

BOOKS BY CARLOS FUENTES

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A NEW TIME FOR MEXICO

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Carlos Fuentes
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aspects of the cosmos into our art, our way of seeing, our sense of taste, our dreams, our music, our language.

From the roof of Mexico, one can better appreciate this way of being. We are like Calderwood's picture of Rivera's sculpture of a god that can be truly seen only at a distance, from on high.

This is a portrait of a creation that never rests, because its work is not yet complete.

2 : ON MEXICAN TIME

Kierkegaard in the Pink Zone

In an essay as intelligent as it is amusing, Søren Kierkegaard explains his personal strategy for staying alive and preserving his independence of spirit and movement in a Copenhagen that, a century and a half ago, had something like Mexico City's Pink Zone—a cluster of meeting places, coffeehouses, shops, libraries, squares; they were traditional habits, as Nietzsche would explain it, become modern, universal fashions. The place, in sum, where you saw and were seen.

Kierkegaard, by appearing every day at the same time in the cafés, streets, and theaters of his Pink Zone (call it Greenwich Village, St.-Germain-des-Prés, the Via Veneto, King's Road), convinced his contemporaries that they were dealing with a consummate loafer. His apparent availability provoked sympathy and tamed the envy and anger that would have fallen on his head if, absent and secluded, he had given the impression that he was a writer ensconced in an ivory tower (a term, lest we forget, coined by Sainte-Beuve about the Romantic poet Alfred de Vigny).

What to do with the time allotted us? Such is the problem posed by "that individual," as his Danish brethren called Kierkegaard, forced by the customs of his time to nourish his anguish privately and to flaunt his indifference in public. More precisely, he was forced by his time to do exactly the contrary of what the spirit of the time demanded. Time is always a version of another time, even when it flows on oblivious of us, as in Newton's sublunar consideration. We defend ourselves from timeless time by investing in time, reverting to time, diverting, subverting, and converting time. The pure version of time is a time without humanity. Diversion, reversion, inversion, subversion of time are the human responses, the stain—*la mancha*—of time. The corruption of its immaculate,

fatal indifference to us. To write is an untimely struggle against time. We are out in the streets with Kierkegaard when it rains; we are with him in the basement when the sun shines. Writing is a countertime, an obstacle in Romance languages, *un contretemps*, *un contratiempo*. Writing in Spanish is indeed a rebellion against a time out of sync, a countertime opposed to the usually oppressive official time, a stain on the calendars of dogmatic rule, religion, race: *la mancha*, the stain, is the space of Don Quixote and the time of our tradition.

Is the Kierkegaard gambit possible in Mexico? I start by doubting it. The European author writes with a sense of linear time, time progressing forward as it both directs and assimilates the past. Even the great literary and philosophical violations of purely lineal continuity—Vico's *corsi e ricorsi*, Joyce's vicocyclometers—presuppose that a linear time does exist, that it is the central tradition and can thus be creatively disrupted. In Mexico, on the contrary, there is not and never has been one single time, one central tradition, as in the West. In Mexico, all times are living, all pasts are present. Our times appear before our eyes dressed in impure cloaks, charged with resistant agonies. We face a double battle: against a time that also diverts us, reverts back against us, subverts us, and converts us constantly.

The coexistence in Mexico of multiple historical levels is but the external sign of a deep subconscious decision made by the country and its people: all times must be maintained, all times must be kept alive. Why? Because no Mexican time has yet fulfilled itself. We are a horizon of latent, promising or frustrated, never fully achieved potentialities. A country of suspended times. The poet López Velarde saw in Mexican history a series of "subverted Edens" that we would like, simultaneously, to recover and to forget.

As a child, I used to travel by car every summer between my father's diplomatic post in Washington, D.C., and my grandmother's home in Mexico City. I felt even then a ruined quality in both countries, the United States and Mexico. But I also felt that in the United States the ruins were merely mechanical, the ruins of promises kept and accomplished and then left behind. For me, as a Mexican, it was depressing to contrast the progress of a country where everything worked, everything was new, everything was clean, with

the inefficiency, backwardness, and dirt of my own country. Today I can see the destiny of U.S. progress—with abandonment, inefficiency, danger, and crime invading the citadels of what I admired as a child. And I have rescued my Third World infant pride and realized that while U.S. progress has produced garbage, Mexico's backwardness has produced monuments. Mexico's ruins are the vital ruins of the nation's origin, the debris of projects promised and then abandoned or destroyed by other projects, natural or human, but always proximate to something that an innocent look can only identify as a perpetually original force. That is the difference between the ruins of Mexico and those of classical antiquity. A Toltec temple has no descendancy; it is a ruin in itself and for itself. I have already alluded to the most pristine and permanent of Mexico's original forces, nature itself. And while it remains true that U.S. ruins are the debris of promises kept and then left behind, of objects eagerly bought, used, and thrown away—enormous piles of garbage, automobile graveyards, suffocated cities, blackened factories—since my youthful trips Mexico, too, has industrialized and a lot of these features have also become daily garbage in Mexico.

The paradox of time in Mexico is that when its promises are kept they self-destruct and when they remain unfulfilled they go on living forever. The basic example is the Spanish Conquest, which to Indian eyes signified the accomplishment of a benevolent myth: the return of the good god, Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent, at the precise time foreseen by the calendars of religion and mythology—Easter 1519, the Indian Year of the Reed, *Ce Acatl*. With the arrival of the Spaniards the time of Indian Mexico fulfilled its promise only to find its death. The era during which Mexico was a Spanish colony was an anachronism that tried to prolong fictitiously the world order and the mind-set of the Middle Ages, denying the time both of Indian antiquity and of European modernity (rationalism, mercantilism, free inquiry). What it did marry was the authoritarian traditions of the Aztec world and the needs of Spanish royal absolutism.

Both submerged times came back perversely, the Indian time as sentimental nostalgia, the modern time as exploitative capitalism. Nevertheless, the colonial centuries did create a new time, *mestizo*, based on the mixture of Indian, black, and European bloods, and

a new culture, Baroque, a culture of disguise and dissatisfaction, protecting the persevering religious faith of the Indian world under Christian domes, compensating for the people's poverty and uncertainty with altars of gold, shrines of silver, and carved stone. By the time independence was won from Spain three centuries after the Conquest, we did have a new, mestizo culture but did not give ourselves credit for it; we wanted to become just like France or the United States as quickly as possible. We wanted to become "modern." The dreams of Mexican modernity in the nineteenth century—liberalism and positivism—were achieved only partially and always at the expense of the communitarian bonds, the dignity, the rights, and the culture of the peasant and indigenous peoples, as I attempt to describe in Chapters 3 and 5. Benito Juárez's dream of a nation of small property owners ruled by market values becomes the Porfirio Díaz nightmare: severed from their traditional links and the protection given them by the Spanish crown, the Indian and agrarian communities dissolve into the big belly of the latifundios, the haciendas, sometimes as large as Holland, where the laborer is chattel. The will to modernity of Juárez and his companions in the Reforma movement of the mid-nineteenth century ignored the simultaneity of Mexico's times, leaving us with pure actuality, deprived of deep historical or cultural identities. That is why the freedoms won by Juárez so easily became forms of subjection under Díaz.

Only the Revolution made present all of Mexico's pasts—and that is why it deserves a capital R. I will extend this idea throughout this book. The Revolution revealed the plurality of times instantaneously as if it knew that there would be little time for ceremonies of reincarnation. Mexico's heavy tradition of centralized power, the inveterate mental tendency to paternalism and strict economic pragmatism soon transformed the Revolution into an institution—an institution that pays homage with words to the Indian and revolutionary pasts while expressing its capitalist creed in its acts. Again, the cult of actuality has been translated into forms of internal authoritarianism and external dependency.

The rhetorical kowtow to simultaneity in Mexico's history thus has a double meaning: it numbs, justifies, depoliticizes; but it also keeps the ancient aspirations of the Mexican people alive. The na-

tional tiger takes siestas, but it is not dead, as recent events in Chiapas have proved.

Instantaneity: the Mexican response to time. When André Breton called Mexico the chosen land of surrealism, he was saying that in Mexico desire finds an immediate response precisely because, the necessities being as enormous as they are, it needs supra-real instruments to achieve satisfaction. This explains much of Mexican art and literature—the paintings of Tamayo, for instance, and the novels of Rulfo. In the land of need that is Mexico, desire is a central fact of life and imagination. Western civilization, in a certain sense, has been one long road toward the encounter of desire and its objects. In our time, we realize that a permanent contradiction has presided over this journey: the desire of the Western world diminishes in inverse proportion to the number of objects capable of satisfying it. The desires and the objects have often been false, and today they are in any case diminished: smaller desires, smaller objects. Much of modern Western art—including surrealism—was a rebellion against this order of things. The greatest European artists—Picasso, Braque, Ernst, Buñuel, Joyce, Kafka, Broch, Lawrence, Akhmatova—make dazzling but desperate attempts to discover, through memory and the imagination, all that Europe had forgotten. Their warnings were timely but went unheeded. Europe became the stage for the most brutal—because less expected, less rationally forecast—of all holocausts.

In Mexico, the impossible distance between desire and the thing desired has given both yearning and object an incandescent purity. The bridges drawn from the shore of aspiration to the shore of satisfaction must override, by force, all "realistic" contingency. In Mexican popular life, in our definitive acts of love and death, passion and revolution, art and celebration, opposites meet and desire is nothing but the acknowledgment of the estrangement previous to the reunion. It is, perhaps, even the condition for the reunion to take place. Death shall become life, revolution shall be a fiesta, passion shall become art, spirit matter, accident essence, and body soul. You shall be I. A mask, a word, a greeting, or a farewell, a way of walking or looking will be enough for the meeting to occur: any celebration that ensures that we come closer—before sickness, death, separation, or distance triumphs all over again. A disguise,

a dance are sufficient to obtain the desired beauty, courage, sensuality, identity: I shall be You. For after all, desire is love for something else; it is transfiguration. Desire must assail reality to meet its object, to recover the unity of the subverted Eden that is our country. The nostalgia of paradise lost, the impossibility of paradise future leave most Mexicans with no possibility other than paradise in the present, the most difficult of all paradises to inhabit because so fugitive—the past one instant, the future the next.

After the great catastrophes of our century, the modern world can perhaps better understand Mexico's ageless conviction that danger is just around the corner, in a lost bullet, a casual encounter, a burst of anger, in sickness, in hunger, in bondage. The violence of centuries has taught us this. The so-called Mexican love of death is really a double resource of life. Death is the other half of life, completing life. But death is part of life only if it becomes a conscious part of life, a permanent companion, an object of celebration and tragic resistance. Life and our sense of history are intimately linked to our sense of death once we realize that we descend from death, that death is the origin of life, that without the death of our ancestors we would not be here in the world at all.

Even more: death is the resource of transfiguration. It is, of course, the way out of life as well as into life, and life, says the popular Mexican song, is worth nothing, *no vale nada*. But it is also the entry into life, since life is as valuable as our conscience decides it is.

The Mexican *mañana* does not mean putting things off till the morrow. It means not letting the future intrude on the sacred completeness of today. There is nothing more distant, I agree, from the Anglo-Saxon sense of expediency—and nothing more attractive, either, to the Anglo-Saxon rebel. In any case, when a total past throbs so powerfully in the present, future time can become something of an abstraction and lose a lot of its value. Perhaps *mañana* is empty, but surely today must be fulfilled. This is the greatest paradox of Mexican time: the instant is retained and eternalized within its fugitiveness. A line from the great Spanish Baroque poet Quevedo that I often quote comes to mind:

... solamente lo fugitivo permanece y dura.
... only the fleeting lasts and endures.

All the commonplaces (that is, the meeting grounds) of Mexico repeat this. The sugar skulls, the black earthen sirens, the straw angels, the cardboard skeletons, the fragile candelabra that are the tree of life, the fireworks that glow while consuming themselves, the hollow Judas figures made to be destroyed during the ceremonial instant of Resurrection, Easter Saturday—all these fragile figures, fascinating in their very provisionality, are the reminder, grave and smiling, that beauty can be fashioned in the image of its object, the passing instant, retaining it, redeeming it.

