Cuadernos de Viaje: Contemporary Mexican Travel-Chronicles

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This thesis aims to prove the existence of contemporary Mexican travel-chronicling. Section 2 concentrates on two recent series of travel-chronicles commissioned by Alianza Editorial Mexicana and the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (1989-1997). The purpose of this section is to examine the variety of contemporary, and possibly postmodern, approaches to this stubbornly realist and traditional genre. Authors studied in detail are: Juan Villoro and Francisco Hinojosa (an ironic approach to the effects of postmodernity and postmodernism on Mexican life and the practice of travel-chronicling); Rafael Ramírez Heredia and Orlando Ortiz (the commonplaces of the contemporary travel-chronicle); Héctor Perea and Álvaro Ruiz Abreu (an increasingly speculative, metaphorical approach); Fernando Solana Olivares and Hugo Diego Blanco (a move towards 'archival fictions' (González Echevarría) which use previous travel-chronicles as an 'archive', rather than as models for form and content).

The background to, and blueprint for, these works is covered in Section 1: post-Independence Mexico developed a substantial tradition of internal and external travel-writing in order to counter foreign travel-writers' representations of Mexico, and to lay the literary foundations for a sense of Mexican national identity. This is compatible with the aims of costumbrismo, and with the Romantic and Realist movements in general. The practice of writing travel-chronicles boomed in the last years of the nineteenth-century with the increased economic stability and ease of travel of the Porfirián 'peace' years: modernista authors developed the first touristic travel-narratives. Authors singled out for comment are Manuel Payno, Guilleremo Prieto, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, Justo Sierra, and Amado Nervo. This tradition has continued throughout the twentieth century, gradually coming to concentrate more on the human faces of Mexico than on its natural resources. Authors studied here are José Vasconcelos, Salvador Novo, Fernando Benítez, and Jorge Ibargüengoitia.
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INTRODUCTION

*Sólo los mexicanos hemos escrito poco a cerca de nuestro país*

Los mexicanos viajan poco, y los que viajan no escriben, ni publican sus impresiones o sus recuerdos. Esta es una verdad tan notoria en México, que no necesita demostrarse. [...] Figúranos que hablar de nuestras poblaciones, de nuestras montañas, de nuestros ríos, de nuestros desiertos, de nuestros mares, de nuestras costumbres y de nuestro carácter, es asunto baladí, y que al ver escrito en una página de viaje un nombre indio, todo el mundo ha de hacer un gesto de desdén. [...] Hay cierta repugnancia para conocer el país nativo, y ésta es la causa de que no puedan desarrollarse vigorosamente todas las ramas de nuestra literatura nacional. Sólo el tiempo y la civilización harán desaparecer estos hábitos de la vida colonial. Por eso nuestra literatura de viajes en el interior del país, es singularmente escasa. No tenemos una sola colección pintoresca o descriptiva; artículos sueltos, narraciones aisladas, algún pequeño estudio publicado hace años en el Museo Mexicano, en el Liceo, en el Álbum; algunas estampas litográficas: eso es todo. Muchas veces tenemos que acudir a los libros extranjeros para tomar algunos datos.1

El libro de viajes es sobre todo un género del Norte: la mirada sobre las tierras conquistadas o por conquistar. [...] Si los toros pudieran escribir una historia de la tauromaquia seguramente no contendría el elogio de los grandes diestros. Los mexicanos estamos en una situación parecida respecto de los libros de viajes. No debe de haber muchos otros países que hayan inspirado tantos relatos donde se juzgue a sus habitantes con tal vehemencia para condenar y con tan poca generosidad para entender.2

The first of the above epigraphs, written by the Liberal statesman, pedagogue and novelist Ignacio Manuel Altamirano as an introduction to the Mexican Luis Malanco’s *Viaje a Oriente* (1882), displays the widely-held opinion that Mexicans do not produce travel-writing of their own. His comments on the lack of Mexican travel-literature are ironically quoted and annotated by Felipe Teixidor in the prologue to the first edition of his anthology of Mexican travel-writing at home and abroad, *Viajeros mexicanos: siglos XIX y XX* (1939);3 by Francisco López Cámara in his book *Los viajes de Guillermo Prieto: estudio introductorio*;4 and again by Emmanuel Carballo in the introduction to his anthology of Mexican travel-writing about the United States, *¿Qué país es éste?: los Estados Unidos y los gringos vistos por escritores mexicanos de los siglos XIX y XX*.5 Ironically, all three

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5 Sello Bermejo (CNCA, 1996), pp. 11-12.
critics uphold (with nuances) Altamirano’s declarations on the lack of Mexican travel-writing.

Altamirano’s text deserves to be quoted in full: it is a brilliant and concise overview of travel and travel-writing from a Mexican perspective. He studies the history of demographic movements on Mexican soil from pre-Cortesian to contemporary times with particular respect to political and technological developments, concluding that the conditions in the 1880s are right for stimulating the practice of Mexican travel-writing, both at home and abroad. He analyses the blend of literature and science in the works of foreign travel-writers visiting Mexico, displaying a marked preference for the authority and impact of literature, and reaching out to the great figures of European Romantic travel-writing to justify this argument. He discusses the value of internal Mexican travel-writing to the Mexican people: the comparison of several subjective impressions will help stimulate readers to make up their own minds, and this independent exercise of critical faculties is a good sign of ‘civilisation’. Finally, he analyses Luis Malanco’s travel-book itself, with respect to its content, its style, and its relationship to other similar texts, drawing conclusions which define literary travel-writing.

In his role as one of the key figures in the creation of the modern nation-state of Mexico and of a corresponding sense of nationality, particularly in the field of literature, Altamirano was determined that there should be a national brand of travel-writing to compete with the works of Europeans, North Americans and even other Latin Americans travelling in Mexico and elsewhere. From at least 1870 he was making statements to this effect, and indeed, by the early 1880s his words were having an effect. A significant number of travel-books were published in the 1870s, and from the 1880s onwards many more came into print - even ones concerning travel well before that date were finally written up and published. By the time that Altamirano made the statements quoted above Mexicans were already busy making up for lost time. His comments that only three writers had bothered to publish travel-books or articles on the subject of Mexico and that there was even less material by Mexicans concerning travel abroad - ‘nueve o diez libros a lo más’ (p. 230) - are, of course, a deliberately biased view, designed to provoke even more Mexicans to publish travel-books.

The second epigraph, written by the novelist, journalist and poet José Emilio Pacheco in December 1997, over a hundred years after Altamirano’s ‘manifesto for Mexican travel-literature’, continues to deny the existence of Mexican travel-writing, concentrating on the overwhelming production of foreign travel-literature on Mexico. After briefly reviewing the history of European travel-writing from Classical Antiquity to the times of the Conquest, Pacheco concludes that travel-writing is not part of Mexican culture, even though, as Altamirano noted, Mexican culture has been created by travellers, both

6 His only failure - in my view - is to consider literary travel-writing as something of particular interest to women-readers on account of its display of emotional registers and picturesque consciousness...
7 See Altamirano and Gutiérrez Nájera in Section 1, Chapter 1 of this thesis.
8 See bibliography to Teixidor’s Viajeros mexicanos, pp. 221-25.
9 Carballo corroborates the bias and selectiveness of Altamirano’s vision in ¿Qué país es éste?, p. 12.
Europeans and indigenous Mexicans. Pacheco then goes on to defend the value of foreign travel-writing on Mexico; something with which Altamirano seemingly had no problem, despite wanting a national travel-literature of his own.

Finally, Pacheco brings his argument up to date, and ironically, here, the similarities between his text and that of Altamirano are revealed:

En los tiempos del turismo masivo, la internet, el correo electrónico, los discos que ponen en nuestra pantalla el Museo del Prado o los tesoros del Nilo sin riesgo de ser aniquilados por los integristas, el libro de viajes se diría un género tan anacrónico como la novela epistolar o la tragedia en cinco actos y en verso. A pesar de todo, en las grandes librerías se alza un estante dedicado a estas obras y en los grandes periódicos dominicales este tipo de narración se ejerce cada semana. Hay, por lo visto, algo que sólo pueden transmitir las palabras sobre la página. (p. 13)

His statement is ambivalent: since he has so far omitted to acknowledge the existence of Mexican travel-writing, one might presume that the bookshelves dedicated to travel-literature and the articles in the Sunday papers are those that Pacheco has seen in the United States or in Europe. Nevertheless, one cannot help suspecting that this statement does acknowledge the existence of Mexican travel-writing: Pacheco’s article was published in Mexico for a Mexican reading public, and the contents of these bookshelves and newspapers must be accessible to the Mexicans for whom he is writing. Ironically, then, despite their differences, Altamirano and Pacheco concur in their denial of a practice that, whether the time be right or wrong, they inadvertently reveal to exist.

If Mexicans do not fully recognise the existence of their own travel-writing, it is hardly surprising to find that European and North American critics of Latin American literature do not: ‘There is not a strong tradition of Latin American empirical observation or of Latin American travel writing, and even less on travelling within the Latin American continent’, writes the critic Jason Wilson.10 He then cites briefly works by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and José Vasconcelos before asserting that, ‘For a native tradition of verifiable observations the reader has to [...] read poets like Neruda or Cardenal or fiction writers like Quiroga, Rivera or García Márquez, to match the kind of observations made by the great foreign travellers in Latin America’. While the brilliance and importance of poetic and fictional recreations of Latin America by local authors cannot be denied, nor their complex relationship to foreign travel-literature, the importance of non-fictional narratives, including travel-writing, written by Latin Americans deserves more recognition. Roberto González Echevarría has done much to rectify this negative vision in his Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative, without, however, studying in detail any Mexican texts.11

Cynthia Steele, the only ‘Western’ critic who has made any mention of specifically Mexican travel-writing, sees it as a new development rather than as a tradition: ‘A very

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recent trend is toward autobiographical texts and fiction based on travel, both foreign and domestic'. She then lists María Luisa Puga and Mónica Mansour’s *Itinerario de palabras* (1987); Juan Villoro’s *Palmeras de la brisa rápida: un viaje a Yucatán* (1989) and Rafael Ramírez Heredia’s *Por los caminos del sur: vámonos para Guerrero* (1990) as examples of this trend. Some Latin American critics, however, have paid Mexican travel-writing more attention: the Peruvian critic Estuardo Núñez has commented on the proliferation of travel-writing by Mexicans, Argentinians and Peruvians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in Mexico Carlos Monsiváis has defined travel-writing as the ‘género decimonónico predilecto’. Inspired with the spirit of contradiction and, at the time, only aware of the attitude which categorically denied the existence of Latin American travel-writing, my initial aim in writing this thesis was to find proof of travel-writing in present-day Mexico: travel-writing written by Mexicans about Mexico. Starting with a perusal of the shelves of Mexico City’s many book shops, I quickly found evidence of a significant number of contemporary works, in particular two commissioned series of travel-writing. These series thus became the main focus of my research, the results of which constitute Section 2 of the thesis. The secondary aim of this section is to examine the variety of contemporary approaches to Mexican internal travel-writing.

