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**Oral Narratives of Elena Lezama de Rodríguez: A Female View of the Mexican
Revolution of 1910-1928**

Jaime Sánchez

**A dissertation presented to the
Graduate Faculty of Middle Tennessee State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree Doctor of Arts**

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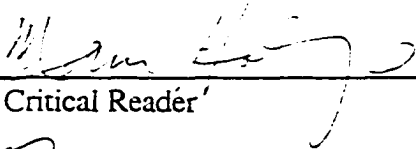
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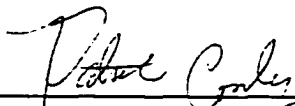
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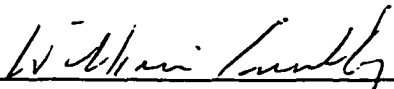
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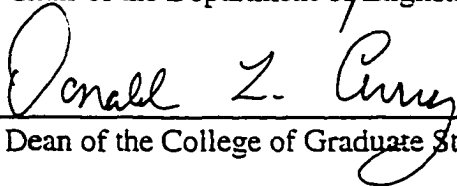
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Abstract

Oral Narratives of Elena Lezama de Rodríguez: A Female View of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1928

The main objective of this dissertation is to transcribe into written form a series of oral narratives dealing with the Mexican Revolution. The historical period that they cover goes from 1892, eighteen years before the initiation of hostilities between the revolutionary forces of Francisco I. Madero and the government of Porfirio Díaz, through the end of the Revolution in 1928. The original narrator of the stories is Elena Lezama de Rodríguez, and she provides a female perspective on the conflict.

The purpose of this project is to preserve a literary creation. The stories are based on historical facts, but Elena Lezama de Rodríguez embellished them with fictional elements. Nevertheless, they reveal a deeper reality than historical narratives/accounts because they deal with people's emotions during a serious crisis.

The dissertation is divided into four distinct sections. The first one provides an historical background for the narratives. It shows how the social turmoil of the Revolution ironically facilitated the emancipation of some women who belonged to the aristocracy. The literature consulted includes views by members of different political factions of the various historical events.

The second section explains the methodology used to transcribe the stories. The process followed three steps. First, the stories were recorded in writing, initially in Spanish and then in English, trying to maintain all the elements of the original oral narrative. Secondly, through an immersion into Elena Lezama de Rodríguez's world, the

stories were edited and expanded in an attempt to place them in their historical perspective. This immersion included reading personal correspondence, interviewing family members, and visiting actual settings. Finally, the stories were organized in a narrative structure that basically follows a chronological order. The literature consulted includes sources dealing with cultural studies, post-colonial theory, feminist narratives and discourse, alternative forms of representation, anthropological narratives, and fiction dealing with the Mexican Revolution.

The third section, the stories themselves, forms the bulk of the dissertation. Finally, the fourth section analyzes the artistic importance of the stories and the achievements and limitations of the emancipation of aristocratic women during the Mexican Revolution as seen through Elena Lezama de Rodríguez's eyes.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this project to the memory of my grandmother, Elena Lezama de Rodríguez, who made my childhood pleasant. I want to thank my mother, Dr. Margarita Rodríguez de Sánchez, for her help in the creation of this work. I also want to thank my aunts María Elena, Josefina, and Marta, and my cousins Graciela and Imelda for the invaluable information that they gave me to fill some gaps in my grandmother's stories.

I owe immense gratitude to Dr. Robert Petersen, Dr. Marion Hollings, and Dr. Patrick Conley for their guidance and encouragement. I also express my gratitude to Betty Palmer Nelson for her invaluable suggestions and encouragement. Finally, I thank my wife, Annette Ragland Sánchez, for her continuous support and her help proofreading my work. She has my eternal love.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In Spanish colonial Mexico, the Procession of the Royal Flag was a celebration that commemorated the fall of the Aztecs at the hands of the Spaniards headed by Hernán Cortés on August 13, 1521. This holiday was celebrated until 1821, the year when Mexico won its independence from Spain (González Obregón 47-58). In 1822, Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi wrote an article entitled "The Life and Funeral of Mr. Royal Flag," in which he argued that it would be inappropriate to continue celebrating the fall of the Aztec Empire. He proposed the celebration of September 15, 1810, the date when Mexican patriots began the Independence War (qtd. in González Obregón 56). This simple example shows how the winners are the ones who write the history of the events, and the losers usually remain silent.

The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1928 was a social movement joined by many individuals with a wide variety of ideologies. Furthermore, it can be stated that what began as a revolution evolved into a civil war, and then into an oligarchy. Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata were some of the losers in this conflict while Alvaro Obregón and his followers retained power. It is not surprising, therefore, that the most widely circulated historical accounts of Villa and Zapata present a very negative image of these individuals. It would be interesting, however, to know their side of the story to obtain a better perspective on what actually took place.

In addition, women participated very actively in the Revolution of 1910-1928, but accounts of their contribution to the Mexican Revolution are not very common (Meyer

and Sherman 555-7). Therefore, it would be extremely helpful and valuable to hear a female voice dealing with these events, and this is precisely what this dissertation attempts to do. The female view that we are examining was originally expressed in a series of oral narratives, and our work consisted of transcribing them into written form.

The voice is that of Elena Lezama de Rodríguez, my grandmother. She lived in Tacuba, a suburb of Mexico City, most of her life (1885-1973). The town of Tacuba has been absorbed by Mexico City, and it is now efficiently connected to the rest of the city by a modern subway system. During the Mexican Revolution, however, Tacuba was simply a small town situated approximately ten miles away from downtown Mexico City. Tacuba suffered hunger and the repression of Huerta's dictatorship as much as the big metropolis. On the other hand, while Mexico City suffered more of the effects of the actual fighting, Tacuba witnessed the funerary processions to the cemeteries that are still situated nearby. As a result, my grandmother experienced first hand the horrors and glories of the Revolution.

Elena was born into an aristocratic and relatively wealthy family. Her parents were José María Lezama and Carmen de la Sierra. Elena's father was a lawyer by profession. He had a reputation for being intelligent and severe. Gradually, he improved his position in the government of General Porfirio Díaz until he became Judge of the Supreme Court. Carmen de la Sierra was, by all accounts, extremely arrogant, and she was a friend of Mexico's first lady at that time, Doña Carmen Romero Rubio.

My grandmother did not enjoy the oppressive environment of the aristocracy. She was rebellious but very agreeable. In addition, she attended a public school where she had

the opportunity to know people from the middle and lower social classes. Elena was not allowed to study for a professional career, and so she married Francisco José Alvarez in 1906. He was a handsome man born into a good family and worked as an executive of a famous department store. It seemed that she would live as an aristocratic woman for the rest of her life. Nevertheless, her husband died in 1911. Almost simultaneously, Francisco I. Madero overthrew Díaz's government, and the old aristocracy lost much of its influence.

In 1912, my grandmother married Jesús Rodríguez Tovar, a medical doctor from the middle class. The marriage took place precisely during the first phase of the Mexican Revolution. It should be noted that Jesús Rodríguez Tovar, my grandfather, was a very intelligent individual, but he was not an aristocrat. In addition, he was very dark, and his color contrasted with the light complexion of the aristocrats, who were of European descent. It should be noted that indigenous people were ineligible as members of the elite during the government of Porfirio Díaz. This was a step backwards because Benito Juárez, who was a pure Indian, had been the previous president of Mexico.

Elena's narratives provide a clear image of her personality. Nevertheless, it is important to provide a brief description of her character at this time. I knew my grandmother very well because she lived with my family for approximately five years. She was a very friendly woman who possessed a delightful personality. Her manners and social skills were excellent, and she was able to carry on a conversation with all people regardless of their social status or education. She went back to college as a married woman and graduated in 1935, which was very unusual at that time. Her major was

Carmen de la Sierra and Her Siblings

Guadalupe, Piedad, Manuela, Carmen, Ana
 | |
 Guadalupe 11 children

Elena Lezama's Marriages

Fco. José Álvarez (aristocrat) - Elena Lezama - Jesús Rodríguez (middle class physician)
 | |
 Francisco José, María Elena José de Jesús, Marta, Cristina, Margarita

Jesús Rodríguez and His Siblings

Petronila, Anita, Rita, Jacinta, José María, JESÚS, Luis
 | | |
 2 sons Romualda, María 7 children

Jesús Rodríguez's First Two Marriages

Manuela Parra ----- Jesús Rodríguez ----- Soledad Guzmán
 | |
 daughter, Manuel Fidel Rosalía, Josefina

The family tree stresses that my grandmother's first husband was an aristocrat while my grandfather was a middle class physician. This is important because, going from the aristocracy into the middle class, Elena had the unique experience of moving freely within the different sectors of the Mexican society of that time. In other words, she knew the elite aristocracy and the middle class very well because she belonged to both classes during different times in her life. In this way, she provides a unique barometer of the social, economic, and political climate through the oral stories that she narrated

frequently to her family and relatives. As her grandson, I had the opportunity to listen to these stories several times when I was a child, and my job in this dissertation is to organize them, taking into account their historical background.

Finally, it should be noted that Elena's stories clearly show three important points. First, a female view of the Revolution brings to light the lives of individuals who are often forgotten in a patriarchal society, such as women and children. Secondly, a female view recognizes problems that are often ignored, which range from the culture's homophobia to widespread hunger. Finally, this female perspective tears down false historical icons and shows that traditional historical figures are artificially created.

Chapter 2

Historical Background

When we refer to the Mexican Revolution in this dissertation, we refer to the popular revolt that took place throughout Mexico from 1910 through 1928. The magnitude of a conflagration of such dimensions as the Mexican Revolution can be visualized somewhat by pointing out that the population of the country decreased from approximately fifteen million people in 1910 to little more than fourteen million in 1920. Given the growth rate of the population until 1910, Michael Meyer and William Sherman moderately estimate that between one and a half and two million people lost their lives during this decade (552-561). In addition, it should be noted that those affected covered all social classes and ages since middle class individuals mixed with poor people while children, women, and men fought side by side (Torre Villar and Navarro de Anda 271-3).

To understand this terrible conflict that shook Mexican society to its very roots, as Jesús Silva Herzog indicates throughout *Breve historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, it is important to understand the basic features of the administration of General Porfirio Díaz, who directly or indirectly governed Mexico from 1876 to 1911, when he was overthrown by a popular revolution led by Francisco I. Madero. The government of Díaz was not as negative as subsequent administrations have tried to portray it, and it represented an era of progress in various sectors (Reyes 315-326) .

First, Mexico created an important economic infrastructure based on the development of a railroad network, financial institutions, mining, industry, and agriculture. In addition, even though this economic growth was largely achieved by

increasing the public debt, the financial reform that began in 1881 gradually reduced this debt. This process, which continued until 1893, practically eliminated this problem. Through strict fiscal discipline, a controlled and gradual growth of tax revenues, and the rapid increase of exports, Mexico balanced its budget in 1894 in spite of economic crises suffered on various occasions. Secondly, the economic growth was accompanied by an impressive development in various sectors. Some of the most beautiful buildings and monuments that cities and towns exhibit at the present time date back to the Díaz regime. The arts and sciences received great encouragement and support from the administration. In this way, the middle class or petit bourgeois enjoyed a privileged place in society (Meyer and Sherman 439-452).

How could a revolution of such magnitude take place under these circumstances? At that time, a society that had grown accustomed to a long period of peace remained puzzled and in shock when a government that seemed immovable under those circumstances began to crumble. However, it was precisely this confidence which facilitated the gradual hatching of the revolt. To understand this concept, it is important to highlight several important problems that writers like Bernardo Reyes and other supporters of Porfirio Díaz have chosen to ignore. These problems have been thoroughly presented and analyzed by Francesco Ricciu in *La Revolución Mexicana* and by José Muñoz Cota in *Conferencias*. To begin with, a good portion of the capital used to finance the economic growth came from foreign investors, mainly from the United States and England. In this way, several individuals like William Randolph Hearst became owners of economic empires. To a great extent, Mexico was viewed as a land where people of

imagination, money, and audacity could become even wealthier in a short period of time. While the economic growth of the country was respectable, it could not support the economic bonanza that both national and foreign capitalists enjoyed. In other words, as Anita Brenner indicates repeatedly in her work, their wealth was only partially obtained through the country's economic growth, and it was also amassed through the exploitation of the working and rural classes (40). William Cornell Green, for example, bought the mines of Cananea in Northern Mexico in 1881, and he organized the Greene Consolidated Copper Company. In 1906, the workers went on strike because Mexicans were paid less than their United States counterparts for performing the same jobs. In addition, all managerial and leadership positions were staffed entirely by United States personnel. The strike became violent, and the Mexican governor of Sonora authorized Arizona rangers to cross the border to quell the rebellion. The strike leaders were later hanged from trees (Meyer and Sherman 483-491).

Wealthy land owners or *hacendados* like the Terrazas family did not hesitate to break apart the strong ties of the Mexican family for their economic gain. In this way, male agricultural laborers were transported away from their families and experienced terrible living conditions. This situation was perpetuated by the *tiendas de raya*, which were stores where workers were forced to buy food and clothing at very high prices. Naturally, the owners of these stores, who were the same *hacendados*, loaned money to their workers in exchange for future working commitments. As a result, unbearable debt loads were suffered during a lifetime and even for various generations (Silva Herzog 7-53).

Francisco Bulnes states that Porfirio Díaz did not seem to realize that this was a very explosive situation, and Díaz attributed the social unrest to political problems (5-8). Meanwhile, social differences were accentuated to an extreme, and segregation was not even disguised. In the main plazas of cities and towns, for example, the common people were prohibited from entering the parks and recreational places where the aristocracy promenaded (Rodríguez Tovar, Letter). Lower-class people seemed to survive by natural selection and the amazing prolific power of the natives. In his doctoral dissertation, my grandfather, Jesús Rodríguez Tovar, cites several examples of women who had more than twenty children, most of whom died between the ages of one and two when their mothers stopped breast-feeding them. This is because they were given *pulque* to drink, an extremely fermented beverage with a relatively low alcoholic content (Rodríguez Tovar, "Enfermedades" 16-18). It should be noted that these people had no other choice since they did not readily have access to a continuous supply of fresh water.

Finally, it is also important to point out another characteristic of the Díaz regime. While his government openly stressed an order patriarchal in nature, female participation in the movements promoting social change was evident from the very beginning. In this way, mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of the striking workers at the mines of Cananea openly and actively supported the miners' demands. Also, while middle-class women enjoyed a certain level of freedom to enter the work force and follow professional careers, women from the aristocracy remained at home and did not study beyond elementary school (Ramos Escandón 143-162).

A Wealthy Philanthropist, Francisco I. Madero

The Maderos were a very wealthy family from the northern state of Coahuila. Francisco I. Madero, an idealist and a man of action at the same time, published *La sucesión presidencial en 1910*. In that work, Madero expressed that the greatest danger to Mexico was the series of military dictatorships that created an absolutist regime. In short, he believed that Mexico was ready for a democratic government and initiated a political campaign that united important sectors opposed to the Díaz regime to form the Antireelection Center in 1909. This group included prominent intellectuals and very talented individuals like José Vasconcelos, Filomeno Mata, and many others.

As expected, Porfirio Díaz responded with brutal repression and ordered the arrest of Francisco I. Madero and his followers. Nevertheless, the young idealist escaped to the United States and responded by boldly declaring that he would begin a revolution on November 20, 1910 if the administration of Porfirio Díaz did not respect the will of the people. Many individuals, including Madero's grandfather, laughed at this statement, but the young man fulfilled his promise and initiated the armed revolt. Porfirio Díaz underestimated the support that Madero had obtained. Many people were in hiding, waiting for the appropriate moment to take action. One of them was a young laborer from the state of Durango, Doroteo Arango, better known as Francisco (Pancho) Villa. Once again, Díaz failed to notice that some individuals from the lower social classes were extremely talented and charismatic. Madero also received support from important sectors of the middle class who believed that General Díaz and his group were too old and antiquated to lead Mexico into the future. Aquiles Serdán and his family illustrate this

situation. They were ready to go up in arms on November 20 when their plans were discovered. Consequently, they were brutally assassinated by the repressive machinery of Porfirio Díaz on November 18, 1910 (Taracena 83-116).

There were others, like Emiliano Zapata, who simply wanted justice for the people that they represented. John Womack in *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (3-9) and Enrique Krauze in *El amor a la tierra: Emiliano Zapata* (15-28, 39-47) point out that Zapata was well aware of the enormous injustices that people suffered in the agrarian sector. This problem dated back to the communal ownership of arable land during the time of the Aztecs. People who had worked the land in a communal society for centuries were gradually dispossessed through a series of gimmicks, maneuvers, and brute force.

The old dictator realized too late his mistakes, and when he was trying to negotiate, Pancho Villa and other leaders took Ciudad Juárez in the north on May 10, 1911. Madero installed his provisional government in that city. A few days later, General Díaz left for Europe after having sent his resignation to Congress on May 25, 1911. Finally, Madero entered Mexico City triumphally on July 7, 1911. Popular elections were held, and Madero took possession of the presidency on November 6, 1911 (Torre Villar and Navarro de Anda 271-273).

Two Fatal Mistakes

Madero experienced a unique opportunity to lead Mexico into prosperous times while leading a truly democratic government. He had popular support and was also respected by the old aristocracy and the wealthy (Muñoz Cota, *Ensayos* 74-90). As my

grandmother used to say, Madero came from a very good family, and it was surprising that he would surround himself by a mob of *pelados*, which is a pejorative name for people from the lower social classes, particularly those living in urban areas .

Nevertheless, Madero made two fatal mistakes that José Vasconcelos in his memoirs (1: 434-451) and Alfonso Taracena in his biography of Madero (126-151) repeatedly mention but do not satisfactorily explain. First, Madero licensed the revolutionary army while practically leaving the old federal army intact. Secondly, he moved very slowly with the social reforms that the revolutionaries demanded. As a result, several revolutionaries felt betrayed and refused to put up their arms. Emiliano Zapata represents a prime example of this situation. When the demands of the people that he represented were not fulfilled, Zapata stopped recognizing Madero as president and began an active campaign of land and social reform. Madero initiated a campaign against Zapata and first sent Juvencio Robles and later Felipe Angeles to fight against the charismatic leader from the south. Both campaigns failed since Zapata followed a tactic of guerrilla warfare and attacked by surprise. Some of these attacks took place very near Mexico City, in Xochimilco (Ricciu 68-75). My grandmother told me that even at that time, Zapata had the reputation, particularly among the poor, of being almost supernatural because he appeared and disappeared like a ghost.

Victoriano Huerta

Madero ceased his attacks against Zapata to deal with other rebellions. The most important of them was a counterrevolutionary movement led by Félix Díaz, a nephew of

General Porfirio Díaz, and Bernardo Reyes. Victoriano Huerta, who was in charge of commanding the troops to defend Mexico City, changed sides. He withdrew recognition of Madero's government and ordered General Aureliano Blanquet to arrest the president. Making a charade of legality, Huerta forced the resignation of President Madero and Vice President Pino Suárez, and they were later assassinated on February 21, 1913 (Torre Villar and Navarro de Anda 274-278).

This was the first time that residents of Mexico City experienced first hand the atrocities of armed struggle during the Revolution. The period from February 9 to February 19 is known as the *Decena Trágica* (the Tragic Ten) because it covers the ten days of confrontation between the counterrevolutionaries and the troops loyal to Madero. Artillery exchanges took place, and the inhabitants of the city suffered hunger. Civilian and military casualties amounted to several thousands, and the bodies lay putrefying on the streets for a long time. The bodies were later cremated, their limbs contracted with the flames, and their faces made horrible grimaces (Taracena 135-177).

It should be noted that the coup was actively supported by the American Ambassador in Mexico, Mr. Henry Lane Wilson. This individual was not a career diplomat but a corporate lawyer, and his actions show his complete ignorance of the political and social situation of Mexico since Madero favored an approach to the United States at the expense of the European nations. On the other hand, the coup was welcome by important sectors of the Catholic Church, including the Pope, who congratulated Huerta for overthrowing Madero's government. This was contrary to the view of some priests who were aware of the social inequalities of Porfirio Díaz's regime and even

participated actively in the revolt (Meyer and Sherman 518-521; Taracena 135-177).

As my grandmother repeatedly said, it was a painful realization to witness the hatred and cruelty that can exist. Suddenly, it was as if the inhabitants of the city were simply living in a huge prison, and their guard was as cruel and repulsive as a jackal.

The Centaur from the North

Government leaders from other countries and local political leaders within Mexico failed to recognize Huerta's government. Venustiano Carranza, the governor of Coahuila, invited other governors to oppose Huerta's regime. Alvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles, and Pancho Villa joined forces against Huerta while Zapata fought from the south against the military dictator. This period represented the most glorious moments of Pancho Villa. The charismatic leader and his *División del Norte* (Northern Division) defeated the federal army time after time, and the Centaur from the North appeared invincible not only to Huerta but also to other revolutionary leaders. As a result, a split between Villa and Carranza appeared inevitable even before the Huerta regime was overthrown on July 15, 1914. The Revolutionary Army orderly entered Mexico City on that day without causing any harm to the civilian population. By that time, Huerta had already resigned the presidency and retreated to the United States, where he would eventually die in prison. Venustiano Carranza arrived in Mexico City on August 20 while Villa remained in the countryside visibly ignored by Carranza. In *Francisco Villa y la Revolución*, Federico Cervantes presents a full and detailed account of these historical events (17-225).

There are two other important points that need to be mentioned. The first one is the American invasion of Veracruz on the Gulf Coast. The government of Woodrow Wilson used a series of excuses to attempt to remove Huerta from power. However, this tactic had exactly the opposite effect because it awakened a nationalistic fervor that actually strengthened Huerta's position. In any event, American forces remained in Veracruz until November 14, long after the military power of Francisco Villa and Venustiano Carranza had forced Huerta into exile, basically with no other purpose than to save Wilson's political position. It should be remembered that Villa and Carranza never recognized Huerta's regime, and they overthrew the dictator because they wanted to reestablish the revolutionary ideology that Madero had previously developed (Meyer and Sherman 531-534).

The second point that needs to be stressed is the active role of women in the military action. The image of the *soldadera* (female soldier) became a normal occurrence of the period. The *soldaderas* were not merely female companions of the male soldiers. They formed an indispensable support group of the armies and served in the ranks, sometimes fighting while carrying babies on their backs (Meyer and Sherman 555). Furthermore, it was common and accepted for women to hold officer ranks in the revolutionary armies (Meyer and Sherman 557).

A Fatal Split

First Chief Venustiano Carranza agreed to hold a convention which initially met in Mexico City and then in Aguascalientes in October of 1914. Ironically, Carranza later

refused to recognize the Revolutionary Convention because it did not choose him as president. Villa and Zapata, on the other hand, observed the agreements. At this point, the split between Villa and Carranza became irreconcilable, which marked the beginning of the most chaotic period of the Mexican Revolution. Berta Ulloa presents full details of this historical period in *La revolución escindida* and *La encrucijada de 1915*.

The *Carrancistas* (Carranza's followers), led by General Alvaro Obregón left Mexico City on November 24, 1914, and the *Zapatistas* (Zapata's followers) entered the same day. Villa and his army arrived in Tacuba, a suburb of Mexico City, on November 30 (Ulloa, *La revolución* 43-5). A few days later, he and Zapata met in Xochimilco. Meanwhile, Obregón began a ruthless campaign. For example, he allowed the looting of Mexico City when his army entered the metropolis on January 29, 1915 and confiscated shipments of food from the Red Cross to unbalance the government of the Revolutionary Convention. During the next six months, the two armies entered and left Mexico City many times creating complete chaos (Ulloa, *La revolución* 103-6, 127-142). This period, referred by many as "*El Tiempo del Hambre*" (The Time of Hunger) also marks a period of steady economic decline. Finally, the *Villistas* (Villas's followers) were surprisingly defeated in León on June 5, and the *Carrancistas* occupied Mexico City permanently on August 2, 1915 (Ulloa, *La revolución* 161). It should be noted that some official historians like Berta Ulloa call this period "*El Terror*" (The Time of Terror) because of the executions ordered mainly by Pancho Villa and his men (*La revolución* 62-4). Nevertheless, as John Reed indicates in *México insurgente*, Villa simply used the rules imposed by Victoriano Huerta (56). In other words, it was generally believed that some

individuals could not be held prisoners because they would be extremely dangerous if they ever escaped. In addition, these historians fail to mention that the overall population of Mexico City despised the *Carrancistas* because of the abuses that it suffered at their hands (Pérez Salazar).

Rampant Corruption

Carranza gradually increased his power, and a new constitution was drafted during his administration. The Constitution of 1917 is a remarkable document in many respects, but it unfortunately strengthened the executive power. This naturally reflects Carranza's own personal ambition to remain in control because he did not want to experience again a setback like the one he suffered with the Convention of Aguascalientes. In his efforts to gain support, Carranza tolerated and promoted rampant corruption, which eventually backfired. José Vasconcelos provides details and analyzes this corruption in his memoirs (1: 824-836, 2: 33-4).

General Alvaro Obregón, a supporter of Carranza, resigned as Secretary of War and gradually distanced himself from the First Chief. Finally, Obregón began his own presidential campaign in 1919, which Carranza tried to repress by force. Nevertheless, the president was politically clumsy, and he underestimated the audacity and intelligence of Obregón, who surrounded himself by the old supporters of the late Francisco I. Madero. This political maneuver paid off, and Obregón gained the support of many political groups (Ricciu 140-7). Finally, Carranza was overthrown and assassinated in Tlaxcalantongo on May 20, 1920. In *La Carrera del caudillo*, Alvaro Matute explains

Obregón's amazing transformation from being Carranza's supporter to becoming his murderer (189-190).

The Tarnishing of Two Legends

As can be expected, the official history of the Revolution has constantly stained the images of Villa and Zapata. A careful analysis of all available facts, however, reveals a very different scenario. John Womack is a historian who carefully analyzes all sources, and he presents a full view of Emiliano Zapata in *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*. Womack indicates that it is true that Zapata was not an educated individual, but he remained faithful to his goals to eliminate the economic inequities and injustices, mainly in the agrarian sector (6-7). Official Mexican history stresses Zapata's alcoholism, ignoring other attributes. Furthermore, he is sometimes charged with acts committed by other members of his family, such as the illegal sale of foodstuff by his brother Eufemio (Ulloa, *La encrucijada* 130-1). In addition, it is seldom stated that the Carranza administration used extreme violence against civilians in an attempt to force the revolutionary leader to capitulate (Krauze 101-2). In any event, Zapata was betrayed by Jesús Guajardo who, following the orders of Pablo González, prepared an ambush of Zapata at Chinameca, and Zapata was assassinated on April 10, 1919 (Krauze 121).

Similarly, some supposedly accurate historical accounts attribute to Villa character traits irrelevant to the study of the Mexican Revolution. For example, Marte R. Gómez stresses that Villa was a womanizer but fails to analyze Villa's military campaigns and social reforms (48-9). Similarly, Berta Ulloa tries to associate Villa with robbery,

violence, and alcohol (*La encrucijada* 184). In reality, however, Villa did not drink, even during social events, as José Vasconcelos points out. In addition, Villa is often portrayed as an insane bandit who attacked the town of Columbus, New Mexico because the American government failed to recognize his government. As Alberto Calzadías Barrera indicates in his entire book, *Por qué Villa atacó Columbus*, it is seldom said that Villa destroyed the warehouses and property of the merchant who sold him blanks instead of real ammunition, contributing to Villa's defeat in León and Celaya in July, 1915 (77). It should also be indicated that the biographies of Villa written by *Carrancistas* like Marte R. Gómez are readily available, but it is almost impossible to find narrations by *Villistas* like Alberto Calzadías and Federico Cervantes. In any event, like Zapata, Villa was also assassinated. He was ambushed and shot several times on July 20, 1923 in Hidalgo del Parral. The official version was that he was killed due to a scandal involving women. The reality is that Villa was potentially very dangerous to Alvaro Obregón (Cervantes 636-650).

It is important to point out that another American invasion took place in March of 1916, this time led by General John J. Pershing. The expedition of approximately fifteen thousand soldiers failed in its primary goal to capture Pancho Villa. The Americans could never locate Villa, while suffering several casualties from guerrilla attacks. Therefore, the American soldiers finally left Mexico in January and February of 1917, mainly because the war in Europe demanded special attention from the United States (Meyer and Sherman 539-542).

Growth, Political Turmoil, and Religious Conflict

After the assassination of Carranza, Adolfo de la Huerta became interim president. The country achieved peace during his short administration. This was obtained by the elimination of potentially dangerous individuals like Pablo González, by negotiation, and by the customary bribing of military leaders by Alvaro Obregón. Basically, Adolfo de la Huerta facilitated the electoral triumph of Obregón, who became president on December 1, 1920 (Ricciu 148-154).

The nation's gross national product grew during the administration of General Obregón, albeit at a very slow pace. Nevertheless, Mexico improved its relations with the United States and renegotiated its foreign debt. Perhaps the most important aspect of the Obregón administration is the great advancement in the education sector led by José Vasconcelos. This is the time of the great muralists and dramatic improvement in the education of the general population. Villa and many others knew that the key for true advancement of the poor was to get them out of their ignorance, and that dream was being fulfilled (Meyer and Sherman 569-577).