Does not this Mexican time, sacralized and profaned and maintained at maximum intensity, offer us, the men and women of Mexico, the temptation of becoming, we ourselves, time? Does it not push us to the brink of opposing, to our personal time, all those versions of time that the far too diverting, subverting, inverted, reverted, converting, and controverting Mexican time both offers and denies us? All too often, Mexican time, totalizing yet latent, tries to substitute itself for our own personal clocks, simply because this time of ours, more than a recipient of our personalities, pretends to substitute itself for them and is occasionally richer, more varied, and more powerful than they. We city-dwelling middle-class Mexicans, ferocious individualists with a collective bad conscience, are as troubled by the time of Mexico as we are by our desire to be rid of it and by our fear of being overwhelmed by it. We exorcise it. Maybe this book is one more attempt at literary witchcraft. The fact is, the time of Mexico reaches us charged with all that we could become, but the charge precedes us and is so enormous that at moments we would like to become pure time, so as to defeat the historical time that denies, mocks, defies, and besieges us. This book is a chronicle, at many levels, of such a time and its troubles, such a time and its figures.

Wouldn't it be nice to be a Yankee, a Brit, a Frenchman, even a Dane? Kierkegaard was talking about time on the European scale, a malleable time. He could mock time and play with it, hide from it, do nothing whatsoever, and yet be seen as a most active individual. He could show himself, expose himself to time, do a

million things, and pass for a vagrant. He could be free. But in Mexico, time mocks individuals, and particularly writers. The writer partaking of his times may be seen as frivolous or demagogic; retiring from time, he becomes an inmate of the ivory tower condo. It is easy in Latin America to be seen not as a writer but as a bloodsucking vampire, exquisite aesthete gringo, or frog imitator. Kierkegaard, in Mexico, would have ended his days crying at the intersection of Insurgentes and Reforma, two typically revolutionary names for sedate city avenues. His public presence would be the only admissible testimony to his private anguish; his gesture, solitary proof of his *gesta*; his presence, sufficient confession of his absence.

We turn on the television sets of the Mexican mind, and every night we hear the same evening news. Top of the news: THE SPANISH HAVE CONQUERED MEXICO. Second item: THE GRINGOS STOLE HALF OUR TERRITORY. After that, murders, arson, kidnappings, and five-legged calves. We try to understand the fabulous totality and instantaneity of true Mexican time. We cannot disguise ourselves as what we are not, so as to live that total, instantaneous time which we can perhaps understand but not fully experience. For ours is a demanding time; it wants us to live it completely, with hands and dreams, with desire and dust. We are citizens of a region where once the air was clear, suburban inhabitants of a city whose founding hieroglyph is as fearful as it is paradoxical: *atl tlachimolli*, burnt water. Mexico City denizens, our tongues are on fire; ashes make our mouths water. Garrulous sphinxes, prophets of the past, Oedipuses without a mother because someone else—others, everyone—has been fucking her forever. Narcissuses condemned to gaze at ourselves in the bottom of a cup of instant decaf. Prometheus chained to the shrink's couch, to the priest's confessional, to the multiple little thrones that the Institutional Revolutionary Party distributes to offices, congresses, and unions. The past contains all of our images, all of our desires, all of our solutions. The present undresses us. The future, over and over, deceives us.

What a bore, says Julio Cortázar of Argentina, to have all the time in the world in front of you. How uncomfortable, say I of Mexico, to have all of the past behind you . . . and to be, precisely, a writer of the Mexico City upper middle class, bereft of the trans-

missible values of a cardboard Judas or a black earthen siren; to lack all instantaneous salvations; to write. How very uncomfortable. Quick, let us advance—there is no time left. We must go forward to 1910; we must make the Revolution. Stop, draw back; we have all the time in the world: the PRI knows what it's doing; there's no need to be impatient. There's a Moctezuma in your future; put a Cortés in your motor. Confession in church or psychoanalysis on the couch: heal the past. Art: paint the past. Revolution: restore the utopian past, found the utopian future. Politics: invoke the revolutionary past while practicing the conservative present. Religion: believe in our holy mother the Virgin of Guadalupe. Culture: we are one seamless civilization from Quetzalcoatl to Pepsicoatl. Invert: without a past what have I to confess? Subvert: without the Revolution what institutional stability do I have? Revert: Paradise, here I come. Divert: I can well remember the year 2000.

In writing this book, I accept Kierkegaard's lesson. I show myself struggling with time. That is, I show myself countering time, shelterless, and then I withdraw to write in seclusion, knowing full well that each line is a countertime.

3 : INDIAN MEXICO

A Trip to the Center of the Origin

I

Travel is the original movement of literature. Words are the origin of myth; myth is the first name of home, forebears, and tombs. It is the word of that which abides. The word of movement tears us from the hearth. Its name is epic, and it throws us into the arms of the world, of the different, of the voyage. During this trip from mythic hearth to epic strangeness, we discover our tragic fissure. We then return to the land of the origin, there to tell our tale and renew our dialogue with the myth of the origin, asking it to have pity on us.

This fiery circle of literature, which in the Mediterranean world has the generic names of myth, epic, and tragedy, is what propels the narrative of travel. It is a wide gyre indeed. It springs from the identification of voyage and language and gives form to poetry—from Homer to Byron to Neruda. Politics has been determined as much by Herodotus as by Pericles, and the best guides for any contemporary summit meeting between Russian and American leaders continue to be the travel books of the Marquis de Custine in Russia and of Alexis de Tocqueville in the United States in the nineteenth century.

Movement and stillness: thanks to language, a voyage can be purely internal, confessional, subjective—from Saint Augustine to Rousseau to Freud—or it can be a trip outside our own selves and toward a recognition of the world; such is the history of the novel from the moment that Don Quixote leaves his village and goes out to compare the truth of his books with the truth of his world. Traveling can also be the immobile voyage of Jules Verne, who rarely left the confines of his own village yet was capable of traveling to the moon or twenty thousand leagues under the sea. A

voyage can be a vast symbolic journey in search of the Golden Fleece or the Holy Grail, and Xavier de Maistre can take us on a trip around his bedroom, Thomas Mann to the magic mountain, or Virginia Woolf to the lighthouse. Yet Thomas Wolfe reminds us that "you can't go home again."

In any case, voyage and narrative are twins because both signify a displacement, an abandonment of the place, the *plaza*, a farewell to the common place and a plunge into the territories of risk, adventure, discovery, the unusual. Voyage and narrative are surely all of this, yet finally they are simply voices telling us that the world is ours but that world is alien. How shall we explore it, how shall we make it our own? How can we travel around the world without losing our souls but, rather, discover ourselves as we discover the world, realizing that we lack an identity if forsaken by the world, though without us the world itself would become faceless?

This is, perhaps, the common cipher that unites personal destiny with the art of travel. I address others, my life, my work, my love, my world. And nothing permits me to think that these, my life's truths, will come to me if I do not go toward them.

II

Three contemporary authors of travel literature particularly seduce me. Bruce Chatwin died tragically at the age of forty-six, leaving at least half his work unfinished. His books *In Patagonia* and *The Songlines* take us south to Argentina and to the vast Australian hinterland. In them, Chatwin gives powerful examples of his two great literary virtues: an unparalleled capacity to distinguish an object and bring it into relief, infusing it with singular luminosity yet never separating it from its context, and the art—also incommensurable in contemporary literature—of skipping two out of every three probable sentences, thus giving us an essential text driven by great elliptical power. In *The Songlines*, these literary virtues, from a man one must consider one of the best writers of the second half of the twentieth century, come together as an inquiry into the movements of Australian aborigines. The nomadic life, not the sedentary life, is the normal life, Chatwin informs us.

In his book *The Snow Leopard* the American novelist Peter Matthiessen transforms his trip to Nepal in search of the blue sheep

of the Himalayas into a spiritual pilgrimage toward the Crystal Mountain and its Buddhist sanctuary; the awaited reward for this quest is a vision of the snow leopard. Like Chatwin, Matthiessen is in possession of an essential prose, and like him he, too, asks why our idea of the world depends so much on movement and stillness, on staying put or displacing ourselves. Is it true, as Chatwin points out, that for the nomad the world is already perfect, while the sedentary being vainly agitates himself trying to change the world? And is it not equally true, as Matthiessen finds out on his trip to the great mountain range, that movement is but the search for the perfection forever fixed in a single holy place?

The Mexican writer Fernando Benítez tried to answer these questions from the center of a paradox pertinent to Mexico and Mexicans. The paradox consists in knowing that the meeting with the sacred place is an illusion, that to find it is only proof that we must go forward, renew, begin all over, continue searching. Chatwin and Matthiessen also arrive at this truth, but only when they become pilgrims in their own lands, when they discover the other, the strange, in the bosom of their own countries. Chatwin wrote the indispensable novel of Wales, *On the Black Hill*, and Matthiessen has found the North American other in the remnants of the Indian world of the United States, in alien territory, the reservation, but also a forbidden territory. (*In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, one of Matthiessen's Indian books, was for a long time besieged by an army of legal suits.)

Mexico has been a favorite hunting ground for the Anglo-Saxon writer, from Thomas Gage, who made his colonial voyages in the eighteenth century, to Fanny Calderón de la Barca, the Scottish wife of the first Spanish ambassador to independent Mexico. More recently, we have been visited and described by Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, and Malcolm Lowry. (Evelyn Waugh permitted himself the sick prank, worthy of the author of *Vile Bodies*, of writing a libel against the nationalization of oil in Mexico, paid for by the British petroleum companies, as if he had really been in Mexico and witnessed its horrors; in truth, he never went farther than the London bank where he cashed his check.)

Books by United States writers on Mexico have abounded, historical, sociological, and touristic, and many gringos have skillfully incorporated the Mexican theme into their novels and

poems—from Hart Crane to Harriet Doerr, from Katherine Ann Porter to Jack Kerouac. A great French writer, Antonin Artaud, is, however, the author who came closest to (and whose descriptions are almost indistinguishable from) the other Mexico, Indian Mexico, in his trip to the Tarahumara.

This is the world that Fernando Benítez explores in his great books on the Indians of Mexico—the world of the Coras, the Tarahumaras, the Huicholes and the Tepehuanes, a world, as foreign in a way, to the Mexican Benítez as to the Englishman Huxley or the Frenchman Artaud. The difference is that this is Benítez's world, part of his country, his identity, his heritage. His drama is as acute as Matthiessen's among the Sioux or Chatwin's among the Welsh: these people are other, but they are mine. The extraordinary quality of Benítez's books is that he can see the Indians with objectivity yet participates with them in a drama of conflictive subjectivity. The Indians are his yet also not; he cannot be a complete man without them, even if they go on with their lives, totally indifferent to him.

Why does this happen? Benítez is the bearer of a pluralistic cultural conscience. He knows that Mexico cannot be only one of its parts but must be all of them, though some of them, such as the Indian regions, are slowly dying, victims of all kinds of abuse, of injustice, misery, solitude, alcohol. . . . How do we maintain the value of these cultures and save them from injustice as well? Can Indian values coexist with those of Western progress, with modern conditions of health, work, and social protection? Is it worthwhile to maintain those original values if the price is continuing poverty?

These are some of the anguished questions that run through Benítez's books, giving them, apart from their literary excellence, immense moral value. The author's literary ethics opens up a series of burning options, only superficially dualistic, since we soon realize that each of their terms is inseparable from the others: each option is the mirror of another, reflecting it without touching it. But it is also its twin, its carnal pain, its mysterious destiny.

III

The Indian world of Mexico offers an opposition between the visible and the invisible. The modern history of Mexico, Benítez re-

minds us, has powerfully conspired to make the Indian population invisible. The Europeans' conquest of Mexico left the Indians a defeated people, and sometimes a defeated people prefer to go unnoticed. They become at one with darkness, wishing to be forgotten so as not to be struck once more. But after the colonial period, independent Mexico was menaced by foreign wars and dismemberment; it had to protect and reinforce the parts of the nation most threatened by foreign powers—Spain, the United States, France—and consign large fragments of its territory to oblivion. The Indians became part of a terra incognita; nobody, at any given moment, knew where the Huicholes, the Coras, or the Tarahumaras really were; nobody, notes Benítez, really cared whether they existed or not.

