

BETRAYAL OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION  
AS RECORDED BY LOPEZ Y FUENTES

---

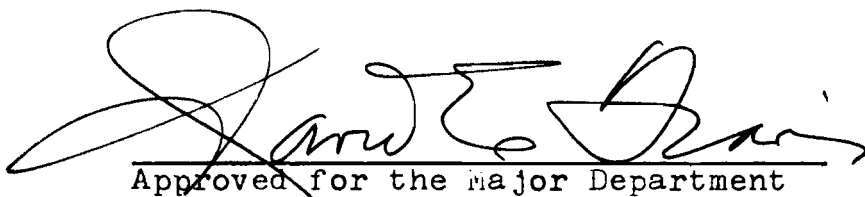
A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Department of Foreign Languages  
Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia

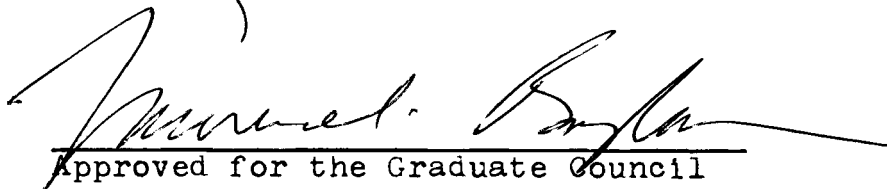
---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science

---

by  
Barbara Lee Rush  
January 1971

  
Approved for the Major Department

  
Approved for the Graduate Council

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. David Travis for his encouragement, help, and patience during the course of this study.

Appreciation is also expressed to my husband for his suggestions, understanding, and encouragement.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Qualifications of López y Fuentes. . . . .	1
Statement of the problem . . . . .	1
II. BIOGRAPHY OF GREGORIO LOPEZ Y FUENTES. . . . .	3
Childhood experiences. . . . .	3
Formal education . . . . .	3
First literary activities. . . . .	4
Life during the Revolution . . . . .	4
Publication of poetry and first novels . . . . .	5
Career as a journalist . . . . .	5
Summary of literary works. . . . .	6
Personal qualities . . . . .	6
III. EXPLOITATION OF THE POOR . . . . .	8
Introduction . . . . .	8
Forced labor . . . . .	9
Military obligations . . . . .	13
Forced building of public facilities . . . . .	14
Forced donation of food and property . . . . .	15
Native women attacked. . . . .	16
Payment of unfair taxes. . . . .	17
Exploitation by priests. . . . .	18

CHAPTER	PAGE
Couples matched for breeding purposes. . . . .	19
Exploitation by oil companies. . . . .	19
IV. POLITICAL CORRUPTION . . . . .	22
Introduction . . . . .	22
Discrimination in law enforcement. . . . .	22
Two sets of laws . . . . .	23
Judicial decisions based on money and influence. . . . .	23
Crimes punished unequally. . . . .	25
No protection against unjust accusations and punishments. . . . .	28
Use of political position to become rich . . . . .	30
Using politics to become powerful. . . . .	34
V. MORAL DECAY. . . . .	41
Introduction . . . . .	41
Among the revolutionary forces . . . . .	41
Among the priests. . . . .	45
Among the indios . . . . .	46
Among the <u>nuevos ricos</u> . . . . .	47
Among inhabitants of areas where oil was discovered . . . . .	52
VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS. . . . .	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	58

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The corruption of Mexican society during and after the Revolution of 1910 has been the subject of much of Mexico's twentieth century literature. Gregorio López y Fuentes is one author who not only accurately reported the conditions as they existed, but also actively protested them. His novels present a lively and realistic view of the changes Mexico was undergoing during the first half of this century. López y Fuentes was not a disinterested spectator watching a country transforming itself; rather, he was a reporter, editor, headline writer and, at times, propagandist for the causes in which he believed. For an authentic introduction to life in Mexico and a sympathetic understanding of the country's problems it would be hard to find a better guide than the novels of Gregorio López y Fuentes.<sup>1</sup>

It is the purpose of this study to present what López y Fuentes revealed about three prevalent social evils in Mexico. Ten of his novels were read and situations pertaining to social corruption were noted. From these notes examples were selected which identified and explained cases

---

<sup>1</sup>Ernest Herman Hespelt (ed.), El indio (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1940), pp. 19-20.

of social corruption. These examples were the basis of the text of this study. The subjects that are discussed in detail in the respective chapters of this thesis are (1) exploitation of the poor, (2) political corruption, and (3) moral decay in revolutionary Mexico.

López y Fuentes identified his whole attack on the Revolution when Odilón, in Milpa, potrero y monte, says, with respect to the conditions of the times, "No es eso lo que quiso la Revolución."<sup>2</sup> One of López y Fuentes' major themes is that the Revolution did not accomplish what it set out to do. Although meager reforms were enacted and token land redistribution was made, the Revolution left the country socially and morally weak.

---

<sup>2</sup>Gregorio López y Fuentes, Milpa, potrero y monte (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1951), p. 29. Further references to this work will be given in parentheses in the text by title and page number.

## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHY OF GREGORIO LOPEZ Y FUENTES

In many ways the literary works of Mexican novelist Gregorio López y Fuentes reflect his life. His books are an accurate and picturesque image of Mexican life as he saw and experienced it.

López y Fuentes' contact with the rural people of Mexico began on his father's ranch, "El Mamey" in Veracruz, Mexico, where Gregorio was born November 17, 1897. The "town" consisted of some Indian huts surrounded by the hacienda where his family had lived for generations. López y Fuentes' father, Francisco López, was a farmer, cattleman, and businessman. It was in Francisco's small store that Gregorio first became acquainted with the campesinos who later appeared in his novels. López y Fuentes spent his childhood and adolescence in the country, in contact with peasants, muleteers, Indians and mestizos. In this way he came to know intimately the rural life of the Huasteca region of Veracruz. His works reflect his deep knowledge of the customs, language, refranes, and psychology of the area.

A small school at Zontecomatlán was where Gregorio received his first formal schooling. When he was eleven



years old, his father sent him to Chicontepepec to continue his studies. Chicontepepec was close enough to home for Gregorio to visit his family ranch on week-ends. He made the short trip with muleteers who traveled through the mountains.

Since Francisco López wanted his son to be a teacher, Gregorio was sent to Mexico City when he was fifteen to study at the Escuela Normal de Maestros. There he wasted no time in pursuing his literary instincts, and he saw his first works printed in Nosotros, a literary magazine which he published with his friends, Rodrigo Torres Hernández and Francisco González Guerrero. In 1914 he produced his first book, La Siringa de cristal, poetry modeled after that of Rubén Darío.<sup>3</sup>

López y Fuentes was at the Escuela Normal during the last year of the presidency of Madero and witnessed the insurrection of Huerta and the beginnings of the constitutional revolution. When North American troops entered the port of Veracruz in April, 1914, Gregorio and other students at the school were sent to drive them back. He left the army in Veracruz and returned to his father's ranch. However, he became enthusiastic about the ideas of the revolutionary movement, so he enlisted in the ranks of the

---

<sup>3</sup>F. Rand Morton, Los novelistas de la revolución mexicana (Mexico City: Editorial Cultura, T. G., S. A., 1949), p. 97.

Revolution. He fought until Carranza and Villa confronted each other, then sided with Carranza's party and returned to Mexico City. As he found himself more attracted to writing than to politics, he left the revolutionary life and dedicated himself to journalism and literature.

He gained some teaching experience at the Escuela Normal para Maestros where he served for a while as a professor of literature. In 1922 he succeeded in publishing his second book of poems, Claros de selva. At the same time, his first novel, El vagabundo, appeared in the pages of El Universal Ilustrado. He abandoned poetry in favor of prose, probably because he found prose to be a more frank and simple manner of expressing what he saw and lived in the Revolution.<sup>4</sup>

The second novel of López y Fuentes, El alma del poblacho, was published in 1924. This same year his literary reputation led him to the position of reporter with El Gráfico, a daily evening paper. In this capacity he published a daily story under the title "La Novela Diaria de la Vida Real" in which he dramatized an interesting news item of the day. The column was so successful that he wrote it for five years. Critics believe that writing this column

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

was influential in developing his literary style and his concept of the novel.<sup>5</sup>

In 1937 López y Fuentes became director of El Gráfico and in 1945 he began serving as director of El Universal, one of the best and most influential daily newspapers of Mexico. His direction of this paper proved his outstanding ability as a newspaperman.<sup>6</sup>

After leaving his position with El Universal in 1952, he worked as director of Ediciones de Libros de la Editorial Novaro for four years. He retired in 1956 in order to organize his books, and on December 11, 1966, he died in Mexico City.

López y Fuentes produced two books of poetry, one short novel, eleven major novels, one volume of short stories and countless journalistic stories, news articles, and essays.<sup>7</sup>

As a journalist and novelist, López y Fuentes demonstrated a liberal and sincere character.<sup>8</sup> His warm sympathy for mankind and his intellectual honesty produced

---

<sup>5</sup>Antonio Castro Leal (ed.), La novela de la revolución mexicana (Mexico City: Aguilar, 1960), II, 137.