On the negative side, Obregón possessed an antireligious feeling that made him unpopular among several sectors. While he was politically clever and adequately managed the situation, his successor, Plutarco Elías Calles, failed to deal with it in a positive way (Meyer and Sherman 587). The religious conflict dates back to the time of the Spanish conquest. While certain clerical leaders had tried to protect the poor, others had protected a conservative and powerful elite. Two priests were the main rebel leaders in Mexico's independence war against Spain from 1810 to 1821 (Meyer and Sherman

285-298). Later on, President Juárez stripped the Church from its extraordinary wealth and power in 1857 (Meyer and Sherman 379-384). During the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1928, the religious elite and the Pope in Rome supported the extremely unpopular regime of Victoriano Huerta. As a result, the Constitution of 1917 prohibited various religious activities by foreign clerical groups. Berta Ulloa makes a detailed analysis of this situation in *La Constitución de 1917* (417-466).

When Plutarco Elías Calles was nominated as presidential candidate in 1923 to succeed Obregón, General Obregón's political enemies allied around the figure of Adolfo de la Huerta, who had expected to be nominated. It should be noted that the assassination of Pancho Villa in July of 1923 had exacerbated a tense political atmosphere, and the nomination of Calles was the event that finally ignited political violence. Adolfo de la Huerta rose up in arms in November of 1923. He enjoyed popular support, but his military strategy lacked coherence and effectiveness. As a result, the revolt was soon repressed, and it was completely crushed in March of 1924. Adolfo de la Huerta fled to New York, never to go back to his country, but this did not stop violence from escalating in Mexico (Ricciu 168-175).

In *Estado y sociedad con Calles*, Jean Meyer, Enrique Krauze, and Cayetano Reyes undertake a detailed analysis of the religious conflict during the presidency of Plutarco Elías Calles. As these historians indicate, after Calles was sworn in as president of the country in 1924, he ordered the expulsion of various foreign ecclesiastics, and these measures were carried out to an extreme in certain parts of the country. Consequently, there was an actual persecution of priests and nuns in various places (223-

230). In addition, the government favored a religious break with Rome led by the patriarch Joaquín Pérez. The Catholic Church tried to hurt the government by suspending its payment of taxes, but it failed, so it suspended the celebration of religious ceremonies beginning on July 31, 1926 (Meyer, Krauze, and Reyes 230-1). This traumatized the deeply religious Mexican population, particularly in the rural areas. In addition, the conflict was aggravated by the agrarian problem of land ownership. As a result, groups of peasants known as Cristeros formed guerrilla groups and began to fight against the government of Calles. These groups burned government schools, killed teachers, and dynamited trains. In retaliation, government troops killed priests, looted churches, and converted some of them into stables. The Cristeros were gradually defeated, but the deep resentment did not disappear (Meyer and Sherman 588-9).

The End of the Struggle.

In *Los inicios de la institucionalización*, Lorenzo Meyer, Rafael Segovia, and Alejandra Lajaus analyze the transformation of the Mexican political climate from Calles's rigid government style to the oligarchy that currently governs Mexico. According to these historians, when the Constitution of 1917 was amended to allow the reelection of General Obregón, people were in shock. In addition, Calles gave his support to the former president, so some sectors assumed that Obregón would continue the religious repression. On top of that, Obregón won the presidential election after the assassination of his two main opponents, General Francisco Serrano and General Arnulfo Gómez (Ricciu 188-9). The aftermath of this situation was the assassination of Obregón himself in July of 1928

at the hands of José de León Toral, a member of a conspiracy to assassinate the president elect and a deeply religious man who had become a mystic during the Cristero Rebellion (Meyer and Sherman 588-9).

Toral was later executed after a well publicized trial, and this marked the end of the rebellion in Mexico. Too many people had died, and it was as if popular energy had suddenly become exhausted. Calles controlled the government during the six following years by placing puppet presidents that he could control (Meyer and Sherman 590). When he gave his support to Lázaro Cárdenas for the presidential election of 1934, he unconsciously chose the man who would eventually exile him in 1936, but this was truly a political conflict that had nothing to do with a popular revolt (Ricciu 209-213).

Chapter 3

Methodology and Justification

The codification of the collection of stories presented in Chapter 4 of the dissertation actually took place between 1957 and 1965. During this eight-year period, Elena Lezama de Rodríguez, my grandmother, created a series of oral narratives that portray a new female version of the extremely turbulent times of the Mexican Revolution.

Why were these stories specifically created from 1957 to 1965 and not before or after? The answer is that the specific conditions that permitted the development of these stories took place during this period. It was during this time that she enjoyed some leisure that permitted her to meditate on the social and political turmoil that took place around her. It was also during this time that she enjoyed the individual and unconditional attention of an audience that included myself.

Some of my relatives may disagree with me and point out that my grandmother always told stories. To this, I will simply respond that they were different narratives even if they dealt with the same topic. This is because, as John Fiske indicates, "Popular creativity is concretely contextual. It exists not as an abstract ability as the bourgeois habitus conceives of artistic creativity" (158). In other words, the conditions surrounding the narratives are unique to this period. It was precisely during these eight years that Elena and I, as her youngest grandchild, developed the close relationship that facilitated the creative process, and this relationship, in turn, was the result of various contingencies of our daily lives. For example, my grandmother and I lived in the same household. She happened to enjoy telling stories, and I loved listening to them. She happened to be a very

caring person, and I was an ill child who required care. She enjoyed conversing after dinner, and I happened to be a very slow eater who spent a long time sitting at the table. In fact, if my digestive system had been healthy, and I had finished my dinner when everybody else did, perhaps these stories would not exist. But those unique circumstances combined, and I sat at the table listening with awe to my grandmother's stories, as she wove events and circumstances of her life in order to entertain me.

Elena Lezama, then, recorded her stories in my memory from 1957 to 1965. After this time, she moved in with my aunt, and I entered adolescence. Both of these events disturbed the circumstances that propitiated her creative process. As a result, the stories that she told me after 1965 were really a repetition of the previous ones. My grandmother died in February of 1973, and I began recording her stories early in 1994. Retrieving from my memory stories narrated to me more than three decades earlier, when I was a child, represented a great challenge. It was necessary to go back to my childhood, from there to the Mexican Revolution, and from that terrible turmoil to its antecedents. This is, in fact, the pattern of organization used to present the stories in this work.

In the introduction to *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past*, Brian Stock indicates that a way of recollecting the past is putting words into writing. That is to say, one can retrieve memories from the past by following a methodical process of focused freewriting. This implies a psychological process based on memory and the visions of childhood (1-4). In this case, it should be also noted that past recollections were reinforced by interviewing family members and people who knew my grandmother, and by an immersion into Elena's world. Finally, following the recollection stage, came a long

process of writing, revising, and rewriting that involved historical research at various levels and the transcription of oral narratives into written stories. All these steps are clarified with specific examples in the following sections.

Freewriting

Focused freewriting was practiced without a time limit. Indeed, a single story sometimes required several sessions because my grandmother had originally narrated the same story several times. All related details were included, such as the time and place where the narrative took place, what circumstances prompted my grandmother to tell the story, her facial expressions, and so forth.

In some instances, there were conflicting details. For example, "The Banquet" is a story that my grandmother told me several times. It portrays an individual who pretends to have eaten a banquet of enormous proportions even though he is actually starving. My grandmother situated the story in different historical settings between 1911 and 1929. In addition, she changed the menu every time she narrated the story. The latter discrepancy is relatively unimportant since my grandmother was simply trying to build up the story to a surprising climax. The historical setting, however, is important, and I clarified this important detail by interviewing a relative who was present when the incident took place. In fact, interviewing greatly reinforced my memories of the past.

Interviewing

I made several trips to Mexico with the purpose of visiting and interviewing

family members who were close to my grandmother. Beforehand, I read *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*, by Lewis Anthony Dexter, and other guides. These books provide general instructions and guidelines to specialized interviewing and the recording of oral history. Nevertheless, much of this preparation was futile because the elderly people that I interviewed posed some unique challenges that forced me to improvise.

I visited approximately fifteen people. Even though all of them were helpful, I obtained most of the information from five individuals: my mother, three of my aunts, and a third cousin. It is interesting that all of the people who gave me valuable information were women. This suggests more family involvement and interest in the transmission of our family history on the part of these women.

I had planned to audio-tape the interviews. Nevertheless, with the exception of my mother, the people I visited felt intimidated by this procedure, so I had to rely on memory and good note taking. In addition, the individuals who possessed the most valuable information were aged, and I had to conduct the interviews on their own terms. Sometimes, they would go off on a tangent after answering a question. On other occasions, they would become sentimental and forgetful. Two of my aunts, María and Josefina, died in 1996, while my third cousin Mela is extremely ill.

Another important hurdle that I confronted is that my grandmother sometimes included confidential information in her stories. Consequently, I had to be tactful. For example, the story that I entitled "Scandal II" deals with unwelcome advances that my grandmother's brother-in-law made to her when she was a young widow. Even though she told me this several times, my mother and I were the only surviving relatives who knew

about this incident. I am glad that this issue is now presented to show the problems that were silenced before.

Immersion into Elena's World

Interviewing itself helped me become more involved in my grandmother's world and character. Talking with the people who lived, enjoyed themselves, and suffered with her brought Elena back to life. It seemed as if she would come into the room where we were chatting and join the conversation at any moment. Nevertheless, I performed other activities that helped me enter Elena's world. One of them was visiting the places she had lived and frequented. If nothing else, this proved extremely useful in preparing the descriptions for the stories. For example, I went to the great column described in the story entitled "Homophobics I," and to many other places.

Another activity that helped me surround myself with Elena's world was to read her personal correspondence and my grandfather's books. She kept over a hundred letters that she wrote and received in several cardboard boxes. However, she removed the dates on all of them because she did not want anybody to figure out her age. Most of these letters were greatly damaged by water, but I was still able to identify which people were very close to her and why. For example, by reading dedicated photographs and books, I verified that my grandmother's family approved of her first marriage but had reservations about her second one. I also read books and essays that my grandfather wrote, including his doctoral dissertation. By reading his poetry, for example, it is possible to recreate his close relationship with my grandmother at all levels, including the sexual one. Finally, I

also read my grandfather's medical books. *Précis de pathologie externe*, by E. Forgue, for example, explains in detail the methods used at the time of the Mexican Revolution to cure wounds and fractures of different kinds (232-331). This information proved invaluable in the description of how he treated his patients in stories such as "Children" and "The Female Soldier."

Family photographs also provided extremely valuable information to reinforce my memory. A family photograph taken in 1900, for example, contains details of the way people dressed at the time. In addition, the general position and attitude of those individuals provide insightful information about their personalities. My grandmother and her sister Paz are sitting together in the photograph, and the general attitude of Paz suggests that the sisters were very close. This is reinforced by the fact that Elena often talked about her sister and built a story, "The Priest," around her.

Finally, another way of becoming involved in Elena's world was experiencing some of the things she enjoyed. For example, I read much of the poetry that she read and recited in public. Some of the poems are classics, such as those written by authors like Rubén Darío and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. Others I found in her books, and my mother told me some poems that she had memorized by listening to my grandmother. Some of these poems are very humorous and appeared in newspapers around the turn of the century. "El primer abogado" (the first lawyer), for example, is a satire that states that lawyers cannot go to heaven because of the outrageous behavior that the first lawyer exhibited in heaven by suing even Jesus Christ. My grandmother showed a similar sense of humor in stories like "The Priest."

Finally, it needs to be stressed that this in-depth involvement in my grandmother's life required much emotional energy. She and I were very close, and the remembrance of past events opened old wounds. Looking once more at the ring that Elena wore when she lay dead, reading a letter that I wrote to her and she kept for years in her purse, going through the photographs that were taken when I was a child drained so much energy from me that now and then I had to rest days or weeks before continuing with the project. I am glad, however, because this was a worthwhile effort. Now I can look at my own past and share it with others.

Historical Research

Carolyn Steedman indicates in "Culture, Cultural Studies, and the Historians" that cultural studies involve the writing or rewriting of history. In other words, it is impossible to separate an individual from his or her historical reality. Therefore, it is impossible to think of my grandmother and ignore her views on a social hecatomb like the Mexican Revolution or her opinions about well-known historical figures such as Villa, Zapata, and Carranza. When textbooks consider Carranza a hero and my grandmother calls him a thief, however, there is an obvious discrepancy that needs to be analyzed. As Steedman indicates, texts and documents are themselves historical facts, not just repositories of facts, and the past that they configure is not carved in stone simply because they are used as representatives of a real historical reality (621). In this way, writing Elena's stories that are so closely associated with the Mexican Revolution necessarily involve the presentation of a historical view that may not agree with the official account of events.

The objective in preserving these oral narratives is mainly artistic and literary, but there is an unavoidable historical component.

Discovering the historical framework surrounding an oral narrative is a monumental task and a nearly impossible one. First, as Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler point out in the introduction to their anthology, *Cultural Studies*, "[I]t is probably impossible to agree on any essential definition or unique narrative of cultural studies" (3). What, then, is the approach or tradition that needs to be taken to understand the Mexican Revolution given conflicting views and trends? As Tony Bennett indicates, there is an important relationship between culture and power, and imposing a certain cultural agenda empowers those who possess that culture (24). Amílcar Cabral points out, concerning this issue, that culture represents a factor of resistance to foreign and other types of domination (64). What cultural background, then, surrounds my grandmother's stories?

Given these complications, I divided the historical research into three basic groups: sources provided by historians, information obtained from family members, and accounts provided by essentially literary sources, that is, novels and short stories. In turn, I divided the first group according to four different viewpoints about the Mexican Revolution: female, male, official, and the view of the defeated. The information obtained from family members and literary sources was simply divided according to the gender of those providing the information. Naturally, it was necessary to read general history books of the Mexican Revolution before selecting specific sources that present a particular view or tradition. Michael C. Meyer, Francesco Ricciu, Jesús Silva Herzog and Ernesto de la

Torre Villar are the main authors consulted to obtain an overview of the Mexican Revolution.

Sources from Historian - Female View

In *Presencia y transparencia: La mujer en la historia de México*, Carmen Ramos Escandón analyses the situation of women in the history of Mexico from the native Indian cultures to the twentieth century. She stresses the participation of women in Mexican history and points out that Mexico was ruled by a small number of men during the dictatorship of General Porfirio Díaz (150). By contrast, few countries have experienced such a wide participation from women in an armed struggle as in the Mexican Revolution.

A collection of essays edited by Gertrude M. Yeager, *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Women in Latin American History*, also stresses the participation of women throughout the history of different Latin American nations. It indicates that the general view that exists in some industrialized nations of Latin American women in general and Mexican women in particular as meek, subservient second-class citizens is a misconception (xv-xx, 18). This does not mean either that Mexican women are "liberated" as American feminists understand that term.

What was the position of women during the Mexican Revolution? To begin with, the concept of "Mexican women" is a generalization that needs to be avoided because their individual freedom and identity varies widely depending on their social class, geographical region, marital status, and so forth. Secondly, the position of women is

dynamic, particularly during rapid social change such as that which occurred during the Mexican Revolution. Finally, the seemingly meek attitude of Mexican women is chiefly the result of their beatification in the eyes of men. In other words, Mexican women generally did not have the sexual freedom of men, but this was because of their mystical place in society rather than their subservient role (Pérez Salazar). This explains why even the ruthless soldiers who supported Victoriano Huerta would respect my grandmother when she carried her "baby" wrapped up in a blanket in the story entitled "Elena." This also explains the sacrilegious level of Carranza's affront when he ordered the arrest of men and women alike as prisoners of war and the deportation of the entire population of several towns in an effort to force Zapata to surrender (Krauze 102-106).

What then is the position of women that should be presented in the stories? As mentioned above, a prototype of a Mexican woman from the revolutionary period does not exist, so the stories present a wide variety of female characters, and many of them develop over the range of several narratives. Nevertheless, there are some important trends that need to be underlined. First, as indicated by Brígida García and Orlandina de Oliveira in *Trabajo femenino y vida familiar en México*, Mexican women have always worked, but the division of labor has changed through the years. In addition, changes in the work that women perform greatly affects family life (199-220), particularly since there are very close ties among the members of the Mexican family. In this way, Mexican families fought together in the Revolution, at least partially as a reaction against the forced labor practices of the Díaz's administration that were disintegrating family unity (Meyer and Sherman 469-475). Several of my grandmother's narratives, such as "Adela

the Cook" and "The Female Soldier," make clear the fact that families and couples were fighting together as a unit.

Secondly, women from the middle and lower social classes, ironically, enjoyed more freedom than aristocratic women. Poor women worked and suffered together with their husbands, and both confronted a common enemy under the extremely elitist administration of Porfirio Díaz (Meyer and Sherman 488-491). Women from the middle classes, on the other hand, had the option of following professional careers if they chose to. In this way, my grandfather's first wife went to medical school; and Soledad Guzmán, his second wife, worked as a nurse. It should be noted, however, that professional fields were still dominated by men. Aristocratic women, on the contrary, did not even have the option of an education. They were taught to be good housewives and the protocol of their class. They were stripped of their own identities and forbidden any participation in any type of business other than the home. This explains why my grandmother was so elated with her second marriage since she was escaping the oppression of the aristocracy to move into the middle class that permitted her to find her own identity and follow her own goals.

Sources from Historians - Male View

Several male historians tend to ignore the presence of women during the Mexican Revolution even though they do not openly declare an antifeminist stance. Therefore, these historians present an incomplete view of the historical reality, but the information that they provide is still very valuable. Luis González Obregón, for example, was a

historian of Mexico City during the regime of Don Porfirio Díaz. This historian's view is patriarchal, as was that of the whole regime, but the detailed descriptions that he gives of streets and buildings of Mexico City is invaluable (163-172, 541-554, 579-584). This information can be complemented with that provided by Jonathan Kandell in *La Capital: A Biography of Mexico City*. In this book, Kandell provides very good details of the social customs during the first half of this century in Mexico City (350-484). With the help of these books, I was able to provide accurate descriptions of Mexico City in stories such as "Aunt Lupe" and "The Crossing."

Alvaro Matute, Jean Meyer, Enrique Krauze, Lorenzo Meyer, and other male historians also provide invaluable information about famous men of the Mexican Revolution, particularly Venustiano Carranza, Alvaro Obregón, and Plutarco Elías Calles. These historians document the political maneuvers that some revolutionaries followed to consolidate their power. They also give an accurate account of Mexico's religious war during the Revolution and the involvement of foreign nations, particularly the United States, in the political and economic direction of the country (e.g., Matute 173-184). The stories of this dissertation contain historical information taken from these books.

Sources from Historians - Official View

The Mexican Revolution created an oligarchic government in Mexico rather than a democracy. As a result, the ruling party since the Revolution has controlled the information that is provided to the general population. To this day, the government censors historical and political information distributed by the media, particularly

television. There is also an official history of the Mexican Revolution that is included in textbooks and provided to students in the school system. As Max Parra indicates, the control of the means of communication determines the type of narrative of a historical period (65).

Under these circumstances, is it possible for those who do not belong to the official ideology to express themselves? In "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Gayatri C. Spivak analyzes the problems of individual representation within the boundaries set by the state and the political economy associated with it. According to this scholar, the subalterns may be able to express themselves, but they cannot be heard or read (104). This is a grim prospect, and this is exactly what my grandmother was trying to express in "The Man of the White Mustache." In this story, my grandmother, as an aristocratic young girl, is permitted to talk about poverty because her expression provides a comfortable catharsis within the context of the ruling class. However, a poor girl is not permitted to express her own suffering.

Deniz Kandiyoti identifies another important problem involving women and the expression of their own identity. Even though national agendas may theoretically support women, they sometimes do not improve the status of women and instead tend to perpetuate a patriarchal society. In Kandiyoti's words, "Feminism is not autonomous, but bound to the signifying network of the national context which produces it" (380). It is difficult to see if this happens in the national context of the Mexican Revolution; the Revolution is very complex due to its dynamic nature and the conflicting forces involved. However, clearly there was a very strong reaction against an elitist society, and this

actually brought important social changes, such as great improvement in education, affordable health care at a national level, rights for the working class, and so forth. This national agenda theoretically protected the rights of women; and in some respects, Mexican women have a better status than women in certain industrialized nations. Aggravated rape, for example, is treated like first degree murder, and women have achieved important positions in government and other sectors (Meyer and Sherman 698-9). Nevertheless, the national agenda mainly protects those who are in power, a very small elite once more. In other words, following Kandiyoti's model, it works for a small elite even though it gives the appearance of protecting all women. In this way, it is ironic that female historians like Berta Ulloa who theoretically provide a woman's view of the Revolution, actually work for the government.

Sources from Historians - The View of the Defeated

As can be expected, the point of view of those who lost in the Revolution, like Villa's and Zapata's followers, receives very little attention in the national agenda. I owe most of the information that I obtained to the erudition of Alicia Pérez Salazar. She and her late husband, José Muñoz Cota, dedicated much of their lives to education, politics, and the study of the Mexican Revolution. In addition to the long conversations that I was able to have with her, Alicia Pérez Salazar gave me or let me borrow books by José Muñoz Cota, Alberto Calzadías Barrera, and Federico Cervantes. It should be noted that some of these individuals suffered persecution at one point or other of their lives due to their political affiliation, and their books have not received the circulation that they

deserve even though they contain valuable inside information, and some of them possess great artistic quality.

These authors present a very different perspective from the official account of the Revolution. They do not hide, for example, the widespread political assassinations carried out by the administrations of Alvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles. They also stress the fact that Carranza imposed his personal agenda by buying allies, corrupting the Revolution, and ordering the assassination of Zapata (Muñoz Cota, *Ensayos* 140-8). Interestingly, the accounts of these historians considerably match the narratives of my grandmother, who called Carranza a thief and Obregón a murderer.

Information Obtained from Family Members

The accounts of the Mexican Revolution that I obtained from male and female family members present two different points of view, but they do not disagree as to the actual historical facts. My grandfather wrote a book of poems and brief essays published in 1948, where he presents a biographical account of some historical events, mainly the American invasion of Veracruz (Rodríguez Tovar, *Ensayos* 37). His personal letters and notes, however, were more informative for this dissertation. He was always concerned about the marked inequalities between the aristocratic elite and the lower class. In fact, he wrote his doctoral dissertation on the illnesses of children caused by undernourishment.

Female accounts of the Mexican Revolution from family members consist mostly of personal conversations and interviews that I had with my aunts and other relatives. This information is uniform and a very useful complement to my grandmother's stories. In

summary, they informed me that the Revolution became chaotic and, like a cubist painting, it was difficult to identify its shape or direction. Finally, they stressed that often people simply reacted to the circumstances in order to survive, and death became an everyday occurrence.

Literary Sources

In *Ultimately Fiction: Design in Modern American Literary Biography*, Dennis W. Petrie argues that biography is not only a historical document but an art, and he makes an analysis of modern biographies to prove it (1-3). Similarly, there are numerous fictional narratives that have a high artistic value and may portray a world closer to historical reality than many history books. This is because literary narratives tend to describe the true feelings of people in addition to their actions. It should be noted at this time that I wanted to get the true feelings of the Revolution by reading novelists and writers of short stories dealing with this historical period, but I also wanted to study the literary technique of these writers, particularly their narrative construction.

Ana Rosa Domenella and Nora Pasternac have prepared an anthology of narratives written by nineteenth-century Mexican women, and Genaro Padilla has edited a similar collection of works by female Hispanic women from nineteenth-century California. These books illustrate the existence of a female Hispanic literary tradition and demonstrate a great variety in the techniques of the narratives. It should be stressed, once more, that a prototype of a Mexican woman or a Hispanic woman does not exist. Rather, there is a wide array of female voices. As Chandra T. Mohanty indicates, some Western

feminist texts tend to analyze the third-world woman as a monolithic subject, but this is simply a sign of appropriation by colonial or imperialist powers (196). Fortunately, Myriam Yvonne Jehenson published a book in 1995, where she briefly analyzes a wide array of Latin-American women writers, emphasizing their differences, particularly as they refer to social class and race. Interestingly, the only narrative dealing specifically with the Mexican Revolution in Jehenson's book is *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*, a novel by Elena Poniatowska (139, 144). In this novel, Poniatowska presents the life of a peasant woman who fights for Carranza in the Mexican Revolution. The novel, narrated by the main character, provides a unique representation of the lives of some women and their contribution to the Mexican Revolution, but the author fails to relate the action to the wider social context of the moment.

The scarcity of female narratives of the Mexican Revolution is, in a sense, encouraging because it indicates that my work is unique, but I still needed to read novels and short stories about the Mexican Revolution to study their technique and their view of the revolt. Consequently, I read works by Mariano Azuela, Carlos Fuentes, Martín Luis Guzmán, José Rubén Romero, Juan Rulfo, Francisco Urquiza, and Edmundo Valadés. These writers present the Mexican Revolution from many different angles: military, political, social, philosophical, ethnographic, and so forth. In addition, they provide several viewpoints, such as that of the politician, the peasant, the foreigner, and others. Not surprisingly from male writers, only two of them provide any insight into female characters: Juan Rulfo and Carlos Fuentes. The former concentrates on the lives of the peasants and those who exploited them. His collection of short stories, *El llano en llamas*,

was invaluable to me because of his masterful use of dialogue. In *Gringo viejo*, Carlos Fuentes presents a female character who is married to a wealthy landowner. She suffers as much oppression from him as the peasants who work his land. She is eventually liberated by the Revolution, but at a very high price: loneliness and poverty. Fuentes masterfully depicts the situation of the aristocratic woman in Mexico before the Revolution. As my grandmother told me, those women lived in a cage of gold and did not even know it.

Means of Representation

According to Michael F. Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, humans are storytelling organisms. Therefore, the study of their narratives reveals the way these people experience the world (103). How should we interpret then my grandmother's use of secret codes in her narratives? This is partially a direct result that her audience was a child. In this way, "friends" may actually mean "lovers," and so forth. Nevertheless, a fragmented narrative, as Homi K. Bhabha points out, may be an indicator of social marginality (56). Under these circumstances, it is important to grasp those moments within the narrative that permit the expression of an alternative consciousness (Martin 411). In other words, we need to use our imaginations to think of other worlds and to discover other living conditions that might have existed in the past. In the case of my grandmother, for example, she escaped the oppression of aristocracy by marrying somebody from the middle class, my grandfather. Nevertheless, she maintained ties with her parents and sisters because of the love she felt for her father and because the Mexican family unit is simply very difficult to break, which has advantages and disadvantages. As a result, in

part, of her loyalty to her old family, my grandmother never openly stated that she in fact found her own identity by escaping from the old aristocratic circles. Nevertheless, her true being became clear by analyzing those moments when she subtly revealed a hidden consciousness, for example, when she humorously satirized the ignorance of aristocratic women and stressed the importance of a good education in stories like "Scandal I."

It should be noted that the social marginality of an individual is not only the result of the oppression exerted by a powerful elite. According to Frantz Fanon, people's identity can be lost or suppressed by an external power, and he also claims that past national culture rehabilitates the nation and gives it hope for a future identity (36-37). Jenny Sharpe also points out that colonialism at various levels is carried out with extreme cultural violence, and this silences the subaltern (223). This explains how the Mexican Revolution initiated a glorious period in Mexican art, and it also explains why my grandmother was so sarcastic about foreign intervention in Mexico, which she portrays in stories like "The Hot Tortilla."

Reality and Imagination

I consider my grandmother's stories literary creations, so I am not going to get very involved with what is reality and what is a literary fictional creation. However, as Lidia Curti indicates in her essay "What Is Real and What Is Not: Female Fabulations in Cultural Analysis," this represents a problem for a cultural analysis of a narrative (142). In the case of my grandmother's stories, she undoubtedly was trying to embellish a reality that was too crude and painful to accept. In some cases, she added a touch of idealism,

like in "The Woman Soldier" and "Children." In these stories, the main characters probably die in battle, but she finishes the stories with a light of hope. In some other cases, she added humor to a tragedy, like in "The Banquet." In this story, an individual who is literally starving humorously feeds himself with an imaginary banquet. Enrique Krauze illustrates a similar process in his biography of Emiliano Zapata. When the revolutionary leader was assassinated, people simply refused to believe it (121-4), and to this day the Indians involved in the uprising in the state of Chiapas call themselves *Zapatistas* (Zapata's followers) because of the admiration they feel towards the revolutionary leader (Parra 65).

Transcription of a Performer

Ian Hunter has studied the relationship of aesthetics and cultural studies (349-354), and Dennis W. Petrie considers that writing biographies is an art. These authors and some other have tried to explain the relationship between art, aesthetics, culture, and historical reality. In this way, the need to identify the aesthetic or artistic significance of my grandmother's stories became obvious. Furthermore, it was necessary to transcribe Elena's artistic performance into writing. As a first step, I tried to discover her views about aesthetics by reading her letters and notes. Interestingly, an essay written by my grandfather, Jesús Rodríguez Tovar, entitled "En defensa de la lógica" ("In Defense of Logic") summarizes her point of view. According to both Elena and the essay, science and art should be pursued regardless of monetary remuneration. My grandparents were undoubtedly trying to create a balance between the influence of positivism during the

regime of Don Porfirio Díaz and the deeply rooted spirituality of the Mexican people (Rodríguez Tovar, "En defensa" 11). If we refer to stories like "The Chicken," we will notice that my grandparents saved many people from starvation, and it is no wonder that they despised the capitalist approach of the Englishman in "A Hot Tortilla."

As a second step, it was important to analyze what aesthetic devices my grandmother used in her narratives. Elspeth Probyn points out that women can be given a voice using alternative forms of representation (501-2). My grandmother used humor and practically gave a theatrical performance when she narrated her stories. Her humor was very easy to put into written Spanish, but difficult to translate into English. This is because Mexican humor is often created at somebody else's expense, and it can be considered cruel by a foreigner. Her physical performance, on the other hand, is impossible to put into writing, so I replaced it with selected descriptions. For example, the description that I included in "Children" when the young boy carries the young girl on his shoulders is my creation. My grandmother provided all this information with physical movement and gestures.

