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by

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**Writing Against the Grain:**

**Ignacio Solares' Novels of the Mexican Revolution**

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**Writing Against the Grain:  
Ignacio Solares' Novels of the Mexican Revolution**

by

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**Writing Against the Grain:**

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This dissertation studies four novels by the Mexican writer Ignacio Solares. Although Solares has written over a dozen novels, this dissertation focuses on the four that are part of the literary tradition known as the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana*. The objective of the dissertation is to identify how the four novels continue, enrich and depart from said tradition.

For this analysis, the dissertation compares the four novels to a selection of twelve classic works that serve as a cross section and template of the *narrativa de la Revolución*. The comparison reveals significant similarities and differences. Chapter one discusses how the four novels, like so many previous *novelas de la Revolución*, contest the conventional celebratory interpretation of the Mexican Revolution.

Chapter two, however, shows that the four look beyond the failures of the Revolution, thus transcending the pessimism that critics have identified as a hallmark of the *novela de la Revolución*. Chapter three focuses on another unique aspect of the four novels, this being that each implicitly encourages the reader to understand religious faith as a necessity for individual fulfillment, and as an empowering force in the struggle for social progress. Chapter four discusses the four novels' relevance to their more immediate cultural and sociopolitical context. An initial argument of the chapter is that the four can rightly be classified as postmodern historical novels, although certain definitions of the postmodern, particularly those that define the postmodern aesthetic as ahistorical and apolitical, do not apply. Solares' *novelas de la Revolución* clearly respond to the sociopolitical dilemmas that define the final two decades of twentieth-century Mexico.

The study concludes that the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana* has been significantly enriched by Solares' contributions. Like many novelists who came before him, Solares helps readers understand the past from a new perspective. At the same time, Solares breaks patterns that had become too predictable in the *narrativa de la Revolución*. These innovations make for a compelling series of novels that encourage readers to reinterpret the present by changing their understanding of the past.

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## Introduction

### Ignacio Solares and his Novels of the Mexican Revolution

The renowned literary critic John Brushwood, in his 1990 review of Ignacio Solares' *Casas de encantamiento*, states: "It has become almost axiomatic, in recent Mexican criticism, to say that [Ignacio Solares] deserves to be more widely read. . . . He is a master craftsman and a superbly compelling storyteller" (121-22). Since the publication of Brushwood's 1990 review, Solares has continued to practice the craft and display the skills that earned him this critic's admiration. And he has certainly gained some considerable public notoriety in recent years. However, the man whom John Brushwood considers to be "one of Mexico's best novelists" (Rev. of *Casas de encantamiento* 121) and "a major figure in contemporary Mexican literature" (Preface to *Lost in the City* vii) has yet to receive abundant attention from literary critics. In fact, the literary criticism focusing on Solares' work is somewhat sparse. To date, less than thirty articles or reviews of his work have appeared in scholarly journals and no book-length study of his work has been published.

This dissertation is the result of my effort to give Solares a bit more of the critical attention he deserves. I do not focus on all of his work, but rather on his four novels that form part of the great tradition of Mexican fiction commonly known among literary

critics as the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana*.<sup>1</sup> In the first chapter of this dissertation, I show that Solares follows a course established by previous Mexican novelists, as each of his four *novelas de la Revolución* challenges the celebratory and triumphalist interpretation of the Revolution, so typical of conventional historiography. In subsequent chapters, I move on to identify aspects of Solares' novels that represent innovation within the great tradition of the *narrativa de la Revolución*. In chapter two, I argue that his novels do not reflect the oft-noted pessimism that is a hallmark of the great tradition. While the four novels certainly draw attention to the tragic failures of the Revolution, they also encourage the reader to look beyond the failures. In chapter three, I argue that Solares' optimistic vision is facilitated by his resolutely religious conception of existence. I observe, furthermore, that Solares' novels ultimately propose a unique type of faith-based activism as a means of achieving individual fulfillment and societal progress. In my last chapter, I explain why the four works can justifiably be thought of as postmodern novels. But I argue also that the four do not exemplify the a-historical and a-political aesthetic many critics associate with the postmodern. Solares' novels of the Mexican Revolution respond directly to the sociopolitical realities that prevail at the time they are written.

In this introductory chapter, following a brief overview of Solares' career as a writer, I explain how and why I place the four novels in the tradition of narrative fiction

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of the themes and content of Solares' other literary works, consult Vicente Francisco Torres' *Esta narrativa mexicana* (25-40), where the critic offers an excellent overview of Solares' literary works through 1987. Also, see Carolyn and John Brushwood's preface to *Lost in the city: Two novels by Ignacio Solares*, where Brushwood offers a brief overview of the themes of Solares' work through 1996. For a quick description of the contents and major themes of Solares' two most recent novels, *El sitio* and *El espía del aire*, see Gonzalo Celorio's review of *El sitio* and César Güemes review of *El espía del aire*.

known as the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana*. I then describe briefly how I went about my research and how I form my arguments in the chapters that follow.

Ignacio Solares has had a distinguished career as a journalist, academic administrator, teacher, novelist, essayist and playwright. He has written over a dozen novels, served in an editorial capacity for numerous publications, taught at some of Mexico's foremost institutions of higher learning, and held several significant administrative positions, the most important of which he occupies currently. Solares is currently the Director de Difusión Cultural for the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). To summarize the development of his career, it is appropriate to begin by mentioning a few details regarding his literary childhood. He was born in 1945 in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua. It was there, during his childhood years, that his passion for the written word began. As he explains to Alfonso González in a 1993 interview, the world of literature was readily accessible to him because his father was a bibliophile.<sup>2</sup> Ignacio regularly accompanied his father on routine trips to the bookstore, learned from his father the joy of rummaging through old books, and was introduced to numerous writers whom his father had befriended, many of them exiled writers from

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<sup>2</sup> In writing my summary of Solares' career as a writer, I relied extensively on information given by Solares in two particular interviews. The first of these two was conducted by Luis Javier Mier and Donna Carbonell, and published as part of their *Periodismo interpretativo*. The second is the aforementioned interview by Alfonso González. The following sources also provided or served to verify a few of the biographical details about Solares: Alfaguara's edition of *Columbus* (inside front cover); Alfaguara's edition of *El espía del aire* (inside front cover); John Brushwood's "Narrating Parapsychology: The novels of Ignacio Solares." (see Brushwood's second footnote); John and Carolyn Brushwood's Preface to *Lost in the city* (see p. vii); Sergio González Rodríguez's "Nostalgia del norte." (see p. 95); Editorial Diana's edition of *La noche de Ángeles* (p. 1 offers an "Acerca del autor" note); FCE's compilation of Solares' short novels *Los mártires*, *Serafín* and *El árbol del deseo*, published under the title of *Los mártires y otras historias* (see p.4); CGE's edition of *El árbol del deseo* (see back cover); CGE's edition of *Delirium tremens* (see back cover). CGE's edition of *Anónimo* (see back cover); Latitudes' edition of *El problema es otro* (see inside front cover). Full listings of all these sources appear in my Bibliography.

Spain. Most importantly, young Ignacio spent countless hours reading in the family library. Growing up in this environment, it is no surprise that he eventually pursued a career as a writer.

Solares begins his writing career in the mid-sixties, in Mexico City. In 1965, approximately one year prior to completing his college degree at the UNAM, he publishes a short story and two essays in *El heraldo cultural*, a magazine that had recently been founded by the well-known Mexican writer Luis Spota. Solares realizes, at this point in his life, that he can make a living by writing. Motivated largely by his family's challenging financial situation, he immediately begins doing whatever type of free-lance work presents itself. He works as a reporter for various publications, including the magazine *Mañana*, the newspaper *Esto*, and the men's magazine *Caballero*, covering and reviewing everything from bullfights and nightclub entertainment to movies and theatre. Soon thereafter, he takes on his first responsibilities in magazine editing, by working in an editorial capacity for various publications.

Whether by choice or by necessity, Solares does not limit himself to magazines with a literary focus. He even has a brief stint in the industry of "adult" publications. Ironically, it is during this stint that he develops a relationship with José Agustín and Gustavo Sáinz, two young writers who would later rise to fame as the most notorious representatives of the generation of Mexican writers known as *la onda*. Solares collaborates with Agustín and Sáinz to launch the short-lived men's magazine *Don*, which is censored after the first few issues.

Solares' career in journalism takes a turn back toward the literary when Vicente Leñero invites him to become one of the editors of the magazine *Claudia*. In this position, Solares once again works alongside his *Don* cohorts José Agustín and Gustavo Sáinz, along with Juan Tovar. The following year, when Vicente Leñero leaves *Claudia* and goes to *Excelsior* to revive the newspaper's cultural supplement *Revista de Revistas*, Solares goes with him. He does not stay long, however, as Octavio Paz offers him a position he can't turn down: Chief Editor of *Plural*. During his tenure at *Plural*, Solares meets numerous legendary writers, including Jorge Luis Borges, Mario Vargas Llosa and Julio Cortázar. Solares, in an interview years later, would state the following about his time at *Plural*: "Fue entonces cuando me centré en la literatura" (Mier and Carbonell 88). The importance of his experience at *Plural* notwithstanding, he leaves the magazine in 1971, having completed an enriching yet exhausting tenure under the leadership of Octavio Paz. Solares leaves *Plural* to become the director of *El diorama de la cultura*, holding this position until 1976.

After his departure from *El Diorama*, Solares' career continues to be defined, to a significant extent, by his journalistic endeavors. He writes columns and serves in an editorial capacity of one sort or another for a number of publications, including *La cultura en México*, *Hoy*, *Somos Somex* and *Siempre*. But Solares' departure from *El diorama* marks an important transition for his career. After his departure from *El diorama*, his career begins to be defined less by his work in journalism and more by his writing of narrative fiction. In 1975, a year prior to his departure from *El diorama*, Solares publishes his collection of short stories *El hombre habitado*. While this collection

is not his first literary work to be published, it is the first in long and consistent series of publications of narrative works by the author, which serves to mark Solares oeuvre as a writer of narrative fiction.

In the twenty-seven years since the appearance of *El hombre habitado*, Solares has written over a dozen novels (five of which have been translated to English), establishing himself as one of Mexico's most important novelists. Nonetheless, critics have not written too much about Solares' work. The relative scarcity of published studies on Solares' work might lead some people to suspect that the work is simply not deserving of attention. However, the little criticism that has been written contains strong statements about his work's high quality. John Brushwood's aforementioned compliments are but two examples of his recognition of Solares' talents. Other examples of Brushwood's enthusiastic praise would include a statement he makes in his introduction to a 1989 interview of Solares. The statement reads: "I doubt that a more significant appreciation of contemporary Mexico is available in any other body of fiction" (17). In Brushwood's review of *Casas de encantamiento*, we find another example of the critic's praise. He states: "[*Casas de encantamiento*] is a good novel even if readers know nothing of its context. For those who know Mexico City – and especially for those who share an obsession with it – the novel is an unforgettably fine experience" (122).

Brushwood is not alone in his appreciation of Solares. Numerous other critics have enthusiastically praised Solares' skills. Alfonso González, for example, in his review of Solares' *El gran elector*, recognizes the consistently masterful handling of the narrator-narratee dynamic in Solares' novels (85). González then proposes that Solares

reaches a new level of virtuosity with his narrative technique in *El gran elector* (85). Renowned Mexican novelist José Agustín has also spoken highly of Solares' work. About Solares' novel *Serafín*, Agustín writes:

Ignacio Solares equilibra eficazmente la realidad y la imaginación, lo extraño y lo cotidiano, lo simbólico y lo manifiesto; ha escrito una novela redonda y unitaria, que contiene los elementos exactos para que los lectores tengamos la impresión de penetrar en la vastísima complejidad de la mente del pequeño héroe [Serafín].  
(qtd. in Solares *Los mártires y otras historias* 4)

Further celebration of Solares' work is found in Luz María Umpierre's review of *El árbol del deseo*. In this review, Umpierre points to Solares' "alto grado de sofisticación literaria" and affirms that Solares "nos ha mostrado con esta obra su importancia dentro del desarrollo literario de su país" (66-67). José Ricardo Chaves also extols Solares. He celebrates "el rigor y la calidad de la empresa narrativa de Solares," asserting that, for Solares, "hay señales luminosas en los cielos de la letra" (55). Jorge Brash, in his review of *Madero, el otro* states:

La prosa de Solares, segura y correcta, no desdeña el giro localista y es vehículo adecuado a un relato que evita con igual fortuna el panegírico fervoroso y la descripción escueta y fría. Este *otro* acercamiento a Madero favorece tanto a la literatura como a la historia de México. (56)

George McMurray, in his review of *El gran elector*, recognizes Solares' "skill as a writer" and describes *El gran elector* as "a richly textured work of art" (526). Sergio González Rodríguez celebrates "la levedad narrativa que sabe emplear Solares," pointing

out that he is a “beneficiario del aprecio hacia el aspecto oral de la literatura” and an “autor de probada solvencia en el manejo de estructuras dramáticas” (95). And Gonzalo Celorio, in a review of *El sitio*, states: “para bien de nosotros, es una *Summa*, una *Summa ignaciana* que felicito y celebro más de lo que estas pálidas páginas pueden decir” (13).

In addition to the comments of critics and peers, the literary prizes bestowed upon Solares stand as evidence of his abilities as a writer.<sup>3</sup> In 1970, the OPIC awards him the “Certamen Nacional de Obras en un Acto”, for his play *El problema es otro*. In 1979, the Encyclopedia Britannica recognizes *Anónimo* as the best Mexican novel of the year. In 1975 and 1977 he wins fellowships at the Centro Mexicano de Escritores. In 1989, he wins the Magda Donato prize with his novel *Casas de Encantamiento*. In 1991, *La noche de Ángeles* earns him the Premio Novedades, awarded by Editorial Diana. In 1992, the theatrical adaptation of his novel *El gran elector* wins a prize for the best play of the year, awarded by the three theater associations of Mexico. In 1996, he wins the Premio Fuentes Mares for his novel *Nen, la inútil* and that same year he is selected as a recipient of the prestigious Guggenheim Foundation grant. Most recently, in 1999, he was awarded the Xavier Villaurrutia prize for his novel *El sitio*. His latest novel, *El espía del aire*, is currently in the running for the Novela Rómulo Gallegos prize, 2003.

The recognition of peers and critics has made Solares a respected literary figure in México. And, one of his novels that is most widely recognized as a significant contribution to the corpus of contemporary Mexican fiction is *Madero, el otro*, his first of

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<sup>3</sup> Information about the prizes that Solares has won was provided from the sources listed in footnote 2 and from a note on the title page of Solares’ *El problema es otro*.

four novels that focus on the theme of the Mexican Revolution. In a brief review of this novel, the critic Victor Ronquillo writes:

La novela de la Revolución Mexicana, como corriente literaria, da de sí y se expande, crece y da un vuelco con esta nueva expresión de las preocupaciones que animaron textos tan significativos en la historia de la literatura mexicana. (72)

Ronquillo's statement further exemplifies the complementary tone that is consistently used by critics who comment on Solares' work. But Ronquillo's statement is interesting for a second reason: In the statement, he classifies Solares' novel, albeit implicitly, as a *novela de la Revolución Mexicana*.

I agree with Ronquillo in his classification and find it appropriate to classify three other Solares novels as such: *La noche de Ángeles*, *El gran elector* and *Columbus*. The classification of four of Solares' novels as *novelas de la Revolución Mexicana* is a first step in my dissertation. It leads me to ask if and how the four novels significantly contribute or add anything to the tradition of narrative in which I place them. But before addressing these questions, I must justify my placement of the novels within the *narrativa de la Revolución*. Are the four works "novels of the Mexican Revolution"? Is it valid to say that the four novels form part of the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana*?

The answer depends on how we define this particular *narrativa*. As critics have noted, the existing definitions vary greatly. Rogelio Rodríguez Coronel, in his 1974 prologue to Casa de las Américas's *Recopilación de textos sobre la novela de la Revolución Mexicana*, discusses how critics had defined the *ciclo literario* up to that time. In his overview, he makes note of the wide variation that exists between one

definition and another. The definitions range from the narrow and exclusive to the broad and inclusive. He states:

. . . [G]ran parte de los críticos restringe sus apreciaciones a la narrativa que surge como testimonio de la fase armada de la Revolución (1910-1917), aunque especialistas como Antonio Castro Leal hacen culminar este período en 1920; otra, más generosa, extiende sus fronteras hasta el inicio de la década pasada [the beginning of the 60's]. . . . También, hay autores, como Marcelo Pogolotti, que establecen dos etapas de la novela mexicana de la Revolución: una que comienza con la obra de Mariano Azuela y sufre su agotamiento en la década del cuarenta, y otra, renovadora, que inaugura *Al filo del agua* (1947), de Agustín Yáñez, y llega hasta el presente. (8)

Coronel then makes mention of a definition given by one of the most distinguished and influential critics of the Novel of the Mexican Revolution, Adalbert Dessau. The novel of the Mexican Revolution, as defined by Dessau in his 1972 *La novela de la Revolución Mexicana* (originally published in 1967, in German, with the title *Der mexicanische Revolutionsroman*), comes to an end with Azuela's *Esa sangre* and Agustín Yáñez's *Al filo del Agua* (Dessau 402). Dessau's definition is thus an example of the narrower, more traditional definitions of the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana*.

The narrower definitions of the *narrativa de la Revolución*, exemplified by Dessau's, have not gone by the wayside. Many critics continue to define the *narrativa* more narrowly, using any one of numerous possible criteria to justify their definition. As is noted by Elvia Montes de Oca Navas, many critics define the *novela de la Revolución*

as one that focuses on the Revolution's so-called period of armed struggle. She states: "En términos generales, se considera como [n]ovela de la Revolución Mexicana aquella que narra el período armado de la misma, 1910-1917" (79). She prefers this narrower definition, even though she is aware of the existing broader definitions. She makes her awareness of the broader definitions evident when she offers, in her introduction, an overview of the numerous critics who have studied and defined the novel of the Mexican Revolution. Nonetheless, she prefers to define the *narrativa* more narrowly.

The resilience of the narrower definitions notwithstanding, there are other critics who prefer broader definitions. Antonio Benítez Rojo makes evident that he is among these critics when he states:

De un modo insistente, se ha pretendido encerrar en un círculo la novela de la Revolución Mexicana, dar por explorada su temática, por concluida su actualidad. . . . Trescientas novelas e infinidad de cuentos no han bastado para representar cabalmente el proteico contexto que generó el pueblo mexicano al lanzarse a la lucha. (219)

Another example of such critics is Marta Portal. In her 1980 *Proceso narrativo de la Revolución Mexicana*, we see the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana* as an on-going phenomenon that is still alive at the time she publishes her work. She discusses more than twenty *narradores de la Revolución*, approximately half of whom publish their narratives after the publication of *Al filo del agua*, a novel that marked, according to Adalbert Dessau, the end of the *novela de la Revolución Mexicana*.

Portal gives credit to the critics who had recognized, long before the publication of her 1980 *Proceso narrativo*, that the *narrativa de la Revolución* did not end with *Al filo del agua*. And she points out that two of the more traditional critics were among the first, ironically enough, to recognize the potential need to rethink the standard definitions of the *narrativa*. Portal states:

Acostumbra la crítica tradicional a señalar el inicio de la decadencia de la novela de la Revolución Mexicana en los años cuarenta. Pero, si más sutilmente, el norteamericano Rand Morton, en el cuarenta y nueve, afirma que la novela de la Revolución está aún escribiéndose, el alemán Dessau, en el sesenta y siete, al comentar la aparición de *La región más transparente* (1958), se pregunta sobre la superación o posibilidades de ulterior desarrollo de la novela de la Revolución. (36-37)

Portal does think of *Al filo del agua* as a milestone. However, for Portal, the novel marks a point of transition in the evolution of the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana* rather than an end-point. Portal believes that “a partir de Yáñez,” we see “la otra novela de la Revolución” (39). With regard to the post-Yáñez generation of novelists of the Revolution, she states:

La generación que no había hecho la Revolución se encontró con sus resultados: una clase privilegiada en el poder político y económico y jacaes y miseria esparcidos por la geografía mexicana. Las palabras de los políticos no concuerdan con la realidad que ven los ojos de los novelistas. Y ellos toman la pluma y lanzan sus novelas como nuevos interrogantes cuyo eco debe ponerle a la neoburguesía

<<los pelos de punta>>. . . [Los] pensadores han evolucionado igualmente. Ya no se habla de la Revolución Mexicana, sino del *establishment* de la Revolución Mexicana, y de la renta vitalicia que para <<la familia revolucionaria>> ha supuesto el movimiento político. (39)

According to Portal's conception, novels such as *La región más transparente* and *Pedro Páramo*, which focus on the *resultados* of the Revolution rather than on the Revolution itself, form part of the same tradition as novels such as Azuela's *Los de abajo* and José Rubén Romero's *Apuntes de un lugareño*, which focus on events that took place during the initiation and peak of the Revolution's armed struggle (39).

Alicia Sarmiento is another critic who offers a broader definition of the *narrativa de la Revolución*. She puts forth this definition in her tiny and little-known monograph *Problemática de la narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana*. She offers, furthermore, a comprehensive system of categorization for this narrative. Sarmiento asserts that her proposal represents "apenas un pórtico abierto a ulteriores indagaciones" (9). As true as this may be, her concise proposal is worthy of merit. She directly and effectively tackles the problem of defining the narrative of the Mexican Revolution.

She begins by offering a clear and meaningful overview of previous attempts to comprehend "lo que se ha dado en llamar la [n]arrativa de la Revolución Mexicana" (8). According to Sarmiento, many of these previous attempts shed light, although only implicitly, on the fact that the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana* is a *corriente temática* and, furthermore, on the fact that it by no means comes to an end in the 40's. About Seymour Menton's attempt, she states: "[Menton] acepta implícitamente que,

mientras la Revolución siga motivando obras narrativas que la formalicen como su tema central, la corriente temática de la Revolución no se interrumpe” (38). About Luis A. Castellanos, she states: “[Castellanos] reconoce también tácitamente este hecho desde que incluye entre los autores de la novela de la Revolución a Benítez, Galindo y Rulfo” (38). And about Marta Portal’s aforementioned *Proceso narrativo de la Revolución Mexicana*, she states:

en él se admite la vigencia del tema de la Revolución por la inclusión de autores contemporáneos. La autora opera con un criterio selectivo muy personal pero, de todos modos, registra en su *Proceso Narrativo de la Revolución Mexicana* una nutrida nómina que va desde Azuela hasta Elena Poniatowska. (38)

Sarmiento thus gives credit to Menton, Castellanos and Portal, among others, for helping to establish a theme-based definition of the narrativa de la Revolución.

While Sarmiento asserts confidently that the *narrativa de la Revolución* is essentially a *corriente temática*, she recognizes that her basic assertion leads to a series of unanswered questions and undefined elements. And she also recognizes that these must be addressed before her broad theme-based definition can be useful and convincing. Among the elements that require further definition is the Revolution itself.

Logically, a critic’s definition of the narrative of the Mexican Revolution is directly affected by that critic’s accepted definition of the Revolution. Felipe Garrido, like Sarmiento and others, recognizes the relationship between the former definition and the latter. Garrido makes mention, furthermore, that the difficulty in defining the

Revolution is due in large part to the vagueness of the Revolution's chronological limits or, more specifically, the vagueness of its end date. He states:

La rebelión maderista estalló el 20 de noviembre de 1910 y desencadenó la nutrida sucesión de enfrentamientos, dentro y fuera de los campos de batalla, que conocemos como la Revolución Mexicana. Nadie lo pone en duda. Lo que no está tan claro es cuando terminó la Revolución. . . . Suele ponerse fin el 21 de mayo de 1920, día en que Venustiano Carranza fue cazado en Tlaxcalantongo y en que, ciertamente terminó la lucha frontal entre las dos facciones dominantes. Cabría considerar, sin embargo, como el final definitivo, otra asesinato: El del principal enemigo de Carranza, Álvaro Obregón, en el restaurante La Bombilla, de San Angel, el 17 de julio de 1928, a manos de José León Toral. (841)

Garrido prefers the end date of 1928 over 1920. Accordingly, the novels that focus largely on events taking place between 1920 and 28 could be classified as novels of the Revolution.

The critic Lanin Gyurko takes a different approach towards defining the end date of the Revolution. Rather than precisely specify the end date of the Revolution, he implies that the date falls somewhere in the second part of the decade of the twenties. After this vague end date we have the "aftermath" of the Revolution rather than the Revolution itself (245). Accordingly, we have two categories of novels. One is the novel of the Mexican Revolution. The other, the novel of the aftermath of the Revolution. About the two categories, Gyurko states:

The first, which spans almost the entire twentieth century, one of the most prolific, profound, and original currents in Mexican literature, is the novel of the Mexican Revolution. Among the nations that have experienced revolutions, none has a body of literature so complex, vital, and insistently questioning of the revolutionaries and their leaders, as well as of the revolutionary goals and the methods utilized to achieve them. The second category, encompasses narratives that focus on the aftermath of the revolution, including the Cristero revolt during the late 1920s and the often-painful construction of a new society...It is this second phase that provides dense and fascinating works like Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955), as well as the all-encompassing novel, including Fuentes's expansive and convoluted *La región más transparente* and the baroque synthesis of all epochs of Mexican history found in Fernando del Paso's *José Trigo*. (244-245)

Gyurko would thus place *La región más transparente* and *Los de abajo* in two distinct categories. Nonetheless, his discussion suggests that the two categories are inherently tied to each other.

Alicia Sarmiento, like Gyurko and others, finds it necessary to address the problem of defining the end date of the Revolution, as she defines the *narrativa de la Revolución*. In her concise and convincing solution, she refuses to think of the Revolution as a phenomenon that came to an abrupt ending. She states:

Se cree que resultaría más fiel a la realidad histórica adoptar la denominación de Revolución y Régimen revolucionario para aludir a dos etapas de un mismo y

complejísimo fenómeno. El tránsito de una a otra etapa podría establecerse en el período gubernamental de Cárdenas. Por manera tal que cabrían bajo la denominación de la Narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana las obras cuyo contenido reflejase la problemática realidad de ambas etapas. (26)

Sarmiento's view of the Revolution and the *Régimen revolucionario* as two etapas of the same phenomenon is by no means radical. After all, Mexico's officialist historical discourse insists on the idea that the PRI (i.e. the *régimen revolucionario*) is a continuation of the Mexican Revolution. Of course, Sarmiento's discussion of the relationship between the Revolución and the *régimen revolucionario* serves a different purpose than does the officialist discourse. Sarmiento does not celebrate the fact that the revolution gave way to the PRI. She does, however, recognize this fact. More importantly, she recognizes that the relationship between the *Revolución* and the *Régimen* is one that is explored in several of the novels forming part of the *narrativa de la Revolución*.

Sarmiento admits that her definition of the *narrativa de la Revolución* results in the grouping together of a huge number of works. She points out, however, that critics can sub-categorize the *narrativa* as they see fit for their own purpose. Critics can, for example, divide the numerous novels into "tipologías subtemáticas" (44). According to this approach, Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir* and José Guadalupe de Anda's *Los cristeros* might be placed in the same sub-category, because they focus on the theme of the *cristero* rebellion. Sarmiento points out that the possibilities for "nuevas

agrupaciones” may be endless (44). She then mentions a few possible subcategories and leaves it at that.

Sarmiento, however, goes on at greater length about her proposed system of *diachronic* classification. According to this system, the works are classified into three tiers, according to formal characteristics that are directly tied to the particular period of literary history when they were written. About the first of the three tiers, she states:

La producción de esta etapa corresponde a lo que [el crítico] McManus ha denominado como un “nuevo realismo” y Dessau como “realismo ingenuo”, atendiendo al modo de percepción y representación de la realidad. Bajo el fuerte impacto de la realidad sobre la conciencia creadora, los autores parecen compelidos a contar lo que han visto o vivido. (40)

Mariano Azuela, Martín Luis Guzmán and, to lesser extent, José Rubén Romero are arguably the most notable authors of this first stage of Sarmiento’s chronology.

In the works of the second stage, “la condición de la novela como representación de una realidad dada” continues to be evident (42). Nonetheless, the authors of the second stage produce works that differ significantly from those produced by the authors of the first. About the second stage of authors, Sarmiento writes:

Más culta y cosmopolita que la etapa anterior, se abre a influencias foráneas en materia literaria. Es así como, en el orden formal, la lectura de Joyce, Woolf, Dos Passos y especialmente Faulkner, determina la adopción de nuevas técnicas narrativas. El perspectivismo, las diversas formalizaciones del fluir de la

conciencia, permiten al narrador penetrar en la interioridad de los personajes cuya individualidad conforma de este modo con perfiles más complejos. (41)

Agustín Yáñez and José Revueltas belong to this second stage. Juan Rulfo does and doesn't. His collection of short stories "El llano en llamas" is representative of the second stage, but *Pedro Páramo* is a third stage work.

Regarding the authors of the third stage and their works, Sarmiento states:

. . . es decisiva la influencia de dos hispanoamericanos: Borges de una parte y Asturias de otra porque, por la vía de la deliberada invención o de la alteración insólita de la realidad, han creado nuevas formas expresivas para una nueva dimensión de lo real. Los mexicanos han asimilado y recreado con originalidad estas influencias. De ahí que la expresión de la realidad nacional sea ahora en muchos casos no el trasunto de la directa observación sino la visión refractada por un prisma mágico, mítico y paródico. (43)

A list of the most notable authors of this third stage would include the names of Carlos Fuentes, Elena Garro, Jorge Ibarguengoitia and Elena Poniatowska.

Sarmiento's definition of the narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana is the one I find most useful, convincing, and comprehensive. While it is not my objective to fully apply Sarmiento's system of classification to the four Solares novels I study, her system helps me to situate the four novels, generally yet firmly, within the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana*. Sarmiento establishes, first and foremost, that the narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana is a *corriente temática* and it is this most fundamental aspect of her definition that allows me to include four of Solares' novels as part of the tradition of

narrative. Each focuses on some aspect of that complex phenomenon known as the Mexican Revolution. In *Madero, el otro*, the focus is on Francisco Madero, the man most often credited for initiating the Revolution. In *La noche de Ángeles*, the focus is on Felipe Ángeles, the revolutionary general that typically appears in conventional historiography as Pancho Villa's supreme military strategist. In *El gran elector*, the focus shifts to the *régimen revolucionario*. And in *Columbus*, Solares retells the story of Pancho Villa's attack on Columbus, New Mexico, from the perspective of an old man who has tried to make sense of his own participation in the attack.

My classification of Solares' novels, as important and necessary as it may be, is a preliminary step that leads me to address other questions: How do Solares' novels contribute to the great tradition in which I place them? What aspects of Solares' novels, besides their focus on the theme of the Revolution, represent continuity within the tradition? What elements, if any, represent something new and different? These questions motivated my research.

My first step toward answering these questions was to reread the four Solares' novels that are the primary focus of my study. Of course, as I completed this step, I began comparing the four novels to other novels of the Revolution I had previously read during the course of my graduate coursework. I thus began formulating some preliminary answers to my questions. However, I was aware that I needed to refresh and deepen my knowledge of the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana*, prior to determining if and how Solares' four novels contributed to this tradition.

I decided to proceed by formulating a reading list of ten novels of the Mexican Revolution, and devised criteria for selection of the ten novels. I decided that the list could and should include some of the classic works I had previously read. Furthermore, I decided that the list should represent the works of ten different novelists and serve as a cross section of the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana*, as I understood it. I asked myself which novels would most-likely be selected by critics whose definition of the narrative of the Mexican Revolution was similar to mine. In other words, I asked myself which novels might be selected by critics such as Marta Portal, Silvia Lorente-Murphy, Alicia Sarmiento and Manuel Antonio Arango, all of whom considered the narrative of the Mexican Revolution to be an on-going tradition that spanned several generations of writers. I did not want to exclude titles that would likely appear on each of these critics' lists; I did not want any glaring omissions.

Fortunately, several of those critics who defined the *narrativa de la Revolución* as an on-going tradition had already confronted the challenge of identifying a list of classic or landmark novels of the Revolution. I thus had the luxury of reviewing previous lists. This review led me to identify five novels which would shine by their absence if I were not to include them. The most obvious of these was Azuela's *Los de abajo*. The other four easy choices were Martín Luis Guzmán's *La sombra del caudillo*, Agustín Yáñez's *Al filo del agua*, Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* and Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. All five were identified as landmark novels by nearly all of the critics whose comments I reviewed. Manuel Antonio Arango refers to these very five novels as "las principales novelas de la Revolución Mexicana" (11). I believe the assertion is too bold

and I am aware of no other critic who has made such a statement about them. Nonetheless, among the critics who define the narrativa de la Revolución as an on-going literary tradition, one would be hard-pressed to find one that would exclude these landmark novels from their list of major works. And so, I wanted the five to appear on my list.

The next three novels I added were Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, Jorge Ibarguengoitia's *Los relámpagos de agosto* and José Revuelta's *El luto humano*. Critics do not name these three as often as they do the first five; however, the three titles do appear time and time again. All three are also mentioned by Marta Portal and Silvia Lorente Murphy. Likewise, Alicia Sarmiento includes all three novelists in her list of *narradores de la Revolución Mexicana*.

The last two choices were the most difficult to make. By reviewing the lists of previous critics, I compiled a long list of possible choices but no two clear choices stood out among them. I eventually decided on José Rubén Romero's *Apuntes de un lugareño* and Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*. My reason for including the first is that I wanted to include a work by José Rubén Romero, since he is widely considered to be one of the most important *narradores de la Revolución* and also one of the most important Mexican novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Adalbert Dessau states the following about the novelist:

Una de las más interesantes figuras representativas de la novela mexicana moderna es José Rubén Romero. Después de Azuela y Guzmán, es el más importante creador de novelas de la Revolución. (352)

His most widely read work is *La vida inútil de Pito Pérez*, a novel that many consider a novel of the Revolution in its own right. I, however, selected the lesser-known *Apuntes de un lugareño*, because it is more often identified, along with his novel *Campamento*, as a novel of the Mexican Revolution.

For my tenth choice, I selected Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*. This testimonial novel has been identified as a novel of the Revolution by many critics. I decided to include it for two reasons. First, Poniatowska is currently one of the most important literary voices in all of Latin America. Secondly, since the novel's protagonist, Jesusa Palancares, is a practitioner of Spiritism, I wanted the opportunity to compare Poniatowska's representation of Jesusa's practice of Spiritism to Solares' representation of Madero's practice of Spiritism in *Madero, el otro*.

After completing the list, I then added two additional works by two of the authors already represented on the list: *El águila y la serpiente* by Martín Luis Guzmán and *La región más transparente* by Carlos Fuentes. These two works might have appeared in my original list, were it not for my self-imposed requirement, which called for ten works by ten different authors. Of course, *El águila* and *La región* are both, in the minds of many critics, two landmark examples of the narrative of the Mexican Revolution, and it was convenient for me to add them because I was familiar with the works. The twelve novels that make up the cross section, listed in chronological order by original publication date (in parentheses), are as follows:

1. *Los de Abajo* (1916), by Mariano Azuela.
2. *El águila y la serpiente* (1928), by Martín Luis Guzmán.