<sup>6</sup>Morton, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>7</sup>Aurora M. Ocampo de Gómez and Ernesto Prado Velásquez, Diccionario de escritores mexicanos (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1967), p. 203.

<sup>8</sup>Morton, loc. cit.

unaffected, simple, and accurate writings about the Mexico of his times.<sup>9</sup> His view of country life, his familiarity with the various types of country people whom he had known since infancy, his social concerns which led him to fight in the Revolution, his experiences, his power of observation, and his capacity to present realistically the happenings of everyday life, led him to interpret the pressing, dramatic problems of the Mexican people during the revolutionary days.<sup>10</sup> He not only reported what he saw, but he campaigned for causes that were dear to him, especially equality for the peasants and Indians. In his novels and his life, he showed a profound interest in the social reforms which, hopefully, the Revolution would bring to his country.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>Verna Carleton Millan, "New Books and Prizes in Mexican Letters", New York Times Book Review, Section 6 (May 10, 1936), 8.

<sup>10</sup>Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>11</sup>Morton, op. cit., p. 96.

## CHAPTER III

### EXPLOITATION OF THE POOR

Throughout Mexican history the blancos<sup>12</sup> have demonstrated a belief that indios<sup>13</sup> were inferior beings. This attitude is confirmed by several of López y Fuentes' characters. In El indio some local officials were discussing their views on the Indians' place in society, and the alcalde, in expressing his idea as to why the indios should not be educated, openly stated that blancos were superior:

. . . ¡Eduquése al indio y veremos después quién cultiva la tierra! De no exterminársele, es necesario dejarlo en el estado en que se halla, trabajando para los que física e intelectualmente somos superiores.<sup>14</sup>

One mestizo expressed this idea as to the inferiority of the indios:

. . . Unos creen que es necesario colonizar con raza blanca los centros más compactos de indígenas, para lograr la cruce. Los partidarios de esta

---

<sup>12</sup>Blancos is used to refer to white men and mestizos. Since it is more appropriate in meaning than any English words, it will substitute for the English. Because of its frequent use, it will not be underlined henceforth.

<sup>13</sup>Indios refers to the native tribal groups of Mexico. It will substitute for its closest English correspondent, as its meaning is more accurate. It will not be underlined henceforth.

<sup>14</sup>Gregorio López y Fuentes, El indio (Mexico City: Editorial Novaro Mexico, S. A., 1955), p. 53. Further references to this work will be given in parentheses in the text by title and page number.

medida se fundan en que de esa cruz a hemos salido nosotros, los mestizos, que somos el factor más importante y progresista. Hacer con ellos lo mismo que con los animales descastados: cruzarlos con ejemplares superiores (El indio, p. 52).

When this superior attitude of the blancos was coupled with the humility and pacifism of the indios, it was inevitable that the place of indios in Mexican society would become one of servitude. With the social structure thus established, exploitation of the indios became an accepted part of daily life.

The most common form of exploitation was forcing the natives to provide labor. They were frequently required to be guides and to act as beasts of burden for blancos. In Campamento an Indian guide runs beside the soldiers' horses, driven on by an officer, until he dies of exhaustion. The incident elicits these remarks from a revolutionary soldier who is also an indio:

--La revolución se está haciendo con sangre de indio. . .

--¿Lo dices porque tú andas en ella?

--Lo digo por ese indio que acaba de morir desparrado por la fatiga y por la brutalidad. Lo digo por los millares de indios que han quedado en los caminos, aplastados por el peso de las impedimentas, como bestias de carga. . . .

--Lo digo porque todos los beneficios que pregona la revolución no parecen comprender al indígena, que sigue siendo el mulo de la llamada gente de razón. Llegamos a una parte donde escasean los forrajes, y lo primero que se nos ocurre es obligar al indio a traernos en sus lomos la pastura. Necesitamos correos que crucen los peligros de un campo enemigo, y ahí está el indio, quien muchas veces no regresa, porque lo sorprenden en una emboscada. ¡Queremos guías y echamos mano

de los indios! ¡Hay que atacar, y echamos por delante a los indios!<sup>15</sup>

It was not only among the revolutionaries that guides were subjected to inhuman treatment. López y Fuentes illustrates in El indio the dangers of being an Indian guide for blancos in search of riches--in this case, gold.

Three blancos entered the Indian village and requested a native guide--one who knew the mountains and plants--to accompany them in their search for medicinal plants. The village huehues<sup>16</sup> refused the request, but when the blancos produced what they said was an order that a guide be provided, the huehues consented to furnish one. They knew refusal of an order would bring them trouble.

A strong young Indian was sent to guide the blancos, whose real purpose was to locate gold. They referred to a map which indicated where the treasure was, but when they were unable to find it, they asked the guide for its location. The indio only smiled. They threatened to kill him if he did not tell, but still he said nothing. They tortured him and pleaded with him, but forced no information from him. While the white men were off at a distance trying to decide what to do, the indio tried to escape. The ties

---

<sup>15</sup>Gregorio López y Fuentes, Campamento (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S. A., 1931), pp. 84-85. Further references to this work will be given in parentheses in the text by title and page number.

<sup>16</sup>huehues: governing elders of the village

which bound his legs and hands caused him to tumble down the mountain. The whites left him there and he was later found by a hunter, crippled for life.

The natives avenged the maiming of the guide by stoning the three blancos as they left the area. One blanco was killed. The indios, fearing extreme punishment for this act, took what they needed from their homes and fields and abandoned their town. The whites were very angry at not finding the villagers at home awaiting punishment, but they were even more angry when it became apparent that they had to allow the villagers to return to their homes without being castigated. The blancos had to make peace with the indios because they could not get along without the free labor the indios had been supplying!

The day after the natives began returning to their ranchería, they received an order to present some workers to serve as domestics in the homes of influential whites. Others were ordered to report for work at the sugar mills of the local haciendas.

In Tierra, the bondage of natives to whites is again portrayed by López y Fuentes. The many workers on Bernardo González' hacienda were bound to him by debts. Through the system of the tienda de raya, workers were cheated and forced to assume their parents' obligations to the hacendado. Laborers were coerced by threat of punishment to make all



their purchases at the hacienda's tienda de raya. The job of the bookkeeper of the store was to insure the perpetual bondage of the workers to don Bernardo.

One worker, Urbano Tlahuica, had inherited the debts of his father and grandfather. He wanted to get them paid off and keep from building up his own debts, but the bookkeeper, "que conoce su oficio de enganchador"<sup>17</sup> forced him to buy things he didn't want. When Urbano visited the tienda, the employee handed him goods and recorded their cost to his bill. There was no way Urbano could keep from getting deeper in debt.

Others were victims of unusual bookkeeping practices. They knew they had worked many hours and had not asked for enough goods from the tienda to owe as much as the records indicated. The employee clarified the large debt for one indio: "--Un peso que te doy, es un peso que me debes; y otro peso que te apunto, ¿no hacen en total tres pesos?" (Tierra, p. 224). The workers knew they were being cheated but could do nothing about it. With methods such as these, the peons continued to be forced to work for important landowners.

---

<sup>17</sup>Gregorio López y Fuentes, Tierra, in La novela de la revolución mexicana, Vol. II, Antonio Castro Leal, ed., (Mexico City: Aguilar, 1960), p. 224. Further references to Tierra will be given in parentheses in the text by title and page number.

Even after the Revolution, the situation remained basically unchanged. The peons were unable to see what the Revolution had done for them. "Muchos de los trabajadores no lo han dicho claramente, pero lo han dado a entender cuando el hacendado ordena que abandonen sus trabajos personales para ir a atender los de él" (Tierra, p. 236). They spoke of the same misery, the same debts they could not repay and the same slavery to the landowners.

Besides being forced to work for the hacendados, the campesinos were also obliged to become soldiers. Although most indios passively accepted their lot, there were at the time of the Revolution a few who believed something could be done to improve their situation. But the hacendados found ways to exploit the troublemakers. Those workers who caused trouble were sent off to the government as army recruits. The hacendados pretended to be public-minded citizens sending their good workers to the army to help in the maintenance of order and peace, but their real purpose was to get rid of nuisances and to gain the favor of political chiefs.

In Tierra, Zapata tells about his reclutamiento. When Zapata's father announced that the hacendado was going to take their family's land away from them, Zapata tried to fight it: ". . .moví la cuestión de los linderos ejidales. Me calumniaron y el Gobierno me mandó de recluta" (Tierra, p. 239). This was a common occurrence.

Villagers from El indio were also required to serve as soldiers, but the situation was different. A revolutionary band became lost on an outing, and when the soldiers came upon the settlement, the leader demanded that the indios provide them with supplies and twenty youths as guides. As for these guides, "los dotó inmediatamente de carabinas e hizo que caminaran en la vanguardia. Nunca regresaron" (El indio, p. 142).