In my search for background material to provide a brief introduction to, and a blueprint for, the contemporary works studied in Section 2, I discovered that post-Independence Mexico actually had a relatively strong tradition of internal and external travel-writing (no doubt stimulated by Altamirano), and that this has continued throughout the twentieth century. While it is certainly true that Mexico is swamped by the often unflattering accounts of foreign travel-writers - a fact which fascinates Mexicans as much as it annoys them -, and that the Mexican tradition is by no means as voluminous as that which flourishes in Anglo culture for example, the history of Mexican travel-writing from Independence to the present day deserves to be written. Section 1 attempts to do just this.

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Some Considerations for a Working Definition

Altamirano and Pacheco allow themselves to plunge into the history of travel-writing without giving any theoretical explanation of the kind of texts they are discussing: the examples and terms used are deemed to be self explanatory. Both writers refer to the objects of their attention as 'libros de viaje' or 'literatura de viajes'. This is possibly so because they are relying heavily on non-Mexican examples of travel-writing to define their field of enquiry and the most common terms in English for this kind of text are precisely 'travel-books', and 'travel literature' or 'travel-writing'. However, within Mexico itself, and gaining in popularity from at least the 1860s onwards, the term 'crónica de viaje' is the most accurate expression in Spanish to describe the practice of travel-writing.

Other terms do exist in Spanish: there are books which call themselves 'viajes', 'crónicas' of different places, 'viajes narrados', 'crónicas andariegas', 'andanzas' and 'por tierras de...', 'países' and 'destierros', 'impressions' and 'cuadernos de viaje', 'memorias' and 'recuerdos de viaje', 'notas', 'apuntes' and 'cartas de viaje', 'libros de andar y ver', and there are all those books which do not refer directly in their title to their generic status. Critics will talk about 'literatura viajera', 'crónicas viajeras', and 'narraciones', 'relatos', and 'recuentos de viaje' or 'de viajeros'. Nevertheless, 'crónica de viaje' seems to be the generic term to which all commentators of these texts return at one point or another.

The only theoretical discussion of the generic term to be used for travel-writing in Latin America is to be found in the work of the critic Estuardo Núñez. In his prologue to the anthology Vianderos hispanoamericanos (pp. ix-xx), Núñez finds the most appropriate term for Latin American travel-writing to be 'viaje' rather than 'crónica'. He posits that chronicles are merely temporal narratives of more historical than literary value, and that 'viajes' display a more spatial consciousness in their desire to describe Latin American reality. 'Viajes' are hence more literary. He then substantiates his argument by looking at the fall-off in usage of the term 'crónica' in the Colonial period, and the increase in the publication of 'viajes'. He is, in part, correct - there is a change in usage of terminology over this period which continues into the nineteenth century - but the use of the term chronicle has since mutated and made a come-back. In Núñez's own bibliography the use of the terms 'crónica' and 'crónica de viaje' in the titles of travel-books is evident from 1928 onwards. In fact, Núñez's separation of the terms 'crónica' and 'viaje' seems rather pedantic: his definition of the 'viaje' corresponds perfectly to what is currently being written under the rubric of 'crónica de viaje'.

The term 'crónica' is admittedly problematic. The chronicle of the Conquest - 'crónica' or 'relación' - is usually considered the foundation-stone of Latin American literature. In the

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15 Indeed, this thesis takes its title from a recent collection of 'cuadernos de viaje'.
16 I have translated 'crónica de viaje' throughout as 'travel-chronicle' in order to signal the distinction between different terms. 'Travel-chronicle' is a relatively obscure denomination in English, although it does exist. In fact, 'travelogue' would be the most accurate English term for the 'crónica de viaje' in terms of its semantic relationship to other less exclusive terms such as 'travel-literature' and 'travel-books'. I have not used it because it does not preserve the etymological link to the practice of chronicling.
words of Alfonso Reyes: ‘Nuestra literatura es hecha en casa. Sus géneros nacientes son la Crónica y el Teatro Misionero o de evangelización. [...] La crónica primitiva no corresponde por sus fines a las bellas letras, pero las inaugura y hasta cierto instante las acompaña’. In using the term ‘crónica’ today, a writer undoubtedly still acknowledges this heritage. However, the term did fall into disuse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (as Núñez notes), and it was revived in the mid-nineteenth century to designate a particular kind of journalistic practice.

The catalyst for its revival is usually traced to the light-hearted costumbrista ‘chroniques’ published in Parisian newspapers from the 1850s onwards. Nevertheless, despite the ‘new’ genre’s recent importation into Latin America, it still preserved a latent link to the Hispanic tradition, beyond the obvious coincidence of its name with an earlier Latin American literary practice. This fact would appear to justify the general backdating of the use of the term ‘crónica’ to similar works published earlier than the 1860s, both in this thesis and in the works of other commentators of the genre.

There have been booms in the production of ‘cronicas’ in the modernista period and now, again, in the postmodernist era. In his *Antología de la narrativa mexicana del siglo XX* Christopher Domínguez Michael notes that: ‘Desde el siglo XIX la crónica fue una de las manifestaciones más libres y creativas de la literatura mexicana’. The chronicle as a vehicle for committed journalism was given a major boost by Carlos Monsiváis in the wake of the Tlatelolco massacre of 1968, and, according to Domínguez Michael, ‘Desde los años setenta, en México, todo lo que no es ficción, es crónica’. Hermann Bellinghausen has also commented on this proliferation of the chronicle: ‘Van por el mundo, decenas, cientos de textos, que se suponen cronicas. Suposicion que comparten lectores, autores y editores, de manera que la crónica existe a pesar de su aparente confusión polímórfica.’

Analysts of the chronicle as a journalistic practice such as Bellinghausen, Raymundo Riva Palacio and Federico Campbell tend to define it as ‘a subjective vision of the news’; the Mexican equivalent of American New Journalism. It needs to be about something of interest to the general public, but it must be a personalised rewriting of events mixing narrative, description and critical discourse with ‘intensidad, humor, fantasía, el desmadre...

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17 *Obras completas*, 26 vols (FCE, 1955-92), XII: *Letras de la Nueva España* (1960), 313. More recently the narrative codes embedded in these ‘simple chronicles’ have also been reexamined, looking at their parentage with novels of chivalry and with legal documents.
19 See section on ‘Costumbrismo’ in Section 1, Chapter 1 of this thesis.
20 2nd edn, 2 vols (FCE, 1996), II, 73.
21 Personal letter, 12 February 1996.
que ordena el universo postapocalíptico'.

It needs to pay particular attention to the recording of pertinent details, to providing a ‘nota de color’, in order to make the reader relive events for him/herself. The personalisation of the rewriting may be on the narrator’s own behalf if he/she was an eyewitness, or from the perspective of any other witness to the events: in either case ‘being there’ must be demonstrated. (This is another good reason for the inclusion of pertinent details; details which only an eyewitness could record.) In either case, the exercise of personalising the style of writing, insists upon the literary value of the chronicle.

This definition is not so very far from that which might be given for the chronicles of the Conquest, although current advice on the writing of chronicles also deems chronological order to be optional; a choice which was not on offer in the genesis of the chronicle genre. It also reveals some of the literary considerations, however involuntary, which underpinned the original chronicles. The best chronicles of all time hold literature and history (or journalism) in the balance. The sixteenth century chronicle might have focused more on its news value than its literary style, thus meriting the definition as a ‘texto histórico en el que se van recogiendo los hechos según sucedieron cronológicamente’, but increasingly literature prevails over news in the chronicle: it has become an ‘artículo literario, generalmente de no mucha extensión, que versa acerca de algún comentario o juicio de sucedidos’. Monsiváis’s definition in the introductory notes to his A ustedes les consta is the most extreme in its evaluation of the literary value of the chronicle:

Reconstrucción literaria de sucesos o figuras, género donde el empeño formal domina sobre las urgencias informativas. [...] En la crónica, el juego literario usa a discreción la primera persona o narra libremente los acontecimientos como vistos y vividos desde la interioridad ajena. Tradicionalmente - sin que eso signifique ley alguna -, en la crónica ha privado la recreación de atmósferas y personajes sobre la transmisión de noticias y denuncias. (p. 13; author’s italics)

This fully ratifies the chronicle as a literary practice, giving it the autonomy to exist independent of its role in the press.

One point which merits no particular comment in these definitions is that travel is almost always involved in the production of a Latin American chronicle, from the time of the crónicas de Indias onwards: ‘being there’ as an eye-witness usually requires ‘getting there’. However, where some chronicles miss out the narration of the journey to concentrate on the investigative goal of the journey, others narrate the personal journey as well. In general, contemporary chronicles which have a more journalistic focus are the ones which omit the journey - unless it constitutes part of the news in question (the chronicle of a pilgrimage or of a demonstration, for example). The remainder are travel-chronicles and they are usually even more of a literary practice, both in their intentions and in their results.

24 Carlos Monsiváis, prologue to El fin de la nostalgia: nueva crónica de la ciudad de México, ed. by Jaime Valverde Arciniega and Juan Domingo Argüelles (Nueva Imagen, 1992), p. 25.