3. *La sombra del caudillo* (1929), by Martín Luis Guzmán.
4. *Apuntes de un lugareño* (1932), by José Rubén Romero.
5. *El luto humano* (1943), by José Revueltas.
6. *Al filo del agua* (1947), by Agustín Yáñez.
7. *Pedro Páramo* (1955), by Juan Rulfo.
8. *La región más transparente* (1958), by Carlos Fuentes.
9. *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962), by Carlos Fuentes.
10. *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (1963), by Elena Garro.
11. *Los relámpagos de agosto* (1964), by Jorge Ibargüengoitia.
12. *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1969), by Elena Poniatowska.

My study of these twelve and Solares' four novels of the Mexican Revolution allowed me to formulate two fundamental preliminary observations. First, I observed that Solares' novels, like nearly all of the novels of the cross section, contradicted the conventional celebratory interpretation of the Revolution. Each conveyed the idea that the Revolution had been betrayed by those who took power when the armed struggle ended. Solares' novels were thus remarkably similar to the novels of my cross section, all but one of which expressed discontent with the final outcome of the Revolution. In Solares' novels, however, I observed a sustained optimism that was not evident in the novels of the cross section. I learned this was a fundamental difference. Solares' novels presented their critique and at the same time reflected a desire to transcend the pessimism that dominated the critiques found in previous novels.

As I began to elaborate my two preliminary observations, I found I could not convincingly support their validity without first substantiating and explaining, at some length, several assumptions I was making. First, I would have to substantiate my assumptions about Mexico's conventional and celebratory interpretation of the Revolution. How could I argue that Solares' novels contradicted the conventional interpretation of the Revolution without first specifying and documenting the nature of the interpretation being contradicted? I knew some the basic elements of the conventional epic but I lacked the expertise to define its parameters matter-of-factly. Thus, in order to trace a summary of the conventional interpretation, I would have to find concrete and convincing coordinates by looking to experts on Mexican historiography and to various examples from conventional and official historical discourse.

The second fundamental idea I had to substantiate was that eleven of the twelve novels of the cross section were pessimistic. I had a strong sense that my observation was valid; nonetheless, I was not prepared to defend the accuracy of my observation. I had to substantiate the idea that pessimism was a virtual constant in the novels of the cross section. Only then could I go on to argue that Solares' four novels of the Revolution were *unusually* optimistic.

With the objective of substantiating these ideas I proceeded with the second stage of my research. This led me to achieve my objective as planned and also cleared some misconceptions. Furthermore, I began formulating an outline to help me keep straight the various components of my findings and my arguments. The outline grew and eventually changed into several distinct outlines, four of which I would then develop into the four

following chapters of this dissertation. The four chapters, in their final form, may be summarized as follows.

In my first chapter, I begin by giving a brief overview of Mexico's conventional epic of national history, showing that the Mexican Revolution represents the culminating chapter in the triumphalist epic. In the second section of the chapter, I show that the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana* is a literary tradition that contradicts the familiar celebratory interpretation of the Revolution. I support my argument by making reference to several literary critics who have previously discussed this aspect of the narrative tradition. I also look to the cross section to find numerous clear and concrete examples of the revisionist tendency. Eleven of the twelve narratives of the cross section contradict the conventional celebratory interpretation by communicating to the reader the idea that the Revolution was betrayed by those who came to power as a result of the armed struggle. *Al filo del agua* (hereafter referred to as *Al filo*) is the one exception. In the third section of the chapter, I proceed to show how Solares' four novels of the Revolution contribute to the ongoing contradiction and revision of the familiar conventional epic.

In chapter two, I begin by arguing that the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana* is indeed, as many critics have suggested, a pessimistic genre. The cross section offers ample evidence of this pessimism. *Al filo*, however, is once again the exception. I take a brief look at each of the novels of the cross section, pinpointing and tracing reflections of pessimism. Each, except for *Al filo*, ends with a situation that suggests little opportunity for improvement. They emphasize the tragic failures of the society and characters portrayed, and offer little to suggest that the tragic turn of events will eventually be

reversed. In each novel of the cross section, there is a correlation between a novel's contradiction of the celebratory version of history and the novel's pessimism. In short, the reflection of pessimism goes hand in hand with the novels' contradiction of the epic conventional version of national history.

In the second section of chapter two, I show that Solares' novels do not perpetuate this correlation. Solares' novels reflect a desire and an ability to look beyond the failures of the Revolution, and they facilitate a transcendence of the pessimism that has typically predominated among those who recognized the failures. Solares expresses and explores, by way of his narratives, dark feelings of disillusionment and pessimism. However, he does not allow these feelings to dominate his narratives. I close the chapter by commenting that Solares' novels, with their optimism, represent a timely change of direction for the *narrativa de la Revolución*. Previous novelists managed to explore and express, to the point of exhaustion, the pessimism that the critic Marta Portal associates with a post-war attitude.

In chapter three, I argue that Solares' optimistic vision is facilitated by his religious conception of existence. Furthermore, I show how Solares' novels encourage the reader to understand religious faith as an empowering force. Each of Solares' novels suggests that religious faith can and must facilitate individual fulfillment and social progress. This suggestion is unique in the narrative of the Mexican Revolution. Commentaries about the value of religious faith, any variation of it, are nowhere to be found in any of the novels of the cross section. We do find illustrations of the ways in which religious faith, particularly in the form of Catholicism, has slowed down,

prevented, or failed to contribute to such progress. But none of the novels encourage the reader to look toward any kind of religion or spiritual discipline as a means of achieving progress for either society or the individual. Solares' novels do not undermine the previous novels' critique of the Catholic Church. In fact, Solares points to the shortcomings of the dominant institutionalized religion in Mexico. However, alongside this critique there is a clear message about the importance of living according to the dictates of a set of religious beliefs and a religious discipline, and the religious path he outlines is not only a facilitator of spiritual salvation but also of social progress.

In chapter four, I begin by situating Solares in the rapidly changing landscape of contemporary Mexican novelists. I end the first section by concurring with Raymond Leslie Williams' observation that Solares is, among other things, a writer of postmodern historical novels. I point out however, that certain definitions of postmodern art and literature, particularly those that define the postmodern aesthetic as ahistorical and apolitical, are not applicable to the four novels I study. With this clarification, I begin the second half of the fourth chapter, where I discuss how Solares' novels respond to the social and political dilemmas that prevail at the time they are published. I argue that the novels, with their attention to history, their optimistic religiosity and, most importantly, their reverence for Madero's ideals, offer a clear and direct response to the great sociopolitical crisis that defines the final two decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexico.

## Chapter 1

### Solares' Response to the Conventional

### Interpretation of the Mexican Revolution

The *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana* is typified by works that question the conventional celebratory interpretation of the Mexican Revolution (Gyurko 246). Solares' four novels of the Revolution represent a continuation of this trend in Mexican fiction. In each of the four, Solares alters a fundamental aspect of the conventional interpretation of the Revolution, thus contributing to a subversion of the celebratory epic. Primary among Solares' alterations is his reinterpretation of Francisco Madero in *Madero, el otro*. The reinterpreted Madero, whose image is restored rather than tarnished by Solares' treatment, facilitates Solares' subsequent alterations, one of which is the dethroning of Venustiano Carranza from his pedestal in the official pantheon of revolutionary heroes. The glory that Solares takes away from Carranza, he gives to the lesser known Felipe Ángeles, whom he portrays in *La noche de Ángeles* as one of the greatest champions of Madero's cause. In *El gran elector*, Solares continues his subversive alteration of the conventional epic by lampooning the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (the PRI) and stripping the party of its revolutionary credentials. Then, in *Columbus*, Solares retells the story of Pancho Villa's military attack on the United States. The retelling serves to commemorate the unfortunate yet significant role that mediocre, pathetic individuals have played in perpetuating the myth of the Mexican Revolution.

## The conventional interpretation of the Mexican Revolution in historical discourse

In Mexican historiography, the Mexican Revolution is usually interpreted as the last great milestone in the nation's struggle for progress. It is the culminating episode in an epic narrative of national history. And, as Eric Van Young has observed, historiographers tend to follow the same narrative pattern when putting forth the celebratory interpretation of the "Great Event." Van Young summarizes the epic that is "now familiar to most Mexicanists," as follows:

In [the familiar epic], one failed or partial revolution gives way to another, and the Great Event [i.e. the Mexican Revolution] is somehow immanent in all of them. The Bourbon Reforms of the eighteenth century attempted to jump-start *étatiste* forms of modernization in the colony (so the narrative runs), creating social and political contradictions resolved only in part by independence from Spain. Independent but not yet a nation, the shaky new state stumbled, was preyed upon and eventually dismembered. It fell victim to forms of praetorian opportunism and internecine struggle resolved only in part by the liberal revolution of the Reforma, then by a second and more effective wave of authoritarian modernization during the Porfiriato. These great cycles of change-within-stasis awaited a society-wide upheaval to send the remnants of the old society crashing down, a denouement that took the form of a great revolution. The post-revolutionary state effectively consolidated, deepened, and extended economic modernization; sculpted a durable neo-authoritarian political arrangement made decent with a populist fig-leaf; and finally managed to generate a feeling of Mexicanness across large

sectors of the national population. This affective and moral project was one that creole patriots, liberal reformers, Porfirians and even 1910 revolutionaries had failed to realize. (144-45)

Van Young points out that the Mexican Revolution is not, in this type of rendering, “just another white cap rolling in toward the beach,” but rather, “a mighty tsunami that permanently changed the Mexican landscape” (145). He makes clear, furthermore, that the “1910 revolutionaries” are not the sole heroes of the cataclysmic wave of change. After all, it was not they who ultimately realized the huge “affective and moral project” known as the Mexican Revolution. The final realization was the work of the men who continued the project by consolidating a new state after the armed revolutionary struggle had ended.

The conventional epic, with its celebration of the Revolution and its emphasis on the role of the post-revolutionary state, has been given validity through various means of historical representation in contemporary Mexico. These means would include civic monuments, television documentaries, historical soap operas, propaganda produced by the PRI and, most importantly, history books. Among these history books, the ones that project the classic epic most clearly are perhaps the history textbooks used in the classrooms of the Mexican public school system. Josefina Zoraida Vázquez discusses the content of these textbooks in *Nacionalismo y educación en México*, her excellent retrospective of the teaching of national history in the Mexican school system from the beginning of the twentieth century through 1961. Vázquez explains that the first history textbooks to make mention of the Revolution were the ones published in the years

immediately following the end of the armed struggle. In these early texts, the Revolution was not yet being portrayed consistently and clearly as the culminating episode of Mexico's history. However, with the passing of time, the Revolution took on greater and greater significance, particularly in the textbooks published specifically for use in the public school system.<sup>4</sup> By 1960, the last year covered in Vázquez's survey, the State was requiring all public schools to use the "free" history textbooks published by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP). In these textbooks, the Revolution is unhesitantly portrayed as the culminating event in an epic story of national progress.

Vázquez's study does not look at the content of any SEP textbooks published after 1960, the crucial year in which the state began requiring all public schools to use the free SEP textbooks. However, Bernardo Mabire explains that the version contained in the official history textbooks of 1960 is one that persists virtually unchanged through the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He states:

las grandes líneas explicativas de las etapas fundamentales en la historia nacional se mantienen constantes en los libros de texto gratuitos de 1960-65, 1974-75 y 1992, excepto por los vaivenes de los juicios respecto a la dominación española. ("Dilemas del nacionalismo" 403)

To be sure, one of the *grandes líneas explicativas* of the SEP textbooks is the one that explains how the Revolution did away with a repressive regime (i.e. the *Porfiriato*), giving way to a new era of stability and economic development for Mexico.

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<sup>4</sup> For details as to how the official textbooks' presentation of the pantheon of Revolutionary heroes evolves with the passing of time, see Zoraida, pages 189, 196, 209, 258, 276, 278, 280, 281, 282.

The SEP textbooks are but one type of history book that has helped to project the celebratory interpretation of the Revolution to the masses. Also important are the countless history books that summarize, for adult audiences, the history of the Mexican Revolution or the history of Mexico. Regarding these books which are sold in bookstores throughout Mexico, the SEP is once again worthy of mention. It is one of the most active publishers of such books. Curiously enough, the SEP publications that fall within this second category of history book follow the same *líneas explicativas* as the free SEP textbooks, at least with regard to the Revolution. The SEP's *Historia de México: Una síntesis*, originally published in 1961, is one example that allows us to see the confluence. Near the end of the book's final chapter, the authors of the *Historia* state:

Al lado del desarrollo económico y material que ha logrado cambiar radicalmente la fisonomía física, social y cultural del territorio y población del país, la Revolución Mexicana ha sido también la causa de un intenso desenvolvimiento científico, artístico y espiritual, que se caracteriza por su orientación funcional, nacionalista, democrática y libertaria. (121)

The authors close by stating:

Y aunque fue mucha la sangre derramada en nuestra última sacudida social y son todavía muchísimos los problemas no resueltos, y aún quedan muchas lacras, y todavía no alcanza el país plena madurez política, puede, sin embargo, afirmarse que, gracias a su revolución, México ha realizado progresos efectivos en el aspecto social, económico y político. Si la Revolución Mexicana es la primera gran convulsión social del presente siglo, puede, en cierto modo, aseverarse que,

con ella, México – a pesar de su atraso en muchos aspectos – ha sido el primer país que ingresó al siglo XX, una centuria que comenzó aquí en 1910. (132)

The authors' conclusion is clear: The Mexican Revolution may not have eradicated all of Mexican society's problems and injustices; nonetheless, the "sacudida social" represents a great final triumph in Mexico's history.

The interpretation offered in the 1961 *Historia* is typical, not only because it defines the Revolution as a great triumph, but also because it defines it as an event that spans several decades. The heroes of the Revolution are not only those men who participated in the period of heavy armed struggle, but also those who consolidated the state in the decades that followed. In fact, we are told in the *Historia* that the Revolution does not come to fruition until Carranza assumes the title of *primer jefe*. The 1910 uprisings inspired by Madero mark only the *estallido* of the Revolution. It isn't until the latter part of the decade, when Carranza takes over, that the Revolution begins to bear fruit. Under Carranza's leadership, the Revolution enters the long and great era of *constitucionalismo*. Carranza's tenure marks but the first of several "puntos evolutivos" of the decades-long era. The latter "puntos" are marked by the administrations of Álvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elias Calles, Emilio Portes Gil, Pascual Ortiz Rubio, Abelardo Rodríguez, Lázaro Cárdenas, Manuel Avila Camacho and Miguel Alemán.

But we needn't limit ourselves to SEP publications to find other examples of the conventional interpretation summarized by Van Young. In fact, any synopsis of Mexican history that is targeted for a wide audience will likely feature a narrative that follows the pattern outlined by Van Young. For example, the Colegio de México's *Historia Mínima*

*de México* (1971), published one decade after the SEP publishes its *Historia de México: Una síntesis*. The 1971 *Historia* is the result of a collaborative effort of several distinguished historians, including Daniel Cosío Villegas, who served as coordinator of the project. The text, written for “un público no sólo numeroso sino sumamente heterogéneo,” dedicates two of its seven chapters to the Mexican Revolution (9). The second of the two chapters, written by Dr. Cosío Villegas, begins by explaining matter-of-factly that scholars who specialize in the study of the Mexican Revolution agree “más o menos” that the Revolution can be divided into three stages (159). The third of these stages, he explains, “ha sido llamada la etapa de ‘consolidación’ o de ‘modernización’, si bien el nombre más gráfico es el de ‘estabilidad política y avance económico’ ”(159). This third stage “se inicia de verdad en 1929, cuando se funda el primer partido político oficial o gubernamental con el nombre de Partido Nacional Revolucionario” (159). According to Villegas, the official revolutionary party, which began as the PNR and later was changed to the PRI, must be given credit for surviving “los embates del tiempo, . . . aún cuando no puede atribuírsele todo el mérito del cambio tan saludable” (161). Cosío Villegas thus implies that the third stage of the Revolution lasts well into the second half of the century and, furthermore, that this stage was characterized by the advent of a series of beneficial economic changes taking place in an era of political stability. To be sure, readers of this third chapter of the *Historia* would never guess that Dr. Villegas was criticized on more than one occasion for encouraging negative interpretations of the Revolution (For examples of this line of criticism against Cosío Villegas, see Cosío Villegas, *Tres polémicas*.)

## The interpretation of the “Great Event” in the novel of the Mexican Revolution

While celebratory assessments of the Revolution and the post-revolutionary state are easy to find in Mexican historiography, one is hard pressed to find such interpretations in Mexican narrative fiction. In fiction, the assessment of the Mexican Revolution tends to be negative. As the critic Jorge Fornet points out: “El caso es que la novelística revolucionaria [i.e. the *narrativa de la Revolución mexicana*], aunque trató de ser fiel a los hechos – o tal vez por eso mismo – se negó a asumir un papel obsecuente o laudatorio” (6). The following literary critics have come to similar conclusions about the *narrativa*. Helena Beristáin, in a study of the novels of Azuela, Guzmán, Romero and López y Fuentes, argues that the novelists communicate, through their narratives, the idea that “la ‘Revolución’ no fue más que un mito, una palabreja sin valor y sin contenido, usada con acierto por la oligarquía explotadora, para afianzar mejor su poder sobre la irredenta muchedumbre de los parias.”<sup>5</sup> Another critic, Alicia Sarmiento, concludes that the indictment of the Mexican Revolution is, in fact, a quintessential element of the *narrativa de la Revolución*. She argues that the novels reflect the “común actitud crítica de los autores respecto a la Revolución misma” (11). About this “común actitud,” she states:

. . . [la] actitud de crítica frente a la Revolución hace coincidir a autores de diversas procedencias ideológicas. Se manifiesta desde la simple mostración de

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<sup>5</sup>Quoted in the “Otras opiniones” section, p. 320, of Rogelio Rodríguez Coronel, ed. *Recopilación de textos sobre la novela de la Revolución Mexicana*. See Bibliography for complete entry on the *Recopilación*.

los hechos hasta las expresiones abiertamente contrarias a la Revolución puestas en bocas de personajes novelescos. La Revolución, aún cuando aparezca en muchas obras como un hecho necesario, es puesta en juicio por variadas razones: por no haber sido fiel a los ideales, por la corrupción de los dirigentes, por la violencia desatada, por no haber llevado a cabo reformas políticas, sociales o económicas que de ella se esperaban, por no ser revolucionarias, y por serlo. (33)

Sarmiento continues her commentary by affirming that the harsh critique of the Revolution, “tanto como el tema [de la Revolución], constituye un elemento común a todas las obras de las diversas épocas” (33). Her statement echoes the conclusion of the critic Luis Castellanos who had asserted decades earlier that the *narrativa de la Revolución* expresses a disbelief (“un descreimiento”) in the ultimate objectives and achievements of the Revolution (23). Castellanos asserts boldly that this expression of disbelief is a *constante* of the *narrativa de la Revolución*, stating further:

Esta [constante], que podría entenderse como crítica interna, no es un sentimiento antirrevolucionario, sino un deseo de que los principios en cuyo nombre se inició la lucha no fuesen traicionados, de que no se aprovechara el hambre de justicia para levantar nuevas castas privilegiadas mientras otros sectores quedasen privados de los más elemental. (23)

My cross section of the *narrativa de la Revolución*, as identified in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, offers little evidence to the contrary. Of the twelve novels listed, only one offers a somewhat celebratory interpretation of the “Great Event,” while

eleven underline the failures of the Revolution rather than the progress it may have brought about. *Al filo del agua* is the one exception.

*Al filo*'s endorsement of the Revolution has been noted by several literary critics. Rand Morton highlights this endorsement in his 1949 study of Yáñez's work. More recently, in a book-length analysis of Yáñez's work, Christopher Harris convincingly argues that *Al filo* "was clearly designed to steer readers towards a critical yet ultimately positive assessment of the uprising's social impact on rural Mexico" (9). Harris supports his argument by stating:

The ending of the novel, for example, provides a case in point. María's departure from the village in the company of the revolutionaries, despite fears that she will be raped, is presented to us as a climactic moment of liberation from the oppressive dictates of religious fanaticism. Her newly-found freedom thus embodies what for Yáñez was the most observable achievement of the Mexican Revolution: 'La bandera más alta de la Revolución,' he stated to an audience of artists and politicians in 1951, 'es la libertad.' With María's freedom in mind, it becomes clear that as the revolutionaries sweep through the village they come to represent a force for social and political change which, at both an individual and collective level, we are invited to expect will be for the better not for the worse.

(9)

Harris is aware that his interpretation of *Al filo* echoes the previous conclusions of several critics, among them Joseph Sommers, who argued that Yáñez's evaluation of the

Mexican Revolution is “guarded” but “relatively optimistic” (Sommers 67, qtd. in Harris 10).

*Al filo*'s endorsement of the Revolution is not to be found in any of the other novels of the cross section. In fact, the other novels project a negative interpretation of the Revolution. The work of critics who have previously studied these novels verifies this characteristic. Elvia Montes de Oca Navas, in her discussion of Azuela's *Los de Abajo*, Romero's *Apuntes de un lugareño*, Guzmán's *La sombra del caudillo* and *El águila y la serpiente*, offers some insightful observations. Regarding *Los de abajo*, she argues that its central message is voiced through the character of Luis Cervantes, when he tells his friend Venancio: “Lástima de tanta vida segada, de tantas viudas y huérfanos, de tanta sangre vertida! Todo ¿para qué? Para que unos cuantos bribones se enriquezcan y todo quede igual o peor que antes” (*Los de abajo* 44 , qtd. in Montes de Oca Navas 180). About the writer José Rubén Romero, the critic comments that he is among the novelists who “se muestran avergonzados del curso que siguió la Revolución, así como de los resultados” (175-76) . Romero's *Apuntes de un lugareño*, like so many other narratives of the genre, registers “el engaño de muchas promesas no cumplidas” (Montes de Oca Navas 175-76). The critic goes on to discuss Guzmán's *La sombra del caudillo* and *El águila y la serpiente*, pointing out how both narratives evoke a war that results only in a vicious struggle among factions driven by selfish ambitions (186-88).

Silvia Lorente-Murphy echoes Beristáin as well as Montes de Oca Navas when she states the following about Guzmán's *La sombra*:

De una manera profundamente crítica, el autor presenta el tético cuadro de la política mexicana de los años veinte, demostrando de qué material se hizo la Revolución, y, especialmente, los efectos que produjo: un ambiente político corrompido y dirigentes corruptos y ambiciosos. (852)

Lorente-Murphy finds an equally negative assessment in Rulfo's *El llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*. These two works suggest that “no ha habido, en rigor, una Revolución” (855). She continues:

El régimen porfirista no sufrió un menoscabo de fondo. Así lo atestiguan los campesinos relegados al silencio, a la soledad, a la miseria y a la violencia como único medio de sentirse aún vivos, de *El llano en llamas*, y así lo atestiguan los muertos y semimuertos de *Pedro Páramo*, curtidos de soledad y esperanzas frustradas. De la Revolución Mexicana, sólo ha quedado una terminología, unas imágenes, decoraciones, anécdotas y motivos artísticos, es decir, elementos periféricos, pero en el fondo, un vacío total. (855)

Rulfo's works thus provoke, “probablemente sin proponérselo, el más tremendo, convincente y eficaz desmontaje del mito de la Revolución Mexicana” (857).

In Revueltas' *El luto humano*, we see another example of the type of *desmontaje* that Lorente Murphy identifies in her interpretation of *Pedro Páramo*. Antoine Rabadán points out that the Revolution, as portrayed by Revueltas, “lleva al pueblo a liberarse, sólo que en un sentido negativo que desemboca en la limitación de su humanidad” (22) . Rabadán continues,

Al interés colectivo y a la conciencia colectiva que guiaban los primeros años de la Revolución, sucede un antagonismo de individualidades en el seno mismo del pueblo y este fenómeno conduce a la trágica realidad de la Revolución Mexicana: el arribismo. Del pueblo en armas surge una nueva clase de burgueses negociantes, enriquecida a expensas de la vieja burguesía porfirista. La unidad del pueblo estalla en otros tantos elementos antagónicos. (24)

The idea that the Mexican Revolution resulted quite simply in a transfer of power from one bourgeoisie to another is communicated even more emphatically in Carlos Fuentes' *La región más transparente*. The critic Francisco Javier Ordiz is among the critics who have discussed this aspect of the novel. According to Ordiz, Fuentes' landmark novel suggests that the Revolution brought excessive wealth and power to a new elite class that is as selfish and greedy as the prerevolutionary oligarchy. Ordiz also argues that the novel offers readers a glimpse at the way in which members of Mexico's new ruling class manipulated the history of the Revolution into a social myth that justifies their elite position (Ordiz 225). The character of Federico Robles is a symbol of this new elite class. At one point in the novel, the shamelessly corrupt Robles looks out onto the city from his penthouse apartment and tells Manuel Zamacona, "con México, solo se puede hacer lo que nosotros, la Revolución hemos hecho. Hacerlo progresar" (*La región* 279, qtd. in Ordiz 225). Robles' hypocrisy has reached absurd proportions as he makes this statement.

Fuentes continues his critique of the Mexican Revolution in *La Muerte de Artemio Cruz*. The critic Walter Langford perceives this novel as Fuentes' "judgment of

the Revolution some forty years after its inception,” pointing out that Fuentes “indicts the Revolution in powerful terms for failing all of the people except the few who got rich off it by corrupt and ruthless practices” (134) . This indictment comes through clearly. The reader will hear this indictment, for example, when the narrator reveals the thoughts of don Gamaliel Bernal at precisely the moment in which Bernal finds himself tragically relinquishing everything, including his only daughter, to a younger man who symbolizes the Revolution. The younger man is, of course, Artemio Cruz. When Bernal realizes that Cruz will take his place in the hierarchy of power, he contemplates the situation as follows:

Artemio Cruz. Así se llamaba la guerra civil; así se llamaban quienes llegaban a sustituirlo . . . . Desventurado país que a cada generación tiene que destruir a los antiguos poseedores y sustituirlos por nuevos amos, tan rapaces y ambiciosos como los anteriores. (50)

Bernal’s epiphany captures Fuentes’ tragic interpretation of the Revolution. Artemio, who symbolizes the Revolution, is no better than the men he replaced. He is simply the new man in charge.

Regarding Elena Garro’s *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, the critic Jorge Fornet points out that “la trayectoria de la Revolución es resumida en breves líneas,” as the narrator states:

Hubo un momento, cuando Venustiano Carranza traicionó a la Revolución triunfante y tomó el poder, en que las clases adineradas tuvieron un alivio. Después, con el asesinato de Emiliano Zapata, de Francisco Villa y de Felipe

Ángeles, se sintieron seguras. Pero los generales traidores a la Revolución instalaron un gobierno tiránico y voraz que sólo compartía la riqueza y los privilegios con sus antiguos enemigos y cómplices en la traición: los grandes terratenientes del porfirismo. (Garro 70, qtd. in Fonet 32)

Ibargüengoitia's *Los relámpagos de agosto* certainly gives the reader a strong dose of comic relief that is absent from most novels of the Revolution. But the humor does not take away from the severity of the critique launched by Ibargüengoitia. The central character of *Los relámpagos de agosto*, like the central character of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, is a revolutionary general who strives for personal power with no interest for any type of revolutionary ideals.

In Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, the focus is not on a revolutionary general, caudillo, or politician, but on a peasant woman who participates in the Revolution as a *soldadera*: Jesusa Palancares. The outspoken Jesusa, who narrates the testimonial novel, seems little interested in painting a rosy picture about her past. In fact, most of her recollections are marked by cynicism and bitterness. Her recollection of the Revolution is no exception. At one point in the narrative she tells the story of how *zapatista* forces, under the command of a General Mariscal, shot down the *carrancista* general, Julian Blanco, at the Fuerte de San Diego in Acapulco. She states:

Allí fue donde los mariscaleños, la gente de Mariscal, comenzaron a balacear a Julián Blanco que era carrancista. Había sido zapatista lo mismo que Mariscal, pero cuando los carrancistas se hicieron del puerto, todos se voltearon a ser carrancistas. Se olvidaron que eran zapatistas. Así fue la revolución, que ahora

soy de éstos, pero mañana seré de los otros, a chaquetazo limpio, el caso de estar con el más fuerte, el que tiene más parque. También ahora es así. (71)

The fact that Jesusa's situation was clearly not improved as a result of the tragic Revolution she remembers, gives greater weight to her critique.

#### The interpretation of the Revolution in Solares' novels

Solares' novels of the Mexican Revolution continue the trend exemplified in all but one of the novels of the cross section. Each of the four subverts the conventional and celebratory interpretation of the Revolution. Solares begins this subversion with his unconventional portrayal of Francisco I. Madero. As portrayed by Solares, Madero is a hero whose brilliance and courage is tied to his practice of Spiritism.<sup>6</sup> Solares' portrayal of Madero sets up his unique reinterpretation of Felipe Ángeles as the greatest disciple and successor of Madero. And the glory that Solares gives to Ángeles he takes away from Venustiano Carranza, whom he topples from his pedestal in the officialist pantheon of revolutionary heroes. Solares then takes an even bolder subversive step, as he launches a

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<sup>6</sup> Cynthia Steele offers a useful definition of Spiritism in her *Politics, Gender and the Mexican Novel*. She states: "Spiritism was introduced to the Latin American elites during the nineteenth century, eventually finding its way to the urban and rural lower classes, where it became syncretized with folk Catholicism. This occultic religion, which is based on the theories of Allan Kardec (a pen name for Leon Denizarth Hippolyte Rivail, France, 1804-1869), is similar in most respects to orthodox Christianity, particularly in its concept of the dual (material and spiritual) nature of humanity and in its ethical emphasis on good conduct as a basis for reward. The major difference lies in its belief in possession (in some cases, through mediums and assistant mediums, or *mediumidades*) as a means of communication between incarnate spirits and incorporeal beings" (Steele 59). About the doctrine of Spiritism and Allan Kardec, Enrique Krauze explains: La doctrina basada en la existencia, las manifestaciones y enseñanzas de los espíritus había nacido a mediados del siglo [XIX] en el estado de Nueva York, pero se propagó con vertiginosa rapidez en Francia gracias a su adopción por quien a la postre sería su principal profeta y fundador: Allan Kardec. Hacia 1854 había más de tres millones de espiritistas practicantes en el mundo y decenas de miles de mediums en Europa y América. Antes de morir, en 1868, Allan Kardec había escrito ya varios libros – entre otros, *Le Livre des Esprits* (1857), *L'Évangile selon l'espiritisme*, *Livre des Mediums* (1864) – y fundado la *Revue Spirite* y la Société Parisienne d'Études Spirites. (*Biografía del poder* 11-12)

frontal attack against the official party of the Revolution, the PRI. Solares' final subversive step is his retelling of the often sidelined episode of Pancho Villa's attack on the town of Columbus, New Mexico. When Solares puts this episode under his lens, a most unattractive and uninspiring type of revolutionary is revealed. The central character of the narrative is not the legendary Pancho Villa, as might be expected. Instead, Solares gives us the carefully crafted character of Luis Treviño, who is, by design, one of the most pitiful and mediocre men to ever grace the pages of any novel or history of the Revolution.

To better understand the subversive nature of Solares' novels, it is useful to first look at the way in which some of Solares' key subjects, topics and characters have appeared in officialist and conventional historical discourse. Let us begin with the figure of Madero. In Mexico's national pantheon of revolutionary heroes, Madero's position is a prominent one, to be sure. He is the initiator of an ultimately triumphant Revolution and one of its greatest heroes. As to Madero's involvement with Spiritism, most historians prefer to avoid the topic altogether or to dismiss it as an excusable and irrelevant eccentricity of Madero.

Enrique Krauze's take on Madero's involvement with Spiritism is an exception. In his chapter on Madero, entitled "Místico de la libertad", he argues that Madero's adherence to his spiritual beliefs and to the doctrine of Spiritism was of profound influence in the shaping of his character, his life and his presidency. With regard to Madero's six-year period of study in Europe, Krauze states: "[A Madero] no lo arroban el arte ni los países que visita, sino 'el descubrimiento que más ha hecho por la

trascendencia de [su] vida': el espiritismo" (25). About Madero's initial interest in politics, which begins a few years after his discovery of Spiritism, Krauze states: "La política no desplaza al espiritismo: nace de él" (33).

Krauze's emphasis on the relevance of Madero's involvement with Spiritism is not at all conventional. It is more common to see historians ignore or quickly dismiss Madero's Spiritism as an irrelevant idiosyncrasy of the great hero. An example of this type of dismissal is found in Eliseo Rangel Gaspar's *Imagen de Madero*, published in 1984 by the Departamento del Distrito Federal as part of a collection entitled *Conciencia cívica nacional*. The officialist historian argues that José Vasconcelos accurately understood Madero's connection with Spiritism. He thus proceeds to define "la verdadera dimensión del espiritismo por Madero sustentado" by summarizing Vasconcelos' interpretation (162). Vasconcelos, we are told, found it significant that his good friend Madero never spoke with him seriously about the subject of Spiritism, having had every opportunity to do so during their frequent discussions of "temas filosóficos" (qtd. in Rangel Gaspar 162). Vasconcelos stated: "Jamás le oí tomar en serio, ni mencionar siquiera el credo espiritista" (qtd. in Rangel Gaspar 162). Vasconcelos' conclusion is that Madero never truly believed the ideas on which the Spiritist doctrine is based, and that the hero's "pasajera conexión" with Spiritism was nothing more than an irrelevant pastime: "Ni creyó en ellas ni mantuvo esa relación en los días de su madurez intelectual. Mucho menos cuando tuvo a su cargo la función ejecutiva de la nación" (qtd. in Rangel Gaspar 162).

The dismissal of Madero's Spiritism as an irrelevant eccentricity is typical of conventional historiography. This dismissal serves as something of a protective mechanism, so that Madero's atypical beliefs do not appear as a severe flaw. A more damaging flaw to his portrait comes as the result of historians' emphases on the idea that Madero was a well-deserving yet somewhat incompetent player; a dreamer unable to realize his vision; a good yet naive man. As Enrique Krauze states: "La bondad de Madero siempre se ha confundido con cierta ingenuidad" (32). And the episode of Madero's execution on the order of Huerta is often presented as conclusive evidence of the hero's naiveté and his inability to act pragmatically. Even Adrián Aguirre Benavides, whose numerous representations of Madero are nothing short of reverent, makes Madero look weak when he tackles the episode of the hero's execution. In Benavides' *Errores de Madero*, an officialist work written under the "patrocinio del señor Licenciado José López Portillo," the author begins by stating that the purpose of the book is to "exaltar la figura del iniciador de la Revolución Mexicana" through an "análisis de los errores que sus detractores le atribuyen" (11). Benavides does an admirable job, for the most part, of defending Madero against those who see Madero's so-called errors as evidence of his shortcomings. However, the historian falls short of his objective when attempting to explain how and why the great hero was blind to the plotting of the villainous Victoriano Huerta. The best Benavides can do is quote Vasconcelos' rather awkward explanation of Madero's apparent lack of foresight. The quote reads:

Lo más probable es que el destino, al consumir fines tortuosos, ciega a los más lúcidos en el instante en que van a destruirlos; sobreviene una especie de parálisis

[en] la víspera de las derrotas injustas pero inevitables. La maldición que pesa sobre nuestra patria obscureció la mente del más despejado de sus hijos, entorpeció la acción del más ágil de sus héroes. (qtd. in Benavides 161)

This Vasconcelos quote makes for a shoddy defense of Madero. Rather than help Benavides achieve his objective of exalting the figure of Madero, the quote taints Madero's portrait by emphasizing the hero's tragic failure to act pragmatically in his final moments. Benavides' representation of Madero is an example of the way in which historians' celebration of the hero is often dampened by an emphasis on the hero's inability to act pragmatically in the most crucial moments.