Finally, I made a detailed analysis of the vocabulary that my grandmother used. I simply wrote long lists of words that were characteristic of her. Then, I used those words and expressions to transcribe the stories. It should be noted that she herself got many of those expressions from the poems that she memorized and from picaresque novels, such as *El diablo cojuelo* by Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas.

Narrative Structure

I read four anthropological narratives to get ideas of how to arrange the narrative structure of my collection of stories. I read *Voyage to South America*, by Antonio de Ulloa and Jorge Juan. This book describes various cities, towns, and provinces in South America as seen by the authors during a trip they took in 1735. This work is written in strict chronological order and addressed to an audience completely unfamiliar with the places being described. In a sense, I confronted the same problem because I had to present various aspects of Mexican culture to American readers who may be unfamiliar with it. In a story like "The Banquet," for example, I chose to use food items familiar to an English-speaking reader. In addition, the book by Ulloa and Jorge Juan gave me the idea to arrange the stories basically in chronological order. Originally, I had written the stories without any particular order. However, the complicated events of the Mexican Revolution and the great number of family members who appear in the stories made them extremely difficult to understand. The repetition of names complicated the situation. For example, the characters who appear in the stories "Aunt Lupe" and "The Three Lupes" are all different. Therefore, I gave them their husbands' last names, which is not customary in Mexico.

Also useful in making decisions concerning the structure of these narratives was *Memorias del fuego*, by Eduardo Galeano. This is a fascinating work in three volumes. The author uses multiple sources to uncover the forgotten memories of people from Latin America, beginning with the ancient native cultures and ending with this century. This is not really an anthology or a collection of ancient works but a transcription using a single

narrator. Since this is, in a sense, what I was trying to do, I decided to use a single narrator to introduce and end each separate story. The stories themselves are told by another narrator who sounds very similar and who gives us my grandmother's point of view.

Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan is a fascinating anthropological work by Vincent Crapanzano that presents the life and death of a Moroccan tile maker. The author uses two devices that I adapted for my own collection. First, Crapanzano makes the presence of the anthropologist obvious in the narrative. Secondly, he makes clear that he is simply presenting a series of still images. I also made my presence obvious in the writing because I did not want to give my grandmother attributes that actually belong to me. In addition, I remember my grandmother narrating her stories as unique experiences taking place at specific times. I am only showing the reader the still photographs that I still carry within me.

Finally, I should mention that I owe more to Amitav Ghosh than to the other anthropologists. *In an Antique Land* is a magical work that mixes history, sociology, anthropology, and the author's personal memoir. I also think that my work is a mixture, and as a mixture, I offer it to the reader. In addition, Ghosh transports the reader through space and time, going to India and North Africa during the Middle Ages and to Egypt in modern times. My work also moves briskly through time. My narration goes back to the late nineteenth century, to different periods of the Revolution, to the present time, and to various times when the narratives originally took place. In fact, my work mentions my grandmother's death, but it also brings her back to life.

The Oral Perspective

We have outlined the historical background and the methodology used to transcribe the stories. As was previously mentioned, there are many female views and experiences of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1928, but the open expression of one of them can shed some light not only on historical facts but on the human experience as well. That is the purpose of this project.

It should be noted, however, that this work presents some important challenges. Oral narratives will disappear unless somebody records them. It is true that there is an oral tradition that passes from generation to generation, but this tradition is gradually distorted when individuals add, change, or delete various elements in order to adapt the narrative to a new audience or simply because new narrators are also creators. Since the oral narratives of Elena Lezama de Rodríguez were not recorded as they were taking place, there were four problems that needed to be solved.

First, there was a period of at least twenty years from the moment that the oral narratives were last heard to the moment when we began recording them in written form. Fortunately, I heard these stories many times, and I was still able to talk with family members and relatives to verify my notes. In addition, the recording of an oral narrative does not consist simply of writing down what the narrator says. Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin remark that "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (103). In this way, we can reach, at least partially, the narrative life of a human being by studying his or her human ways. Thus, even though I could not

physically resuscitate my grandmother so that she could tell us her stories again, I could recreate many details that were part of her life. I read all her correspondence and notes, gathered a big collection of photographs and memorabilia, talked extensively with people who knew her intimately, visited the places that she frequented, and even watched operas and plays that she liked.

A second challenge that I confronted with this project was my young age at the time my grandmother told me the stories. This does not refer to a memory issue, and this is not an issue of the frankness that she could have with a child. The problem is that she purposefully mixed reality and imagination when she told me the stories. Did she do it because she was creating a fairy tale for a child? The answer is that most times she did not. She had a unique narrative style that she used with other family members and friends. In fact, she only adapted her storytelling to me on very special occasions, for example, on my birthday or when I was sick. Lidia Curti says that fiction moves in our everyday life and history, creating anthropological and novelistic meanings, and she also states that "fables and myth have a longstanding link to gender, to the feminine" (142). In this way, it has never been my concern to reach a historical reality in this project because I think that the fictitious elements provide a greater significance and perhaps a more accurate account of some incidents that took place in the Mexican Revolution.

A third challenge to this project is my own gender. Being a male, would my grandmother present female issues to me? Elena talked about sexuality, but not in terms of achieving some type of liberation through sexual freedom. According to her, male and female faithfulness and mutual respect were very important, but she did not deny

sexuality. She believed that sexuality should be accompanied by love, and this union would preserve life. In this way, the couples that she presents in her stories may not be married, but the love that brings them together helps them to survive. This is the case in "The Female Soldier," where a priest and a young woman live like a couple. As a result, there is not any type of religious recrimination in her account but a great concern for their safety. For my grandmother, love grows and should not be confused with infatuation. Love is like a natural creator of life. For this reason, in "Breasts," a young boy is ridiculed publicly because he interprets the natural act of breast-feeding a baby as something unnatural. I would like to point out that much attention has been given to sexuality, machismo, marianismo, and the image of the Virgin Mary in feminine studies of Latin American culture and literature. In *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Women in Latin American History*, Gertrude M. Yeager collects a series of essays on Latin American women, some of which deal with sexuality and sex (e.g., Stevens 3-17). Several of these ideas seem to be valid, but the general concept of female sexuality in Latin American culture seems to evade them. I could not use these theories in transcribing my grandmother's stories because I got a strong feeling that I would be changing her character. Chandra Mohanty indicates in "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse" that Western scholars see third-world women as monolithic objects when in fact they form a wide arrays of cultures and voices (196). In this way, I feel that by using certain feminist theories in the recreation of Elena's stories, I would be imposing on her a culture that she did not experience.

Finally, language is the last challenge in the recreation of these stories. I do not

refer to the problem of transcribing an oral narrative into written text although I do not deny that it is a great challenge. Nevertheless, I refer to the problem of translating the stories from Spanish into English. In terms of time and effort, this was the hardest part, and I actually eliminated some stories because I thought I could not do them justice in a different language. This is because an English-speaking reader would be unable to understand the cultural implications of some unique language expressions.

After making these observations, it is clear now that the importance of this dissertation consists of recreating a female voice that would have been lost otherwise. Nevertheless, this work is also important because it stresses and points out the characteristics of a narrative from the vantage point of oral tradition versus a written text.

Chapter 4

Stories

For the most part, we have covered anything related to the methodology and analysis of these stories in other chapters of this dissertation. Therefore, the thirty-four stories that follow should be simply read like any other literary narrative, with a certain degree of curiosity and anticipated enjoyment.

I wrote these stories because I thought they would recreate a female voice to make an important statement. Now, after several years of researching and writing, I step back and contemplate my work. What I see is a surprise, a series of snapshots that preserves memorable moments of people's lives. I realize then that one of the goals of an artist is to keep the human being alive.

Miraculously, my grandmother, Elena Lezama de Rodríguez, has somewhat resuscitated and speaks to us. She tells us how people try to survive, and she stresses the uniqueness of each individual. At the same time, however, she presents her experiences in such a way that we empathize with their suffering and aspirations. I stay behind and can only say, "Do you see that lady? That delightful woman is my grandmother. She has a magic personality." I hope that I have done justice to her by presenting her narratives, and I also hope that readers will be as rewarded by reading the stories as I was by writing them.

A Confusion of Names

People's lives can be generally divided into two main periods: when they dwell with their parents and when they have to confront life by themselves. It was in the first period, when I lived in Clavería, a middle-class neighborhood in Mexico City, that I felt more content with my own existence. This is because back in 1962, when I was only eight years old, death seemed like a distant shadow that could never reach me or the people I loved.

Our house in Clavería was small, but it possessed a unique character. Its gothic windows and crenelation on the roof made it look like a real castle. It was situated on a corner facing south, so we received sunlight all day long. Even at night, the street lights illuminated its blue façade, creating an enchanting atmosphere. We only had three bedrooms, so my two brothers and I had to sleep together, but we did not mind. My grandmother lived in the adjoining room, so once in a while, I slept with her. I looked forward to those nights because she told me family stories and fairy tales.

My grandmother wanted to be called Mother Elena, I guess as a way of denying her own age, but it seemed terribly long. Therefore, my brother Javier began calling her by her first name, Elena. This was not popular with my mother because she demanded respect of our elders, so Javier had to switch back to the long name. I loved the word Elena so much, however, that I pleaded and pleaded to use it until I partially succeeded. My parents did not allow me to call her Elena, but they let me use the English equivalent, Helen.

"Good morning, Helen," I told my grandmother every day.

"Good morning, my dear little one," she used to say.

Hello, Elena," Javier whispered, not letting my parents hear.

"Good morning, my beloved chubby one," my grandmother answered every time.

To call somebody *mi gordo querido* ("my beloved chubby one") can never be construed as insulting, and it is only an expression of love in Spanish, but it still drove my brother crazy.

We all ate together our big meal at midday. Since I had a poor appetite, my mother did not let me talk until I finished my food. I guess that could have been an excuse to keep me quiet, but I did not mind because I loved watching my brother Javier and my grandmother bickering all the time. Javier was a handful! Once he let my grandmother's canaries that she kept in her room out of their cage, and it took us hours to catch them. Another time he put a box full of red ants under my parents' bed when my father was taking a nap. The ants, naturally, bit him, and my brother would have gotten the spanking of his life if it had not been for my mother's fast and soothing intervention. Once Javier put a cricket in my grandmother's facial powder box, and it jumped out when she was going to put some powder on her face. The poor cricket was completely white but very much alive, and it got away.

Once while we were eating lunch, Javier kept pestering my grandmother. He shook the table every time she grabbed her glass, to make her spill the lemonade; he called her "Elena" quietly but constantly; he even opened his mouth to show her half-chewed food. My grandmother loved every second of it and kept snapping back with "my beloved chubby one" and throwing kisses at him, until she suddenly said, "Okay, that's

enough, Memo."

"My name is not Memo," my brother said.

"Well, you are just alike."

"Who's Memo?" I inquired.

"He *was* my younger brother," my grandmother said.

The conversation moved on to other topics, and as usual everybody finished eating before I did, so before long my mother and I were the only ones at the table.

"Helen got suddenly sad." I said.

"Yes, she gets that way sometimes when she remembers her family, but she is all right. Now stop talking and eat!"

A few minutes later I went upstairs to my grandmother's room. She was looking at some old, sepia photographs so attentively that she did not notice me.

"Can I see these pictures?"

"My dear little one, . . . I didn't hear you coming. Sit down on the bed, and I will show you what I have."

I did as she ordered, and then Helen told me two stories, one about her brother Memo and another one about their father, Jose María. Both stories go back to 1910, when the Mexican Revolution broke out.

José María

José María Lezama, my great-grandfather, was a short man with an enormous mustache; he had gradually climbed the social and economic scale through persistence and hard work. By 1909, he had lost much hair, gained much weight, and like the entire Mexican government, had aged considerably.

This man, whom I knew only through my grandmother's stories, loved his daughter, and she equally adored him. He came from a middle class family that motivated him to study. Like a good seed in fertile soil, José María took advantage of every opportunity and began growing. After graduating from law school, door after door began opening on new opportunities that eventually led him to the Supreme Court. As a magistrate of the highest judicial body of the country, he applied the law implacably and without making exceptions.

This approach, greatly supported by the Mexican president, General Porfirio Díaz, initially benefitted the country because it reinforced disorder into political stability, and this in turn produced foreign investment and economic growth. As a result, President Díaz received the blessing of foreign and local investors, including the Catholic Church, but these individuals represented only a small percentage of the total population, who gradually became tools in a growing economic machine that ignored their needs. In this way, the laws that originally brought peace became weapons of exploitation.

General Díaz was reelected time after time, at first because he had no opposition, and later because he did not allow any opposition. Nevertheless, by 1910, Porfirio Díaz, my great-grandfather, and the Mexican government were growing old, and some people

began to sense the first premonitions of change. Francisco I. Madero was such a visionary, and he organized the Anti-Reelection Center with the aid of some brilliant, young intellectuals. My great-grandfather thought that challenging the regime was completely insane, but one of his younger sons, Memo, dared to differ, which caused numerous family quarrels.

While Díaz imposed his authority on a national level, José María did likewise at home. In the same way, while Madero met with Díaz and promised the old man that a revolution would ensue if the will of the Mexican people was not respected, Memo challenged his father's authority by refusing to obey him and follow family protocol. Finally, in June of 1910, my great-grandfather put Memo in a boarding school in Mexico City from which the young man would later escape. Likewise, Díaz himself ordered the arrest of Madero around the same time, but the young man would subsequently evade his guards and flee to the United States. Then two revolutions would break out.

Madero's call to rebellion found response in many parts of the country, and the rebels gave the federal government various military blows. Finally, Díaz was forced to resign, and the aged dictator left the country in May of 1911. A few days later, a small group of *Maderistas* banged at my great-grandfather's door to arrest him. As they burst into the house, the old man was running across the flat roof, and when the arresting officers expected to find José María in his bedroom, the old man was already jumping to the neighbor's roof. It was not a long distance, less than two yards, but enormous for an old man. He got away and lived in hiding for almost two months.

When Madero entered triumphantly into Mexico City in July, 1911, he declared a

general amnesty, and José María returned home. A few days later, the same people who almost arrested him invited him to a banquet and to participate in the new government. He accepted the former and declined the latter.

At the banquet, my great-grandfather toasted the success of the new Mexico, but he still changed glasses with an army officer.

"Let's change glasses in case you want to poison me like a Roman emperor," he said.

"Licenciado Lezama, you are such a joker," somebody added.

"Just in case."

Upon his return home, José María found his son Memo waiting for him. The young man was ecstatic. He talked cheerfully about the school he wanted to attend.

"Now that Madero has been elected president, the people we have exploited for so long will finally receive the reparation they deserve," Memo said.

"I wonder why, coming from a good family, he mixed with that ragged mob," Memo's mother remarked.

"Because he has brains and a heart too!" responded Memo.

"I forbid that you talk to your mother like that," José María yelled. "I am still the head of this house!"

Memo simply smiled knowingly, and very slowly, pompously, he retired to his room while his father became livid with rage. Little they knew that the revolution was just beginning and much blood was still going to be spilled.

Memo

Guillermo Lezama de la Sierra was his whole name, but his family called him Memo. He was born some time in 1895, but I don't know exactly when and where. I saw his face only a few times in some fading, sepia photographs that water subsequently destroyed. A maid told me that rain somehow found its way into my aunt's house, where my grandmother lived the last five years of her life. Thus, when my aunt opened the wooden box that contained a treasure of memories, she found nothing but a dried out mixture of pestilent decay. That's how the old pictures disappeared that I had in my hands as a child and desired so anxiously to keep. . . . Or did they? It seems that those images somehow penetrated my flesh, my bowels, and live within me. It seems that I will meet the specter of Memo somewhere around the corner and will shake his hand. Then I will embrace him, and very close to his leathery face, I will whisper in his ear that I understand his past attitude. How could he know what would later occur?

My grandmother Elena, ten years older than her brother Memo, loved him like a son, and she always celebrated his buoyant spirit and clever ingenuity. "Memo does this, and Memo does that . . .," she bragged about his progress, and from that very day when he began to talk, it appears that Memo never stopped.

When he was only eight years old, Memo used a nail to perforate the ears of a goat they had and put on them my great-grandmother's silver earrings. "What a sight that was!" my grandmother used to exclaim.

When the family met to pray the rosary on Friday afternoons, Memo used to answer to the phrases of that monotonous ritual with sudden and spontaneous remarks of

his invention, such as "Virgin Mary, pass me a cherry," "Lonely Lot, I need the chamber pot," and many other ridiculous expressions. As could be expected, Memo ended up exiled to his room, but that was exactly what he longed for because that type of praying bored him to no end.

As years passed and Memo grew up, he realized that General Porfirio Díaz was an old tyrant. His government actually prohibited the common people from mixing with families of the upper class, so while the well-to-do ladies enjoyed a promenade in the Alameda Park, others less fortunate were forced to watch at a considerable distance. Ironically, the gold reserves of the country were very high, and foreign countries invested in a market that promised ever increasing profits. This cosmetic development, built on the foundations of exploitation, continued for many years until ever increasing pressures brought the first winds of change. Brutally repressed public demonstrations and strikes were the first signs of the deadly hurricane that would soon arrive, but nobody realized their importance and magnitude, not even José María, who possessed inside information about the government and society.

In October of 1911, when Memo was only sixteen years old, he had proved in his own way that General Díaz's dictatorship was in fact anachronistic, and President Madero's new and youthful impetus to create a better government resembled values like Memo's own. He was very idealistic and believed in a democratic government both at a national level and at his own home. Nevertheless, as weeks passed and the novelty of the new government gradually faded out, people's great expectations began to die. Eighty years later, I can clearly see that President Madero could not or simply did not take two

vital steps: a fast implementation of new programs to satisfy social demands, and the disbandment of the old federal army. However, it is also true that many pressures, particularly from foreign concerns, prevented him from fulfilling his plans.

Memo did not know all this, so in desperation he joined the *Maderistas* when other groups attempted to depose the government of President Madero. Memo's family's pleas and attempts to prevent his departure were fruitless, and he left towards the end of 1912, never to come back.

My grandmother told me that some time in early 1913, Memo and an army officer, Jacinto, were galloping at full speed trying to get away from enemy forces. The two young men were riding magnificent horses, so they rapidly lost the other men. That was when Memo suddenly stopped and dismounted from his horse.

"The stirrup broke, and the animal needs a rest. It won't take me but a few minutes to fix it," Memo said.

"You better ride like that, or I will take you on my horse if yours can't make it," Jacinto indicated.

"That's all right. We've lost them. Go ahead, and I will see you in Coyoacán."

Those were the last words that Jacinto would ever hear from his friend. Memo never got to Coyoacán, and Jacinto had to continue his flight a few days later when Madero's government crumbled. Memo's family did not hear this news for three more years, until Jacinto visited them with hopes of finding his old friend.

"That's the only time I ever saw my father cry, and that pain eventually killed him," my grandmother told me while I was sitting on her bed.

I had Memo's picture in my left hand. His eyes were very light, probably blue, and he looked like a handsome young man in his uniform. José María's photograph was slightly larger. My great-grandfather did not smile, as people were accustomed to pose in those times. Very slowly, playing like the child that I was, I raised both portraits and faced them to each other, and I actually expected that they would carry on a friendly conversation again.

Papá Chuchito I

The differences of opinion between José María and his son Memo may be difficult to comprehend, particularly since they resulted from a social upheaval as complex as the Mexican Revolution of 1910. For this reason, we must backtrack a few years and meditate on the milieu of prerevolutionary times and on the lives of the people who experienced firsthand those events. The best place to begin is with the lives of my grandparents.

I never met my grandfather, Jesús Rodríguez Tovar, because he died five years before my birth, but my grandmother told me so many stories about him that I feel his presence within me. In addition, his essays and poems have permitted me to study in detail his philosophy of life. On top of that, he wrote notes in the margins of everything he read, so the few books that survived the revolution and time have given me a good idea of his taste and character. Finally, family photographs, mainly from the latter part of his life, have given me a clear idea of his physical characteristics.

My grandfather was born into a family of farmers in the state of Puebla in 1866, ten years before General Porfirio Díaz seized power in Mexico, which the dictator would not yield until the revolution overthrew his regime. During the government of Porfirio Díaz, Mexico's wealth increasingly concentrated in the hands of foreigners and a few influential Mexican families, and most other people's only chance to escape poverty was to possess a rare combination of intellect and a great capacity for hard work. Fortunately my grandfather had both characteristics. He was over six feet tall, very unusual for that place and time, and he could still travel by horse for hours after his eightieth birthday.

That physical strength allowed him to work hard while pursuing two careers, first in education and then as a medical doctor.

These achievements proved even more difficult for several reasons. To begin with, Papá Chuchito, as my grandmother told me I should call my grandfather, lived in a family where women by far outnumbered men, so there were some tasks, such as family protection and house repair, which he had to assume alone. In addition, my great-grandfather, Manuel Rodríguez Téllez, was blind, and Papá Chuchito was his guide, which required much time, but also brought them extremely close.

In spite of these problems, my grandfather managed to find time to read and go to concerts. He loved Mark Twain's novels because he identified himself with the characters of the American writer. At an early age, around ten, my grandfather spent Saturday mornings catching frogs in a river near his hometown, Tecali. He took his shoes off and wore a straw hat similar to that of Tom Sawyer. Then he would sell the frogs at the market and use the money to attend the cultural events presented in the city of Puebla about fifteen miles away. If Papá Chuchito could not afford the tickets for these events, then he would at least buy *camotes* (a type of candy prepared from sugar and sweet potatoes) and listen to a band that played at a kiosk in one of the main parks. On occasions, he would buy limes and eat them sitting on the first row, right in front of the wind-instrument musicians. My grandfather enjoyed squeezing the limes in his mouth just as these musicians were ready to play because they had difficulty performing due to the salivation created by the young Jesús squeezing the limes. I guess Papá Chuchito was always interested in the processes of the human body, and it is natural that he would

eventually become a doctor, but he was mischievous indeed.

By the time Porfirio Díaz assumed the presidency in 1876, Mexico was a rural country of less than nine million people. Mining utilized primitive techniques, and many peasants still used the same communal farming practices that the Aztecs employed centuries before; however, lonely peasants working the land with oxen and wooden plows provided a melancholic beauty to the scene. These people, like flowers of flesh, grew towards the sun and fed their spirits with the afternoon showers of summer. Slow moving clouds contrasted deeply with the sky and the high, distant mountains that divide the state of Puebla from the Valley of Mexico. I can therefore understand my grandfather's joy when he hunted frogs by the riverside, listening to a symphony of wings and croaks.

Papá Chuchito spent his childhood in sacred communion with the land, and his life only marginally changed when he attended the State College of Puebla to study education, as all his sisters had done a few years before. Then the family of teachers initiated a series of new programs that were implemented by the government. The most important of these programs was the development and establishment of the kindergarten in Mexico's public education. In this way, they became part of a group of professionals favored by the government but not included in an ever wealthier aristocratic elite.

By this time, Don Porfirio's government had implemented various programs of modernization. Mexico possessed an extensive railroad network, mining adopted new technologies, and agriculture production grew. Nevertheless, the mining industry was controlled by a few families like the Guggenheims, and millions of acres of land were gradually gathered by people like the Terrazas family in Monterrey, William Randolph

Hearst, and Sir Weetman Pearson. The landscape did not change, and peace reigned, but my grandfather noticed the first seeds of the great hecatomb. "Don Porfirio creates mixed emotions in my soul," Papá Chuchito wrote in a letter to his parents. "He possesses elegance and good taste but treats the poor as if they were a drove of mules. He rewards academic merit, but the lower classes, the people, are treated with contempt. During a typical Sunday afternoon, the wealthy *señoritas* promenade along the walkways of the Alameda Park while their servants follow them at a distance because they are not allowed to enter the park. That different treatment cannot continue. . . . I wonder why these turbulent thoughts invade my spirit at this moment of my life."

My grandfather wrote these lines in 1899, perhaps when he had just arrived in Mexico City to study medicine. I have a photograph from that time taken from a school document. My grandfather has an oval, dark face; his mouth is small. He is not wearing the pair of round glasses that he has in every other photograph, and his small eyes look vivid, full of desires and plans. Nevertheless, my grandfather must have felt lonely when he arrived in Mexico City because he would only see his family once in a while. On the occasion of this great change, his blind father gave him a farewell letter that Papá Chuchito memorized and often recited to my mother. Unfortunately, she only remembers the first lines, which say:

You now depart.

The events to come lie in your hands;

The beauty of reality opens immensely before your eyes.

The eternal image . . .

Scandal I

Back in 1892, when Don Porfirio Díaz had a firm grasp on the reins of power, the well-to-do girls belonging to the aristocratic families of Mexico went to special schools. These families had wealth and in some way either benefitted from or participated in the government machinery of the inflexible ruler. The Terrazas clan, for example, owned more than one million acres of the best land in Northern Mexico and exploited thousands of people by using them as cheap and practically forced labor. The little girls of the poor families went to the public schools if they were lucky, many times without shoes. The well-to-do little girls, on the contrary, attended private academies dressed in ruffled dresses and high-buttoned shoes.

Elena was registered at the age of six at Saint Anthony's Institute for Girls, a place whose mission was not to educate children in science and arts, but rather in good manners and social protocol. That was not a suitable place for somebody like Elena, and she got increasingly in trouble. At first, she became restless and chatted with whomever was at her side. As a result, the teacher constantly punished her by keeping her in the classroom during recess time. Elena cried the first few times, but then she made a game of the situation by standing on the cornice of the window making faces at her classmates. The children celebrated Elena's unusual behavior by laughing more or less openly at the pantomimic representations of their friend. This in turn inflamed the temper of the teacher, who prohibited Elena from participating in any games or recreational activities.

The teacher, Miss Conchita, was an old, single, conservative woman who firmly believed in the uncontested authority of certain sectors. She thought, for example, that

President Díaz's regime and the Catholic Church were sacred institutions with omniscient power over the citizens of Mexico. She also believed that women should be educated to serve in the household, and that any professional education was highly improper for a true lady. In short, Miss Conchita only taught good manners to the young girls who attended her class.

Elena did not understand or care about Miss Conchita's uncompromising attitude. She just could not handle the boredom of the classroom and projected her frustration with a rebellious attitude. Tears gradually changed into mocking smiles and then into open defiance. Elena began an underground war of sabotage. One day, for example, a dead snake appeared mysteriously tied to the cord that Miss Conchita pulled to toll the school bell. Another time, Miss Conchita found a cat sleeping on her desk, and she hated cats.

Finally, the battle of all battles broke out in a spring day of 1892. The morning began very peacefully, and Miss Conchita had a minor cold.

"God bless you well, Miss Conchita," all the girls said in unison after the teacher sneezed.

"Thank you very much, well educated girls."

"Education that we have received from your good self."

"And from your parents as well."

This ritualistic dialogue was carried on every time Miss Conchita sneezed, and since the teacher had a cold, Elena assumed the class wouldn't have time to do anything else for the rest of the day. Therefore, she decided to chat with the classmate to her right, Lupe Guillén.

This proved to be a fatal error because Miss Conchita took advantage of this carelessness to initiate an attack. The teacher slid as silently as a leopard towards Elena's left flank. Suddenly, the teacher pinched Elena's leg with such fury that the Trojan Paris could not have made more damage with his swift arrows. Elena thought she was mortally wounded, and using her small blackboard as a mace, she discharged a Herculean blow on the teacher's head. Pieces of wood, chalk, and splinters flew in every direction as the board broke into a thousand pieces. Simultaneously, Miss Conchita's head began bleeding so profusely that the red liquid resembled a river of blood, and her wolf-like howling was so intense that people from every corner of the building ran to the scene of the battle.

"What happened?" asked Elena's father sternly when he got to the school.

"I felt as if a wasp had stung my leg, so I swung my small board to get rid of the bug. Look!" said Elena raising her dress. Her leg in fact showed a wound almost two inches in diameter. Judge Lezama, Elena's father, simply took his daughter home, and he didn't talk about the ordeal for the rest of the day.

The following morning, Elena refused to go to Saint Anthony's Institute for Girls. "You will have to tie me to a chair and gag me. Otherwise, I will get away."

"But you need to go to school," added her father.

"Take me then to the public school," responded Elena; she was determined to fulfill her purpose.

Judge Lezama, who adored his daughter, yielded to this strange request saying, "All right, but if you don't behave, I will take you back to Saint Anthony's, and I won't care if Miss Conchita, the bug, stings you again."

This is the way Elena shared part of her life and became friends with the girls of the public school, some of whom went to school without shoes. Some people were more scandalized by Elena mixing with another social class than by her breaking the blackboard on the teacher's head, but the fact is that Elena gained much wisdom and knowledge by attending the new school.

Papá Chuchito II

Jesús Rodríguez Tovar, my grandfather Papá Chuchito, overcame the loneliness that he experienced as a student in Mexico City by marrying Manuela Parra in 1901. Manuela was a medical student at the National University, which at that time was located in the building of the former Spanish Inquisition in Mexico City. Manuela was tall and stocky. Her oval face, her thick nose, and her small mouth did not show any distinguishing features. Her melancholic eyes, however, clearly indicated a deep concern. Manuela suffered from tuberculosis, which would eventually kill her in 1905. She and my grandfather procreated two children, a girl who died a few weeks after birth, and Manuel Fidel, who also died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-nine in 1942.

Papá Chuchito married Soledad Guzmán in 1906. She was a beautiful woman who worked as a nurse. Her big, light eyes suggested a vivacious approach to life. Her pointed nose and thin lips suggested a delicate and refined personality. My grandfather begat two daughters with her: Josefina and Rosalía. Josefina died childless at an old age in 1996, but Rosalía bore a daughter and two sons. And all the days that Rosalía lived were sixty-two years. And the names that she gave to her children were Graciela, Rafael, and Manuel. Soledad Guzmán, Papá Chuchito's second wife, lived only one year after she gave birth to her second child and died unexpectedly of appendicitis in 1910.