25 First acceptation of the word ‘crónica’ in the Gran Diccionario de la lengua española, 2nd edn (Madrid: Sociedad General Española de Librería, 1988), p. 495; and the acceptation currently given by the Diccionario de Mejicanismos, ed. by Francisco de Santamaría, 5th edn (Porrua, 1992), p. 312, respectively.
The narration of one’s own travels - the *a priori* defining characteristic of the travel-chronicle - forces the narrator to take an active part in his/her own narrative (homodiegetic narration). It is this recording of the details of private life as well as of matters of potential public interest which distinguishes the tone of the travel-chronicle from that of the chronicle (although this is arguably a matter of degree). The travel-chronicle thus tends to foreground questions of identity in the traveller’s confrontation between self and other on the road. The resultant text is written for other outsiders, not for the inhabitants of the place visited, and it is this inquisitive outsider’s vision in which the travel-chronicle specialises, constantly comparing and contrasting the strangeness of the places visited with the familiarity of home. (This is as much true of travel within one’s own country as abroad.)

Travel-chronicles tend to adhere to the chronological order implicit in earlier definitions of the chronicle. This is indicative of the fact that they are generally more traditional in their approach, whereas the practice of writing chronicles has become more experimental, more amorphous. Realism is the dominant style of writing, regardless of epoch. Intertextuality within the field of travel-writing is continually used in these texts to acknowledge respect for and deviance from the tradition. Both the development of the narrator as a protagonist, and the use of intertextuality to signal an awareness of tradition, are key factors in the increased literary construction of the travel-chronicle.

To return to the original terms of the discussion: what are the differences between ‘libros de viaje’, ‘literatura de viaje’ and ‘crónicas de viaje’ in contemporary Mexico? The term ‘libros de viaje’ makes no selection on the basis of literary value, whereas the term ‘crónica de viaje’ excludes modern reference guidebooks, for example, on account of their lack of narrative structure and literary composition. (All travel-chronicles have literary pretensions, whether they live up to them or not.) The term ‘literatura de viajes’ could include fictional journeys - the travel-chronicle definition ostensibly does not: it deals with real events, people and journeys. Definitions of travel-writing for other contexts than the Mexican tend to implicitly limit the parameters of the genre in a similar way, whatever term they actually decide to use.

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26 See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, foreword by Jonathan Culler, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp. 243-47. Genette argues the insufficiency of the terms ‘first’ and ‘third person’ narrator, suggesting the terms ‘homo-’ and ‘heterodiegetic’ as alternatives which more accurately represent narratorial position with respect to the narrative. A ‘heterodiegetic’ narrator is one who is consistently absent from the story being told. In the case of the ‘homodiegetic’, Genette further subdivides the field into cases where the narrator is the hero of his/her own narrative (the ‘autodiegetic’), and cases where the narrator is a secondary character or observer in the narrative (‘weak homodiegetic’ narrative). A travel-chronicle could, arguably, be either ‘autodiegetic’ or just ‘heterodiegetic’. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I have simply used the terms ‘homo-’ and ‘heterodiegetic’ throughout, and given further specifications where necessary.

27 Jason Wilson defines travel-writing as ‘an eclectic and refreshing hybrid of memoir, essay and autobiography in the realist mode, dealing with a verifiable place, and with an identifiable narrator’ (‘Travel Literature’, p. 803). That the works be non-fiction is implicit; that they possess literary quality is not. This latter is usually implied in English by discussing specifically ‘literary travel-writing’. (See also Paul Fussell’s slightly different definition of the ‘travel book’ and its literary value in *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 202-15).
For the travel-chronicle in the context of Mexico, further specifications are that the texts must be written by Mexican writers, in Spanish, for a Mexican reading public. I have paid particular attention to texts dealing with travel within the national boundaries of present-day Mexico as this is the focus of Section 2 of the thesis, although the value and the frequency of the counterpoint between impressions of home and abroad has necessitated some study of travels beyond the frontiers of the Mexican Republic.

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SECTION 1

The History of the Mexican Travel-Chronicle
CHAPTER 1

The Nineteenth-Century Tradition

The principal aim of nineteenth-century Mexican travel-chronicling is the construction of a national identity for the newly-formed nation. The outstanding characteristics of the travel-chronicle in this period are, precisely, its purposefulness, coupled with the detailed attention paid to the description of all things ‘Mexican’ - in particular local natural phenomena and the idiosyncrasies of the Mexican people -, and the consistency of its formal features (a clear, chronologically-ordered and goal-orientated journey structure, and a strong homodiegetic narrator). This characteristic format is reinforced by intertextual references to other travel-chronicles. The use of intertextuality is clearly a way of corroborating the truth value of the text - someone else has done or seen or said the same thing, even in nigh-on virgin territory -¹ and in so doing it also creates a canon of other such texts: the content, the form, the continuity of purpose are seen to be handed down from generation to generation, from father to son; literally, a tradition is in the process of being formed.²

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² See Raymond Williams’s *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Fontana Press (London: HarperCollins, 1988), pp. 318-20), for a definition of tradition. Williams also notes that, ‘It is sometimes observed [...] that it only takes two generations to make anything traditional’ (p. 319).
Pre-Independence Mexican Travel-Chronicles

Before Independence, the only literature associated with travel produced by Mexican-born authors which attempted to describe Latin American reality in a more thorough, down-to-earth, proto-scientific fashion than the fanciful sketches of the early chronicles of the Conquest came in the form of the encyclopaedic ‘crónicas’, ‘relaciones’, and later, ‘historias’ written by missionaries. These texts, because of their encyclopaedic and historical intentions, tended to skip the integrated, personal narrative element of the travel-chronicle, often preferring the selfless recording of other, more famous, people’s travels to stand alongside their scientific observations. The lack of travel-narrative is also linked to their attempts at scientific rigour. Science tries to fix the object of its attention: the contingency and shifting perspective of travel would detract from the universality of such observations.

The most salient example of the period in the case of Mexico is the Jesuit missionary, Francisco Xavier Clavijero’s *Historia de la Antigua o Baja California* (c. 1770). Clavijero’s text was written while in exile in Italy: idleness and homesickness contributed to his inspiration to describe his lost home; the contrast between Mexico and Italy gave him the means by which to identify the singularities of the native country. During the politically turbulent period stretching from the late eighteenth century to the present day, in many cases exile within Latin America itself, or in Europe or the United States, is a key factor in the production of external Latin-American travel-chronicles. The backwards glance and wandering eye of the unwilling exile often produce a travel-chronicle which tells us more about individual Latin American countries - life and travels there - than it does about the journey of exile itself.3

The exception to the rule is the account of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier’s travels in Europe from 1795 to 1805 which was, however, not published until the first years of Independence (in his *Memorias de Fray Servando Teresa de Mier...*). Written on return from exile in Europe, Teresa de Mier no longer needed to write about his country of origin, although he did make some comparisons between Europe and Mexico. Instead, he produced what is perhaps the first ‘proper’ Mexican travel-chronicle, external or internal; one that combines description (of cities, not countryside) and overtly political comment with the narration of personal ‘adventures’.4

A source of literary influence on a writer such as Teresa de Mier is to be found in eighteenth-century politically-orientated French travel-writing. Travel-writing in France

3 Rafael Landívar, a Jesuit missionary born in Guatemala (then part of New Spain), and who lived for many years in and around Mexico City, also wrote in exile his *Rusticatio mexicana* (1781), a verse encyclopaedia of the bounty of Mexico, published in prose as *Por los campos de México*, ed. and trans. by Octaviano Valdés, Biblioteca del Estudiante Universitario, 34 (UNAM, 1942). See also Rafael de Zelis’s *Viajes en su destierro* (written c. 1777), prol. by Efrén Ortiz Domínguez, Colección Rescate, 29 (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, Instituto Veracruzana de Cultura, 1988).

4 See Héctor Perea’s *La rueda del tiempo: mexicanos en España* (Cal y Arena, 1996) for a more detailed analysis of Clavijero and Teresa de Mier with respect to their travels in Europe (pp. 65-69).
had a significant role to play in the formation of group identity from the Middle Ages onwards. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Montaigne, La Fontaine and Racine all provided staple examples of internal travel-writing, establishing a repertoire of 'French' icons, customs and commonplaces, which in the eighteenth century gradually developed a proto-national orientation. The travel-writing associated with this formation of national identity constituted a complex network of journeys involving both internal and external travels by French writers, plus travel-writing on France by foreign visitors and even the narration of fictional journeys.

The most important pieces of French politically-orientated travel-writing prior to the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789 tend to deal with external and/or fictional journeys. Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (set in France but fictional, and ascribed to two Persians; first published anonymously in 1721) and Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* (written from exile in England and first published there in 1733) both use travel-writing as a convenient hold-all for Revolutionary political thought; one which tended to be taken seriously (read as truth), particularly when it came from a foreign source; and one which allowed more freedom than the other genres did at that time. Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), a fictional travel-narrative including travel in the New World was also a vehicle for ironic philosophical and political comment. These texts by Montesquieu and, particularly, Voltaire are the precursors of Teresa de Mier's adventures, and also of the numerous journeys into exile of Mexican Liberal politicians in the course of the nineteenth century.

What should be retained about pre-Independence travel-chronicles written by Mexicans or other Latin Americans is that there are very few of them. Most native Latin Americans were not given permission to travel during Spanish rule, in order to keep the dominions of the Spanish crown isolated from alternative markets in Europe, and from radical European philosophy and religion (i.e. Liberalism and Protestantism). The few Latin Americans who did travel were exiled political and/or religious dissidents (a rather dangerous policy in retrospect...). This includes Clavijero and Fray Servando Teresa de Mier; and also the Venezuelan Francisco de Miranda and the Peruvian Jesuit Juan Pablo Vizcardo y Guzmán. The greatest significance of these figures' writing is achieved in the cases in which they managed to return to Latin America and resume their political or religious activism with renewed vigour after direct contact with precisely those European sources from which they were supposed to have been kept isolated.

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6 *Candide* no doubt caught the attention of Latin American writers as much on account of its 'exotic' contents as on that of its philosophical and political bite.