The attention given to Madero's supposed naiveté and tragic lack of foresight does not facilitate the embellishment of his portrait. It does, however, facilitate the embellishment of the portrait of one of his official successors: Venustiano Carranza. In the pantheon of Mexico's great revolutionary heroes, Carranza's figure is somewhat less prominent than Madero's. He is, nonetheless, one of the Revolution's "great men." Many are the historians whose representations of Carranza are nothing short of reverent. Some of the most blatantly celebratory portrayals of the "primer jefe" are those offered by Isidro Fabela, one of Mexico's prolific historiographers. In Fabela's literary portraits of Carranza, the *primer jefe* appears as a virtually flawless superhero. In *Paladines de la libertad*, Fabela writes:

Carranza adunaba en su persona, moral e intelectual, eminentes cualidades: era honrado en el más amplio sentido del vocablo. Teniendo hacienda la mermó a tal grado que a su familia la dejó en la pobreza. . . . Era lo que se llamaba un hombre

de juicio: de una inteligencia sagaz aunque no vivaz, que le hacía ver las cosas, las circunstancias y los hombres con nitidez. . . . Sus apreciaciones y resoluciones siempre fueron serenas y bien intencionadas. . . . Era bueno, de una bondad justiciera que nunca llegaba a las exaltaciones de la ternura externa ni pasaba más allá de la prudencia. Practicaba la caridad constantemente, sin alardes ni ostentaciones. Jamás vi delante de sus ojos una mano tendida y doliente sin otorgarle un socorro. Como que una de las premiosas y cotidianas comisiones de sus ayudantes, era la de repartir donativos a los menesterosos. (169-70)

Fabela's adulation is more extreme than most, to be sure. Nonetheless, the adulation of Carranza is common, albeit in a slightly more subtle form.

One of the more common ways that historians embellish Carranza's portrait is to emphasize his greatness in terms of Madero's weaknesses. Historians often make Carranza shine precisely in the areas where Madero supposedly lacked luster: in the ability to act pragmatically and prudently in the political arena. The ever-prudent *Primer Jefe*, with his pragmatism, realizes the vision conceived by Madero, the idealist. Enrique Krauze follows this very pattern in his chapter on Carranza in *Biografía del poder*. Krauze underlines the well-documented tensions that marked Carranza's relationship with Madero. These tensions, Krauze explains, are evident in statements made by Madero. Among these statements is one in which Madero calls Carranza a "viejo pachorrudo" (a sluggish old fogey). Krauze proceeds to question the validity of Madero's remark. Carranza may have been old, Krauze accepts, but he was "nada pachorrudo" (196). He was a man whose age made him wiser, a leader of clear vision and impressive

foresight. Krauze states: “Nada lo sorprende [a Carranza]. Más sabía el viejo por viejo. Había vivido, escuchado y leído mucha historia” (196).

Krauze then goes on at length about Carranza’s love of history, complementing his “peculiar sabiduría de la historia” and pointing out that his “respetable movilidad libresca” made up for his lack of experience abroad. Furthermore, Carranza managed, according to Krauze, to extract practical lessons from history. And Madero was one of Carranza’s topics of study. From his studies of Madero, Carranza learned lessons about what he should *not* do:

También de Madero había extraído lecciones prácticas, lecciones de todo lo que *no* debía hacer. Sus propias palabras de Ciudad Juárez le resonaban proféticas; la Revolución no había sido implacable; el interinato [De la Barra’s interim presidency] resultó, en efecto, una prolongación viciosa, anémica y estéril de la dictadura”; un “humanismo enfermizo” había “contaminado” a la Revolución “malogrando su fruto”. (196)

Krauze ultimately celebrates the way in which the wise and pragmatic Carranza leads the progress of the Revolution. Carranza gets credit for bringing the Revolution to fruition.

Krauze’s chapter on Carranza reveals Krauze’s more conventional side, which has led some critics to criticize Krauze or to label him as conventional or officialist. Eric Van Young tempers the classification by calling Krauze “semi-officialist” historian (see footnote 4 in Van Young 145). The more tempered label seems more appropriate, considering that Krauze does at times offer some unconventional critiques and insights. His chapter on Madero offers examples of his more unconventional side, as he

emphasizes Madero's involvement with Spiritism and points to historians' tendency to inaccurately interpret Madero as a naive man. Ironically, however, he then goes on to exemplify the very tendency he rejects, as he celebrates Carranza's pragmatism and intelligence at the expense of Madero and his idealism. But my purpose is not to single out Krauze. Most historiographers have been much bolder in asserting that Carranza was the man who finally brought the Revolution to fruition. This is a conventional and widely held idea, which complements the idea that many of his fellow 1910 revolutionaries were unfit for the job of *primer jefe de la Revolución*. Carranza was the one destined to be leader.

Among the revolutionaries whose abilities are deemed limited, according to conventional historical discourse, is Pancho Villa. The colorful Villa has inspired more legends and more kitsch than any other Mexican revolutionary. However, conventional and officialist renderings of the Mexican Revolution portray Villa in a somewhat ambiguous manner, as half hero and half villain. In the typical rendering, Villa's status as a hero begins to deteriorate soon after the story of the Revolution arrives at Madero's assassination. When Madero is killed, the tensions between Villa and Carranza escalate. The conventional rendering ultimately favors Carranza. As Carranza's star is on the rise, Villa's is in decline. Villa becomes a danger to the success of the revolutionary struggle. His military escapades begin to look like bandit raids or acts of selfish desperation. It is during his period of decline that Villa launches his attack on the town of Columbus, New Mexico. The episode is not given central attention in conventional or officialist historiography, but it does facilitate the teleology of the great narrative. Even though it is

an episode of secondary importance, it serves to further discredit Villa and to reconfirm the validity of the idea that Carranza was, of all the revolutionaries, the one destined to keep the revolutionary torch burning. The torch, in the hands of Villa, would have suffered the same fate as the rogue general's attack on the United States.

Like Villa, another revolutionary general whose status deteriorates as his conflicts with Carranza escalate is Felipe Ángeles. Ángeles is typically portrayed as the great war strategist whose formal military training added a touch of sophistication to Villa's primitive style of war. Ángeles is thus a second-tier hero who shines as an appendage to Pancho Villa. As such, he shines nonetheless. But his luster fades in later episodes (after Madero's assassination and Venustiano Carranza's ascension) when he gains some independence from Villa. These episodes, like the later episodes of Villa's participation in the war, are characterized by tensions between the general and Venustiano Carranza. The conflict between Ángeles and Carranza ends with Ángeles' execution at the hands of the *primer jefe*. Leading to this execution is Ángeles' last-ditch effort to regain greatness by launching a military campaign against Carranza. The Primer Jefe easily squelches Ángeles effort and prudently sentences the ex-general to death by execution. Ángeles thus goes from being a second-tier hero to being a second-tier enemy of the Revolution, emerging in the classic villainous form of the revolutionary general-turned-rogue caudillo, while Carranza's image as the pragmatist leader is further solidified.

This type of interpretation of Ángeles is the one we see in the Colegio de México's *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*. In this *Historia*, the highly respected

historian Álvaro Matute states the following about Carranza's decision to execute the revolutionary:

...se levantó una parte de la opinion pública para pedir clemencia al propio Venustiano Carranza y a Manuel M. Diéguez, pero fue en vano. Carranza tenía en la memoria la clemencia que dispensó Madero a Félix Díaz y ahí estaban los resultados. Los partidarios de Ángeles alegan en su favor que Carranza dio la espalda a la opinión pública; los enemigos del hidalguense se alegran al decir que la ejecución sólo conmovió a un grupo de damas católicas.

Matute, with one subtle stroke of his brush, puts a stain on Ángeles' image while adding at the same time a bit of extra shine to Carranza's. Carranza, it seems, acted prudently by going against "una parte de la opinión pública." After all, Ángeles might have turned out to be another Félix Díaz, the evil villain who made Madero pay dearly for his clemency. Matute does not explicitly validate the comparison of Ángeles to Díaz. Nonetheless, he does do so implicitly, by drawing attention to the logic that led the ever-prudent Carranza to draw the comparison.

As Matute closes his account of Venustiano Carranza's 1919 execution of Ángeles, he also brings to light the fact that Ángeles and Villa were no longer the allies they were during the earlier years of the decade, when they had their glorious run. And Matute makes passing mention of a few of the theories regarding the distance that came to separate Ángeles and Pancho Villa. Matute does not give the source of these theories and even suggests that the theories may not necessarily reflect the truth. He proceeds, nonetheless, to bring the ill-documented theories to the forefront. He tells us what

“algunos opinan,” what “otros dicen,” and what is, according to him, “factible” about Ángeles’ and Villa’s parting of ways (104). According to Matute, some say that Ángeles tried to control Villa; others believe that Ángeles was too much of a Yankee sympathizer for Villa; and it is quite feasible that Ángeles may have conspired with General Calero to remove Villa once he had served his purpose militarily (104). Matute, by bringing these ill-documented theories to the forefront, implies that Carranza’s execution of Ángeles equated to the elimination of a hopeless yet calculating rogue. Matute closes his account of the way in which Ángeles “lost his life” (103), by stating:

Derecho o no, razón de Estado o no, es obvio que 1919 no era como 1912. Ángeles perdió la vida en una lucha extemporánea y muy mal planeada, carente de apoyo real. Prácticamente estaba solo. Incluso se plantea una separación entre él y Villa. Algunos opinan que Ángeles quería manejar al “Centauro” y éste no se dejaba; dicen otros que Villa encontró a Ángeles muy partidario de los yanquis y que eso los alejó. . . . Independientemente de diferencias reales o inventadas, Villa y Ángeles no podían ser la mancuerna militar de antes, porque Ángeles solo podía hacer la guerra dentro de cánones establecidos y Villa lo hacía por instinto guerrillero. . . . Hombres como Calero desconfiaban de Villa y se podían comunicar mejor con Ángeles. Es factible que hayan querido hacer a un lado al guerrillero – difícil de manejar – una vez que lo hubieran aprovechado en el aspecto militar. No obstante, ellos también habían perdido perspectiva. Esta etapa de la trayectoria de Felipe Ángeles es la de una impotencia total. (103-104)

Matute's rendering of the final episode of Ángeles' life does not allow Ángeles to make a heroic exit. And Carranza's decision to kill Ángeles serves as further evidence of the shrewdness and practicality that made him the *primer jefe*.

The conventional interpretations of Carranza's conflicts with Villa, Madero, and Ángeles, gives the benefit of the doubt to Carranza. In the interpretations of these conflicts, however, is not where Carranza shines brightest. Where Carranza shines brightest is in the conventional interpretation of his role in establishing the Constitution of 1917, which is Carranza's great gift to the nation of Mexico and the fruit of his effort to turn Madero's vision into a tangible reality. This Constitution of 1917 is, in turn, the document that makes possible the establishment of the post-revolutionary state. In the great teleological chain of conventional and officialist history, Carranza is thus a link of huge importance: With his Constitution of 1917, he is the link between Madero and the post-revolutionary state. Interpreted as such, Carranza serves well those who make use of historical representation in their efforts to legitimize the revolutionary credentials of the state.

Such use of historical representation is exemplified in Eliseo Mendoza Berrueto's introduction to *Carranza, sus amigos y enemigos*, published by the State of Coahuila in celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the constitutional convention of Aguascalientes (ed. Bernardino Mena Brito). The book was published in 1990, while Berrueto was governor of the state of Coahuila. In his introductory essay, Berrueto explains, in familiar form, how the relationship between Carranza and Madero was often tense, due to the distance between Carranza's pragmatism and Madero's idealism (Mena Brito xxvi). The

relationship of the so-called collaborators was marked by a “tensión que se establece entre el idealismo y un sentido más objetivo del quehacer político” (Mena Brito xxvi). This familiar sounding discussion of the tensions between Carranza and Madero sets up perfectly the next segment of Berrueto’s celebration of Carranza, where he tells us that Carranza, with his “realismo, o pragmatismo político,” and “frente al maximacismo de ideólogos y soñadores, . . . sabe hacer realidad, plasmando en leyes los más hermosos sueños de la utopía” (Mena Brito xxvi). Berrueto states:

El genio de Venustiano Carranza estriba en su sensibilidad y en su realismo, o pragmatismo político, pues mediante ellos supo catalizar los más dispares anhelos, demandas, y tendencias que se manifestaban en la compleja utopía revolucionaria mexicana, hasta hacerlos fórmulas de gobierno, proyecto de nación. Carranza es, por lo tanto, el padre del moderno estado mexicano. (Mena Brito xxvi)

Berrueto’s interpretation of Carranza is introduced by Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s dedicatory note, in the same book:

El Constituyente de 1917 estableció para el Estado Mexicano la responsabilidad de promover y orientar las transformaciones sociales que el país requería y todavía demanda. Con la promulgación de la Constitución, las demandas populares de la Revolución se tornan en base legal para llevar a cabo las modificaciones a la estructura política, económica y social del país. La Constitución dio la pauta para establecer un nuevo orden institucional, capaz de

estructurar relaciones que se gestaban en el seno de la nueva sociedad. (Mena Brito iii)

Salinas' celebration of the man who initiated the process of "institutionalizing" the Revolution equates, of course, to a celebration of the institutions that arose from this process. Salinas makes this equation clear when he finishes his praise for Carranza's greatness. He states, "los principios y las instituciones emanadas de la Revolución son plenamente vigentes," and "el régimen de la Revolución Mexicana seguirá conduciendo el proceso de transformación nacional" (Mena Brito iii).

To be sure, the celebration of Carranza's Constitution of 1917 is a standard segue into the celebration of the so-called *régimen revolucionario* and *instituciones emanadas de la Revolución*. Of course, to speak of the *régimen revolucionario* or the *instituciones emanadas de la Revolución* is to speak of the PRI (i.e. Partido Revolucionario Institucional). The terms *régimen* and *instituciones* make easier the task of implicitly defining the PRI as one of the great fruits of the Revolution. With these terms, the PRI needn't be mentioned explicitly. Nonetheless, some officialist interpretations of the Revolution do make explicit mention of the PRI. In Manuel Sánchez Vite's introduction to the *Análisis ideológico de la Revolución Mexicana*, for instance, we see an explicit celebration of the PRI. In this introduction, Vite states:

La Revolución Mexicana, al representar una ruptura inevitable, dialéctica, lógica, se impone a sí misma la tarea de institucionalizar los valores acrisolados en el fuego de la lucha armada, como los nuevos principios rectores de la vida nacional. En este esfuerzo, cumplido con éxito evidente, se destacan dos hechos de

profundo contenido social e histórico: la Carta Magna de 1917 y la creación, en 1929, del Instituto Político de la Revolución – El Partido Nacional Revolucionario, que la circunstancia nacional y la necesidad histórica transforman sucesivamente en Partido de la Revolución Mexicana y Partido Revolucionario Institucional. (9)

The PRI is thus represented as one of the great milestones in a long and ongoing revolutionary struggle that Madero initiated in 1910. Note also the emphasis on the *Carta Magna* of the *Constituyente de 1917*.

Solares, with his four novels of the Mexican Revolution, subverts the conventional and officialist interpretation that links the *régimen* back to Madero and the 1910 Revolution. His reinterpretation of the figure of Madero, in *Madero, el otro* is the fundamental first step. It leads to a new interpretation of Madero's so-called successors and of the institutions that supposedly emanated from the Revolution. Solares himself has commented that his unconventional interpretation of Madero, which emphasizes characteristics that previous interpreters have swept aside, could lead to a new interpretation of the Revolution. Solares states:

. . . pienso que a partir de ese Madero espiritista, contradictorio, sentimental, con una entrega absoluta a la escritura automática – lo que es decir a la escritura en su mejor sentido posible – y a la causa democrática en la que creía, que podemos entender mejor al personaje y la historia misma de la Revolución Mexicana. (*Madero en la historiografía* 208)

As Solares' commentary suggests, his Madero is not a textbook hero. Solares emphasizes the hero's contradictory nature, the hero's sentimentality, the hero's devotion to Spiritism and the hero's practice of automatic writing. While these emphases may not sound like embellishments, they certainly do not tarnish the hero's image. The reinterpreted Madero emerges from Solares' treatment with his image shining brighter than in conventional portrayals.

Solares shows Madero's essence of Madero is by reinterpreting the problematic episode of Madero's death in *Madero, el otro*. Here, Madero dies the way he does because he is a man determined to live according to a set of principles and beliefs, even if it costs him his life. He reaches a point where he desires to die in the name of the Revolution. Madero is thus a deliberate martyr rather than a victim of his own incompetence, lack of vision, or, as Vasconcelos suggests, momentary mental paralysis. Solares' Madero does not walk blindly and unknowingly into a death trap. Instead, his faith and values give him the courage to make the ultimate sacrifice in the name of his revolutionary cause.

The idea that Madero chose to sacrifice his life is emphasized from the beginning. The narrative begins with Madero initiating an afterlife journey at the moment he is shot by his executioners. The second-person narrator, whose identity is not made explicit, speaks directly to Madero throughout the narrative, helping the hero to navigate the paths of the difficult metaphysical journey. The narrator is thus a guiding spirit who helps Madero advance properly through the various stages of his journey. This spirit-narrator

makes Madero reflect on his earthly existence to analyze the most perplexing events and aspects of his life.

The spirit-narrator begins his guidance by insisting that Madero reflect on the moment of his execution. Madero is troubled by the episode of his death but the spirit-narrator helps Madero to overcome the pain by reminding him that his death was part of a plan rather than an unforeseen tragedy. According to the spirit-narrator, Madero had been planning on giving up his life for quite some time prior to the execution. Madero knew his death was coming and wished his death, not out of distaste for life but out of a desire to “fertilize the Revolution with his blood” (14). The spirit-narrator tells Madero:

Esperabas, desde hacía días, que sucediera en cualquier momento, ¿verdad? Incluso, lo escribiste.....“Mi sangre fertilizará la Revolución”. Y a tu hermano Raúl, en diciembre del diez, en Nueva Orleans, le dijiste que después de triunfar “esperabas perder la vida, no importa cómo, porque la Revolución, para que sea fructífera, debe ser bañada en sangre”. Por eso, el día nueve de ese febrero trágico, antes de entrar en la Fotografía Daguerre, al caer un soldado a tu lado por una bala que iba dirigida a ti, ¿lo envidiaste? Vamos, hermano, reconoce que lo envidiaste. (14)

Later, the spirit-narrator helps Madero remember when and how he made the decision to begin a path that “implicaba entregar la vida y coronarla con una muerte violenta” (59). The spirit-narrator recalls that Madero makes the decision as a result of his communications with the spirits of the deceased. During those communications, the

spirits told Madero he would not achieve his “gran misión en la tierra” without spilling his blood (59).

Madero’s stoic acceptance of death is emphasized once again when the spirit-narrator recalls the day Madero received word of Aquiles Serdán’s murder. On that sad day, when the news arrived, Madero immediately concluded that Serdán’s death was part of a divine plan. Furthermore, Madero realized that the divine plan called for his death as well. The spirit-narrator reminds Madero of these thoughts, telling him: “Sabías que tu propia muerte, tan próxima, respondía, en la misma forma que la de [Aquiles], al dictado de una proclama superior, también con santo y seña de los pormenores del sacrificio” (163).<sup>7</sup> Madero is thus represented as a deliberate and courageous martyr.

Solares’ interpretation of Madero as a deliberate martyr compliments Solares’ emphasis on the idea that Madero was a man of strong religious beliefs and, more specifically, that he believed wholeheartedly in the doctrine of Spiritism. The spirit-narrator emphasizes Madero’s religious beliefs and his practice of Spiritism throughout the novel. At one point, the spirit-narrator offers a response to Vasconcelos’ well-documented insistence on the irrelevance of Madero’s Spiritism. The spirit-narrator, speaking to Madero, reveals the reason why the hero never spoke to his friend Vasconcelos about Spiritism:

. . . [M]antenías una absoluta discreción respecto a *lo otro*, que era, por cierto, lo que tenías siempre en mente y de lo que más te hubiera gustado hablar con tus colaboradores más cercanos. Pero era imposible. El menor de los riesgos era

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<sup>7</sup> See also page 36.

perder autoridad. El mayor que corroboraran lo que ya dejaban traslucir, aunque en tono de broma, ciertos artículos y caricaturas de la prensa: el Señor Presidente de la República está loco. Por eso, por ejemplo, nunca habías hablado de eso *otro* con Vasconcelos quien, a pesar de su cultura y de su sensibilidad, ni te hubiera entendido, no hubiera podido entenderte. Y en una ocasión, hacía varios años, Juan Sánchez Azcona se refirió en forma impersonal, a la “chifladura” del espiritismo, y resultó dato suficiente para que no volvieras a tocar el tema con él. Así era mejor, y quienes te rodeaban parecían comprenderlo. (84)

To be sure, Madero’s spiritual beliefs are a major characteristic of the hero in *Madero, el otro*.

Solares’ interpretations of Venustiano Carranza and Felipe Ángeles also complement his interpretation of Madero. Solares’ interpretation of Carranza is radically unconventional. He rejects the conventional idea that Carranza is the successor of Madero’s revolutionary cause. In Carranza’s place on the pedestal, he puts the lesser known Felipe Ángeles. The debunking of Carranza and the elevation of Ángeles is initiated in *Madero, el otro* and to be fully realized in *La noche de Ángeles*, where Carranza appears exposed as the anti-Madero and Ángeles shines as the man who is committed to Madero’s ideals and principles.

The tensions between Carranza and Madero are often highlighted in conventional historiography, as we saw earlier, and Solares draws attention to some of the same tensions. However, in Solares’ portrayal, the tensions are interpreted as evidence of a fundamental opposition between Carranza and Madero. The two are anything but

*colaboradores*. They are opponents in conflict due to irreconcilable differences that separate them. Furthermore, Carranza is vilified.

The opposition between Carranza and Madero begins to appear in *Madero, el otro*, when the spirit-narrator tells Madero: “Carranza. . . al que considerabas ‘vengativo, rencoroso y autoritario’; del que decías: ‘Es un viejo pachorrudo que le pide permiso a un pie para adelantar al otro’; quien, quizá, se hubiera levantado contra ti si no lo hace Huerta” (17). In this passage, the spirit-narrator makes reference, as does Krauze in his *Biografía del poder*, to Madero’s labeling of Carranza as a *viejo pachorrudo*. But the spirit-narrator, unlike Krauze, does not follow up with an attempt to correct Madero’s remark. The remark stands.

The tension between Madero and Carranza is again brought to the reader’s attention when the spirit-narrator gives Madero a brief glimpse into the future, telling him about the prophetic article that Felipe Ángeles would publish years later in Tucson, Arizona. In this article, Ángeles confesses that his decision to discontinue his pacifist ways comes as a result of his sheer desire to fight against the *constitucionalistas* and the “antimaderista Carranza” (87). Conventional historiography does not hide the fact that Ángeles and Carranza eventually became bitter enemies. However, conventional historiography suggests that Carranza was the legitimate carrier of the revolutionary torch. Solares gives the legitimacy to Ángeles, portraying him as a champion of Madero’s cause.

In *La noche de Ángeles*, Solares develops his interpretation of Felipe Ángeles. Solares continues to emphasize the idea that Felipe Ángeles was a great disciple of

Madero. Ángeles' integrity and his commitment to Madero's revolutionary ideals are emphasized from the very beginning, as the third-person narrator begins to tell of Ángeles' return to Mexico after a period of exile in the United States. The purpose of the general's journey is to reunite with Villa. But the narrative emphasizes that this objective was secondary to Ángeles' more fundamental goal of working toward the realization of Madero's ideals. Ángeles' commitment to Madero's ideals is captured with a reference to a statement from Ángeles' diary: "Mis ideales son los del Presidente Madero. Yo repito, los ideales del Presidente Madero..." (14). In the last paragraph of the first chapter, there is once again an emphasis on Madero's influence on Ángeles. The novel reads: "Madero le dejó un como contagio de sus visiones" (16).

The emphasis on Ángeles' loyalty to Madero and his revolutionary ideals helps Solares to reinterpret the historically documented clash between Carranza and Ángeles. Solares' interpretation of the clash is quite different from interpretations such as Álvaro Matute's, which portray Carranza as the pragmatic decision maker, and Ángeles as the rogue general who diverts from the honorable path of the Revolution. In Álvaro Matute's interpretation, Ángeles is not explicitly labeled a traitor. As we saw earlier, however, Matute suggests that Carranza had some reasons to think of Ángeles as such. In *La noche de Ángeles*, the third-person narrator makes mention, as does Matute, of Carranza's allegations. However, Ángeles is given an opportunity to respond to the allegations. The novel reads:

Fue poco después de la batalla de Zacatecas, cuando [Ángeles] se enteró de que Carranza lo llamó "el nuevo Judas".

Nada le podía haber dolido tanto.

– ¿Yo un nuevo Judas? – le preguntó a Federico Cervantes, clavándose un índice en el pecho.

– ¿Eso dicen que dijo el viejo maldito? ¿Y quién se cree él, Jesucristo? – dudó antes de decirlo, pero finalmente lo dijo – : Verá usted que es él quien me mata a mí. (136)

The opposition between Ángeles and Carranza is central to the plot and brought to the forefront early in the narrative, when the narrator evokes the episode of Ángeles' visit to Carranza at the Nogales, Sonora General Fort in 1913. The retelling of this episode begins with the narrator's reference to Isidro Fabela's account of the visit. Quoting Fabela, the narrator states: "Ángeles fue recibido en el cuartel general de Carranza en Nogales, como 'nunca jefe alguno lo fue, con tanta cordialidad y simpatía', dijo Isidro Fabela" (69). The narrator then proceeds to give an account that contradicts Fabela's. According to the account featured in *La noche*, Carranza treats Ángeles rudely. When Ángeles arrives at the Fort, they meet in Carranza's office. Carranza offends Ángeles by talking about the "humanismo enfermizo con que lo contaminó todo el señor Madero" (72). Ángeles responds: "Ese humanismo, enfermizo lo llamó usted, con que Madero contaminó su movimiento, es a mi parecer la más alta meta a que puede aspirar un revolucionario" (72). Carranza doesn't like the response and proceeds to mistreat Ángeles at the formal dinner reception later that evening.

Solares' explicit contradiction of Fabela is significant because it raises questions about the reliability of an historian who devoted volume after volume to the exaltation of

Carranza. Not surprisingly, *La noche de Ángeles* evokes a different image of Carranza than does Fabela. Solares' interpretation of Carranza resembles the one Friedrich Katz offers in his *Life and Times of Pancho Villa*. Quoting the words of the real Felipe Ángeles, Katz writes: "The first tragic consequence of Madero's assassination was the assumption of leadership by Carranza, a man who was 'intelligent and bad' . . . . [A]nd we saw in 1913 the anti-ethical phenomenon of a democratic revolution headed by a man of clearly defined dictatorial tendencies" (684). In *La noche de Ángeles*, we hear a similar interpretation of Carranza voiced through the hero Ángeles, who says: "Lo peor que podía pasarle a este país sería quedar en manos de un hombre como Carranza" (136). We hear a more complete criticism when the narrator makes reference to Felipe Ángeles' 1908 article comparing Madero and Carranza. Quoting extensively from the article, the narrator states:

Ángeles escribe un artículo comparativo entre Madero y Carranza: "La bondad de Madero resplandece aún en las abatidas frentes de sus asesinos y la dureza inflexible de Carranza envuelve poco a poco a su gobierno en las tinieblas frías de que hablaba Homero...Madero era un corazón de oro; Carranza de acero...Madero peleó y murió por la libertad; Carranza ha dicho que la libertad es un error y una candidez...Madero abrió los brazos al enemigo porque quería gobernar para todos y cada uno de los mexicanos; Carranza tiene los puños cerrados contra los enemigos y sólo gobierna para los que lo apoyan...Madero murió, pero su causa vive; Carranza vive, pero su dictadura y su política están heridas de muerte...Al final entre las siluetas del glorioso soldado de nuestra

segunda Independencia, resurgirá, risueña y luminosa, la figura del humilde y bueno de Francisco I. Madero”. (146)

This representation of Carranza is not within the norm of conventional history.

The debunking of Carranza is significant, for Carranza holds a prominent position in the officialist pantheon of revolutionary heroes. But Solares' subversion of Carranza's heroic status is also important because it facilitates a subsequent and much bolder step: Solares' stripping the PRI of its revolutionary credentials. We saw earlier how officialist historical discourse often traces the PRI's roots to Carranza, and to the constitucionalismo that Carranza initiated. Solares does not reject the idea that Carranza laid the groundwork for the PRI. However, by vilifying Carranza and rejecting the idea that he was Madero's successor, Solares weakens the linkage between the PRI and the 1910 Revolution.

In *El gran elector* Solares continues his indirect questioning of the PRI's revolutionary identity by launching an attack against the PRI. Solares shifts his attention from Carranza, the man who laid the groundwork for the *nuevo orden*, and focuses directly on the *nuevo orden*. Solares rejects the idea the PNR/PRI is the triumphant product of the Revolution. According to Solares' vision, the so-called *régimen de la Revolución Mexicana* (i.e. the PRI) has not been an agent in promoting national progress. Furthermore, he suggests that the official party has systematically manipulated the nation's historical imagination to create and preserve its reign of power.

Solares achieves this commentary by way of a humorous narrative in which a character-narrator, Domínguez, breaks a silence he has kept for years about the spiritual

and emotional crises that his boss, the *Presidente de la República*, has suffered over the course of the decades. Domínguez speaks candidly and spontaneously about the crises and in the process reveals more than he intended about the man with whom he has worked for over sixty years. As Domínguez speaks, he reveals that the President is a man who resorted to unethical, immoral, and unlawful means of maintaining control of the Presidency of the nation. Domínguez never mentions his boss's name, but the facts, events and conversations recalled by Domínguez, eventually reveal the identity of the President.

Among the details recalled by Domínguez are his references to a series of notorious historical events that take place during the President's tenure. These references reveal the dates of the President's tenure and, by extension, his identity. One of the earliest references is to the President's first presidential race, in 1929, against Vasconcelos. This reference suggests that the President is none other than Pascual Ortiz Rubio. But Domínguez's subsequent historical references negate this simple answer. For example, Domínguez's reference to the 1944 assassination attempt against his boss, suggests that the President is Manuel Avila Camacho. And a latter reference, to the President's problems during the events of 1968 suggests that he is Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. The solution to this series of contradictory references is, quite simply, that the President has assumed the guise of a great many men during his long tenure. He is, at one time, all of the Mexican Presidents who were members of the official party of the Revolution (i.e. the PNR, which later becomes the PRI). This President has thus been in power for over sixty years.

Domínguez, through his spontaneous recollection of events, reveals that the President, throughout his long tenure, has systematically misled the masses into believing a number of empty promises and false claims of social progress. This revelation begins to take shape when Domínguez goes into extensive detail about the President's passion for reading his own *discursos* from years past. According to Domínguez, he and the President routinely spend time reading the old *discursos*, for it is in these that the President finds some of the best material for his new speeches, as well as for the *Memorias* he has been trying to write. During the routine reading time, the President often pushes Domínguez to find the "hilo conductor" of the old speeches (30). This thread is crucial in giving "continuidad" to his sixty-year tenure (32).

Domínguez recalls one evening when he reads for the President a brief section of a speech dating back to 1933. Domínguez reads:

Compatriotas! La crisis social y económica que vive en estos momentos el país ha venido a marcar el momento histórico preciso en que el centro de gravedad de la Revolución deberá pasar del campo de lo social al campo de lo económico. Vivimos momentos históricos. La lucha ha cambiado de naturaleza y objetivos; en lo sucesivo las conquistas que se han efectuado en el terreno social se irán ampliando y confirmando por la sola inercia de los intereses creados; por lo tanto, es en el terreno económico en donde la Revolución deberá concentrar todo su dinamismo y su poder de organización. (30)

After reading this section, Domínguez informs him of the date of the speech. The President responds by saying: "Muy actual, ¿no te parece?", to which Domínguez replies,

“Casi podría decirlo hoy mismo” (31). The President fails to recognize that the speech’s timelessness is tied to the failure of the promises he makes in that speech.

As Domínguez continues his account of that same memorable reading session, he emphasizes, unknowingly, the President’s uncanny knack for dismissing or ignoring his failure to make good on his presidential promises. Domínguez recalls how the President, at one point in the conversation, presents on a positive note his questionable record of economic progress by telling Domínguez:

no todo ha podido realizarse y aún tenemos millones de analfabetos, de indios descalzos, de marías, de harapientos muertos de hambre, de niños que se mueren de frío en los camellones de insurgentes. . . pero también hay millones que de entonces para acá pudieron ir a las escuelas que tú y yo les construimos; millones para quienes se acabó la tienda de raya y se abrió la industria urbana. Piensa en ellos, Domínguez. Millones que sin ti y sin mí hubieran sido barrenderos y hoy son obreros calificados, que hubieran sido criadas y hoy son mecanógrafas. (35)

Those who have read Carlos Fuentes’ *La región más transparente* will likely recognize that the President’s response replicates a memorable piece of dialogue spoken by the greedy and selfish tycoon Federico Robles (See *La región* 120). This implicit reference to Fuentes’ novel further emphasizes the artificiality of the President’s words. Even the President realizes that his response to Domínguez sounds artificial. The realization leads him to assume a defensive posture, telling Domínguez: “Y mira que no he mencionado para nada la palabreja [ésa] de justicia social, para que compruebes que te estoy hablando con el estómago y muy lejos de endilgarte un discurso” (36). With this statement, the

President digs himself deeper. His claim that he is speaking off the cuff is unconvincing. Furthermore, by referring to social justice as a *palabreja*, the President reveals he is not committed to the pursuit of social justice. His mention of social justice in his speeches is a lie.

Domínguez later reveals that the President lies also about his views on Mexican history and, more specifically, about his views on the history of the Mexican Revolution. In public, he interprets the Revolution as the great event that gives birth to the *régimen revolucionario* that leads Mexico into an unparalleled era of progress. But the President's private comments to Domínguez reveal a much grimmer interpretation. At one point, Domínguez recalls the time he and the President stumbled across a metaphor that captures the essence of a long chapter in Mexico's history, which begins in 1914 (the year that Carranza officially takes power) and stretches through the President's reign of power. Domínguez and the President stumbled across the metaphor during the following exchange (The President speaks first):

- Del catorce a la fecha: apenas un parpadeo de la historia
- Un suspiro más bien por la nostalgia que me despierta.
- O un eructo: intentos por resolver una mala digestión.
- Eso fue lo que heredó usted, señor: una mala digestión histórica.
- Y si quieres llevar la imagen a sus últimas consecuencias, puedes decir que mi administración ha sido un simple pedo en la historia de México. No me importa con tal de que a partir de ahora empecemos a digerir mejor. (38)

As this exchange makes evident, the President is aware of the lackluster performance of his administration. But he is not one to accept responsibility for the shortcoming of his efforts. Furthermore, when he speaks to the public, he talks about the post-revolutionary period as if it were a great success story. His triumphalist version of history is exemplified in one of his 1960 discursos, an excerpt which Domínguez reads to him:

Este año de mil novecientos sesenta tiene para los mexicanos un triple significado conmemorativo; hace ciento cincuenta años el país inició la lucha por hacerse independiente. Hace cien años el pueblo afrontó, en la reforma, la empresa de formar una comunidad de hombres libres incorporada a la historia del mundo moderno; y hace cincuenta comenzamos la transformación más honda de nuestra sociedad en sus sistemas político, cultural y económico, para crear formas de vida acordes con la dignidad y el destino del pueblo mexicano. (40)

The President remembers the speech fondly and responds favorably to Domínguez's selection. He tells Domínguez: "Hoy podría repetirlo tal cual, treinta años después" (40). Not surprisingly, the 1960 speech reiterates a narrative not unlike the familiar one summarized by Van Young.