The Revolution broke out, Madero became president of the nation, and Papá Chuchito married Elena in 1912. With her, he begat José de Jesús, Marta, María Cristina, and Margarita. José de Jesús died as a baby in 1913, but the other three children would grow and have three children each. Marta bore Pablo, José, and the little Marta; María

Cristina bore Susana, Martín, and Guillermo; and Margarita bore Jorge, Javier, and Jaime.

Papá Chuchito lived only twenty-five years after he begat his last child. And all his days were six hundred and eighty-five years less six hundred and two. And he begat eight children, but only half of them brought more children into existence, but most of his grandchildren begat even more children.

And Papá Chuchito was a great doctor, and he assisted in the birth of six of his children and four of his grandchildren and many of his third wife's grandchildren by her first marriage.

And if you think this is confusing, just read the biblical genealogy of Adam.

And if you think that I am writing some type of religious parody, do not blame me. Blame instead Papá Chuchito and Elena because they were the ones who used to tell their genealogy using one thousand "begats" and as many names.

The Man of the White Mustache

Tres Guerras (Three Wars) Elementary School was a typical government school towards the end of the nineteenth century; clean and respectable but poor. At least some teachers were very well prepared, but they confronted the societal problems that the students brought with them, mainly poverty. Some of the children did not even have shoes and attended classes wearing the same worn-out dresses all year round. Fortunately, classes did not meet in December and January, the coldest months of the year. In addition, children enrolled in a public school were often taken out of school before completing their education because their households required everybody to work.

The first day when Elena went to that school, after the school year had begun, the principal and the teachers were almost in shock. The reason Judge Lezama had decided to send his daughter to that place puzzled them. Nevertheless, he calmed them down when he gave them leeway to treat Elena like anybody else and to inform him or his wife if Elena misbehaved.

Later on, Elena's new teacher, Miss Lucinda, found out from the girl herself about the scandal that had taken place with Miss Conchita at Saint Anthony's Institute for Girls. Elena took good care to hide any details that could incriminate her. In fact, she wouldn't admit any guilt for that incident for decades, but her new teacher, an experienced and mature individual, easily put two and two together.

Miss Lucinda handled Elena's hyperactivity by giving challenging assignments and freedom to the new girl. Since Elena was a natural performer, the assignments included learning several pieces of poetry by heart and presenting them to the class. This

happened to be the perfect approach to utilizing the pupil's potential to the benefit of the whole class. Furthermore, the literary performances gradually involved the attention of more and more people. Before long, Judge Lezama found himself gathering clippings from newspapers and magazines with poems that he considered to fit Elena's personality. Many of the poems were humorous and utilized the dialect of the lower social classes. Others were "dramatic" and presented old literary clichés like that of the poor little girl working in a cold night to help support one or more villains who abused her.

But Judge Lezama was not the only one who participated in Elena's literary adventures. The principal of the school herself, Ms. Soledad Baliachi, decided to present a play at the school and appointed Elena as director when the girl was not more than eleven years old. Elena responded to the challenge by presenting an anonymous Spanish comedy, *Las Bribonas* (*The Mischievous Women*). She convinced her father to pay some carpenters to make the stage and setting, and seamstresses to design the costumes for all the actors. In addition, Elena raffled some of her mother's porcelain figures and printed some programs with the proceeds.

The day of the premiere, a buzzing crowd hovered impatiently by the school entrance waiting to be admitted to the play. It was a strange mixture of people who belonged to the working classes and people who moved comfortably in Don Porfirio's elite circle. Even though Elena's family did not wear formal attire, their clothing contrasted sharply with that of other guests who wore their *rebozos* (a type of shawl) and straw hats. Nevertheless, the two groups seemed to interact on friendly terms, and nobody could have guessed that a revolution would break out in a few years.

The audience reacted so positively to the presentation, and so much was talked about the play in other circles, that the principal decided to reward Elena in a commendable way. In short, the principal managed to include Elena in a select group of girls that would each receive a medal from the hands of no other than the president of Mexico, Don Porfirio Díaz.

The day of the ceremony, Don Porfirio Díaz, sitting on the presidential chair, received the group of young girls. Elena approached the old man very slowly and shook his hand. The general smelled like baby powder, and his shirt crunched with any movement of his arms. His black suit contrasted sharply with his light complexion and his white, long mustache. Doña Carmen Romero Rubio, the general's wife, asked Elena to recite a poem.

"I am not prepared, " the girl said.

"You must remember one of the poems," Mexico's first lady said. She didn't understand that Elena referred only to her costume.

"I guess that I can improvise," said Elena.

Immediately afterwards, the young girl disheveled her hair and took off her stockings and shoes. The name of the composition that she represented was "Miserable María," and it was one more version of the poor orphan who works until late hours of the night and is killed by her abusive guardian because of giving her money to another needy orphan.

Everybody applauded, the first lady hugged Elena, and Don Porfirio added, "Please give my regards to your father."

My grandmother told me this story many times, and she stressed the fact that Don Porfirio knew her father very well. In contrast, she played down the fact that she had won a medal and had recited a poem to the president and his wife.

"Helen, weren't you happy to shake the president's hand?" I asked her once.

"He was a fine gentleman, but I later realized that he was too engrossed in enjoying the status quo."

"How was that?"

"I deserved a medal for directing the play, but Rosa, one of my classmates, deserved one for her performance."

"Why didn't she?" I asked.

"She was so natural representing 'Miserable María'."

"Helen, why didn't his Rosa receive a medal?" I insisted.

"I was young, inexperienced. . . ."

"And Rosa? What about Rosa?"

"I never heard from her after we got out of school."

"But why didn't she go to see Don Porfirio?" I asked once more.

"She was a working girl. Don Porfirio didn't like to deal with those people, but I didn't know it until later. . . . I wanted to work in the theater, but actresses had a bad reputation. . . . My parents didn't let me."

"Helen, can you tell me more about Rosa?"

"My father was very respected," my grandmother said and began to cry.

This conversation took place when Helen was already very old and confined to a wheelchair. She became extremely sentimental at times, and this sentimentality was easily touched when somebody reminded her of her father, whom she adored. Therefore, I held my grandmother's hand and asked her to tell me about the time when she had gone to hear the great Caruso. I did not dare to ask about Rosa ever again.

The Crossing

Around 1905, Santa Julia was probably the most famous slum in Mexico City. Many years before, that place had been a middle-class neighborhood with attractive houses and picturesque parks, but it gradually fell into disrepair. Big houses with interior courtyards were subdivided into many dwellings, and it was not unusual to find fifty or more people living in a house designed to hold no more than ten or twelve. An entire family lived in a single room under those circumstances, and several families shared a bathroom whose toilet many times did not work.

General Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico with an iron hand for thirty years, generally kept crime under control. Nevertheless, crime prevention in the slums of Mexico City was not a priority for the administration, which was trying to control other groups that constantly challenged the government's legitimacy and authority. Common criminals lived in Santa Julia in a world of their own, completely ignored by everybody else as long as they did not bother the aristocratic elite in power. Many of these people were thieves and robbers of various kinds, from the petty thief to the professional burglar, and some individuals were murderers for hire. The most famous criminal in the last group was a ruthless and inhuman man known only by his nickname, "The Tiger of Santa Julia." He had become a legend, and people swore that once he had stabbed an old man to death, and then he had used the same knife to eat a piece of steak. "But he washed it first," people used to say.

Who would risk his life walking down the streets of Santa Julia? My grandfather did because he firmly believed that it was his duty to provide medical services to all

people regardless of their social status or moral standard. My grandfather, whom people simply called "Doctor Rodríguez," would get in his carriage and go to attend his patients all day and every day of the week. "Work and do not worry about your food because those who work deserve to be fed," he used to say. This seemed to work for him, and he provided food to an entire army of friends and relatives during the Mexican Revolution.

One day in 1905, a few months before the first important outbreak of labor unrest in Cananea, a child went to Doctor Rodríguez's house and told him that his services were urgently needed. The child's mother was in labor, and they needed to rush to her house in Santa Julia. Doctor Rodríguez and the young boy travelled a short distance by streetcar, and then they penetrated into the slum of Santa Julia on foot.

Doctor Rodríguez was an experienced obstetrician, and the delivery was carried out without any mishap. The only peculiarity was that they had to move the bed to a small hall that divided two rooms. This was because it began to rain, and that was the only place where the water leaks would not bother them. After a few hours, a baby boy began to cry, and his scream formed harmony with water that dripped in numerous pots and pans distributed in the rooms, and with the deluge that was falling outside.

Doctor Rodríguez left as soon as the rain diminished somewhat. The unpaved streets were flooded, so the whole neighborhood looked like a Venice of the indigent. Finally, he reached a point where an entire lagoon made it impossible for him to cross.

"Do you need help, Doctor Rodríguez?" a young man asked.

My grandfather thought that it was one of his patients and answered, "If you have a boat, perhaps we could cross . . . and my patients must be waiting for me."

"I'll carry you on my back. I know every hole in this place, and we won't fall."

It seemed like a ridiculous thing to do, but Doctor Rodríguez really did not have any choice. Besides, his patients depended on him. It must have been a unique scene, a thirty-year-old, strong man dressed almost in rags carrying a strong, tall, forty-year-old man on his back.

When they finally reached the other side, my grandfather said, "You look familiar, but I don't remember your name."

"I am 'The Tiger of Santa Julia,' and I helped you because once you saved my mother's life," he answered and walked again into that river of mud.

Homophobics I

Even at the present time, homosexuality poses unusual situations in a Mexican society dominated by *machismo*. Men are supposed to be strong, truthful, and isolated from anything that could be considered a typical feminine quality. Tears, for example, have no place on the face of a *macho*. Naturally, not all Mexican men possess this attitude, but the social pressure is such that even the most impartial man will forcibly reject and discriminate against a homosexual to avoid any possible doubt about his own masculinity. The situation was even more critical a century ago, when my grandmother was only a child, and I will let her narrate a story that I remember word for word.

I was just a young girl when Don Porfirio Díaz was the president of the Republic, and the unfortunate incident took place precisely during those times. That day I was standing with my father waiting for the *tranvía de mulitas* (mule-driven streetcar), which we simple called streetcar. It was a beautiful morning of early May, when the poppy plants were in full bloom and the flower merchants set up their stands with so much care and devotion that the stands themselves seemed like a great bouquet of gigantic flowers. I guess that's why the newspaper man thought that the perfect moment had come.

We were standing by the big, marble column commemorating our independence from Spain, the one next to the Tacuba church, the one surrounded by countless fruit stands where the merchants set up the *tianguis*, our typical market, on Sunday mornings. The great column is still there; it imitates those of the great Roman emperors and has an eagle at the top. Morelos, our independence hero, stands at the bottom reading a roll that

contains our human rights, freedom from slavery, freedom from Spain, and all those things. That's the statue where, to this day, those dirty pigeons like to relieve themselves right on his head!

My father was standing next to the statue, and he was also reading, but not our human rights. He just liked to skim the newspaper to review the latest news and government decrees, which used to appear in the newspaper, I think. My father was short and fat. He liked to dress elegantly and often wore a top hat and a frock coat. We rode the streetcar every day. I used to get off after a few blocks and then walked a few steps to the public school, but my father rode all the way downtown to the Supreme Court.

There was always a newspaper man on that corner. He was *joto* or effeminate and had the stupid idea of liking my father. That was foolish because my father was very masculine and had a terrible temper. Well, the poor sissy gave a melancholic sigh and looked lovingly at his hero. My father, who remained oblivious to everything until that moment, was surprised by the strange noise of the sigh. He then put the paper slowly in his briefcase, took off his glasses, cautiously placed them in a coat pocket, and grabbed his cane. Immediately afterwards, with tremendous speed, he overwhelmed the newspaper man with the blows given by the cane. My father beat him for awhile and would have torn him to pieces if the streetcar had not arrived at that time.

"Please don't hit me, *Licenciado*," the newspaper man kept repeating, even when we were already boarding the streetcar, while people around him laughed.

The following morning, we waited for the streetcar at the same place. My father bought his paper as usual, which the *joto* handed to him without even raising his face. I

have to admit that I felt sorry for the poor man. He looked devastated and was covered with bruises that distinctly marked the blows of my father's cane. That was back in May of 1895.



My grandmother told me this story in 1965, and I simply smiled and asked her to tell me the story again.

Aquiles Serdán

When I was no more than seven years old, my parents took the whole family to visit my aunt Pepita, who lived in the city of Puebla. My aunt was a great hostess, and she and her husband, Uncle Alfredito, took us to visit several points of interest, including the house of Aquiles Serdán.

At first, I thought that visiting a house converted into a museum would be boring, but my expectations proved false. That place had been the scene of a horrendous shootout on November 18, 1910, just two days before the official outbreak of the Mexican Revolution. At the time of my visit, I did not fully understand the details about the Serdán family supporting a democratic government and being willing actively to participate in a revolution to oust the administration of the famous elderly dictator, General Porfirio Díaz. However, the museum's displays of the guns used in the fight, the careful preservation of the bullet holes on the walls, the old photographs of the Serdán family, and the signs pointing to the exact place where Aquiles Serdán had been riddled with bullets exerted a strange but strong appeal on my mind.

Aquiles Serdán was a young, educated man. When I saw his photograph, I thought that he tried to compensate for the thin hair on his head with an enormous mustache. When the police raided his house, he tried to save his life by hiding in the crawl space under the house and the wooden floors. This tactic functioned for awhile, but he ran out of oxygen after a few hours and was mercilessly massacred as he was trying to come out of his hideout. It would have been easy to arrest him, but the government officers had orders to kill him on the spot.

Coming out of the museum, almost everybody took a short break by having a drink of water or going to the restroom, but I stayed wandering around the entrance hall with my grandmother and Uncle Alfredito. He was a man of about sixty-five at the time, thin and approximately five feet and seven inches tall. Uncle Alfredito was a stern professional painter who seemed to enjoy loneliness and seldom talked.

"Did you like the museum?" he suddenly asked.

"Yes."

"And what did you like the most?"

The second question caught me by surprise, so I simply looked at the closest object around me, which happened to be an oil painting depicting the assault on the house, and said, "This painting."

My uncle smiled from ear to ear and indicated, "I painted it a few years ago based on a sketch that I prepared as the shooting was taking place."

He then held my hand and took me to a building across the street from which he had drawn the sketch of the incident many years before, when he was only a teenager. He gave me full details of all the technical problems, which I did not understand.

Nevertheless, he also related how the assault took place. The man leading the operation was Miguel Cabrera, a ruthless chief of police. At first, Cabrera's men shot incessantly into all the windows and doors of the house, to which the Serdán family responded until they ran out of ammunition. Then, some government people literally climbed the façade, and they broke into the house.

"Cabrera asked a little boy, just about your age, to ring the bell of the house," my

uncle remarked. "Then, the shooting began."

I was puzzled by such a strange action and simply asked, "Why a little boy?"

"Cabrera, like many of those who call themselves machos, was only a coward. He sent the child to test the situation, or perhaps that was only the signal to begin shooting. The fact is that the child was the first one to die. I saw him falling before my eyes with more holes in his body than a strainer. History books don't even mention the child, but I saw it, and that's why I included him in the painting."

"But why a little boy?" I asked quietly.

"Everything happened so fast. I had to run to this building to shield myself. . . . I went to the roof from which I witnessed everything."

"But why a little boy?" I insisted.

My uncle continued talking as if unaware of my question and added, "I didn't include the child in my draft, so I had to get a model to prepare the painting for the museum.

I sensed somebody's presence behind me, so I turned around. It was my grandmother listening also to Uncle Alfredo's narration. My father and the rest of my family were close behind her. I hesitated for a moment, but I then walked towards my uncle, and pulling him by the shirt, I asked once more, "But why a little boy?"

"Cabrera was a dog . . . a monster," my uncle answered, and he remained quiet for a few seconds looking at the façade of Aquiles Serdán's house. Perhaps he was visualizing the child lying dead in a pool of blood.

Immediately afterwards, my uncle smiled and patted my head. Simultaneously, my

grandmother held my hand, indicating that it was time to go on. My hands were sweating.

The Wheel of Fortune

The police station of Tacuba is situated between the streets of *Mar Mediterráneo* and *Calzada México Tacuba*. The name of the second street literally means "Highway from Mexico to Tacuba," and it refers to the times when Tacuba was a small town near Mexico City. Due to the fast population growth, however, the big metropolis has gradually devoured smaller, surrounding communities. Similarly, several open spaces have been replaced with small dwellings and a wide variety of buildings. Around 1960, for example, the police station of Tacuba was surrounded by empty land where peddlers sold all types of wares and carnival people set up their rides. Nowadays, that place is packed with apartment buildings and businesses, but I remember well the days when my grandmother and I rode on the Ferris wheel, known in Spanish as the wheel of fortune.

"Why is this ride called 'the wheel of fortune,' Helen?" I asked my grandmother many years ago.

"Because it's like the wheel of fortune in which we all live. The ones on top come down at the least expected time, and the ones at the bottom rise. . . . You are still little and don't understand, but that's what happened to me when Pancho died."

Pancho was the nickname of Francisco José Alvarez, my grandmother's first husband, a handsome man born into a good family. He worked as an executive of a famous department store of that time, The City of London, and good fortune seemed to work in his favor when he got married in 1906. He had always professed a sincere love towards my grandmother Elena, which she didn't return. In fact, she loved a wealthy landowner from the city of Tulancingo, a so-called Popo Desentis, and their wedding

plans were under way. Their castle of dreams collapsed rather unexpectedly, however, when Popo "accidentally" made another woman pregnant. The details of this incident are obscure, but it fit Pancho's aspirations like a glove for the hand, and he married Elena a few months later. It seems she did not marry Pancho to spite Popo, but Elena's parents exerted considerable pressure to force the wedding.

During the first years of her marriage, Elena seemed to be heading towards the typical life style of those people belonging to the Mexican aristocracy of that time. She had a son, Pepe, and her main endeavors consisted in governing the household and seeing after the needs of her husband. What had happened to that restless girl who wanted to become a famous play director? It appears that a rigid social structure had molded her life and aspirations to serve its needs.

This seemingly immovable status quo, however, was openly challenged in 1910. An idealistic and wealthy young man from Northern Mexico, Francisco I. Madero, dared to run against long time president Porfirio Díaz. Furthermore, Madero boldly indicated that, if the choice of the Mexican people was not respected, he would begin a revolution on November 20 at 3:00 p.m.

While these events were taking place in the political arena, Pancho also began going through a very different phase. He became absent minded and developed problems with his speech. When Elena got pregnant with their second child, Pancho seemed indifferent both to the near arrival of a new baby and to the surging discontent of the masses.

"I need to go to . . . I need to go to . . . I need to go to . . . ," he repeated time after

time.

"Pancho, please stop and think what you want to say."

"I need to"

On November 20, 1910, Madero began the hostilities against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. People thought that the government army would soon smother the rebellion, but Madero's popular army came out ahead in the battles.

Meanwhile, Elena had her second child, María, but Pancho seemed unaware of his surroundings. When Elena showed him the baby, he appeared to look through them and into a different reality that lay somewhere in the distance.

"I need to . . . I need to"

While the revolutionaries were forcing Díaz to the brink of capitulation, Pancho stopped going to work, following doctor's orders. Elena hoped that complete rest would make him react, but her spirits tumbled when he confused her with his mother, who was already dead.

"Mama, I need . . . I need . . . I need"

The situation was not completely desperate. Pancho was receiving economic compensation from his employers, and this would continue for the rest of his life. In addition, Elena's father possessed a comfortable economic position, and she could depend on him in case of an emergency.

As time passed, Pancho developed a split personality, and he became unaware of his own identity. When he talked, he seemed to repeat endless tongue twisters time after time. He never left the house, and Elena always made certain that he was never left alone.

Nevertheless, tragedy struck on a sunny morning of November, 1911. Elena left very early to attend mass, and when she came back, Pancho was gone. The maid in charge of watching him had left for a few minutes to chat with some friends and forgot to lock the door.

Elena and her father looked for Pancho everywhere unsuccessfully until they decided to request the help of the doctor of the town, Jesús Rodríguez Tovar. Doctor Rodríguez began the search hospital by hospital. Finally, he found the answer at the Juárez Hospital in Mexico City. Pancho, wandering aimlessly on the streets, was hit by a vehicle. Since he was blond and spoke a "strange language," the hospital workers thought he was a foreigner. The doctors, assuming the patient had a brain hemorrhage, practiced a trepanation, and Elena's husband died a few hours later. Until Doctor Rodríguez clarified the situation, the physicians who attended Pancho did not even know that he was schizophrenic. Pancho had been buried in a common grave as an unidentified individual. Doctor Rodríguez ascertained the situation because the hospital kept Pancho's suit with the initials F. J. A. (Francisco José Alvarez), and Elena unequivocally identified the clothing.

While my grandmother became a widow, Madero forced the capitulation of Porfirio Díaz, sending the elderly general into exile. The once immovable position of the aristocracy had been shaken to its very foundation, and Elena faced a desperate situation.

Many years later, while riding the Ferris wheel, my grandmother smiled. She undoubtedly reminisced about the unpredictable rotation of her wheel of fortune.

"Whether you go up or down," she added, "it is important to laugh and live life to its fullest."

Immediately afterwards, as if to prove her point, she placed her arm on my shoulder and laughed while the ride brought us high into the sky.

Scandal II

It was a rainy and gloomy afternoon of December, 1911 when Elena grabbed her two children and ran to her parents' house. President Madero had not only declared amnesty to numerous members of Porfirio Díaz's regime, but he had allowed many *Porfiristas* to maintain their positions as well, several members of the Judiciary among them. Since Elena's father was a Supreme Court Judge, she expected that he would come out of hiding and return home at any moment.

Elena lived only a few blocks away, so it didn't take her long to cover the short distance. She carried María and a blue umbrella with her left arm and kept Pepe nearby practically pulling him with her right hand. The children favored their late father with their blond hair and stocky physiques. Pepe's eyes were blue while María's were bright green. The two infants attracted the attention of the people walking down the street, and Elena smiled briefly when somebody complimented her children. Her mind concentrated on her father's safe return.

When Elena reached her destination, a maid told her that the *Licenciado* Lezama, Elena's father, hadn't come back and Mrs. Lezama had gone to visit Mr. and Mrs. Quintana at their house on Altamirano Street in San Cosme, approximately three miles away. Large and close Mexican families form small societies where the different individuals support each other, but understanding the exact relationship of the different members sometimes poses a challenge to outsiders.

Mrs. Quintana's maiden name was María Lezama de la Sierra. She was Elena's elder sister, and both siblings got along reasonably well even though they were not

particularly close. María was approximately five feet and two inches tall. Her soft, blue eyes revealed a benevolent disposition while her turned-up nose and small mouth created a beautiful and harmonious facial structure. Her beauty, however, resembled that of Athena rather than Aphrodite. Perhaps being overweight prevented her from being truly attractive. In an old photograph, for example, her head seems to connect directly to her body without a neck.

Rafael Quintana, María's husband, belonged to a wealthy family that was favored by Porfirio Díaz's regime. Unlike many other aristocrats, however, Rafael Quintana managed to maintain his position and wealth throughout the Mexican Revolution. He was a gifted banker, and one could say that he was a type of political chameleon that sensed business opportunities and took advantage of them. Rafael was a first cousin of Mr. Ramón Beteta, whose family has remained very influential in Mexico's government and economic circles to this day.

After a short trip by streetcar, Elena arrived at her sister's home, a big house with a wide entrance and four balconies facing the front. Rafael Quintana informed her that his wife and Elena's mother had gone shopping, but he invited Elena to pass into the living room to wait for them. Rafael, a tall and slim individual with refined social skills, conversed amicably for awhile. He complimented Elena's children and offered support at that moment of need, just a few weeks after the death of Francisco José, Elena's husband, had been confirmed. Nevertheless, Rafael Quintana gradually moved from complimenting the children to praising their mother's beauty, and his manners gradually evolved from a kind gentility to open flirtation. Elena remained glued to her seat, baffled

by the unexpected insinuations. Finally, when Rafael moved near Elena and tried to kiss her, she reacted by hitting him in the nose several times.

"If you dare to come near me again, I will break your skull," Elena said very slowly, enunciating every syllable and grabbing a big porcelain vase.

"Get out of my house. . . . Get out this instant."

"It will be a pleasure!" Elena said smashing the vase on the floor.

As Elena walked out with her children, María and her mother were coming back. They were naturally surprised when they saw her, red with fury, storming out of the house.

"What happened?" the ladies asked simultaneously.

"That husband of yours is an unfaithful little man," Elena said looking at her sister María. "He just tried to take advantage of me."

The three women looked at Rafael Quintana, who was standing at the entrance hall. He tried to talk, but finally stood motionless with his arms hanging at his side. Slowly, one by one, drops of blood came out of his nose and hit the wooden floor.

Elena and her sister María remained on friendly terms. Nevertheless, María did not leave Rafael. Perhaps she feared facing life by herself or did not dare to come out of a social mold that strongly discouraged divorce. Elena's attitude towards life, on the contrary, became quite bold as a result of this incident. Somehow, her old courage returned, and this allowed her to make some surprising decisions and moves in the near future. In a sense, she took advantage of the social revolution that was taking place.

Scandal III

White like the top of the volcanoes, white like the foam of the waves on the beaches of Puerto Escondido, white like the milk of cattle; that was the perfect color, and it represented beauty. Don Porfirio Díaz, who had a dark complexion during his life in the army, surprisingly became lighter when he became the president of the country, and even his moustache whitened with age. Then, white came to represent power.

My grandfather, who was very dark, did not seem to mind the color of his skin, but I suspect that he was definitely attracted by women of light complexion. This is not only shown by his second and third wives being white, but also by his continuous references to the beauty and sensuality of a fair complexion. "Why aren't the moments that wrap us in pleasure eternal?" he wrote in one of his poems. "Why do the hours march implacable when I feel the joy of your lightness?" he added a few lines later.

In addition, he also recommended that my grandmother carry an umbrella during their promenades in the park because, in his view, it was senseless for her to get a suntan. At the same time, she was very demanding about his attire and supervised every piece of his clothing. Perhaps she carried into her marriage her old aristocratic habits of dressing and manners. Be that as it may, my grandparents created a very happy marriage, and they built it piece by piece even though the prognosis didn't seem very optimistic at first.

To begin with, love between them could not appear as that infatuation of adolescence. My grandfather was a forty-five-year-old man with three children from two previous marriages. In addition, his experience as a teacher and medical doctor facilitated a deep, objective knowledge of people that endowed him with a sense of practicality and

Epicureanism that combined with his religious background. He undoubtedly felt attraction towards a beautiful white woman, but the marriage proposal probably resulted more from the need to rebuild his family.

On the other hand, my grandmother crossed, at that time, through a moment of extreme uncertainty with the death of her first husband and the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution. In addition, she once stated, "I never fell madly in love with anybody because I was not about to be the toy of any man." Therefore, it seems that her acceptance of the marriage proposal also arose from circumstances of need.

In any event, emotional attachment was not really a determining factor in people's acceptance of their union. Nevertheless, social background was of extreme importance to some, and my grandfather, regardless of his intelligence and education, simply lacked the aristocratic lineage in his blood. Furthermore, the color of his skin prevented him from blending with the elite to which he did not care to belong anyway. Therefore, when in early 1912, my grandmother announced her future nuptials, several relatives and members of her family did not hesitate to express their disapproval. Interestingly, the general opinion divided into two opposite lines: those who approved of the wedding, mostly male, and those who flatly rejected it, mostly female.

Standing out in the second group was Enriqueta Alvarez, a short, stocky lady whose face resembled a full moon. She was the only sister of my grandmother's first husband and showed great determination to stop the wedding at all costs. First, she visited every person who could possibly exert some influence on my grandmother to change her mind. When this approach failed, Enriqueta visited my grandfather and pleaded with him

to stop a union destined to failure. He remained patient for awhile until she made some innuendoes against the physical appearance of his daughters by his second marriage.

"Who's asking your opinion about my children?" he asked visibly upset.

"How do you dare to speak to me like that, you, old, dark and horrible man?"

"Nobody asked you to come, milk-colored sausage," he responded.

Even though the mutual insults, childish in many respects, did not represent a real threat, she decided to file suit. When this senseless legal action proved also fruitless, Enriqueta began a campaign of ridiculous slanders, one of which affirmed that my grandparents had plotted to kill their respective spouses in order to get married. Poor Enriqueta didn't seem to remember that my grandfather's former wife had died of appendicitis in the hospital or that he met my grandmother after her first husband had died.

Elena told me all this laughing until tears came out of her eyes, and I imitated her in earnest. Finally, I asked her if Papá Chuchito, as she made me call my grandfather, had requested her hand from her parents.

"I was a grown woman," she answered, "so we only invited them to the wedding. That day, I wore a light-blue dress. . . . I have never looked prettier in my life."

I looked at her and smiled. I never told her that I didn't believe her. She could have never looked prettier than that day when, sitting on her lap, I listened to my grandmother's story about the malevolent plots of the fearful Enriqueta Alvarez.

Homophobics II

Mexican *machismo* seemed to increase with the advent of the Revolution, perhaps because *machos* are supposed to be brave, and this social turmoil favored the very brave, the very intelligent, and the very ruthless. The bravest survived, and those skillful and fast handling firearms were sometimes the most respected or feared. The controversial Pancho Villa illustrates this situation very well. He was highly intelligent, intrepid, and fearless. Interestingly, he also possessed a well-deserved reputation as a womanizer, and even to this date, many Mexican women consider him a model of what a real man, a *macho*, should be. During the Mexican Revolution, men, women, and children took up arms, not to demand, but to take a dignified place in society, and people did not tolerate those men who rejected the rigors of hard labor to concentrate on what was considered at the time a typical female endeavor, and this is exactly what happened to a young man that I am going to call Juan. My grandmother never remembered his name because people always called him *el joto*.