After the Revolution, what the mestizos did in the name of bettering conditions for indigenous groups turned out to be only another way of exploiting the natives. In El indio, the village men were required to put in two days per week to improve a road to town. The indios had no use for the road, as it did not go through their village. The blancos wanted and used the road, but demanded free native labor to build it under the pretext that it was for their own good.

Along with the time donated for repairing the road, the indios were told to give two days each week to help build a school for their children. The school was a failure because no teachers spoke the natives' language. Even the priest exploited the indios by using fear of divine retribution to force them to work on a church and to make a long pilgrimage at harvest time.

In Entresuelo, which takes place after the revolutionary fighting, López y Fuentes shows that natives are

still being used by local authorities to build public facilities. One rural community has trouble with a bridge that keeps washing away, but "por mandato de la autoridad, los indios de los contornos ponen otro pasadizo."<sup>18</sup>

Forcing the poor people of Mexico to provide labor was only one way in which politicians, revolutionaries, and hacendados exploited the lower class. The campesinos often had to donate food or property to their exploiters.

When the soldiers in Campamento entered a country village, they immediately began making their presence known by demanding food. They killed hens and robbed stores and homes to get what they wanted. No peasant was paid a peso for the supplies.

The villagers also had to relinquish their homes to the revolutionaries. When the troops told residents of the pueblo that they needed their houses for sleeping, the people collected a few belongings and fled to the mountains.

The privilege of the hacendado to rob from the indios is clearly illustrated in El indio. One native hunter and his dogs routed a deer from the bushes and pursued it until it was captured and killed. The hunter was so intent on his prey that he didn't notice he had entered the property of the hacendado. The owner claimed that since the deer was

---

<sup>18</sup>Gregorio López y Fuentes, Entresuelo (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1948), p. 48.

caught on his land, it belonged to him, not to the hunter. Finally the landowner agreed to keep only the best portions of the deer and let the native have what was left. The hunter was then threatened to make sure he did not trespass again; if he did, his dogs would be killed and the hacendado would keep all the meat.

One of the blancos' popular methods of taking advantage of natives was to accost Indian women. López y Fuentes recounts several cases which were typical of the times.

Shortly after the three white strangers had entered the pueblo in El indio, one of the blancos violated a young native girl after pursuing her into the mountains. Men from her tribe followed after to prevent the assault, but they were too late. When they threatened the blanco with machetes, the blanco pulled his gun and fired threateningly into the air. The stranger remained unpunished and the natives accompanied the humiliated girl back to the village.

In Los peregrinos inmóviles it is noted that many times young Indian maidens were seen running through the mountains with the amo close behind. The narrator of the story made this observation: "Se me figuraban gallinas perseguidas por el gallo: aunque no las alcance, obedecen de tal modo que acaban por detenerse."<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>Gregorio López y Fuentes, Los peregrinos inmóviles (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1944), p. 66. Further references to this novel will be given in parentheses in the text by title and page number.

Later in the book when the wandering natives lived for a while with a colony of blancos, a similar thing happened. The group had been wandering, searching for food and a place to establish their home. They came upon a settlement of blancos who were mining for gold. In exchange for food and water, the Indian men were sent to work in the mines. While the natives were busy mining, the blancos forced their attentions on the Indian women. In the expected length of time, children were born "que ni eran blancos ni eran cobrizos" (Los peregrinos inmóviles, p. 175).

Government officials exploited the indios by requiring them to pay unfair taxes. All laborers were forced to pay a tax for working. Even children who were scarcely old enough to do the most menial chores were enrolled as taxpayers by those who collected the contribución personal. While the natives were thus being unmercifully taxed, the blancos in town were under a much more liberal program of taxation. This contribución personal had been legally abolished for some time before an Indian teacher saw to it that it's burden was removed from the natives.

In Milpa, potrero y monte, while the campesinos were working hard to pay "contribución por lo predial, contribución del Estado, contribución Federal, contribución por vender, contribución para todo," the blancos in town were

living "del chisme, la copa y el rentoy" (Milpa. potrero y monte, p. 77).

One of the most pathetic forms of exploitation was that practiced by priests. In a private conversation between hacendado don Bernardo and a priest who came to visit his hacienda, both expose their own corrupt objectives.

--¡Ah, curita, tragón de pollos! ¡Ya vino otra vez a explotar a mis pobres indios!

--¿Pobres? ¿Y por quién están así? ¡Hacendado negrero! . . .

Se ríen con carcajadas sordas. El cura saca una botella.

--¿Copa, tan temprano?

--Es vino de consagrar, del bueno, del que raspa el gaznate: ¡coñac cinco letras!

--¡Ah, cura éste más bandolero!

Vuelven a darse palmadas en las espaldas y a reír con carcajadas sordas (Tierra, p. 227).

The following excerpts illustrate the assembly line techniques used by this priest in performing baptisms and marriages for the peones:

. . . Apenas su asistente y sacristán le puso encima las ropas de trabajo, los indios fueron a besarle la mano. Con ademán militar ordenó que las mujeres se instalaran en dos hileras, con sus hijos en brazos, formando un carril.

El sacristán le presentó agua, un libro y un frasco. . . No había tiempo que perder. A hisopazos, desde un extremo del carril lloriqueante, bautizó a todos los niños. El sacristán recorrió las dos hileras y en una bandeja mohosa recibió veinte reales por cada muchacho. . . . .  
 . . . . . pues el sacristán apenas si podía recoger el dinero, ponerlo en sitio seguro y echarle constantemente un ojo encima.

Después fueron los deseosos de contraer matrimonio los que se formaron en parejas. Unos cuarenta próximos esposos, con sus padres, padrinos, hermanos.

Con pluralizar las advertencias, con hacer extensiva la Epístola y echar una bendición general, los matrimonios fueron celebrados dentro de una economía notable de tiempo (Tierra, p. 226).

As the priest left the hacienda, he gave a general benediction, made the sign of the cross, and spoke a few words in the name of Christ, but

viéndolo, se antoja pensar que sería de Jesús, con una pistola de cilindro calibre treinta y ocho en la cintura, y arreando por los caminos una acémila, que lleva en los lacrados lomos dos mil pesos (Tierra, p. 229).

A landowner in Los peregrinos inmóviles found one more way to exploit his native workers. Young native men and women were matched for marriage by the owners in a game which provided entertainment for the blancos. Since the owners wanted good strong laborers, the couples were paired for the best breeding purposes, just like animals, with no regard for their personal desires.

The final group in Mexican society which López y Fuentes reveals as exploiters of the poor are the oil companies. These companies were strong and could treat their workers as they pleased because they had money and the power of the government behind them. There was such an abundance of peones wanting to work in the oil fields that those who protested the living conditions found themselves replaced by another worker.

In a conversation between two workers, all the complaints and problems of their group and the hopelessness of



their situation are disclosed. One man expressed the need for hospitals, medicines, and doctors, but he was informed that in the past anyone who asked the management for more than was already being provided found himself dismissed.

A stranger came to the area and talked about organizing a union so the workers could defend themselves better. The companies threatened to kill him if he so much as showed up there again.

The living conditions of the laborers were extremely bad. "En tiempos de calor: la peste, las moscas, la disentería; durante las lluvias, todo era charco y paludismo."<sup>20</sup> When workers requested quarters that were more or less clean, they found themselves on a day-to-day employment basis, with no obligation on either side to work or to guarantee a job for the next day. Thus, the companies claimed no responsibility for the housing problems of their employees.

As the workers talked of the need for schools for the children and hospitals for those suffering from on-the-job accidents, some of their superiors, overhearing the conversation, advised them: "--Es cosa de llevar o dejar, amigos. . . A quien no le guste. . . , por allá, a un lado

---

<sup>20</sup>Gregorio López y Fuentes, Huasteca (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1939), p. 160. Further references to this novel will be given in parentheses in the text by title and page number.

de la loma, va el camino: ¡para que ponerse con el pecebre a las patadas!" (Huasteca, p. 160).

Thus, the oilworkers were scarcely better off than the indios in rural villages. Although the oilworkers were free to quit toiling for their exploiters--something most rural natives could not do--they had no alternative employment which offered them a better life.

## CHAPTER IV

### POLITICAL CORRUPTION

Although Mexican politics has historically been corrupt, the Revolution pushed into power many uneducated, unprincipled campesinos who were neither intellectually nor morally capable of governing the country. In referring to them, one student of Mexican society said that

if they became corrupt, it was because they were corruptible and if they were corruptible, it was because the world they had been reared in was barren of moral, spiritual, or political values.<sup>21</sup>

López y Fuentes vividly describes the many aspects of political and judicial corruption of the times, and he brings to life the problems faced by the common people because of unscrupulous politicians. Political corruption consisted of discrimination in law enforcement and using politics to become rich and/or powerful.

Discrimination in law enforcement, a familiar form of inequality, protected the rich landowners, other prominent citizens, and criminals. It created an atmosphere of insecurity and fear among the peons. In this category of corruption, (1) laws were changed to accommodate those in power, (2) decisions of lawsuits depended on who was the

---

<sup>21</sup>Frank Tannenbaum, Mexico, The Struggle for Peace and Bread (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), p. 70.

better friend of the judge, (3) punishment of an infraction of the law depended on who committed the crime, and (4) no protection against the unjust accusations and punishments by hacendados was provided for peons.