The President knows that history, to be effective, must contain certain key elements. This is made evident when he tells Domínguez: "En la democracia mexicana, continuación y coronación de nuestras jornadas de independencia y de nuestras luchas de reforma y de los afanes de la Revolución maderista, está el remedio de todos los males que padecemos" (39). The President has respect and confidence in the power of historical representation and he believes in the tried and true formula. The formula, unfortunately,

does not require him to be honest. Telling the people what they want to hear is more important. By telling the people what they want to hear and appearing to be honest, the official party will continue to achieve its single most important goal: winning future elections.

According to Domínguez, the goal of winning the elections, at least the important ones, is foremost on the President's mind. Domínguez explains that “su verdadera preocupación – más, mucho más que el Tratado de Libre Comercio, el pago de la deuda o el control de la inflación – es es todo lo que tenga que ver con votaciones y elecciones en el país” (45). The elections became worrisome for the President as soon as he saw that the masses were growing aware of the official party's rigging of the elections. In response to this problem, the President has begun, according to Domínguez, to entertain the idea of free elections. He also has resorted to the tactic of handing victories to the opposition in less important races. In one particular governor's race in the state of Chihuahua, the President ordered the election officials to hand the victory to the opposition candidate. Domínguez recalls the disappointment of the candidate as follows: “Pues sí, Señor Presidente, ni modo, contestó el candidato a gobernador, muy cabizbajo, lástima que fuera ahora en que de veras íbamos ganando; al contrario de hace seis años en que sí perdimos abiertamente y dijimos que ganamos” (46).

We learn more about the official party's long history of the election fraud when Domínguez makes reference to the contents of a notebook he seizes from the *hombrecito*, an activist who uncannily resembles the figure of Francisco I. Madero. Domínguez seizes the notebook during his investigation of this mysterious activist. The notebook contains

an outline of some of the official party's most shameful efforts to control elections. The *hombrecito* makes specific mention of numerous fraudulent elections, including the first presidential election in the history of the official party, in 1929, and the more recent 1988 elections, which gave the victory to Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The notebook also describes how the official party managed to manipulate elections throughout its history, resorting to assassinations, torture, intimidation of voters and bribery to achieve the desired outcomes.

According to the *hombrecito*, this “adulteración del voto” fundamentally negates the legitimacy as the party of the Revolution (88). Commenting specifically on the significance of the 1988 election fraud, the *hombrecito* states:

¿Qué saldo dejó entonces el seis de julio del ochenta y ocho? Un escenario que se derrumba, un sistema que se cayó y se calló. Un gobierno que echó a andar la más amplia maquinaria y el más vasto operativo de adulteración del voto que México ha conocido en su historia. Y lo peor: que a pesar de ello, ese gobierno continuó esgrimiendo la bandera de la Revolución de mil novecientos diez, del sufragio efectivo y la no reelección, por la que dieron tantos mexicanos la vida. (88)

The notebook makes the President sick, not because it contains lies, but because it contains truth. When Domínguez calls the book “tonterías,” the President tells him: “El problema es que no es ninguna tontería, ya verás” (69).

The most conclusive evidence of the President's dishonesty comes at the end of the novel, when Domínguez tells about the climactic face to face encounter between the President and the *hombrecito*. According to Domínguez, the President breaks down

during the encounter. Contributing to the President's loss of control is his belief that the *hombrecito* is none other than the ghost of Francisco Madero. The President is overwhelmed with mixed emotions during the encounter. Eventually, he becomes enraged and begins to angrily defend the implicit and explicit criticisms contained in the *hombrecito's* notebook. As he tries to defend himself, he ends up giving further credibility to the criticisms. At one point, the President tells the *hombrecito*: "Tu Revolución ya nada tiene que ver con la nuestra desde hace muchísimos años y la bandera que usaste y lo que dijiste ya es más nuestro que tuyo. Mejor dicho, ya no es tuyo para nada" (108). At another point, he tells him: "Me iré muy pronto, óyelo, como se hubiera ido don Porfirio si no lo precipitas todo y echas por la borda lo que habíamos construido durante larguísimos años de sangre y esfuerzo" (110). A third confession comes when he tells him: "Yo vine a desmentir tu sueño y a demostrarte que, a la corta o a la larga, es en el sometimiento y en el autengaño de todos y cada uno...en donde es posible concebir la paz, el progreso y de alguna manera esa entelequia que llamamos felicidad" (111). The novel thus concludes, with a confirmation of the accuracy of a statement that Domínguez had made earlier in the narrative: "En el Señor Presidente el arte del disfraz ha sido consustancial al ejercicio del poder" (55, 63). These comments translate to scathing criticism of the PRI, which is at the same time a rejection of the idea, so commonplace in historiography, that the PNR and the PRI represent a continuation of Madero's ideals.

In *Columbus*, Solares continues his questioning of the PRI with a subtle yet equally powerful commentary. He takes an often-sidelined episode of the history of the

Mexican Revolution, Pancho Villa's attack on Columbus, New Mexico, and gives it a new significance. Solares' interpretation of this episode allows him to capture and display the pathetic, rather than the heroic aspects of the Revolution. Pancho Villa, whose ambiguous yet undeniably powerful figure adds firepower, color, and a certain macho mystique to many of the officialist epics, remains in the background. The central character of Solares' *Columbus* is not Villa but the fictional Luis Treviño, a weak, flawed underachiever whose involvement in the Revolution is largely the result of his diseased psychological state.

It is appropriate that Solares opens *Columbus* with a quote by his friend and mentor José Fuentes Mares, the distinguished historian and essayist whose name serves as the emblem of one of Mexico's prestigious literary prizes. The fact that Solares wins the José Fuentes Mares prize in 1996, the same year that *Columbus* is published, could lead some readers of *Columbus* to suspect that Solares inserted the opening quote at the last minute, as a means of paying a quick tribute. But readers of *Columbus* who are familiar with Fuentes Mares' work will realize that Solares is not paying a quick tribute to a friend. Instead, Solares is responding to the interpretation of the Revolution that Fuentes Mares puts forth in his 1971 publication *La Revolución Mexicana: Memorias de un espectador*. Solares' responds to *La Revolución Mexicana: Memorias de un espectador* by parodying it.

To readers of *Columbus* who are familiar with *Memorias de un espectador*, the parody will become apparent in the first few pages of the novel. It is in here that the reader first sees a resemblance between the narrators and the narrative of *Columbus* and

*Memorias de un espectador.* In *Memorias de un espectador*, the narrator is a fictional character who relates his memories of the Revolution, from the perspective of the final stages of his life. His long life has given him the opportunity to witness the Revolution from its initial period through its latter developments. As he shares his memories of the Revolution, he reveals and highlights numerous details regarding his personal background. He explains, for example, that he was born and raised in the state of Chihuahua in a small desert town of moonlike landscapes. It was in this desert environment that he became, during his childhood, a skeptic. The narrator also tells us that he studied at a Jesuit seminary, not because he felt a calling from God, but because the seminary afforded an education to those like himself who had limited economic resources. In the year of 1910, at the age of twenty and amidst the early chaos of the Revolution, he quits the seminary, relatively satisfied with the basic education he receives in language and the humanities, but disenchanted by the seminary's religious teachings. He leaves with fond memories of his spiritual director, whom he portrays as a strong, intelligent, versatile, modern, and principled priest named Roque.

The narrator of *Columbus* resembles this character and the resemblance is made evident from the beginning of the novel. It is here that Luis Treviño explains that he is from Chihuahua, that he studied in a Jesuit seminary, that he quit the seminary after growing disillusioned, that he has fond memories of a mentoring priest named Roque, that he is a skeptic who has suffered great disillusionment in his life, and that he grew up in the moonlike landscapes of the state of the desert. The description of this landscape is

a virtual carbon copy of the landscape description offered by the narrator of *Memorias de un espectador*.

The differences between the two narrators, however, are greater than their similarities. Their narratives are also different. It is through these differences that *Columbus* realizes its effectiveness as parody. When Fuentes Mares wrote *Memorias de un espectador*, he attempted to give his narrator an air of reliability and credibility. He also wanted his narrator to appear as an upstanding member of society; as a man of wisdom who learned well from the wise and honorable mentors that helped him throughout his long life; an honest man with a desire to reflect sincerely on the past, never hesitating to point out the mistakes that he himself made along the way. Furthermore, he evidently wanted the readers to see the narrator as a wise skeptic whose long life has given him the ability to discern reality from myth.

The trustworthy skeptic relates a well organized, chronologically-ordered series of memories, the result of which is a repetition of the conventional interpretation of the Revolution with some unconventional twists. He tells about Madero's naive nature, about Carranza's pragmatism, about the value of the Constitution of 1917 and about the mixed but ultimately positive results achieved by the official revolutionary party (i.e. the PNR/PRI). As to the unconventionality of his interpretation, we could say that it is only mildly so, because many of the seemingly unconventional ideas he presents are conventional ones that sound unconventional because of the explicit manner in which they are expressed. His interpretations of Madero and Carranza are a case in point. The narrator of *Memorias de un espectador* explicitly and unhesitantly states that Madero was

a confused and naive idealist. Conventional historiographers are not as explicit or as deliberate in revealing any views they may have about Madero's naive nature.

The narrator's representation of Carranza and of Carranza's relationship to Madero is conventional, for the most part. Carranza, Madero's ever-pragmatic successor, is celebrated at the expense of Madero the dreamer, in typical fashion. The unconventional twist is that the narrator speaks irreverently about Madero, making no effort to cover up or apologize for the hero's weaknesses. At the same time, Carranza is identified as the greatest of the early revolutionaries and as a far greater man than Madero. At one point, the narrator states:

. . . La Revolución, para ser posible como gobierno, tuvo que sacudirse las ilusiones de don Pancho y adoptar las tácticas políticas del porfirismo, el que a su vez perfeccionó las heredadas del juarismo. . . . Mientras se creyó en Madero, la Revolución revivió el pretorianismo de los tiempos de Santa Anna y de Paredes, hasta que primero Carranza y sobre todo los hombres de Agua Prieta, restauraron las estructuras políticas del porfirismo para hacer que el país funcionara de nuevo como país. (28)

The unconventional twists of the narrative make his interpretation appear personal and unique, but in the end, the narrative reiterates the conventional interpretation of the Revolution. The narrator's closing comments confirm the conventional and teleological nature of his historical vision. He states:

Viejo espectador, relato cuanto vi, y a mi modo, también cuanto viví al canto de las turbulencias revolucionarias. . . . [E]scribo estas líneas en 1965. Hasta hoy, el

país ha evolucionado satisfactoriamente – me refiero a sus últimos años, claro está – sobre sobre todo porque la Revolución encontró la manera de producir sus propios anticuerpos. Se inclina a la derecha o izquierda mediante movimientos pendulares inequívocos, y tan pronto audaz como cautelosa lleva el timón con guante blanco o mano dura. . . . En el curso de las últimas tres décadas – entre 1935 y 1965 – el equilibrio de los factores reales de poder se logró, no obstante ocasionales desajustes, porque los políticos mexicanos se hicieron de una sensibilidad en diaria consulta con la experiencia, o sea, en suma, con la historia. Mediante la persistente consulta, es obvio, se fortaleció la estabilidad económica, social y política del país. (192-3)

The narrator thus interprets the Revolution in a conventional manner. Although he claims to be a skeptic, he is a teleologist who lets the standard version stand.

In *Columbus*, the narrator does not offer a conventional and mainstream vision of history. He focuses on his personal involvement in the Revolution. His unheroic involvement results in no progress whatsoever, neither for himself nor for his community nor his nation. Treviño's story is that of a man who jumped on the revolutionary bandwagon at the last minute as a means of pursuing his selfish ambition and fulfilling his pathological desires. Treviño is aware of his pitiful condition. Nonetheless, he has spent much of his life fabricating a web of memories and observations that will give some level of heroism to his participation in the Revolution.

The web Treviño fabricates is weak. Treviño offers the reader glimpses of a reality that undermining his attempt to construct a façade of heroic involvement. A telling

detail of Treviño's story is that he joins Villa at a time when Villa's time had passed. He participates in one battle that adds little luster to Villa's status. Nonetheless, Treviño names his bar "Los Dorados" in commemoration of the elite *villista* soldiers who earned their status by helping to make Villa and his *División del Norte* the formidable force it was. If the *Dorados* represented the best of the *División del Norte*, Treviño represents the opposite side of the spectrum. Yet, he exploits the legendary and mythical status of the elite band by naming his *cantina* after them. Treviño's bar is the final product of his attempt to ride the coat tails of the Revolution. And Treviño himself is a metaphor for all who joined the revolutionary bandwagon because they saw the Revolution as an opportunity to pursue their interests. Treviño's livelihood depends on his ability to tie himself to the heritage of the Revolution.

#### Concluding statements

Seeing how the four Solares novels of the Revolution facilitate a questioning of the conventional celebratory interpretation of the Revolution, it is natural to ask what is the value of this revisionary enterprise. To answer this question, we might begin by underlining an observation by Eric Van Young:

. . . [T]he groups that emerged triumphant from the Revolution and their legatees managed to seize the levers of not only political, economic, and social reproduction but also cultural reproduction. The nation builders were thus assured access to the symbolic coordinates by which citizens locate themselves in their social surroundings as well as to the historical memory by which they construct a meaningful past. (144)

One result of this take-over was the writing and dissemination of “triumphalist narratives of post-revolutionary change,” which facilitated the legitimization of a post-revolutionary elite (144). The SEP’s free textbook program is but one concrete example of the ways in which the triumphalist narratives are disseminated. As Bernardo Mabire points out, the SEP distributes its textbooks in an effort to “difundir conocimientos básicos para inducir consenso respecto a valores mínimos, que a su vez sirva de base a la identidad mexicana tal como desea forjarla el régimen” (Mabire “Dilemas” 402). The literary and cultural critic Francisco Ordiz offers some similar observations. Ordiz argues that the “winners” of the Revolution have manipulated history, rejecting the failures of the Revolution, in order to establish and justify the privileges they enjoy as a result of the Revolution. Quoting the theories of Borel and Rossel, Ordiz states:

. . . [L]o que en principio se presentaba como un movimiento histórico de posibilidades inimaginables para el futuro del país (i.e. the Mexican Revolution) se resolvió en una mera sustitución de gobernantes que en buena medida y bajo “disfraces” distintos, prolongaron el “status” existente con anterioridad. Frente a esta realidad, los triunfadores, agrupados en el omnipotente “Partido de la Revolución Mexicana” – convertido poco más tarde en “Partido Revolucionario Institucional” – van a forjar el “mito de la Revolución Mexicana” que, en definición de Borel y Rossel, “demostrará que el resultado, la forma de vivir mexicana, surgida de la contienda es lo justo, lo bueno, lo auténticamente revolucionario y que el sector revolucionario, que ‘fue’ el núcleo dinámico de la revolución, es el mejor, el único garante de la pureza del ideal revolucionario

común. Los mass-media, dirigidos desde el poder, se van a encargar de porpagar esta idea: se trata de hacer ver a los mexicanos los grandes logros y avances obtenidos desde el proceso bélico, exaltando las acciones y la abnegación de sus líderes, que aparacen con una categoría semi divina ante los ojos del pueblo. En realidad se trata una vez más de un intento de “lavado de cerebro”. De usurpación de la Historia, para legitimar la ostentación de un poder corrupto. (224)

Ordiz then quotes the following statement by Carlos Fuentes:

En México el gobierno necesita justificarse con una serie de mitos. Todos sabemos que es el gobierno de la clase burguesa mexicana el que condujo y llevó a su triunfo la Revolución. Pero esta clase burguesa se presenta a sí misma envuelta en una serie de mitos...ellos necesitan fomentar una retórica mitológica que tiene una validez bárbara en México, porque está sustentada por el poder mismo. (Ordiz 224)

Mabire suggests something similar to Fuentes when he emphasizes that “el genio de los regímenes posteriores a Cárdenas. . . consistió en mantener la retórica de la Revolución, sin importar que sonara hueca por momentos” (483). The post-Cardenas administrations, in producing official history, implemented “el uso de la mitología revolucionaria para legitimar privilegios del sector privado y de la burocracias oficiales” (483).

As to Ordiz’s rather dramatic statement regarding the State’s use of mass-media to brainwash the people, I would argue that he’s not far off the mark. One example of a relatively recent state-sponsored effort to use the mass-media to disseminate the conventional triumphalist narrative of post-revolutionary change is the historical

*telenovela* “Senda de Gloria”. One should not underestimate the size of the imprint that a historical *telenovela* can leave on the collective consciousness.

Solares’ novels, by offering an interpretation of history that contradicts the official version, make more difficult, if slightly, the State’s effort to cultivate loyalty of the nation’s citizens through the dissemination of history. Those who believe that the *régimen*’s cultivation of loyalty has not proven to be in the best interest of the nation, might recognize some value in an enterprise that complicates this cultivation of loyalty. Nonetheless, it seems fair, or even necessary, to ask whether there aren’t enough novels that present a non-conventional interpretation of the Revolution. Is the revisionist aspect of Solares’ novels all that significant, given the plethora of alternative versions? In response, I would say that Solares’ response to the conventional version of history is valuable to the extent that its response is more compelling than the response offered by previous novelists. As the State continues making efforts to improve its dissemination of history, one would hope that the efforts to keep this dissemination in check also continue to improve. The question then becomes: Is Solares’ response to the conventional version of history in any way more compelling than the response offered by way of the plethora of previous novels of the Revolution? I argue that they are. In the next chapter, I will proceed to discuss one aspect of Solares’ novels that makes them different and arguably more compelling.

## Chapter Two

### Looking Beyond the Failures of the Revolution

In chapter one, I discussed some of the ways in which these four novels of Ignacio Solares challenge conventional history's celebratory interpretation of the Mexican Revolution. Furthermore, I showed that the four novels, by virtue of the challenge they present, are linked to a long series of landmark novels of the Mexican Revolution. In this second chapter, I will identify one aspect of the four Solares novels that makes them fundamentally different from those same classic predecessors. The difference is that Solares' novels reflect a desire to look beyond the failures of the Revolution and an ability to transcend the pessimism that resulted from the recognition of these failures. Solares expresses and explores some dark feelings of disillusionment and pessimism. However, he does not allow these feelings to dominate his narratives. Solares' novels of the Revolution thus represent a significant change of direction for a literary tradition that has arguably exhausted the effectiveness of pessimistic narratives.

There are many critics who have used the words *pessimism* and *disillusionment* in their studies of novels of the Mexican Revolution. Alicia Sarmiento, for example, in her *Problemática de la Narrativa Mexicana*, talks about the “pesimismo, que se manifiesta tanto en la cruda y realista representación novelesca, como en la variante del humor y la sátira” (33). With her statement, Sarmiento is knowingly and openly reiterating previous critics' comments regarding the pessimism reflected in the novels. She makes specific mention of some of these critics by quoting, among others, Beatrice Berler, who talked

about the “gloom and disillusionment” of the novelists, and Domingo Miliani, who said that *desencanto* is the *signo* of the novelists’ narrative style.

In addition to the critics mentioned by Sarmiento, there are others whose comments exemplify this line of criticism. José Antonio Portuondo, for one, talks about the “tono amargo y desencantado de los señores que escriben sobre la Revolución” (286).<sup>8</sup> Manuel Antonio Arango, in his *Tema y estructura en la novela de la Revolución Mexicana*, states that one of the “notas comunes” of the novels of the Mexican Revolution is their “tono amargo y pesimista” (18). Raquel Chang Rodríguez and Malva Filer, state:

...[las novelas de la Revolución] están marcadas por el pesimismo, por el presentimiento de la tragedia y la muerte. Los personajes aparecen condenados a la destrucción en el conflicto bélico, al hastío y la asfixia de la vida provinciana, o al desencanto y la humillación al observar cómo se ha frustrado el proceso de cambio social. (296)

And there are additional critics who, without specifically using the terms *pessimism* or *disillusionment*, make points similar to the ones noted. Elvia Montes de Oca Navas, in her *Protagonistas de las Novelas de la Revolución Mexicana*, states, “Las novelas que se leyeron para este trabajo, describen un mundo desordenado y sin propósitos, debajo del cual palpita el anhelo por un universo más justo y equitativo, pero que quedó oculto

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<sup>8</sup> It should be mentioned that Portuondo is referring to the authors that wrote las “primeras novelas de la Revolución.” However, it is also true that other critics have made very similar comments when talking about a wider range of novels of the Mexican Revolution, one that includes more contemporary novels.

primeramente y callado deliberadamente después. . . ” (200).

These examples show that many critics see the *narrativa de la Revolución* as a corpus of pessimistic works. But the question remains whether the categorical statements are valid. If we look at a cross section of the genre, as identified earlier, pessimism indeed appears to be one of its hallmarks. In the following section, I look at each of the novels of the cross section individually, pinpointing in each a specific formal aspect that reflects and evokes pessimism. I find that the novels’ plot structure and, more specifically, the novels’ *direction of narrative movement* are most significant in this regard.

To identify and highlight the texts’ *direction of narrative movement*, I summarize what happens in the narratives, drawing particular attention to the starting and end points of their narrative(s). The points serve as coordinates for tracking the direction of the narratives’ movement. In each of the ten narratives, this technique reveals a *downward* or *tragic* direction of narrative movement. Because of this, readers will find themselves at the lowest point when they reach the novels’ end, thus confronting a situation that suggests little opportunity for improvement and a strong sense of pessimism.

In a latter section of the chapter, the same analytical technique, when applied to Solares’ novels, reveals an altogether different trend. None of the novels end with the low point of the narrative. To the contrary, each ends on a high point and, furthermore, each of their endings contains elements that suggest continued movement in an upward direction. I am aware that each novel’s significance is due in small part to the structural and formal dynamic discuss. Nonetheless, I choose to give attention to this dynamic in

the following section as I believe it often determines whether a narrative is pessimistic or optimistic.

We can begin the discussion by looking at Azuela's *Los de abajo*, a novel identified by many critics as a prototype for the novels of the Mexican Revolution. A prototypical characteristic of this landmark novel is its pessimism. Antonio Benítez Rojo describes it as "la novela de la frustración y el libro de la anti-epopeya" (221). Benítez Rojo's comments capture an aspect of the work that is essential to this study. The accuracy of his description may be underlined by looking, first of all, at the novel's plot structure.

Critics, Joseph Sommers among them, have written about the "circular" structure of the narrative. The end point of the narrative is a return to the same point at which the narrative begins; the action begins with Demetrio Macías at Juchipila Canyon, and ends with the hero's return to Zacatecas (Sommers 22). Demetrio's return is a tragic return rather than a victorious one. The final blow to his struggle comes in the last battle scene when his men realize that fighting is useless. They would rather escape but Macías forces them to proceed, threatening to shoot anyone who tries to flee. With his last tactical command, he forces his men into a pit of death and they fall, one by one, struck by the bullets of the enemy:

Demetrio derrama lágrimas de rabia y de dolor cuando Anastasio resbala lentamente de su caballo, sin exhalar una queja, y se queda tendido, inmóvil. Venancio cae a su lado, con el pecho horriblemente abierto por la ametralladora, y el Meco se desbarranca y rueda al fondo del abismo. (139)

He fights on and is shot at the bottom of the canyon, his death bringing no recompense to anyone. Neither his fighting nor his death have contributed to any kind of progress either for himself or for his people.

This is not an epic return of a hero who has fulfilled his quest but rather, as Benítez Rojo suggests, the anti-epic return of a hero whose quest remains unfulfilled. The structure of the narrative is therefore not exactly circular. It resembles instead something closer to a downward spiral. Sommers recognizes the tragic nature of the circularity, stating: “From the circular plot structure emerges the central theme: the cyclical nature of existence. Revolutions and heroism notwithstanding, the destiny of man – in Mexico at least – is a tragic return to the point from which he started” (9). Demetrio’s return is tragic indeed. His death marks the bitter and fruitless end to a life and a struggle.

This powerful negative quality at the end is tied to the way the novel began. In the beginning, the reader confronts a situation that inspires optimism. In the end, the possibilities for victory have disappeared. This dynamic is a powerful communicator of disillusionment. The text presents the readers with a narrative that engages them in a movement, or change, from illusion at the beginning of the narrative to disillusionment at the end of the narrative.

In *Apuntes de un lugareño* by José Rubén Romero, we once again see a narrative that moves in a downward direction. The novel begins with a chapter entitled “Recuerdos Lejanos.” The chapter consists primarily of the first-person narrator’s fond recollections of his humble yet colorful upbringing in a classic provincial Mexican town at the

beginning of the twentieth century. He describes his picturesque home, pretending that his humble description does not do justice to its beauty:

Pintada de un añil corriente se alzaba mi casa cerca de las Cuatro Esquinas. En el fondo del patio, poblado de geranios y rosales, la sombra prieta de los vástagos sobre la pila siempre rezongona. Angostos corredores llenos de macetas. Cuartos bastante oscuros. Este es el recuerdo que tengo de la casa donde nací, y que me perdone mi madre si no le hago mejores elogios, a pesar de las veces que le he oído decir que era preciosa. (9)

The narrator's description of his school add further color and warmth to the portrait he evokes. A more important element in the portrait, however, is the image of the father. The narrator places the father at the center, remembering him as a jovial and admirable family man and member of the community. The narrator tempers his description with a mention of his father's lack of good looks, but this detail adds credibility to the flattering description, taking little away from the aura of the subject. The narrator states:

Mi padre tendría en aquella época unos treinta y seis años. Era alto, delgado, muy feo, pero muy simpático. Gozaba fama de hombre a carta cabal y se hacía querer de las personas que lo trataban, por alegre y divertido. . . . Sabía mover con destreza un caballo. . . . Oírlo referir sus andanzas era para mí un verdadero deleite, pidiéndole siempre de sobremesa, que las relatara. Y mi padre me complacía de muy buen humor. (11)

After describing the setting, the narrator tells how his father, alongside a group of liberals from their largely conservative community, decided to support the revolutionary efforts

of Francisco Madero. In a town where “*todos eran conservadores fanáticos,*” the father’s involvement in the Revolution is risky but nonetheless admirable. The stage is set for an epic victory of liberalism over fanatical conservatism.

The narrative, however, develops into a tragedy instead of an epic. As the Revolution gains momentum, the fanatical conservatives, whose reputation was that of being corrupt and selfish, are removed from the municipal government of the narrator’s hometown, as well as in the state government of Michoacán. As it turns out, the liberals are no better than the conservatives. In one episode, the narrator tells about the day his father was removed from his seat in the local government. The removal came as a result of the way his father handled an official assignment delegated to him by the incoming governor. The assignment consisted of going to a neighboring town to investigate allegations of corruption by municipal government officials, and to rectify the situation. The narrator’s father finds that there is indeed corruption and proceeds to arrest the guilty individuals. Among the men he arrests, however, are some powerful local figures who manage to have the father fired. Little has changed. The rich remain in power and avoid justice.

As the narrative develops, the narrator writes of his adolescence and his career as a low-level government functionary during the early years of the Revolution. The memories make it increasingly evident that the officials and functionaries installed by the Revolution are little different from those whom they replaced. The characters who hold the seats in the new revolutionary government are characterized by their mediocrity and their lack of conviction; the most powerful example of this new type of government

functionary is the narrator himself. His intent is not to represent himself as an exceptional character. He is a run of the mill member of the “new” society. The narrator shows how he stumbled from position to position, enjoying the comforts and conveniences during the good times, and undergoing the difficulties of the bad times. The end of the narrative is characterized by the difficult times when he flees to Mexico City with little money. The worst moment comes when the narrator is arrested and fears for his life. The narrative ends with a note of relief, when he is released and reunited with his family. While the ending could have been worse, it would be inaccurate to say that this is a narrative with a happy ending. The narrative is clearly one that moves in a downward narrative direction. Things become worse as the narrative unfolds. The note of relief at the end merely lessens the decline. Marta Portal makes an insightful commentary about the ending, stating: “El apresamiento del protagonista y el peligro inminente de su ejecución ponen una nota de zozobra en los párrafos finales de estos *Apuntes* que se resuelve en la alegría tibia de la liberación y el autosarcasmo que suscita el miedo retrospectivo y temblón” (146).

In Martín Luis Guzmán’s *El águila y la serpiente*, we find another narrative that takes the characters and the reader from a high point to a low point. Once again, the negative quality of the ending stands in contrast to the positive elements that exist at the beginning of the narrative. As in *Los de abajo*, we can trace a movement from illusion to disillusionment.

The narrator begins with a first person account of the day he initiates an exciting journey. The title of the section, “Esperanzas revolucionarias,” is appropriate because it

emphasizes the hopes and illusions of the journeyman/narrator when he begins his journey. They stem from the fact that his journey will take him to the very heart of the Revolution, where he will presumably join the legendary Pancho Villa against Victoriano Huerta. The narrator's representation of himself at this earlier stage in his life is a vivid portrayal of an energetic young man filled with excitement and optimism about what lies ahead. The narrator says:

Caminaba aprisa, no obstante mis dos maletas, las cuales, a la vez que con su paso me abrumaban, parecían aligerarlo todo con su contacto. Porque llevarlas en ese momento era, no sé por qué, como tener asida entre las manos la realización del viaje que esperaba emprender al otro día . . . . Llevaba en mi cartera cincuenta dólares: en el alma, una indignación profunda contra Victoriano Huerta. (3-4)

At this point hope and optimism abound.

The end evokes an altogether different situation. The optimism and illusion have disappeared. The *esperanzas revolucionarias* have become nothing but *desesperanzas* and *desilusiones*. The one positive detail comes when he leaves Villa alive. He tries to flee the country so he can return to the United States, the point from which he started the journey, where his family awaits him. But the reader is not told whether the journeyman/narrator makes it to his destination. Guzmán, the novelist, in real life makes it across the border to the U.S., where he does indeed reunite with his family. But let us not confuse the real life events of the novelist with the events that take place in the narrative, where there is no final scene in which the journeyman reunites with his family. There is no tender reunion, no epic return of the hero to his homeland. Instead, the novel

concludes at a moment of high anxiety. The journeyman does not know what is going to happen to him or to his countrymen. Mexico is in turmoil, and it is fitting that in the end, he is fleeing from the same man (Villa) whom he so wanted to meet at the beginning of the novel. And, while Villa's stature at the end is no less monumental than at the beginning, he has become a monument to ambiguity and terror rather than courage and optimism.

Guzmán's well-known novel of the Revolution, *La sombra del caudillo* takes the reader from a situation characterized by optimism/illusion to one characterized by pessimism and disillusionment. As in *El águila*, the title of *La sombra*'s first section, "Poder y juventud," emphasizes the positive elements.

In this section, the narrator introduces two young politicians, Ignacio Aguirre, a central character, and Axkaná González, the protagonist. There are no visible complications for either at the beginning. Life is grand. Aguirre is in the initial stages of a passionate love affair with a beautiful woman. He is powerful, vigorous, and at the height of his career. Axkaná is also enjoying a highpoint in his life. His youth, optimism, and brilliance are projected in the scene in which he first appears. The narrator writes:

En el esplendor envolvente de la tarde, su figura (referring to Axkana's figure), rubia y esbelta surgió espléndida. De un lado lo bañaba el sol; por el otro su cuerpo se reflejaba a capricho en el flamante barniz del automóvil. La blancura de su rostro lucía con calidez sobre el azul oscuro del traje; sus ojos, verdes, parecían prolongar la luz que bajaba desde las ramas de los árboles. (4)

The radiance that emanates from Axkaná in this early scene exhibits optimism and excitement. This scene exemplifies the oft-noted contrast between light and shadow in the imagery, an aesthetic constant from beginning to end. But, more important, to this analysis, are the lighter, brighter images that dominate. The imagery emphasizes the positive qualities of Axkaná and Aguirre. They appear as an invincible duo headed to success.

By the end, the possibility of their ascent turns out to be an illusion. Aguirre murdered by the *caudillo*, although Axkaná has managed to stay alive, after a brutal torture by the caudillo's men. In one of the last scenes, the narrator's description of a bruised and battered Axkaná crawling on a highway suggests that the spirit of the once optimistic statesman is dead. The narrator once again uses light to achieve a dramatic affect. But unlike the earlier example of the narrator's depiction of Axkaná, where the sunlight accentuated the young hero's abundance of life, this latter depiction uses the unflattering beams of oncoming headlights to dramatize the pitiful state of a beaten man. The narrator says:

Casi a rastras se movió entonces Axkaná hasta en medio del camino. Allí se arrodilló, se puso en pie y volvió a caer de rodillas, iluminado por los rayos de los fanales, que le desencajaban más el rostro y le prolongaban, trágicamente, hacia arriba, la mano que él levantaba. Su actitud, más que desfallecimiento y súplica, acusaba desesperación: que aquel auto lo socorriese o que lo aplastara igual le habría dado. (245)

The car from which the light beams shine does stop to help him – an act that critics have interpreted to be Guzmán’s way of stating that hope remains alive. This is an insightful observation by critics. I would add, however, that hope is only barely alive. Axkaná’s illusions have suffered irreparable damage that matches the severity of his beating.

Axkaná’s disillusionment is well founded. The world evoked at the end contains little to inspire hope since those in power are not losing any momentum. The caudillo also controls the press. This is seen when he points out that the newspapers make only the briefest mention of the death of Aguirre and the other government officials whom the caudillo’s men murdered. There is no mention of a scandal, no front-page headline, nor an article on the back page. What appears is a brief obituary.

The final scene stresses the tragic state of reality. The same Cadillac in which Axkaná and Aguirre paraded at the beginning is now in the hands of the chief of police, Manuel Segura. The thugs drive away as the clear victors in an unjust world that the critic Manuel Pedro González describes quite accurately as “un mundo de pícaros – pero pícaros trágicos – canallesco e inmoral hasta el crimen” (264). With this, the narrator closes, having removed any element that inspires optimism.

José Revueltas’ *El luto humano* takes the pessimism and gloom of the previous three examples to a higher level. The narrative begins with an eerie opening scene where a child, Chonita, lies on her death bed suffering through the last moments of life. A figure of death personified sits anxiously in a chair next to Chonita, waiting anxiously to get under the covers to penetrate the child. Witnessing this macabre scene are her horrified parents, who sit nervously, sensing the immediacy of a perverted death. The suspense

drives Úrsulo, Chonita's father, to scream: "Dios mío, y sí! Va a morir!" (11). This tense situation is aggravated by the intense feelings of resentment that the parents feel towards each other as a result of their differing views on the importance of having a priest at the girl's side.

A typical reader might guess that a narrative with such a forceful beginning will move upward. How could the situation possibly deteriorate? The narrative does indeed move upward after the opening. Úrsulo and his fierce adversary, Adán, put away their differences and their mutual hatred when Chonita dies. In an uplifting scene, they effectively cooperate to cross a raging river during their journey to get the local priest for Chonita's burial ceremony.

