the protagonists in U.S. policy-making toward Mexico, who very often act in an incoherent, contradictory fashion.

Another practical lesson that can be derived from the period of history Spencer deals with is recognition of the fact that Mexican achievements in its bilateral agenda with the United States, even in the context of the existing asymmetry, have not only been made through that unflinching "flexibility" often interpreted by the other side as weakness, but also due to an energetic policy that induces Washington policy-makers to negotiate and not only impose their will.

*Santiago Pérez Benítez*

**Study Center on the Americas, Cuba**

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Publicación bimestral editada por:

Editorial México Desconocido. / Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia

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