7 Juan Pablo Vizcardo y Guzmán never managed to return to Latin America, but his political manifestos were posthumously handed over to Francisco de Miranda who did return with them (see Estuardo Núñez's *La imagen del mundo en la literatura peruana* (FCE, 1971), pp. 43-45).
The odd non-Hispanic travellers who obtained permission to visit the Spanish colonies before Independence were also catalysts in the process of Independence not only in terms of their political views, but also in terms of their literary construction of Mexico as a unique entity in itself. The most significant foreign traveller to Mexico - and several other Latin American countries besides - in the Pre-Independence period was, of course, Alexander von Humboldt who made his trip to Mexico in 1803-04. Although ostensibly a scientific traveller, Humboldt, through his immediate access to the Mexican intelligentsia of the day, must be held partly responsible for the implantation and spread in Mexico of the Liberal ideas of writers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau and others.

In his publications on Mexico (Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain (1811)), and those covering Mexico included in his thirty-four volume series, Journey to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent (1807-34), he provided an analytical overview of 'the most important' aspects of the country (mainly those associated with the material wealth of the region), thus letting Mexicans know exactly who, what and where they were. His use of the essay format with little in the way of personal comment was a stylistic influence on the first Independent Mexican travel-chroniclers, although the non-intervention of the writer's personality was even more difficult a task for Mexican writers than it was for Humboldt.

Humboldt also, inadvertently, triggered the development of a new aesthetic awareness. Although it cannot be claimed that he was the first to describe Mexican flora, fauna or climate (Clavijero and other Mexican 'encyclopaedists' had already laid strong foundations

8 The critical works with the widest scope are José Iturriaga de la Fuente's Anecdotario de viajeros extranjeros en México: Siglos XVI-XX, repr., 4 vols (FCE, 1993-94), and Moisés González Navarro's Los extranjeros en México y los mexicanos en el extranjero: 1821-1970, 3 vols (El Colegio de México, 1994). Both works are primarily anecdotal, taking an author at a time, and paraphrasing that author's life and travels. Despite this lack of critical or theoretical approach, they are invaluable as sources of factual data.
for this⁹), Humboldt was the first to describe Mexican ‘landscapes’. Besides his attention
to natural features of landscape, he also revived interest in the pre-Columbian civilisations
of Mexico - a branch of study lost with the expulsion of the Jesuits - and gave an aesthetic
appreciation of their architecture and artefacts.

The very concept of ‘landscape’ as something of aesthetic value had only come into
existence in Europe in the mid to late eighteenth century, first through the paintings of
Claude Gellée and his imitators, and then through the early Romantic works of Rousseau
and Chateaubriand.¹⁰ Humboldt’s timely appreciation of ‘landscape’ in the New World
had as important an impact on the development of the ‘poetics’ of Mexican culture
(including travel-chronicling), as his enlightened political views on the basic motivation
behind the Independence movement. His integration of the scientific approach of the
‘enlightened’ traveller, with the proto-Romantic description of nature infused with a degree
of subjective feeling significantly helped catapult Mexico, and other countries visited on his
Latin American tour, to all-round self-awareness. His writings are referred to and quoted
from endlessly in nineteenth-century Mexican travel-chronicles, both for the factual data
they contain and for their descriptions of the country. He is quoted both by fervent
nationalists interested in discovering Mexico for the Mexican people, and by those writing
materialistic accounts of the country in order to attract foreign investors.

After Independence, with the relaxation of restrictions on foreign travel to Mexico, came
many more scientific travellers of the Humboldtian school - botanists, archaeologists, and
later, anthropologists - whose works also had some impact in Mexico. The texts that are
recalled by nineteenth-century Mexican writers, besides Humboldt’s, are really those of the
archaeologists, particularly the American John Lloyd Stephens’s adventurous Incidents of
Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan (1841) and Incidents of Travel in Yucatan
(1843), with illustrations by the Englishman Frederic Catherwood. The large number of
potential foreign investors who wrote of their travels in Mexico in the nineteenth century
were also often spurred on by Humboldt’s glowing account of Mexico’s wealth in natural
resources.¹¹ Although each individual Mexican travel-chronicler has a particular arsenal of
foreign travel-writers’ names to scatter through his chronicles, those of these foreign
investors do not figure highly. In the long run, the works which had most impact on
Mexican writers were those which could boast quality prose, as well as historical interest
and/or good illustrations.¹²

⁹ A Spanish-run research team - the Real Expedicion Botanica a la Nueva Espana (1787-1803) - had also
carried out botanical studies in Mexico in the years immediately prior to Humboldt’s trip (Héctor Gómez
Vásquez, ‘Viajeros naturalistas y científicos en el siglo de las luces’, México Desconocido, 240 (February
1997), 32-42).

¹⁰ See following section of this chapter on ‘Paisajismo & Costumbrismo’ for a more detailed appreciation
of ‘landscape’ and romanticism.

¹¹ Foreign travel-writers in Mexico in the nineteenth century were mostly from the three main competitors
in imperial power to Spain: Great Britain, France, and the United States of America. Travellers from
Germany, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire generally reached Mexico via France, wrote in French
and published in Paris, and hence should be considered as ‘honorary’ Frenchmen.

¹² Jules Verne’s spoof adventure travel-writing on Mexico should also be considered as part of Humboldt’s
legacy in literature on Mexico although it was practically unheard of in Mexico until very recently (see
Iturriaga de la Fuente, Anecdotario, 1, 139-142).
The most notable of the remainder of foreign travel-writers to Mexico in the early nineteenth century is the Marquise Fanny Calderón de la Barca (the Scottish wife of the first Spanish ambassador in Mexico after Independence), whose *Life in Mexico* (1843) appears to have had an almost immediate impact among Mexican writers. Whereas Humboldt initiated the description of natural landscapes, for Fanny Calderón landscape meant little more than the layout of an English garden, and her comments on the views from her stagecoach as she travelled through Mexico are either withering and dismissive, or cursory ‘picturesque’ ejaculations. Her perspective is more that of a gifted satirist of society, with access to all the most important figures of the day, and to an extensive supply of factual and anecdotal information on ‘life in Mexico’.13 Her main topics for narration, description and discussion are daily life, customs, costumes and characters: the stuff of *costumbrismo* (see next section). Her style of writing is light, direct and fast-paced, appropriate to the personal letter format she uses. Alternately ironic and ingenuous, she is, however, unfailingly observant and informative. She also displays an awareness of her rhetorical aims and resources. This confident, agile and often witty style of writing no doubt attracted attention in itself, in addition to the nature of her subject matter. Ironically, though, her criticism of Mexican society seems not to have upset Mexican writers in the way that so many more recent accounts have done.14

In Calderón de la Barca’s wake, in the second half of the nineteenth century, came a fair few leisured and/or ‘cultured’ travellers to Mexico whose writings on the Mexican society they encountered captured an audience in Mexico: William Bullock, Charles Étienne Brasseur, Charles Macomb Flandrau, plus the odd-ball Ernest de Vigneaux who travelled to Mexico in order to help Count Gaston Raousset de Boulbon declare Sonora an independent kingdom. Most of these works, however, have received more attention since the 1950s than they did at their date of publication.

Statistics extracted from Iturriaga de la Fuente’s *Anecdotario de viajeros extranjeros* reveal that nineteenth century foreign travel-writers in Mexico were generally limited to travel in the area around Mexico City. The characteristic routes followed are those that Humboldt took, spanning out from Mexico City in a straggling cross shape which stretches to Veracruz in the south-east and Acapulco in the south-west; to Guanajuato in the north and through Michoacán to Jalisco in the north-west. Optional excursions are Cuernavaca to the south and Real del Monte to the north-east. (Stephens’s travels in the southern states are only for the more adventurous archaeologists.) Mexican travel-chroniclers of the nineteenth century are most at home on the same routes, although necessity does occasion some travel beyond these termini. The through-route of the ‘camino de tierra adentro’, north to the United States, is a common one.

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13 Her access to the lower classes is from an unsurprisingly distanced position: they are either dirty or picturesque, and they are more picturesque when recalled in anecdotes than when experienced in person.

14 Since Santa Anna was in power at the time of her visit, her criticisms of high society were no doubt deemed well-founded by Liberal writers.
Paisajismo & Costumbrismo

The two facets of travel-writing displayed by Humboldt and Calderón de la Barca respectively - the description of nature as an aesthetic subject in itself, dramatic and changeable, and the description of the idiosyncratic characters and customs of different regions - although not entirely new features in nineteenth-century literature, were certainly the two most important developments in sensibility which came to affect Mexican travel-chronicling. In their regional specificity, both have a clear application in the creation and propagation of a sense of national identity.

While both Humboldt and Calderón de la Barca are important exponents of these new features, with immediate literary impact in Mexico, the features themselves stem from wider sources of influence which also have other means of entry to Mexico. The first facet - the transformation of land into landscape - is referred to as paisajismo in Spanish. The second - the description of the archetypical and/or stereotypical features of a particular society - is known as costumbrismo. Both paisajismo and costumbrismo are terms used to describe the work of the artist (and later the photographer), and that of the writer: paisajismo remains a more artistic term, costumbrismo a more literary one. Neither term actually refers to a specific literary or artistic movement - they are topoi used by variety of movements. However, costumbrismo did come to be adopted as the one of the main features of nineteenth-century literature throughout Latin America and the proliferation of individual cuadros de costumbres gives it the appearance of an independent movement.

Costumbrismo and paisajismo are parallel topoi in nineteenth-century Mexican literature; however paisajismo is technically the first to be used and is clearly related to the influence of Northern European romanticism in Mexico, spread by travelling European artists and writers. Many critics also associate costumbrismo with the Romantic movement; nevertheless, it is essentially a Realist, and even, Naturalist subject. While the movements of romanticism, realism, and naturalism may be seen to follow on from one another in clear succession in a country such as France, where at least the two latter movements originated, in Mexico the influence of these movements tended to be either simultaneous or alternating. Realism reached Mexico within only a few years of romanticism, and Romantic novels

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15 *The Oxford Companion to Spanish Literature* (ed. by Philip Ward (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978)) describes this as ‘the special attention given to the portrayal of manners and customs characteristic of a region or country’, p. 137.