There is a memorable scene in a film by Rubén Gámez, *The Secret Formula* (about the formula for making Coca-Cola), in which a Mexican tries to place himself within camera range so as to be photographed, but each time, the camera moves away from him, always leaving him outside the frame. It is as if this character wishes to win for himself the identity of the picture and as if the camera repeatedly denies him that wish. Do both of them—camera and subject—fear they might lose their souls in the act of making or not making a photograph? Who knows? But Benítez's books can be read as one vast and disturbing effort to make the invisible visible. He finds striking comparisons between the supreme visibility of Western painting and the actual appearance of a group of Tarahumaras; their Renaissance-page haircuts, their naked legs, their bulky codpieces make them look like Brueghel figures lost in the high tropics; a young Teztlal shepherd carries a lamb across his shoulders like Donatello's figure of Saint John; and the orgiastic confusion of the Coras during Easter week becomes as clear as the memory of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*.

But once the eye of the city traveler goes away, one cannot doubt that invisibility reclaims this forgotten mimetic world. How can it make itself visible? The answer is fleeting and mutable; its name is Myth, its name is Magic, its name is The Sacred. Can it someday also be named Justice? Benítez does not divorce the two realities. Magical reality makes Indians visible to themselves; the possibility of justice can also make them visible both to themselves and to others.

This idea opens up yet another series of oppositions that Benítez tries to unite. The Indian world, in order to become visible, struggles between movement and stillness. Both are names of the extremes of metamorphosis. Without it, there would be no change, no movement toward the sacred that Benítez quite correctly observes in most of the truly vital activities of the Indian world; a "turning upside down of the order of daily life, altering the usual rhythms of the world, giving the world different authorities and naming things all over again."

How can we make a safe transition from the profane to the sacred? The answer lies in a ritual universe where the masters of the magic arts, the shamans, those who know, those who name, those who sing, occupy the privileged space. Maria Sabina is the best-known of these ritual actors.

They speak, they sing. The passage from the invisible world to the world of images is also a passage from silence to voice, from the forgotten to the remembered, from stillness to movement. Benítez warns that the Huichol people know that in their rituals they "reconstruct" the deeds of their gods, which took place in the original time of creation. Present-day Indians know ritual down to the smallest details. Yet the pain of this knowledge is that it is not self-sufficient. On the contrary, it demands for itself movement, wrenching itself from something, exposing itself to lose the very thing it was searching for: the original unity of humanity and of the world.

The Indian runs the risk of going mad as he faces these choices. He hurls himself into the abyss but creates "an immense ritual" that will become the wings of his mythical flight. Metamorphosis is the name of the ritual. The Indian sings a poem so that the gods may become flowers and enter a mother's womb and come out as clouds and that the clouds may then rain on the cornfield.

Movement and voice. Stillness and invisibility resemble silence; movement and visibility resemble voice. Benítez perfectly captures the tone of Indian voices, so much like their silence: pathos and edginess of modern urban life are unknown here, he says. Indians talk in caressing, mute tones. It is in bad taste to let the voice betray irritation or disdain. Their voices are "white, impersonal," and they are not underlined by gesture or confirmed by look.

The contrast is indeed very striking between the world of Indian

silence and the verbal resurrection that a Mexican writer, writing in Spanish, finds in such a forgotten nature. Facing the varieties of geographic accident and the rich correspondences between nature and its Spanish place-names, Benítez writes, "Words buried in dictionaries become animated, acquire their color, their nuance, their harshness, their depth, their relief, and their drama."

Most dramatic of all is that this verbal wealth not only opposes the writer, who owns his tongue, to the Indians, who own silence, but baptizes the world, naming the New World for the first time. Benítez repeats this feat in his books on the Indians, the feat that the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier attributes to Latin American writers in general. Yet the marvelous élan that the writer both inherits and resurrects is diminished not only by the silence surrounding him but by the mortal danger that the use of his language, Spanish, may signify for Indians.

A Mixtec Indian says this: "They want to kill me because I speak Spanish. The killers speak only Triqui, and they think I am signing documents denouncing them." Benítez realizes that by speaking Spanish the Mixtec has "violated the secret of his people, he has left his own group by speaking the foreign language." Nothing illustrates as terribly as this Indian's words—they want to kill me because I speak Spanish; they think I am denouncing them in a language they don't know—the distance between two cultures within the same nation. Is that distance unbridgeable? Language, Vico tells us, is the first communitarian reality of culture, the first thing that we share, the first thing that unites. Here, it separates, menaces, divorces people. What is the place of justice in a world such as this, "where victims and executions unite to defend with impenetrable silence the intimacy and secrets of their lives"?

The stranger, writes Benítez, "is the eternal enemy," and enmity begins at the basic level of language. To be sure, he offers numerous examples of the cultural distance between the oral and the written word. A man is capable of speaking only if his words do not become "papers." Even in urban Mexico the oral is a surer thing than the written, and the tradition of old-fashioned Mexican politicians is to leave nothing written down. But in the case of the Indians, the denial of writing is not only a form of self-defense but also a form imposed by violence and slavery. The educational effort of the first Christian missionaries was short-lived. The crown

and the clergy reserved for themselves a monopoly on the written word, thus to increase their power "over the illiterate masses of the New World."

Baptized with the name of negation, words led fatally to violence. These are mute men, says Benítez, "who recover speech only with alcohol." Violence and its daughter, Death, atrociously sear the Indian world of Mexico. Collective degradation through alcohol, murders, and wars without limits—these scenes are described by Benítez with the starkness of a Goya engraving, of a charcoal line by Orozco, of a mortal phrase by Rulfo: "They killed his parents and one of his little sisters on the way. Of all the family, only this boy is alive, as well as another little brother called Pedro. . . . If they do not find the man they are looking for, they kill the wife and the children, that's for sure. . . . If people aren't killed here, then nobody's happy."

Alcohol breaks silence but inaugurates violence. "Some were totally drunk and I defended them because there was no other reasonable way of going thirty or forty kilometers across the mountains with a cadaver on their backs in an almost total state of decomposition."

IV

In the reader's memory, this decomposed cadaver recalls another dead body, that of a jailed Indian showing his face between the crude, heavy bars of his cell, all the light in the world concentrated on his teeth: "Their razorlike brilliance expressed the impotent desperation of a caged animal in a way that his elemental Spanish could never express." This also prefigures, in its openmouthed, jailed muteness, another body, not carnal or singular but symbolic: the body of the God, he he called Christ or Deer. Between the divine body and the abandoned, imprisoned, mute, sick bodies, the Indian response is called ritual, mystery, myth. To the individual deaths of human beings and to the universal death of God, the Indians of Mexico respond by traveling from the profane to the sacred, from the body of man to the body of God.

Traveling from one reality to the other requires not only a knowledge of ritual but an understanding of what myth unites, of what has been separated and of what myth remembers, of what

has been forgotten. These are not disguised tautologies but essential movements of the soul, visibly manifesting themselves in ritual. Benítez makes us see how the ceremony of eating peyote has the purpose of halting the dispersion of the self, of allowing communion with the All, attention to the song of inert objects, and a return to the original time, the time of creation, "the virginal age of first ideas, where the Farmers of the World reigned, surrounded by green and blue feathers." Original unity, immediate dispersion—the consciousness of this movement is expressed in the spoken texts of the Huicholes, where the gods, barely born, disperse "and run like water through the jungle."

Within this sacred circle live the fear and the nostalgia of the aboriginal soul, for as they recover the original time, the Indians also preserve its immobility, thanks to myth. "They are the prisoners of the eroded mountains, and God is their jailer." Custom, which gives the Indians a spiritual and mythical universe no longer available to modern Mexicans, also gives them the habit of lowering their heads, consulting witch doctors, buying candles and firecrackers for the saints, being exploited, drinking themselves to death, believing in spirits, doubles, and flying skeletons. Custom, that hard cord of vice and superstition which ties them hand and foot, is at the same time the source of their unity, "the tie that preserves their character and their life."

We all live within a process of constant choice between diverse options, between negations and affirmations, knowing that each decision we make sacrifices a plurality of alternatives. In spite of silence, immobility, and custom, the sense of alternatives and of sacrifice due to choice is even more dramatic in the Indian world. Or perhaps the Indians of Mexico are simply more conscious than we, their modern urban brethren, of the possibility so eloquently described by Jacob Bronowski writing about chess: the moves you don't make are as much a part of the game as the moves you do make.

William James wrote, "The mind is at every stage a theater of simultaneous possibilities." We can both understand this thought and share it with the aboriginal world. It is equally valid for María Sabina and for Rainer Maria Rilke. The indigenous world expresses it through all these dramatic oppositions—visibility and

invisibility, voice and silence, memory and oblivion, violence and death.

Yet there is one more duality that masks this spiritual movement of the plural and the simultaneous: the duality of the provisional and the permanent. Life, faith, ritual are permanent, but things tend to be provisional, as in the village of Copala, described by Benítez, where everything, with the exception of the church, "is provisional and is marked with the seal of violence and death." I do not know if this provisional character merely disguises a kind of virtuality of the absent yet potential movements in the indigenous world; I do not know if, when we travel into Indian Mexico, we are spectators in a theater of simultaneous possibilities. But I do believe that what we see there is a will to survive in spite of catastrophe, injustice, and the hostility of nature.

Nobility and misery meet in the Indian communities, while the vulgarity and pretensions of the urban world disappear. The Indians of Mexico are the only aristocrats in a country of provincial imitations, shabby colonial *hidalgos*, haughty republican Creoles, and corrupt, cruel, and ignorant revolutionary bourgeois. The dignity and beauty of the Tarahumara region's severe witnesses, of the Tzotziles, whose "virility is a triumph over the fragility of childhood," are constantly devastated by poverty, alcohol, fatality: "Everything goes wrong for us everywhere."

Yes, as Fernando Benítez says, they deserve another destiny. For the time being, they meet their fate in isolation, through atavistic wisdom and mythologies, decking themselves out in the regalia of the gods, worn atop ragged clothes and rubber-soled *huaraches*, for they wish to recover the mystery, the distance, the ritual purity, the contact with the gods—and to do so without losing sight of the suffering imposed on their humanity.

Do they deserve another fate? "Once the coherence of the fiesta is broken, the vision of fraternity and abundance dispelled, what remains is the dusty desert, the sloth, the hunger never satiated by the fruits of the cactus. . . ."

Do they deserve another fate? The answer must also be ours. It is up to us to decide if we are interested in participating in the life of Mexico's indigenous communities, sharing their fruits, their ritual purity, their closeness to the sacred, their memory of all that

has been forgotten by urban hedonism, making it ours, on our own terms, while respecting their terms and the values they attach to their culture. It is up to us to decide whether we are able to respect the values of the Indian world, saving it from injustice rather than condemning it to abandonment.

The Indians of Mexico are part of our polycultural and multi-racial community. To forget them is to forget ourselves and condemn ourselves to eventual oblivion. The justice they receive will be inseparable from that which governs the rest of us. The Indians point the way to our own possibility as citizens of a free society. We shall not be just men and women if we do not share justice with them. We shall not be satisfied men and women if we do not share bread with them.

4 : REVOLUTIONARY MEXICO

History Out of Chaos

The Mexican Revolution of 1910–21 was at least three revolutions. Revolution number 1—fixed forever in pop iconography—was the agrarian, small-town movement led by chiefs such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. This was a locally based revolt, intent on restoring village rights to lands, forests, and waters. Its program favored a decentralized, self-ruling, communitarian democracy, inspired by shared traditions. It was, in many ways, a conservative revolution.

Revolution number 2, more blurry in the icons of the mind, was the national, centralizing, and modernizing revolution led originally by Francisco Madero, then by Venustiano Carranza after Madero's assassination in 1913, and finally consolidated in power by the two forceful statesmen of 1920s Mexico: Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles. Their purpose was to create a modern national state capable of setting collective goals while promoting private prosperity.