In El indio an illustration is given showing how officials changed a law to accommodate their personal wishes. A sign which prohibited the use of dynamite when fishing was posted at the river. However, when the blancos found that it suited their purpose to use dynamite, the notice prohibiting it was reversed to read "por orden de la autoridad, durante media hora, se permite pescar con dinamita en esta jurisdicción--El Presidente Municipal" (El indio, pp. 70-71).

The outcome of lawsuits depended on which party wielded the most influence with local politicians. Justice was a relative matter, and a judge would not decide against a personal or political friend. Thus, many farmers found their homes and farm lands taken from them in lawsuits with rich landowners or friends of politicians. Tierra opens with two workers talking about the lawsuit their landlord had just won which gave him ownership of a nearby canyon area. One worker remarks: "Pero cuándo ha perdido el amo un litigio por terrenos?" (Tierra, p. 215).

Later, the case of Rómulo Reyes is recounted. He once had a little ranch and cattle of his own, but after a

dispute with Bernardo González, he remained with nothing. And what don Bernardo did not take from him, the lawyers did.

These particular incidents occurred during the Díaz regime, but López y Fuentes reveals later that the Revolution did little to improve the land situation. Politicians and lawyers worked together to enrich themselves through manipulating the land redistribution laws of the Revolution. The following case illustrates this point. In Milpa, potrero y monte, a group of men passed by Odilón's ranch. Some were carrying machetes, others had guns. They were headed for town to complain about what they considered an outrage. Their conversation was overheard:

--Lo que yo siempre he dicho. . .: parece que estos señores del gobierno se han divertido en enredar las cosas en provecho de los abogados.

--¿Otra vez cambió de dueño la finca?

--Sí, señor: regresaron los Cabrera con suficiente fuerza y nos echaron. . . Esto es cuestión de nunca acabar: si desde un principio se hubiera dicho a la gente del campo: "esta tierra es tuya, aquí tienes con que trabajarla y ya sabes que si no la cultivas te la quitaremos para dársela a otro", todo andaría bien. . . Pero es el caso de que, en lugar de entregarnos el terreno prometido, se nos entrega un pleito. . .

--Eso digo también yo: para todos hay, como no arrebatan. . .

El pleito era bien conocido: la finca estaba cerca y tanto la peonada como los Cabrera eran del rumbo. Los terratenientes fueron despojados de su propiedad y con ella se dotó de parcelas a los vecinos. Todo hubiera terminado así, solo con que se sostuviera lo hecho; pero los abogados, basándose en la extensión, en la inafectabilidad, en reglamentaciones de la Ley del 6 de enero, en distingos entre tierras de temporal, de riego y de

agostadero, así como en ejecutorias y considerandos, entablaron la correspondiente reclamación.

En esas gestiones, los Cabrera se quedaron sin dinero y sin abogados, aunque consiguieron un fallo favorable y la hacienda les fue devuelta, con el consiguiente daño para los que habían sembrado. Así las cosas, un diputado que deseaba ser gobernador patrocinó a la peonada y, mediante una cuota por cabeza, un buen día les dijo que el asunto ya se había resuelto muy arriba y que podían lanzarse sobre la finca 'a cómo diera lugar.'

Así lo hicieron, hubo tiros, murieron dos de los agraristas y uno de los Cabrera, mientras los demás terratenientes salieron huyendo.

Ya sin abogados, mejor dicho, sin dinero con qué pagarlos, fueron y vinieron los hermanos por juzgados, Tribunal Superior, Departamento Agrario y Suprema Corte, hasta graduarse en el doctorado del litigio a base de influencias. Por lo visto, habían logrado un fuerte apoyo, pues aquel día llegaron con fuerzas suficientes, y echaron a los ejidatarios.

--Pero esto no se queda así. . . Vamos a quejarnos para que después no se nos culpe, porque si no se nos hace caso, ya verán cómo las muelles pueden más que las leyes. . .

--La culpa es de ese diputado que nos trae como a los santos milagrosos: de casa en casa y de capilla en capilla.

Y para eso peleamos. . . (Milpa, potrero y monte, pp. 152-153).

Thus, landowners, both rich and poor, were robbed or exploited in these ways, through the courts of "justice."

The type and degree of castigation which befell a law breaker depended not on what law was broken but rather on who the law breaker was. In Arrieros, a man who appeared to be a prominent citizen of a neighboring community was drunk and acting obnoxiously in the town plaza. Nearby, a policeman was seen dragging a drunken but peaceful indio to jail. When asked why he was not also taking the other man

to jail, the policeman answered: "Hombre, que no ve que es del pueblo y, además, que es persona decente?"<sup>22</sup> The arriero<sup>23</sup> pointed out to the official that the man was still drunk, but the policeman only scratched his ear, not knowing how to respond, and continued towards jail with the native.

In Huasteca, López y Fuentes gives an example of how the solving of a crime depends on the people involved, not on the crime itself. A foreigner of unknown nationality was robbed and killed, but the authorities made no effort to find the assassin. The author states that "si hubiera sido un norteamericano, un inglés, un alemán, las autoridades hubieran puesto en movimiento sus recursos todos" (Huasteca, p. 243).

Countless criminal acts went unpunished because of the political connections of the law breakers. López y Fuentes describes at least one such incident in almost every book. In Campamento, one revolutionary said he joined the rebellion only to recover what had been taken from him. He told how a relative of the governor had stolen his ranch:

. . . Primero quiso comprármelo. Como no se lo vendí, me agarró entre ojos. Primero les pegaron tiros de sal a mis vacas. Después me echaron abajo las cercas. Y, por último, me quemaron la

---

<sup>22</sup>Gregorio López y Fuentes, Arrieros (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1944), p. 112.

<sup>23</sup>arriero: muleteer who, with his pack train, travels the mountain trails buying and selling in the inaccessible villages.

casa. Cuando les enseñé las uñas, me alborotaron a los rurales, y mientras yo huía, ellos hicieron allá una escritura falsa y se quedaron con todo (Campamento, p. 184).

Milpa, potrero y monte is prolific with descriptions of criminals terrorizing the country people. The main characters in the novel are victims of crimes perpetrated by an outlaw group which is protected and even hired by local authorities.

Odilón, the farmer, has his fifteen-year-old daughter carried off by the leader of the gang, Febronio Silva. The family could do nothing more than lament her absence since the authorities regarded the abduction as a personal family problem, and they refused to meddle in family affairs.

Oliverio, the cattle breeder, was being robbed of his herd. No one doubts that the thief is Silva, but his associations with the local government keep him from being apprehended.

One neighbor was killed in an ambush, but when a peon went to report it to the authorities, he found none of them interested in the slaying. The judge would not go out to investigate because it was too windy; the lawyer laughed and said he had a cold; the Ministerio Público said he was too old; the Presidente Municipal did not have time. Later, when asked about the progress in solving the crime (which everyone knew had been committed by Silva), the Presidente



Municipal replied that "la autoridad siga investigando" (Milpa, potrero y monte, p. 66).

Odilón feared that his lands would be taken from him by the diputado, so he confronted the Presidente Municipal with his problem. When Odilón asked that something be done to guarantee the safety of the campesinos' lives and property, the Presidente replied that those were matters of alta política<sup>24</sup> and that he did not want to go deeply into it at that time.

Oliverio then questioned the Presidente Municipal about the problems of the cattle breeders:

--¿No sería posible, señor presidente, acabar con esa plaga que tanto perjudica a la ganadería? Son verdaderas bandas que se muestran más atrevidas mientras menos se les persigue: dicen que hasta hay funcionarios que les compran lo robado. . . (Milpa, potrero y monte, p. 69).

He received the same reply as his brother, "es asunto de alta política" (Milpa, potrero y monte, p. 69).

The indios and other campesinos had no legal protection from being unfairly punished by the blancos. Since the blancos believed themselves to be superior to the indios, they felt it was necessary to enforce strict obedience of the natives to their every demand. Failure of the indios to comply with orders resulted in their being unmercifully punished. The natives were also castigated

---

<sup>24</sup>alta política: An explanation of this term is found on pages 34-35.

when they took the law in their own hands to see justice rightly served.

When ordered to supply the blancos with a guide,<sup>25</sup> the natives in El indio were reminded of their past sufferings, of their flights to the mountains, and of their years of hunger--all because they had disobeyed an order and provoked the anger of the blancos. They did decide to furnish the guide, and when he returned, crippled for life, the villagers stoned and killed one of the blancos. The natives rightly feared unjust retaliation from the whites. In fact, a whole troop was sent to the village with orders "muy enérgicas: fuego a los que huyeran y exterminio en caso de resistencia" (El indio, p. 49).

In the case of Antonio Hernández, López y Fuentes demonstrates the blatant disregard for an indio's feelings and his subjection to punishment for something he did not do.