Neither costumbrismo nor paisajismo has been thoroughly studied with respect to its practice in Mexico. There is no whole book dedicated to the study of Mexican costumbrismo as there are for other Latin American nations. The works available on paisajismo are seriously dated: Manuel Maples Arce, *El paisaje en la literatura mexicana* (Porrua, 1944), and María de los Ángeles Mendieta, *El paisaje en la novela de América*, proli. by Alberto Delgado Pastor, Tercera Época, 203 (SEP, 1949). Neither book deals with the specific case of the chronicle, concentrating on poetry and novels respectively. *El paisaje mexicano en la pintura del siglo XIX y principios del XX*, by Consuelo Fernández Ruiz, Leticia Gámez Ludgar & María de los Ángeles Sobrino Figueroa (exhibition catalogue: June-October 1991, Mexico City (Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1991)), is better and more up-to-date, but strictly limited to paisajismo in painting.


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were still being written at the time that the first influences of naturalism were being felt. In fact, it is possible to view Mexico as being under the sway of romanticism throughout the modernista period, right up until the 1930s and 40s. Realism, then, blends with romanticism and it is perhaps this blend of ‘realismo romántico’ which allows for the enduring popularity of costumbrismo throughout the nineteenth century. The remainder of this section looks at the sources and roles of romanticism and realism in the development of paisajismo and costumbrismo, and at their particular applications in travel-writing.

**Paisajismo**

The experience of the lone traveller reflecting on the correspondence of nature to his moods and looking to experience new emotions through contact with the ‘exotic’ and the ‘wild’ is a leitmotif in Romantic literature. Jean Jacques Rousseau’s Rêveries du promeneur solitaire (written c.1776; published posthumously in 1782) signified the beginning of romanticism: with its Liberal, back-to-nature reveries in the Swiss countryside, his descriptions of the ‘picturesque’ Swiss landscape infused with introspective sentiment, plus his recommendation of travel for educational, conscience-raising purposes (reiterated more strongly in Émile (1762)), he created the paradigm for the nineteenth-century travel-writer.19 The integration of personal narrative, description (in particular of landscape) and thought, in a step-by-step guide in his Rêveries was also a new development in the travel-writing of that period; one which has endured as the model for literary travel-writing ever since. Modern travel-writing, with its integration of the narrator-protagonist’s personal experience of travel and sense of self in counterpoint to changing surroundings, might even be considered a specifically Romantic genre.

During the course of the nineteenth century almost every Romantic writer was known for some travel-literature, most of which dealt with external journeys in search of new ‘exotic’ landscapes. In a French context Mme de Staël’s De l’Allemagne (1810) and René de Chateaubriand’s Voyage au Mont Blanc (1806), Itinéraire de Paris a Jérusalem (1811), Voyage en Italie (1826), and most importantly his Voyage en Amérique (1827) should be viewed as the immediate precursors of fully-developed Romantic travel-writing. These are followed by works by Lamartine, Gautier, Stendhal, Hugo, Vigny, Musset, Senancour,


18 ‘Picturesque’ is the watchword of Romantic description. It comes from the Italian ‘pittoreseco’ meaning ‘in a painterly fashion’, and it reached France via England where landscape gardening, followed by landscape painting, had been developed in the mid-eighteenth century from the incidental depictions of countryside in Italian Renaissance painting, and from the more pointed evocations of landscape in the work of the French-born painter Claude Gellée. Originally used as a term to describe expanses of land worthy of being painted (i.e. landscapes), it quickly became multifunctional. Customs and people could then be deemed ‘picturesque’ subjects (Le Voyage en France, pp. xv-xvii).

19 The paradigm is valid for the individualistic journeys of the romantics and also the more scientifically-orientated journeys of naturalists such as Humboldt who used the Romantic aesthetic to give their descriptions of nature more impact (see Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 56).
Constant, Dumas (père), Nerval, Michelet, Georges Sand, Verlaine, Taine, Flaubert, Maupassant and others. None of this travel-writing deals with travel in Mexico; however, Mexican writers seem to have been obsessed with French representations of the exotic ‘other’ whether it referred directly to themselves or not, and much of their writing is directed to the negotiation, through illustration and example, of Mexico’s difficult relationship between exoticism and culture.

Whether directly from Rousseau’s texts, via Humboldt, or via any of the French Romantics, the description of landscape (paisajismo) and one of its preferred vehicles (travel-writing) had a profound and lasting effect on the development of Mexican travel-chronicling. Nineteenth-century Mexican travel-chroniclers refer ceaselessly to the descriptions of nature in the travel-writing of the great Romantics: Chateaubriand in North America, Lamartine in the Holy Land, Gautier in Spain and many others, alongside their more direct appreciations of the work of Humboldt. While seemingly acknowledging the mastery of these great writers in the frequent suggestion that Mexican writers do not have adjectives enough to capture the beauty and subtlety of their natural surroundings, they simultaneously laud Mexican landscapes as equal or better than those of Europe: they require more of the average writer.

Costumbrismo

Romanticism was also responsible for the development of interest in ‘the natural, primitive and uncivilised way of life’ and ‘the cult of the Noble Savage’, yet it was the Realist movement which more thoroughly espoused the ethnological slice-of-life approach to the middle, lower middle and working classes of society who are the most frequent subjects of costumbrismo: the water-carrier, the working-class girl (‘la China Poblana’), the night-watchman and others. If costumbrismo is only seen to be part of romanticism, it must, then, be considered an ironic part on account of its focus on the lower classes rather than the Romantic individual. However, the moralising aspect of much costumbrismo stems more clearly from romanticism than from realism. The best costumbrismo balances Romantic retouched ‘local colour’ with Realist photographic documentation.

The proto-anthropological/sociological study of people and customs was not a Realist invention. In Spain Cervantes and other Golden Age writers had occasionally made costumbrista-style descriptions in their work. In the early eighteenth-century in England, [20] Goethe should also figure on this list of Romantic travel-writers, were it not deliberately limited to French writers. Tocqueville’s historical analysis of North American democracy which stemmed from a journey there to study the penal system was extremely influential in its own right. Stendhal’s Memories d’un touriste (1838) constitute an early and non-prejudicial use of the term ‘tourist’.


[22] This is how José Luis Martínez accounts for it (quoted in Carballo’s Historia de las letras mexicanas, p. 129).

[23] The development of photography in the nineteenth century was central to the perceived need for a Realist approach in literature.

Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele, influenced by the Spanish Picaresque, both wrote articles on the subject of customs and characters which they published in their journals, The Tatler and The Spectator. Influenced in turn by Addison and Steele, the Frenchmen Louis-Sébastien Mercier and Joseph Étienne de Jouy wrote extensively on costumbrista topics. Mercier’s twelve-volume Tableau de Paris (1779-89) contains many sketches of typical events and characters; Jouy’s satirical descriptions of both metropolitan and provincial French society are collected as L’Hermite de la Chaussée d’Antin (1812-14) and L’Hermite en province (1824).25

The encroachment of French culture on that of Spain in the early years of the nineteenth century was seen as an imposition by the Spanish intelligentsia of the day. Romanticism, in particular, was seen as an import which was threatening to destroy the Spanish sense of identity in a wave of afrancesamiento: Spain for the French Romantics was just another exotic destination... In the Spaniards’ struggle to assert their own national identity through the celebration of autochthonous culture and the derision of imported behaviour patterns, they adopted costumbrismo as a literary genre and movement in itself, despite its most immediate French origin. Newly independent Latin American nations trying to create national literatures of their own felt a similar need to that of Spain to find and develop their own local forms of literature and their own local repertoire of topoi: they thus looked to the Spanish and French practices of costumbrismo for inspiration.

In his article ‘The Costumbrista Movement in Mexico’,26 Jefferson Rea Spill traces the development of the movement in Spain and its adoption in Mexico. Although, as Rea Spill notes, Fernández de Lizardi had independently produced some articles satirising the customs of Mexican society in 1812, the movement did not really get started in Mexican journalism until about 1840, and when it did, it acknowledged mainly Spanish sources: Mariano José de Larra’s satirical articles and ‘cuadros’, and also those of Ramón de Mesonero Romanos, Serafín Estébanez Calderón, and Manuel Bretón de los Herreros.27 Many of the articles by these Spanish writers were reproduced in Mexican magazines and journals of the day, although other writers whose costumbrista sketches were published in Mexico in the early nineteenth century were Jouy and the North American/Englishman, Washington Irving. Both Manuel Payno and Guillermo Prieto recognised the positive influence of Larra and Mesonero Romanos in their early costumbrista articles, although

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27 The Spanish costumbrista movement lasted from approximately 1830-1860.
they also worked to make *costumbrismo* something indigenous to Mexico.\(^\text{28}\)

The history of the spread of *costumbrismo* goes part of the way to explaining the revival of the term 'crónica' in Latin America. The light-hearted ‘chroniques’ which were published in Parisian newspapers such as *Le Figaro* in the 1850s may be presumed to have evolved out of the *costumbrista* articles of Addison and Steele via Mercier and Jouy.\(^\text{29}\) Like the works of these latter authors, the concepts and techniques they displayed were quickly imported by Latin Americans writers eager for the novelties of the metropolis. However, if Addison and Steele were influenced by the Spanish Picaresque tradition which also affected the creation of the original ‘crónicas de Indias’, and if the ‘crónicas de Indias’ are seen to be adopted as the founding narrative of specifically Latin American literature, the ‘chroniques’ which rekindled the ‘crónica’ form in Latin America were essentially only re-igniting an ‘autochthonous’ Latin American tradition.