Somewhere between the two, and definitely dim in the collective memory, an incipient proletarian revolution number 3 took place, reflecting the displacement of Mexico's traditional artisanal class by modern factory methods. Radicalized by anarcho-syndicalist theories and leaders, the nascent working class staged the two greatest challenges against the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship: the strike of the textile workers in Río Blanco in 1906 and, a few months later, the miners' strike at Cananea. During the Revolution itself, workers banded in so-called Red Battalions and helped Carranza, but retained their autonomy under the organization called Casa del Obrero Mundial, an alliance of self-governing labor unions. In general, the workers looked down on the peasants as primitives and reactionaries, and looked beyond the middle-class leadership

Tlatelolco massacre), again threw the whole matter of Mexican history and its direction into question.

As in all layered pastries, nevertheless, beneath the icing lie the real goodies: jams, doughs, and chocolate creeks running up and down the cake. Hart's book is not about the icing or the slicing of the Mexican cake but about the way it is filled. Several ingredients are immediately perceived. One is the continuity of the social struggle in Mexico: the Mexican Revolution, one could argue from reading Hart, actually began the day after the fall of the Aztecs to the conquistador Hernán Cortés. The second is the tension, within that continuity, between the dynamics of modernization and the values of tradition. This implies, at every stage of Mexican history, an adjustment between past and present whose most original feature is admitting the presence of the past. Nothing seems to be totally canceled by the future in the Mexican experience: styles of life and legal claims dating from the Aztec or colonial centuries are still relevant in our times.

It is one of the strengths of Hart's book that he not only understands the presence of the past in Mexico but organizes the mutual responses of traditionalism and modernization so clearly. He does this by distinguishing, beyond neat chronological slices, Manichaean melodrama (Mexico as a history of heroes and villains), personal theatrics (Mexico as the story of powerful personalities), and even changes of political administrations, a continuity of social groupings whose interests, at times concurrent, at times inimical, truly explain the dynamics of revolutionary Mexico.

I hope I am not simplifying too much when I single out the four groups that Hart subjects to intensive study: peasants, urban workers, middle class or petty bourgeoisie, and provincial elites. Hovering over them, at times distant and unconcerned, at times intrusive and often repressive, is the central state in all its guises: autocratic Indian empire, Spanish monarchy in its two phases—Habsburgs from 1521 to 1700, paternalistic, removed, but extremely wily at undercutting the colonial elites, and Bourbons from 1700 to 1821, interventionist, modernizing busybodies, convinced that the role of the state was to promote development. This triple tradition—Aztec, Habsburg, and Bourbon—was lost by the independent republic as, along with the rest of Spanish America, Mexico launched into its extralogical imitation of the laws and

and its respect for private property toward worker control of factories and expulsion of national and foreign capitalists.

Revolution number 2 finally triumphed over revolutions 1 and 3 and established, between 1920 and 1940, the institutions of modern Mexico. How this came about, and from what social and historical depths modern Mexico has emerged, is the subject of John Mason Hart's probing and passionate book *Revolutionary Mexico*.

The United States' relationship with Mexico is, perhaps, secondary only to its relationship with Moscow, yet the disparity between the attention given to the world of the former Soviet Union and that granted to Mexico (and, by extension, to Latin America) is flagrant. As the power of both the United States and the former Soviet Union diminish and a post-Yalta multipolar world emerges, Mexico and Latin America are becoming less dependent on either great power, more closely allied to Western Europe and the countries of the Pacific Basin, and more closely knit among themselves as an Ibero-American community. Relations between the Americas will be vastly restructured in the next years and the next century, and nothing will be gained by mutual ignorance. Hart's book goes a long way toward dispelling myths and clarifying the process of Mexican history.

Mexico's history is sometimes presented as a layer cake: you can slice it evenly and in well-cut segments. The Indian world was conquered by the Spaniards in 1521, followed by three centuries of colonial rule. Political independence was achieved between 1810 and 1821, and dictatorship, anarchy, and the loss of half the national territory to the United States in 1847 ensued. The liberal reform led by Benito Juárez in the 1850s was the first attempt at modernization, but it was interrupted by conservative reaction, French intervention, and Maximilian's short-lived empire. Modernization without democracy was the hallmark of the long-lived Porfirio Díaz dictatorship, which began in 1876 and was finally overthrown by the revolution of 1910. The revolution itself went through an armed phase until 1920 and then through what has been called a constructive phase until 1940. A stage of growth and equilibrium seemed to have been reached, until the economic crisis of the 1980s, preceded by the political crisis of 1968 (the

institutions of Britain, France, and the United States. The Mexican Revolution can, in a way, be seen (in this and many cultural matters) as a return to the source. The modern Mexican state—authoritarian, paternalistic, teleologically geared toward the achievement of the common good and therefore more interested in unity than in pluralism—is nearer to Aquinas than to Montresquieu.

Hart concentrates on the social and economic movements of Mexican history more than on the development of the national state, and he is right to do so, since his method permits the reader to grasp seldom-understood processes. The peasantry of Mexico, for example, is correctly seen as a traditionalist class, interested in restoring communitarian rights of land tenure and production derived from the pre-Conquest era and later confirmed by the monarchy's own legal vision of eminent domain. The relative equilibrium of the colonial era, as oppressive and as protected as it came to be, was radically destroyed by liberal activism in the nineteenth century. The liberal laws outlawing communal property led to massive land seizures and the dispossession of village lands by local landed elites; from this eventually sprang the *latifundia* system of the Porfirio Díaz regime, which vastly benefited the Mexican oligarchy and foreign, mainly United States, landowners.

Revolutionary Mexico minutely researches a little-known area, that of United States landed property in Mexico during the Díaz dictatorship. By 1910, it amounted to 100 million acres, including much of the most valuable mining, agricultural, and timber land and representing 22 percent of Mexico's land surface. The complexes owned by William Randolph Hearst alone extended to almost eight million acres. But by 1910, 90 percent of the peasants had become landless.

The Díaz regime began, in 1876, as a dynamic and modernizing administration. Hart describes it as broadly based in a country of 9.5 million people (Mexico today has ten times that number of inhabitants) and enjoying the general support of the middle class and the provincial elites until the end of the nineteenth century. But as the *porfiriato* permitted the development of Mexico to be defined, more and more, from abroad, the middle groups saw

themselves cut off as major profits went to foreign companies. These foreign groups had a great interest in promoting exports but little interest in expanding the internal market.

This scheme, imposed on a basically agrarian society with a strong landowning class, resulted in a weak bourgeoisie, in crushed peasant and labor movements, and, finally, in a failure to incorporate the new groups—businessmen, professionals, administrators, ranchers—that the regime itself had originally fostered. The Díaz government transformed thousands of traditional peasants and artisans into agrarian and industrial workers. But it also had to establish powerful security forces to see to it that workers stayed deunionized, that strikes were broken, and that labor remained cheap. Repression, lack of opportunities, nationalist sentiments, susceptibility to economic contractions from abroad, claims to the land, and new claims to power finally brought peasants, workers, the middle class, and the provincial elites together in revolution. As often happens, the society had outgrown the state and the state did not know it.

Hart's lapidary statement that "the deeper significance of the Mexican Revolution" was that of being "a war of national liberation against the United States" distracts from the overwhelming fact of Mexico as a nation searching for itself through the contradictions and revelations of revolutionary upheaval. The Revolution as self-knowledge, the Revolution as a cultural event, is the most lasting legacy of what went on in Mexico between 1910 and 1940, and this event would have happened with or without the United States. It continues to nourish the arts, the literature, the collective psyche, and the national identity of Mexico more than any other single factor of the Revolution. Yet every other factor includes the cultural perception of self, searching back into precolonial times.

But Hart is correct in saying that Mexico's claim to revolution is justified by the transformation of property ownership that took place, from absentee to local control and from foreign to national ownership. The story of the political and economic transformation of institutions is told on simultaneous national and international planes. What the middle class and provincial elites of Mexico, engaged in revolution, finally faced was a campesino-and-worker-

led revolution to establish a radical state based on popular power. The workers in the Casa del Obrero Mundial, over 100,000 strong, in 1916 defied a government that had just triumphed on the battlefield by staging the largest general strikes in Mexican history. Their aim was workers' self-government, a program that continues to send shudders down the spines of capitalists and totalitarians alike, since it shuns them both. Villa and Zapata were adamant in demanding wholesale land redistribution and direct self-government for the agrarian communities. As Hart describes it, "In the Villistas' wake, dozens of pueblos seized nearby estates and established collectives." Villa emancipated peasants, promulgated land distribution; in his name, thousands of lower-class rebels assaulted United States- and Mexican-owned haciendas.

Zapatismo proved to be incorruptible and undefeatable, and it constantly demonstrated its "capacity to replace the state with decentralized self-government" through a federation of free municipalities. And both the middle-class modernizing and centralizing leaders (Madero, Carranza, Obregón) and the United States saw in these movements the ultimate threat to their own interests. They tacitly banded against them, but naturally their respective sets of options differed. For the Wilson administration, revolution in Mexico came to represent an unwanted choice between two extremes. Washington had to accept the triumph of a collectivist, anti-United States, radical, and experimental, but also confusingly traditionalist peasant and workers' revolution on the southern border—or it had to accede to demands from powerful United States factions that intervention against Mexico, and even annexation of Mexican territories, become Washington's official response to revolution.

These were no idle threats. Between March and September 1913, the United States made enormous shipments of arms to the dictator Victoriano Huerta, in the hope of stopping the Carranza, Villa, and Zapata revolts and of giving Huerta a chance to reestablish those two gringo fetishes order and stability. The Wilson administration, Hart points out, repeatedly signed exceptions to President Taft's earlier embargo on arms to Mexico and only admitted the prohibition when it became obvious that Huerta, an incompetent and bloody tyrant, could not restore order.

The frontier was then opened to arms purchases by rebels, and

this influx ensured the recovery of central Mexico by the revolutionaries and the overthrow of Huerta. Along with this, the Wilson government occupied the port city of Veracruz in 1913 and there amassed a huge arsenal of weapons. But as it faced a popular revolution it could neither understand nor control, the Wilson presidency also faced the pressure of United States interests affected by the Revolution and impatient to intervene. Foremost among these were the above-mentioned Hearst, William F. Buckley Sr. of the Texas Oil Company, and Senator Albert B. Fall, who asked for outright seizure and annexation of Mexico.

These extremes beheld their own imaginable catastrophes—only a fear of lower-class collectivism, but a pre-Vietnam intuition of endless war, already foreseen by two generals, Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott, in 1847, when they withdrew from the heavily populated regions of central Mexico they had conquered, against the advice of those other two noted interventionists, Marx and Engels, who believed, like Buckley and Fall, that the only good Mexico was a Mexico ruled by the United States.

Engels, writing in 1848, greeted, "with due satisfaction, the defeat of Mexico by the United States. This, too, represents progress. For when a country until then perpetually embroiled in its own conflicts, perpetually torn by civil wars and with no way out for its development . . . is forcibly dragged to historical progress, we have no alternative but to consider it as a step forward. In the interests of its own development, it was convenient that Mexico should fall under the tutelage of the United States. The evolution of all the American continent will lose nothing with this." The right to intervention that the superpowers have taken unto themselves in our time (the so-called Brezhnev and Reagan doctrines) has deep historical roots in the nineteenth century.

Poised between pressures, Wilson chose the lesser evil: the middle-class and provincial elites led by Carranza. The Marines turned over the arsenal at Veracruz (artillery, carbines, bayonets, machine guns, rifles, pistols, cartridges, grenades, barbed wire, poison gas, and dynamite) to Carranza. United States ships supporting the Carranza faction entered the ports of Mazatlán, Manzanillo, Acapulco, Salina Cruz, and Guaymas, assuring the flow of supplies. Villa and Zapata were thus defeated. And so—as one reads Hart—was the myth of an immaculate Mexican Revolution that

never received (as Cuba or Nicaragua did in more recent times) armed support from abroad.