In Tierra, landowner Bernardo González was wounded by a sniper whom no one saw. One of his peons, Antonio Hernández, was under suspicion because of a dispute he had had with don Bernardo. Antonio was to have married María Petra, as arranged by the parents of the couple. However, don Bernardo's son, Francisco, wanted to marry her. The hacendado visited the parents involved and tried to free

---

<sup>25</sup>Refer to page 10 for the complete story.

María of the commitment to marry Antonio. Bernardo showed no sympathy or understanding of how binding the natives' agreement was. Antonio refused to allow the promise to be broken, so he and his father were subjected to punishment. His father, old and sickly, was sent to do the hardest labor, while Antonio was put in the mill and not permitted to leave. Finally, they felt forced to concede to don Bernardo's "request" to break the agreement and allow Francisco to marry María.

Six months after the wedding, Bernardo was attacked by the sniper. He believed it was Antonio seeking vengeance, so he sent Francisco to apprehend Antonio and his father. Francisco reproached them soundly and beat them with a pistol until they bled. The other workers were questioned, but none knew of anything Antonio or his father had done which might throw suspicion on them. Only a representative of the owner said that Antonio had been gone from work at the time of the attack on Bernardo. The peons could not explain why Antonio and his father were accused. Antonio was conscripted into the army and his father was set free, but not without receiving pitiless insults from the hacendado. Even Cecilio, Antonio's younger brother, was the object of cruel treatment.

Men in public office in Mexico did not consider their position to be one of public trust. It was more likely regarded as a position from which they were to exact as much

power and riches as possible from the people. The way for a Mexican to get rich was to meddle in politics. Pepe López, in Acomodaticio, confirms this attitude:

. . . He observado a los políticos en el poder y he observado a los políticos deseosos de llegar a él: casi todos no tienen más ideal que enriquecer, y pocos son los que se conforman únicamente con mandar. . .<sup>26</sup>

Professional men as well as politicians found it expedient to tamper with politics to advance their career. In a conversation between Antonio González and his wife, in Acomodaticio, López y Fuentes clearly depicts the impossibility of exercising a profession without involving oneself in politics.

. . . ¡Cuántos abogados están en la bonanza, respetados de todos y en paz con su familia!

Puede ser que encontráramos algunos, pero serían muy pocos, y de esos el noventa por ciento, si no han intervenido en la política, al menos han trabajado para el gobierno a través de una influencia política. Lo mismo sucede con el ingeniero y hasta con algunos médicos, y no puede ser de otra manera: el país, sin industria y siempre en la pobreza, no ofrece al profesionista una vida independiente: el margen más ancho se encuentra en la política y en los empleos públicos. . .

. . . piensa en que, sin la ayuda de la política, es difícil conseguir hasta un modesto nombramiento de juez o de agente del Ministerio Público. . . (Acomodaticio, pp. 36-37).

---

<sup>26</sup>Gregorio López y Fuentes, Acomodaticio, Novela de un político de convicciones (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1943), p. 144. Further references to this work will be given in parentheses in the text by abbreviated title and page number.

There are countless cases in Milpa, potrero y monte of lands being taken away from the campesinos by local officials. If an official wanted a piece of land, he took it. The methods of confiscating property varied, but the results were always the same--one more family homeless and often one more husband and father killed. The case of a tailor, Rodríguez, typified what was happening. Mr. Rodríguez was a man from the best society who did tailoring for all the local rich families. He made the unfortunate mistake of writing to the governor, complaining about the taxes which were steadily increasing. He was accused of slander, insulting the authorities, libel, and more. He and his family had to flee from their home, and "naturalmente que el Alcalde se quedó con la huerta y el taller" (Milpa, potrero y monte, p. 27).

Local officials also profitted financially by using the protection of their public office to buy and sell stolen goods. Febronio Silva robbed cattle in one area and took them to another place where he sold them or exchanged them for other stolen cattle. Sometimes he killed them and made jerked beef which was then sold in town. Regardless, it was civil servants who bought the stolen beef from him and resold it. "Febronio Silva trabaja en mejores condiciones porque tiene amigos poderosos que le compran las reses, iy que vaya el dueño a quitárselas!" (Milpa, potrero y monte, p. 41).

Another manner of enriching oneself through public office was to request or accept payment for doing a job "properly." The mordida,<sup>27</sup> as this was called, controlled the economic life of the towns. Tannenbaum elaborates on it in his study of Mexican society:

The extortions for the privilege of staying in business, organizing any economic activity, or securing the necessary legal permission for carrying on the work of the day have become so burdensome as to weaken the economy and moral substance of the nation.<sup>28</sup>

López y Fuentes points out the existence of the mordida in the case of Odilón, who feared that his lands would be confiscated. For a few thousand pesos, says López y Fuentes, Odilón could be assured that his land would remain in his own hands.

The madness for power and money that prevailed in the political life of the whole nation is expressed in ¡Mi general!. Once the general became involved in politics, he found it was

Una fiebre. Un delirio. Hombres que adoptan actitudes de perro, a fuerza de servirles. Pasiones incontenibles, al grado de considerar la deslealtad como un medio lícito para lograr los

---

<sup>27</sup>mordida: This word literally means "bite," but it is the term commonly used to describe graft, bribery and extortion.

<sup>28</sup>Tannenbaum, op. cit., p. 79.

finés. Subir. Subir. Un vértigo. Y, por sobre todas las cosas, dinero.<sup>29</sup>

The methods used by politicians to gain or retain power were as corrupt as their system of justice and their concern for the welfare of the people. Often, the reason for confiscating land was to retain power rather than gain riches. The land which Odilón was fighting to keep was threatened by an invasion from the diputado who, according to Odilón, "quiere quitarnos estas vegas para dárselas a sus partidarios" (Milpa, potrero y monte, p. 65). In the name of the Revolution, political leaders captured land and "redistributed" it to those who would keep them in power. All of this was part of the alta política which accounted for most of the campesinos' problems and most of the lawlessness of the times. López y Fuentes explained just how it worked:

Y volvieron los hermanos a la sospechosa actitud del Presidente Municipal, cuando visitó el rancho. . . y le trataron el problema de la inseguridad. La alta política le impidió hablar de la cuestión. Alta política, cuando que había sido el temor, . . . el mismo temor que cerraba el camino al comercio. El Presidente Municipal temía al político que le dio el puesto; el político sólo era un lugarteniente del cacique de toda la sierra; sus dominios, como los de un reyezuelo, llegaban hasta la tierra caliente, dominios con que se cobraba dudosos servicios a la Revolución. Por su voluntad, había individuos armados que compraban

---

<sup>29</sup>Gregorio López y Fuentes, ¡Mi general! (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1948), p. 156. Further references to this work will be given in parentheses in the text by title and page number.

reses robadas, con lo que favorecía el abigeato, así como otros manejaban a los campesinos para amenazar con invasiones a los terratenientes, no sin el poderoso argumento de dar tierras a los pueblos. . . . Lo que la Revolución supuso que era una sencilla dotación de tierras, se había convertido en chicana de políticos.

El cacique, a su vez, no era más que otro eslabón, aunque más pesado, en la gran cadena de la alta política. Su táctica era la de mantener aislada la zona en cuanto a divulgación de sus hazañas: un padre y su hijo, muertos en una emboscada; toda una lista de enemigos fugitivos; a la orilla de los caminos, monotonos de piedras con una cruz encima, marcando los sitios donde los Febronios Silva a su servicio asesinaron a sus enemigos. Cada vez que sonaba desfavorablemente su nombre en la Capital de la República, sus diputados se encargaban de reforzar con dinero las defensas, y los funcionarios, como él decía, le daban carpetazo a toda queja, con lo cual, hombres como Odilón y Oliverio, aunque no conocían el verdadero engranaje, confesaban temerosos que tenía muy buenas agarraderas.

Dentro de esa organización, Febronio Silva, el Presidente Municipal y el Juez, así como los demás Jueces, Presidentes Municipales y Febronios Silva, que eran a su vez iguales a los de otras muchas regiones del país, dividido en una geografía especial de la alta política, tenían a su cargo el mandato. A los demás, Odilones y Oliverios, como dicen los arrieros, solo les tocaba hacer lomo para conducir la carga (Milpa, potrero y monte, pp. 78-79).

Making a living presented a real dilemma to the peasants who lost their lands through the procedures of alta política. Some had to work as servants in the homes of the wealthy. Others moved to the suburbs of the city and tried to establish a small business there. Not a few looked for employment in the city, but they found none because knowing how to cultivate the land was useless in a place where there were only consumers. Others sought



permission to pick cotton or oranges. Numerous families were forced by starvation to try to leave the country illegally and search for work in the United States.

In Acomodaticio, López y Fuentes reveals political corruption in the cities where unscrupulous tactics used to gain power were similar to those employed by rural politicians.

The principal character in Acomodaticio, Antonio "Acomodaticio" González, made this observation about politicians early in the novel: "Estos políticos de ahora no tienen convicciones: con tal de sostenerse en el poder, defienden lo que ayer combatieron y combaten lo que ayer defendían. . . (Acomodaticio, p. 33). However, that is exactly what he did later in trying to capture power for himself.