In Mexico, as in Spain, *costumbrismo* was in part a tool of political resistance and in part a complacent, or at best neutral recreation of ‘the good old days’. Depending on who was in power, Mexican writers used *costumbrista* sketches either to fete their own social achievements and revel in their own idiosyncratically Mexican savoir-vivre, or to deride the other party’s social image through ridiculous sketches of its adherents’ manners and lifestyle. In the long run it was a tool most used by Liberal writers, since it was they who were least frequently in power, and most conscientious about the creation of a new, independent Mexican society. Their *cuadros* were generally written ‘not with the intention of furnishing entertainment but [...] with the hope of effecting reforms’, as they tried to goad a sense of national identity into existence.\(^\text{30}\)

Spanish *costumbrismo* started with the description of madrileño society, but in order to describe the full range of inhabitants of Spain, and to document the customs which were rapidly falling into disuse in the capital on account of their exposure to foreign influences and modernisation, it became necessary to travel to the provinces. The Spanish *costumbristas* wrote travel-articles and even whole series of *cuadros de costumbres*

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\(^{28}\) On Mexican developments in *costumbrismo* see Carballo, *Historia de las letras mexicanas*: ‘En México el costumbrismo no fue una importación servil; proviene en mayor o menor grado de la actitud y la obra de Lizardi. El influjo de Larra, Mesonero Romanos, Estébanez Calderón si bien se advierte entre los costumbristas, en ningún momento es decisivo. La posición ante el mundo y el hombre de nuestros escritores costumbristas coincide con la del Pensador Mexicano más que con la de estos prosistas españoles. Simplemente adaptan el costumbrismo dinámico del autor del Periquillo al estatismo propio de sus cuadros de costumbres’ (p. 129).

\(^{29}\) See Aníbal González, *La crónica modernista hispanoamericana*, p. 64.

\(^{30}\) Rea Spill, ‘The *Costumbrista* Movement in Mexico’, p. 295. Two periods of *costumbrismo* may be discerned in nineteenth-century Mexico: a more critical one which lasted until Porfirio Díaz came to power in 1876, and a more complacent one thereafter. This complacent form of *costumbrismo* was probably what got the movement a bad name, and although *costumbrismo* will never disappear from literature, the movement was well over by the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. (Rea Spill actually dates it 1840-1890.)

It should be noted that although the nineteenth-century travel-chronicle is first and foremost a journalistic practice, destined for as wide a readership as possible in order to create a sense of national identity at all levels of society, this does not limit its value as literature - as Carlos Monsiváis has pointed out, before the 1880s there really was no difference between journalism and literature.
concerning their travels: Larra wrote the articles *Las antigüedades de Mérida* and *Impresiones de viaje* in 1835; Mesonero Romanos wrote his *Recuerdos de viaje por Francia y Bélgica* in 1840-41, and fragments of his *Viaje de los dos donceles* (1943), covering a trip to Andalucia, were published posthumously in 1883. The Mexican *costumbristas*, spurred on by their desire to create a nation, travelled extensively within Mexico.

In Carlos Monsiváis’s concise overview of the work of the *costumbrista* writers in his introduction to the anthology *A ustedes les consta*, he notes that the *costumbristas*

> Seleccionan las estampas que respiran en lo literario calor hogareño; en lo político efusión patriótica; en lo nacional la riqueza de lo pintoresco, y en el recuento de viajes comprensión y alabanza del mundo. (Las crónicas viajeras son los prenoticieros de la época.) (p. 25)

He goes on to sum up their aims and procedures:

> De acuerdo al plan de afirmar la nacionalidad glosándola, la crónica oscila entre el turismo intimo (de lances de charrenta y paseos por Ixtacalco al descubrimiento de paisajes y caracteres a las figuras de veladores de barriada y policías hostiles) y una suerte de “filosofía nacional”, el interrogatorio a lo desconocido o inexpresado: debemos indagar en la psicología colectiva que norma fatalmente nuestra conducta. [...] Se necesita - además de la burla como escuela de continencia - fortalecer a la Nación infundiéndole y aclarándole sus orgullos locales y regionales, recreando literariamente las formas de vida más ostensiblemente “mexicanas” y subrayando el desdén por la imitación de lo francés y la nostalgia servil de lo hispánico. (p. 27)33

The task of the Mexican *costumbristas* was not easy. As the writer and politician Guillermo Prieto noted very early on, ‘Los cuadros de costumbres eran difíciles, porque no había costumbres verdaderamente nacionales, porque el escritor no tenía pueblo, porque sólo podía bosquejar retratos que no interesan sino a reducido número de personas.’ But Prieto also took heart: ‘No por esto debe desmayar el escritor de costumbres; sus cuadros algún día serán [...] como el tesoro guardado bajo la primera piedra de una columna.’

The endeavours of these *costumbrista* writers - later chroniclers - are the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

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31 Data paraphrased from Don Carlos Seco Serrano’s prologue to the *Obras de Ramón de Mesonero Romanos*, 5 vols (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1967), I, pp. ii-liii.

32 With regard to the terms used to define Mexican *costumbrista* texts, there is a general shift over the course of the century from the purely descriptive ‘cuadros’ and ‘estampas’ of early *costumbrismo* to the narrative ‘tradiciones’ and ‘leyendas’ inspired by the Peruvian Ricardo Palma, and thence to the ‘novela de costumbres’ (see Núñez, ‘Del Costumbrismo al Tradicionismo’, in his *Tradiciones hispanoamericanas* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979), pp. ix-xxix). Full-blown travel-‘chronicles’ cannot, by definition, be exclusively *costumbrista* or *paisajista*; and indeed, greater numbers of travel-chronicles were written in the latter half of the century, when the nationalist descriptive urge started to look to narrative to sustain itself, and *costumbrismo/paisajismo* blended more easily with personal narrative and comment.

33 In Monsiváis’ analysis *paisajismo* is a branch of *costumbrismo*: the *costumbristas* seek ‘el descubrimiento de paisajes y caracteres’ (my italics).

34 First published in the *Revista Científica y Literaria de México*, 1845; quoted in Monsiváis, A ustedes les consta, p. 24.

Manuel Payno & Guillermo Prieto

In the years following Independence in all the different Latin American nations, political thinkers and activists perceived a need to travel around their newly-won countries to establish for themselves what they actually 'owned', and in writing about their travels the aim is clearly to start to implant a sense of national identity in the minds of a particularly heterogeneous populace. At the same time, sometimes by choice and sometimes by obligation, these writers also travelled abroad, thus checking out how other, more developed nations were shaping up, with a view to returning to their own nations to have another go at establishing national identity. The biggest name associated with this project in Latin America as a whole is undoubtedly that of the Argentinian Domingo Faustino Sarmiento whose *Viajes por Europa, Africa y América* (1849-51) illustrates one of the fullest itineraries of any Latin American of his day. Alongside Sarmiento, one should also mention the life and works of the Venezuelan Simón Bolívar, the Peruvian Manuel Lorenzo de Vidaurre and the Columbian Juan Montalvo.

The major Mexican writers and politicians caught up in this polarised programme of nationalist travel-chronicling are Manuel Payno (1810-94) (*Un viaje a Veracruz en el invierno de 1843; Memorias e impresiones de un viaje a Inglaterra y Escocia, por Manuel Payno, ciudadano mexicano* (1853); *Barcelona y México en 1888 y 1889, por don Manuel Payno, Cónsul General de México en España*); and Guillermo Prieto (1818-97) (*Viajes de orden suprema, 1853-1855; Viaje a los Estados Unidos por Fidel* (1877-78)). Payno and Prieto dominated the Mexican travel-chronicling scene from the 1840s to the 1870s. In fact, this nationalist travel-chronicling impetus continued on through to the 1930s and 40s, culminating with José Vasconcelos's memoirs, although nowhere is the polarised pattern for establishing the Mexican nation with respect to other nations so clear as in the works of Payno and Prieto.

It should be reiterated that the above-mentioned travel-chroniclers, and those who were to continue the tradition on into the twentieth century, were almost all Liberals. While it may be argued that the struggle for Independence was mainly fought by Mexico's Conservative *criollo* elite, the task of creating the 'nation' which had just been called into being by the Treaty of Córdoba was a specifically Liberal enterprise. However, two travel-chroniclers of Conservative persuasion during this period were the Arróniz brothers: Joaquín, whose travel-chronicles, 'El Valle de Orizaba: fragmentes humorísticos', appeared serialised in *El 

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36 According to Núñez, Latin American travellers hardly ever go to Africa, Central Asia or Australasia (*La imagen del mundo en la literatura peruana*, p. 227).

37 Besides the works cited above, these authors, and many of their contemporaries, also published numerous journalistic articles on travel in Mexico and abroad, some of which have only recently been collected for publication in their complete works.

Another example of this type of travel-chronicler is Melchor Ocampo (*Viaje a Veracruz, Puebla y Sur de México* (1839); *Viaje de un mexicano a Europa* (c. 1840/1)); however, his internal travel-chronicle was not published at all until very recently and hence cannot be considered as part of the nationalist programme.

38 Neither author actually refers to his travel-chronicles as 'chronicles' *per se*, although both authors' works are now classified as chronicles (Payno's *Viaje a Veracruz* and Prieto's *Viajes de orden suprema* now appear in their respective collected works under the heading 'crónica de viaje').
Renacimiento (1869), had already converted to Liberalism during the Empire (1863-67); Marcos, on the other hand, remained a moderate Conservative all his life, although he maintained good relations, on an artistic level, with many of the Liberal writers of his day. Marcos Arróniz's publication, the Manuel del viajero en México (1858), although quirky and subjective, is technically speaking a travel-guide. Published in Paris by the Librería de Rosa y Bouret, it was obviously intended to attract foreign visitors - potential investors - to Mexico. It presents Mexico, its landscapes and its customs, as a well-established, cultured nation, with a strong historical tradition, thus presupposing the hard graft of the Liberal enterprise during the 1840s and 50s to found a nation. It also recognises the centrality of figures such as Payno and Prieto to the flourishing cultural scene in Mexico City, and simply skips 'las instituciones políticas que rigen nuestro país', in order to concentrate on 'lo útil y pintoresco' to be found in the capital and its environs.39 While this text is obviously not diametrically opposed to the Liberal approach to nationalist travel-chronicling, the fact that the book is conceived in such utilitarian terms - for the use of foreign travellers - , and is particularly sedentary in its approach, is perhaps an indictment of its Conservative Weltanschauung.40