But if Wilson had a problem, so had the middle-class leaders of the second revolution. They faced the double threat of a radical, self-governing, lower-class movement making it to power and, if Buckley, Hearst, and Fall were to be heard, partition, annexation, or at least the creation of a United States protectorate over Mexico. The middle-class leaders had to reformulate, in contemporary terms, yet another strand running through the Mexican cake like chocolate through a Sacher torte. This issue was nationalism, and even Díaz, who gave so much to the North Americans, felt toward the end of his regime that he had some redressing to do. He went out of his way to help the Nicaraguan nationalist president, José Santos Zelaya, against President Taft's interventionism, and, much to the chagrin of Standard Oil, Texaco, and sundry Harriman and Stillman interests, he gave the British the upper hand in what until 1907 had been United States preserves in the Mexican economy: oil and railroads.

President Taft was not pleased. The United States then backed Madero against Díaz. But as Madero had to ensure his own nationalist legitimacy, United States backing, as noted, shifted to Huerta and then to Carranza against the Villa-Zapata revolutionaries. But Carranza, who was forced to admit Brigadier General John J. (Black Jack) Pershing's punitive expedition against Villa in 1916-17, also had to balance that act with blushing coquetry toward Kaiser Wilhelm (as recounted in Barbara Tuchman's *The Zimmermann Telegram*) and with refusals to reassure United States banking, mining, and oil interests of continued concessions in the future. Again, Senator Fall (who was to fall indeed as President Harding's secretary of the interior during the Teapot Dome scandal) was not pleased. The Obregón government, while more radical ideologically than the preceding Carranza administration, nevertheless reassured North American companies of their place in Mexico. The so-called Bucareli Accords of 1923 went so far as to guarantee the United States that Mexico would not apply its constitution retroactively in matters regarding property of the subsoil. Yet again, in 1938, President Lázaro Cárdenas fully restored the constitutional mandate and went on to nationalize all foreign oil holdings.

The conflicting class interests made apparent by the Mexican Revolution did not come to an end with the defeat of Villa and Zapata and the assimilation of their surviving leadership, as well as that of the Casa unions, into the second revolution. The constitution of 1917 was indeed, as Hart indicates, a result of the solidarity between provincial elites and the rising middle class. Yet that document had to make concessions to all social classes. The Mexican Revolution then went on to consolidate itself in government or, as a revolutionary general famously remarked at the time, "This revolution has now degenerated into a government."

Out of necessity, or through sheer political genius, President Obregón, in the early 1920s, gave the triumphant elite the chance to prove themselves as state builders, creating political institutions that would unite the defeated peasant and proletarian groups with the victorious middle groups. The new government needed to continue its alliance with peasants and workers because it continued to face challenges left and right, from restless campesinos, from the church, from army dissidents, from the remnants of the ancien régime, from the United States, and from the foreign companies. Throughout the administrations of Elías Calles and Lázaro Cárdenas, between 1925 and 1940, the army and the church were brought under control, the central government established its authority over rebellious military leaders, enormous advances were made in health, education, and communications, a *modus vivendi* was reached with the United States during the Roosevelt administration, and the former Villa, Zapata, and Casa leaders were given a say in the umbrella organization that survives under its present title: Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI).

What would have happened in Mexico if Villa and Zapata had prevailed? What if the workers in the Casa had achieved their ends? What if the Revolution, indeed, had not occurred, and Mexico had been left to its own tides of evolution? Indeed, what if the United States had continued as a British colony into the twentieth century, or Russia had evolved under the czars? The questions are tantalizing but finally useless. As Hart comments, through the Mexican Revolution "the masses made striking gains, eliminating

most of the vestiges of caste and archaic social relations that still plague much of Latin America and opening society for public education and individual mobility."

Nearly seventy years after the death of Zapata, Mexico again faces crisis and the need for change. Enormous development has taken place, along with great injustice. Again, as Mexico searches for solutions in economic modernization, it must also find them in political modernization. The society, as in 1910, has outstripped the institutions. But, once more, modernization cannot be achieved at the expense of the small agrarian communities, the forgotten world of Villa and Zapata. *Revolutionary Mexico* is a timely reminder that if Mexico is to achieve lasting growth, it must, at last, permit the strong central state to meet the peaceful challenge of self-government from below. The cultural element again becomes paramount, since the continuity of Mexican history implies an effort to admit the presence of the past, joining tradition with development.

5 : AGRARIAN MEXICO

The Death of Rubén Jaramillo

On a lonely height, like a Mexican equivalent of the Inca fortress of Machu Picchu in the Andes, the ancient Toltec ceremonial center rises amid the ravines of Xochicalco. You can listen to the silence. The cicadas sing at dusk. Rapidly, hooves of goats descend the steps of the ruins. The buzzards caw over the remains of a dead dog. They do not manage to destroy the silence. It is a silence that protects and, in complicity with the setting sun, gives shape to the vast extension of the valley of Morelos. Xochicalco is a stone belvedere that dominates the undulating canvas of the valley, its lights and shadows, its various green hues. The pyramid seems to hang from the sky, and the sky seems made of huge dark blocks of fast-moving clouds. All of it, land and sky, is bounded by the clearly cut mountains, which have the shape of the breasts of the Roman she-wolf. Here Rubén Jaramillo died.

Who Was Rubén Jaramillo?

"He was one of us. He fought for us all his life. That's why he died, because he created powerful enemies. Listen, way back in 1938 Jaramillo was president of the board running the cooperative at the big Zacatepec sugar mill created by General Cárdenas for our benefit, for us, for communal farmers. Jaramillo decided to put an end to the old vices. He talked, he pleaded, he convinced the peasants to stop drinking, until he had to go into hiding, because the gunmen for the alcohol merchants threatened to kill him. Don't let them tell you tales! We'll always remember Jaramillo because he tried to help us and see that we got a square deal. He never asked a cent from us. He spent what little he had on us. He wrote down our pleas. He went with us to face the authorities.

known but were not always attributable to it alone. The symbiosis between the state and the PRI, the PRI's corporative structure, the Scholastic politics of traditional Mexico—which have always placed the common good above the risks of democratic pluralism—and the demagoguery that often accompanied agrarian reform are only a few. In contrast, later policies dismantled or rendered ineffective many of Cárdenas's revolutionary advances. Continued agrarian reform would have required credit, machinery, seed, co-operatives managed honestly and democratically. Popular organizations needed to do more for their constituents and less for the state and private enterprise. "I delivered strong organizations to the workers and campesinos," Cárdenas once said to me, implying that what happened to them after 1941 was not what he would have wished.

"You should have stayed in the presidency until you completed your task," Fernando Benítez told the general. Cárdenas replied in his deliberate and thoughtful way, "I would have become a Trujillo." In order to ensure the power and independence of the executive, Cárdenas set the rules required to prevent absolutism, coups d'état, and military tyrannies in Mexico: no reelection; all power to Caesar, but only for six years, and only once.

Mexico today is not the Mexico of Cárdenas, but it is what it is, for good and for evil, thanks to Cárdenas. His goals of a just and shared progress, his trust in the country, his conviction that economic life does not occur on blackboards but in kitchens, streets, fields, factories, and the privacy of the home are still valid today. Like no one else, Lázaro Cárdenas was willing to bet that our human resources are Mexico's first and best capital.

My personal memory of Lázaro Cárdenas is warm. He offered me friendship and good counsel at the beginning of my literary career. I traveled with him through many regions of our splendid, energetic country, so often impeded, humiliated, and maligned yet patient, willing to give the best of itself if only it is treated with a little trust and respect. From La Piedad to Querétaro, from La Barca to Uruápan, from Guanajuato to Guadalajara, I have never seen a Mexican more loved, respected, and followed than Lázaro Cárdenas. To understand why one had merely to hear him talking with people: Cárdenas loved, respected, and followed the people of Mexico.

9 : SO FAR FROM GOD

Mexico and the United States

The most famous saying about Mexico and the United States has been attributed to Porfirio Díaz, the old dictator who ruled my country with an iron hand from 1877 to the outbreak of the Revolution in 1910: "Poor Mexico! So far from God and so close to the United States!" In the present circumstances, we would be well advised to change this celebrated saying and exclaim instead, "Poor Mexico and poor United States! So far from God and so close to each other!"

Our two countries have become extremely interdependent yet also have an extremely lopsided power relationship—the United States is strong, Mexico is weak—and both elements are dramatically heightened by the fact that we share a common border, one of the longest, most conflictive, and most challenging borders in the world: three thousand kilometers long, from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, from San Diego-Tijuana to Brownsville-Matamoros. A cultural frontier where two different civilizations face, challenge, and enrich each other—cultures as different as those of the United States and any Asian nation. A labor frontier, with five thousand Mexican workers, both legal and illegal, crossing each day, acting on the demand of the United States economy. And, of course, an economic frontier, with Mexico the third-largest client of the United States (after Canada and Japan) and the United States the largest market for Mexican goods.

The porousness of the border is more than a matter of products: 300 million people cross the border in both directions every year, and with them, ideas, habits, information, and cultural trends come and go. The vast asymmetry of power between the United States and Mexico is less and less significant with each passing day.

If in the past, Mexico got pneumonia when the United States caught a cold, today we get the flu together and have not developed an efficient vaccine against our increasingly common ills.

It is not an easy border. True, it is unmilitarized. For how long? Ultraconservatives in the United States demand that, the Berlin Wall having fallen, a new wall now be constructed between the United States and Mexico.

It is not an easy border, because its significance is unique. It is the only visible border between a developed postindustrial state and an emerging, developing nation, between the First and the Third Worlds. All the frictions, all the lessons, all the opportunities of the north-south relationship in the twenty-first century are bound to manifest themselves along that line from the Pacific to the gulf.

But this is not only a border between Mexico and the United States or even between a developing and a developed nation. It is also a border between the United States and *all* of Latin America, which begins south of the river that you call the Rio Grande and we call the Rio Bravo. What happens on the line between Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Sonora, is bound to affect the relationship between the United States and the rest of the Western Hemisphere.

Not an easy border, no. Is it more than a border, asks a character in my novel *The Old Gringo*. Is it a scar? Will it heal? Will it bleed again?

This will depend, of course, on our policies with regard to the main issues on the U.S.-Mexico agenda, starting with trade and migration but including many other areas of the increasing interdependency of the two countries.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) among Mexico, the United States, and Canada was designed as the first stage in a new, more constructive and integrated relationship. It became part of a central thrust in the post-cold war world: sharing the possible benefits of free trade out of a conviction that a growing exchange of goods, services, capital, and labor in an interdependent world is not a zero-sum game, since output and investment are not fixed, and that economies in free trade should grow prosperous together, not at one another's expense. Free trade is a positive-sum game: this is the philosophy that stimulated the NAFTA.

While the treaty was being discussed, I made a bet with my

friend the Mexican writer Jorge Castañeda: if NAFTA was approved by 1 January 1994, he would invite me to dinner; if it wasn't, I would invite him to dinner.

It was a win-win situation, for we enjoy each other's company. Castañeda was a staunch opponent of NAFTA as it stands.

While sharing many of his criticisms, I always thought the treaty would be approved for the very simple reason that it serves, above all, the national interests of the United States. But you would not think so to hear the Texagogue Ross Perot thunder on about the "sucking sound" of jobs heading from the United States to Mexico.

This argument should be disposed of quickly. First, labor-intensive jobs in the low-tech industries of the past are going to go to low-wage workers, NAFTA or no NAFTA. With NAFTA, they will go to Mexico and therefore strengthen the U.S. strategic position vis-à-vis the other two great trading blocs, Asia and Europe; without NAFTA, they will certainly go to Indonesia, China, or Malaysia and improve Japan's position. But if low wages were the principal factor in attracting jobs, Bangladesh would be an employment paradise. It is not.

Mexico is also the United States' fastest-growing export market and second-largest trading partner. About three-quarters of every Mexican dollar spent on imports is spent on U.S. goods, and for every dollar's worth of growth, Mexico spends 20 cents in the United States.

Does the growth of U.S. exports to Mexico mean U.S. employment grows along with them?

This is what the partisans of NAFTA affirmed and its foes vehemently denied. The partisans argue: If each \$1 billion of net improvement in the U.S. trade balance signified 20,000 new American jobs, it was conservatively foreseeable that within two years the \$42 billion in U.S. exports to Mexico (the figure for 1992) would jump to \$52 billion with NAFTA, and the \$30 billion in U.S. imports from Mexico would rise by \$5 billion; the new U.S. trade surplus would create nearly 200,000 new export-related jobs.