Back in 1912, when Madero was the president of Mexico and my grandmother had just gotten married for the second time, Juan answered an advertisement that she had placed on her house door soliciting the services of a maid. He simply knocked at the door and indicated that he wanted the job.

Those were prosperous times. Madero had taken over the government from the elderly dictator Don Porfirio Díaz, and people looked to the future with optimism. My grandfather had a big practice as a medical doctor, and this allowed him to live

comfortably with his new family. My grandmother already had four servants, three women and a man, in her house. Adela was a young and attractive woman who worked as a cook. Virginia was a mature woman of around fifty who had been hired as nanny to take care of the children that my grandmother brought from her first marriage. The third woman was María, a young girl of about thirteen who helped with the cleaning of the house but spent most of the time washing and ironing clothes and gossiping with the other servants. Finally, Pancho worked as a *mozo*, that is, a man hired at a household to perform unskilled labor that requires considerable physical strength. According to my grandmother, Pancho was young, strong, and incredibly stupid.

In any event, my grandmother considered that she needed somebody else to sweep and wash the tile floors, dust the house, and keep household items in their place. In other words, she needed a maid, but she had never expected a man to apply for that job.

"I'm sorry, but I want a maid and not a *mozo*," she said.

"I'm a good worker. Leave your house to me, and I'll make it precious, absolutely precious," Juan responded in a high-pitched voice, modulating each word like a lyric song.

"I will accept you on a trial basis," my grandmother said after hesitating for an instant at the thought of hiring such a peculiar individual, ignoring the dissatisfaction that was likely to come from the other servants.

The first day on the job, Juan put on an apron and began to work. It was amazing how quickly and thoroughly he cleaned the glass cups and the porcelain figures. Furthermore, Juan arranged the figures on the living-room tables with such good taste

that it was a pleasure to see them. The tableware shone like never before, and the house in general was immaculate. Juan combined the femininity of a woman and the strength of a man to be the perfect maid, but unfortunately the first serious conflict did not take long to arise. The following morning, Pancho *el mozo* informed my grandmother that he was quitting the job.

"I'm leaving, I'm leaving. I don't want to be with the damned *joto*."

"But Pancho, please calm down and let's talk this over," my grandmother pleaded.

"I'm leaving, I'm leaving. I don't want to be with the damned *joto*," Pancho repeated like a broken record.

All this discussion took place in front of Juan, and according to my grandmother, she was mainly to blame. Since Juan could not sleep with the female servants regardless of how much he might have wanted to become one, my grandmother decided that Juan and Pancho could sleep in the same room. We will never know exactly what happened that night because Pancho never told, but we may assume that Juan made some type of insinuation. The fact is that Pancho *el mozo* spent the night in the kitchen waiting for my grandmother to wake up.

It must be said that Mexican women are masters of their household, and they frequently hold enough power to make decisions that affect others, including their husbands. In this way, the Mexican *machismo* is full of contradictions because males often enjoy certain privileges while playing a role of servitude to their spouses at the same time. My grandmother was no exception, and she alone decided who would leave and stay, and under what conditions. In this case, she indicated that Juan would live in a

separate room, which persuaded Pancho *el mozo* to stay.

As weeks and months passed, the servants appeared to tolerate each other when my grandmother was present. However, Juan did not hide his homosexuality and exaggerated his feminine mannerisms, to which the others responded by sneering at him and by insulting him with more or less subtlety. That was a time bomb that unfortunately exploded at the most inappropriate time.

One evening, during a family reunion, one of my grandmother's sisters indicated, referring to Juan, "Where did you get 'her'? Nowadays it's very difficult to find good help."

I don't know whether this remark was ill-intentioned or not, but the effect was the same. Juan waited a few seconds, slowly approached my great-aunt, and pointing a finger at her, he said, "You will pay for this."

My grandmother might have ignored this threat if it had been addressed to one of the other servants, but she could not tolerate it when it involved a member of her own family.

"Juan, don't try to get above yourself. How do you dare to speak like that? You have to leave this house . . . immediately."

By the expression on his face, it seemed that Juan had been stabbed in the chest. He did not demand the salary for the days he had worked since the last pay day; he did not even pick up his possessions and clothes; he simply walked out through the front door, and nobody saw him again.

The following day, the servants were humming songs while performing their daily

chores.



Many years later, sitting at the dining-room table, my grandmother still insisted that she never had a better maid than *el joto*.

Aunt Lupe

I have very diverse relatives on my mother's side. This is because my grandfather married three times and my grandmother twice, and they had children with their different spouses. It should be noted that there was never a divorce, but poor health was definitely a problem. In any event, I came to have uncles, aunts, and cousins of all sizes, hues, and colors, but nobody like my aunt Lupe. She has been dead for more than thirty years, but her image is still present in my mind.

I remember Aunt Lupe when she was in her late forties. To a six-year-old child, she seemed as tall as the National Cathedral. Aunt Lupe had a stocky but well-shaped figure that she tried to conceal. She wore long dresses, long-sleeve blouses, and silk scarfs. Her face was round, and her light blue eyes shone with life when she narrated fairy tales to me. Her white complexion easily turned reddish with physical exertion, and since she was a very active woman, it was never pale.

Once I asked my aunt with that brutal honesty of a child, "Why didn't you get married if you are so pretty?"

"Because I never met anybody as nice as you are, my love," she answered, hugged me like a bear, and gave me a kiss.

She always called me "my love," which embarrassed me because my brothers teased me, but I never complained. For me, it was still a great event to visit my aunt because her stories and fairy tales overjoyed me. I didn't mind her grabbing me with force and sitting me on her lap like a puppet because that was the beginning of our story-telling ritual.

Once, on a hot summer day, she wore short sleeves for a change, and I remarked, "You look prettier today than other times."

My aunt simply laughed, hugged me with force, and gave me a kiss.

I remember well the last time I saw her. She was very sick in bed. She looked pale and was obviously in pain. When I left, she just said, "If I feel better next time, I will tell you the story of the boy whose body was changed into candy."

Aunt Lupe died three weeks later. My parents did not allow me to attend the wake, and I stayed at home with my grandmother and brothers. I expressed my frustration by "clamming up" and isolating myself. My nanny took me to school the following day, and I gradually regained my spirits. Nevertheless, the shadow of death darkened my soul again when my mother, dressed in mourning after attending the funeral, picked me up that afternoon. This time, however, my mother told me how much Aunt Lupe had been suffering with terminal cancer.

"Your aunt is now in Heaven, where everybody is happy, but she will be sad if you are upset," she told me and added, "Let's say a prayer to let her know how much we love her."

My mother's words and praying together had an almost magical effect to comfort me.

Legally, Aunt Lupe was my mother's first cousin, but in fact they were not related at all. Furthermore, nobody could ever find out who my aunt's biological parents were. These *incognitas* are the result of very peculiar circumstances.

Back in 1913, my great-grandmother, that is, my mother's mother's mother, went

shopping in downtown Mexico City. The political situation had been very unstable due to the turmoil created by groups that were trying to regain the privileges they enjoyed with the previous regime, and by other individuals who searched only for personal gain. These problems were exacerbated by President Madero's leniency with his political enemies, which was viewed by many as weakness on his part. Nevertheless, President Madero seemed to have practically controlled the situation, and the only armed opposition had been confined to a single fortification in the city, which was expected to surrender soon. That is why my great-grandmother ventured to go downtown, but she had made a mistake.

Mr. Victoriano Huerta, an army general later known as "The Jackal," betrayed the Mexican president and initiated a coup that would culminate with the assassination of President Madero and Vice-President Pino Suárez. The heavy shooting began precisely when my great-grandmother was selecting some fabrics at a cloth store. The owner immediately closed his business, and nobody went in or out for several hours. Finally, the uproar disappeared, so my great-grandmother ventured to the street and, not finding any type of transportation, began by foot her return home. Suddenly, after she had advanced a few blocks, she saw a body lying on the pavement. It was a young woman killed by a bullet wound in the head, and on top of her, there was a baby girl sucking the breast of her dead mother. The shooting began anew, and this imminent danger brought my great-grandmother out of the stupor created by such a scene. She just grabbed the baby and ran, and finally reached her home in Tacuba, a suburb of Mexico City at that time, near midnight.

It was extremely dangerous to walk down the streets of Mexico City for several days, during that shameful historical incident known as the Tragic Ten because it lasted ten days, so the investigation to find out who the baby was could not be initiated for more than a week, and it proved fruitless. The baby was officially adopted by one of my grandmother's sisters and baptized as Guadalupe Téllez. Nevertheless, she was actually raised by three single sisters of my great-grandmother. Lupe, as everybody called the baby, was a blessing to them. She worked hard and took care of them in their old age. When they died, Aunt Lupe inherited a large property that she used as a boarding house, and this is the way she supported herself for the rest of her life.

Recently, my mother showed me a picture where I am sitting on Aunt Lupe's lap. She looks distinguished, and I seem thin and frail. Both of us are smiling and happy. On the back of the picture, there is a dedication written by me. The handwriting is clumsy and irregular, typical of that of a small child, and it expresses a sincere thought together with a cliché. The dedication reads:

To my aunt Lupe,
I love you because you are blond like gold
and because you are good to me.

Jaime Sánchez Rodríguez

The Three Lupes

While many people left their homes to join the armed groups fighting against Victoriano Huerta, others remained in Mexico City and organized different types of resistance forces against the usurper. The bravery of these individuals must be recognized since the uncovering of their actions or ideas meant torture and subsequent death by a firing squad. Therefore, during Huerta's regime, people exercised extreme discretion and care in order to avoid showing any type of political involvement. Nothing can illustrate better this nerve-racking situation than the story of Lupe Guillén, but we need to go back to 1890 to understand its implications.

At that time, one of my grandmother's aunts, Guadalupe de la Sierra, lived by herself in Tacuba. Guadalupe, whom we can call Lupe I for the purpose of this narrative, was a childless widow who spent her life reading and visiting relatives and friends. Her husband had been wealthy, so she did not need to work.

As a relatively idle individual, Lupe I used her female intuition to find out intimate details of people's lives rather than concentrating on more rewarding, intellectual endeavors. As a result, she knew exactly the time when her neighbors left and came back to their homes, their marital problems, and whether or not they attended church regularly. That is why she noticed that Isabel, her next-door neighbor, had not come out of her house at eight o'clock in the morning as she always did. Isabel lived by herself with her baby daughter, so Lupe began getting concerned. Later that morning she heard the baby cry, and when the little creature's wailing continued for ten minutes, Lupe forced her way into the house to discover that Isabel lay dead on the floor while the baby screamed with

full force in a cradle.

Sometimes it pays to be nosy. Lupe adopted the baby, whom she also called Guadalupe, and raised her as her own daughter. The younger Lupe, to whom we can refer as Lupe II, grew up like a beautiful bougainvillaea. Her dark complexion made her big, green eyes stand out. Her dark and lustrous long hair shone with the sunlight, and her tender smile gave the young woman an attractive but simultaneously virtuous appearance. The young Lupe was, in short, a perfect mixture of Artemise and Aphrodite.

At a young age, she married a young journalist whom we will call Luis Guillén. My grandmother could never remember his first name, but it really does not matter if it was Luis or Paco or Pedro or Marcos. They got married and were extremely happy together. They had a baby girl in 1912, when Madero was still president of Mexico. Luis insisted on naming the baby Guadalupe, so we can refer to her as Lupe III, but Luis and Lupe Guillén simply called her the "Bald-Headed One."

The revolution that began in 1910 actually helped the young couple prosper because there was greater freedom of the press and consequently more work for the young journalist. These prosperous circumstances, however, changed after the military coup led by Huerta. Several newspapers were forced to close or their writing staffs were replaced with "puppets" working unconditionally for the new government. In this way, young Luis faced the specter of economic disaster with a daughter and a wife, who by that time was expecting their second child.

"What shall we do?" Lupe asked when she heard that Luis had been dismissed from his work as a journalist.

"We will find something," Luis answered, trying to console her.

That night, the situation became desperate. A group of soldiers broke in their house and dragged Luis out without giving any explanation for their actions. Lupe wrapped her baby and immediately went to her adoptive mother's house.

"I need you to keep my little 'Bald-Headed One' while I try to find Luis. Some soldiers just took him God knows where," Lupe said.

The old Lupe calmed her daughter down and rightly proposed to first find Licenciado Lezama, my great-grandfather and former supreme court judge. It did not take them long to go to his house and explain the situation, and Lupe Guillén and the old man were promptly on their way to the local jail, where all political prisoners were taken.

It was still dark when they arrived, and it took them a long time to be admitted into the main office. While my great-grandfather was trying to obtain some information from several clerks, Lupe sat down on a wooden bench. The clerks were rude, and the old man had to swallow his pride. The large room was silent and cold. Lupe watched my great-grandfather gesticulating with a forced smile, but she could not hear his words. At one point, he seemed to say, "He has to be here," but then he changed again to his soft-spoken tone.

As time passed, the blackness of the sky began changing into an ash grey, and then Lupe heard something like a military march in an adjacent courtyard. She stood up on the bench, and she was able to see through a small window with a broken glass what was happening nearby. A group of soldiers stood in formation in front of a wall while the band played. Meanwhile, a group of approximately fifteen men was herded to the

opposite wall. Although this action should have lasted only a few seconds, in that short time Lupe thought she recognized Luis among the prisoners. She was not sure at first because one of his eyes was partially closed and his lips were swollen. However, he looked in her direction and screamed with all his might, "Good-bye, Lupe. . . . Take care of our little 'Bald-Headed One!'"

The prisoners were immediately aligned against the wall and executed by the firing squad while the band played a happy, loud song. Lupe was afraid, petrified with the stridency of the sound, and the silhouette of her husband melted before her eyes. Meanwhile, the clerks were arguing with my great-grandfather that there was nobody by the name of Luis Guillén in that prison.

Lupe Guillén had a miscarriage that day, and shortly thereafter the three Lupes left Mexico City and hid for several months at a relative's house in Puebla. Simultaneously, anybody associated with Luis Guillén went into hiding or joined the growing armed groups fighting against Huerta. Confusion and disorder dominated the nation, and the Mexican society was like a dislocated mind.

Two Miracles

Life and death, joy and sadness, hope and despair, these feelings blend in unexpected ways in the gigantic puzzle of a sociopolitical crisis. In this way, President Madero's assassination and the brutal repression that "The Jackal" Huerta implemented mercilessly did not have the effect that the usurper expected. Instead of intimidating the general population, Huerta's actions raised unanimous indignation, and people who had thus far maintained a marginal position actively refused to accept the presidency of "The Jackal."

Huerta the drunkard, Huerta the murderer, Huerta the beast who carried out massive assassinations in order to solidify his power actually awakened patriotism and good will.

"Helen, didn't you like Huerta?" I once asked my grandmother jokingly.

"That bloodthirsty jackal? Not on your life."

"But Helen, Huerta said that Madero was killed by some thieves who were only trying to rob him," I insisted teasingly.

"In your dreams!" my grandmother said, and she then remained in a daze, with her eyes looking through me and into the turmoil of early 1913, when my grandfather left his family to join the constitutional forces, which were an ever growing group of individuals from very diverse backgrounds fighting against the government of "The Jackal" Huerta.

Venustiano Carranza functioned as commander in chief of the Constitutional Army. Carranza, a man with an imposing personality, was the governor of the northern state of Coahuila, and he did not accept receiving orders from Huerta, a man who not only

stepped on all moral and legal principles, but who also possessed a disgusting personality.

My grandfather felt optimistic at first and, as a physician, volunteered to provide medical help to entire families that got involved in the armed struggle. Within a short time, however, he noticed that Carranza brushed off valuable individuals for no apparent reason other than representing a potential challenge to his power. In addition, Carranza spurned representatives from the agrarian sector with whom my grandfather identified closely. Adding to all this confusion, it gradually became evident that the Catholic Church leadership and the American ambassador, Mr. Henry Lane Wilson, actually supported "The Jackal" Huerta, in what can be considered one of the greatest foreign policy fiascos of the twentieth century.

My grandfather became rapidly disillusioned, so he returned to his home confused and absorbed in his thoughts. It was early June of 1913. He arrived early in the morning at his house, but my grandmother and the children were not there. After being absent for a few weeks, he could not stand the separation from his Elena any longer, so he decided to look for her at her Aunt Manuelita's house, who lived only a few blocks away.

Another surprise awaited him at that place. The door of the house was partially open, so he became alarmed and immediately rushed into the house, a typical dwelling in the old Roman style, with a courtyard in the center. Everything seemed in order, and even the hanging pots with leafy ferns displayed exuberance, but poor Manuelita was lying delirious on her bed.

"Who are you?" the old lady asked.

This is Doctor Rodríguez . . . Jesús, Elena's husband. Try to rest."

My grandfather examined his unexpected patient and diagnosed that she suffered from food poisoning, so he administered a vomitive and remained there until her prognosis improved. By noon, my grandfather locked the door and went again to his own home. He lay down to wait for his wife, thinking that Manuelita, who had been wealthy and considered herself an aristocrat, perhaps was forced to eat stale meat. Food was scarce during those difficult times.

He finally fell asleep, and a few hours later my grandmother woke him up exclaiming excitedly, "Miracle! Another miracle!"

"Elena, my dear, what do you say?"

"It is a miracle! I went this morning with the children to the Basilica to pray to the Virgin of Guadalupe for your return, and here you are."

My grandfather smiled with a mischievous expression and added, "And the other miracle?"

Aunt Manuelita almost died, but she says that Jesus Christ in person came to save her. He appeared all of a sudden in her room when she was very sick."

"I know that I am a good doctor, but not *that* good. Elena, it was me. I was there this morning. The door was open. . . . Poor Manuelita, I will explain it to her."

"You are not explaining anything to anybody. You would break her heart. Besides, it *was* a miracle that you arrived at the right time."

Manuelita died fifteen years later of a heart attack, and this time neither the biblical Jesus nor the one of flesh and bones could save her life.

Homophobics III

Captain Bedolla burst into Doctor Rodríguez's office unexpectedly. It was an early afternoon of July, 1913, just a few days after the assassination of President Madero and Vice- President Pino Suárez. Of course, the press was muzzled by the repressive government that organized the coup with the help of the American ambassador, Mr. Henry Lane Wilson, a corporate lawyer who acted without being sanctioned by the administration of President Taft.

The official story was that President Madero was accidentally killed in a shootout that took place when he was being transferred from the National Palace to another location. But people knew the truth; they knew that "The Jackal" Huerta and his men had ravaged people of their hard-gained achievements. And "The Fly" Bedolla, as the soldiers usually called him, was one of those jackals. The nickname fit him perfectly well. That Bedolla was as dark as a fly, as hairy as a fly, and as short as a fly. In addition, his long mustache looked like a pair of black antennas, and when his bright eyes moved, they seemed to jump out of their sockets. The soldiers jokingly said that Captain Bedolla was so ugly that there was not a woman in all Mexico willing to lie down with him.

"I want attention now," yelled Captain Bedolla.

"Wait your turn or come back after eight," said the doctor while he examined a patient who lay down on a sofa.

The white part of Bedolla's eyes, somewhat red, nobody knew why, reddened even more; his nostrils snorted with anger. He stood motionless for a few seconds, and he finally left slamming the door.

Bedolla did not return for a whole week. However, he knocked at the door the dawn of the eighth day. By that time, governors of various states had failed to recognize Huerta's regime, and it was only a matter of time until Bedolla would have to battle the ever-growing forces of the Revolution.

"It feels as if the skull pierces my brain," said Bedolla.

The doctor examined the officer very carefully, asked questions, and took notes. His hand moved the pen very slowly while his eyes surveyed the other individual very cautiously.

"Your case seems to be psychosomatic . . . a problem of the mind that affects the body," the doctor added, anticipating Bedolla's question. "Please, come back tomorrow, and I will tell you something definite."

The next visit was short. Bedolla sat down, crossed his legs, and began tapping the arm of the chair. The doctor sat on the opposite side of the room, behind an enormous desk.

"Captain Bedolla," the doctor said, "I think that you are hiding a secret, and that's why you have such terrible headaches. For this reason, you need to answer my next question like the army officer that you are. . . . Do you like men, Captain?"

"How do you dare?" Bedolla said. His jaw began shaking, and he did not add another word. He left again slamming the door even harder this time. Nevertheless, Bedolla went back to the doctor's office that night around eleven o'clock. The doctor's wife begged him to be careful because Bedolla was a very dangerous person, but the visit went much more smoothly than the previous times.

"How did you find out?" Bedolla asked now speaking with his natural, high-pitched voice. His hands and arms moved everywhere with exaggerated refinement. "Will you cure me now?"

"There is nothing anybody can do. . . . I am sorry."

Bedolla's eyes did not resemble those of a fly on this occasion. They looked rather like those of a cow. In any event, he simply hit his heels, and after a brief "thank you," departed never to come back.

Very shortly, violence exploded all over the country. Thousands died while the bullets seemed to avoid Captain Bedolla. It was almost as if they discriminated against him. Finally, he was captured fighting the *Villistas*, Pancho Villa's men. People rumored that Bedolla was not hanged, but executed by a firing squad because of his bravery. Some even said that, in front of the firing squad, the captain opened his shirt and yelled, "Why do you take so long to fire? Pull the trigger, bastards."

The soldiers indicated, by the body full of holes, that that officer was a true man. When the doctor heard the story, he knew that Bedolla was only a *joto* trying to commit suicide.

Elena

While Europe was in turmoil in May, 1914, preparing for the Great War, the Mexican Revolution reached a critical point. Even though "The Jackal," Victoriano Huerta, had the support of some groups in Mexico City, indignation broke out all over the country due to the assassination of President Madero, and armed opposition reacted with force. In early May of that year, Huerta took refuge in Mexico City, which was soon surrounded in four fronts. Alvaro Obregón came from the northwest, Emiliano Zapata attacked from the south, Pablo González advanced from the east, and the controversial but charismatic Pancho Villa gathered a long chain of victories from the north.

Huerta's troops in Mexico City were understandably nervous, particularly since their commander had set the battle rules: no prisoners were to be taken. Villa, for example, used to order the execution of *Huertistas* (Huerta's soldiers) by firing squad if they had defended themselves bravely, but anybody even suspected of treason or having exploited the Mexican people was hanged.

The general population of Mexico City feared the possibility of a block-by-block battle that could take place, but people hoped anxiously to be liberated from "The Jackal." This sanguinary individual had eliminated any political opposition by ordering the assassination of numerous congressmen and senators, and his troops had sacked the city of any supplies since the transportation of food and basic staples from other parts of the country had been interrupted.

A sunny morning of that month of May, Elena ventured to go out of her house.

She was a young woman who enjoyed life to the maximum, seemingly indifferent to the dismal situation and the dangerous soldiers who patrolled the streets. This petite lady had a charming figure, whose thin legs might have been considered its only slight imperfection, but the long dresses used at that time took care of that minor problem. That morning, Elena was wearing a light blue dress with ruffles that she used to attend mass on Sunday mornings. She also wore a matching hat that protected her white complexion from the sun.

Elena had big, bright eyes. They were hazel, almost green. Her nose was straight and thin, and her small mouth continuously scattered smiles all around her. Her facial expressions were somewhat flirtatious, but they always maintained such dignity that they prevented anybody from showing any lack of respect. This was particularly the case that morning since she was carrying a baby completely wrapped in a yellow blanket and María, a young maid, accompanied her.

María was very dark and no more than fourteen years old. That morning, she moved from one side of Elena to another trying to cover the baby with a small umbrella, and Maria also carried a diaper bag with baby clothes and other items.

The small group left their house in Tacuba, a suburb of Mexico City at that time, and began strolling in the direction of Elena's father's home. They only needed to walk six blocks, but they had to pass by the Municipal Palace, a place boiling with *Huertistas* suspicious of anything that moved. As Elena and her companions approached this place, she noticed a road block. María began shaking like a child, but Elena simply smiled and told her, "Why are you afraid, María? Do you think that these gentlemen will bother a

woman with a baby?"

The sergeant of the squad heard this statement, advanced towards Elena, and said taking off his hat, "Good morning, Ma'am."

"Good morning, Sir," Elena answered rocking the baby.

"Where are you going?"

"With your permission, I need to visit my parents. They get awfully upset if they don't see their grandchild at least once in a while," she said and began humming softly a lullaby.

The sergeant smiled, put on his hat, and said to his subordinates, "Move out of the way and let the lady pass."

Elena passed, rocking the child, while María kept moving from side to side holding the umbrella, and they soon reached their destination, where they were received in amazement.

"How did you come here?" her father asked.

"I just had to celebrate your birthday, Father," Elena remarked. "And I am going to fix turkey with *mole* for you. I brought everything."

Elena unwrapped the "baby," which happened to be a turkey ready to be cooked, and she got the ingredients for the *mole* out of the diaper bag. Her husband had smuggled in these forbidden items hidden in his medical bag the day before. In this way, Elena and her family had a feast while the nearby soldiers ate stale tortillas and beans with vermin.

Many years later, Elena, my grandmother on my mother's side, told me this anecdote. She was very old then and confined to a wheelchair, but she had a very

attractive personality, and one could still see clear signs of the beauty of her youth.

"You were really something," I said.

My grandmother was hard of hearing, so she just smiled and added, "And men think that they govern the world."

Androcles and the Lion

Francisco I. Madero, Victoriano Huerta, Venustiano Carranza: an idealistic revolutionary, a traitor, a vindicator of the revolution, that is how history textbooks portray these three individuals who played important roles in the Mexican drama of the early 1900's. Upon looking at the facts, however, we can discern that this is not completely accurate. Madero in fact initiated a revolution, Huerta assassinated Madero and became president through a military coup, and Carranza ultimately defeated and expelled Huerta from the country. Nevertheless, it is seldom mentioned that Carranza was an egocentric and corrupt individual, and Madero failed to implement important social changes that Mexico urgently needed. These omissions occur because, as my grandfather used to say, "textbooks often serve those who are in power. "

Be that as it may, historical figures are frequently controversial, but this was not the case with "The Jackal," Victoriano Huerta. Writers would have difficulty portraying this man as anything but a flat character, the villain. Everybody agrees that Huerta possessed infinite thirst of power, and he did not hesitate to carry out wide spread assassinations in order to solidify his authority.

Under these circumstances, my grandfather and many other people joined Carranza in his struggle against "The Jackal." After a few weeks, however, my grandfather became aware of Carranza's autocratic attitude, so he returned to his home. My grandfather continued tending his office for a few months until some men in uniform, Huerta's men, appeared unexpectedly at his house in April 1915 and arrested him. They did not provide any explanation for their actions, so at this date we can only speculate on

the causes of his detention. Perhaps they discovered that my grandfather had joined Carranza at one time. He may have made a comment against Huerta's regime which was overheard by an informer, or maybe the whole ordeal was simply a mistake. We will never find out, but we know that any type of problem with Huerta's government could prove deadly due to the ruthless, repressive, and sanguinary nature of this cruel individual.

We will leave my grandfather on his way to jail to relate what his wife was doing in the meantime. Fortunately, my grandmother had gone with her two children to visit her parents while the arrest took place, so she found out what had happened from a neighbor who had witnessed the arrest. She immediately took her children to their grandparents' house and began a search for a lawyer that would take the case. That was a difficult undertaking because a political prisoner's defender could also be considered an enemy of the regime, and not many people would be willing to take that risk.

Nevertheless, my grandmother found a good lawyer who calmed her down. He told her that they needed to take a two-way approach. First, it was important to dissociate my grandfather from any political affiliation or ideology. Secondly, they had to use delaying tactics because Huerta's regime was rapidly crumbling and should fall within a matter of days. By that time, political prisoners would be considered heroes. Finally, the lawyer told my grandmother that he would arrange for her to visit my grandfather the next morning, so she eventually returned to her parents' house, tearful but hopeful, to pick up her children.

When my grandfather arrived at the prison, he was immediately summoned to the public prosecutor's office. A guard soon escorted him to a much cleaner hall decorated with ferns and other plants. The guard knocked gently on a door that said "General Prosecutor" and announced my grandfather's arrival.

"You must be a 'big fish' for Mr. Musquis to want to see you even before going through interrogation," the guard said as he left.

"Interrogation or torture?" my grandfather thought, but his pondering was suddenly interrupted by the general prosecutor, Mr. Manuel Musquis Blanco.

"Come in and take a seat, Doctor Rodríguez. Do you want a cigarette?"

My grandfather did not smoke but accepted the offer.

"I bet you don't remember me with this mustache," the prosecutor said.

"Aren't you from Puebla?"

"So you remember, Doctor Rodríguez. Yes, you were my teacher years ago, and you helped me a lot. Now it's my turn to reciprocate. You can sleep tonight in my quarters, and I will have all the paper work ready so you can go home tomorrow before lunch."

The following morning, when my grandmother was escorted into the prosecutor's office, she found my grandfather drinking a cup of hot chocolate and eating croissants. The prosecutor was smoking a cigarette, and both men were having the time of their lives remembering old days.

"There is no doubt," my grandfather said on his way home, "that my name should

be Androcles and my old pupil Manuel must be Mr. Lion."

Why Grandpa Hated Balloons

The Mexican Revolution presented a battleground for a wide variety of ideologies and individuals. Some of these people firmly believed in a better society where people in general could receive the respect they deserved as human beings. Other individuals, however, entered the revolution hungry for power and looking only for personal gain. Emiliano Zapata belonged to the first group, and Alvaro Obregón marched in the ranks of the second one.