But the brief upward movement lasts only long enough to set readers up for the tragic downfall. After the scene of the river crossing, the narrator begins dealing the characters [and the reader] a series of blows. By the end, the raging river has flooded the community and the surviving characters sit on the floating roof of their house, grasping at their last few moments of life and their frustrated goals. The buzzards flying overhead then begin their descent toward the characters. On this tragic note, the narrative ends.

In Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, the reader confronts two equally important narratives, both of which move in a tragic, downward direction. The first concerns Juan Preciado's search for his father, Pedro Páramo. The second narrative tells the story of Páramo himself.

In the first, Juan faces obstacles upon starting his search. Nonetheless, he moves forward, driven by his expectations and his illusions of what he will find. These

expectations are, to great extent, a byproduct of the stories his mother shared with him prior to her death. She did not hide the pain they suffered. For instance, she speaks with great remorse that Pedro Páramo abandoned them. Nonetheless, she did speak favorably about certain aspects of her past, evoking the town of Comala as a picturesque, bucolic town. Her rosy depictions of Comala leave a powerful impression in Juan's memory. At one point, Juan describes his expectations of what he might find in Comala, stating:

Traigo los ojos con que ella miró estas cosas porque me dio sus ojos para ver:  
“Hay allí, pasando el puerto de los Colimetos, la vista muy hermosa de una llanura verde, algo amarilla por el maíz maduro. Desde ese lugar se ve Comala, blanqueando la tierra, iluminándola durante la noche.” (180)

But Preciado's search does not lead him to a picturesque town or to a green prairie with ripened corn. Instead, he finds a virtual Hell where his father reigns ruthlessly. Worse, he becomes trapped within the limits of the infernal world he discovers, and he dies, having found nothing of value. This ending comes abruptly, about halfway through the novel.

The second narrative, which tells the story of Pedro Páramo's life, is as depressing as the story of Juan's search. Pedro begins his life in the rather normal Mexican town of Comala. During those years, life for Pedro was far from perfect, but it did contain a significant element of beauty and happiness. This element is evident, for example, in the narrator's description of hummingbirds flying around a jasmine tree outside of Pedro's house: “Había chuparrosas. Era la época. Se oía el zumbido de sus alas entre las flores del jazmín que se caía de flores” (190). Such images of fertility and natural harmony serve as the backdrop for Pedro's life during his adolescent years and,

more importantly, as the backdrop for the development of his relationship and his obsession with Susana San Juan. During Juan's early years, Susana becomes the object of his desire. Furthermore, she is an object of desire that seems very much in reach.

However, the story takes an abrupt turn when Susana San Juan leaves Comala. Images of hummingbirds and jasmines no longer color the landscape after her departure. And Pedro, obsessed with his memories and frustrated by his unfulfilled desires for the young Susana San Juan, becomes the cruel and ruthless cacique of the town. During his tenure as cacique, he turns the town into a lifeless place. He does eventually manage to bring Susana back to Comala; however, she has become a demented old woman, the antithesis of the young, virginal, wet-lipped girl that fueled Pedro's obsessions. The novel ends on the last page with Pedro's death, which is not tragic. After all, there is a sense of justice in seeing Páramo die unfulfilled. His death, nonetheless, cannot be interpreted as positive, because he has managed, in his lifetime, to wreck the lives of those who came into contact with him. Also, he affects the lives of future generations (e.g. Juan Preciado). At the end, there are no signs of better things to come for anyone. Furthermore, Páramo's tenure as cacique served to elicit the worst in the townspeople. The town has no heroes or heroines to lead the community in new directions, only mediocre citizens, and dead ones at that, who did not rebel during Páramo's reign. And Pedro's death cannot be interpreted as a just punishment for his evil deeds. He approaches death stoically, perhaps purposefully, meditating on a mat like a shaman. When he dies, he turns into a pile of rocks. The ending, so fitting for a man named whose name evokes a place of stones and

rocks, leaves the reader with a feeling of lifelessness and with nothing to inspire hope for the future.

In *La región más transparente*, the end, once again, is the narrative's lowest point. One of the central characters, Rodrigo Polá, has suffered a series of personal tragedies that push him from the top of the socioeconomic ladder to the bottom rung. This downfall is not tragic. After all, Polá is a corrupt and treacherous man whose downfall seems well deserved. Furthermore, Polá seems to achieve some kind of spiritual enlightenment as a result of his downward spiral. Unfortunately, Polá's transformation will scarcely affect the condition of the world in which he lives. As Lanin Gyurko shows, the transformation of Polá comes only after he has lost power and his position of leadership. The transformed Polá has no power or desire to change the ruinous society he could have helped to improve when he was powerful. Now, the society is controlled by individuals more powerful, intelligent and ruthless than he. Lanin Gyurko states: "[T]he power vacuum that Robles leaves is immediately filled by Roberto Régules, the shrewd financier, who had directly brought about Robles's downfall and who will be even more ruthless than the titan whom he has demolished" (279). It thus seems that when one ruthless leader appears another makes his exit. Polá's downfall is part of a cycle that continues endlessly. The narrative leaves the reader with this pessimistic vision of the future.

Regarding Fuentes' next novel, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, the critic Joseph Sommers states the following: "Todo su ambiente está penetrado por el aura de la muerte" (190). This is true, although I would add that the ambiente de la muerte actually

intensifies as the novel reaches its end. This intensification facilitates the tragic nature of the novel. At the beginning, the “aura de la muerte” identified by Sommers is evident. Artemio lies on his death bed at a Mexico City hospital, having recently suffered a heart attack. The scene is not positive and things do not improve as the narrative unfolds. Cruz does not recover from his heart attack and dies at the very spot in which he lay as the novel begins. And the dying process is torturous, filled with physical and metaphysical agony. This is tragic.

But the greatest sense of tragedy and disillusionment is the result of the narrative that is revealed to the reader as Artemio reflects on his life. During the dying process, a tragic story is revealed to the reader. It is the story of Artemio’s rise to power. And from the very beginning of this story, there are elements that taint the rewards and the success that Artemio seems destined to enjoy. Nonetheless, the beginning of the story is characterized to significant extent by elements of beauty, love and sensual excitement. Artemio Cruz is young, virile, good-looking and physically powerful. He is tough and sensual at the same time, a man full of life. And, the reader cannot help but get caught up in the allure of his escapades and his exciting rise to power. With his green eyes, thick moustache, military gait, sexual stamina and ability to find a way to win, he is the epitome of a macho man. Rounding out the portrait is his young, beautiful, capable and lusty girlfriend who follows him from town to town, awaiting his arrival at the end of the day with a fresh meal, fresh fruit, a beautiful body, and a healthy appetite for sex.

At the end, all of this has disappeared. Artemio’s physical attributes and vigor are gone. He is no longer the virile, pistol-porting stud, capable of forcing women to love

him. Instead, he is a pitiful old man who has difficulty passing gas and urinating. The young Regina is no longer part of the picture. She has been replaced by Catalina and Teresa, the bitter wife and ungrateful daughter whose only concern during Artemio's final moments is securing their fair chunk of Artemio's immense fortune. This is how Artemio dies. All he has gained in his life serves only as a cause for anguish. And, when his death comes, it brings no recompense. Instead, Cruz's spirit is thrust back into the inescapable cycle of life. The critic Francisco Ordiz discusses the theory of circular time as it relates to Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. He states:

Esta teoría del tiempo cíclico como determinante de la Historia de México, supone la idea del inmovilismo, del eterno presente y de la falta de progreso y evolución que ha registrado el país desde su origen. La visión de Fuentes es básicamente pesimista y parece guiada por la evidencia de la predestinación y el fatalismo. El autor no resuelve nada en su ambiguo final; la coincidencia de la muerte y el nacimiento de Artemio parece que no permite albergar muchas esperanzas de que se rompa el mito inexorable. (92)

In *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, the narrative tells the story of a community in a small provincial Mexican town. The story is presented to the reader by a first person narrator whose voice is not that of a single person but of the town where the story takes place. In the first pages, this composite narrator sets the scene for the story about to unfold, by offering snapshots of various aspects of the town and quickly describing the grand transformations brought on by a series of wars.

The general introductory description suddenly ends as the narrator is struck by a flashback to the point in time when the story begins. In this flashback, the narrator vividly sees Isabel, a central character of the novel, dancing in the porch of her house back when she was still a little girl:

. . . [Y] ahora, Isabel está otra vez ahí, bailando con su hermano Nicolás, en el corredor iluminado por linternas anaranjadas, girando sobre sus tacones, con los rizos en desorden y una sonrisa encandilada en los labios. Un coro de jóvenes vestidas de claro los rodea. Su madre la mira con reproche. Los criados están bebiendo alcohol en la cocina.

– No van a acabar bien – sentencian las gentes alrededor del brasero.

– ¡Isabel! ¿Para quién bailas? ¡Pareces una loca! (12)

The memory is bittersweet. Already there are glimpses of elements that contribute to the destruction of the town and of Isabel. But alongside these bitter elements we see a sweet side of life: Isabel dancing, the children and the servants having a good time at the party, the togetherness of Isabel and Nicolás, the warmth of the fire. It is ultimately a festive atmosphere in spite of the bitterness of the people sitting by the fireplace.

In the end of the narrative, the reality portrayed is one in which all positive elements have vanished. Only bitterness and heartache remain. Isabel dies and the memory of the sweet little girl has faded. Her death, at twenty years old, does little to inspire. Instead, it serves to amplify the narrative's final note of despair. The inscription on Isabel's tombstone offers a summary of her role in the story of the town:

Soy Isabel Moncada, nacida de Martín Moncada y de Ana Cuétera de Moncada, en el pueblo de Ixtepec el primero de diciembre de 1907. En piedra me convertí el cinco de octubre de 1927 delante de los ojos espantados de Gregoria Juárez. Causé la desdicha de mis padres y la muerte de mis hermanos Juan y Nicolás. Cuando venía a pedirle a la Virgen que me curara del amor que tengo por el general Francisco Rosas que mató a mis hermanos, me arrepentí y preferí el amor del hombre que me perdió y perdió a mi familia. Aquí estaré con mi amor a solas como recuerdo del porvenir por los siglos de los siglos. (295)

The novel ends with these words. The reader is left, as in Pedro Páramo, with the sterile imagery of stones and death, with no signs of a better future.

Ibarguengoitia's *Los relámpagos de agosto* brings humor to the *narrativa de la Revolución Mexicana*. But the humor does not take away from the tragic and pessimistic message of the novel.<sup>9</sup> The central character and narrator of the story is an ex-revolutionary general who makes use of his personal connections (*su palanca*) and his keen opportunism to climb the social ladder in a world where selfishness, ambition and greed are the most powerful forces. The story begins with the narrator telling about the day that he receives, at the age of thirty-eight, a letter from Mexico's President-elect, inviting him to be in charge of the Presidential *Secretaría Particular*. According to the

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<sup>9</sup> The Joaquín Mortiz edition includes an anonymous one-page preface that describes the novel as follows: "La primera novela que escribió Ibarguengoitia y que tituló *Los relámpagos de agosto*...es el reverso humorístico de la novela de la Revolución. Dejando al lado el realismo cruento, las vivencias dolorosas, la emoción directa y el dato histórico preciso, lo que predomina aquí es una esencia satírica y quemante. La narración, presentada en la forma de "memorias" de un general revolucionario caído en desgracia y situado siempre en circunstancias mordázmente cómicas, mantiene de principio a fin el tono de la parodia y del absurdo burlón."

narrator, the episode is significant because it marks the first time that his merits were finally being officially recognized. “Por fin mis méritos iban a ser reconocidos de una manera oficial,” he says (12). But the narrative then reveals that the narrator is not the man of merit he claims to be. Rather, the narrator is an unreliable and pathetic character. His story is a series of tragicomic mishaps. The arrival of the letter, seemingly an event that marks a new stage of success for the protagonist, is actually the beginning of a downward spiral.

At the end of the narrative, the general ends up in jail, lucky to be alive, having barely escaped a death sentence. This outcome might seem, at first glance, a comic rather than a tragic ending. After all, the general deserves such a fate. He is a lying, corrupt, and ruthless hypocrite. Upon closer inspection, however, this ending is more tragic than comic, for the jailers are more evil than the prisoner. It isn't a case of good triumphing over evil. Instead, we have an ending similar to the endings of *La sombra del caudillo* and *La región*, where the reader is left with the idea that powerful and evil individuals have a secure hold on power. And, the downfall of Arroyo has little to do with his lack of good character. It has more to do with his inability to compete with the more capable criminal minds of those in power. The half page epilogue at the end of the novel gives the narrative its final tragic note. The reader is informed that Arroyo goes on to recuperate his position of power and wealth in society. So, while the narrative is replete with humorous elements, it would be incorrect to call it a *comic* narrative, because the ironic ending is tragic.

In Elena Poniatowska's testimonial novel *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, the bitter and hardened narrator Jesusa Palancares tells a story that explains why she is this way. In her life there is little to inspire hope. She does at times express faith in the coming of a better existence after death, but her expression does not serve to inspire faith in the reader. Her visions of a better future are unconvincing. More convincing is the sad portrait she paints of her lived experiences. The portrait is tragic. Only when she speaks nostalgically of her past do we sense happiness in her. This is not to say that her visions of her past are all positive. In fact, her past is characterized more by hardship than by happiness. Nonetheless, her reflections of the past do contain a nostalgic positive note, while her reflections about her present situation and her immediate past portray only hardship.

An early passage of the novel, where Jesusa reminisces about her father and the toys he provided her, captures the bittersweet nature of her childhood memories as well as her pessimistic vision of earthly existence. Jesusa explains that her father did not have any money to buy toys for her. Nonetheless, he managed to provide. He improvised toys out of anything he could find, including rocks and sticks. Jesusa didn't mind, she was happy playing with dirt and singing her songs. She explains:

Como mi papá no tenía medio de comprarme nada, mis juguetes eran unas piedras, una flecha, una honda para aventar pedradas y canicas que él mismo pulía. . . . Los trompos de palo me los sacaba de un árbol que se llama pochote y ese pochote tiene muchas chichitas. Escogía las más grandes para hacerme las pirinolas y nomás les daba yo una vuelta y ya bailaban. Y mientras giraban yo fantaseaba. . . . Como no tenía pensamientos jugaba con la tierra. Me gustaba

harto tentarla porque a los cinco años todavía vemos la tierra blanca. Nuestro Señor hizo toda su creación blanca a su imagen y semejanza, y se ha ido ennegreciendo con los años con el uso y la maldad. Por eso los niños chiquitos juegan con la tierra porque la ven muy bonita, blanca, y a medida que crecen el demonio se va apoderando de ellos, de sus pensamientos y les va transformando las cosas, ensuciándolas, cambiándoles el color, encharcándoselas. (21)

The novel closes with Jesusa offering another one of her classic commentaries about the sad nature of earthly existence. In this commentary, she even questions her father's love for her. Furthermore, her irreverent reference to Jesus suggests that she might begin questioning him next. She states: "Yo no creo que la gente sea buena, la mera verdad, no. Sólo Jesucristo y no lo conocí. Y mi padre, que nunca supe si me quiso o no. Pero de aquí sobre la tierra, ¿quién quiere usted que sea bueno? . . . Ahora ya no chingue. Váyase. Déjeme dormir" (304). The novel thus ends, on an angry note, with the resentful Jesusa asking the narratee (i.e. Poniátowska) to leave her alone so she can get some sleep. Even worse, the passages leading up to this last one suggest that Jesusa wants life to be over with. She has had enough of this existence and looks forward to her death.

#### Solares' novels of the Revolution: Looking beyond the typical pessimism

Solares' novels reflect a desire and an ability to transcend the pessimism reflected in previous novels of the Mexican Revolution. Solares expresses and explores, by way of his narratives, some very dark feelings of disillusionment and pessimism but he does not allow these feelings to dominate the narrative. Solares' desire and ability to transcend the

pessimism of previous novels is evident, beginning with his first novel of the Mexican Revolution, *Madero, el otro*.

The upward direction of the narrative is the characteristic that most clearly reflects and promotes this desire to transcend pessimism. Using the narrative's beginning and end points as coordinates, it is easy to trace the narrative's upward direction. The action begins at the moment Francisco Madero receives a fatal bullet through the head on the first day of Mexico's *decenia trágica*. At that moment, Madero experiences physical death and begins an afterlife journey, guided by the voice of the spirit-narrator, as I explained in chapter one. The words spoken by the spirit-narrator make evident that Madero is full of metaphysical pain and anguish as he begins his journey in the afterlife. And, the voice will not allow Madero to distance himself from the thoughts and memories that cause this pain. Instead, the voice insists that Madero face his memories of the past, beginning with the recent memory of his final moments on earth. Madero must look directly at the tragic image of his limp and lifeless body lying on the ground "como un títere al que hubieran cortado los hilos, desfigurado dentro del charco de sangre, las aletas de la nariz profundas y dilatadas, los ojos asimétricos" (7). The hero hears the voice of the spirit-narrator telling him: "Mira, llevas la misma ropa del día dieciocho en que te aprehendieron: la camisa dura, el jacquet y el pantalón claro a rayas. El sombrero de hongo – ridículo – ha rodado hasta cerca de una de las llantas del Protos. . . ." (7). As Madero recalls these images, the spirit-narrator pushes him to ponder the reasons why he might be feeling anguish as he begins his afterlife journey, telling him:

¿ . . . [F]ue el rompimiento tan brusco, tan repentino, tan a destiempo? ¿O la convicción de haber cometido un gran error sin lograr ubicarlo con exactitud? ¿Te hubiera sucedido igual si mueres en tu casa, con las manos de Sarita entre las tuyas? ¿O es el presentimiento de que tu muerte no hará sino desencadenar otras muertes, otros odios hasta ahora dormidos, el tigre que tanto temió don Porfirio que despertara, o la ola roja que cubrirá a tu país como a ti te cubrió los ojos con el estallido del últimos disparo? . . . ¿No te duele más el sacrificio de tu hermano Gustavo que el tuyo propio? (8)

Madero's anguish is severe and appears to be justified. Furthermore, the spirit-narrator suggests the possibility that Madero's death brings no relief to anyone, including the hero.

A comparison of this gloomy beginning to the previously mentioned beginnings of the novels of the cross section reveals a contrast. The novels of the cross section offer the reader a brighter start. *Los de abajo*, for example, begins with Demetrio's escape, which represents a victory for the hero and suggests future victories. *La sombra* begins with flattering depictions of Axkaná and Aguirre, during a time in their life when all is well. *El águila* begins with the depiction of a young adventurer enthusiastically embarking on a new mission. *Los relámpagos* begins with the narrator telling about the day in which he received a great promotion. The beginning of *Los recuerdos* is marked by the narrator's heartfelt recollection of little kids dancing and playing at a party. Even *Pedro Páramo* evokes glimmers of hope at the beginning of its narrative! *Madero, el*

*otro*, however, begins with a graphic image of death, an anguish-filled hero, and a grim outlook for the future.

As the narrative of *Madero, el otro* continues, it becomes evident that the spirit-narrator is helping Madero to move to a better state of existence. Like a psychotherapist who encourages a hypnotized patient to uncover blocked memories from a painful past, the spirit-narrator helps the hero achieve a better understanding of who he is, and helps the hero liberate himself from the anguish caused by his memories. At the end of the narrative, the lifeless body of the hero remains in the same pool of blood where it lay at the beginning. The only physical change is that Madero's body is "tendido boca arriba," facing the heavens, rather than facedown like in the beginning. (246). This minor physical change symbolizes the significant metaphysical transformation that the hero experiences during the course of the narrative. Metaphysically, the hero has moved from a place in which anguish, anxiety, disillusionment, guilt and pessimism afflict his spirit to one in which he understands the nature of his complicated past and is at peace. The peaceful state of the hero is described as a heavenly place:

. . . el único lugar en donde se conjugan la acción y la paz más plenas, lo que pudiste haber sido y lo que fuiste sin remedio, la piedra angular, explicativa que corona el arco, el punto exacto en donde convergen hacia ti, como el centro de una rueda, todos los rayos de la luna. (246)

The narrative thus ends, with celestial images serving as the backdrop for the hero's spirit. The memory of his lifeless physical body is no longer the cause of any anguish.

In the novels of the cross section, we see eleven examples of novels where the positive elements presented at the beginning of the narrative deteriorate by the end. In *Madero, el otro*, the beginning is characterized by an abundance of negative elements and this facilitates a movement towards the positive.

In *La noche de Ángeles*, two narratives unfold simultaneously and in relation to each other. One tells the story of the events that led to the 1919 execution of Ángeles. This story is a by-product of Felipe Ángeles' ability to recall, from the vantage point of the afterlife, his life on earth. The second narrative tells the story of a journey that Ángeles must complete after he dies. The course of Ángeles' afterlife journey is determined by his ability to recall and comprehend the earthly events leading to his execution.

Both narratives move in an upward direction. The first, which tells of the events leading to Ángeles execution, is easy to outline. It begins with the general preparing to return to Mexico after a period of exile in the United States. The purpose of the general's journey is to reunite with Villa and thus continue his struggle to achieve the ideals of the Revolution. The similarities between this beginning and that of *El águila y la serpiente* make possible a meaningful comparison. Both narratives begin with the evocation of the central character embarking on a journey to meet Pancho Villa after a period of exile in the United States. But the attitudes of the journeymen are different. Guzmán is excited as he prepares for his journey. He is full of expectations, illusions and anticipation. Ángeles feels no excitement, no thrill, no anticipation of victory. Instead, he is a character full of

doubts and questions, a man of little energy or hope. The narrator emphasizes Ángeles' broken spirit and body, stating:

...[Ángeles] ya traía el dolor aquel y la tristeza como un gran peso sobre la espalda: le doblaba el espinazo y se lo dibujaba en la camisa como el de un gato flaco. Y fue la tristeza misma la que le produjo el dolor del estómago y él lo sabía.

“Los míos son males de la tristeza.” (9)

Ángeles thus begins his journey, as a man “que comprende y participa de todas las debilidades humanas” (22).

The first of *La noche's* two narratives ends on the second to last page of the novel, with Ángeles' execution. Hardly a happy ending, it would seem. But the episode is actually positive and inspiring, for Ángeles dies with total dignity, having chosen death as the best means to move the Revolution forward. Ángeles is willing to die because he remembers and is inspired by Madero's willingness to fertilize the Revolution with his own blood. Ángeles, prior to his execution, has an opportunity to escape. But, instead of escaping, he chooses to give his life to accelerate the success of the Revolution. The narrative thus ends, with Ángeles portrayed as a hero whose spirit is unbeatable.

The second of *La noche's* two narratives tells of Ángeles' afterlife journey. This second narrative is not presented to the reader directly or explicitly, as is narrative number one. The reader must piece together the afterlife story by listening to the scarce and intermittent words of a second-person narrator, who speaks directly to Ángeles using the formal *usted* form. The identity of the second-person narrator is left to the reader to determine, much like the identity of the narrator of *Madero, el otro*. The narrator is

perhaps the spirit of someone who was close to Ángeles, maybe Madero. Or, it could be that Ángeles is hearing an inner voice that speaks to him from a higher or deeper level of consciousness. The similarities between this second-person spirit-narrator and the second-person spirit-narrator of *Madero, el otro* are obvious.

The story of Ángeles' afterlife journey begins when the second-person spirit-narrator awakens Ángeles, asking him to look at his past. The spirit-narrator tells Ángeles: "General. General Ángeles. Mire:" (9). After delivering this wake-up call to Ángeles, the spirit-narrator stops talking and a third-person narrator begins telling the story of the events leading to Ángeles' execution. The purpose of the spirit-narrator's wake-up call is to make Ángeles focus on his past and, more specifically, on the events leading to his execution. As the third-person narrator delivers the story of these events, the second-person spirit-narrator interrupts periodically to help the hero analyze them. The brief intermittent interruptions of the second-person spirit-narrator indirectly reveal to the reader the nature of the hero's afterlife journey.

The journey begins on a low point, with the hero in a sad state. Ángeles feels a "sentimiento de derrota" and carries a feeling of sadness "como un peso en la espalda" (19, 25). The spirit-narrator, like the spirit-narrator in *Madero, el otro*, evokes the darkest of memories and points out their most painful, perplexing and complicated aspects. At one point, the spirit-narrator reminds Ángeles of the day his men laugh at him (24); at another point, the spirit-narrator reminds the General of the death of one his most beloved and loyal lieutenants (24). And, the questions posed to Ángeles by the spirit-narrator have

no clear answers (15); instead, they raise doubts and expose weaknesses in the hero's way of thinking, feeling and acting.

As the narrative continues, it becomes clear that the spirit-narrator is ultimately helping the general, rather than torturing him with painful memories. Like in *Madero, el otro*, the spirit-narrator helps the hero work through the anguish afflicting his spirit. In the end, the hero disembarks on the "muddy shores" of twentieth century Mexico, having achieved a breakthrough (186). With a renewed spirit, he will inspire and lead, as he did in times past, the men and women who are willing to fight for the ideals of Madero's Revolution. The novel thus ends, with the beginning of a new journey and a new challenge. The question of whether or not he will succeed in meeting the challenges of this new journey is left open. Nonetheless, the hero is optimistic about the results. His spiritual state, when compared to his spiritual state at the beginning of the narrative, is very positive.

In *El gran elector*, we once again have a narrative that ends on a positive note. The narrator is the hilarious Domínguez, who tells the story of the events leading to his boss's most recent spiritual and mental breakdown. Early in the narrative, Domínguez reveals that his boss, the *Presidente de la República*, has a history of such breakdowns. None, however, have been as serious and threatening as the most recent. Domínguez begins by recalling the day when his boss, the President, was looking out the window of his Zócalo office, like so many other days, at the crowd gathered in the central plaza. All was normal that day except for the fact that the President spotted a mysterious looking "hombrecito" who had an uncanny resemblance to Francisco Madero. Domínguez

describes how the President's anxiety and stress levels increased, as he obsessed over the potential threat presented by this *hombrecito*.

Domínguez's story culminates near the end of the novel, when he tells about the confrontation between the President and the *hombrecito*, which takes place in the President's office, after Domínguez apprehends the *hombrecito*. At the beginning of the confrontation, the President is relaxed and the *hombrecito* is tense. But, this changes in the few minutes it takes Domínguez to go get coffee for the President. When Domínguez returns with the coffee, everything has changed. Domínguez explains: "unos cuantos minutos después, la escena había cambiado del todo: aunque el *hombrecito* seguía en la misma posición y con la misma mirada ausente . . ." (107). The President, unlike the cool and collected *hombrecito*, has lost control of himself. Domínguez explains, "hablaba casi a gritos y los ojos le papaloteaban en las órbitas" (107). The President's mental and spiritual well-being are gravely injured as a result of the confrontation. The story thus ends, with the defeat of the central character and the victory of his antagonist, the *hombrecito*.

The reason the President's defeat is positive is that he is a villainous and despicable character. His defeat is thus a great moment to witness because he deserves to lose. The *hombrecito*, on the other hand, deserves to win. As I discuss in the previous chapter of this dissertation, he is committed wholeheartedly to the advancement of society. He deserves a victory and this is what he gets.

In Solares' fourth novel of the Revolution, *Columbus*, optimism is reflected more subtly and indirectly than in any of the previous three. In *Madero, el otro* and *La noche*

*de Ángeles*, the positivity and optimism is reflected by way of narratives that begin negatively and end positively. In *El gran elector*, we again see a narrative that ends on a positive note. *Columbus* inspires and reflects optimism more indirectly, by putting the spotlight on a pessimistic but unconvincing character/narrator and then helping the reader to reject the narrator's pessimistic autobiographical interpretation. The novel, rather than directly project an optimistic outlook, facilitates optimism indirectly by helping the reader reject the pessimism projected by the narrator.

This novel, once again, contains two narratives. We could describe the first, in simple terms, as follows: a pessimistic old man named Luis Treviño talks to a young reporter about his experiences in the Revolution. There are thus two characters in this narrative. The action takes place in the bar owned by Treviño. The narrative is an implicit narrative because there is no narrator to explicitly describe the scenario or the events taking place. The reader must imagine the scenario by interpreting the subtle clues contained in the words of Treviño. Treviño's words are the only source for clues because his voice is the only one the reader explicitly hears in the novel. The words of the young reporter do not appear explicitly in the narrative. Nonetheless, the reader will likely recognize that the young reporter is part of the scenario because Luis Treviño says things like: "tú, muchacho, que andas con eso del reportaje" (16).

This narrative begins *in media res*, with Treviño in the middle of a sentence, explaining to the young reporter his reasons for joining Villa: "Para joder a los gringos" (11). At this point, the identity of the narrator is not yet evident. But, soon thereafter, the narrative reveals that the narrator is Treviño and that he is speaking to a young reporter

who visits him in hopes of finding information about his father. As it turns out, the young reporter learns little about his dad. Instead, he gets an earful of Treviño's autobiographical rambling.

The story of Treviño's life, told by Treviño, is the second narrative of the novel. Treviño attempts to explain why he joined Villa and what happened as a result. His story may be seen as an attempt to make himself into a type of hero and to turn the story of his life into some type of *bildungsroman*. He claims to have begun his life as an idealistic young man, later gaining the clarity of vision that turns him into a pessimist and a disillusioned skeptic. He explains that was once fascinated, as a young man, by the desert skies and the desert landscape of his Chihuahua homeland. The desert inspired him to the point of mystical exaltation, offering him an ideal setting for spiritual retreats he cherished. As he grew older, the desert began to affect him in a different way. He explains:

De mis retiros místicos – hasta antes de que me nacieran las dudas – siempre regresé con los ojos, con las manos, con la piel como en efervescencia, en un grado de exaltación casi insoportable. Ver ahí, en absoluta soledad, un amanecer – el momento preciso en que las lenguas del sol empiezan a reptar por la arena, encendiéndola poco a poco – se te puede convertir en una peligrosa droga, me cae. Ve a comprobarlo un día, anímate, tú que andas con eso del reportaje. Claro, la ilusión te durará hasta el momento en que te pongas a pensar, y como dejar de pensarlo, si no más bien estás solo y tu alma, la presencia que suponías era apenas tu propia sombra – que ahí es siempre enorme, desdoblada – , y detrás de las

noches magníficas que has gozado en el desierto no hay sino eso, una noche magnífica y arena infinita y estrellas muy cercanas, gordas y delumbrantes o tan pequeñas como llamitas de fósforos, pero al fin de cuentas titilantes en un universo que, por decirlo con moderación, ha sido abandonado de la mano de Dios, si es que alguna vez existió Dios y tuvo mano. Entonces te vuelves alérgico a la droga. . . . (15-16)

Treviño goes on to explain that his disillusionment leads him to quit the seminary. He suggests that the decision is a milestone in the development of his pessimistic brand of wisdom.

At this point in the novel, it is hardly apparent that Treviño's story is a parody of pessimistic discourse. As Treviño continues his story, the flawed and unreliable nature of his character become obvious and the element of parody becomes more explicit. Treviño's pessimism is not contagious. His narrative, rather than inspire pessimism in the reader, simply reveals that the narrator is a pathetic loser.

The flaws in Treviño's character are revealed throughout the story. In one of the most revealing sections, he tells about his decision to quit the seminary and move to Juárez, where his uncle finds him a job as an errand boy at a local brothel. The brothel catered largely to Americans and was famous for its midget prostitutes. Treviño emphasizes, "fue el mejor burdel de la época, de eso no tengo duda," explaining further:

Se habían puesto de moda entre los gringos las enanas – se metían con dos y tres a la vez – y había que buscarlas por donde se pudiera (hasta en un circo que pasó por Chihuahua nos jalamos un par). Tenían que ser enanas, pero no enanas indias:

esa parecía la condición. Por lo menos, no totalmente indias sino ya medio mezcladitas. Por ejemplo, a una enana que bajé de la Tarahumara le hicieron el feo, no hubo gringo que se metiera con ella y tuve que regresarla a su cueva de origen. (16-17)

Treviño's attempt to put a positive spin on his job at the brothel is unconvincing from the beginning. It reaches absurd proportions as he goes into further detail about the brothel's ongoings. The absurdity of the story makes it hilarious and tragic at the same time. The caricaturesque descriptions of the wild sexual activities are funny. But the story is sad because it is plausible that the strange exploitations described by Treviño could have existed. It is also sad that Treviño is in denial of his having facilitated a situation he supposedly despised. While he viciously criticizes the *gringos* and their mistreatment of the prostitutes, he is the one who recruited the prostitutes and the gringos. Furthermore, Treviño looks back at all of this without recognizing that his actions were as despicable as those of the gringos he criticizes. He is a hypocrite.

Treviño's pathetic nature is further exposed when he goes into detail about his decision to leave the brothel and join the Revolution. At the beginning of the novel, he claims he joined Villa to "joder a los gringos" (11). However, as the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that his motivation for joining Villa was not quite so simple. His decision to join Villa also stemmed from his infatuation with Villa's ability to overpower and humiliate adversaries. Treviño's infatuation becomes evident when he nostalgically describes the emotions he felt as he and fellow *juarenses* gathered around to witness Villa's battles from a hillside viewpoint on the edge of Juárez:

. . . [L]os juarenses nos congregábamos en las colinas del lado oeste de la ciudad, especialmente en un cerro que nos resultaba una atalaya ideal. Hasta niños y comida llevaban, como a un *picnic*.

Desde ahí vi la batalla en que Villa derrotó a los federales huertistas, en noviembre del trece. Apenas me avisaron que había empezado el tiroteo, corrí a ganar un buen lugar, con el corazón hecho un bombo. Llegué a las cinco de la mañana, cuando peleaban por el rumbo de la Estación Central del ferrocarril, dentro de una llamarada que parecía precipitar el amanecer y que desparramaba unas lucecitas como cohetes de feria. . . . La gente se apretujaba a mi lado, cubriéndose con serapes. . . . Frotaban los ojos soñolientos, echaban vaho a las manos heladas o aplaudían ciertas escenas, nomás por aplaudir y sin demasiada convicción partidista, tengo la impresión. El fuego de los cañones les resultaba también especialmente vistoso. (26-27)

For Treviño, the highlight of the grand spectacle comes when Villa establishes his superiority over Huerta's army. With great excitement, Treviño describes how the surviving *huertistas* ran around in disarray as Villa went in for the kill. Treviño explains that the spectators loved this. They laughed hysterically and compared it to a legendary battle in which Villa made the *huertistas* parade naked in front of him.

The reaction of the spectators, as described by Treviño, is disturbing. Even more disturbing, however, is Treviño's description of his own reaction. He explains that his fascination with the spectacle sparked in him the desire to join Villa. Furthermore, Treviño reveals that he felt this desire in spite of the "mistreatment" suffered by his father

at the hands of Villa's men: "Ya desde entonces, en algún rinconcito de mi vida – y a pesar de lo mal que habían tratado a mi padre, ya te contaré – me crecía el deseo de unirme a la horda de villistas: nomás por unirme a ellos, por formar parte de ellos, por seguirlos" (29). Treviño mentions the "mistreatment" in passing, as if it were something insignificant. But this detail, even in brief mention, suggests disturbing images to anyone familiar with the mythical reputation of Villa's soldiers. In fact, Treviño's brief mention of the detail is disturbing precisely because it is so brief. Why does Treviño not give further information about this "mistreatment"? Is he in denial of the pain his Father suffered at Villa's hands? Can he not bring himself to talk about it? Actually, the reason Treviño withholds from going into further detail is that he does not want to interrupt his vivid recollection of the excitement he felt when watching Villa humiliate the *huertistas*.