The United States also stood to lose some 100,000 old jobs, but not just because NAFTA would negatively affect a number of labor-intensive industries. Those jobs would migrate or be lost, in any case, if the United States did not stand up to its real competition, the high-tech, high-productivity, high-salary club in the Pa-

cific Basin and the European Economic Community. To think otherwise is to give Mexico a truly bum rap.

NAFTA, by integrating a population of 360 million people with a \$6.5 trillion trading bloc—the largest in the world—would in any case enormously strengthen the U.S. position in the highly integrated, capital-scarce, technologically advanced economy of the twenty-first century. This is what was really at stake for the United States: Where would it focus its energy in the new global economy? How would it stand up to German or Japanese competition?

U.S. indecisiveness in these issues makes one wonder whether the federal republic founded in 1776—the sole great power in history to be blessed with only two neighbors, both of them weak—can enter the twenty-first century with a sure step and a sense of its true duties. Or will the United States be content as a backwater from the second industrial revolution, a Luddite widow set to repudiate advanced technology in the name of full employment and the narrow interests of pressure groups?

Like all other industrialized nations today, the United States faces the cruel paradox of “jobless productivity,” in which the more you produce, the less employment there is. It is not the Third World that is taking jobs away from the industrialized world. Technology is. Blame yourselves. Don’t blame Mexico. And the humane political and social resolution to the paradox lies within U.S. borders: it is the retraining, education, and development of workers for new jobs.

Granted, this is not an easy situation. Konrad Seitz, the outspoken director of strategic planning at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, bluntly states that a high standard of living in the future will be available only to nations or groups of nations that possess the most advanced production technologies. A country that manufactures products of the first or second industrial revolutions—automobiles, steel, and so on—will have to content itself with “the salaries of Mexico or Korea,” he says. High salaries will be reserved for those who make products of the third industrial revolution—what Alvin Toffler calls the “third wave”: space technology, cyber-information, biotechnology, services, and so on.

Will the three big blocs resolve the struggle over these resources peacefully or with strife? And who will accompany them into the twenty-first century?

After 1989, the government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari decided that Mexico’s best opportunity lay in having at least a foot instead of one of these blocs. It seemed natural to profit from the border situation and the de facto integration taking place between the U.S. and Mexican economies. It also seemed advantageous to eliminate a noxious protectionism from our relations.

Lest we forget, NAFTA signifies the only dynamic U.S. initiative toward Latin America in a long, long time. Our relations were strained by President Reagan’s obsession with Nicaragua and President Bush’s efforts to prove he was not a wimp by invading Panama and kidnapping General Manuel Noriega. In the meantime, economic realities made Latin America the only area in the world where the United States had a trade surplus. From the Rio Grande to Cape Horn, this was the fastest-growing market for U.S. goods. (In 1993, while U.S. exports to Latin America increased by almost 33 percent, to the rest of the world they increased by only 4.4 percent.)

The regional subgroups that have been gaining strength in Latin America—Mercosur, the Andean Group, the Central American Common Market, the Mexico-Chile Free Trade Agreement, the G3 Agreement among Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela—all eagerly anticipated the first step called NAFTA. I hope a North American trade pact will raise the levels of investment and employment in Mexico. I hope this will lessen labor migration to the United States and boost salaries in Mexico through higher productivity as well as greater independence and aggressiveness of the labor movement.

But Castañeda is right in many of his criticisms.

NAFTA is not a panacea. It will never take the place of hard work, internal investment, greater political democracy, and social justice in Mexico. So the only certain beneficiaries of all this were Castañeda and myself. We had a great dinner together on New Year’s Day, 1994.

II

During NAFTA’s first year, many of the optimistic predictions came true. Mexican imports from the United States rose spectacularly, and Latin America continued to be the world’s fastest-growing market for U.S. goods.

Mexico, which in 1986, in the midst of the international debt crisis, imported goods worth a mere \$13 billion from the United States, imported \$50 billion (only slightly less than Japan) in 1994. The trade balance favored the United States, which imported \$40 billion from Mexico, to the amount of \$10 billion.

The Mexican imports signified enormous benefits for many states and regions of the United States. Our imports from Texas in 1994 were as high as \$13 billion—one-third of the state's total exports. From Michigan, Mexico imported \$6 billion, equivalent to one-fifth of that state's total exports. Similarly, one-fifth of Arizona's exports went to Mexico, as did one-fifth of New Mexico's. And from California, our yearly imports were in the range of \$5 billion. Whole regions, such as the traditional Rust Belt, have in the last few years registered a trade surplus for the first time in many years, due entirely to exports of machinery and capital goods to Mexico.

The interdependency is so extended that even a recondite state like Delaware became a major exporter of chemicals to Mexico, and a relatively invisible state like Kansas established a lively trade of crops and processed foods with Mexico.

What NAFTA did was to institutionalize the growing relationship among the three North American economies. That relationship would have increased with or without NAFTA, but NAFTA spelled out opportunities, rights, and duties that would otherwise have gone unheeded or been insufficiently stimulated.

The philosophy governing NAFTA was—and is—quite correctly that free trade is not a zero-sum game. Output and investment are not fixed. More output and investment in Mexico does not occur at the expense of more output and investment in the United States. Economies in free trade grow rich together, not at one another's expense: as each country prospers, it becomes a bigger market for the other's exports. New investment opportunities at home and abroad call forth an increased supply of capital to invest, and investment raises incomes and savings and stimulates further investment.

NAFTA enshrined these hopes and principles, and what we now may call NAFTA I—1994, the initial year of the Treaty—bore out their validity. The export-import relationship between Mexico and the United States grew astonishingly, producing the largest increase

in our history, and 700,000 United States jobs became dependent on Mexican imports—giving the lie to that great sucking-sound theory that U.S. jobs would go south. Ross Perot's theory in effect undersold one of the greatest strengths of the U.S. economy: its unequalled capacity to move capital and labor across space, social class, and economic activity.

Yet it is also true that these strengths were undermined by the post-cold war recession in the United States, which sent interest rates down and created pockets of unemployment in areas hit by the closure of defense industries and by a lack of worker-retraining programs, circumstances that have at times been unjustly ascribed to Mexican labor migration, which plays the role of scapegoat for deficiencies in the U.S. economy.

And Mexico, battered by the debt crisis of the 1980s—the lost decade of development, which affected all of Latin America—sought strong and revolutionary macroeconomic solutions, first under the de la Madrid administration, and then more fully under the Salinas administration. These measures included bringing inflation down to single digits, balancing the budget, increasing foreign reserves, welcoming foreign investment, keeping interest rates competitively high, and privatizing as much as possible. And enshrining supply-side economics, known in Latin America as neoliberalism, the equivalent to the trickle-down theory (or voodoo economics, as candidate George Bush called it back in 1980).

President Salinas tried to blunt the harsh social effects of this policy through Solidarity, his social giveaway program, but it was not enough. Mexico needed—and did not get—policies encouraging investment in activities that would further employment, wages, growth, and savings. Instead, the Salinas reforms provoked a flood of speculative, unregulated capital that did not go into productive areas. Like flight capital in any other emerging market, it stayed in Mexico as long as it was profitable to stay and fled as soon as dark clouds started accumulating in the sky. Recession and low interest rates in the United States sent this flight capital to Mexico; recovery and rising rates sent it back to the United States.

Never has Mexico received as much foreign investment as it did during the Salinas years: almost \$59 billion between January 1989 and September 1994, but of that enormous sum, almost 85 percent was speculative flight capital.

Spurred by the Salinas reforms and then by NAFTA, however, the 15 percent that represented productive capital achieved excellent results. It created more than five thousand new businesses in Mexico, along with almost 1.5 million new jobs. Most of these jobs and enterprises were closely related to NAFTA: firms were positioning themselves for NAFTA or were created as a result of the passing of the NAFTA laws.

This was not sufficient to offset the negative effect of a number of factors. First, the excessively quick opening of the traditionally overprotected Mexican market led to a veritable shopping spree by Mexican businesses and middle-class individuals, who sometimes imported prestige items like mineral water and tennis shoes that could be had for less in Mexico at comparable quality. Larger imports of U.S. machinery, vehicles, telecommunications, and other manufactured goods forced the government to pay with its decreasing foreign-currency reserves. These fell from a height of \$33 billion in February 1994, after the Chiapas uprising, to \$17 billion in March, after the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio; to \$4 billion in November, as the political mystery deepened with the assassination of Francisco Ruiz Massieu; and then to less than \$1 billion as the Zedillo administration took over on 1 December.

No longer able to meet its financial obligations, the Zedillo administration drastically devalued the peso on 19 December, without first arranging for safety nets and rescue operations, and only four days after having assured leading financial institutions in the United States that no devaluation was foreseen for the overvalued peso. *From \$33 billion to nil in one year.*

Why were no alarms sounded? Who is to blame?

Again, given the interdependency of our two economies, fault should be spread with some kind of rough justice. The principal culprit is the Mexican government.

The Chiapas rebellion in January 1994 revealed that, if Mexico had one foot in the First World, it still had the other foot in the Third World: it is a country with 40 million people living in poverty, 17 million in *extreme* poverty, out of a growing population of 90 million (which will reach 100 million before the century is over). How do we feed, educate, provide jobs for, and simply raise these millions out of misery or at least offer them a measure of hope?

The neoliberal model espoused by the Salinas administration responded by fighting inflation, balancing the budget, inspiring confidence in Mexico, attracting investment, concentrating wealth in a few competitive firms and individuals, and hoping that trickle-down would take effect. But the hope was undermined by evidence that the economy was not growing, that fighting inflation had become a fetish, that excessive foreign spending was not compensated for by increasing local production, that real growth was hindered by one of the lowest savings rates in the world, and, finally, that flight capital had become unmanageable.

Yet the deeper reason for the crisis has simply to do with democracy in Mexico. The secrecy surrounding our economic realities is related to the absence of something well known in Anglo-Saxon law for which there is not even a proper term in Spanish: accountability, checks and balances. These are part of a democratic system of government with a real separation of powers, in which the legislative and judicial branches balance and offset the executive. In Mexico, from the Aztec emperor Moctezuma right down to Carlos Salinas, the executive has been all-powerful, untrammelled, subjected neither to accountability nor to checks and balances.

To a great degree, the present crisis is due to the capricious nature of the Mexican presidency, to the fiat that one person, or a small group, can dictate unchallenged.

With its growing middle class, its increasingly diversified economy, its natural trend toward decentralization, as Guadalajara, Monterrey, Juárez, Tijuana—cities other than the gigantic federal district of Mexico City—grow in strength and population, Mexico has made enormous strides in advancing freedom of the press (including radio, though not yet television, coverage) and of independent social organizations such as agrarian co-ops, trade unions, women's groups, volunteer services, religious groups, business and neighborhood associations, if not the official corporate unions affiliated with the PRI. Mexicans understand that you can achieve development by dictatorial means—look at Chile, look at China. But authoritarian capitalism clashes with NAFTA, and besides, Mexicans want development with democracy and social justice.

Mexican society, I mean, has gained enormously since the mas-

sacre in Tlatelolco Square in 1968 signified the end of the "Mexican miracle," which had been built on a specific trade-off. When the Revolution was institutionalized in 1929, the government had said, We shall assure economic growth and social stability in exchange for your forfeiting democratic freedoms; the PRI will take care of politics. This trade-off worked for four decades. But it has now failed. Only a fully democratic system can solve the political problems in Mexico, but a transition to democracy has been immensely complicated by our economic crisis.