Zapata came from a peasant background, and he was designated by the people of his community to protect their land. He knew first hand the systematic and outrageous exploitation that a few wealthy landowners had carried out for years. He possessed an in-depth knowledge of how the system of single-owned, large land estates impoverished the real workers and prevented them from improving their living conditions. So Zapata rose up in arms and began a rebellion that was extremely important due to its political and sociological implications. Therefore, when Villa's and Zapata's troops entered Mexico City on November 13, 1914, the general population felt somewhat optimistic that a new government would be established to pursue the ideals of the revolution. Unfortunately, nothing could be farther from the truth since Venustiano Carranza did not recognize the agreements reached a few weeks before at the Convention of Aguascalientes, and this turned the revolution into a civil war. Finally, the *Carrancistas* entered Mexico City in January, 1915, led by no other than General Alvaro Obregón.

The *Carrancistas* sacked the city, and this was followed by two months of severe food shortages and a scarcity of water. In addition, Carranza demanded the payment of

high levies to finance the war and tried to circulate a currency that people simply refused to accept. On top of all this, Carranza initiated a troublesome anticlerical campaign that proved very unpopular with the mostly Catholic Mexican population.

My grandfather had good reasons to be upset. With the occupation of the city, the *Carrancistas* stole practically everything he owned. They took the horse that he used to call on patients; they carried away with them anything that could possibly have a monetary value, such as jewelry, ceramics, and even clothing; they also stole all his food, with the exception of some bags of grain that they failed to find; they also sacked his library; and they even snatched many of the tools and instruments that he used in his work as a medical doctor, including the mortars and scales that he kept in the back room of his drugstore. The *Carrancistas* obviously had no use for these items, but they completely ignored my grandfather's pleas to leave alone those items that he needed to save lives.

Doctor Rodríguez, as people knew my grandfather, did not have much time to reorganize his office. He gradually but steadily began to receive more and more patients, most of them children, with respiratory and digestive illnesses that were a direct product of the crisis. By mid-February, he had to get up at five o'clock in the morning, and he was already preparing his instruments and boiling water before six. By the time he opened his office around seven, there were already some people waiting on the street. Then he would work all day, feeling parasitized abdomens and watching throats full of ulcers and secretion.

One of those days, while he examined a child, Doctor Rodríguez pondered if his efforts would prove fruitless. The young patient's broken cry was accompanied by the

slow, sad whining of the water that boiled in various pots. The child suffered from emaciation and anemia, and his thin limbs made his head look bigger than its real size. His inflated abdomen stretched the dark skin so much that it actually shone, except on those places covered with eruptions. Why didn't he float away like a balloon?

"Have you given any food to your son?"

"Weeds."

"Don't you know that he can't digest those things?" Doctor Rodríguez remarked.

"That's all I could find."

The two adults looked at each other for a while without a word. Silence is painful for those who have said so much that they have nothing left to add, so the doctor forcibly whispered almost to himself, "We need to give him tincture of opium to control the diarrhea first, and we also have to apply serum to prevent him from dehydrating. Later on we can use calomel to take care of the infection."

The young mother continued looking at Doctor Rodríguez with attention as if she wanted to count the wrinkles on his face. Her eyes looked particularly big and expressive in her thin face. She could have been pretty, but her dark complexion was covered with white stains. She kept her mouth partially open due to anticipation, but also because of ulcers on her lips.

"Pellagra and sprue are illnesses that require"

Doctor Rodríguez could not finish his thought. He knew very well that the main cause of the child's disease was simply undernourishment, and he would die unless they gave him something to eat. The doctor was also aware that he and his family had not

suffered hunger while many others could not provide for the most basic necessities. Why should he enjoy such a privilege? Because he was a doctor and possessed a network of relatives and friends out of Mexico City who could supply him with the basic staples? And why shouldn't the others enjoy the same right?

"Excuse me a moment. I will be back soon."

"Yes, Doctor Rodríguez."

A few minutes later, he came back with a small bag of rice flour frequently used to prepare *atole* (a thick and generally sweet drink). "Keep this and fix some *atole* for your son. Be sure to boil the water, and don't force him to drink too much at first. A few spoonfuls will be plenty to begin with, and then you can gradually increase the amount."

The young woman thanked the doctor and left. Then he went to call the next patient. Several children were crying with a broken noise that created a melancholic rhythm in the waiting room. Nobody was talking, but a woman was singing to her child, "Triqui-trin, triqui-tran, triqui-trin, triqui-tran."

Doctor Rodríguez excused himself. and he returned a few minutes later carrying a trunk. He placed it on the floor, opened it rapidly, and began throwing small bags of grain out of the trunk unto the floor. Nobody moved or said a word.

"Can't you see that this is yours?" Doctor Rodríguez said, finally blowing up.

He then stormed out of the room while everybody jumped to pick up the grain as if they were grabbing fruit from a piñata.

The doctor returned shortly afterwards and simply said, "Next, please."

Another woman with another balloon child stood up while the monotonous moans

of the other children continued. Doctor Rodríguez saw many patients that day, but nobody made any comments about the incident that had taken place. They merely thanked him and left.

It rained that night, and the drops of water that fell almost in slow motion rippled the puddles of the street. The wind whipped at times the window from which Doctor Rodríguez watched the black sky. He knew that his action had been foolish. Food was a great treasure at the time, and he could not predict what the *Carrancistas* would do if they ever found out that he stored such a desired asset in his house. Besides, a multitude of relatives and friends depended on him, and he could not risk running out of the grain that was needed for their subsistence. But the *Carrancistas* never discovered his secret, and he continued his work unmolested.

Doctor Rodríguez never blew up again, and he remained calm even when he had to sign the death certificates of children so their parents could bury them in their little pine coffins. When the crisis improved momentarily on March 9, 1915 with the return of the *Zapatistas*, the doctor became his old self. He sang with a guitar, joked constantly, and teased his relatives and friends. Nevertheless, for the rest of his life, he insisted on not having balloons for his birthday parties. He never ceased to hate them!

Breasts

Joel was somewhat lustful at a young age. Lustful. . . or curious? Everyday, he used to appear surreptitiously near the maid's room precisely at the time when she got ready to breast-feed her child, whom she had been nursing for over two years. My grandfather used to say jokingly that she would still be nursing her son by the time he decided to join the revolution as a soldier, but the fact is that she did not have many options. Her milk was, after all, not only the best, but the only, food available many times. As a result, little Cirilo had grown healthy and strong.

Joel was also strong and tall for his age. At twelve years of age, he almost reached five nine, but his beardless face was not that of a man. Perhaps that is why everybody ignored his "secret" and "casual" appearances as the maid unbuttoned her blouse and, oblivious to Joel's presence, offered her breast to the young Cirilo.

One afternoon in 1915, during what Mexicans called *el tiempo del hambre* (the time of hunger), my grandparents paid a visit to Joel's family. My grandfather led the conversation and expressed his disillusion with Carranza, who by that time had already given signs of his corruption and endless ambition. My grandfather was tall, strong, dark, and ugly. In fact, he exhibited a strange pride in his ugliness, which in Mexican culture may be a sign of masculinity under certain circumstances.

In any event, my grandfather sat on a comfortable armchair and did not fail to notice Joel's obvious curiosity when the maid pulled out her breast, which was naturally enlarged given the circumstances. My grandfather contemplated the scene for a few moments, during which everybody, all women, remained silent.

Suddenly, my grandfather got up very slowly. Then, almost in slow motion, he took off his coat and folded it on the armchair. One by one, he ceremoniously removed his cufflinks, and then he unbuttoned his shirt. He performed this task with so much care that one would think he was performing a complicated operation. To everybody's surprise, he then took off his tie, his shirt, and his undershirt. Immediately afterwards, he sat down, looked at Joel and said, "What this woman is doing is very natural. She's just feeding her child. Come here, sit on my lap, and I will breast-feed you so you know how it is done."

Joel did not even have time to blush because he abandoned the room running like a colt while the ladies laughed until tears came from their eyes.

Children

Once around 1958, I was so sick and weak with mononucleosis that I could hardly walk. I was small, not more than five years old, so my grandmother carried me on her back to take me to her room. Due to a powerful thunderstorm, the electricity had gone off. It was already dark, but the candles that my mother had placed around the house lit our way. I grabbed Elena by the neck, and we walked slowly, with our shadows creating strange and monstrous figures on the walls.

I sensed that my grandmother was concerned about my health and wanted to please me in any possible way, perhaps with magic. She placed me on a sofa, covered me with a blanket, and sat on her bed. She then proceeded to tell me a story. Now I realize that she added lyrical elements and body movement that she seldom used. I was not aware at that time that she was creating a unique performance of story telling using various elements from her strong literary background. Like any young child, I was simply absorbed and delighted with her narrative.

The shadow of their bodies created a monstrous specter with four arms and a minute head. The upper arms remained motionless and only moved when driven by the erratic motion of the staggering body. The short legs could barely support a weight that seemed to drag the monster to the very center of the earth. But the legs seemed to be made of a flexible metal that would bend at unimaginable angles just to return to its original shape like a magic, self-propelling spring. Then the shadow would advance a few steps, maintaining its equilibrium with the help of its middle arms. At times, the strange

creature swaggered with elegance and pride, as if boasting a strange arrogance that all should admire. But the place was desolate. The moon, which had emerged from the distant hills in the distance, was their only companion; it was almost red.

Martín, who had carried Victoria on his shoulders on and off for two consecutive days and nights, leaned against an adobe fence to regain his breath. During the day, when exhaustion overwhelmed him, he would lower his young fiancée to the ground and both would lie down to recover their strength. Once, he almost fell asleep, but he woke up very agitated because sleep was a luxury that they could not afford. Both were Zapatista soldiers left behind by an army anxious to enter the big metropolis of Mexico City. Therefore, they were deserted in a place where fugitive *Carrancistas* still rummaged the area looking for food and revenge. So Martín and Victoria could not stop. During the day, when the sun protected them, they felt secure mixing with the people who went about their daily business as if nothing had happened, as if there were not a revolution taking place. These people sympathized with the young couple and did not hesitate to offer them protection and shelter, but Victoria had a bullet wound in her leg and urgently needed a doctor. Therefore, Martín only asked people to pick Victoria up and put her back on his shoulders so they could continue their way.

Leaning against the fence, Martín realized that he could not lower Victoria because he would be unable to put her back on his shoulders by himself. The moon continued rising and changed its color to a light blue. The eleven-year-old boy could now glimpse the shadow of some buildings that indicated that they had reached the outskirts of Tacuba. The young warrior sweated profusely, but a fresh breeze dried the humidity on

his face. Finally, after remaining motionless for a few minutes, the monstrous shadow staggered along a little street paved with stones, advanced two or three steps, and straightened up again.

"I'll take you to the barracks. I know where they are, and our troops must be there. Then I'll look for the doctor. There is a doctor in Tacuba, they told me, so I'll find him at all costs. . . doesn't matter if my skeleton breaks. I promised your mother that I wouldn't leave you on the plain so that the others would kill you. I promised her, your late mother."

"I'm thirsty," Victoria said.

"Hold on a little more. We're almost there," added Martín, and his wobbling legs projected the ghostly shadow forward like a scythe.

Martín found the doctor's house at 4:30 in the morning. The young lad was able to use the sergeant's horse this time. The *Carrancistas* had stolen the doctor's mare a few days before, his only means of transportation, but Martín could use the sergeant's horse to take the doctor to the barracks.

"Who's there?" Doctor Rodríguez, my grandfather, asked.

"I want the doctor," answered Martín.

The young boy looked almost comical with his 30-30 rifle and the cartridge belts across his chest, but it was no joke. His voice, imitating that of a grown man, indicated the seriousness of the situation.

"I will be ready in a minute," the doctor said, and he rushed inside to gather his tools.

The peculiar pair arrived at the barracks in a matter of minutes, not a moment too soon. The bullet had not touched any important artery or vein, but the wound was infected, and Victoria had not eaten much for two or three days.

"I will need to move her to a better lit place," Doctor Rodríguez said. He not only needed more light but a cleaner place as well, so he asked those people surrounding them to set a clean table by a nearby window. Two men promptly brought a mahogany desk that provided a surrealistic touch to the scene, and three young women washed the top with water and soap. Immediately afterwards, Doctor Rodríguez lifted Victoria in his arms and laid her on the desk. She reminded him of his sister many years before, when she had hurt her leg playing the "enchanted game," a pastime children practice during their free time. On that occasion, Doctor Rodríguez was the enchanter that would turn the other children motionless upon a touch of his hand, so his sister ran, tripped, and hurt her leg. Victoria was lighter than his sister at that time, but he still felt that Victoria was part of his own family.

"You shouldn't be suffering these things," he said, and then added almost to himself, "You could be my grandchild."

Doctor Rodríguez proceeded energetically and quickly, like somebody who evidently knew very well what had to be done. He cleaned her leg with boiled water and antiseptic, and then proceeded to reopen the wound with a scalpel to remove all foreign material including some small pieces of cloth. He cleaned the injured part with boiled water again and repeated the procedure several times. Finally, he scraped the border of the wound to facilitate the scarring process. It was almost like sanding a piece of board,

but the girl withstood the pain as well as any man.

As Doctor Rodríguez was ready to leave, Martín promised that he would pay him soon. The doctor smiled wondering what type of money they would use since different groups issued their own currency, which often proved worthless or circulated only in a few parts of the country for a limited amount of time.

After several days of daily visits, Doctor Rodríguez indicated that Victoria was sufficiently recovered, so he didn't need to go back. He simply shook hands with his new friends and returned home not expecting to see them again. However, Martín and Victoria appeared at the doctor's house by dawn the following day. They were riding the sergeant's horse, and the whole regiment would march towards Toluca in a matter of minutes. Victoria wore a long white dress and a big wide-brim hat that she had pulled to her back. Her tresses were clean and shone in the moonlight. The young girl was no more than eleven years old but already looked like a dark Indian princess. She smiled so much that she almost looked like a bride except for the rifle and the cartridge belts that she carried.

"We came to thank you and to pay you," Martín said handing a pair of live chickens to the doctor. The young couple did not act like two miserable peasants, but like individuals who had enough money to reciprocate a favor.

"We also want you to be our godfather when we have our wedding. We want you there as soon as the fight is over," added Victoria.

"It will be an honor," the doctor said.

The young couple said good-bye and directed the horse in the opposite direction

to the barracks. They did not want to escape but simply to go around the block to enjoy the horse ride a little longer. The silhouette of horse and riders stood out against the sky, which appeared increasingly lighter at daybreak. The figure turned the corner, and the doctor walked to the opposite side to see them when they finished the circle around the block to join the other soldiers. He waited a few seconds and saw them appear one last time. They waved their arms, and the houses across the street seemed to swallow them one by one as they disappeared behind them. Then the shadow became a memory. My grandfather walked slowly to his house, as if resisting going back, and he then proceeded to get ready for his daily work.

He did not see or hear from those children ever again.

The Female Soldier

José García knocked at the door in the middle of the night. He was dark, short, and robust. His white clothing of coarse cotton cloth identified him as a Zapata follower. The outfit was old and worn out, but the soldier managed to maintain it clean and presentable. In addition, José García possessed a dignified movement in his walking that distinguished him from the peasants that formed the bulk of Zapata's ranks.

"Is Doctor Rodríguez in?" the soldier asked the servant who had just opened the door, but the doctor came out almost simultaneously carrying his medical bag.

It was almost mid-July of 1915. The temporary government that Villa and Zapata supported and which had been designated by the Revolutionary Convention in Aguascalientes had left Mexico City permanently a few days before. Carranza's and Zapata's armies had taken turns occupying and abandoning the city so many times that nobody kept an accurate account. Nevertheless, Zapata's forces were gradually crumbling, and his final defeat was only a matter of time.

During that period of constant scimmages and acts of sabotage, the doctor remained especially alert to assist the wounded. Sometimes it was the *Carrancistas*, and it was the *Zapatistas* on other occasions. Sometimes the wounded died, but there were instances when they recovered miraculously.

"It is my wife, doctor. The *Carrancistas* wounded her, and I want you to save her."

"You know I'll do anything in my power," the doctor responded.

"It's a shot in the leg. It was bleeding too much, but I improvised a tourniquet. We

need to rush, though, to avoid the possibility of gangrene," added the soldier as if advising the doctor what to do.

José García's language indicated that he was an educated person. Doctor Rodríguez did not respond, and he just wondered what had pushed that man to the Revolution. There were so many stories and so many different cases. The doctor knew that many would die, and nobody would even know that they ever existed.

The two men arrived at the barracks within a few minutes. The doctor immediately undertook a delicate procedure of cleaning, blocking the hemorrhage, and sewing the wound. He moved his hands with great speed and precision. Meanwhile, José García observed the operation at a prudent distance. The soldier's eyes expressed a strange mixture of apprehension and gratitude.

"Now you need to rest," the doctor said.

The young woman gave him a forced smile. Her face, covered with sweat, showed the effects of pain and fatigue. Nevertheless, her features were pretty. The eyes were big, somewhat melancholic. The nose was thin and small, with the nostrils expanding repeatedly with an agitated breath. The mouth was attractive even though her chapped lips could not hide the effects of fever and thirst. The complexion had a fine texture, so smooth that it invited people to caress it. The doctor in fact passed his hand smoothly on her cheek.

"You are too young to be going through this," the doctor said.

"What are we to do?"

"The *Carrancistas* could hurt you even more, you know."

The young woman shrugged her shoulders and added, "If I had stayed at home, they would have done anything they wanted with me. At least here I can kill them first."

"And why should we kill? Do you think that God is happy with us? Do you think that the priest from your home town is happy with us?" the doctor asked.

"*Doctorsito*, I don't know about God, but the priest doesn't mind it. He is the one who asked me to join the Revolution. Then, we got married just like that."

The female soldier pointed to José García, who was listening silently to the conversation. Nothing could surprise Doctor Rodríguez anymore. However, he felt close to the two soldiers and wanted to tell them that he also liked Zapata. He desired to tell them that he wanted them out of the Revolution because he didn't want them to die. He thought of the frustration that he experienced by saving lives one day so the flame of life that he so carefully preserved could be extinguished the following day. But he remained silent. He simply said goodbye and returned home, sleepy and exhausted.

The *Carrancistas* took the city two days later, and the doctor never saw the couple again.

Zapata

Once I dreamed that Emiliano Zapata came to my house. He was rather short, slim but robust. I saw him first walking in a big crowd which ignored him. He moved softly, almost floating in the air, gallantly. His pants and jacket fit very tightly, and his riding boots had spurs that intermittently irradiated golden rays, but nobody paid any attention to him. I opened my way with difficulty in that crowd until I could finally grasp his hand. Zapata looked very intently into my eyes, but his expression was not that of firm determination before a battle. On the contrary, he seemed melancholic and sad.

"Come to my house. There are many things I need to know," I remarked, and he simply followed me, docile like a child.

Suddenly we were at home. He had taken off his big hat and was buried in his thoughts. His enormous mustache, his dark complexion, his coarse hands identified him as a laborer of the land.

"Why did you do it? I asked. "Why did you sacrifice yourself. You knew that your cause was destined to failure in spite of being noble and just . . . or perhaps it crumbled to pieces because of its very nobility. But you never gave up; you never abandoned that senseless goal to return the land to the peasants, a meaningless objective even if the land rightly belongs to them, even if they believed in you, even if they still admire you. . . . How could you succeed? How could you possibly survive in that sea of corruption?"

Zapata did not utter a word, and something in my glasses prevented me from seeing him well. I took them off, and while cleaning the lenses I noticed that a strange red light surrounded me. I looked at Zapata, and he was also red. I lightly touched him and

realized that his entire body was soaked in blood.

Perhaps this dream was a direct result of the few stories related to the Zapatista movement that my grandmother told me. She did not particularly like Zapata because he was uneducated and crude, and when I asked her if there was any other reason, she simply replied, "All those revolutionaries were only a mob of uncouth bandits."

"But did Zapata ever lie or renege on his ideals?" I promptly questioned.

"No. . . . He defended his people, but he was a savage."

I wonder how my grandparents managed to overcome an important difference of opinion. My grandmother rejected the revolutionaries because of their violence even though she was aware that General Porfirio Díaz had created an elite that exploited the poor. My grandfather, on the other hand, sympathized with some revolutionaries, mainly Zapata, even though he was aware of their violence. Perhaps my grandparents, like many other people, were simply going through a challenge to their survival, and this prevented them from arguing about their ideological concerns.

In any event, at that time, around 1915, my grandmother told me, the trip from Mexico City to Puebla was very hazardous. It took the train several hours to cross the mountain ridge and to traverse the roughly hundred miles separating both cities. In addition, sabotage became increasingly common, and various revolutionary groups used to blow up the railroad cars, always choosing a different spot in areas practically impossible to guard.

Needless to say, passenger transportation decreased, but it did not disappear

because many people vitally needed to travel to survive, my grandfather among them. That was the Time of Hunger, and foodstuffs and many other staples were very scarce. My grandfather, however, managed to obtain in Puebla a regular supply of grain and other products, which he then took to his house in the suburbs of Mexico City. He always waited until a train was dynamited and immediately bought a ticket for the following morning. His logic was that these acts of sabotage would very unlikely take place on two consecutive days.

During one of those trips, just as he was ready to leave Puebla on his way home, two poor peasants came to request his services in the nearby town of Tecali. My grandfather would never deny medical attention to anybody, particularly since these men had proved invaluable in obtaining grain.

They travelled the relatively short distance by horse, and on the way the two men with rugged hands gave my grandfather a long account of all the abuses that they were suffering in the hands of Carranza--his unfulfilled promises, the unfair distribution of the land, which they loved and worked with their bare hands.

"That's why we are *Zapatistas*, because my General Zapata is a real man who never backs down," said one of the men.

"For my General Zapata, I'll tear out my own soul," added his companion.

When the group arrived in Tecali, they met some peasants working the land. They all knew each other well, and the two men with the rugged hands remained chatting with their friends while my grandfather went to attend the patient at a house less than a hundred yards away.

The furrows of the working land seemed to extend infinitely into the horizon. The peasants hit the dirt harmoniously with their hoes, and a solitary person walked rhythmically behind a yoke of oxen in the distance. The plow penetrated the land as if performing an erotic ritual.

"Hey, you!" A strange man riding a horse suddenly exclaimed. He was accompanied by half a dozen other individuals, and all wore the same uniform. They were Carranza's men.

"Are you deaf? We need to ask you some questions!" The stout man roared again while the peasants approached timidly. Their expressionless faces seemed indifferent to the situation.

"Have you seen any *Zapatistas* around here? We have reports that they are roaming the place."

"Don't know, don't know," the peasants answered in unison.

"Have you seen anybody who seems suspicious around here, somebody like hiding or carrying a gun?"

"Don't know, don't know."

"Do you even know who Zapata is, you damn Indians?"

"Don't know, don't know," the peasants repeated incessantly.

"That Zapata is a bandit, and he may rob you all, so you need to watch out, . . . but you're just a bunch of idiots. No wonder we've problems in Mexico . . . with people like you."

The soldier pronounced the last words almost to himself, and he and his men

turned around preparing to leave. It was precisely at this moment when the peasants got their weapons out of their coarse-cotton-cloth shirts and pulled the triggers. The soldiers did not have a chance and fell dead to the ground. It all sounded like an explosion.

Somebody called my grandfather a few minutes later, and he rushed to the place with his medical bag. There was nothing to do, and the soldiers lay motionless on the filthy ground in highly grotesque positions. All of their eyes, with the exception of one, seemed to be looking at a ghost. Evidently, the bullet had entered the upper neck of one of the men and exited through his eye ball.

"What happened?" said a shopkeeper who came out of his business about two hundred yards away.

"Don't know, don't know," repeated the people gathering around the scene.

"I am wasting my time," my grandfather said. "All I can do is to issue the death certificates."

Two men, trying not to step on the blood with their bare feet, carried the bodies to the side of the road and arranged them in a circle with their heads pointing towards the center. The cadavers formed a floating star on the sand. Then, the two men proceeded to look for some identification. My grandfather quickly filled out the dates on all the documents. Immediately after, he proceeded to write the names that were dictated to him. Finally, time after time, he wrote on the cause-of-death caption, "multiple bullet wounds," "multiple bullet wounds," "multiple bullet wounds," "multiple bullet wounds," "multiple bullet wounds," "multiple bullet wounds," "multiple bullet wounds."

The Priest

My grandmother and *El Viejo* (old man), as she used to call my grandfather, were devout Catholics. However, their independent and lively personalities sometimes led them to disagreements, even clashes, with the parish priest of Tacuba. These delicate situations had to be handled with extreme care because a priest in those times, particularly before the Revolution, had enough power to sabotage the steady flow of clients that my grandfather had. Fortunately, in a sense, any church has internal conflicts and even breakups that can be helpful to outsiders if handled intelligently. In this way, if a priest prohibited something to my grandparents, they would simply go to a rival priest and get his approval. This was the case when the parish priest of Tacuba, Father Emilio Raser, found out that my grandfather was applying anesthesia to women giving birth, which according to Father Raser, constituted an anathema and an act of atheism because the Bible says: "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children."

This conflict gave as rise to a series of confrontations that my grandparents, however, took with a grain of salt, as my dear Helen shows in some of her stories. One time, for example, it happened that . . . but I don't think I should intrude. Instead, I will let her tell you one of those accounts herself.

It was back in 1915, when Carranza and Villa were fighting each other, that my sister Paz wanted to get married. Fernando Pichardo, an old friend of the family, had asked for her hand in marriage, and everybody agreed. You know, in those times courtship and marriage were very ceremonial and followed a very strict protocol. Pacita

behaved in the old fashioned way even though the Revolution brought many changes. That's why Pichardo made an appointment with my parents and very formally expressed his intentions to marry my sister. That's also why Pacita went to confession and asked Father Raser for his opinion, which was not very bright because that was none of his business.

My sister was a saint, but sometimes not very practical. This priest was very stubborn and didn't want El Viejo to use anesthesia with the mothers giving birth. El Viejo used to say that Father E. Raser could in fact erase all the sins of mankind, but as far as medical procedures were concerned, he was utterly ignorant. In any event, my sister told me everything that went on in the confession.

"Father, I am afraid to marry Fernando Pichardo," she said.

"Why so?"

"Because I am afraid to have children."

"You must respect the holy sacrament of matrimony, Paz, and that includes having children."

"But Father, I have heard that it hurts beyond belief."

"You have sinned with those words. Don't you know that God has ordered women to bear children in intense pain and suffering?"

"But Father"

And this went on for weeks and even months until Father Raser told Paz something strange just to get her off his shoulders.

"Paz, I will ask God to let me suffer in your place the pain that you would have

giving birth. In this way, you can go ahead with the wedding."

The priest undoubtedly believed that these words were nonsense because my sister was more than forty years old. In any event, seasons succeeded each other. Paz got married, and eventually she gave birth to a healthy baby girl, and oh miracle! My sister didn't experience any pain whatsoever. However, strange and unexplainable events began occurring at the church the day of the birth. Long before dawn, Father Raser got out of bed and began walking restlessly around his room. Within a couple of hours, he began running up and down the stairs of the bell tower swearing only for Saint Anne. Later on, he ran for some time randomly in the courtyard screaming and sometimes making double and triple flips in the air. And wagging tongues said that the priest was invoking Satan himself. Finally, howling like a dying wolf, he implored with horrendous sounds, "Paz, don't you dare to have any more children! Paz, can you hear me, Paz?"

The Chicken

Mexican etiquette at the beginning of the twentieth century required that, whenever a person received a favor or present, something equivalent had to be given in return. In this way, if people were invited to a feast, they were expected to invite their hosts sometime in the future. This custom worked until the Mexican Revolution made it impossible to return favors. How could people thank enough another person who had literally saved them from starvation? How could they return a favor to someone who prevented them from facing a firing squad? That is very difficult indeed.

During that time, my grandparents gave food to an army of relatives, friends, acquaintances, complete strangers, and even former enemies. My grandfather told them their company was already sufficient reward, and he absolved everybody from any social debt. My grandmother told them not even to think of that food as a favor. But not everybody forgot, and for decades my grandparents' house was frequently full of people visiting them to give them a present or just to inquire how they were. In fact, many years later, in 1973, hundreds of people attended my grandmother's funeral. Her friends and her friends' children still remembered that she helped them during the Mexican Revolution, and they attended her funeral to give her a last farewell.

Whenever I greeted these people, some of whom I hardly knew, they treated me as if they had known me for years and were my best friends. One of them, my aunt Mela, invited me to her house on several occasions for lunch and dinner and to play with her child. Once, after one of these visits back in 1961, I encountered my grandmother when I got back home. She immediately stopped watching television and asked where I had

been.

"I come from Aunt Mela's house. She invited me for lunch," I said.

"Did you have enough to eat?" my grandmother asked, laughing to herself.

"They always fix what I like. Why?"

"I will tell you if you promise to keep it a secret."

I promised her and sat down quietly. You must know that it is not important to keep that secret anymore because everybody involved in the story has died. In this way, I am completely free to repeat the story that she told me and that you can read below.

Many years ago, around 1920, when Adolfo de la Huerta became provisional president after Carranza's assassination, he declared that the revolution had ended and Mexicans would soon see the benefits of the long struggle. We did not see much change, though, and food was still scarce in Mexico City. That's why I was surprised when Mela's parents invited me for supper, but I accepted the offer and went with my four children at the appointed time.

We talked and talked and talked until the maid came in the living room and asked, "Can I bring the chicken?"

"Not yet. We'll have something to drink first," said Mela's mother, Lucha.

A few minutes later, we all got a glass of lemonade, and the maid brought a few cookies, a total of twelve for nine people. Then we chatted awhile and were invited to go to the dining room.

"Can I bring the chicken?" the maid asked again.