Treviño later makes good on his promise to tell more about the mistreatment his father suffered. It occurred on the night a group of *villistas* broke into his parent's house, looking for money. Treviño learned about this episode from his mother. Recalling the details of his mother's story, he states:

Dentro de una verdadera pesadilla, me contó mi madre, un grupo de villistas irrumpió una noche en mi casa y busco bajo las duelas del piso, en los techos, en los colchones, en los cajones, en los roperos, abajo de los muebles, destruyéndolo y revolviéndolo todo. Lo hacían, deshacían, en nombre de la Revolución y para dar ese dinero a los pobres, hijos de puta. Como no encontraron nada, a mi padre casi lo matan. Quedó tan fregado que ya no pudo trabajar y mis hermanos y yo tuvimos que buscar para el chivo.

Y sin embargo, con esos antecedentes, terminé yéndome a la Sierra con Villa, ¿puedes entenderlo? (38-39)

Treviño, it seems, recognizes momentarily the irrationality of his decision to join Villa. However, he does not stop to give his irrationality a second thought.

Later, Treviño recalls the way in which his then-girlfriend Obdulia reacted when he told her he wanted to join Villa. She became excited and rewarded him by promptly taking him up to her bedroom. Treviño's decision to run off with Villa thus became final and Obdulia insists on going with him. During their adventure, she finds out that Treviño is not cut out to be a revolutionary and is unable to take care of her. She proves to be a more capable revolutionary and eventually leaves him, recognizing that she is much too intelligent, too strong, too talented and too beautiful for him.

The "climax" of Treviño's short-lived career as a revolutionary comes when he finally gets the opportunity to participate in battle. The battle, as it turns out, is Villa's most embarrassing military escapade: his attack on the town of Columbus, New Mexico. Treviño's disappointing performance on the field of battle reveals further his inadequacy. His experience as a villista ends in total disappointment. Nonetheless, he tries to exploit the experience. He returns to Juárez and purchases a bar, naming it "Los Dorados" in commemoration of Villa's legendary band of soldiers, and decorating the walls with pictures and trinkets that evoke the Mexican Revolution. In his bar, Treviño spends his time wallowing in the tragic irony of his experience as a revolutionary.

His story does not end happily. At the same time, the ending is not tragic. After all, Treviño is a weak character who suffers a fate that seems fitting. Let us not forget,

furthermore, that the novel contains two narratives. The story Treviño tells is but one of the two. And, the novel does not end when this explicit narrative ends. It ends, rather, with the end of the implicit narrative we mentioned earlier.

This implicit narrative ends when the young reporter leaves the bar without notifying the drunk Treviño. Treviño is initially outraged by the sudden departure but promptly calms down and begins retelling his story from the beginning. The narrative thus ends where it began. The difference is that nobody is listening this time. Treviño is left without an audience. The young reporter (i.e. the narratee) was smart enough to walk away and not subject himself to Treviño's pessimism. This is reassuring.

#### Concluding statements

Marta Portal, in her book-length study of the *narrativa de la Revolución*, states that the pessimism of the narratives reflects “una disminución muy profunda de la fe en los valores que en el pasado inmediato se defendían con adhesión absoluta” (363). José Antonio Portuondo states something similar when explaining the reasons behind the bitter tone of the novels he studies. He argues that the novels of the genre reflect the perspective of someone whose total vision of existence has been turned upside down by the catastrophic events of the Revolution (286). My study of the novels of the cross section lead me to believe that these generalizations are correct. Only one of the novels of the cross section reflects a faith in some sort of value or belief system. This would be *Al filo del agua*.

Certainly we could call the works “modern tragedies,” according to the definition of modern tragedy given by the Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams, in his 1966

publication *Modern Tragedy*. Williams defines the twentieth century's "dominant idea of tragedy," making frequent reference to Schopenhauer, whom he sees as the often unacknowledged forerunner of this idea. According to Williams, Schopenhauer had begun, in the nineteenth century, to comprehend, articulate and help shape the idea that is now dominant in most 20<sup>th</sup> century tragedy. Quoting Schopenhauer, Williams states:

What we see in tragedy, Schopenhauer insists, is, "the unspeakable pain, the wail of humanity, the triumph of evil, the scornful mastery of chance, the irretrievable fall of the just and innocent." What we see in the tragic action is the power of evil and of blind fate. (37)

This is the type of tragedy that is evoked in the novels of the cross section.

About Solares' novels, we could say that his novels contradict this idea. The fall of the just and the innocent is not irretrievable, and it is not the "power of evil" but rather the "power of good" that prevails in the end. The righteous and the unrighteous eventually get what they deserve. This optimistic view of life is different from the pessimistic one that prevails in the novels of the cross section. Furthermore, Solares' novels reflect a desire to surpass the disillusionment that had become predictable in the *novela de la Revolución*. While the overt expression of pessimism and disillusionment may have been necessary and thought-provoking when the novels of the cross section were published, I argue that Solares' transcendence of pessimism and disillusionment is intellectually stimulating and socially responsible, as it is achieved at a time when

pessimism and disillusionment are not simply the “lot of the intellectuals” but rather a disease of the masses.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Beatrice Berler affirmed that “gloom and disillusionment was the lot of the Revolution’s intellectuals in her 1964 article “The Mexican Revolution as reflected in the novel” (43).

### Chapter 3

#### **The Positive Interpretation of Religious Faith in Solares' Novels of the Mexican Revolution**

In chapter two, I argue that Solares novels reflect a desire and an ability to look beyond the failures of the Revolution. In this chapter, I begin by pointing out that Solares' optimistic vision is facilitated by his religious conception of existence, the basic characteristics of which I proceed to outline. I then argue that Solares' novels implicitly encourage the reader to understand religious faith as a fundamental necessity for individual fulfillment and as an empowering force in the struggle for social progress.

Solares' *novelas de la Revolución* are unique in their presentation of religion as a potential force of empowerment in people's lives. Commentaries about the value of religious faith, any variation of it, are nowhere to be found in my previously identified cross section of the *narrativa de la Revolución*. Not one of the novels in the cross section encourages the reader to look towards any type of religion or spiritual discipline as a means of achieving societal or individual progress and fulfillment. What we do find are various illustrations of the ways religious faith has slowed down, prevented or failed to contribute to such progress. *Al filo del Agua* is worthy of mention in this regard, being that the novel focuses on the ways that religion and faith negatively affect the society portrayed. In *Al filo*, religious faith equates to religious fanaticism, and Yáñez's positive assessment of the Revolution is based largely on the idea that the Revolution broke the chains of this fanaticism. As Christopher Harris points out:

In *Al filo del Agua*, the overarching textual strategy adopted by Yáñez in order to steer his readers towards a positive assessment of the social impact of the Revolution in rural Mexico is to depict, from the vantage point and improved circumstances of the 1940's, two of the most disturbingly unacceptable features of Mexican society during the final eighteen months of the Porfiriato: (i) the psychological distress that was being caused by religious fanaticism; and (ii) the extreme poverty that was being endured on haciendas throughout the country.

(10)

Harris accurately points out, furthermore, that the psychological stress caused by the religious fanaticism is the “principal social problem portrayed in *Al filo del agua*” and that “it would be difficult to identify anything else as the novel’s main theme” (11, 12).

Another interesting case is the testimonial novel *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*. In this novel, Catholicism offers little to the central character and narrator Jesusa Palancares. And, Jesusa’s bitter critique of the Church does not lack reason. She abandons Catholicism and adopts the practice of Spiritism in its place, becoming completely enthralled with the Spiritist doctrine. The sincerity of Jesusa’s devotion notwithstanding, Spiritism is portrayed as an inadequate blend of superstition that gives the practitioner a false sense of empowerment.

The other novels of the cross section do not present such an explicit critique of religious faith; however, they do not encourage the reader to consider religious faith as an empowering force. Solares’ novels are thus unique, as each of them reflects a belief or, at the very least, an interest in the idea that religion can be an empowering force, not only

for the individual but for society as a whole. It is important to note, however, that Solares' novels do not reflect a desire to undermine the validity of critiques that shed light on the inadequacy of traditional or mainstream religion in Mexican society. In fact, Solares' novels reiterate these critiques, albeit faintly.

In *Madero, el otro*, for example, the narrator recalls the Catholic Church as an institution plagued by hypocrisy and an "interés desmedido por lo terrenal" (105). This *interés* drives church officials to maintain and cultivate relationships with the rich and powerful, often compromising their integrity in the process. The Church's hypocrisy is underlined when the narrator recalls the speech given by a Catholic priest at the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party of Evaristo, the Madero family patriarch who had little patience for his grandson Francisco's altruism. The spirit-narrator helps Madero recall the party and the speech, telling him:

. . . [E]l sacerdote, ahí en el púlpito, a un lado de la Virgen de los Misioneros a la que rezabas de niño, elevó un agradecimiento al Altísimo por la larga vida otorgada a su hijo Evaristo, caballero de la fe católica – así lo llamó, ¿lo recuerdas?, caballero de la fe católica – ,plena y sin mácula, dedicado al bien de su comunidad, de su familia y de su iglesia. . . . (105)

The narrator draws attention to the priest's use of the term *caballero de la fe católica* because Evaristo does not deserve such an accolade. The term conjures up images of the medieval military religious orders like the Knights of St. James (Caballeros de Santiago), who fought in the name of Christianity to reconquer Spain from the Moors. Another important knightly order is the Knights of Malta, the "oldest order of chivalry in

existence,” which exists today as a “religious community of lay men and women, and chaplains, whose aims are the sanctification of its members, service of the faith and of the Holy See, and welfare work” (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* 194). Of course, the priest is using the term *caballero de la fe* figuratively as a means of reverently emphasizing Evaristo’s commitment to the faith and to the community. Nonetheless, his use of the term suggests that Evaristo deserves to be singled out and revered due to his commitment to the Church and his community. The priest knows that Evaristo is committed to neither. Evaristo is, nonetheless, a rich and powerful member of the prerevolutionary oligarchy, which explains why the priest is present at his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party and why the priest extols him so enthusiastically.

Later in the narrative, the spirit-narrator recalls the day that counter-revolutionary soldiers, led by Gregorio Ruiz, tried to liberate the imprisoned enemy of Madero, Félix Díaz. The spirit-narrator tells Madero: “Al pasar por una iglesia, el general Ruiz se detuvo para pedirle al sacristán que hiciera sonar las campanas y aquel repique simbolizó el inicio del ‘movimiento de liberación’ ” (203). The so-called “liberation movement” of General Ruiz ends in a gun battle, during which the counterrevolutionary soldiers take positions in the church towers. The narrator recalls: “La mañana transparente se incendió con un fuego cruzado al que se agregaba el de las fuerzas rebeldes parapetadas – entonces se descubrió que las había – en las torres de la catedral” (206). So, once again, the Church is portrayed, albeit subtly, as an institution that sided with the forces of the Porfirian establishment, and against Madero’s revolutionary campaign.

In *La noche de Ángeles*, a subtle critique of the Church is voiced by the hero near the end of the narrative. When a Catholic priest encourages the hero to confess and take communion before facing the firing squad, the hero refuses, telling the priest:

– Le aseguro que todos estos meses que he vagado por la sierra no he hecho sino confesarme conmigo mismo. Y la comunión, ya ve usted: Estoy a punto de tomarla ante el pelotón del fusilamiento. . . . Me considero profundamente creyente en Cristo y en su palabra, y mi mayor consuelo en estos días ha sido mi reencuentro con él a través del libro de Renán. Pero sólo puedo creer en un Cristo libre y vivo aquí con nosotros, en todo cuanto nos rodea, más allá de las rígidas formas eclesiásticas. (180-81)

The hero's irreverence towards Catholicism and its "rígidas formas eclesiásticas" seem justified.

In *El gran elector*, the saintly *hombrecito* travels to the town of Aguichapán, where he tries to make the townspeople aware of the oppression they suffer at the hands of the town leaders. He asks the people whether "el jefe de policía, el presidente municipal, y el sacerdote eran íntegros y queridos" and "cuáles eran las quejas que la gente hacía de ellos" (51). No mention is made of the townspeople's response to these questions. However, the questions imply that the "sacerdote" is likely to have contributed to the people's oppression.

In *Columbus*, Treviño's story suggests that the Jesuit seminary did not succeed in giving him spiritual direction. He joins the seminary at a young age, prepared to study and embrace a spiritual faith and religious discipline. At the time he joins, he is a mystic

in the making. The desert had awakened in him an extraordinary spiritual sensibility. He was ready to become a man of God. The seminary, however, does nothing to develop this spirituality. The seminary priests seem more concerned with encouraging their students to do battle against those [Americans] trying to steal parishioners from the Church. Treviño states:

En el seminario de Chihuahua aprendí que si quería salvar mi alma debía prepararme para las contiendas que se librarían apenas los demonios del Anticristo – que sería el Perro mismo, que vendría a la tierra a reclutar prosélitos – invadieran, como mancha de fuego, las arenas de nuestros desiertos. No era difícil en aquellos años averiguar la nacionalidad de los demonios. Ya lo habían intentado en el año catorce, acuérdate, por el lado del mar, de Veracruz, en el mes de abril. (12)

Moments later in the narrative, Treviño states: “desde que salí del seminario supe que mi destino sería luchar contra *algo*” (14). Ironically, he enters the seminary with a desire to be a man of God and exits prepared to do battle against *algo*, be it the gringos or some other opponent. Treviño speaks romantically of his desire to fight, as if it were an heroic trait; however, the novel makes clear that his desire is ill-founded.

Treviño’s negative memories of the Padre Roque, the priest who mentored him at the seminary, compliment the critique of the Church. At one point, Treviño recalls how this priest, upon hearing confession, would often laugh a “risita burlona” (80). Later in the narrative, Treviño tells about the hallucination he had one night while suffering from a terrible fever outbreak. In this hallucination, he sees Roque as a type of demon or

monster: “[T]uve una larga alucinación en que vi al padre Roque a un lado del catre con un rostro desfigurado y bestial, babeante” (93). A few pages later, Treviño recalls the day he receives a copy of the Tibetan book of the Dead, as a gift. Upon receiving it, it occurs to him that Padre Roque would have discouraged the material. The narrator recalls the moment as follows: “Abrí mucho los ojos al leer el título: El libro tibetano de los muertos, Dios Santo, que hubiera dicho el padre Roque de los laberintos por los que andaba metido” (112).

Treviño later recalls how the priest guided him through his first mystical experience. The priest uses this special occasion as an opportunity to indoctrinate Treviño about the “superioridad de la Iglesia” (130). The priest insists on the Church’s grand importance, asking Treviño: “¿Sabes que la Iglesia es el cuerpo de Dios en la tierra y los sacerdotes los ministros de Jesucristo? ¿Lo crees sin una gota de duda en ti?” (131). The narrator’s recollection of the domineering priest does not encourage the reader to think positively about the Church.

As faint as these critiques are, they suggest that Catholicism is not the conduit to the particular type of faith that informs Solares’ conception of existence. Solares is not proposing Catholicism nor any other form of traditional Christianity or institutionalized religion for that matter. The religious faith that Solares proposes, while it incorporates several fundamental Christian beliefs, is something different from traditional Catholicism.

In the first couple of pages of *Madero, el otro*, some of the basic aspects of Solares’ religious conception of existence become apparent. The opening lines are an

excerpt from the Bhagavad Gita in which the deity Krishna tells Prince Arjuna: “Cualquier forma en que el hombre medite continuamente, esa forma es recordada en la hora de la muerte y hacia esa forma va él, oh Arjuna” (6). As soon as the action begins, the relevance of the opening lines is revealed. The initial action is a manifestation and illustration of the metaphysical principle that Krishna describes to Arjuna. Madero’s spiritual journey is a function of the thoughts that preoccupied him during his life on earth. Solares thus makes evident, in the first couple of pages of the novel, two of the beliefs that give shape to his conception of existence: One is the belief in the continuation of life after death. The second is the belief in the relationship between an individual’s thoughts on earth and the individual’s state of being in the life beyond.

As the narrative continues, we begin to see that *Madero el, otro* is not so much an exposition of beliefs regarding the life beyond, as it is an illustration of how these beliefs could and should determine how we live on earth. The novel tells the story of the hero’s afterlife journey but, more importantly, it describes and explains how the hero’s life on earth is defined by his religious faith. The novel thus portrays the hero as a man who goes to extremes to understand and live according to his faith’s dictates. The religious faith does not give him absolute power nor does it make him flawless. However, the hero is portrayed as a man whose extraordinary attributes and accomplishments are the result of his religious faith and his adherence to the code of conduct his faith requires. The narrative thus invites the reader to see the hero’s faith and spiritual discipline as sources of strength and power here on earth.

The origins, the sources, the general characteristics and the unique complexities of the hero's faith are revealed by way of subtle clues and explicit references throughout the narrative. One early clue is given when the narrator beckons Madero to recall a teaching he learned in the Bardo Thodol, or Tibetan Book of the Dead, as it is often called in the West. The mention of the Tibetan Book of the Dead is a telling reference to readers familiar with the sacred text. If nothing else, the reference suggests that Madero had an interest in Buddhism. The reference also reveals that Madero had access, through this classic text of Eastern religion, to knowledge about the life beyond and the importance of preparing for this other life. Furthermore, the reference suggests that Madero was willing to deviate from mainstream sources in his search for religious knowledge.

The spirit-narrator makes clear that Madero looked to numerous alternative sources for religious knowledge. The hero studied an eclectic mix of religious literature, all of which was outside of the mainstream for a man of his time. The spirit-narrator reveals that Madero was a "buen lector de filosofía hindú," that the Bardo Thodol was one of Madero's "libros predilectos" (8), that Madero "devoured" the Spiritist manuals of León Denis, a.k.a. Allan Kardec (53, 146), and that he read and revered the teachings of the Holy Gospels.

Evidently, Madero took his readings of religious literature seriously. Reading about religion was not some kind of hobby or pastime for Madero. His readings of the Gita, for example, inspired him to write a formal commentary, the completion of which was one of his priorities in the days preceding his death. The spirit-narrator implies the

importance of these commentaries by recalling how Madero carried and refused to let go of the *Comentarios* on the evening he was abducted by his would-be assassins. The spirit-narrator, helping Madero recall the details of the episode, tells the hero: “En el portafolios que con tanto celo retuviste hasta el final, y que no soltaste ni siquiera cuando el mayor Cárdenas te obligó a bajar del auto, llevabas tus *Comentarios al Bhagavad-Gita*” (90).

In one of the few published article-length studies of Solares’ novels of the Revolution, the critic Douglas Weatherford “explore[s] the importance of books, readers, and reading,” arguing that “Solares is intent on emphasizing his characters' passion for the written word” (74). I agree to some extent with Weatherford’s statement. However, I would argue further that those same characters who are so passionate about reading, are much more passionate about the truth they find as a result. The written word is a means to an end.

In *Madero, el otro*, the numerous references to the books Madero reads do serve to emphasize his love of books. But, more importantly, the references serve to emphasize his religious faith. At one point, the narrator mentions that reading is but a stepping stone to something greater. The statement comes when the narrator recalls the precise moment when Madero becomes a practitioner of Spiritism. Prior to this moment he was “only” an impassioned reader, a “mere” spectator and student of the doctrine:

. . . tus lecturas, las más constantes y apasionadas, eran precisamente sobre espiritismo. Pero eras sólo eso, un estudioso, hasta que aquella noche traspusiste la frontera y de mero espectador te transformaron en actor. . . Algo, aún nebuloso

se acercaba a ti, ¿pero qué era? . . . Había que empezar por pedir a Dios que, en caso de que así fuera, permitiera el encuentro milagroso por medio de la escritura. Apoyaste la pluma en la hoja *blanca*. . . .Decías después que si aquella primera emoción de descubrir como se arrastraba tu mano independientemente de tu voluntad se hubiera prolongado demasiado, hubieras muerto. (54)

This is an important evening for Madero, for he gains access to a new source of inspiration and spiritual direction. The source is his communication with the souls of the deceased.

The narrator makes numerous references to Madero's communications with souls or spirits, often recalling in detail the spirits' teachings. Through these recollections, the narrator helps the reader comprehend the nature of Madero's religious faith and discipline. One of the fundamental aspects of Madero's faith is his wholehearted belief in God and in the continuation of life after death. The first message that Madero receives from the spirits is: "Ama a Dios sobre todas las cosas y a tu prójimo como a ti mismo" (54). While the references to Madero's love of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Gita, the Holy Gospels, and other religious works, reveal that Madero had access to religious knowledge, the narrator's recollections of Madero's communications with the spirits confirm that Madero was a man of faith and not simply a curious reader or student of religion.

Madero, simply by hearing the voices of the spirits, gained greater faith in the existence of God and the life beyond. His faith, however, was also strengthened by the content of the messages he received. The spirits spoke to him about the existence of God

and the continuation of life after death, encouraging him to eliminate all doubts. The spirit of Raúl played a significant role in teaching Madero about matters pertaining to the afterlife. The narrator reminds Madero of Raúl's importance, telling him:

Raúl te instruyó sobre las cuestiones del más allá: al descubrir tu miedo porque tu madre que estaba enferma, pudiera morir, te dice: “No entiendo ese miedo tan horrible a lo que ustedes llaman muerte, que en realidad no es sino la vida, pues al abandonar el espíritu su envoltura material viene a disfrutar una verdadera vida, y más alguien como mamá, que ha tenido una existencia plena de buenas acciones.”

(56)

A few pages later, the narrator makes reference to the time when the spirit of José Vierna Zorrilla reiterated to Madero the importance of eliminating all doubt and having complete faith in God. Zorrilla, who took his own life with a handgun, told Madero:

a cada momento me vuelvo a ver con el arma brutal en la mano y, a pesar de mi dolorosa resisitencia a ya no . . . a ya no apretar el gatillo, vuelvo a hacerlo una y otra vez, y vuelvo a sufrir el mismo dolor de mi falta de resignación y de mi falta de fe en Dios. (62)

Madero also learned how to “dominar la materia” with the help of the spirits and particularly with the help of Raúl's guidance and Raúl's reprimands. Raúl helped Madero to renounce the pleasures of the material world and focus instead on the spiritual dimension of existence through a rigorous combination of meditation and study of Spiritist manuals. The spirit-narrator recalls that Madero achieved great results through this discipline. He tells Madero: “En un tapanco de de tu hacienda alcanzaste la plenitud

más viva: la que no es de este mundo. Ahí aprendiste a estar en total soledad y armonía contigo mismo” (57).

But even after Madero achieved this new state of higher spiritual awareness, the spirits continued to push his development, encouraging him to identify and pursue a great mission in life. Raúl was, once again, among the spirits who spoke to Madero most insistently and clearly about this mission. The spirit-narrator recalls Raúl’s influence, telling Madero: “Raúl te enseñó un camino nuevo, apaisado, vertiginoso: ‘Los espíritus gozan sobre todo con sacar a algún pueblo de la esclavitud, con ayudarlo a sacudirse un ignominioso yugo’” (58). The spirit of José Vierna Zorrilla also spoke to Madero about this mission. Zorrilla told Madero: “Sobre ti pesa una responsabilidad enorme. Has visto el precipicio hacia donde se dirige tu patria. Cobarde de ti si no la previene. . . . Has sido elegido por tu Padre Celestial para cumplir una gran misión en la tierra” (59). The spirits insistently spoke to Madero about this great mission, emphasizing that the mission was primarily one of spiritual objectives.

The spirit-narrator makes it clear that Madero did not understand this teaching right away. While Madero did not hesitate to embark on a mission to help people, the mission on which he originally embarked was aimed at improving the people’s physical and material well being. He became a competent practitioner of homeopathic medicine and generously offered free consultations and medicine to the poor. Also, he worked on a project that promised to eradicate hunger in the Nazas river valley. The spirit of Raúl, however, taught Madero how to change his approach. He encouraged Madero to aim directly at the improvement of people’s spiritual and psychological health rather than

their physical well-being. He thus beckoned Madero to work toward the achievement of a spiritual objective, insisting that the physical and material aspects of reality were not as important as the spiritual. Raúl's message to Madero was particularly clear one evening. Earlier that day, Madero had stubbornly tried to give medicine to a dying man who had gone to him to seek spiritual guidance. Raúl responds to Madero's stubbornness by telling him: "Aprende también a darles consuelo en el transe de la muerte. Nadie los ayuda a morir y es la mayor ayuda que necesitan. Cuéntales de esta otra vida para su consuelo. De qué sirve que tengan comida y techo si no tienen fe?" (66).

It is easy to understand why Raúl's bold teaching (that faith is more important than food or shelter) resonated with Madero. After all, the religious literature that Madero loved most emphasizes the priority of the spiritual and metaphysical over the physical. W.Y. Wentz, in his preface to his first edition of the English translation of the *Bardo Thodol*, explains that the Tibetan Buddhists' emphasis on directing the thought process at the moment of death, is but an extension of their belief in the principle which states that one's thoughts determine one's state of being. This principle is one that Wentz also sees expressed in the *Bhagavad-Gita* and in the Hebrew book of Proverbs. Wentz states:

As the *Bardo Thodol* teaches, so have the Sages of India long taught, that the thought process of a dying person should be rightly directed. . . . Sri Krishna, in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (viii, 6), says to Arjuna, 'One attaineth whatever state [of being] one thinketh about at the last when relinquishing the body, being ever absorbed in the thought thereof' . . . . Our past thinking has determined our present status, and our present thinking will determine our future status; for man

is what man thinks. In the words of the opening verse of the Dhammapada, ‘All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts’ . . . . Likewise did the Hebrew Sages teach, as in Proverbs xxiii, 7, ‘As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he’. (Wentz xviii)

In addition to Madero’s reading of the Gita, the Bardo Thodol, and the Bible, his reading of Spiritist doctrine contributed to his willingness and ability to understand and accept Raúl’s teaching. Spiritist doctrine teaches that societies are held together by their faith in the life beyond the grave. As soon as the people of a society lose this faith, the society is doomed. Allan Kardec, in his *Libro de los Espíritus*, states:

Por una aberración de la inteligencia hay personas que no ven en los seres orgánicos más que la acción de lo material y refieren a ella todos nuestros actos. No han visto en el cuerpo humano más que una máquina eléctrica, no han estudiado el mecanismo de la vida más que en el funcionamiento de los órganos, la han visto cesar con frecuencia por la ruptura de uno de sus hilos y no han visto otra cosa más que ese mismo hilo; han indagado si quedaba algo, y como sólo han encontrado la material inerte ya, y no han podido distinguir el alma que se desprendía , ni han podido apoderarse de ella, han deducido que todo estribaba en las propiedades de la material y que, por lo tanto, después de la muerte, sólo la nada del pensamiento existe. Triste consecuencia, si así fuese, porque entonces no tendrían objeto el mal y el bien, el hombre obraría cuerdamente no pensando más que en sí mismo y en sobreponer a todo la satisfacción de sus goces materiales, se romperían los lazos sociales y rotos quedarían para siempre los más santos

afectos. . . .Una sociedad fundada en tales bases, llevaría en sí misma el germen de su disolución y sus miembros se despedazarían como fieras. (50)

The spirit-narrator makes clear that Madero was in touch with the spiritual world. Madero recognized and even preached Kardec's ideas about the primacy of the spiritual world over the material. In the *Manual Espírita* that Madero wrote under the pseudonym of Bhima, he wrote:

Me dirijo al obrero, al desheredado de la fortuna, al que no encuentra Consuelo en un culto que rechaza su razón que tampoco lo encuentra en el materialismo, que solo enseña el triunfo del más fuerte. Ese obrero que no cree justo perecer después de una vida miserable y laboriosa. Que no cree justo haber venido a este mundo tan sólo a enriquecer a otros, a proporcionarles abundancia con sus privaciones a permitirles una vida holgazana mientras él se aniquiló en el trabajo. Pues bien, a ese obrero destino mi obra, en la que encontrará una filosofía que abrirá su conciencia a nuevos horizontes y le hará comprender que nuestra vida no se desarrolla sólo en el miserable cuadro de una existencia terrestre, sino que tiene, por tiempo, la Eternidad, y por espacio, el Universo. (79)

The spirit-narrator, by recalling this passage, makes evident Madero's belief that a strong faith in the spiritual world is fundamental to the realization of positive change for the masses. Madero did not ignore, however, the need to also tackle problems on an earthly level. He believed in the power of political action. The essence of his pursuit of progress was actually a mix of spirituality and politics. Madero believed in the applicability of divine laws to the struggle for social progress. This belief determined the direction of his

political action and his struggle for democracy. When Madero fought for democracy he believed he was helping to bring about the people's spiritual liberation.

The spiritual base of Madero's fight for democracy is evident throughout the novel. At one point, the spirit-narrator helps Madero recall how he campaigned on behalf of don Francisco Rivas in the town of San Pedro de las Colonias. Madero beckoned the people to elect don Francisco Rivas, since Rivas promised to open schools, build a hospital, and take running water to the poor. However, "lo más importante" was that don Francisco offered to "respetar la voluntad popular, empezando por la votación del próximo domingo" (70). Madero was certain that by working towards real democracy he was carrying out the dictates of the spirit of his brother Raúl. The spirit-narrator reminds Madero of this certainty by telling him:

Y la emprendías [la aventura política] a otro pueblo o a otro rancho, dentro de la ventolera que te cubría de polvo y te picaba los ojos, seguro de cumplir con el mandato que te había dictado el espíritu de Raúl: "Aspira hacer el bien a tus conciudadanos realizando tal o cual obra útil, trabajando por algún ideal que venga a elevar el nivel moral de la sociedad, a sacarla de la opresión, de la esclavitud, del fanatismo. (70)

We hear subtle echoes of the Spiritist doctrine when Madero tells the people "En ustedes hay una intuición innata para saber quién debe gobernarlos. Es un acto libre que nadie tiene derecho a reprimirles. . . . Vamos, no se dejen vencer desde el principio por las dudas o por la apatía" (74-75).

Madero's passionate struggle to achieve fair elections and to get the townspeople to the voting booth was part of his larger project of getting people to recognize their ability to determine their future. According to Spiritist doctrine, all individuals have a God-given ability to determine their destiny but they must actively exercise this ability without allowing doubt and apathy to prevent them from doing so. In following this path of faith-based activism, Madero hits his stride. Faith gives him strength. The spirit-narrator emphasizes this when he tells Madero: "Esa fe transformó tu figura, nimbándola. No hubo más el frágil o el pequeño Madero" (150). The spirit-narrator reinforces this image of a strengthened Madero when he recalls the day that Madero single-handedly neutralized the violence that erupted outside of the Hotel Coahuila, where he planned to give a speech. That day, Madero's friend and colleague Roque Estrada saw Madero, for the first time, as some kind of supernatural hero. The spirit-narrator states: "Roque Estrada dirá que lo sucedido le demostró, por primera vez, tus "otros" poderes. 'Pensé que con su mirada y sus palabras tan sugestivas el Señor Madero algo manifestaba de poderes sobrenaturales' " (154). The spirit-narrator thus portrays Madero as a hero of extraordinary powers, whose strength lies in his belief in God. This image of Madero is projected once again when the spirit-narrator recalls the dictate given to him by the spirit of José:

Póstrate ante tu Dios para que te arme caballero, para que te cubra con sus divinas emanaciones contra los dardos envenenados de tus enemigos. . . .Eres el último de los soldados, pero soldado de la libertad y el progreso, de los que militan bajo las

gloriosas banderas de Jesus de Nazareth, de los que han derramado sobre el mundo su amor, su sangre, para apresurar el reino de Dios. (172)

Madero's mission on earth was inspired and facilitated by his faith. This faith gave him the armament that allowed him to proceed wholeheartedly and selflessly with his mission. His faith gave him the power and courage to approach worldly matters with complete resignation, willing even to risk his life.

In *La noche de Ángeles*, like in *Madero, el otro*, the continuation of life after death is a basic premise on which the novel is built. We once again have a novel that tells the story of a hero's afterlife journey. As he completes this journey, he recalls the events that led to the end of his physical life. We thus have, much like in *Madero, el otro*, two narratives. Also, like in *Madero, el otro*, a second-person spirit-narrator speaks directly to the voyager. However, unlike the second-person spirit-narrator of *Madero, el otro*, this spirit-narrator intervenes only sporadically. He stimulates the voyager's flow of memory at the beginning of the novel and then lets the memories flow by way of a past tense, third-person narrative. The spirit-narrator's interventions remind the hero [and the reader] of the metaphysical journey that is taking place alongside the third-person narrative.

More than one critic has failed to notice, or at least failed to identify in clear terms, the presence of two narratives in the novel. One such critic is Sergio González Rodríguez, who states the following about Ángeles' recollection of memory:

. . . [E]l general Felipe Ángeles hará un ajuste de cuentas íntimo en una noche precisa, la de su regreso a México luego de vivir exiliado en Estados Unidos. A través de visiones retrospectivas de la muerte de Madero, la pugna de Carranza

con Ángeles, la campaña villista, se lee la insistencia de un recurso hábil por el que Solares mismo, transformado en especie de alta conciencia del personaje, se erige en analista, inquisidor o confesor de los actos ya cancelados. (95)

While the critic makes some valid observations in his review of *La noche de Ángeles*, he fails to address, perhaps because he failed to notice, that Ángeles experiences his *visiones retrospectivas* while traveling in the afterlife, rather than while crossing the Río Grande. Had Ángeles experienced his “visiones retrospectivas” while crossing the Río Grande, as Rodríguez suggests, the hero’s vision of his “pugna with Carranza” would be futuristic rather than retrospective, for most of the “pugna” takes place after this crossing.

Another critic who apparently missed the presence and the significance of the metaphysical afterlife journey is Douglas Weatherford, who states:

The structure of *La noche de Ángeles* revolves around the general's return to Mexico in 1918 after a long period of exile. The novel includes flashbacks and flash forwards [sic] that fictionalize the period from Ángeles' early relationship with Madero through his execution in 1919. The objective time of the novel, however, is limited to the brief period that Ángeles spends in a small boat crossing the Rio Grande from the United States into Mexico. (81)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> José Ricardo Chaves also confuses, like Weatherford, the crossing of the Río Grande and the crossing of the río celestial. He states: “La narración recae una y otra vez en la imagen del general llevado en la barca de un Caronte campesino, indígena. Ángeles retorna del exilio, regresa a su patria, va a su muerte. Este recurso de una imagen o de una situación que se repiten a lo largo del texto ya había sido usado por Solares en su anterior novella Madero, el otro, donde el elemento repetido era Madero en tránsito de muerte, en los momentos posteriores a su fusilamiento.” (54) Chaves fails to identify the fact that the so-called “elemento repetido” in *La noche de Ángeles* is essentially the same element that is “repeated” in *Madero, el otro*. This element being that of the hero “en tránsito de muerte.”

Weatherford confuses, understandably, the hero's crossing of the *Río Bravo* [i.e. Río Grande] with the hero's crossing of the *río celestial*. The critic's confusion is understandable, for the novel begins at a moment when Ángeles himself confuses the two crossings. The hero is confused because he is in a hypnotic state when begins his afterlife journey. In this hypnotic state, he recalls his life on earth and feels as if he were reliving the recalled episodes.