The United States will certainly be puzzled by the prospect of forthcoming political dramas in Mexico. Since World War II, Washington has depended on a basically stable nation on its southern border. The authoritarian sins of the PRI were forgiven because it gave the U.S. a secure southern flank. Mexico's independent foreign-policy forays were irritating but finally condoned: Mexico's maintenance of diplomatic relations with the Castro regime in Cuba is a good example, and in any case it provided a much-needed lifeline between Washington, Mexico City, and Havana. But now, as the left-wing PRD self-destructs in internal polemics and petty divisiveness, as the PRI disintegrates in incompetence, economic crisis, bloodbaths, and the loss of the Mafia-like *omertà* among its members, perhaps the U.S. will be tempted to foster the fortunes of the center-right PAN, to support it as the alternative to the PRI, and to bank on the electoral victories that could, with minimal strife, take it to victory in the 1997 legislative elections and in the general elections in 2000. Besides, in 1997, the mayor of Mexico City will be chosen, for the first time, at the ballot box, transforming him—or her—into the second most powerful elected official in the country. Imagine how the president and mayor are going to get along!

The PAN has been garnering impressive victories. In 1996, it controls four state governorships and eleven mayoralties of state capitals. Unfortunately, Mexican politics are not subject to predictable calendars. President Zedillo's lack of political expertise permits many negative factors to surface and many democratic slogans to be perverted. For example, given the weakness of presidential leadership, the banner of federalism is quickly becoming a fig leaf covering a return to old-fashioned *caciquismo*, or domination of the federal states by local authoritarian political bosses.

In Guerrero, Governor Rubén Figueroa has not been called to account for the massacre of protesting campesinos in the town of Aguas Blancas. In Tabasco, Governor Roberto Madrazo defies the federal executive in the name of federalism so as to avoid charges of violating electoral laws on campaign spending.

The United States is imbued with faith in the two-party system, a system that is not responsive to Mexico's more pluralistic political makeup. Perhaps we shall end up with two parties arising out of a divided PRD and another two parties out of a divided PRI. The PAN hides its internal differences and values its unity. Yet the real answer to Mexico's political needs is a left-of-center social democratic party along the lines of the German, French, or Spanish model. Developing such a party takes time, and three factors in the equation—the U.S. government, the PRI dinosaurs, and the exasperated Mexicans themselves—can tax the rationality and patience required to rebuild Mexico's political system.

President Zedillo has repeatedly spoken in favor of democratic presidential authority. It is up to him to stimulate and expedite a political pact based on deep reforms of the system and a overhauling of the electoral rules so as to make them truly democratic, modern, and fair. But whatever the tempo of executive-inspired reforms, the other branches of government, the legislative and the judiciary, as well as Mexico's civil society and its organizations, should propose dynamic ideas, shed old habits, adopt new democratic forms.

In the meantime, here we are, caught between the promises and the dangers of Mexico and the United States' shared crisis but perhaps not fully aware of the obligations the new situation imposes on us.

Mexico's obligation is primarily to put its house in order. The draconian self-discipline imposed by the Zedillo administration, though temporary, is, by the president's own admission, cruel: steep increases in the prices of gasoline and transportation, a 50 percent increase in value-added taxes, cuts in government spending, and almost total credit restriction. These are coupled with a 2 percent fall in the GNP, 750,000 people out of work, 42 percent inflation, and only 10 percent in wage increases.

Three short fuses may set off the Mexican bomb: bank failures, company closedowns, or street demonstrations and acts of van-

dalism, as in the Venezuela of President Pérez's second term—a Mexican reprise of that *caracazo*.

I certainly hope that none of this occurs. The Mexican people are extraordinarily patient, though most have never known anything but misfortune. But in 1982 the debt crisis struck a middle class with money in its pockets thanks to the oil boom. Today, Mexican middle-class families will be unable to pay the mortgages on their two-bedroom apartments, the monthly payments on their Volkswagens, and maybe even the rent. Their dramatic pauperization is evident in every corner of our larger cities.

Do we have time to set the stage for economic renewal?

Again, the answer to this question is intimately linked to the interdependent Mexican and U.S. economies.

To renew growth in Mexico, a policy based on internal savings has to take hold. This is the way that Chile came out of a comparable financial crisis in 1982—though, admittedly, under a brutally iron-fisted military regime.

More than this, Mexico can dramatically increase its inherent strengths, notably in export-led growth. The relationship with the United States comes into play here at two important levels. One of the original considerations of NAFTA was that all three partners—Mexico, Canada, and the United States—shared large current-account deficits, large foreign debts, and a need for export-led growth. All three came together because all three needed to enhance the international competitiveness of companies in North America. The pact has worked very well for U.S. and Canadian firms in Mexico, as trade figures show.

But now the present crisis is already hurting the United States economy. U.S. goods will become far more expensive in Mexico. Mexican goods will become far cheaper in the United States. The balance is bound to change in Mexico's favor: already, right on the border, trucks are backed up on the Mexican side to enter the United States, but U.S. trucks are not heading south in comparable numbers.

The U.S. will lose export-related jobs: it lost 30,000 after the peso's devaluation, and 700,000 more are at risk. The ugly tactics that may be used will tarnish NAFTA. Already, some firms in the United States, threatening to move south, have imposed two-year wage freezes on U.S. unions. Already, a wildcat strike among

bonded factory workers in Juárez has thrown 1,300 workers out of their jobs at plants in Indiana. But at the same time, General Electric, whose exports to Mexico went up by 70 percent in 1994, is planning to export from Mexico to the United States, furthering a trend: in 1994, the company sold \$300 million to Mexico but sold \$1 billion from its Mexican plants worldwide.

General Electric seems to have found a way to protect itself from currency hurricanes, by balancing its peso and dollar revenues, its export and import markets, its real-estate projects with leases payable in dollars, and its exports from the United States to Mexico with exports from Mexico to the world.

In this wider picture of opportunity, a company comes out ahead even if Mexican salaries go up, as we hope, and investment and production costs in pesos come down. Revenues in dollars will still rise.

No wonder that Nike is planning to produce all its shoes in Mexico—for Mexicans, other Latin Americans, and then U.S. consumers. Mexico has become extremely cheap: immense opportunities are to be had, and they will build up the strengths of a country that, despite all its troubles, is destined to grow economically.

I have spoken out against the U.S. government's \$20 billion rescue package, which, even with a further \$31 billion collected from other sources, does nothing to set Mexico on its feet and back on the road to greater production. It merely permits us to attend to debt repayment with financial obligations called *tesobonos*, designated by peso value but payable in dollars: this is a grievous mistake, disguising foreign debt as internal debt, which, owing to the executive branch's lack of accountability, was not scrutinized in the Mexican congress. Notes of \$71 billion were due in 1995. Repaying them meant freezing investments favoring production, employment, and social services, the real spur to economic recovery.

The hour of truth has been postponed. But sooner or later Mexico will have to renegotiate its foreign debt without using the traumatic phrases *suspension of payment* or *moratorium*. Meanwhile, by accepting the U.S. package, the country has paid a very high price in sovereignty without gaining renewed investor confidence, as the package intended it to. For who can trust a country regarded as a perpetual minor, its economic policies dictated by Washington,

its oil collateral held at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York in case of default—or disobedience? We must not postpone the moment of truth: we have a liquidity problem and must renegotiate, as so many other nations have done over the centuries.

We must build on our strength.

Let us have a renewal of growth at the risk of some inflation.

Let us stimulate direct foreign investment by showing that we do not care as much for speculative flight capital as we do for productive, permanent investment. Rather than worry about paying U.S. bondholders, let us worry about U.S. exporters who risk losing jobs and profits, U.S. exporters interested in creating platforms in Mexico.

Let us, as even the *Wall Street Journal* now suggests, tax speculative capital and require that it stay in the country a minimum period before flying back home.

Let us fortify the very basis of a rebounding Mexican economy: direct foreign investment, rules for flight capital, export-led growth, productivity, employment, savings.

Let us strengthen NAFTA by adding, as the European Economic Community has, a social component to its free-trade dynamics, admitting that the private sector needs more investment but also better wages, more jobs but also better productivity, better technology but also more training, better infrastructure but also more education.

Let us not put the cart before the horse. Investor confidence will return when Mexico starts producing again, and producing more and better means paying attention to the economy's social factors. We cannot enter the First World with 42 out of 90 million Mexicans living in abject poverty. We should pay attention to the priorities of human development, without sacrificing fiscal discipline, currency stability, and access to financial markets.

At the United Nations development summit held in 1995 in Copenhagen and headed by former Chilean president Patricio Aylwin, my fellow members of the Latin American commission and I proposed a policy to increase productivity among the poor through stimulation and assistance: worker retraining, access to credit, technical aid, and systems to commercialize and distribute the goods of small- and medium-size producers. This is vitally important in Mexico, as it is throughout the world: Latin America has the high-

est income per capita of any of the world's low-income regions, but it is also the region with the worst inequality in the distribution of wealth. Income is more and more concentrated, the gap between rich and poor is ever greater, and growth by itself does not eliminate poverty. (Between 1950 and 1980, Latin America's GNP grew by 80 percent, but poverty grew by 10 percent in the same period.)

The U.S. should attend to this situation as well as to a fundamental solution, fiscal reform. It was achieved in Chile after 1990, when taxes were raised by agreement of the government and the political parties, who affirmed that there is no market economy without a sound tax basis. In its absence you get the deformity that permits twenty-five individuals in Mexico to earn more than twenty-five million people do. Without tax reform in Latin America, we will never have good education, health, food, and housing. How long will the millions of Latin Americans living in poverty tolerate an economic model obsessed with achieving First World single-digit inflation while sacrificing growth, employment, and social policies? How long before political instability or social explosions defy trickle-down economics? The true Latin American and Mexican miracle is that so many people manage to survive under conditions of such penury.

Governments are offering only imaginary change in Latin America. The people are waiting for the imagination of change.

The United States should also be aware that solving basic local problems is the best way to exercise responsible global power. As the Mexican writer Julieta Campos asserts in her trenchant volume *What About the Poor?*, "Global problems are found in the growth of local spaces, and they should be understood and attended to locally if they are to contribute to authentic world change."

This, in the end, is the soundest way of dealing with the other paramount problem in U.S.-Mexican relations, immigration.

III

On 12 June 1992, Michael Elmer, a U.S. border patrol agent, shot and killed Dario Miranda, an undocumented Mexican worker, in a place called Mariposa Canyon, in Arizona. Using an unauthorized weapon, Elmer lodged two bullets in Miranda's back. Then he tried to hide the body.

Accused of murder, assault, and obstruction of justice, Elmer was pardoned by a state-court jury. The flagrant injustice of this decision led to a new trial in federal court, where once again Elmer was exonerated, this time by a jury of one black and eleven white Americans.

These bare facts shed a terrible light on the wave of antimigrant hysteria and xenophobia that grows day by day along the tense border between Mexico and the United States.

Through the bodies of workers such as Miranda's, the border is bleeding again.

What is the basis of the anti-Mexican phobia, particularly in California? During a recent visit to Los Angeles, I heard the same arguments over and over. Mexican workers, it seems, are the principal cause of the state deficit. Supposedly they receive excessive social benefits, do not contribute to the state economy, and overburden it with educational and health expenses. They are also the reason for unemployment in California, and, last but not least, they introduce drugs.

These are just plain lies.

Drugs do not enter the United States through Tijuana and San Diego tied up in migrant workers' kerchiefs. They arrive in planes belonging to U.S. dealers whose names no one knows and who are never the objects of the sort of publicity and persecution given their Latin American counterparts.

The United States has washed its hands of its drug barons—and laundered their money. All guilt is in the offer, none in the demand. It is easier—and more pharisaical—to militarize Bolivia than to militarize the Bronx.

Nor is unemployment caused by the use of Mexican labor. It is part of a long-lasting recession, complicated in California's case by a cutback in defense industries, and nationally, by the paradox of a third industrial revolution, which brings about unemployment even as productivity grows. The United States has not adopted a wise policy of industrial conversion and worker retraining; and it has not faced up to the labor complications derived from the post-cold war expansion of technology.

Blame all these realities, but not Mexican workers, who respond to the demands of the U.S. market and do work that no one in the United States is willing to perform.

Finally, the U.S. deficits in California and elsewhere are the product of twelve years of voodoo economics under Ronald Reagan and George Bush. You cannot cut taxes, raise defense budgets, and expect surpluses. Undocumented workers do not apply for welfare benefits. But as consumers they pay taxes far in excess of any benefits in health care and education they may in fact receive. The Mexican worker is a scapegoat, pure and simple, for problems caused by gringos that gringos don't want to confront.