"Not yet," responded Lucha.

Immediately afterwards, the maid brought the salad. Each one of us ate a cracker and one leaf of lettuce with vinegar and oil, and the maid asked again, "Can I bring the chicken now?"

"Not yet, not yet. First bring the soup."

The maid left and came back immediately with nine small bowls half full with bean soup. Ah . . . and she also brought nine crackers, one for each person. By this time I was very anxious to have the chicken, so I was glad when the maid asked once more, "Can I bring the chicken?"

"Wait until we have some coffee," said Lucha.

The maid picked up the dirty dishes and gave us a cup of black coffee with no sugar. She also brought seven cookies, which meant that a couple of us would have to do without them. Then she asked for the last time, "Can I bring the chicken?"

"Yes. Bring the chicken now," said Lucha finally.

A few seconds later, my stomach sank when I saw the maid carry in a small, live chicken to eat the few crumbs that had fallen to the floor.



When my grandmother finished the story, I looked at her for a few seconds and whispered in her ear, "I don't believe you."

"And I don't blame you," she answered. "I have seen many things in my life that I still can't believe. If you come with me outside, I will buy you an ice-cream cone."

A Hot Tortilla

Language, like a flowing river, constantly changes and evolves. While the meaning of some words remains static for some time, other terms experience an everlasting metamorphosis. For a few years they may be repulsive, like an ugly worm, only to transform themselves into a beautiful butterfly later on. *Gringo* is such a word.

Nowadays, Mexicans say, "Former Mexican president, Carlos Salinas, was such a good crook that he even deceived the *Gringos*," and the term *Gringos* refers to Americans, but it carries a positive connotation because it implies a high level of intellect and astuteness.

In the past and in various places, *Gringo* has come to signify foreigner, a non-Spanish speaking individual, foreign language, unintelligible language, and a nickname applied to Americans and British alike. This last meaning was the one in vogue in Mexico in 1923, around the time when the controversial Pancho Villa had been assassinated on the orders of President Alvaro Obregón. Ironically, this political murder created optimism among some foreign investors at first because they thought it would ensure a period of peace.

"And these idiots think it will create a period of peace," said a short man in a dress suit. He held a hat in his hand which he moved right and left with the pace of the conversation.

"Violence engenders violence," added Doctor Rodríguez, who was chatting with no other than his brother-in-law, Mr. Fernando Lezama.

"And the blasted *Gringo* just wants to see you to gain access to people related to

the oil industry."

The *Gringo* to whom Fernando referred was a British citizen who had gone to Mexico representing the interests of the oil industry of his country. We will call him Mr. Wilson because his name was lost with the passing of time. Mr. Wilson probably wanted to expand, or at least solidify, the British presence in the exploitation of Mexican oil. His approach was erroneous because Doctor Rodriguez, while very respected in professional and other circles, had little to do with the oil industry. His only connection was with Mr. Ricardo Monsalve, the doctor's wife's brother-in-law and a government executive dealing with the oil sector. However, the relationship between Monsalve and the doctor was forced due to these relatively distant family ties, and it did not work on friendly terms.

"I tell you the *Gringo* is a scoundrel, and what makes me more upset is that he thinks we Mexicans are just a tribe of savages."

"Is that so?" the doctor asked frowning.

"Absolutely! When he went to the office, he told a friend of his that Mexicans, unable to plan for themselves, have to rely on Western Europe. Furthermore, he said the one thing he dislikes about Mexico is having to deal with so many foreigners, ignoring completely that he is the foreigner in our land."

"Is that so?" the doctor repeated.

"Absolutely! The rascal was finding solace in his own thoughts in our office thinking that nobody could understand him. The scoundrel belittles us, so he does not conceive that any of us could possibly speak other languages. That idiot . . . , but I understood every word he said. I was going to ignore the whole issue, but when I heard

your name, I couldn't stand it any more."

"Is that so?" the doctor said again.

"Absolutely! And that's when I decided to warn you because you're not only my sister's husband, but also my godfather and friend."

"Thank you for the information," the doctor finally added with a malicious smile.

By an extremely unlikely chance of fate, Fernando Lezama had found out the Englishman's plan. Fernando worked in the Office of Foreign Affairs, where the Britisher had gone to renew his tourist visa. Imprudently, the *Gringo* began reading to a friend a list of names of people who might prove useful in gaining support from the Mexican government. This shows a considerable level of corruption since this process probably involved bribery and possibly extortion, not to mention the fact that the business activities performed by the Englishman could not be conducted legally using a tourist visa.

In any event, the *Gringo* made in fact an appointment with Doctor Rodríguez. Having been invited for breakfast, Mr. Wilson arrived early in the morning at the doctor's house. However, the visit did not march as Mr. Wilson had planned. To begin with, the doctor could not talk to him for at least two hours because of an emergency call from a patient.

"I should be back by eleven, and then I will join you over a special Mexican dish. The only problem is that I am the only one in my family who speaks English," the doctor said.

"Could you please at least tell me how to say 'thank you' in Spanish?" Mr. Wilson asked.

"That's easy; just say 'otro chocolate' and smile."

The doctor left without revealing to Mr. Wilson that "otro chocolate" actually means "more hot chocolate," and a few minutes later, breakfast was served. The maid brought tamales of various kinds, refried beans, and tortillas. The Englishman seemed to enjoy the food even though he did not handle very well the green sauce prepared with *serrano* peppers. Finally, to end the breakfast, the maid brought hot chocolate with a wide variety of Mexican bread.

"Did you enjoy the food?" somebody asked Mr. Wilson in Spanish.

"*Otro chocolate*," responded the Englishman.

"Serve another cup to Mr. Wilson."

The *Gringo* drank the hot chocolate, more slowly this time and added, "*Otro chocolate*."

"Serve another cup to the gentleman."

This process was repeated at least half a dozen times until Mr. Wilson, with a horrified face, kept repeating "*otro chocolate, otro chocolate, otro chocolate*," shaking frantically his head and both hands from one side to the other trying to express negation.

Doctor Rodríguez finally came back around noon, and Mr. Wilson was still waiting for him.

"Please, be our guest for lunch," the doctor said. "I didn't have breakfast, and you can't turn down our special dish."

That special dish was *rajas*, whose main ingredient is a very hot pepper called

poblano. The interior of these peppers is supposed to be taken out in order to make them milder. Nevertheless, the cook mysteriously missed doing this process with the pepper given to Mr. Wilson.

"Some Mexicans say that a man who is not able to eat *rajas* is not a true man," the doctor said jokingly.

"How interesting," responded Mr. Wilson smiling, but that smile disappeared with the first bite.

"Aaah!" exclaimed the Englishman.

"Are you all right, Mr. Wilson?"

"Help! This is burning my mouth. Help!"

"Bring a hot tortilla to Mr. Wilson."

"Help!"

"The hot tortilla will help. It provides a soothing feeling to the irritated membrane," said the doctor as if dealing with a patient.

Mr. Wilson ate at least a dozen tortillas, alternating them with swallows of cold lemonade. He felt finally better and was able to eat some dessert. However, before he could talk business, the Englishman experienced a tremendous urge to use the restroom.

"Will you excuse me?"

Mr. Wilson walked and then ran to the bathroom. A few seconds later, seating on the commode, he screamed, "A hot tortilla! I need a hot tortilla!"

The doctor never saw the Englishman again.

Adela the Cook

Adela was a lively young woman of no more than twenty years of age back in 1912, when Francisco I. Madero was the president of Mexico and people in general had great expectations for the country. Her enchanting figure and sincere, open smile attracted the admiration of many men. In addition, her light brown complexion and big, black eyes contrasted in such a way that this created an aura of mystery around her.

Adela worked as a cook for my grandparents, and she had the bad habit of meddling with their conversations. When my grandfather told a joke, Adela was the first one to laugh even though she remained in the kitchen while my grandparents chatted in the dining room. Furthermore, the young cook intervened in the political discussion of her employers and had a definite opinion as to the right direction that the country should take.

"If I were in Madero's shoes, I would execute Félix Díaz and Bernardo Reyes by a firing squad."

"Isn't that too severe?" my grandfather asked.

"Not at all. Those two are like snakes. Everybody knows that they are *Porfiristas* to the bone, and they will show their hidden claws at the first opportunity."

"Look at her," my grandmother added. "She makes herself the same as us and criticizes Don Porfirio even though she knows nothing about him."

My grandmother benefitted from the Revolution because she was able to pursue her own aspirations by escaping the rigid social mold prevalent prior to the outbreak of hostilities, but she still defended former dictator Porfirio Díaz because, after all, her father had been a Supreme Court Judge during the general's administration. Nevertheless, they

all knew that Adela stated the truth, which seemed obvious to everybody except to President Madero. Félix Díaz was Don Porfirio Díaz's nephew, and Bernardo Reyes was an old collaborator of the dictator. In fact, they hoped and expected to turn the Revolution around and go back to the old times when they enjoyed a privileged position in society. General Porfirio Díaz had been deposed and exiled, but Félix Díaz, Bernardo Reyes, and others were waiting for the chance to eliminate Madero at all costs.

A year later, when Madero was assassinated and the "Jackal" Huerta took over the government, Adela decided that she should join the Revolution. This could have been an idealistic response, but it was probably more an instinctive reaction of survival. The brutal repression that Huerta's government exerted went against anybody who could have possibly criticized his government. And who hadn't done it? Who could remain indifferent in view of the massive arrests and executions that were taking place? My grandparents' house wouldn't be a good hiding place for Adela if her political comments had been heard by one of the many spies or informers who were roaming the streets. In short, it seemed more sensible to join the revolutionary forces before being trapped by the federal army of Victoriano Huerta.

Those were the shining episodes in Carranza's life, those were the brilliant campaigns of the charismatic Pancho Villa, and those were the heroic moments in the life of the poor but audacious Adela the Cook. She packed a few rags and joined the Revolution.

Nobody knows if she went alone or with her boyfriend. Nobody knows exactly in what battles she saw action. Nevertheless, Adela surprisingly appeared more than ten

years later at my grandparents' house. It was a sunny and warm morning in April of 1924, and she looked much older and carried an eight-year-old child with her. Through the conversation that ensued after the unexpected appearance, my grandmother was able to discern that Adela had probably participated from November of 1923 to March of 1924 in the rebellion of Adolfo de la Huerta against the government of Alvaro Obregón.

Adolfo de la Huerta enjoyed popular support, but this ultimately proved futile. Alvaro Obregón's army crushed the rebellion, causing at least seven thousand casualties, de la Huerta left the country, and many of his followers remained behind to suffer alienation and poverty. My grandmother strongly suspected that Adela took part in the revolt because the former cook complained about the bad luck that she had experienced "at the front." In addition, her return followed by only a few days de la Huerta's final defeat. Nevertheless, Adela stubbornly refused to discuss her experiences as a soldier in the Mexican Revolution.

"I'm looking for a job, but I won't work as a servant," Adela said during the interview.

My grandmother understood that the Revolution had created a sense of pride in Adela and simply added, "You can be the supervisor of the maintenance staff."

At that time, my grandmother had three servants but thought she could still use the services of a maid. Jesusita was a young woman hired to wash and iron clothes. Loreto was a cook who had taken Adela's place almost eleven years before. The new cook had two young daughters of about eleven and twelve who helped their mother in the kitchen and ran errands. The three of them went to the market every day to carefully

select the items for the day's meals and to gossip with merchants and friends. Finally, Pancho was a muscular man who had worked at the house for over twelve years as a *mozo*, that is, performing unskilled household labor that required his physical strength.

These three servants were what my grandmother called "maintenance staff," but Adela took her job very seriously. She moved from room to room giving orders like a sergeant and called them her "joint chiefs of staff." She didn't move a finger to clean the house, but her leadership encouraged the others to work, and the house looked immaculate for a while. As days and weeks passed, however, problems began to arise. The servants were allowed to take a day off, generally during the weekend, but Adela gradually took longer and longer to come back, sometimes two and three days. The problem was that Adela left the house mainly to get intoxicated.

Within a few months of Adela's return, wine bottles began to disappear mysteriously, and she showed at times some peculiar traits. On one occasion, she said that the spirits of the dead came to haunt her, and added that she chased them away by showering them with the most indignant insults. If the soul of a priest appeared to her, for example, she would scream blasphemies against God; if the phantom of a brave soldier came to her, she would offend him by calling him a homosexual and a coward; if the innocent spirits of children appeared to her, she would offend their innocence by alluding to the most brutal and disgusting sexual aberrations. Doctor Rodríguez, my grandfather, showed great concern about the mental stability of the poor woman and tried to give her treatment, but she did not admit her alcoholism.

Finally, the situation reached a critical point on a day when my grandparents and

their family came back from a visit to some relatives in the city of Puebla. When they went in their house, Pancho was playing marbles with Adela's son. The *mozo* seemed afraid to see my grandparents and added nervously, "I had nothing to do with what those women did."

When my grandmother opened the kitchen door, she saw the three servants lying completely inebriated on the floor. There were half empty bottles of various types of alcoholic beverages spread all over the place, and somebody had thrown up on a beautiful tablecloth. The stench of the vomit was partially disguised by the strong odor of brandy, rum, and mescal.

"What is the meaning of this?" my grandmother shouted.

Loreto and Jesusita didn't even move, but Adela opened her eyes. She looked petrified when she saw my grandmother and mumbled, "Why do you come back to torment me?"

"What do you say, indecent drunkard?" my grandmother responded.

"Let me be, you Angel of Death," retorted the servant, and she began to mutter a strange litany using the crudest and most vulgar insults.

A few days later, Doctor Rodriguez put Adela in an asylum, the famous Castañeda, a mental hospital founded during the presidency of Don Porfirio Díaz. Her child remained with my grandparents for a few days until they found some of his relatives who lived in Mexico City. He visited my grandparents about ten years later. His mother had died of pneumonia just a few months after she was admitted to the Castañeda. The young man was leaving Mexico City to live in the countryside, very far away, and had

decided to drop by to thank my grandparents for the help that they had provided to him and his mother many years before.

"The young man had at least some hope for a better life, but why did his mother have to end like that? Unhappy woman . . . didn't she deserved a better life?" my grandmother indicated when she told me the story. We were sitting at the kitchen table of my house. I was eating very slowly while I listened attentively to my grandmother's words. She grabbed a piece of bread and began playing with it in her hand.

"She was a drunkard, but I wondered what pushed her to that. I wanted so much to help her, but there are some people who are beyond our reach," my grandmother added, paused for a few seconds, and then briskly changed the conversation and asked me how I was doing at school.

The Banquet

In 1926, President Plutarco Elias Calles declared that the Revolution had triumphed. Therefore, people should just go back to work and enjoy the results and benefits of the long struggle. The only problem was that there was not much to enjoy, particularly since the government had taken over the Church and prohibited any religious ceremony. As a result, people in the countryside took up arms and began what was called the Christian War, which would last approximately three bloody years. Fortunately, violence did not really reach the major cities, so many people did go back to work. Among them was a young man that we will call *Don Insatisfecho* (dissatisfied). This man looked like a long broom upside down. He was approximately six-foot tall and weighed no more than a hundred pounds. His legs were long, his arms seemed even longer, and his indomitable hair looked like a whisk broom. *Don Insatisfecho* worked as a sales representative for a pharmaceutical company, and he also was a full-time student in medical school.

One cold evening in December of 1926, *Don Insatisfecho* made a business call on my grandfather, who was a reputable doctor in the suburbs of Mexico City. My grandfather owned a drug store that had been sacked by the *Carrancistas*, and he could never replenish its inventory. He had his house, his drugstore, and his office in the same building. That evening, my grandfather was busy with a patient, so *Don Insatisfecho* waited some time in the drug store, walking from wall to wall and looking at the empty shelves. My grandmother, who tended the drug store, kept him company, and they had a nice conversation.

"These are difficult times," my grandmother said.

"Difficult indeed, and now we are forced to go into hiding even to pray. Last month, my sister got married in my parents' living room, and I heard that the priest was arrested last week."

"Good heavens!" added my grandmother, "just for officiating a wedding?"

"Well, the priest also performed a few christenings, and somebody opened his mouth."

"You are not in trouble, I hope."

"I am fine."

"You don't look quite well."

"That's because I didn't sleep enough last night. I woke up hungry with my stomach growling at one o'clock in the morning. I tossed around for a while in bed, but I finally had to get up. I went to the kitchen and had a pint of milk with fried crullers and two pieces of sweet bread. Dissatisfied with that, I also ate a bowl of shrimp dip with some crackers and a few cookies, ten or twelve. Fortunately, I still had a box that the nuns from St. Francis Convent gave me not long ago, just before the government ordered its closure. . . . Have you tried those cookies?" Don *Insatisfecho* inquired.

"Not recently."

"I will be sure to bring you some next time. . . . Anyway, as I was telling you, I didn't sleep well last night. Besides, I had to get up early to go to a seven o'clock class. I got up at five and decided to have a good breakfast. I had a large cup of foamy hot chocolate with two pieces of sweet bread. Then I had a couple of ranch-style eggs with

refried beans. Naturally, I ate the beans with about half a dozen tortillas and *serrano* peppers. Dissatisfied with that, I also fixed a *licuado* with a pint of milk, two eggs, three bananas, vanilla, and a little sugar.

My grandmother just looked at Don *Insatisfecho*. He was in ecstasy.

"When I got out of my class at about eight o'clock, I remembered that my mother had invited me for breakfast. I was not really hungry, but I had to go. She gave me a cup of chamomile tea that I fixed to perfection with two heaping teaspoons of sugar and a little cream. Then I had five tamales, two sweet ones and three Oaxaca style. They were not bad. Dissatisfied with that, however, I also ate two meat pies dipped in green tomato sauce. On top of that, my mother gave me fruit bread with the tea, and some sweets to eat on my way back to school."

"I worked hard, and naturally, I was hungry by lunch time, so I went to a restaurant near the Plaza of Santo Domingo. I began with a big bowl of chicken soup. The second course was a plate of Mexican rice and chicken livers, . . . chicken livers with onions. Then they gave me meatballs with *chipotle* peppers. They were not bad, but dissatisfied with that, I also ordered a delicious dish of beef stew in red chili sauce. The next course was a bowl of beans with tortillas, and I had coconut flan for dessert. . . . It was a little bit too sweet, but a cup of black coffee compensated for the taste somewhat."

Don *Insatisfecho* accelerated his speech, oblivious of my grandmother's presence.

"I left the restaurant, and I was walking down the street when I ran into a good friend of mine who invited me for lunch. I told him that I had had something to eat, but he finally convinced me telling me that I could have only an appetizer. The appetizer

consisted of cheddar-cheese puffs, avocado dip, and tortilla chips, and he also gave me some tropical-fruit drinks, mainly of mango and papaya. When I was going to leave, he directed me to the table. His mother is a great cook. She gave me lentil and bacon soup, dry soup with vermicelli, fried fish, a whole duck in green mole sauce"

"Don *Insatisfecho*, forgive the interruption, but it's supper time. We can only give you rice with beans, but you are invited to stay."

Don *Insatisfecho* accepted immediately. My grandmother pretended not to notice that he finished his meal in three swallows and his arm was shaking as he held a glass of water in his hand.

You see, the Revolution had triumphed, and people were full of dreams. That's all they had.

A True Christian

With the outbreak of the Revolution, sometimes entire families joined the conflagration. On other occasions, a single member of the family would depart and leave the others distressed wondering the whereabouts of their son or father or daughter. This was the case with José María, my grandfather's elder brother.

The life and fate of José María were prohibited topics of conversation in some family circles, and I would have never found out that he even existed if it had not been for my grandmother. Once, when making the comment that marriage ultimately depends to a great extent on luck, she said, "I was just very fortunate not to marry somebody like José María."

"Who is José María?" I immediately asked and pestered Elena until she gave me an evasive answer.

I was persistent for years to come, but the information I obtained did not amount to much. José María was one or two years older than my grandfather. Like everybody on that side of my family, he was dark, physically strong, and very outgoing. Nevertheless, like nobody else on that side of my family, his moral responsibility left much to be desired. In other words, he simply was a black sheep that all wanted to erase from their minds.

When José María joined the Revolution, some time between 1910 and 1913, he had a wife and two young daughters whom he left without any economic resources. His wife, whose name I could never find out, died months or years later and was shortly followed to the tomb by her fifteen-year-old daughter, Romualda. The other daughter,

María Concepción, would have starved to death if it had not been for the care and protection that she received from her aunts, my grandfather's sisters.

The information related to José María's fate is very diverse and emerged from years of speculation that began the very day of his exodus from his native heath. He could have died any time from the Battle of Celaya in 1915 to the Cristero Rebellion in 1928. Contradicting news and rumors place his body anywhere from Chihuahua in Northern Mexico to Oaxaca in the South. One thing is certain, however: he could have contacted his family several times and neglected to do it. Furthermore, according to my grandfather, his brother José María joined the Revolution as an adventurer but in no way as a result of his social convictions.

Meanwhile, María Concepción, whom I knew and called Aunt Mari, followed every lead to every place. She was untiring and tenacious but could never find her father dead or alive. Aunt Mari must have been born around the turn of the century, and I remember her as a short, sturdy woman of around seventy when my family and I went often to her house. She remained single and lived with relatives that I also loved.

Aunt Mari always walked looking at the floor, as if searching for a lost pearl. Her complexion was dark, her hair white. She read magazines and books all the time, bringing them so near that they almost touched her eyes. She seldom talked, but her mild disposition allowed her to get along very well with anybody who knew her. She was undoubtedly the best cook of the family, and I can swear that I have never tried soups as delicious as the ones she prepared: chicken soup, bean soup, tortilla soup, and many more. She could smell food at a considerable distance and tell what ingredients needed to

be added to that dish. If cooking and baking are arts, she was definitely a great artist.

Now that I can only visit her at the graveyard, I understand the piercing pain and frustration she must have felt when searching for her father. Now I often remember a comment she made when somebody asked her why she looked so much for a person that she barely knew.

"I wanted to find him . . . alive or dead," she answered, "to let him know that I had forgiven him."

Siblings I

General Alvaro Obregón had a handle-bar moustache and one arm. The other was literally torn off by a cannon ball during the Battle of Celaya against Pancho Villa in 1915. Ironically, Pancho Villa lost the battle, and this marked the beginning of the debacle of his army, the famous *División del Norte* (the Northern Division). Some people affirm that, in spite of the triumph, Obregón never forgave Villa for the loss of that limb, so he plotted against the charismatic "Centaur from the North" for eight years until Villa was finally assassinated. That was in 1923, and Obregón could at last savor his complete control of the country.

General Obregón was the president of Mexico from 1920 to 1924. Plutarco Elías Calles, a member of Obregón's group, ruled from 1924 to 1928, but many affirm that Obregón was the actual leader behind the scenes. The fact that the one-arm general ran for reelection in 1928, contrary to the Constitution of 1917 and the ideals of the Revolution, further indicates that he mainly followed his personal ambition.

Nobody was braver than Villa, nobody was more loyal to the ideals of the poor than Zapata, and nobody was more audacious than Obregón. And the latter remained in power over the corpses of the other two, but not for long. Even though the Obregón administration brought many benefits to the Mexican people, such as a far reaching education program, the general was deeply hated by many, particularly radical Catholics. As a result, José de León Toral, an artist considered a religious fanatic by some and a martyr by others, assassinated Obregón during a party celebrating the general's electoral triumph.

What could a four-year-old girl know about all these political conflicts? That's how old Margarita was on that July day of 1928 as she played alone in her front walled yard. The house was a one-story dwelling that spread over an extensive area. For Margarita, each room was a different country, and the house was a planet. High ceilings and spacious rooms provided the little girl with a world of her own where cordiality and common sense prevailed, that is, until that day when she played alone in her yard.

"Somebody knocked at the front gate, or so it seemed to me, and I thought that it was one of my father's patients," she said to her family later on.

However, what to Margarita seemed people knocking at the gate was in fact a desperate mob trying to save their lives. When, unaware of the situation, she opened the door, the little girl was actually raising the curtain on the stage of reality. Dozens burst into the yard stumbling over themselves in haste, and they would have torn the girl to pieces in their rush if a saving hand hadn't picked her up to place her in a corner, behind a gigantic pot.

From that protective position, Margarita witnessed people rushing in like a tidal wave. Some of them were bleeding, and the strident uproar compelled the child to cover her ears. Then, Margarita's brothers and other men forced the door shut to prevent several armed soldiers who were in pursuit from breaking in. A few seconds later, Margarita heard shots and screams that denoted excruciating pain, but the perturbing noise gradually faded into silence.

After the fugitives had left through the back door, which faced another street, and once peace appeared to prevail once more, the situation was clarified. An official act in

memory of General Obregón was taking place near Margarita's house when people spontaneously began to cheer in happiness. Some even shouted repeatedly, "Death to Obregón, death to Obregón," which was almost humorous since they were referring to a corpse. In any event, the man leading the military contingent at the ceremony ordered the cavalry to charge against the crowd, and that's when Margarita opened the door, unconsciously providing many people an escape.

The arm that picked Margarita up, saving her life, belonged to no other than her brother Fidel. Siblings in such a closely knit family structure are like zealous guards always ready to intervene when the security of any member of the group is in danger, and that's what Fidel did.

Concerning Margarita, she experienced demophobia from that moment on, and airports and train stations make her nervous to this day. Twenty-six years after this incident, she became my mother. Nevertheless, I knew of this incident through my grandmother Helen. I clearly remember her narrating it to Pascual Toral Moreno, who was a first cousin of José de León Toral, Obregón's killer. Pascualito, as my grandmother called him, was a pianist who changed his name for several years to avoid any association with José de León Toral since this involved persecution and possible death, even though the pianist had nothing to do with the conspiracy.

"The repression became vicious after the assassination of Obregón," Pascualito said with a melancholic smile.

"At least nothing happened to Margarita. Otherwise, I wouldn't have my little boyfriend," my grandmother said pulling me close to her and ruffling my hair.

Siblings II

The five bullet wounds in the head of President Elect Alvaro Obregón marked the beginning of a drama that, in 1928, went beyond the wildest imagination. After going through "interrogation," an euphemism for torture, accused murderer José de León Toral did not reveal any useful information to clarify the situation, and it was not until the threat of torture to his immediate family that he implicated a nun in the conspiracy. Her name was Sister Concepción Acevedo de la Llata, but people remember her simply as Madre Conchita, a nickname that possesses a certain connotation of kindness and familiarity. It became apparent, then, that the assassination of General Obregón was ultimately a consequence of Mexico's long conflict between church and state.

The subsequent trial of all the people implicated, conducted in November of 1928, became a public spectacle, and it was the most sensational judicial inquiry of the Mexican Revolution. People applauded and cheered during the proceedings when Toral was vilified by the prosecution, and many shouted demanding his death. Outside of this precinct, however, some people quietly praised the assassin, considering him a martyr who would endure torture and ultimately sacrifice his own life to eliminate the "heathen" Obregón.

The outcome of the trial brought the maximum penalty to the singular pair: capital punishment by a firing squad for José de León Toral and twenty years of prison for Madre Conchita. Ironically, she got married and eventually got out of prison to live on Alvaro Obregón Avenue.

Helen laughed when she heard Madre Conchita relate such a peculiar anecdote

during a television interview, and the producer included many historic photographs as the conversation progressed. One picture showed Obregón, approximately five minutes before his death, wearing a bow tie.

"Helen, why did people hate Obregón so much?" I asked my grandmother.

"Because he got great pleasure from going into churches riding a horse, and then he had target practice shooting at crucifixes and statues of saints."

Such actions seem far fetched to me, but even more unbelievable incidents did occur during those turbulent times. The most heroic actions took place simultaneously with the vilest ones because the most noble individuals mingled with the greatest scoundrels. Sometimes, children performed heroic deeds that somewhat toned down the barbaric actions of some strong men who called themselves the heroes of the Revolution.

Such was the case when my mother, at age four, stood in the street by the back porch of her house listening to a parakeet chatter. It was an unusual bird that my grandmother would later give away because it learned vulgar expressions and blasphemies from people passing by.

The street seemed deserted that afternoon, but a strange breeze foreboded unexpected events. Suddenly, as if gushing up from the ground, several cavalry soldiers appeared on the street galloping their horses at full force. Margarita first saw a strange pale man riding a white horse. They floated like ghosts. Then she watched horses of all colors. The rider of a black horse was as thin as a skeleton. He carried a long sword and moved it in all directions as if trying to kill not only with the sword, but also with hunger and pestilence and the beasts of the earth. The horses struck the ground with such force

that it seemed an earthquake was taking place. Suddenly, a brisk jerk pulled her up in the air, there was darkness, and something red covered her face.

When the clamor of the horses disappeared, Margarita was sitting in a corner of the porch, and her sister María was embracing her with her arms and legs. María was sixteen years old, and her red bandanna had fallen on Margarita's face. The parakeet's cage was swinging after receiving a blow from the soldier's sword.

The situation was clarified a few moments later. The funeral procession of José de León Toral was passing in front of my grandmother's house when some people had the idea of kneeling and crossing themselves as if beginning to pray. When the man leading the military guard of the procession saw this, he ordered the cavalry to charge, and some soldiers rode to the street behind to prevent the people who were running away from escaping.

My grandmother told me this story on several occasions, the last time lying on her death bed. I clearly remember how she looked at my aunt María and then at my mother and said, "Margarita, do you remember when María saved your life?"

Perhaps the End

The assassination of President Elect Alvaro Obregón and the subsequent execution of the murderer did not ignite a new massive revolt. On the contrary, the religious struggle that Catholic guerrillas had carried out for about three years finally came to an end. It seems that the nation itself was exhausted and unable to continue the conflagration. As a result, former President Calles came to the center of the political arena, and he manipulated like puppets three consecutive presidents that "governed" Mexico from 1928 through 1934. But even that abuse came to an end, and General Cárdenas, who assumed the presidency in 1934, gradually consolidated his power with the support of the working classes, and he was finally able to expel Calles from the country.