This vivid recollection is what the second-person narrator is trying to achieve. He allows the hero to get caught up in the recollection, to certain extent. Nonetheless, the narrator also wants the hero [and the reader] to be cognizant of the journey at hand and therefore intervenes sporadically, interrupting the flow of memory, reminding the hero [and the reader] of the “objective time of the novel,” and encouraging an analysis of the episodes recalled. The reader is thus made aware that the 1918 trip across the Río Grande is but a flashback, the first of many, which the hero recalls during his afterlife journey across a celestial river of the afterlife. Contrary to Douglas Weatherford's observation, there are no “flash forwards [sic]” to the period in time that stretches “from Ángeles' early relationship with Madero through his execution in 1919” (81). These are all *flashbacks*. The structure of the narrative is thus similar to that of *Madero, el otro*: a hero recalls and interprets his life on earth, from the vantage point of the life beyond the grave.

To overlook the presence of this *río celestial* is to overlook an important component of Solares' conception of existence: the reality of a life after death. In *La noche de Ángeles*, the evocation of the afterlife, which serves as a backdrop for the narrative, facilitates the heroification of Ángeles, a protagonist whose belief in the

afterlife determines his path in life. Solares, by situating the main action of the narrative in the afterlife, evokes the life beyond as a real dimension of existence and thus begins to validate the accuracy of the hero's belief system. This validation is significant aspect of the novel. Like in *Madero, el otro*, Solares validates this faith by featuring a hero who draws his greatest strength and courage from this faith.

As in *Madero, el otro*, the first clues as to the specific nature of the hero's spiritual faith are the references to books the hero reads. One important reference comes early in the narrative when the narrator makes mention that the hero carried a copy of Renan's *The Life of Jesus* in his satchel, on the night he crossed the Río Grande. The reference suggests that Ángeles' conception of existence may have been influenced by Renan's unorthodox interpretation of Jesus, as well as by Renan's spiritualist rejection of materialism.

The *Life of Jesus* is considered by some to be a deeply religious book, in spite of the unorthodox viewpoints it expresses about the significance of Jesus. Joseph Henry Allen, in his 1922 edition of Renan's controversial book, offers insight into the essence of Renan's spiritual vision, quoting Renan's response to those who saw an irreligious motive in his work. In this response, Renan refutes the charge of irreligiosity and positioned himself as an ally of even the most dogmatic Christianity. His rationale was that Catholics, Protestants and freethinking Christians such as himself had one common enemy, which he identified as the "vulgar materialism, and the baseness of him who serves himself alone" (Allen vii). Renan's response reiterates the closing statement from his Preface to the *Life of Jesus*, where he states:

Religions are false when they attempt to prove the infinite, to define it, to incarnate it (if I may so speak); but they are true when they affirm it. The greatest errors they import into that affirmation are nothing compared to the value of the truth which they proclaim. The simplest of the simple, provided he practice heart-worship, is more enlightened as to the reality of things than the materialist who thinks he explains everything by chance or by finite causes. (35)

To those readers who understand Renan's work as a denouncement of materialism, the fact that Ángeles read the *Life of Jesus* suggests that Ángeles was at least interested in Renan's spiritualist and anti-materialist interpretation of reality.

As it turns out, Ángeles was indeed a man who believed material reality to be of secondary importance in the universe. And, the narrative suggests that he came to this belief by way of Madero. Time and time again, the narrative emphasizes the role that Madero played in helping Ángeles develop his faith. In Angeles' memories, the figure of Madero often appears as the figure of a guru or spiritual advisor. One of Angeles' memories, previously recalled by Madero in *Madero, el otro*, is of the time when he first revealed to Madero his budding faith in God. Madero responded by telling him: "Esa creencia, me parece, determina nuestra actitud en el mundo. Sea en el terreno que sea" (32). Madero sensed Angeles' budding spirituality and made significant efforts to foster the development of his newfound faith in God, the continuation of life after death, and the primacy of the metaphysical over the material. Angeles' recalls later a conversation in which Madero responded to his skepticism by telling him: "Verá que el tránsito no es tan doloroso y que abriremos los ojos en un sitio mejor que éste" (60).

Madero also influenced Ángeles by recommending and giving to him various works of religious literature, one being the Bhagavad-Gita Gita. The third-person narrator recalls the influence that the Gita had on Ángeles:

[Madero] le recomendó la lectura de un libro que se permitía regalarle: el Bhagavad Gita...A los pocos días, Ángeles le escribió diciéndole que el libro había ejercido una gran influencia sobre él, aclarándole un montón de cosas que tenía en frente pero que no veía. (37)

Madero also gave the General a copy of the *Manual Espírita* and a copy of *Después de la muerte*. These Spiritist manuals had great impact on Ángeles. The third-person narrator explains that Ángeles “leyó buena parte de los libros de un tirón” and that he “tuvo siempre [los libros] en su mesita de noche” (30, 38).

Later in the narrative, the impact of the Spiritist texts is once again emphasized by way of references to those sections of the manuals outlined by Ángeles:

[Ángeles] subrayó un pasaje del libro de León Denis, donde el autor es visitado por el espíritu de Juana de Arco: ‘Animo, amigo mío. Ahora que el porvenir se dibuja con más claridad, ahora que se acercan los momentos de lucha, que las pruebas más temibles van a acosarte, estaré aún más cerca de ti, secundando todos tus pasos. No lo olvides, amigo, el objetivo está ahí, el objetivo que hay que alcanzar, el objetivo que te abrirá las puertas de este otro mundo.’ Denis decía que a partir de esa experiencia se operó en él una transformación extraordinaria. Los temores, aseguraba, se fueron para siempre. (38)

In another section of the narrative, the third-person narrator recalls:

Subrayó la parte del *Manual Espírita* que dice: “Me dirijo al obrero, al desheredado de la fortuna, al que no encuentra Consuelo en un culto que rechaza su razón que tampoco lo encuentra en el materialismo, que solo enseña el triunfo del más fuerte. Ese obrero que no cree justo perecer después de una vida miserable y laboriosa. Que no cree justo haber venido a este mundo tan sólo a enriquecer a otros, a proporcionarles abundancia con sus privaciones a permitirles una vida holgazana mientras él se aniquiló en el trabajo. Pues bien, a ese obrero destino mi obra, en la que encontrará una filosofía que abrirá su conciencia a nuevos horizontes y le hará comprender que nuestra vida no se desarrolla sólo en el miserable cuadro de una existencia terrestre, sino que tiene, por tiempo, la Eternidad, y por espacio, el Universo. (39)

By highlighting these two sections of the Spiritist manuals, the third-person narrator emphasizes those aspects of Spiritism that were most compelling to Ángeles. This guidance by the third-person narrator is necessary, because he previously asserts that Ángeles did not embrace the Spiritist doctrine in its totality. The narrator previously states: “[Ángeles] le creyó a Madero. Le creyó a pie juntillas aunque no se volviera espiritista” (29).

The third-person narrator thus makes clear that Ángeles never became a Spiritist. Ángeles did, however, become a wholehearted believer in God, the afterlife, and the primacy of spirit over matter. Near the end of the novel, it becomes apparent that Ángeles welcomed his death, because he knew it would help push forward a great social cause. He was not afraid of death. From his jail cell, where he awaited the order of his executioners,

he recalled a passage that Madero wrote on the inside cover of one of the books he gave him:

Existe un cuarto: la vida. Otro: el más allá. La muerte es la puerta por la que se pasa de uno al otro. ¿Por qué dramatizar la puerta, el breve tránsito? La muerte es el camino hacia la luz. Se lo sabe cuando se ha vuelto; en fin, cuando se ha vuelto de algo que se le parece. Cristo y Buda conocieron la iluminación mucho antes de desaparecer en ella. (168)

As Ángeles approached his death, he had complete faith in the existence of *el más allá*.

One critic suggests that Ángeles, by willingly facing the firing squad, committed a “melancólico suicidio a distancia” (54). The critic expands on this conclusion by adding erroneously that Ángeles approached death “lleno de dudas, en un universo sin señales y silencioso” (Chaves 54, 55). This critic evidently overlooked an important section of the narrative, near the ending, where Ángeles speaks with a Catholic priest moments prior to his execution. The priest questions Ángeles’ faith in God and his fearlessness in the face of death, telling Ángeles that it is a sin to desire one’s own death. Ángeles explains the reasons behind his willingness to die, pointing out that his death, like Madero’s, “sembrará una semilla que tarde o temprano germinará” (181). The priest insists that he take communion and Ángeles tells him: “Estoy tranquilo con mi conciencia y le diría que en estos momentos amo la vida como nunca la amé y por ello precisamente tengo fe en que continuare vivo de alguna manera” (182). It is clear that Ángeles was not “lleno de dudas,” as the critic Chaves seems to think. To the contrary, Ángeles approached death

calmly because he, like the Buddha, Jesus, and Madero, had become aware of “la iluminación mucho antes de desaparecer en ella” (168).

In *El gran elector*, the narrative once again gives attention to the spiritual beliefs of the central character. However, this central character (the President), unlike the central characters in the previous two novels, is unable or unwilling to let his spiritual beliefs be a consistent source of direction and guidance in his life. The character of the *hombrecito*, on the other hand, is a man who, like Madero and Ángeles in the previous two novels, draws great strength from his spiritual faith. For the President, faith is something that comes in waves that peak when he experiences one of his mysterious *entrevisiones*. About these *entrevisiones*, which appear to be something similar to a nervous or spiritual breakdown, the narrator Domínguez states:

. . . [P]refiere llamarlas entrevisiones y relacionarlas más con lo espiritual que con lo puramente nervioso, tan peyorativo para un hombre de sus capacidades. . . .

Cómo las describe? Ante todo como una exploración obligada en un posible reino milenario, como lo llama. El edén en que México podría convertirse si las cosas marcharan como el Señor Presidente pretende. El otro México que él quiere trasladar a esta tierra para que sus compatriotas también lo vean – lo entrevean – y gocen de él. Por eso considera sus crisis espirituales una obligación y dice que con ellas baja al volcán del Inconsciente Colectivo, se acerca a la Madres Primeras, se conecta con el Centro de Todas las Cosas y su cuerpo adquiere una pura condición parasitaria, algo así como de mero gusano adherido al alma. (16-17)

Domínguez's description suggests that the *entrevisiones*, regardless of their association to the President's emotional or nervous instability, reveal the President's connection to the spiritual world. However, the President has no commitment to practicing and cultivating his spiritual faith. He simply dabbles whimsically in spirituality and religion when it is convenient for him.

Domínguez begins to reveal the erratic and unreliable nature of the President's spirituality when he says: "En diferentes épocas – en especial en los años cincuenta – ha asistido a sesiones espiritistas y luego por los setenta y ochenta le dio por la parapsicología y la magia – aunque esto más bien fue un rollo en que lo emboletó su mujer" (16-17). Later in the narrative, Domínguez explains that in 1940 the President begins calling himself a Catholic ("le dio por dizque decirse católico") as a way of coping with the guilt he feels after committing a series of atrocities (73). Domínguez tells us that year later the President becomes interested once again in Catholicism and even modifies article 130 of the Mexican constitution, thus allowing the government to recognize the Vatican. Domínguez interprets this action of the President by stating:

Resulta significativo que fuera precisamente en su vejez cuando modificara el artículo ciento treinta de la Constitución y reanudara relaciones con el Vaticano: quizá no mira de la misma forma las cosas de la religión el joven impetuoso que peleó contra la Iglesia Católica, que el anciano reflexivo que se siente a las puertas del más allá. (48)

Evidently, the President's commitment to spiritual matters is not only erratic and superficial, it is also motivated by selfish interests. The President is looking to buy his way into heaven.

We can contrast the spirituality of the President to that of the *hombrecito*, who like the characters Ángeles and Madero in Solares' previous two novels, derives superior power, strength and presence from his devotion to his spiritual faith and his beliefs. Furthermore, the *hombrecito's* faith, as in the case of Madero and Ángeles, defines his social/political mission.

Before readers have an opportunity to observe for themselves the relationship between the *hombrecito's* spiritual and political goals, Domínguez and the President jump to the conclusion that this relationship exists. The President is quick to jump to this conclusion because he believes that the *hombrecito* is the ghost of Madero, whose mission resulted, according to the President, from his fusion of politics and spirituality. The President thinks that Madero has returned to complete his mission. And, he is eager to identify evidence supporting his theory. At one point, Domínguez reads to the President a passage from the notebook he confiscated from the *hombrecito*:

“El seis de julio del ochenta y ocho representa, por fin – después de tantos años de adormecimiento – el resurgimiento del México inviolable, rebelde y participativo, que intuye su destino más allá de fluctuaciones fugaces de lo económico o de lo político. ¡México va más allá de eso!” – otra vez lo del más allá, señor – . “¡No sólo de pan y política vive un pueblo!” (86)

The President immediately notices that the final statement is a variation of one of Madero's famous phrases from a speech given in the city of Orizaba in the year of 1909. The appearance of the phrase in the *hombrecito's* notebook is, to the President, further conclusive evidence of the *hombrecito's* identity. He tells Domínguez:

Tenía que ser. Es el fondo de su sueño: rebeldía, sacrificio, trascendencia de la política para acceder “a más altos planos del espíritu”. En ese sentido su discurso de mil novecientos nueve en Orizaba es inefable: “Sólo la fe nos hará libres. Estamos todos, desde siempre, en donde sin saberlo deberíamos haber estado, pero hay que ir más allá del yo, más allá del tiempo. Por eso es bueno que en esta reunion tan numerosa y netamente democrática, de entusiastas trabajadores mexicanos, demostréis al mundo entero que vosotros no quereis sólo pan, quréis por sobre todas las cosas libertad...” En fin, te estoy citando de memoria. ¿Qué te parece? (86)

The accuracy of the President's conclusions regarding the *hombrecito's* identity are never confirmed. However, the President's conclusions regarding the fusion of political and spiritual goals do seem valid.

As Domínguez tells the President more about the *hombrecito's* activities in the town of Aguichapán, the *hombrecito* begins to take on the appearance of a prophet. The townspeople people apparently began following the *hombrecito* because they sensed his spiritual faith and enlightenment. To them, he was as much a healer as a politician. Among those who attended the *hombrecito's* speeches, were some who “hasta recién nacidos llevaron, como para que nomás oyeran, aunque no entendieran, esas palabras que

luego iban a repetirse por todos los sitios, como ecos” (96). And, the people seemed more interested in *how* he conveyed his message than in the specifics of the message itself: “Dicen que no era tanto lo que decía sino cómo. Las inflexiones de su voz. Y la mirada, me hablaron mucho de su mirada” (93).

The connection between the *hombrecito*'s defense of democracy and his spiritual faith is emphasized a few pages later in the novel, when the secretary talks about the *hombrecito*'s activities in the town of Aguichapán. The Secretary learned about these activities while following the *hombrecito* during an investigation. According to the Secretary, the *hombrecito* organized a series of *pláticas* with the townspeople. The Secretary asks the townspeople about the nature of the *pláticas* and gets various conflicting answers. Nonetheless, the townspeople do agree on the main message of the *hombrecito*'s talks. The secretary states:

. . . [E]n fin, los convenció de que aunque fuera con su vida defendieran la legitimidad de las elecciones que iban a celebrarse...en eso sí se pusieron todos de acuerdo: en cómo les recalca que la dignidad física y espiritual de un pueblo está en relación directa a su capacidad para elegir a sus gobernantes, y que sin esa dignidad la vida no vale la pena vivirla. (96)

The President, upon hearing this, describes it as “la democracia como iniciación religiosa” (96).

Domínguez's account of the final encounter between the President and the *hombrecito* reveals that the President is terrified and intimidated by the *hombrecito*'s spirituality. In the encounter, the enraged President tells the *hombrecito*:

Tus altos ideales están por encima de un solo hombre – y en especial de un hombre como yo – y van más allá de este mundo miserable. . . . ¿Quién te crees? Decías que en la otra vida hay varios planos astrales, como estrellas por habitar. ¿Por qué no te marchas a la más lejana y nos dejas en paz? (101)

The *hombrecito's* commitment to his spiritual goals makes the President feel threatened and inadequate. Furthermore, the President senses and is terrified by the possibility that the *hombrecito's* faith-based political mission will eventually be accomplished.

In *Columbus*, like in *El gran elector*, the central character's lack of spiritual commitment is presented as a flaw. Treviño, like the President, is a man who takes a sporadic interest in spiritual matters yet is ultimately unable to embrace a religious or spiritual discipline. His doubts regarding the existence of God get in the way of his religious inclinations. The tensions between these inclinations and his lack of faith are made evident throughout the novel. At one point, Treviño recalls the supposedly simple meditative exercise that the *padre* Roque tried to teach him. He states:

Aunque ya imperaban en mí las dudas, no podía dejar de recordar ciertos consejos del padre Roque. . . . Por ejemplo, uno muy sencillo para expandir el alma: intentar ver simultáneamente, en un momento dado, todo lo que ven los ojos de la raza humana; lo que ven los miles de millones de ojos de la raza humana. Yo lo intenté y sólo conseguí marearme, pero ¿alcanzas a suponer lo que implicaría ese simple vistazo panorámico al mundo? La realidad dejaría de ser sucesiva, se petrificaría en una visión absoluta en la que el “yo” desaparecería aniquilado; es cierto, pero esa aniquilación ¡qué llamarada triunfal! ¿Por qué protegernos – y con

una cotidianidad tan insulsa como en la que caí yo apenas terminó la Revolución – de esa experiencia última, que en realidad es la primera puesto que la tienen casi todos los niños? Exista o no un dios personal, no podré renunciar nunca, nunca, al sentimiento de que aquí, pegada a mi cara, entrelazada en mis manos, puede haber como una deslumbrante explosión hacia “lo otro” o de “lo otro” hacia mí; algo infinitamente cristalino que podría crujar y resolverse en una visión total, sin tiempo ni espacio. ¿Será? (32-33)

Roque’s teaching apparently strikes a chord with Treviño but it ultimately has little impact on him. Treviño did not and will not, for whatever reason, embrace the spiritual teachings that have been made available to him. He recognizes his failure, stating: “cuanto he intentado de trascendente y superior en mi vida se me queda en las manos, dejándome sólo una fina e inútil lluvia de polillas muertas” (34).

The character of don Cipriano is another who, like Roque, fails in his efforts to enlighten Treviño. According to Treviño, Cipriano tried to introduce him to the teachings contained in the Bhagavad-Gita and the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Cipriano even gives Treviño his personal copy of the Bhagavad-Gita. Treviño recalls the day Cipriano gives him the book, stating:

[A don Cipriano] le llamó la atención mi afición a la lectura – algo muy poco común entre los villistas, por cierto – y me mostró su selecta biblioteca, bajándome algunos viejos volúmenes de los estantes más altos, ayudándose con una escalera de rueditas.

– Éste es el verdadero problema para los hombres de hoy – dijo poniendo sobre el escritorio una pistola y un libro – conciliar las armas con las ideas – y puso la pistola encima del libro – no separarlas porque entonces, por decirlo en términos revolucionarios, nos lleva al carajo, ¿comprendes?

El libro que había elegido era de filosofía hindú: el Bhagavad Gita, el libro de cabecera del Presidente Madero, me aclaró.

– [Madero] logró conciliar la violencia revolucionaria con la fe en Dios, la acción en el frente de batalla, al tiempo que oraba interiormente. ¿Por qué nosotros no? Ten, te regalo el libro, lo tengo repetido. Ahí está la respuesta a tus dudas. (86)

Later in the narrative, Treviño tells the young reporter about his interpretation of the Gita, revealing that he interprets the Hindu masterpiece in a manner that Madero would surely not have liked. He quotes a section of the work in which Krishna tells Arjuna about the continuity of life. Treviño then offers his interpretation, stating: “O sea: la muerte no existe, así de sencillo. Podía matar a todos los carrancistas y gringos que quisiera, al fin tarde o temprano iban a renacer, lo que no dejaba de ser una chinga y, en el fondo, una nueva frustración” (153). The Gita is thus source of frustration, rather than a facilitator of a true spiritual faith and an understanding of God.

Treviño’s view of the universe as one that has been “abandonado de la mano de Dios, si es que alguna vez tuvo mano” (16), is similar to that which Raymond Williams describes as the twentieth-century’s typical tragic vision of God and existence. According to Williams, this twentieth-century vision is akin to “the late-medieval view that

humanism had challenged: of a God separate from his creatures, who while they live are beyond his reach, and who in the act of living create hurt and evil, their energy turning to fever and the flow of desire turning to self-destruction, until death comes to release them” (115). Of course, Treviño’s vision of the universe is not presented in a way that encourages the reader to adopt this vision. To the contrary, it is presented in a way that encourages the reader to see the godless vision as a recipe for failure and frustration.

#### Closing comments

Solares’ novels encourage the reader to see religion as a potentially empowering force in people’s lives. And, he does not specify one particular religion. Instead, he suggests that many of the world’s religions can be the source of the same essential teachings and wisdoms. Christianity is no exception. But, I should emphasize once again that Solares’ appreciation of Christianity is not conventional. At times the path that Solares outlines appears to resemble the path of liberation theology, particularly in its Latin American manifestation. Not unlike liberation theology, the path proposed by way of Solares’ novels is one that requires an attempt to recognize and resolve the material problems that plague society. The New Catholic Encyclopedia, which offers a concise history and description of Liberation Theology in Latin America, states:

In Latin America, liberation theology is an interpretation of Christian faith out of the experience of the poor (their suffering, struggles, and hope). . . . [T]his theology has understood “liberation” to mean a process of basic change toward a more just and participatory society, one in which people will be able to live more as brothers and sisters. . . . [It] emerged in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s as

Latin Americans concluded that current models of development would not bring most people out of poverty. What was needed was a new model of development – a revolution (not necessarily violent). (546)

The path outlined by Solares, however, differs from that of the liberation theologians in its divergence from the Catholic Church. Latin American liberation theology “is very ecclesial – it grows out of pastoral work and much of the theological writing itself addresses the (specifically Roman Catholic) Church” (New Catholic Encyclopedia 547).

The path outlined by Solares is not ecclesial. Furthermore, the spiritual salvation that Solares encourages and outlines is not necessarily to be achieved through Christianity. It would therefore be incorrect to associate Solares with liberation theology. In fact, the path Solares outlines resembles something more akin to Theosophy, about which the following is stated in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*:

According to modern theosophists, theosophy is not a religion, but a philosophy of life uniting religions, philosophy, and science. . . . [T]hey teach the immanence of God in the world, understanding by this that there is no creation in the Christian sense and that God is not wholly external to creatures but part of them. The evolution of the soul is a fundamental doctrine. . . . Evolution, in the theosophical sense, is a process of self-realization or manifestation carries on by the Cosmic Life by means of repeated incarnations. . . . Death involves rebirth, liberating the human spirit from the physical body to enjoy the astral life. (934-35)

Another interesting comment on Theosophy is offered by José Ferrater Mora, who states that Theosophy requires the “adopción de una forma de vida humana con vistas al aprovechamiento de las fuerzas secretas e ignoradas de su naturaleza mediante el ejercicio ascético, la meditación, etc.” (1318). He then adds:

De un modo especial se llama teosofía a la corriente relacionada con el budismo y defendida particularmente en los Estados Unidos por Helene P. Blavatsky, Henry Steel Scott y Annie Besant; esta dirección no limita sus actividades a los aspectos meramente teóricos sino que pretende reformas prácticas a base del ideal de una reunión fraternal de la humanidad. (1318)

The path outlined by Solares, evidently has as much in common with Theosophy as with any variation of Christianity. Solares does not shun Christianity, but he does suggest clearly that Christianity is but one among many vehicles that could facilitate spiritual salvation.

To anyone who has read Solares’ novels of the Revolution, it should come as no surprise that Solares, in an interview by Alfonso González, stated: “creo que ninguna religión, por sí sola, basta. A medida que jalas de las religiones lo mejor de ellas, logras complementar un panorama religioso” (121). Solares also tells González:

Creo que en el mundo, más que nuevas ideologías y soluciones, lo que falta es más místicos . . . . Gente que se retira, vamos a decirlo así, a atraer hacia ellos una posibilidad – y aquí hay que creer, hay que tener fe – una posibilidad de luz que será la que ilumine a los demás . . . . El problema, creo yo, es que en este momento es muy difícil ser místico yéndote al desierto o subiéndote a una

columna como Simón en el desierto . . . . Tiene que haber un rescate de todas esas posibilidades que ofrece lo religioso; ya no solamente en cuanto a la salvación de tu alma sino en cuanto a la sobrevivencia del mundo mismo. (122)

In his novels, Solares communicates this same message more subtly, by featuring heroes who have extracted “lo mejor” from several religions and/or religious doctrines.

Madero and Ángeles are featured as prototypes of the heroes who could make a change in today’s world. Interestingly enough, when González asks Solares if these characters are mystics, Solares responds by saying, “totalmente, claro” (122). But we see in the novels that the characters are not at all the type of mystics who cultivate their relationship with God by escaping reality. To the contrary, it is in the course of their involvement with their earthly reality that their relationship with God is fulfilled. Solares’ heroes are men who recognize their duty to try and change the world in which they live. In *La noche de Angeles*, this sense of duty pushes Angeles to return to his *triste y pobre tierra* to continue his work on earth. The character of the *hombrecito* in *El gran elector* also shares this sense of duty and it is what gives him the inner strength to face the President with absolute fearlessness. When the encounter is over, he resumes his duty by promptly taking his place among the people in the plaza, thus continuing the struggle against the *partido oficial*. Clearly, Solares’ vision of heroic action requires the hero to work towards the improvement of the sociopolitical reality that helps define existence. Solares’ novels thus offer no evidence of a longing to return to the way things were prior to the Revolution. To the contrary, they inspire the reader the reader to adopt a

revolutionary path towards social and spiritual liberation. Solares' novels of the Revolution are, in this sense, truly revolutionary.

## Chapter 4

### **Solares' Novels of the Revolution: Their Relevance to their Immediate Literary and Sociopolitical Context**

In the previous chapters of this dissertation I discuss the relationship between four of Solares' novels and a series of literary predecessors. I also look at how the four novels promote and project a reinterpretation of Mexico's historical past. In this fourth chapter, I discuss the four novels' relationship and relevance to their more immediate cultural and sociopolitical context. In the first half of the chapter, I survey several critics' attempts to situate Solares and his work within the evolving landscape of contemporary Mexican narrative fiction. I end the section by concurring with, yet expanding on, Raymond Leslie Williams' observation that Solares is, among other things, a writer of postmodern historical novels. I justify this classification by explaining why the four novels can be considered postmodern. I point out, however, that certain definitions of postmodern art and literature, particularly those that define the postmodern aesthetic as ahistorical and apolitical, do not apply to any of the four. This point of clarification leads me into the second half of the chapter, where I argue that Solares' four novels of the Revolution, with their attention to history and their reverence for Madero and his ideals, are a response to the sociopolitical dilemmas that help define the final two decades of twentieth-century Mexico.

As I point out in my introductory chapter, Ignacio Solares has been prolific since the publication of *El hombre habitado* nearly thirty years ago. Already, he has produced a

substantial body of work that has earned him the praise of critics. Solares is, nonetheless, a relatively young writer whose best work may still be in front of him. This is one reason why any effort to determine his place in literary history cannot be definitive at this point in time. The task of identifying Solares' place among his contemporaries in Mexico is difficult for the same reason. This difficulty notwithstanding, critics have begun tentative observations regarding the relationship between Solares' work and that of fellow Mexican writers who could be considered his contemporaries.

More than one critic has tried to situate Solares in terms of a specific generation. Solares' date of birth is one criterion that has helped critics situate him as such. The publication dates of his works have also been used as a criterion. Perhaps most importantly, some critics have begun tackling the task of comparing Solares' work to that of others, thus identifying differences and similarities that serve to situate Solares more specifically among his contemporaries. One early attempt at comprehending the relationship between Solares and his contemporaries is carried out by Luis Javier Mier and Dolores Carbonell in their *Periodismo interpretativo: entrevistas con ocho escritores mexicanos*. This 1981 publication contains transcriptions of Carbonell's and Mier's interviews with eight Mexican writers whose birthdates fall between the years of 1940 and 1949.<sup>12</sup> The publication also contains the two interviewers' comments regarding these eight writers whose birthdates make them part of the "generación del cuarenta" (10). According to Carbonell and Mier, the eight are, in 1981, "en el umbral de la

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<sup>12</sup> The eight writers are Gustavo Sáinz, José Agustín, Juan Tovar, Ignacio Solares, René Avilés Fabila, Luis Carrión, Jorge Arturo Ojeda and Jorge Aguilar Mora.

madurez artística” and the “futuros divos” of Mexican fiction (14, 87).

While Carbonell and Mier justify their use of the term *generation* by making note of the writers’ birthdates, they understand that the term, when applied to a group of writers, implies more than the proximity of the writers’ dates of birth. Carbonell and Mier thus employ the problematic term with appropriate caution. And, they are particularly cautious when it comes to their inclusion of Solares in the generation. They include him as “uno de los exponentes más jóvenes” of this generation that is (in 1981) “aún en gestación” (14, 87). But, they also mention that Solares “se autodefine como un escritor fuera de época,” and they validate Solares’ comment by recognizing the differences between his work and that of the other members of the generation (87). According to the two critics, these differences are most striking when comparing Solares’ work to that of Gustavo Sáyiz and José Agustín, two writers who are more often identified as the premier exponents of *la onda* than as members of the so-called *generación del cuarenta*.

One difference between Solares’ work and that of the writers of *la onda* has to do with their use of language. Carbonell and Mier emphasize that Solares’ work “nada tiene que ver con los juegos de lenguaje de Agustín” (87). Solares agrees with the interviewers’ observation. When asked in his interview about the difference between the language he employs and the language used by Agustín and Sáyiz, he responds: “conocí el lenguaje de la onda demasiado grande, y simplemente no me interesaba, quizá porque nunca me dijo nada” (Carbonell and Mier 91). The differences between Solares’ language and that of Agustín and Sáyiz have been noted by others, including the critic Luz María Umpierre, who sees these language differences as indicators of Solares belonging to a

different generation than Sáinz and Agustín. She states: “Las obras de Solares se apartan de las de los escritores de la generación literaria que Margo Glantz llama ‘la nueva onda’ debido al uso de un lenguaje realista distinto del collage de voces y la ‘onda musical específica’ de la generación anterior” (66).

The differences between the language of Solares and that of Sáinz and Agustín are certainly significant. There are, however, other equally significant differences between Solares’ work and that of the *onderos*. Sara Sefchovich’s observations about *la onda* serve to highlight certain characteristics that are typical of this literature. She states:

Los personajes aquí son jóvenes, ociosos y pudientes que gustan del rock, la diversión, la droga y el cine. Suyos son los esquemas y valores que propone la sociedad norteamericana, el nuevo modelo cultural de la década. Es una literatura que abandona la solemnidad de Rulfo, incluso la ironía de Arreola y se ríe en serio, se divierte en serio, se sabe moderna en serio. . . . El placer es el máximo valor. Extrovertida, ruidosa, llena de gente, esta novelística tiene también afanes de pasar a la historia y de abrir nuevos caminos y códigos; y en su momento lo logró. (169)

Sefchovich’s description evokes a literature that is radically different from Solares’. As is evidenced in the four novels I study, Solares’ narrative does not promote a hedonistic approach to reality; it is not a “literature ruidosa,” nor does it celebrate sex, drugs and rock-and-roll. Solares’ novels do contain what might be called a *feel-good element*, for they identify a path that leads to contentment and fulfillment; however, this path is the selfless, meditative, contemplative path of the socially committed mystic, and not the

carefree, hedonistic, live-for-the-moment path of the *onderos*. The literature of *la onda* encourages the reader to relish the moment at hand. Solares' novels, on the other hand, suggest that it is often necessary to sacrifice the comforts of the present. His novels place an emphasis on working towards a better future. The process of preparing for the afterlife is also given great importance. And, the process is not easy. It requires discipline, patience and, to a certain degree, an ascetic's awareness regarding the futility of the pursuit of earthly pleasures. As I argue in chapter three, it is not inaccurate to say that Solares' narratives point the reader towards a *religious* path as a means of seeking and achieving liberation and fulfillment.

Critics as well as fellow writers began noting the *religiosity* of Solares' work prior to the publication of the four novels I study. Luz María Umpierre, for example, talks about Solares' religiosity in her 1981 review of *El árbol del deseo*, affirming that the work "tiene las mismas connotaciones filosófico-religiosas que aparecen en las otras dos novelas del escritor" (66). And, Solares has never denied this religiosity. Evidently, he recognized long ago that that this religiosity was one of the characteristics that separated him from his contemporaries. When Mier and Carbonell tell Solares, "Parecería que la religión desempeña un papel determinante en cada una de tus obras," he accepts the observation, making reference to a commentary that José Agustín offered about his play *El problema es otro* (90). Solares states:

...todos los temas que toco, de una u otra forma tienen que ver con [la religión].

Es curioso cómo en la obra de teatro, y sin que yo me diera cuenta, el asunto

desemboca en un problema teológico. Por ello, las críticas – una que hizo José Agustín, por ejemplo – decían que era una obra totalmente católica. (90)

Years later, John Brushwood would comment that Solares’ “insistence on narrating a spiritual reality. . . sets him apart from the mainstream of fiction” (Rev. of *Casas* 121).

Vicente Torres is another who recognized the spiritual element in Solares’ work early on. He recognized, furthermore, as Brushwood would years later, that this element sets Solares apart from some of his contemporaries. However, Torres also observed that this aspect links Solares to others. The critic placed Solares in the “grupo de escritores que se dio a conocer después del puñado de narradores encabezado por Gustavo Sáyín y José Agustín” (10). Torres’ 1991 publication *Esta narrativa mexicana* is a compilation of his own essays about this post-*onda* group, which he called *los narradores de los 80*. In the introduction to *Esta narrativa*, Torres argues that Solares, with his spirituality, sets somewhat of a precedent for several other members of this group. Torres also explains why he placed the essays on Ignacio Solares and Armando Martínez before the other essays, stating that Solares and Martínez represent “una especie de bisagra que une a la promoción de José Agustín con los narradores de los 80” (11). Torres states:

. . . [S]i bien [Solares] comenzó a publicar poco después de Sáyín y compañía, no compartió su temática ni su lenguaje. El buscó una literatura trascendente que ampliara los márgenes de la realidad – con metempsicosis, apariciones, delirios – y estuviera impregnada de religiosidad. Veinte años después, la obra de Solares encuentra a sus semejantes en los libros de Severino Salazar, Emiliano González, Enrique López Aguilar y Alberto Ruy Sánchez. (11)

Torres goes on to reiterate the idea that Solares sets a precedent with his *religiosidad*. In an effort to explain why the last essays of *Esta narrativa* focus on the writers Severino Salazar and Albert Ruiz Sánchez, he states:

Ahora bien, si este trabajo abre con Ignacio Solares, cierra con Severino Salazar y Alberto Ruiz Sánchez porque estos autores comparten algunas de las preocupaciones que Solares planteó hace casi tres lustros. La serpiente se muerde la cola: Ignacio Solares quiso ampliar los márgenes de la realidad con sueños, apariciones religiosas, pesadillas y premoniciones. Severino Salazar contempla el mundo con ojos religiosos y llenos de asombro; incluso, podría decirse que la marca de agua de sus libros es la indagación filosófica. (21)

Torres also points out, in another section of his introduction, that throughout the eighties, various authors, including Luis Arturo Ramos, Silvia Molina, José María Pérez Gay, Salvador Castañeda, Paco Ignacio Taibo II, and Agustín Ramos, “enfrentan la historia mediata e inmediata” (18). Solares’ historical novels had not yet been published at the time that *Esta narrativa* goes to print, and Torres could therefore not include Solares in the group of writers. However, had Torres written his observations from the vantage point of 2003, he surely would have addressed the fact that Solares’ preoccupation with history is, along with his spirituality, an element that must be mentioned when situating Solares in the landscape of contemporary fiction.