The politicians of California have, to their shame, led the anti-Mexican campaign, believing that the U.S. electorate needs reliable villains and enemies, Mexican or Japanese, to single out now that the Communists are gone. But xenophobia and racism lead to the pogrom and the concentration camp. Before going out to hunt Mexicans—as some teenage gangs have been doing—U.S. xenophobes should go see Steven Spielberg's movie *Schindler's List*.

Polish and German Jews were, however, white. The anti-Mexican phobia has a name and color: racism. This is what Governor Pete Wilson plays with when he stokes the anti-immigrant fire and excludes Mexicans from receiving compensation for earthquake damage. He sang a different tune as a senator. He demanded then that the border patrol facilitate the entry of Mexican workers to save his state's harvests—and, of course, those of his own properties.

The heart of the matter is that Mexican workers travel across the border in response to the demand of the U.S. market. California produces one-third of the nation's agricultural wealth, and 90 percent of that wealth is harvested by Mexican hands. Exclude the Mexicans at the border and California will be in real trouble.

Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, self-designated "liberal" senators, cannot ignore this. Yet they, too, call for a closed frontier, even (in Boxer's case) for a new Berlin Wall. A nice crowning gesture to the NAFTA agreement.

Of course, as a Mexican I would like my country to export products instead of people, as President Carlos Salinas repeatedly put it. Maybe one day that will happen. Just a few decades ago, Spain exported workers to France; Italy exported workers to Scandinavia. Today, Italy exports high fashion instead of low wages, and Spain exports shoes instead of feet. Yet when Mexico no longer exports workers, the United States will go on needing them, and

it will import them from other Latin American countries or perhaps from Asia. Agriculture, the hotel business, hospitals, transportation—they would all suffer without Mexican labor, as would the U.S. wage scale.

The United States contributes to Mexico's economy in this situation: Mexican workers send back \$3 billion from their earnings, now Mexico's fourth-largest source of foreign currency. But Mexico also contributes to the U.S. economy. As I have noted, Mexico, before the crisis, imported billions of dollars' worth of goods annually from the United States, and Mexican imports from the Rust Belt transformed a trade deficit in that area into a trade surplus.

Perhaps Jorge Bustamante, the active and courageous defender of human rights on the border, is right when he proposes that Mexico should enforce a one-day boycott of U.S. goods.

We can each hurt the other. It would be better if we understood each other. The California politicians who fan the flames of racism and xenophobia are playing with a very dangerous fire. It is unseemly for the Clinton administration to join this opportunistic chorus. Both nations should recognize that Mexico and the United States are parties to bilateral fluxes in the labor market. This economic and social problem cannot be solved by police measures.

Mexico is glad to have its excess labor migrate, and the United States is glad to manipulate cheap Mexican labor, chastising it in days of crisis, accepting it in boom times, and always maintaining the police fiction of an impregnable frontier.

But do our two governments truly want to negotiate this problem or merely play possum for as long as possible? The realities of worldwide economic integration should put things in their rightful place.

More and more, international agreements will protect the rights of migrant workers, the lives of those who, like Dario Miranda, are shot in the back for no crime other than looking for a job.

Instead of manipulating illegal immigration, favoring it in good times and blaming it in hard times, let us, Mexicans and Americans, work together toward a rational understanding of the factors in both the bilateral and international labor markets.

Proposition 187 in California is an unsound proposition. Financially, legally, medically, socially, politically, and humanly aberrant,

it exacerbates the issues instead of solving them, and it serves only narrow-minded demagogic electoral agendas, not the national interests of Mexico or the United States. It sets the stage for a police state, for stool pigeons and witch-hunters.

Let us keep the whole picture in mind.

Mexico has not done enough to stem the tide of workers to the United States. Its economic weaknesses, as well as the deep injustices in its society, are only the passive faults of my country: Mexico has also lacked active policies to invest in the regions from which most of the migrant laborers come to the United States. These regions are perfectly identifiable and should be targeted by the Zedillo administration for agro-industrial development.

But the United States should also heed John Kenneth Galbraith's warning in *The Nature of Mass Poverty*: "Were all the illegals in the United States suddenly to return home, the effect on the American economy would . . . be little less than disastrous. . . . Fruits and vegetables in Florida, Texas, and California would go unharvested. Food prices would rise spectacularly. Mexicans wish to come to the United States, they are wanted, and they add visibly to our well-being."

Proposition 187 would deny this. But I would deny Proposition 187 on legal grounds: it is unconstitutional to deprive the children of undocumented immigrants of a public education. I would deny it on financial grounds: California now spends just over a billion dollars a year to educate immigrant children, but by applying Proposition 187, it would lose nearly \$16 billion a year in federal-aid programs to education. I would deny it on social grounds: it will throw thousands of children into the streets, where they will be fodder for the unscrupulous. And finally I would deny it on financial grounds: undocumented workers in the United States spend \$29 billion more in taxes than they receive in services; workers come looking for work, not for welfare.

What Mexico and the United States have yet to reach is a sound bilateral agreement that stipulates without lies or hypocrisy the number of legal migrant workers the U.S. economy is ready to receive each year and establishes their right to cross the frontier, the places where they will work, the length of their stay, and their registration with U.S. trade unions. They would work only in sec-

tors where they would not displace U.S. workers—a very large sector, by the way: restaurants, hospitals, transportation, hotels, domestic services, and numerous agro-industrial activities.

This, in itself, would not stop illegal immigration, but it would add a powerful force to those resisting it, the registered workers themselves. The onus would then be on the Mexican government to provide economic opportunities for workers in Mexico, on the United States government to protect the admitted workers' legal status and rights, and on the unions to protect the migrant workers as they do their own.

I believe that Mexico and the United States must look to their own strengths to overcome these problems and heighten the opportunities offered by our intimate relationship.

Mexico is still the thirteenth-largest economy in the world. It has ceased to be a monoproducer semicolonial economy. Oil was responsible for 80 percent of Mexican exports in 1982, but today, 80 percent of our exports are nonoil: sophisticated and diversified electrical machinery and vehicles, telecommunications equipment, apparel, and accessories.

Mexico should build on the strength of diversification to further NAFTA II, while the United States should heighten its comparable advantages: its adaptability to change, its mobility, its perpetually shifting patterns of employment, and the fact that, after all, its economy is twenty times larger than Mexico's.

Where will the nations of North America focus their energies in a new, post-cold war global economy? How can we shape that new reality in favor of our own people but without damaging other people? Can we keep the global economy from breaking into warring trade blocs? Can we give political will and imagination to new international institutions so as to harness the present anarchy of shifting speculative flight capital? Can we set an example of shared substantive growth based on savings, productivity, and unemployment?

Beyond all these questions, an essential fact remains: Mexico and the United States are neighbors, permanent neighbors.

At times, perhaps, the United States would like to see Mexico disappear over the horizon and drift to the South Seas. At times, too, Mexico would like to see the United States shrink to a more humane size and use its power less arrogantly, with a greater sense

of proportion and of the inevitable passing of glory and sharing of the human condition, which includes loss, pain, and death. But the United States will not break off like an iceberg and float to the North Pole. We are destined to live together.

Our challenging border is a scar: Mexico lost half its territory to the United States in the war of 1847, an unjust war denounced then by Lincoln and Thoreau and only by Robert F. Kennedy a hundred years later. The scar must close. The border must not bleed again.

It is inevitable that such a lopsided relationship should cause frictions. But in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, and especially during the fruitful coincidences of the Roosevelt and Cárdenas administrations, the U.S. and Mexico decided that, even if conflict was inevitable, negotiation should be the rule. This philosophy has survived the numerous strains in U.S.-Mexico relations. As Mexico, for the first time since Pancho Villa invaded Columbus, N.M., in 1916, becomes a hot electoral issue in the U.S., Washington and Mexico City should sharpen the wits of their respective diplomacies: everything can be negotiated, no single issue should poison the relationship as a whole.

We do not choose our parents or our neighbors. But we do choose our friends. We must find ways to live together, cooperate, understand our differences, respect them, but also work for all the things that build our friendship, our common interests, our mutual responsibilities.

Let us be able to exclaim one day: "Mexico and the United States, so close to each other and so close to God."

sacre in Tlarelolco Square in 1968 signified the end of the "Mexican miracle," which had been built on a specific trade-off. When the Revolution was institutionalized in 1929, the government had said, We shall assure economic growth and social stability in exchange for your forfeiting democratic freedoms; the PRI will take care of politics. This trade-off worked for four decades. But it has now failed. Only a fully democratic system can solve the political problems in Mexico, but a transition to democracy has been immensely complicated by our economic crisis.

The United States will certainly be puzzled by the prospect of forthcoming political dramas in Mexico. Since World War II, Washington has depended on a basically stable nation on its southern border. The authoritarian sins of the PRI were forgiven because it gave the U.S. a secure southern flank. Mexico's independent foreign-policy forays were irritating but finally condoned: Mexico's maintenance of diplomatic relations with the Castro regime in Cuba is a good example, and in any case it provided a much-needed lifeline between Washington, Mexico City, and Havana. But now, as the left-wing PRD self-destructs in internal polemics and petty divisiveness, as the PRI disintegrates in incompetence, economic crisis, bloodbaths, and the loss of the Mafia-like *omertà* among its members, perhaps the U.S. will be tempted to foster the fortunes of the center-right PAN, to support it as the alternative to the PRI, and to bank on the electoral victories that could, with minimal strife, take it to victory in the 1997 legislative elections and in the general elections in 2000. Besides, in 1997, the mayor of Mexico City will be chosen, for the first time, at the ballot box, transforming him—or her—into the second most powerful elected official in the country. Imagine how the president and mayor are going to get along!

The PAN has been garnering impressive victories. In 1996, it controls four state governorships and eleven mayoralties of state capitals. Unfortunately, Mexican politics are not subject to predictable calendars. President Zedillo's lack of political expertise permits many negative factors to surface and many democratic slogans to be perverted. For example, given the weakness of presidential leadership, the banner of federalism is quickly becoming a fig leaf covering a return to old-fashioned *caciquismo*, or domination of the federal states by local authoritarian political bosses.

In Guerrero, Governor Rubén Figueroa has not been called to account for the massacre of protesting campesinos in the town of Aguas Blancas. In Tabasco, Governor Roberto Madrazo defies the federal executive in the name of federalism so as to avoid charges of violating electoral laws on campaign spending.

The United States is imbued with faith in the two-party system, a system that is not responsive to Mexico's more pluralistic political makeup. Perhaps we shall end up with two parties arising out of a divided PRD and another two parties out of a divided PRI. The PAN hides its internal differences and values its unity. Yet the real answer to Mexico's political needs is a left-of-center social democratic party along the lines of the German, French, or Spanish model. Developing such a party takes time, and three factors in the equation—the U.S. government, the PRI dinosaurs, and the exasperated Mexicans themselves—can tax the rationality and patience required to rebuild Mexico's political system.

President Zedillo has repeatedly spoken in favor of democratic presidential authority. It is up to him to stimulate and expedite a political pact based on deep reforms of the system and a overhauling of the electoral rules so as to make them truly democratic, modern, and fair. But whatever the tempo of executive-inspired reforms, the other branches of government, the legislative and the judiciary, as well as Mexico's civil society and its organizations, should propose dynamic ideas, shed old habits, adopt new democratic forms.

In the meantime, here we are, caught between the promises and the dangers of Mexico and the United States' shared crisis but perhaps not fully aware of the obligations the new situation imposes on us.

Mexico's obligation is primarily to put its house in order. The draconian self-discipline imposed by the Zedillo administration, though temporary, is, by the president's own admission, cruel: steep increases in the prices of gasoline and transportation, a 50 percent increase in value-added taxes, cuts in government spending, and almost total credit restriction. These are coupled with a 2 percent fall in the GNP, 750,000 people out of work, 42 percent inflation, and only 10 percent in wage increases.

Three short fuses may set off the Mexican bomb: bank failures, company closedowns, or street demonstrations and acts of van-