That was the beginning of a very prosperous time. Mexico assumed control of its oil industry and began a period of economic growth. Simultaneously, the United States, under the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt, fully respected Mexico's autonomy and its economic policy, even when it went against the interests of some American companies. It seemed that the loss of more than one million lives had not been in vain, and Mexico enjoyed approximately thirty very fruitful years.

My parents grew up during this period of relative peace and development, and then I was born. We can then say farewell to the painful but illustrative experiences of the Mexican Revolution. All the main revolutionary leaders are now dead and buried together in spite of their antagonistic views and rivalries. Let's turn our eyes to something else; let's analyze other affairs and more recent conflicts. They seem insignificant, smaller than

an insect, but that is because the media, controlled by the groups in power, buries them, pulverizes them, erases them. Nevertheless, these obscure incidents may eventually appear clear to the public view. Actually, these events represent, in many senses, a somewhat distorted image of the revolutionary struggle that began in 1910. The social conflicts, the power struggle, the exploitation, the indifference of some to the suffering of many are all very similar to those of previous times.

Let's analyze the more recent episodes! It all became clear in 1968, when . . . , but no, this book should not explain them. Dear reader, receive and meditate on the alarming incidents of the Mexican Revolution which I have presented in these pages. The other occurrences, the ones I witnessed myself, will appear in another book at the proper time.

Chapter 5

Significance and Conclusion

This dissertation has both artistic and social value. It has artistic importance because it preserves oral narratives that would have been otherwise lost. It possesses social value because it presents social realities that have been hidden by the official accounts of history manipulated by political figures. The main, but not the only, social reality presented here is a female view of the emancipation of Mexican women, particularly from the aristocracy.

Artistic Importance and Oral Tradition

An oral narrative is actually a performing representation that is very difficult to transcribe into a written text. When my grandmother told me her stories, she accompanied the narrative with body movements, facial expressions, and verbal word play. "The Hunchback" is a story that I did not include in the dissertation because it does not deal with the Mexican Revolution, and it is a work exclusively for oral representation, therefore impossible to transcribe. Nevertheless, I will use it as an example of elements that are also present in other stories. The narrative begins with the Hunchback going to the Carpenter's house for dinner. While laughing during the conversation, a fish bone gets stuck in the Hunchback's throat, and he dies of asphyxiation. The Carpenter does not want to be blamed for this death, so he takes the body to the Baker's house. The Baker, in turn, takes the body to the Butcher's house, and so forth. My grandmother included up to thirty-five individuals, but the last one to get the body is the Policeman. He is accused of

murder and about to be hanged when the person who took the Hunchback's body to the Policeman's house, let's say the Plumber, confesses. The Plumber is about to be hanged when somebody else confesses. This goes on until the Carpenter, the first individual, confesses to the crime. When he is about to be executed, his wife kicks the Hunchback in the back, the Hunchback spits out the fish bone, and he automatically resuscitates. The plot of this story is irrelevant because the story is mainly a memory game and a tongue twister. My grandmother told me this story dozens of times, and I participated, trying to find a moment when she changed the order of the different characters. If she did or if she hesitated in the fast narrative, then she lost the game. This simple technique is very effective, and she used it in several of the stories, such as "Papá Chuchito II," where she presents the genealogy of my grandfather by making a parody of biblical genealogy. The technique is also used in "The Banquet" and "The Chicken." It should be noted at this point that all these stories follow a rhythm, accelerating and slowing down to highlight the important points.

After stressing the importance of an oral tradition as a performing art, it is now important to evaluate how successfully these stories were transcribed from the oral to the written form. In Chapter 3 of the dissertation, we discussed four challenges related to this issue, and it is now appropriate to see to what degree I was able to overcome them. First, the time period that passed from the oral performance to the transcription into written form, more than twenty years, was more an inconvenience than an impediment. This was a limitation in the sense that there were some stories that I was unable to recreate simply because I could not remember or find enough details.

Concerning the second challenge, my young age, it should be noted that this created a certain limitation. My grandmother did not omit violence from her narratives. Actually, the most violent moments marked the climax of some stories. This is the case with "The Three Lupes" when Luis is executed, and that creates a chain reaction of violence. Something similar happens with "Zapata." In this story, the cadavers of some soldiers are placed on the sand "forming a floating star." This was actually being done so they could be more easily handled for identification purposes. Nevertheless, the metaphor alludes somewhat to their fate and also creates a sarcastic image. I had nightmares that night, and my mother asked Elena to avoid this type of story. As a result, there were a few stories that I never heard directly from her.

The third challenge, the one related to my gender, is an issue that a woman should evaluate. My mother and my only surviving aunt have both expressed approval of and excitement with the stories that I have transcribed. In fact, they have repeatedly asked me to send them a copy of the dissertation. I believe that there are some feminine issues that I did not touch, but that is because Elena never expressed them, and I prefer not to speculate. In this sense, it could be argued that the emancipation provided by the Mexican Revolution was not complete.

Finally, the translation from Spanish into English was probably the most difficult barrier to overcome, and I will briefly analyze the structure of the oral narrative to illustrate this point. Oral narratives are very short because the audience only remains attentive for a few minutes. As a result, the narrative pace is fast and rich in rhetorical and visual elements. Elena's narratives usually provided a brief historical reference, usually as

an introduction to the story, but there were exceptions. The stories also had surprising climaxes that could be humorous or tragic. Having a good technique consisted of disclosing the climax to the audience at the right time. Otherwise, the performance would suffer a terrible flaw.

Exactly how to disclose the climax could vary according to the audience and the situation. When the climax was humorous, this could even be achieved at the expense of somebody in the audience. For example, I remember a story about a farmer and his wife. My grandmother would ask questions to the audience in such a way that somebody would unwillingly state, "I have two horns and a tail." The humor of the story is impossible to translate into English because the key word in Spanish, "*ciento*," can be orally interpreted as "one hundred" or "I feel," but this is not the case in English.

As was previously indicated, rhythm is of extreme importance. A climax can come after a gradual accelerated process or, exactly the opposite, suddenly after the narrative pace has slowed down. In addition, the actual sound of the words help in the creation of the atmosphere. In this way, my grandmother used specific words to imitate the sound of rain in "The Crossing." Unfortunately, those words cannot be translated, and I created an equivalent metaphor, "[A]nd his scream formed harmony with the water that dripped in numerous pots and pans."

Naturally, a story includes other narrative elements, such as characterization, time, theme, and plot. They are not different than those used in a written work. In this way, it is possible to create an infinite number of oral narratives. A good performer needs good memory, a great power of observation, creativity, and a natural and agreeable disposition.

My grandmother had all these characteristics in abundance. I will close by giving you an example of her talent. Once, she went to church in Houston, Texas. She was the only Spanish speaking person in that place, and my aunt Cristina was late to pick her up. When my aunt got there, my grandmother had a crowd of adults and children listening to one of her stories that she managed to tell using only a few English words that she knew.

Descriptions

My grandmother created beautiful images and similes at a rapid pace. Frequently, she adapted them from the many books that she read, particularly the picaresque novel. "The Chubby-Cheeked Man with the Cigar" ("El cachetón del puro") is a story that I did not include in the present selection because it does not deal with the Mexican Revolution, but it provides an important feature of the literary influence of the Spanish classics in my grandmother's stories. In this work, a man who is riding a train wants desperately to go to the bathroom, but the bathroom is always occupied. Finally, while the train is going through a dark tunnel, he puts his buttocks out of the window to relieve himself. Unfortunately, the tunnel is not very long, and the train goes out into the daylight before the man can finish. The story ends when somebody simply exclaims, seeing the train pass, "Look at that man with huge cheeks smoking that cigar." A similar picaresque description takes place in *La vida del Buscón llamado don Pablos*, by Francisco de Quevedo (96). Similarly, descriptions in stories like "Children" are similar to those found in the novels of Benito Pérez Galdós. It would be impossible to track down all the literary sources of my grandmother's stories because many of the poems that she memorized are

folk works or anonymous poems that appeared in newspapers or magazines. I was able to get my hands on a few of them, and my mother had memorized some others. I tape recorded some of these poems, and a detailed analysis of these works would provide sufficient material for another dissertation.

Reality

If I had to describe my grandmother's stories using one word, this term would be "candid." In fact, my grandmother used direct, simple, clear descriptions in her narratives. In "The Crossing," for example, she describes the slums of Mexico City as "the Venice of the indigent." This is a short, clear description, but it is also loaded with powerful irony. While Venice has numerous palaces, the houses of the poor people are literally falling apart. In the same story, when the baby is born, "his scream formed harmony with water that dripped in numerous pots and pans distributed in the rooms, and with the deluge that was falling outside." This short description is very powerful because it stresses the poverty into which the child is born. In addition, it also heightens the importance of the arrival of new life. In other words, the flood is associated with the birth of the child.

All these simple but powerful descriptions highlight the clarity of a reality that makes some people uncomfortable. In very simple words, my grandmother highlights some truths that are often ignored. In this reality, some people are extremely selfish and ruthless, but there are others who exhibit high human qualities. In this reality, people suffer, and they are not vindicated. In a sense, my grandmother told me many stories to keep the memory alive of people who died in the Revolution. This is undoubtedly the

case with "Children," "The Female Soldier," and "Adela the Cook." Finally, the stories portray a confusing and dangerous scenario where everybody is trapped, and the only way to get ahead is by developing strength of character and using humor. For my grandmother, the Mexican Revolution was an uncontrollable outbreak of human passions that put people of all types to an extremely difficult test. For my grandmother, there were heroes in this situation, but nobody seems to pay attention to many of them.

Humor

My grandmother had a good sense of humor that was based on ridiculing one or more individuals. This is the case in "The Priest," where a narrow-minded priest fails to appreciate labor pains until he suffers them himself. In "A Hot Tortilla," the humor is based on ridiculing Mr. Wilson, an Englishman who belittles Mexicans and fails to understand their culture.

Humor is also used with an element of surprise very common in oral narratives. In "The Chicken," for example, some guests at a dinner gradually build up expectations to eat chicken just to find out that the chicken continuously mentioned by their host is a live chicken used to eat the few crumbs that fell on the floor. In addition, it should be also noted that the chicken itself is suffering the food shortage.

Finally, the stories also use humor in very subtle and refined descriptions. In "The Man of the White Moustache," for example, Don Porfirio Díaz is described as smelling like baby powder. The sharp contrast of the old dictator with a smell associated with babies implies various connotations. The description tells us, in a sense, that Don Porfirio

Díaz was so old that he had returned to his infancy, and it also implies that the complicated protocol of the aristocracy is ultimately ridiculous. The dictator is also described as having a crackling starched shirt. This also alludes to how rigid he was in governing the country.

The humor of the stories creates a balance for descriptions of tremendous violence. When my grandmother told me the story of how the *Carrancistas* were massacred by Zapata's followers, I truly had nightmares that night. That is why I considered it proper to include my dream in the story "Zapata."

Emancipation of Aristocratic Women during the Mexican Revolution:

Achievements and Limitations

By removing the old patriarchal aristocracy from power, aristocratic Mexican women had a unique opportunity to find their own identity. Naturally, this was not an easy task because it implied abandoning their old status and a tremendous effort to educate themselves to function in a different society. To understand this problem fully, it is important to analyze first the process followed in the acquisition of a new consciousness and then to point out the achievements and limitations of such emancipation.

The Acquisition of Consciousness

It is ironic that the Mexican Independence War (1810-1821) was not planned or initiated by the repressed Indians but mainly by individuals of Spanish descent who had

been born in Mexico. In the same way, various Mexican women from the aristocracy emancipated themselves during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1928 through circumstances that they did not foresee or plan. Furthermore, many aristocratic women opposed those forces that offered them the opportunity of emancipation. This is because they were completely unaware of their own situation in society and, therefore, were unable to search for their own identity.

The stories in this dissertation present the female voice of Elena Lezama de Rodríguez, a voice that would have remained hidden if the Mexican Revolution had not taken place, and if Elena had not possessed three important qualities: intelligence, perception, and good luck. Intelligence was a necessary element to analyze the rapidly changing scenarios during a period of social revolt. In this way, she was able to adapt to very difficult circumstances for her own benefit and that of her family. For example, while many aristocratic women ended their lives supporting themselves by running boardinghouses in their old mansions, Elena decided to step into the middle class and go back to school. This change offered many opportunities to my grandmother, but it also alienated her from her original family, mainly her sisters.

Concerning my grandmother's perception, she supported the theory that women enjoy a better sense of intuition than men, and she also indicated that her own power of perception was very high among women. I myself witnessed how she could make a complete evaluation of an individual after just exchanging a few words with that person. "I always knew that Carranza was a selfish thief, particularly after I saw him playing the bugle heading a large contingent of soldiers. He was so pretentious and conceited. How

could anybody believe that he was fighting for the Mexican people?" she told me once, and she was not mistaken. My grandmother had the good fortune of seeing personally and sometimes talking with such historical figures as Francisco I. Madero, Venustiano Carranza, Porfirio Díaz, Pancho Villa, and Emiliano Zapata. She despised Carranza and disliked the violence of Villa and Zapata, but she evaluated them all as human beings with qualities and defects. "Madero came from a good family and was well intentioned; Villa was a womanizer and had a very agreeable conversation; Zapata was Indian and crafty, and he always defended his people; Don Porfirio was very strict and maintained everybody in order."

According to my grandmother, she used her strong intuition and the social skills that she obtained from her aristocratic upbringing to get her own way. She repeatedly told me how she managed to pass foodstuffs under the very noses of the guards who were supposed to control the movement of these items, as presented in the story "Elena." I admired her fine attire and her good manners when she dealt with wealthy people, but she was equally agreeable with the poor. In fact, she had numerous friends from very different social classes, and she could rapidly analyze an individual and deal with him or her accordingly.

It should be noted that my grandmother enjoyed extremely good luck in addition to her natural attributes. Even though she never mentioned it, she was very lucky that her first husband died. According to her, he was handsome and came from a good family, but he was not very bright. Some of my relatives may get upset by reading these lines, but my grandmother admired her second husband (my grandfather) because of his intelligence

and education while the affection she felt towards her first husband was somewhat impregnated with pity.

Be it as it may, my grandmother could not have emancipated herself if it had not been for the support that she received from my grandfather and his family, mainly his sisters. Papá Chuchito, my grandfather, did not hesitate to provide anything my grandmother wanted, particularly if it was education. He trained my grandmother as a nurse, and both tended patients during the Mexican Revolution. My grandmother repeatedly gave me detailed descriptions of newborn babies who died of starvation because their undernourished mothers could not give them any milk. "I held them in my hands. They were as small as rats, and all I could do was to swallow my tears not to depress their poor mothers even more. That's why I despise that bandit of Obregón, because he intercepted the shipments of food that those people should have received."

It should be mentioned that two groups of individuals supported my grandmother's educational goals in addition to my grandfather. The first group was formed by male members of her own family. Her sisters in particular were very hostile towards my grandmother and considered her projects extravagant and in poor taste. I can only speculate the reasons behind this attitude. Perhaps they were simply jealous, but I think they were still carrying the aristocratic burden that women should only work at home and study no further than elementary school.

My grandfather's sisters, on the other hand, considered that education had the utmost priority. In fact, they decided to remain single and follow professional careers rather than getting married to stay at home. This situation suggests that the emancipation

of women was not only a result of the Mexican Revolution since these women had followed professional careers long before the outbreak of the revolt. When one considers that until 1856 the idea of higher education for women had not been realized, the advances made by Mexican women from this date to 1910 are indeed remarkable. It should be noted that these advances took place precisely during the regime of Don Porfirio Díaz, but they did not benefit aristocratic women. In this way, my grandmother found herself between two opposite ideologies, one that strangely supported an aristocratic ignorance, and the other that promoted education and the consequent emancipation of women.

The Burden of Social Class Consciousness

It may be difficult to identify the type of ethnographic writing of my grandmother's stories since she was being pulled in two different directions by two opposite ideologies. The dialectical result of this opposition is a new view that recognizes uniqueness as the maximum truth. In other words, my grandmother did not view any individual as a member or a representative of a group. For her, all humans represented a unique personality that was loaded or influenced by the prejudices or ideas of a larger group. "The Crossing" clearly describes this ideology by presenting the "Tiger of Santa Julia," a ruthless murderer to most people, as an individual capable of possessing positive attributes such as gratitude and love. In the same fashion, my grandmother despised the official images of the different revolutionaries, and that's why she insisted in providing their human or negative side. "Villa was not bad looking, and it's is easy to imagine how

he could wrap women around his finger with his agreeable conversation," she told me once, and I could see Villa, who is usually depicted as a nasty scoundrel in official history books, as a good-looking individual and an agreeable conversationalist.

Identifying the specific individuality of each person, however, did not completely rid my grandmother of her social class prejudices. In this way, she treated everybody with extreme kindness, but also knew how to play her role as a housewife. "Marriage and the home are two very important tasks that decent women must perform," she told me more than once. In this way, she helped people of all classes during the Mexican Revolution, but she did not forget that her servants belonged to a different class after all and did not let them forget it. In "Homophobics II," and "Adela the Cook," for example, it is clear that Elena maintained a social barrier that ultimately separated her from the servants. It should be noted that my grandmother perceived her social class consciousness as a burden. She was aware of race, aristocratic family origins, and etiquette; she rejected these prejudices, but she could not completely get rid of them. When my grandmother was very old and senile, she often fought with a maid who took care of her, and the insults that my grandmother used were always racially related. That is probably the reason why, on her death bed, my grandmother asked to see the maid, Rosa María, to ask her forgiveness. I distinctly remember how my grandmother held Rosa María's dark hands, kissed them, and said, "I have been a great sinner; please, forgive me." Rosa María, who fought with Elena as playing with a child, was stunned. She briefly said, "Yes, but you are not going to die," and went to cry to a different room. None of the stories presents this conflict better than "The Man of the White Moustache," where my grandmother seems to want to go back to

the past to give to the lower social classes what was rightly theirs.

Achievements

The emancipation of women that began in the second half of the nineteenth century and was rapidly accelerated by the Revolution obtained achievements at various levels. Jennifer Daryl Slack and Laurie Anne Whitt have indicated that there are ethical issues in the analysis and the study of culture (571). The greatest ethical issue in the self-expression of my grandmother through her stories is the expression itself. In other words, when an individual speaks for the first time after being silenced for years, we must listen to that scream of self-expression without changing it with our analysis. That is why I tried to be as faithful to the original oral narratives as possible.

Another achievement of the emancipation of Mexican women was that it gave to some of them an immediate chance of survival. In "The Female Soldier," for example, the woman wounded in the fight indicates that participating in the struggle at least gives her an opportunity to survive. When asked why she is fighting against the *Carrancistas*, she simply responds, "If I had stayed at home, they would have done anything they wanted with me. At least here I can kill them first."

Naturally, the Mexican Revolution gave women a greater degree of freedom, particularly to aristocratic women if they took advantage of the situation. To begin with, education opportunities greatly expanded for all social classes, including the old aristocrats. My grandmother told me many times, "I would have gone to school when I was young, but it was not in fashion then. But I forced all my daughters to go to college."

In fact, my mother and all my aunts followed professional careers, and my grandmother ensured that they did not get married until they finished their studies. In addition, my grandmother herself continued her studies for the rest of her life with considerable success. Having the freedom to follow an education was not the only achievement of women. The First Feminist Congress celebrated in Yucatán in 1916 formulated a program that gradually materialized. The first principle deals precisely with the access of women to an education. The other principles talk about a radical change in legislation in order to provide women access to all types of activities performed mainly by men to that point. The sectors mentioned include government, business, professional careers, and culture (Silva Herzog 2: 233-8).

In addition, sexual freedom was also postulated in this congress. Sex education, in fact, has taken place in Mexico since the 1930's. Nevertheless, women do not have the same level of sexual freedom as men do to this day. This may not be a matter of freedom as much as a logical result of the Mexican family structure and the position of women to a level of deities. It should be remembered that the maximum religious figure in Mexico is not Jesus Christ but the Virgin of Guadalupe. In *El laberinto de la soledad*, Octavio Paz develops the theory that the most logical explanation of this situation is that male Mexicans developed a historical complex due to the massive rape of Indian women when the Spaniards conquered Mexico.

Be that as it may, sex is a topic not really discussed in my grandmother's stories. However, the only signs of problems due to sexual repression take place with homosexuals. Mexican society is homophobic to this date, and that is clearly presented in

the three stories dealing with homophobia. Concerning heterosexual sex and procreation, there is a general tendency to look at them as a natural phenomenon. This is illustrated in the story "Breasts." When the young boy of the story, Joel, peeps at the maid breast-feeding her baby, Joel looks unnaturally at something that is natural, and that is precisely the point that my grandfather is trying to make by offering to "breast-feed" the young boy.

In May, 1996, I conducted a personal interview of Alicia Pérez Salazar. We talked about sexual liberation and the Mexican Revolution, and she indicated that sexual freedom was very common in the different armies. Nevertheless, she stressed that there is a difference between sexual freedom and wantonness. She further pointed out that international feminism exaggerates the importance of sex in terms of the overall picture of the Mexican woman. In doing so, according to Alicia Pérez Salazar, European and American feminists impose their own cultural agenda instead of truly helping the situation of Mexican women.

Finally, it should be noted that female emancipation during the Mexican Revolution expanded the respect that women have. If they were respected before because of their roles as mothers and wives, the Revolution helped introduce them into other fields. Nevertheless, the important role that women played in the Mexican Revolution has not received the attention that it deserves. Perhaps this is because women see a reality that some people would prefer to hide. I hope that the stories of this dissertation have provided at least a snapshot of this reality that stresses more the suffering and passions of ordinary people, men and women alike, instead of artificially creating heroes for the benefit of the demagogues that currently govern Mexico.

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Glossary

atole Thick and generally sweet drink made from corn or rice flour.

bribón Rascal or mischievous person.

camote Type of candy prepared from sugar and sweet potatoes.

Carrancista Venustiano Carranza's follower.

chile chipotle Red pepper used to spice the food.

chile poblano Large pepper generally stuffed with meat or cheese.

chile serrano Hot pepper, similar to the jalapeño, that Mexicans eat on a daily basis.

chocolate Chocolate candy or hot chocolate.

Cristeros Guerrilla group that fought against the Calles's administration for religious reasons.

Decena Trágica Period of ten days (2/9/13-2/19/13) considered tragic because of the suffering involved among the civilian population when Victoriano Huerta overthrew the popular government of Francisco I. Madero.

El Terror Period of a few weeks in December 1914 and early 1915 when *Zapatistas* and *Villistas* arrested and executed people suspected of participating in the coup against President Madero.

flan Cream caramel.

gordo Literal meaning is "fat," but used as a kind appellative for young children.

gringo Nickname applied to Americans and British.

hacendado Wealthy landowner.

Huertista Victoriano Huerta's follower.

joto Pejorative name for a male homosexual.

licenciado Lawyer or college graduate.

licuado Drink prepared with milk, eggs, vanilla, sugar, and tropical fruits.

Maderista Francisco I. Madero's follower.

mozo Man hired at a household to perform unskilled labor.

pelado Pejorative name for people from the lower social class.

Porfirista Porfirio Díaz's follower.

rebozo Type of shawl.

soldadera Female soldier.

tianguis Street market.

Tiempo del Hambre Period of time in 1915 when there were food shortages in Mexico City.

tienda de raya Store where peasants were forced to buy their goods.

tranvía de mulitas Mule-driven streetcar.

Villista Pancho Villa's follower.

Zapatista Emiliano Zapata's follower.

Main Historical Figures

Calles, Plutarco Elías Military leader allied with Obregón. He was president from 1924 to 1928 and controlled the Mexican government until 1934, the year when Lázaro Cárdenas became president. Calles was finally exiled to the United States in 1936.

Carranza, Venustiano Revolutionary leader who organized the Constitutional Army against the government of Victoriano Huerta. He and Obregón fought against the armies of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. Carranza became president in 1917 but was assassinated in 1920 by Obregón.

Díaz, Porfirio President/dictator of Mexico who controlled the government of the country from 1876 to 1911. He protected the economic interest of wealthy landowners and big enterprises. Local and foreign investors gained big profits at the sake of the Mexican poor. He was overthrown by Madero and died in France in exile.

Huerta, Adolfo de la Interim president for a few months in 1920 after the assassination of Carranza. He organized a revolt against Calles and Obregón in 1923 but was defeated and exiled to the United States.

Huerta, Victoriano Military leader who was the main figure in the military coup against President Madero. Huerta was president from 1913 to 1914 but was never recognized by the United States. He was defeated and exiled to the United States in 1914, where he died in prison.

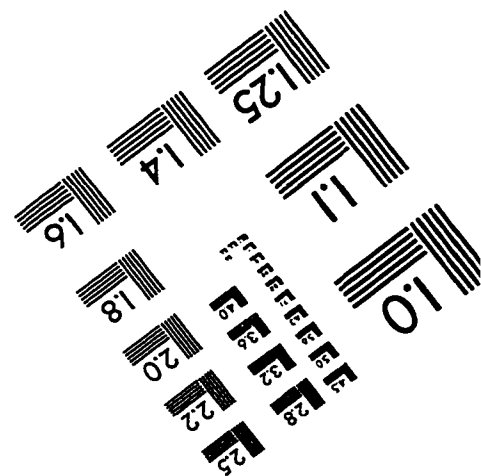
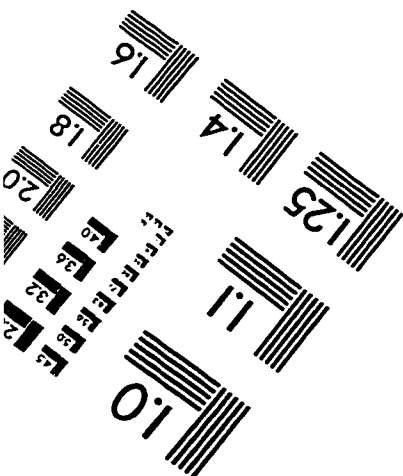
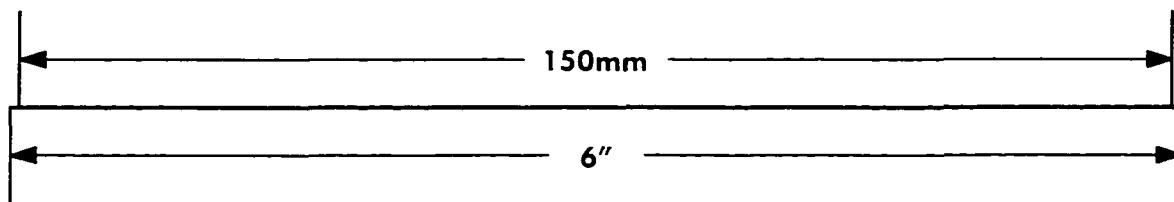
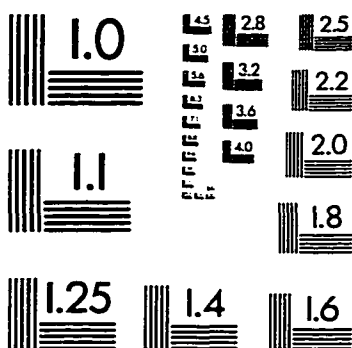
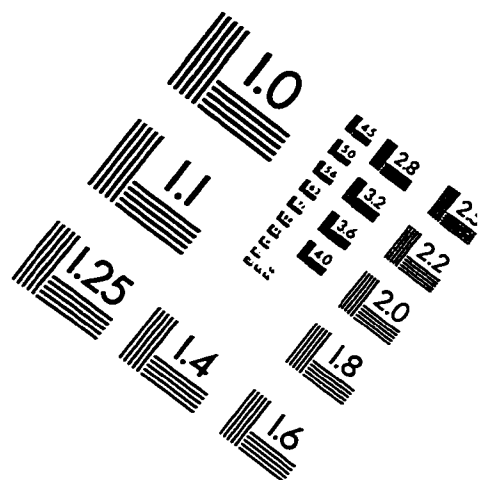
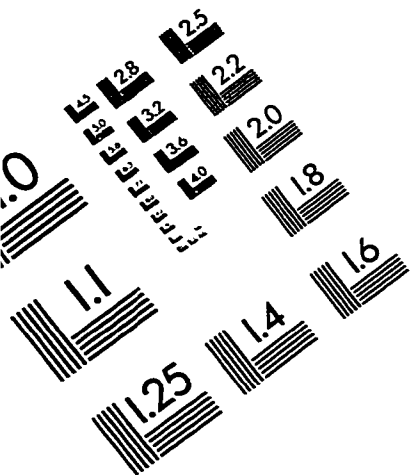
Madero, Francisco I. Wealthy revolutionary leader who initiated the Mexican Revolution and overthrew the government of Porfirio Díaz. He was president from 1911 to 1913, when he was assassinated by Victoriano Huerta in during a military coup.

Obregón, Alvaro Revolutionary leader from the State of Sonora in Northwest Mexico. He fought against Victoriano Huerta and became famous as a military leader after defeating Pancho Villa in 1915. He was president of Mexico from 1920 to 1924 and was assassinated after winning his reelection in 1928.

Villa, Francisco (Pancho) Controversial military and popular leader from Northern Mexico who supported the Revolution. His greatest military victories were against the government of Victoriano Huerta. He was defeated by Alvaro Obregón in 1915 and was assassinated in 1923, when Obregón was president.

Zapata, Emiliano Military and popular leader from Southern Mexico. He was unyielding in defending the rights of the peasants. He was betrayed and assassinated in 1919, during the administration of Venustiano Carranza.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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