Without regard for the principles involved and willing to sell out for his own gain, Acomodaticio resolved to control a political party. He was paid to swing its convention votes to a promising candidate, which he accomplished with lies, even though another party leader had pleaded with the convention "oír algunas verdades, tal vez las únicas que existan en este gran almacén de mentiras . . . (Acomodaticio, p. 168). Acomodaticio then took over the management of the campaign and finally raised his candidate to the presidency.

During the election, the prevalent attitude among candidates seemed to be "anything goes." Each man and his followers did whatever was necessary to win more personal power. Each man tried to be the number one friend of a candidate. It was said of Acomodaticio that "en cuanto a la forma de ganarse las simpatías del candidato, Acomodaticio bien que sabía acomodarse. . . (Acomodaticio, p. 192). When don Salvador Moreno found himself pushed from his favored position with the presidential candidate by Acomodaticio, he approached a supporter of the opposing presidential candidate to help him assassinate Acomodaticio. This planned assassination was not carried out, but later Moreno's body guard and right-hand-man, Mano de Tigre was killed. López y Fuentes sums up the election with these words: "Las elecciones no ofrecieron nada de particular: hubo muertos, heridos, protestas, amenazas. . ." (Acomodaticio, p. 259). Violence was an accepted, even expected political tool.

After the election, Acomodaticio's rival, Moreno, pronounced this judgment, which again illustrates the relationships of alta política.

. . . Dentro de poco, gracias a este compadrazgo, el licenciado González tendrá de compadres, a su vez, a muchos gobernadores, como éstos tienen por compadres a los presidentes municipales, los presidentes municipales a los caciques y los caciques a los jueces de congregación. . . (Acomodaticio, p. 286).

Making false promises to win votes was another accepted political practice. In Entresuelo, reference is made to the fact that numerous local leaders promised during their campaigns to build a permanent bridge across a river which divided the pueblo. When these men were elected, they did not use public money to build a bridge; they used it to become rich.

The fact that peasants were pawns to be moved by politicians to help win an election is disclosed in El indio and Huasteca. An educated tribal Indian who came to the defense of the villagers in El indio and freed them from forced personal services to the blancos became a hero to the natives. In helping the indios he became involved in politics, and as he rose in office, his interest in the welfare of his tribe gave way to preoccupation with his own political ambitions. The tribe became a mere political constituency necessary to keep him in office. He required that the head of each family give a cuota to his campaign and to the campaigns of higher officials who befriended him. Later, he requested more money for ammunition to defend himself and the village against enemies created by his ambitions. Not only did the indios have to donate money, but they also donated their provisions and time. They had to take gifts in the form of turkeys, chickens, corn, and beans to the powerful politicians who supported their leader, and although they had received new fields to farm, they became

so involved in politics that they had no time left to till the soil.

In Huasteca, politicians instigated misunderstandings which led to clashes between neighboring peasant communities. The two communities had been living side-by-side peacefully, both using the resources of a nearby mountain. When election time came around, one candidate told his community that the mountain was rightfully all theirs. The opposing candidate said the same thing to the other community. Soon after, when a woman was cutting wood on the mountain, some men from the other community abused her. Her community then attacked the other one. From that time, there were constant ambushes, with each side trying to destroy the other community.

One large battle left many widows and orphans in each ranchería. The two politicians used this battle to create a scandal in the capital by claiming there was an attempt on their own life by the supporters of the other candidate. In the words of one candidate,

Estuve a punto de ser asesinado. Pido justicia y garantías. Se avergonzará el país si un hombre de la estructura moral de mi contrincante va a la representación nacional. . . (Huasteca, p. 282).

In reality, neither candidate had been near the scene of the fight, "sino en la población engregados al escamoteo del voto" (Huasteca, p. 281).

So, for the purpose of winning an election, politicians viciously turned neighbors against each other. The candidates suffered not at all from their campaign methods, but the communities remained ravaged and bitter.

Thus, the revolutionary movement was characterized by the mordida, injustice and exploitation of the peasants for political purposes. General Martínez summed it up in Acomodaticio: ". . . la desgracia del país ha consistido siempre en que las ambiciones personales no han permitido ver bien a la patria" (Acomodaticio, p. 119). As they had been in the regime of Porfirio Díaz, the office-holders of revolutionary governments were anxious and ready to extract all they could from the poor masses.

## CHAPTER V

### MORAL DECAY

"The decline in personal integrity," says Tannenbaum, "is the greatest single moral failure of the Mexican Revolution."<sup>26</sup> Although this was most apparent in the revolutionary ranks and among politicians, these groups were not the only ones guilty of forsaking a principled life. Members of the church priesthood were found to be conscienceless; Indians were not capable of handling their freedom after so many years of serfdom; and the class of nuevos ricos created by oil discoveries sank to the depths of selfishness and greed. The moral decay which Tannenbaum referred to filtered into almost every section of society.

In Campamento and ¡Mi general!, the lack of scruples among soldiers is displayed. The anonymity which they enjoyed as a member of a large and unknown band led to pillaging, killing, raping, and complete lack of concern for the well-being of peasants whose condition they were supposedly fighting to improve. In Campamento, one cabecilla<sup>27</sup> is approached by his commanding officer to defend the uncalled-for and vicious actions of his troops:

---

<sup>26</sup>Tannenbaum, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>27</sup>cabecilla - leader of a small group of fighters

--. . . Se le acusa a usted de haber dado muerte, por venganza, a todos los varones de una familia enemiga de la suya. Y, según dicen, las mujeres de esa familia no se han librado de sus atropellos,

--¡Eran enemigos de la causa!

--Pero no estaban sobre las armas. Vivían entregados a sus trabajos. ¿No es verdad?

--Pero eran enemigos. . .

--¿Y las mujeres?

--De eso no sé.

. . . . .  
--Se le acusa a usted, general, de haber requisado todos los animales caballares y vacunos que había en las fincas de su jurisdicción. ¿Quiere decirme en qué ha empleado el dinero producido por la venta de los animales?

--En pagar a mis muchachos.

--Tengo informes de que nunca han estado a sueldo.

--Es mentira.

. . . . .  
--También se le acusa de haber quemado pueblos indefensos, ajenos a la lucha y después de saquearlos.

--Necesidades de la campaña, general.

--¿Quiere decirme que campaña?

--¡General, usted duda de mí! (Campamento, pp. 94-95).

More of this type of revolutionary activities are seen in ¡Mi general!. Some of the general's forces hanged peaceful men just to take their money. Others burned rancherías only for vengeance, as did the cabecilla in Campamento.

Revolutionary forces also suffered from dehumanization of their fighters. López y Fuentes illustrates this by describing a military surgical operation which is hopeless and terribly long. The indifference and lack of emotion on the part of the doctor and observers is almost intolerable. The doctor warns the wounded man that the

operation will be difficult: "Veremos que tan macho eres tú." (Campamento, p. 130).

Disregard for human life was demonstrated by a colonel in the closing scene of Campamento. Some disabled and sick soldiers, peons, women and children were unable to cross a swollen river, as the colonel commanded. He refused to be disobeyed, so he started forcing them into the water, where they drowned. A lieutenant killed the colonel to prevent him from hurling more helpless people into the raging river, then he jumped in himself to escape punishment for having shot his commander.

As the career of the protagonist in ¡Mi general! is followed, accounts of more revolutionary atrocities are exposed. Greed and desire for recognition and power are revealed as the primary factors motivating the general. Leaders of small revolutionary groups were anxious for victories, acclaim, and rapid advancement. They were hungry for the rich, extravagant life in the Capitol which awaited successful revolutionaries.

The general, who had been victorious in numerous skirmishes, believed that he should be known and recognized by everyone in the city. When one man in a tavern had the gall to tell him to his face that he did not know his name, the general became very angry. He grabbed the man and threw him against the bar, brutally crushing his head. This



incident set off a fight in which the tavern was practically destroyed and the bartender was shot and wounded.

A short time later the general and his men became involved in another scandal. They paid for a casa de alegría for the evening and were thoroughly enjoying the music, liquor, dancing, and women when another group of soldiers arrived. The other group demanded entry into the house, but they were told to leave. They refused and began to break in. During the ensuing fight, no one was injured, and both revolutionary groups finally left, seeking another place to continue their revelry. It was with such notorious acts that generals of the Revolution sought to leave anonymity as they bid for fame and influence.

The general was one of the fortunate ones who finally achieved a degree of political power as a result of his battlefield accomplishments. For a while, he lived high among the parties and banquets that characterized his class of new politician. However, he did not know how to keep his position and soon found himself broke and homeless. He accepted a variety of jobs, one of which was as bodyguard and gunman for a gubernatorial candidate. In this position, he demonstrated his deplorable indifference to the right of another human to live. When a man insulted his candidate, the candidate ordered the general to "calle a ese imbécil" (¡Mi general!, p. 249). The general did not

hesitate to shoot and kill the man, then remarked that "a mí me interesaba más rectificar mi puntería que la vida de aquel infeliz" (¡Mi general!, p. 250).