To return to the Liberals, Payno’s didactic obsession with creating a nation through travel is unmistakable. The sole purpose of his narration of travel in Mexico is to illustrate the customs and character of the nation's inhabitants; to describe the beauty and fertility of the land; and to map it out with the landmarks of national history and the stories of national heroes, thereby conveniently backdating Mexican nationality to the pre-Columbian era. In order to back up his arguments he quotes liberally from the writings of previous travellers in Mexico, in particular Humboldt and Fanny Calderón de la Barca, producing what is virtually a collage of 'lo mexicano' as seen by foreign commentators. Furthermore, he manages to squeeze in the opinions of foreigners he meets on his travels, who reassure him that Mexico is at least as good as France: 'Un francés que venía en la Diligencia, me dijo que esos campos estaban labrados lo mismo que se usa actualmente en Francia', he notes happily.41

Foreign influence is also discernible in his references to, and adaptations of, the works - in particular, the travel-writing - of the French Romantics (Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Dumas, Hugo etc.), and of that idiosyncratic English traveller in France, Lawrence Sterne. Payno

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40 Marcos Arróniz’s guide to Mexico was not the first text of its kind. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a number of similar works were published (see Vicente Quirarte’s prologue to Juan Nepomuceno Almonte’s Guía de forasteros, y repertorio de conocimientos útiles (Imprenta de I. Cumplido, 1852; Instituto Mora, 1997), p. ix). These guides do all seem to be conceived in Conservative terms. However, it should also be noted that the Liberal geographer Antonio García Cubas also wrote and made maps to attract foreign investors in the 1880s and 90s (see Sonia Lombardo de Ruiz, ‘Antonio García Cubas: constructor de la imagen de la nación mexicana’, México en el Tiempo, 22 (January/February 1998), 10-17). In the later years of the nineteenth century, foreign investment was welcomed by both Conservatives and Liberals alike. (The suggestion concerning the sedentary nature of nineteenth-century Conservative politics was made by Carlos Monsiváis (personal interview, 30 January 1997).)

41 Un viaje a Veracruz en el invierno de 1843, prol. by Esther Hernández Palacios, Colección Rescate (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1984), p. 27. All further quotations from Payno's work are from this edition.
flaunts false humility in his repeated bows before the master, Lamartine: doubting his own capacity as a writer, he tells Prieto (to whom all the letters which compose the Viaje are addressed), ‘Así, si yo fuera Lamartine, te describiría un cuadro brillante y espléndido...’, and yet this is precisely what he goes on to do in the following paragraphs, describing the ‘éter azul’ of a sky dotted with clouds ‘volando como los ángeles del sol’ (p. 20).

With respect to Sterne, one assumes that Payno hopes to be at least as amusing and as risqué as the author of A Sentimental Journey, although one also senses that the satirical drive in Payno’s text is not as all-encompassing as Sterne’s. Payno’s work does have a critical edge to it, though. There is some indication of a tension in his work between rose-coloured romanticism and abrupt realism, between fabulous accounts and documentary evidence. It is as much prescriptive as it is descriptive of ‘lo mexicano’. It aspires to teach its readers about all things inherently Mexican (the country’s history and its physical attributes), to cultivate a taste for things which could come to be Mexican with time (French culture and North American democracy), and to point out those lapses in etiquette which let the Mexicans down so. Written during the time of Santa Anna’s dictatorship, the Viaje a Veracruz is also highly critical of current Mexican administration: the state of the roads, the indigents and highwaymen who roam along them, and the amount of foreign investment in the country.

Prieto’s acute criticism of Santa-Anna’s administration is what motivated his Viajes de orden suprema: he was sent into internal exile on two separate occasions, once to Cadereyta, in the state of Querétaro, and once to Oaxaca. Although evidently disgruntled by the indignities of being exiled, particularly on the first occasion, Prieto took advantage of the situation. ‘Nosotros con pocas diferencias, por impericia, por desdén o corrupción, continuamos siendo extranjeros en nuestra patria’, he had commented sometime earlier. Internal exile was a good opportunity to let other Mexicans know who they were - Prieto does not seem to have suffered any self-doubt in this matter, but the humility of the ‘nosotros’ encourages a nice sense of bonhomie and community spirit.

Acclaimed as the ‘national’ poet of the nineteenth century, Prieto seems to have had a lot less talent for narrative than Payno, producing a text which is truly Humboldtian in its attempt to be all-inclusive:

Es un libro periodístico en el que se mezcla la crónica con el artículo de fondo y con las estadísticas; la narración, con la canción y la descripción; la denuncia, con la autobiografía y la profecía [...]. Es [Prieto] al mismo tiempo político, guerrero, poeta, economista, historiador y profeta improvisado y sobre la marcha.43

The narrative might be top-heavy, the style verbose, but the social satire is far more rigorous than Payno’s attempts. Full of in-jokes about the ‘partido santannista’ and ‘la romería política’, grotesque vignettes of fellow travellers (‘[El españolazo] roncaba con despecho, roncaba con inspiración lírica, roncaba terminando en punta, porque silbaba,

42 First published in the Revista Científica y Literaria de México, 1845; quoted in Monsiváis, A ustedes les consta, p. 24.
soplaba o se quejaba; roncaba un ronquido salpicado con palabras mal articuladas; su ronquido era un ronquido que crispaba, que alarmaba, que acalambraba.\textsuperscript{44}, a fair bit of posturing and self-irony (he deems his exile to be 'una invitación de viajar entre soldados' (p. 103)), and a beautiful Sternian send-up of the overly Romantic travel-chronicle ('¿Qué tipos tan pintorescos, tan uniformes, tan pedantes...!' (p. 112)), Prieto's Viages appear to display a certain largesse with respect to the professed aim to create a nation - they certainly have a lot less overbearing didacticism than Payno's travel-chronicles. However, as pointed out by the editors of \textit{La Ilustración Mexicana} in 1851, 'Para corregir los vicios y los defectos de que por desgracia adolecen las sociedades, no bastan a veces los consejos, ni son suficientes los preceptos; hay sí una arma terrible: el ridículo.'\textsuperscript{45} This is a classic \textit{costumbrista} technique.

Prieto is sometimes less satirical in his approach. For example, in his journey along the 'Ruta de Cortés', on his way from Mexico City to Oaxaca via Puebla, for the second leg of his internal exile, he follows the topoi set out by Humboldt, Lamartine and Payno, paying less direct attention to political issues, and more to the description of the landscape and references to Mexican national history. However, he is generally a much more self-reliant ('independent') travel-chronicler than Payno - his extensive quotation from Humboldt's \textit{Political Essay} (p. 550) is quite exceptional in his work -; and the overall impression is that, at least in Prieto's self-confident view, a Mexican national identity has already been 'assumed' into existence.

Payno and Prieto's travels abroad illustrate the two main trends in external Mexican travel-chronicling of the period. Destinations were either the United States of America or Europe. A place of exile or of diplomatic service, the United States was viewed with some ambivalence by commentators. Certainly, in the early years of Independence the United States was seen as a model democracy, as analysed by Tocqueville and romanced by Chateaubriand.\textsuperscript{46} However, after the secession of the northern Mexican states to the North Americans in 1848, all subsequent travellers by land had at least five hundred miles of 'border' territory to cross. The experience of this dilated border zone, and the sense of loss, frustration and anger it provoked in Mexican travel-chroniclers, tempered their experience of the United States. Despite all North America's modernity and prosperity -

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Obras completas}, ed. by Boris Rosen Jélomer (CNCA, 1992- ), IV: \textit{Crónicas de viaje 1}, ed. by Francisco López Cámar (1994), 114. All further quotations of Prieto's work are taken from this edition.

\textsuperscript{45} Quoted by Rea Spill, 'The \textit{Costumbrista} Movement in Mexico', p. 305. Prieto's style of writing, incidentally, looks remarkably like a blueprint for the work of Mexico's most recent satirical chronicler: Carlos Monsiváis.

\textsuperscript{46} The two most important Mexican travellers in the early nineteenth-century are the diplomat Lorenzo de Zavala (\textit{Viaje a los Estados Unidos} (Paris, 1834; Mérida, 1846, with an introduction by Justo Sierra O'Reilly) and Justo Sierra O'Reilly himself, whose four volumes of \textit{Impresiones y recuerdos de un viaje a los Estados Unidos y Canadá} (1851) describe a political mission made in 1847-48 to make a plea for help to the North American government during the Guerra de Castas. Although Liberals, both writers were antifederalists (Zavala supported the independence of Texas; Sierra O'Reilly that of Yucatan) and their portrayal of the United States is coloured by this distancing from Mexican federal policies. Nevertheless, Zavala and O'Reilly are also critical of the United States. (More detailed discussion of these writers and others who have written on the United States may be found in Carballo's \textit{¿Qué país es éste?}, pp. 9-48.)
railways, industries, penitentiaries - this first flexing of Imperial muscles left Mexican travel-chroniclers with a strong feeling that the Mexican was inherently different, in character and in culture, from his nearest neighbours.

Travels in Europe were more positive than in North America, perhaps because they were less politically orientated - European nations were generally perceived as less of a threat to independent sovereignty in Mexico than the United States, particularly after 1848, and despite the continued European invasions of Mexican territory. Whether sent as a diplomat, as an exile, or as a journalist (or any combination thereof), travel-chroniclers to Europe tended to seize the opportunity to complete the nineteenth-century Mexican version of the *Grand Tour* - after all, foreign travel for Mexico-born subjects of the Viceroyalty was extremely difficult during the eighteenth century. This being so, the preferred educational destinations were France and Italy, although there were also numerous religious and cultural pilgrimages to the Holy Land during this period. Travels in Spain were largely occasioned by diplomatic tasks but later in the century, probably responding to the interest shown in Spain as an exotic destination by key French Romantic travel-writers, it, too, became the subject of leisured, erudite travel, helping Mexicans complete their sense of national identity with reference to a bit of what is really their own ancient history.