To be sure, Solares’ attention to history is an element that links him to a large group of contemporary writers. Solares’ novels form part of a corpus of works that Seymour Menton calls the *nueva novela histórica de la América Latina* (11). Menton, in

his 1993 publication *La nueva novela histórica de la América Latina, 1979-1992*, offers a bibliography of Latin American historical novels published between the years of 1979 and 1992. The bibliography makes evident that Mexican writers contributed significantly to this corpus of works. Furthermore, it makes evident that the new historical novel, in the case of Mexico, gains momentum in the second part of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties. The bibliography does not include novels published after 1992 and therefore excludes *El gran elector* and *Columbus*. But it does include *Madero, el otro* and *La noche de Ángeles*. The first of the two is classified within the section of the bibliography reserved for *nuevas novelas históricas*. The second is located in the listing of *novelas históricas más tradicionales* (14, 27).

Menton's general distinction between two different types of *nuevas novelas históricas* is reasonable. However, I would argue that *La noche* belongs in the same category as *Madero, el otro*, because it encourages the reader to see history as a type of discourse and to question the veracity of history. The novel thus exemplifies one of the quintessential characteristics of Menton's first type of *nueva novela*. Actually, all four of Solares' novels of the Revolution encourage a questioning of the reliability of historical discourse. And, this particular aspect of the four novels leads me to classify them all not only as *nuevas novelas históricas* but also as postmodern historical novels. In classifying them as such, I must recognize Raymond Leslie Williams for having previously identified Ignacio Solares as an author who has made "significant contributions to the Mexican postmodern novel" (148). At the same time, I find it necessary to follow up my recognition of Williams by identifying some shortcomings of his argument.

Williams supports his general assertion about Solares by making observations about *El gran elector*. According to Williams, this novel is quintessentially postmodern, for it suggests that “everything, in the end, is discourse – different levels of speech – including the nation” (149). Williams’ definition of the postmodern historical novel draws substantially from Linda Hutcheon’s *Poetics of Postmodernism*, and Williams thus emphasizes how *El gran elector* calls attention to its own *discursivity*. According to Linda Hutcheon, one characteristic of the postmodern historical novel is that it encourages the reader to recognize that all discourse is a fabrication of sorts. Williams argues that *El gran elector* exemplifies this very characteristic.

On the one hand, I agree that *El gran elector* does this. Worthy of mention in this regard is the way the character of the President explicitly and spontaneously recycles sections of old *discursos* in his attempt to establish, through discourse, the truth about past and present. The novel lampoons the discursivity of the President’s representations and thus encourages, to some extent, recognition of the artificiality of all discursive representations of truth. Williams emphasizes this significant function of the novel by stating that *everything* is discourse in *El gran elector*. However, Williams’ failure to qualify this strong categorical statement renders it inaccurate. Technically, everything in *El gran elector* is indeed discourse, as Williams argues. After all, it could be argued that *everything* is discourse in any narrative. Williams fails to point out, however, that a significant portion of the novel is neither self-reflexive nor explicitly fabricated. A portion of the novel is designed to convey truth rather than to encourage a questioning of it. I am referring particularly to the excerpts from the *hombrecito*’s notebook. The reader

is not encouraged to see the notebook as fabricated discourse. Instead, the reader is encouraged to see it as a reliable and truthful reflection on Mexican history and politics. The novel thus offers the reader two very different types of discourse. One is blatantly artificial, calling attention to its own discursivity, and thus designed to spark the readers' skepticism. The second is designed to convey, without stirring the suspicions of the reader, a particular vision of past and present reality. The first ultimately facilitates the novel's deconstruction of truth and historical memory. The second facilitates a reconstruction.

To be sure, the simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of truth and history is contradictory. And, it is this very contradiction that further justifies the classification of *El gran elector* as a postmodern historical novel. This type of contradiction is the essence of the postmodern aesthetic, as defined by Linda Hutcheon. She convincingly argues that postmodern historical novels do not necessarily abstain from encouraging a particular version of the truth, even when they facilitate, as they nearly always do, a questioning of the veracity of discursive representations of reality, past or present.

Hutcheon's emphasis on the postmodern historical novel's construction (alongside the deconstruction) of historical memory, and of truth in general, is central in her argument. And, she is aware that she is thus arguing against a number of influential critics, the likes of which include Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton. Eagleton and Jameson both argue that the postmodern is ahistorical: Truth is questioned to the point that it becomes lost. Raymond Leslie Williams is in Hutcheon's camp and recognizes

that many postmodern novels are quite *historical*. However, with his assertion that *everything* is discourse in *El gran elector*, he suggests, perhaps inadvertently, that this novel exemplifies the postmodern aesthetic as defined by Jameson and Eagleton, rather than by Hutcheon. (147) Another important point that Hutcheon makes in her *Poetics* is that postmodern historical novels are “inescapably political” (Hutcheon 4, 18). Once again, she is here arguing against the detractors of postmodernism. She is refuting, in particular, claims such as Terry Eagleton’s, that postmodernism is empty of political content. I agree with Hutcheon’s observation and will now proceed to show, in the second part of this concluding chapter, how each of Solares’ four novels of the Revolution are a case in point.

Solares’ first three novels of the Revolution, published between 1989 and 1993, are *political*, as they respond directly to the complex Mexican sociopolitical crisis that came to be known in the early eighties quite simply as *La Crisis*. This great crisis was defined to a significant extent by a widespread questioning of the legitimacy of the PRI and the system of government the PRI represented. Mexicans had long been aware that the one-party system, which had been in place for over 50 years, could hardly be defined as a democracy. By the early eighties, however, this awareness had risen and intensified to the point that it became a major national issue. On a massive scale, people were questioning the PRI’s right to govern.

This widespread questioning did not begin overnight. To trace its history, we might begin, as has been done by numerous historians and sociologists, by marking the year of 1968 as a significant turning point. On the second of October of that year,

President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz deploys Mexican military troops equipped with tanks to stop the student protests taking place in Mexico City's Tlatelolco plaza. The confrontation between students and military ends with a bloody massacre. Over one hundred civilians, many of whom are innocent bystanders watching the protests, are injured or killed. As a result, the nation begins questioning the legitimacy of the PRI as it had never been questioned before. Kate Doyle of the National Security Archive at George Washington University sums up the importance of the Tlatelolco massacre by stating: "It is Mexico's Tiananmen Square, Mexico's Kent State: when the pact between the government and the people began to come apart and Mexico's extended political crisis began" (1). Her comments echo those of Octavio Paz, who identified 1968 as the year that best marks the origins of the "gran crisis del sistema mexicano" (17). In a 1997 *Vuelta* article, Paz comments on the significance of 1968 and the importance of the student movement that culminated tragically in the Tlatelolco massacre. He states the following regarding the "contingentes juveniles que formaron el núcleo del movimiento":

Eran jóvenes radicalizados por la ideología de esos años, impresionados por las figuras de Castro, Guevara, y, en algunos casos, Mao. Sin embargo, más profundo que esas aspiraciones revolucionarias, había en ellos un vago anhelo democrático. Ese anhelo estaba inscrito en el fondo histórico de México desde la época de Madero. Anhelo olvidado y sepultado por los sucesivos gobiernos que habían regido al país, más preocupados por los aspectos sociales y económicos de la Revolución Mexicana, pero que seguía vivo y que esperaba siempre la menor ocasión para manifestarse, como había ocurrido en 1929 con el vasconcelismo. En

1968 comenzó a reaparecer en la superficie histórica un estado de espíritu que había permanecido semioculto: la parte más activa y pensante del país estaba cansada de la hegemonía del PRI y de su complemento, el sistema presidencialista. (17)

The *anhelo democrático* that Paz identifies resurfaces again with a vengeance in 1982. On this year, the Mexican masses were rudely awakened to the fact that President López Portillo's promises of economic progress would not be fulfilled. The feelings of resentment towards the hegemony of the PRI intensified, as an increasing number of people began associating the economic crisis with the official party's inefficiency, incompetence and corruption. Mexico was in a crisis and when people referred to *La Crisis* they were not talking only about economics but about the lack of integrity and morality that had come to define the government, the State and, of course, the PRI. Opposition parties began calling for a *renovación moral*. By the early eighties, these demands had become so widespread that the PRI found it necessary to publicly recognize the need for a *renovación* within the party. Sara Sefchovich points out:

A principios de los años ochenta, el discurso político mexicano incorporó una palabra que ya utilizaban profundamente la derecha y la izquierda: crisis. . . .

Durante la primera mitad de la década [de los ochenta], entre derecha, izquierda y gobierno hubo coincidencia en la necesidad de una "renovación moral". Esto quería decir terminar con la corrupción y lograr la democracia. (197)

Héctor Aguilar Camín makes a similar point when he states the following about the campaign for "moral renovation" that was initiated in the 80's:

Desde la cúpula oficial, también inconforme con las últimas decisiones de López Portillo, vino la ratificación pública de las ineficiencias, la corrupción y el dispendio gubernamentales. La campaña de la renovación moral, reconoció como cierto el pozo de corrupción generalizada de la administración pública, tema favorito de la sensibilidad ciudadana clasemediera. (128)

Camín goes on to point out that President Miguel de la Madrid would fare no better than López Portillo. De la Madrid's troubles begin soon after he takes office. Among his troubles are his tiffs with the leaders of organized labor. The decades-long alliance between labor and the official party was falling apart. Camín states:

Maniatados por su *viejo* estilo de comportamiento, que es sostener la llamada “alianza histórica” con el “Estado de la Revolución”, los dirigentes obreros arriaron parcialmente sus banderas programáticas que desafiaban con claridad el rumbo elegido por el gobierno lamadridiano, hasta configurarse como un polo articulado de disidencia en el que sobreviven conceptos e inspiraciones fundamentales del maltrecho establecimiento ideológico conocido como Revolución Mexicana. Ese mismo año, el Congreso del Trabajo se autopostuló defensor del legado diciendo: “La clase trabajadora, hoy más unida que nunca, cree firmemente en la Revolución Mexicana. Si por incapacidad, infidelidad, incumplimiento o deshonestidad, la Revolución ha sufrido desviaciones, ello ha ocurrido en contra de los principios, programas y objetivos de la Revolución”.

(124)

De la Madrid's troubles continue throughout his sexenio. In 1985, Mexico City suffers its worst earthquake in history and, as Cynthia Steele points out, the insufficiency of the State's response to the devastation "exposed endemic corruption in the government and private sectors and provided continuing demonstrations of government negligence, inefficiency and dishonesty" (146). Many thus begin looking towards the 1988 presidential elections, thinking that the time to oust the PRI is at hand. Octavio Paz, with the support of his band of ideologues, goes so far as to publish an edition of *Vuelta* under the title "PRI, hora cumplida." (18).

It turns out, however, that the PRI was not yet ready to lay down in 1988. When the election results are tallied, the PRI is declared the winner. Many Mexicans immediately suspected that the PRI won the 1988 elections by manipulating the results. With the passing of time, these suspicions would prove to be correct, and the fraud of the elections would be recognized by the international community. In the pages of *National Geographic*, Michael Parfit summarizes the fraud of the 1988 Presidential election by stating, quite matter-of-factly: "the hotly contested election was accompanied by fraud – computers broke down with the race undecided and were booted back up with the PRI's victory installed" (23).

In the last year of the 1980's, Ignacio Solares gives us *Madero, el otro*, his first of three novels that respond to the dilemmas that define the decade. The novel expresses the desire for a moral renovation as well as the "anhelo democrático" that had been, according to Paz, "inscrito en el fondo histórico de México desde la época de Madero" (17). And, Solares, with his never-failing attention to "las cosas del pasado," as Mier and

Carbonell put it (87), achieves a relevant expression by focusing on a figure from the past: Francisco I. Madero. *Madero, el otro*, with its championing of Madero's reverence for democracy, spirituality and moral integrity, couldn't have been published in a timelier manner, considering that it came out in 1989, shortly after the inauguration of the fraudulently elected Salinas de Gortari. Salinas would eventually become one of the most prominent symbols of the PRI's moral bankruptcy. As Carlos Monsiváis points out: "el gobierno de Salinas es el más ruinoso entre los que registra la memoria histórica de esta generación, con todo y su carga de 'misterios' (el caso Colosio, el caso Ruiz Massieu, el caso Conasupo, etcétera)" (29).

During Salinas' sexenio, the people's *anhelo democrático* and their desire for a *renovación moral* continue to intensify and Solares continues to write novels that express the people's sentiments. In 1991 he publishes *La noche de Ángeles* and in 1993, *El gran elector*. These two novels, along with *Madero, el otro*, are what I call Solares' novels of the Salinas *sexenio*. Each of them pays homage to the figure of Madero, who is virtually the antithesis of Salinas de Gortari. In *Madero, el otro*, the first of the three novels, the character of Madero appears as the focal point of the novel. And, the novel's interpretation of Madero has much in common with another that appears in the second half of the eighties, just prior to the novel's publication. This other interpretation of Madero is Enrique Krauze's.

One similarity between Solares' interpretation and Krauze's is that they both emphasize Madero's practice of Spiritism, as I mentioned in previous sections of this dissertation. There exists however, a second similarity, which is perhaps less apparent yet

certainly of equal importance. Solares' interpretation, like Krauze's, recognizes Madero for his profound understanding and appreciation of the value of democracy and for his tenacious pursuit of democratic ideals. Regarding Krauze's interpretation of Madero and the historian's reverence for Madero's democratic ideals, Sara Sefchovich points out that it forms an integral part of the historian's response to *La Crisis*. She states:

Según Enrique Krauze, discípulo de Paz y uno de los ideólogos de [*Vuelta*], lo primero a lograr es la democracia, pues ella es el cambio fundamental que generará todos los demás. . . . Se trata de una utopía que echa sus raíces – por paradójico que parezca en el pasado: en dos momentos de la historia de México a los que se supone perfectamente democráticos: la era juarista y la era maderista. (199)

Solares' interpretation of Madero, like Krauze's, forms part of a response to the dilemmas of the eighties. More specifically, Solares' interpretation of Madero, like Krauze's, encourages the reader to embrace Madero's moral integrity and his struggle for democracy. In the Mexico of the eighties and early nineties, when the Mexican people's *anhelo democrático* and their desire for a *renovación moral* is at an all-time high, Krauze and Solares see Madero as a touchstone historical figure.

In *La noche de Ángeles*, Solares continues to express the *anhelo democrático* and the desire for a *renovación moral*. Solares blows the dust off of Felipe Ángeles, a character who had been relegated to a second tier of importance by officialist historians. Solares calls on this hero to return to the muddy shores of Mexico (“la orilla debe de estar muy enlodada”) to inspire and lead his countrymen in a struggle to overcome the crisis at

hand (186). Ángeles, as interpreted by Solares, is a hero for the times. This hero appears as one who has the ability to inspire courage in his countrymen in times of trouble, and as a man of tremendous moral integrity who understands the importance of democracy. While he is by no means perfect, he is certainly portrayed as great. And, his greatness is facilitated by his commitment to the ideals of Madero. At one point in the narrative, Ángeles recalls and then responds to Luis Cabrera's implicit rejection of Madero's faculties as a leader:

- ¿Quieren otro Madero en la Presidencia? – preguntó Luis Cabrera. Eso:
- ¿Queremos otro Madero en la Presidencia? ¿Otro mártir? ¿Otro ingenuo en política? ¿Otro místico? ¿Otro lector de los Evangelios? ¿Otro defensor de las elecciones libres? ¿Otro creyente de que sólo la libertad impulsa al hombre a nuevos y más altos designios? (15)

Cabrera's rhetorical question implies that men like Madero are unfit for the presidency of Mexico. Ángeles responds with a series of his own rhetorical questions, underlining the idea that Madero is precisely the kind of man Mexico needs. Of course, Solares' was expressing, through the character of Ángeles, the sentiment of someone who understood that Mexico's democracy was in crisis.

In *El gran elector*, Solares continues to reiterate the *anhelo democrático* and the desire for a *renovación moral*. The novel voices an indictment against the immoral and anti-democratic behavior of the PRI of the eighties and early nineties. The novel identifies the manipulation of elections as one of the most shameful and damaging of the PRI's tactics. At one point in the narrative, Domínguez makes reference to a section of

the seized notebook, containing an explicit reference to the fraudulent handling of the 1988 presidential elections. The passage reads:

El chantaje, la intimidación, el engaño, el abuso y las tradicionales formas indignas de acarreo humano, como si se tratara de animales, fueron los recursos de que se valió el partido oficial durante las elecciones presidenciales de mil novecientos ochenta y ocho para que los campesinos lo salvaran de una derrota aún mayor: Qué vergüenza abusar así de la ingenuidad, del analfabetismo y del hambre, lo cual no hace sino revelar el espíritu indigno del gobierno actual. . . . Un día después de las elecciones – denunció el diputado Jorge Amador – hubo ríos en Michoacán que llevaban en su corriente, como peces muertos y descompuestos, miles y miles de boletas marcadas a favor de la oposición. ¿No se encontró otro sitio en dónde echarlas? Tenía que ser en los ríos para que, al igual que las aguas negras, hicieran visible lo que más muerte y enfermedad provoca en este país. . . . Ahí iba, corriente abajo, la voluntad del pueblo, que debería ser lo más sagrado para un gobierno supuestamente honesto y democrático. (82-83)

Because the *hombrecito* is a likeable character who inspires the reader's trust, the passage from his notebook is all the more compelling. The reader is virtually invited to join in *hombrecito's* struggle against the hegemony of the official party. The invitation is alluring, as the struggle is showing signs of progress. The tide of history has turned against the PRI because more and more people have begun realizing that they must exercise their right to vote and, furthermore, that they must vote against the PRI. Even in the poorest sector of the rural working class, where the PRI's method of making false

promises to voters had historically been most effective, there are signs of increasing resistance against the hegemony of the official party. The notebook of the *hombrecito* reads:

. . . [Los] campesinos ya no son los de antes, y eso nadie lo ha tomado en cuenta. Tienen experiencia urbana y muchos de ellos incluso transnacional porque van y vienen a Estados Unidos. . . . Los campesinos, pese que le pese al partido oficial, están despertando. Empiezan a hacerse de una cultura, oyen la radio y ven la televisión. . . . A medida que el gobierno insista en sacar a cualquier costo una falsificación de la voluntad popular campesina, está sembrando vientos que se le pueden volver tempestades en los años próximos. Por ello, he llegado a la conclusión de que la clave del fin del sistema está en esa gente, porque el día en que el México rural deje de ser manipulable, el partido oficial se volverá minoritario. . . y morirá. (85)

The *hombrecito* goes on to suggest, in his notebook, that the 1988 presidential election represents a key moment in the awakening of the people's revolutionary spirit, despite the fact that the election was manipulated. The 1988 elections are thus a victory for democracy rather than a defeat. He states: "El seis de julio del ochenta y ocho representa, por fin – después de tantos años de adormecimiento – el resurgimiento del México inviolable, rebelde y participativo" (86).

The *hombrecito's* interpretation of the significance of the 1988 elections sound overly optimistic, some may argue. However, it could also be argued that the optimism of *hombrecito* is a result of his extraordinary foresight. After all, it was not long after the

1988 elections that Mexicans became aware, on a massive scale, of their ability to affect their destiny through their active participation in democracy. In 1997, four years after *El gran elector* is published, Carlos Monsiváis documents this awareness when he states:

Hoy lo más significativo en la vida política de México es la transformación de las mentalidades. No hablo de un proceso homogéneo, ni de milagros, ni de resultados ya extraordinarios, sino del enfrentamiento al determinismo (¿cómo informarse debidamente en las condiciones de pobreza?), y del abandono masivo de características que parecían fatales: inercia, resignación, miedo, canje del voto por unos cuantos servicios y un puñado de regalitos. De manera todavía irregular la opinión pública o la sociedad civil o la sociedad (como quiera llamársele) manifiesta su interés: participar de alguna manera en la conducción de su destino.

A lo largo del siglo una “garantía de gobernabilidad” ha sido el papel pasivo de la ciudadanía, distribuido en indiferencia, apoyo, apoyo ocasional a los Presidentes de la República y murmuraciones. . . . [Las] protestas contra la corrupción, uno de los hechos más oprobiosos, se diluían por el efecto del cinismo. . . . Pero en los años recientes el deseo de una vida cívica ha destruido esquemas y actitudes fatalistas. No en balde la izquierda y la derecha usan con frecuencia el mismo lema: “Sí se puede!” (29)

Monsiváis’ unusually enthusiastic commentary is indicative of the fact that democracy in Mexico is, in 1997, back on its feet and that the PRI’s hegemony was weakening.

In 1997, the party was not dead but it had begun undergoing, to the chagrin of many party members, a transformation. The fact that Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s

successor, Ernesto Zedillo, decided to aggressively pursue the investigation and indictment of Raúl Salinas de Gortari for the 1994 murder of José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, was one sure sign that the PRI was changing. A PRI President's pursuit of justice at the cost of a predecessor was a first in PRI history. It could be argued that the transformation of the PRI, in the mid nineties, marked the denouement of *La Crisis*, as Mexicans knew it.

This is not to say that Mexico's troubles had come to an end. Mexico would continue to face serious problems, economic and otherwise, as the century and millennium came to a close. But Mexico was no longer experiencing the particular mix of sociopolitical dilemmas that came to be known in the eighties as *La Crisis*. In the post-Salinas years, Mexico would face a whole new mix of problems, dilemmas, possibilities and hopes, finding itself in a new sociopolitical reality and era.

Among the numerous realities that helped define the new era was the rapidly changing relationship between Mexico and the United States. If there is one aspect of Salinas' sexenio that is discussed as often as its moral bankruptcy, it is Salinas' role in establishing long-term economic policies that would lead to stronger ties between Mexico and United States. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was, for better or for worse, a significant turning point in Mexico's cultural, political and economic history. The controversial NAFTA meant different things to different sectors of Mexican society. One thing, however, was for sure: Mexico's relationship with the United States, and Mexico in general, would change significantly as a result of this agreement.

As a result of the signing of NAFTA, Mexicans were faced with the challenge of reconsidering the anti-American posture that helped define Mexican nationalism, particularly since the Revolution. As Héctor Aguilar Camín points out, there was, during the Revolution, a “reafirmación de la frontera norte como la línea número uno de resistencia nacional” (*Subversiones* 98). The signing of NAFTA meant that Mexico was officially changing its posture towards the “enemigo identificado” (Camín *Subversiones* 98). Mexico was not abandoning completely its defensive posture towards the US; however, the signing of NAFTA indicated that Mexico was lowering its guard to some extent. The 90’s would be the decade during which Mexicans would witness “la inserción del país [de México] en el mercado mundial mediante la intergración con Estados Unidos” (Camín *Subversiones* 111).

Solares’ fourth novel of the Revolution, *Columbus*, published in 1996, responds to this new sociopolitical reality. In this novel, the expression of an *anhelo democrático* and the critique of the PRI are hardly apparent. *Columbus* is the work of a novelist who has moved beyond the quintessential concerns of *La Crisis* to focus on other ones, including those related to Mexico’s changing relationship with the United States.

The novel may be seen, on the one hand, as an expression of Solares’ resentment towards the United States, and as a reflection of his anxiety in the face of Mexico’s new posture. The comments of the critic Alfonso González emphasize this aspect of the novel. In *Columbus*, González argues, the “crítica y temor a los Estados Unidos,” evident in Solares’ work “desde *Madero, el otro y La noche de Ángeles*,” is intensified (“La intensificación” 16). According to González, the critique is voiced through the character-

narrator Luis Treviño, whose hatred for the United States is clear from the first page of the novel. González interprets and defines the origins of Treviño's hatred, basing his interpretation largely on the interpretation offered by Treviño himself. About Treviño's hatred, the critic states:

Después de experimentar el trato que los estadounidenses les dan a los mexicanos al cruzar la frontera y a las dependientas enanas en el prostíbulo donde trabaja por no haber conseguido otro empleo, Luis [Treviño] llega a la conclusión que los Estados Unidos son una manifestación del Anticristo, del Imperio del Mal y que para salvar su alma tiene que combatirlos. (“La intensificación” 20)

González explains that Treviño's convictions were strengthened when he learned of the events that led to the tragic death of a group of Mexican migrant workers at a U.S.-Mexico border crossing. González then defends the veracity of the tragic incident, explaining that U.S. border agents were known to require Mexican migrant workers to take kerosene baths at border checkpoints as a delousing measure. González then confirms that thirty-five workers were killed “en una ocasión,” when the kerosene from one of the baths was ignited by the cigarette butt of a supervising U.S. border agent (20). González verifies this sad episode of border history to explain Treviño's hatred of Americans. “Después de este incidente,” González states, “Luis [Treviño] está seguro de haber hallado su *raison d'être*, algo en qué creer, su misión en la tierra: los gringos son la encarnación del mal y del anticristo” (20). González concludes his analysis by arguing that *Columbus* captures “la reacción mexicana ante los abusos a mexicanos y mexicano-americanos [sic] durante las postrimerías del siglo veinte” (21).

I interpret the novel differently. The novel is not so much about the victimization of Mexico at the hands of the U.S., as it is an exploration of the classic anti-American mindset that has long been a hallmark of Mexican national identity. Treviño's character is indeed defined by his xenophobia and his anti-American sentiments, as González suggests. And, Treviño's anti-American ramblings may momentarily ignite or fuel some readers' feelings of hatred towards the United States. However, González fails to point out that Treviño's way of coping with his hatred of the U.S. is as unattractive as the behavior of the Americans he criticizes. As the novel unfolds, Treviño's anti-American ramblings become less and less compelling, notwithstanding the fact that his discourse contains some sound and valid criticisms of the United States. Treviño's critique is ultimately unconvincing.

Treviño's hatred leads him to participate in the attack on Columbus, widely considered to be one of Villa's greatest blunders. When Treviño reflects romantically on the feelings of grandeur he felt while yelling "mueran los gringos!" during the attack, he appears as a pitiful and pathetic figure. His hatred is not at all contagious. It is absurd. And, his description of his cold-blooded murder of an innocent American during the attack reveals that he is no better than U.S. Border Agents who inhumanely administered the kerosene baths to Mexican migrant workers.

The novel's satirical critique of the hypocritical anti-Yankee posture exemplified by Treviño is effective. Nonetheless, Treviño's critique of the United States is not totally invalid. The novel does remind the reader that the U.S. has often been a bad neighbor to Mexico, thus deserving to be disliked. However, the novel captures and conveys the idea

that Americans are not the anti-Christ. In more than one section, Treviño's portrayal of Americans underlines the fact that Americans are human beings first and foremost. Of course, Treviño is unaware that his portrayal is achieving this effect.

At one point in the narrative, Treviño even underlines the fact that the U.S. offers many underprivileged Mexicans certain opportunities that are all but denied to them in Mexico. Treviño, while telling about the final outcome of the attack on Columbus, explains that the Americans end up arresting a group of foot soldiers who participated in the attack, executing many of them. Among those arrested was Pedrito, an orphan boy who served for some time as Treviño's guide. Treviño explains:

A Pedrito, que también iba a pie, lo arrestaron y como era menor de edad no lo pudieron fusilar. Lo mandaron a una correccional para menores de donde salió años después, estudió allá y, ya como ciudadano norteamericano, se casó con una pochita muy mona, tiene cinco hijos y abrió una tintorería de gran éxito en el propio Columbus, a donde puedes ir a saludarlo cuando gustes. (171)

Pedrito's case serves to call into question the validity of Treviño's interpretation of the U.S. as the anti-Christ. Furthermore, the mention of Pedrito's case does not give credibility to Treviño's reflections about the millions of Mexicans that migrate north only to find that the "espejismo de los Estados Unidos" is worse than Mexico (61).

*Columbus* ultimately encourages readers to recognize that it would be more productive to dedicate energy towards self-improvement than towards hatred and vilification of a neighbor. And, the novel illustrates how such hatred and vilification can be used to facilitate the pursuit of selfish interests and to disguise more immediate

problems. As in the previous novels, the message is one of anti-violence, anti-hate and respect for humanity. The novel's reference to the Bhagavad-Gita brings to the forefront an ancient work that captures this message. And, once again we see the figure of Madero, although not quite as explicitly. He is now in the background. Nonetheless, he looms largely as a great hero who sacrificed his life to get this message across.

#### Closing words

Solares' novels are a product of the time in which they are written. Clearly, Solares was deeply concerned and fascinated by the sociopolitical reality that prevailed. The novels contain much evidence of this concern. The novels do offer a reinterpretation of the past, of course, but much of their content situates them in their immediate context. Much of their content translates to a commentary about the Mexico that existed at the latter part of the twentieth-century.

The postmodern aesthetic of the novels further connects them to the time in which they were written. Solares' novels are traditional in many ways. Nonetheless, the overall aesthetic of Solares' novels situates them, once again, in the times they were written. The Solares novels I study belong in the same tradition as *Los de abajo*, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, *Los relámpagos de agosto* and the other novels of the cross section. However, Solares' novels clearly exemplify a postmodern aesthetic. This does not make them better or worse than the novels of the cross-section, but it does help to give them their respective and unique place in the tradition. Furthermore, it helps to show that the tradition of the *narrativa de la Revolución* is continuing to evolve.

## Conclusion

### Writing against the grain: Solares'

#### Novels of the Mexican Revolution

The four Solares novels studied in this dissertation go against the grain in several ways. First, they dispute the conventional celebratory *interpretation* of Mexico's Revolution and post revolutionary *régimen*. Second, they go against the grain of previous novels within the tradition of the *narrativa de la Revolución*, as they transcend the hallmark pessimism of this great *narrativa*. The four novels, furthermore, with their exploration of the virtues of religious faith, go against the grain of various types of discourse produced by a Mexican intelligentsia that has long associated religion with fanaticism and oppression. Solares' religiosity, however, does not prevent him from writing against the grain of Catholic doctrine. In his *novelas de la Revolución*, Solares criticizes the repressive dogmas of the Church and encourages readers to look to other religions as necessary. And finally, it should not be overlooked that the four novels go against the grain of those postmodern narratives that deconstruct history without putting anything its place. Solares' novels of the Revolution, all of which are postmodern in their own right, do not simply carry out a deconstruction. They reconstruct a vision of the past and offer direction for the construction of a better future.

To be sure, many readers will not buy into the faith-based political activism that Solares outlines and proposes by way of his novels. In fact, it is likely that numerous readers and critics will dismiss Solares precisely because his novels suggest that religious faith is a necessity for effective political action and social progress. Among those readers

who are weary of Catholicism, some will undoubtedly and mistakenly write Solares off before realizing that he is not preaching Catholic doctrine. Among those readers who are open to the idea of a faith-based activism, the more conservative ones may prematurely assume that Solares' eclectic mysticism is simply another New Age distraction. Nonetheless, Solares' proposal will be compelling to the more attentive readers, as it is presented in a series of carefully crafted novels that reflect Solares' deep understanding of history and contemporary social issues. Furthermore, the novels make it clear that Solares' spiritual direction shares as little with Catholic doctrine as it does with New Age crystal worship.

Of course, the hero who exemplifies the type of faith-based activism that Solares proposes is Madero, whose spiritual enlightenment gives him the courage and understanding necessary to be a true revolutionary. Solares' reinterpretation of the revolutionary hero may seem strange and far-fetched to some. However, we must remember that Enrique Krauze's interpretation of Madero is in many ways quite similar to Solares'. And there are others who also see Madero in this light. Elena Garro's interpretation of Madero is virtually the same as Solares. In her 1997 *Revolucionarios mexicanos*, Garro laments the fact that Madero's exemplary revolutionary quest, based largely on his recognition of the importance of the spiritual dimension of existence, earned him ridicule from cynics and power mongers. Garro defends Madero, however, and with a great optimism reminiscent of Solares', declares that the same nation that produced a hero of Madero's stature is also capable of producing, some day, an

exemplary history. (50, 51) Her interpretation of Madero and his continued relevance is essentially the same as Solares'. She states:

El pueblo no se equivocó en llamarlo el Apóstol. Enfrentado a un país totalitario, fenómeno político y social que más tarde debería repetirse en el mundo moderno y cuyos orígenes se encuentran en el porfirismo, Madero comprendió que la lucha no podía ser simplemente civil y armada sino espiritual. Comprendió que era necesario un ejemplo para rescatar los valores espirituales en desuso y oponerlos a la desvergüenza utilitaria y totalitaria del poder, o del poder por el poder, o del poder cueste lo que cueste, ejercido por una camarilla de gentes de bajísimo orden y carentes de toda cultura. . . . (49)

Only time will tell whether Madero, as interpreted by Solares in his novels and by Garro in her literary portrait, will form part of the pantheon of Mexico's national heroes.

As to Solares' denouncement of the PRI, it is worth noting that much of the critique will continue to be relevant, when (and if) the PRI becomes a thing of the past. The critique of the *régimen's* manipulation of the writing and dissemination of history, for example, is likely to resonate in years ahead. History will continue to explain and justify the present. As the present changes so will the writing of history. If Mexico's Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) gains further momentum once Vicente Fox leaves office, it will be interesting to see how party officials approach the daunting task of making adjustments to the conventional celebratory version of the Revolution. Of course, it is logical to assume that the PAN will eventually take steps to ensure that a new interpretation of the Revolution, one that does not lead directly to a celebration of the PRI

and its policies, is disseminated among the citizens of the nation. A new conventional version will likely be established, rendering the old version useless. One thing is for sure: The history of the Mexican Revolution will continue to represent a major chapter in Mexican history for the foreseeable future. The history of the Revolution will thus continue to help shape how Mexicans comprehend their past and, consequently, how they approach the future. Solares' novels, by presenting a vision of the Revolution that will never be captured in mainstream historiography, and by reminding the reader that any history of the Revolution is to some extent artificial, will continue to have an impact on readers for many years to come.

Finally, it should not go unnoticed that Solares dared to propose, by way of his novels, a possible means through which to achieve those revolutionary ideals that were betrayed by the *régimen*. Solares' novels offer the reader something in which to believe and a specific means of achieving progress. This having been said, Solares deserves credit for having the courage to insist on the idea that real progress will never be achieved without being attentive to the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of reality.

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## **Vita**

Rafael Dent Hoyle is the son of Robert Lewis Hoyle and Olga Santos Hoyle. He was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1964, but lived outside of the United States, mostly in Mexico City, during much of his early childhood. He moved back to the United States at the age of eight and lived for many years in Tucson, Arizona, where he attended Amphitheater High School and the University of Arizona. At the University of Arizona, he earned his B.S. in Business Administration in 1986, and his M.A. in Spanish in 1992. He then went on to study at the University of Texas at Austin, completing his Ph.D. in the fall of 2003. While pursuing graduate studies at Arizona and Texas, he gained valuable experience as an instructor of Spanish. He taught at Arizona for two-and-a-half years and at Texas for two. He also held teaching positions at Pima Community College, Austin Community College, and International Studies Abroad Inc. (ISA). In 1997, he took a full-time management position with ISA and continued there at the time of his graduation from Texas.

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