The low moral caliber of revolutionary men is also illustrated in Milpa, potrero y monte. A friend of Odilón's told him how he joined the rebellion to fight for equality. One night he told his wife to wait for him and he left to join the revolutionary forces. He fought in numerous battles and when he finally returned home, he found only his land still there. In his words,

. . .La revolución se había comido mis vacas, los enemigos habían quemado la casa y uno de esos revolucionarios que únicamente lo fueron desde lejos, verdadero cacique de pueblo, le dijo a mi mujer que me habían matado, y ella, para consolarse se enredó con él. . . (Milpa, potrero y monte, p. 42).

In Tierra and El indio, López y Fuentes briefly cites examples of moral decay among priests. The priest in El indio used fear of divine retribution to force the extremely superstitious natives to build a church and to make a long pilgrimage at harvest time. The priest showed no interest in the spiritual well-being of his subjects.

On pages eighteen and nineteen of this text, the priest of Tierra was shown hurriedly visiting the hacienda of Bernardo González to give mass baptisms and weddings at so much per head. There he fraternized with the greedy hacendado, his companion in the exploitation of the

laborers. This unethical priest robbed the peons of their scant earnings in the name of divine grace, then when asked to hear the confessions of some peons, replied:

--¿Confesión? ¡Si les estoy viendo en la cara que son unos benditos de Dios! ¿Qué pecados pueden haber cometido? Váyanse en paz. Si algún pecado tienen, yo se los perdono. . . Déjadme trabajar (Tierra, p. 226).

The Indians in Los peregrinos inmóviles found themselves demoralized to a certain extent after their many years of slavery. During their search for a new place to establish a community, many disagreements arose, and what was originally one band of Indians split into several smaller groups. Instead of considering what was best for them as a community, the natives became selfish and each began insisting on having the best for himself. They became jealous of each other and lost ambition and initiative as their foremost concern came to be acquiring what someone else had. One group, in an effort to get the better land of the others, made an alliance with strangers against the other group.

The peregrinos also had forgotten that being free required accepting certain responsibilities. Ser libre came to mean that a man did not have to work if he did not feel like it. When one group tried to construct houses according to their traditional system of working together,

they were unable to continue because a considerable number asked:

- ¿Pues qué, no soy libre?
- ¿Por qué se me quiere obligar a trabajar hoy?
- Tengo que hacer mi casa. . . Sí, señor; pero la haré cuando yo quiera!
- ¡Soy libre! (Los peregrinos inmóviles, p. 124).

Huasteca is a study of the effects of riches suddenly acquired or desired by Mexicans from the development of oil fields. Those peasants on whose land oil was found became morally corrupt, and those by-passed by the oil companies' hand-outs experienced intense greed for their share of the new money. Consequently, crimes increased at an astonishing rate as everyone grabbed for his share. The easy money created a segment of society which was void of moral and spiritual values.

López y Fuentes reveals the power of money to corrupt people by portraying the changes which occur in a peasant family from the time oil is discovered on their property until the wells run dry. Guillermo and Micaela, brother and sister, are typical examples of the kind of honorable peasant folks who degenerated into lazy, self-centered boors when they found themselves unbelievably rich. The course of their moral decay is followed in detail.

The father of Micaela and Guillermo signed a lease allowing an oil company to drill on his property, and the family became instantly and fabulously rich. What was once

a peaceful farm in the country, with a family which worked together and respected each other, became "la discordia, los litigios, los crímenes, las ambiciones" (Huasteca, p. 165).

Micaela's personality changed rapidly. She was obsessed with their riches and said that when she inherited her share, she would buy their whole community, house by house, until it was one great ranch. Finding a marriage partner for her became a matter of concern, because most rich young men were from aristocratic families who scorned her humble origins. Young men of modest income fled from her, fearing she would believe they were only interested in her inheritance. Micaela was quite unconcerned about the matter, and stated that "en cuanto quiera casarme, compraré un marido!" (Huasteca, p. 89). That is precisely what she did. Harry, the man she chose to marry, came to the region in search of money, "como a todos los lugares donde abunda el dinero llegan los tahures, los prófugos de la justicia, los coyotes y las prostitutas" (Huasteca, p. 97).

In Guillermo's youth, when he had been a close companion of the narrator of the story, Guillermo's father proclaimed that an "hijo que se va a la ciudad, es hijo menos en la familia: lo que gana en la cabeza, lo pierde en el corazón. . ." (Huasteca, p. 35). Guillermo later proved this to be true, but his moral deterioration began

before leaving the farm and heading for the city. As soon as the papers were signed to lease the oil rights of their land, Guillermo and Micaela ceased to be the narrator's friends. Money immediately ruptured their companionship.

A number of years later, when the narrator saw Guillermo in the city, Guillermo greeted him in a scornful manner, treating him as if he were a servant. He invited the author to his room, where it was at once obvious that the one-time strong, healthy, incorrupt farm boy had drastically changed his values:

Instalados en las habitaciones de Guillermo, de un vistazo abarqué toda su vida: una mesa con botellas; copas con residuos de licor; en una pieza contigua y visible en parte por una puerta franca, una mujer morena y joven, tendida en una cama deshecha, con todo el busto al aire, dormida o borracha.

A tiempo que Guillermo regresaba. . . , cerró sonriendo despectiva e intencionadamente, como diciendo: no es nada; bien podrían verla cuanto quisieran: una de tantas. . . (Huasteca, pp. 165-166).

Guillermo's business dealings were no less immoral than his personal life. He gave a check to his lawyer to pay witnesses in a lawsuit in which he was involved. "La alegría que mostraban los testigos estaba diciendo a gritos que eran testigos falsos" (Huasteca, p. 167).

After leaving Guillermo's apartment, the narrator happened to run into Micaela, whom he did not recognize at first. She had transformed herself into a very modern lady of the city. She began talking about only the things of

interest to her: money, fur coats, travel abroad, etc. When Guillermo's name was mentioned, she commanded: --"¡No me hables de ese bandido! Negarse a darnos todo lo que nos corresponde en la herencia de papá!" (Huasteca, p. 178). She went on to tell about the lawsuit she and her husband were fighting with Guillermo. She said that when they got what was rightfully theirs, she wanted to go live in the United States.

When asked about having children, Micaela's reply demonstrated just how self-centered she had become:

--¿Hijos? De soltera soñaba con un chico. Es el sueño de todas las mexicanas. Pero fui a los Estados Unidos y allá aprendí a no desearlos, y la manera de evitarlos: los hijos acaban con la juventud de la madre (Huasteca, pp. 180-181).

A short time later, Micaela's husband, Harry, is robbed and killed in an ambush. Micaela, when learning of the crime, accuses Guillermo:

--¡Quiero que sepan de una vez por todas quién mató a mi marido: ¡fue Guillermo, mi hermano! ¡Mi hermano es el asesino! ¡Odiaba a Harry porque le metió pleito cuando se negaba a que vendiéramos nuestra parte! ¡El es! Así quiero que lo sepan las autoridades, para que se castigue a mi hermano! ¡Todo por el dinero! ¡Maldito dinero! ¡Maldito petróleo! (Huasteca, pp. 236-237).

In a reply to Micaela's accusation, the judge acknowledges the hatred which had built up between the brother and sister:

--Cuando nos enteramos del asesinato esta mañana, criminos lo que usted, Micaelita. Y, es natural, ¡pues quién no ha sabido de los disgustos y de las

amenazas, entre ustedes, todo por los intereses? Pero su hermano es inocente en este caso: su esposo fue asesinado por unos asaltantes que quién sabe como sabrían que llevaba tanto dinero encima! Hay un testigo presencial. . . (Huasteca, p. 237).

It was then disclosed that Harry had been attacked precisely as he was fleeing from Micaela with all the money and jewels he had been able to collect from her.

. . . Huía de ella. . . Lo que él quería y había querido siempre, era el dinero, el dinero que había jugado y perdido, el dinero que había dilapidado en viajes, el dinero que se llevaba como despojo de una gran fortuna que ya no tenía perspectiva de aumentar . . . (Huasteca, p. 239).

After Harry's death, fortune began to change for Guillermo and Micaela. The oil wells were exhausted, so they sold their land. When the money from the sale was gone, they were reduced to unbelievable poverty, for they had lavishly squandered their fortune. Penniless and friendless, they aged far beyond their years. Guillermo sent for his boyhood friend--his only friend. When the friend entered their small, dilapidated, sparsely furnished room, he hardly recognized them. Micaela had "ese aire distraído y marchito de las mujeres que han rodado, que han bebido y que han fumado mucho" (Huasteca, p. 195). He found Guillermo "pésimamente vestido y también con un marcado deterioro en la cara, resultaba unos veinte años más viejo de lo que realmente era" (Huasteca, p. 295). Guillermo talked about the ingratitude of those whom he had assisted in his affluence; he complained about the other petroleros who had previously



looked on him as their equal and who now did not even know him. He mentioned the difficulty of finding a job, since after so many years of idleness he did not know how to do anything. Money, he noted, caused the death of his father; money created the distance between him and his sister; money was the ruin of everyone. Because of their financial reversal, Guillermo and Micaela were re-united by their common misery. However, Guillermo lived in constant fear that Micaela would kill him, as she refused to be convinced that Guillermo had nothing to do with her husband's death. A few days later, during another visit, Micaela had become more sick and delirious. She was slowly dying. Guillermo, with tears in his eyes, sadly lamented having sold his land--the land that had given them such a good, wholesome life before oil was found on it.

In all the regions where oil was discovered, the lives of the inhabitants were drastically changed. Crowds flocked to areas that were rich in oil, for workers hoped to enjoy their portion of the wealth and wild life. López y Fuentes reveals this in a reference to Tampico:

¡Tampico!

El nombre parecía inmantado por las leyendas de la prosperidad económica, de las fortunas hechas de la noche a la mañana y de la vida licenciosa (Huasteca, p. 127).

To illustrate this "licentious life," an account is given of one man who was rewarded ten thousand pesos for

closing the valve on an oil geyser which seemed impossible to cap. The recipient of the award took time only to get cleaned up before he headed with his money to the nearest prostíbulo where he spent his complete earnings on his "best friends" whom he had met only a few hours earlier. The party he threw was an absolute scandal.

. . . Los dueños de piquerías cercanas al lugar preferido por el ganador de los diez mil pesos, protestaron ante las autoridades, pues que aquel barrio era de gente decente. . . Algunos policías se presentaron a ver de qué se trataba y cuando un extranjero dijo que se les dejara en paz en vista de que un héroe celebraba su valor y su fuerza, hasta los policías se embriagaron.

--México es un país libre!

--Sí, señores, todos nosotros somos libres!

Y el grito fué de boca en boca, como un eco de montaña en montaña. . . (Huasteca, p. 188).

The invasion of so many avaricious strangers created an atmosphere of uncertainty among local landowners. Both Mexicans and foreigners contributed to the ambushes, robberies, deceptions and deaths which became a part of every day life.

Peasants who refused to sell or lease their lands to oil companies were subjected to torturous mistreatment as a means to force them to sign a contract. One landowner was kidnapped and taken into the mountains where he was not given food or water. When he finally decided to sign, he was too weak to do so. His body was found next to the paper that had been left for him to sign.

Another man was killed in an ambush because he refused to lease or sell his land. No one knew who killed him,

. . .pero a poco se presentó un buen mozo, pidiendo muy seguido agua en la casa de la viuda. Apenas ella le enseñó el diente, él habló de casarse. Y, apenas casados, él supo convencerla de la conveniencia de firmar el contrato de venta y, como la mujer estaba en la canícula, todo se hizo fácilmente. Apenas recibió el dinero, desapareció para siempre (Huasteca, p. 66).

The woman was forced to seek work as a servant in the house of some rich people.

In another case, a landowner was taken to a foreign country where he was held for four years while his property was drained of its petroleum. He was then set free, and when he returned home, he had to find work as a peon on a hacienda.

Because López y Fuentes cites countless examples of such treacherous schemes, it is obvious that the petroleum sector of Mexican society was experiencing a period of moral turpitude. When López y Fuentes' account of immorality in the oil business is combined with his view of the corruption of politicians and revolutionaries, there is little doubt that he regarded the Mexican Revolution as a moral failure.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Undeniably, López y Fuentes' novels portray a decadent Mexican society. It is a society in which personal greed takes precedence over social interests, and moral principles are replaced by immoral practices.

In the eyes of López y Fuentes, the poor people of Mexico were not merely financially poor. Through their exploitation by the upper class, they became spiritually poor. Years of oppression left them resigned to their subservient role. López y Fuentes depicts them as having no spirit left to fight their oppressors.

The oppressors regarded their subjects as mere chattels who had no legal, social, or moral rights. Workers were maintained by force in their status quo, for fear that if they should make progress, they would serve their masters less well.<sup>28</sup> They were the helpless pawns of the white man, living as societal outcasts at the bottom of the social structure. As López y Fuentes saw it, the Revolution which was to release the peons and return land to them, only used

---

<sup>28</sup>H. E. Maté, "Social Aspects of Novels by López y Fuentes and Ciro Alegría," Hispania, XXXIX (September, 1956), 292.

them to replace the cruel landlords with modern political bosses who were equally unsympathetic, brutal, and greedy.

In his novels, López y Fuentes exposes the inefficiency and corruption of revolutionary governments. There were double standards of law and taxation. Mexicans who had neither money nor a powerful position received no legal protection from local bandits, landlords, and officials. Governmental dignitaries sanctioned illegal, oppressive practices and were often guilty of them themselves. López y Fuentes portrays local office-holders as self-seeking bureaucrats whose only concern was personal gain. To keep their lucrative position, they obeyed the rich landlords and higher politicians who kept them in office.

Thus, the governments which proclaimed the defense of the poor people were the ones that created by betrayal, theft, and speculation a new ruling class which dragged the country once again to economic and social inequality.<sup>29</sup>

The fighting and strife of the Mexican Revolution agitated society to such an extent that moral codes were abandoned. The Mexicans were simply not prepared to make the sacrifices which were necessary to create a stable society. López y Fuentes reveals that not only in government, but in private and religious life as well, individuals

---

<sup>29</sup>Daniel Cosío Villegas, "Mexico's Crisis," Is the Mexican Revolution Dead? (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 83.

were motivated by greed. Personal ties and real happiness were sacrificed for the fleeting security of money.

López y Fuentes has as a major preoccupation in most of his novels the failure of the Mexican Revolution to balance the inequalities of his society. He constantly points out that the same old abuses exist but they are under a different leadership. The Revolution he describes did not bring reform--it brought new oppressors and moral disaster.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### A. BOOKS

- Arias-Campoamor, J. Fernández. Novelistas de Méjico. Esquema de la historia de la novela mejicana. Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1952.
- Brushwood, John S. Mexico in its Novel, A Nation's Search for Identity. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1966.
- Castro Leal, Antonio (ed.). La novela de la revolución mexicana. II. México: Aguilar, 1960.
- González, Manuel Pedro. Trayectoria de la novela en Méjico. México: Botas, 1951.
- González Peña, Carlos. Historia de la literatura mexicana. Ninth edition. México: Porrúa, 1960.
- González Peña, Carlos. History of Mexican Literature. Trans. Gusta Barfield Nance and Florence Johnson Dunstan. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1943.
- Hayner, Norman S. New Patterns in Old Mexico, A Study of Town and Metropolis. New Haven, Connecticut: College & University Press, 1966.
- López y Fuentes, Gregorio. Acomodaticio. Novela de un político de convicciones. México: Ediciones Botas, 1943.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Arrieros. México: Ediciones Botas, 1937.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Campamento. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S. A., 1931.
- \_\_\_\_\_. El indio. Trans. Anita Brenner. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1937.
- \_\_\_\_\_. El indio. Edited by Ernest Herman Hespelt. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1940.
- \_\_\_\_\_. El indio. México: Editorial Novaro México, S. A., 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. El indio. México: Editorial Citlaltepetl, 1964.



- \_\_\_\_\_. Entresuelo. México: Ediciones Botas, 1948.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Huasteca. México: Ediciones Botas, 1939.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Los peregrinos inmóviles. México: Ediciones Botas, 1944.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ¡Mi general! México: Ediciones Botas, 1948.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Milpa, potrero y monte. México: Ediciones Botas, 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Tierra. Edited by Henry A. Holmes. Boston: Ginn & Co., 1949.
- Moore, Ernest R. Bibliografía de novelistas de la revolución mexicana. México: [n.n], 1941.
- Morton, F. Rand. Los novelistas de la revolución mexicana. México: Cultura, 1949.
- Ocampo de Gómez, Aurora M., and Ernesto Prado Velásquez, Diccionario de escritores mexicanos. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de Estudios Literarios, 1967.
- Prewett, Virginia. Reportage on Mexico. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1941.
- Ross, Stanley R. (ed.). Is the Mexican Revolution Dead? New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966.
- Tannenbaum, Frank. Mexico. The Struggle for Peace and Bread. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950.
- Thompson, Wallace. The Mexican Mind. A Study of National Psychology. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1922.

#### B. PERIODICALS

- Kazin, Alfred. "Mexico, From Conquistadores to Cárdenas," New York Herald Tribune Books, XIII (February 21, 1937), 3.
- Maté, H. E. "Social Aspects of Novels by López y Fuentes and Ciro Alegría," Hispania, XXXIX (September, 1956), 287-292.

Millan, Verna Carleton. "New Books and Prizes in Mexican Letters," New York Times Book Review (May 10, 1936), 8.

Menton, Seymour. "Reseñas," Revista Iberoamericana, XVII (February-July, 1951), 136-141.

Moore, Ernest. "López y Fuentes, Novelist of the Mexican Revolution," The Spanish Review, IV (April, 1937), 23-31.

#### C. NEWSPAPERS

New York Times, December 13, 1966.