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In 1870, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the creation of the Mexican Academia Nacional de Ciencias y Literatura, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (1834-93) gave the keynote speech. After firmly establishing the cultural goals of the institution - the creation and diffusion through state education of a nationally-orientated corpus of cultural material -, he went on to say that,

> Los viajes de exploración en el interior del país y de nuestras costas, el establecimiento de jardines de aclimatación, las clasificaciones zoológicas, las observaciones físicas, las indagaciones históricas y el cultivo de las bellas letras, cuyo desarrollo es necesario impulsar hoy que por un movimiento espontáneo la juventud se consagra a tan apacible estudio, son objetos que por descuidados se propone considerar la Academia preferentemente, sin por eso dejar de atender a otros ramos interesantísimos de la ciencia.47 (My italics)

That is to say, the need for internal travel in Mexico was still acknowledged as an imperative in the late nineteenth century, and travel-chronicling would not entirely lose out with the gradual shift in emphasis from early Liberal to científico schools of thought,48 although it would start to move on from the costumbrista/paisajista mode to encompass works of more formal scientific impetus. The focus must also be directed at travel at home rather than abroad - statistics for Mexican travel-chronicling in the nineteenth century do show a marked preference for external travel.49

What is interesting about Altamirano’s statement is that only six years later, in 1876, the Spanish Institución Libre de Enseñanza was founded by Francisco Giner de los Ríos and friends, along very similar lines to those espoused by Altamirano: empirical education for all with an emphasis on scientific method and directed by an overarching nationalist ideology. One of the mainstays of this approach were the hands-on group-excursions into the Spanish countryside in search of an essential, intrahistorical Spanish national identity, to be defined through the methodical interrogation of what was really out there, rather than the nitpicking rejection of all that was foreign practised by earlier generations of Spanish costumbristas. Much of the travel-writing of the Generation of 98 stems from this educational background.

47 Altamirano, Discursos y brindis, Obras completas, 1 (1986), 240; quoted in Perea, La rueda del tiempo, pp. 37-38. See also Altamirano’s further comments on the need for Mexicans to write both external and internal travel-chronicles made in 1882 and quoted in the introduction to this thesis.
48 The Mexican científicos were moderate Liberals inspired by Auguste Comte’s positivism.
49 Information culled from the bibliography to Teixidor’s Viajeros mexicanos reveals a total of 47 travel-chronicles published by Mexican authors during the nineteenth century (or shortly thereafter and concerning travels which took place in the nineteenth century). Of these 47, only 6 or 7 cover travel in Mexico as their main objective. (Collating bibliographic material from other sources, I estimate the total number of nineteenth-century Mexican travel-chronicles to be in the region of 60 volumes, of which around 20 deal exclusively with travel in Mexico, and a further 10 to 20 include travel in Mexico on the way to somewhere else. Many more texts by Mexicans on Mexico were published as individual articles rather than as whole books and have not been subsequently anthologised - for example, Ignacio Ramírez’s journey to Baja California in 1864, published in El Semanario Ilustrado on 20 November 1868.)
Mexican influence over Spanish cultural institutions cannot be proven at this point. Rather, by the 1870s Mexico and Spain were culturally neck and neck: Mexicans were contemporaries of Spaniards, if not yet of all men. Yet from that date on, Mexicans and other Latin Americans would gradually start to exert their cultural influence in the Peninsula, culminating with the spread of the modernista movement to Spain in the 1890s.

Altamirano, in line with his proposals for internal, nationalist travel-chronicling, restricted his own travel-chronicling to the Mexican Republic (for example, the serialised letter describing a journey to Mazatlán and Acapulco published in El Semanario Ilustrado in November 1868, and his series of articles collected under the heading Paisajes y leyendas: tradiciones y costumbres de México, first published in periodicals in the early 1880s). The literary journal that he founded in 1869 with Gonzalo Esteva, El Renacimiento, was also a major organ for the publication of internal travel-chronicles, although it did strike a balance with translations of foreign travel-writing on Mexico and the publication of Mexican external travel-chronicles. The other main writer of this period to concentrate exclusively on internal travel-chronicling is Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (1859-95) who, despite his obsessive interest in French culture, never travelled abroad. He left only a handful of travel-chronicles on trips in Mexico between 1882 and 1893: these he planned to have published in book form as his Viajes extraordinarios.

Despite these two authors’ slight production in terms of actual travel-chronicles, their importance as cultural commentators and as literary innovators cannot be underestimated. Altamirano is credited with having finally inaugurated Mexican national literature; a literature inherently distinct from that of other nation-states, rather than a literature which produces a running commentary on what Mexican national identity should be, as Payno and Prieto had tended to do. Gutiérrez Nájera’s place in history is that of the father of Latin American modernismo. This movement is frequently charged with the undiscriminating importation of European - mainly French - literary styles and subject matter: romanticism, Parnassism and symbolism. A brief look at Gutiérrez Nájera’s travel-chronicles does, however, provide material for a refreshing revision of this accusation, and the literary innovations of Altamirano are perhaps the best place to start this revision.

Despite his didactic profession, Altamirano was a lot less heavy-handed in his travel-chronicles than might have been expected. He was aware that the two main forms of travel-chronicle written about Mexico thus far had been the scientific essay of Humboldt and friends and the overt political catechisms of Payno and Prieto, and he was careful to

50 Both Altamirano and Giner de los Ríos were the progeny of the Romantic tradition: their interest in travel and travel-writing stems from this shared heritage rather than from the influence of one over the other. For Spanish travel-writing in the late nineteenth century see Josefina Gómez Méndez, Nicolás Ortega Cantero, Dolores Brandis & others, Viajeros y paisajes (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988).
51 Altamirano did not travel abroad until only a few years before his death, visiting Europe in the early 1890s.
52 The entirety of Gutiérrez Nájera’s travel-chronicles may be found partly in his Cuentos, crónicas y ensayos, ed. by Alfredo Maillefert, Biblioteca del Estudiante Universitario, 20, 3rd edn (UNAM, 1992); and partly in the recent collection of his Viajes extraordinarios, ed. by Rafael Pérez Gay (Breve Fondo Editorial, 1996).
take a more personal, readable approach: ‘Todo llevará el sello de la impresión personal, todo tendrá el airecito de la confidencia’. Woed by modernity - its speed, its accessibility, its aesthetic - and soothe by the first years of the ‘paz porfiriana’ - the prosperity and the stability - Altamirano appears happy to be almost a tourist in Mexico. Certainly he displays his erudition in terms of Mexican history, with references to a most up-to-date list of commentators, including Joaquín Arróniz and Ernest de Vigneaux, as well as all the old favourites from Díaz del Castillo to Humboldt, and he also reveals himself to be a connoisseur of Mexican customs and character traits. But all this is presented more as an ‘espectáculo’ than as lessons in ‘historia patria’ and ‘las bases del carácter mexicano’. Religious rites are partially depoliticised as picturesque scenes and in aesthetic appreciation of Santa Anna and Lerdo de Tejada’s respective houses in Xalapa, he simply exclaims, ‘¡Qué dos motivos para una disertación filosófica, histórica o política!’ (p. 165).

Not weighed down quite as much as Payno by didacticism and demonstration from first principles, nor as much as Prieto by the sheer bulk of information documented, Altamirano has more space to create himself as a character in his texts. Although, in certain aspects, Prieto is a forerunner in this field, Altamirano casts himself as the self-conscious, hypersensitive individual, ‘estrafalario’ and temperamental, but generous and lovable, with access to a self-irony that simply reinforces his projection of self-importance - he is every bit the Romantic individual! A father figure for the Mexican nation, demonstrating through personal experience that improvements in infrastructure can put first-hand knowledge of the nation’s boundless natural and cultural resources within easy reach of the man in the street, Altamirano heralds the dawn of the Republic’s leisure industry. Paradise is a place in Mexico.

In Altamirano’s writing Mexico is still, of course, being compared to other places, but no longer as the local faute-de-mieux for something European and civilised (Xochimilco as the Venice of Mexico etc.). There is increasing subtlety in the terms of comparison. While in passages of realism Altamirano admits to some disappointment with Mexico as it is - its lack of culture and its natural paradise infected with ‘el vómito’ and other hazards - in his more dreamy moments Mexico tacitly becomes the civilised, but still exotic, term in comparison with other European (i.e. French) exotic projections: ‘Para mí lo que distingue a Jalapa de las ciudades montañosas del África Septentrional y de sus hermanas las ciudades de la costa de Andalucía...’ (p. 164 - Spain is exotic in this context). Xalapa still has all the positive attributes of a tropical paradise, but, according to Altamirano the source of Xalapa’s uniqueness is its ‘cleanliness’ (‘extremada limpieza’), indicative of its purity (‘blancura deslumbradora’) and civilisation. It is as good, if not better, than France.

Although this access to fantasy, frivolity and leisure is still indicative of a nation desperately trying to compare favourably with Europe by casting itself in her role, it also signifies a very different approach to the writing of chronicles: they become ‘lighter’,

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Altamirano’s writing was changing to keep up with modernity, yet perhaps ironically, in his attempts to keep up with the times, it was Altamirano who repopularised the term ‘crônica’ to describe his non-fictional literary texts. As Carballo notes, the reviews *El Siglo XIX* and *El Correo de México* were publishing self-styled chronicles by Luis G. Ortiz and José Tomás de Cuéllar respectively in 1867, and Altamirano followed suit in 1868. However, it was Altamirano’s journal, *El Renacimiento*, which brought about the real renaissance of the chronicle from 1869 onwards.55 For Carballo, the chronicles of the Conquest and the work of early nineteenth-century Mexican historians such as Carlos María de Bustamante, Lorenzo de Zavala and José María Luis Mora are the immediate precursors of the revived chronicle, and Altamirano does quote extensively from these three Mexican historians in his *Paisajes y leyendas*. However his work does also corroborate Anfíbal González’s theory of French influence: in 1869 he described himself as ‘un cronista’, but bemoaned the fact that it was easier to be a chronicler in Paris, Berlin or London than in Mexico.56

The increasing move from the production of an overtly political text to one in which politics is disguised in aesthetic terms (the revamped ‘crônica’) was at once a response to the market forces of an apparently prosperous capitalist society (an ostensibly depoliticised and ‘modern’ text, in form and content, made its mass consumption easier), and a way of writing Mexico into literature without having to resort to obvious qualifications (‘mexicano/a’ and its variations). ‘Es Altamirano el primer autor que se exige la universalidad, y no sólo a sí mismo, sino a la nación’.57 Altamirano was the first post-Independence Mexican writer to get an international reputation, and he achieved this by packaging Mexico in a way which made it an attractive export (it compared favourably), and at the same time, through his texts, he imported European culture for a Mexican audience without making them feel deprived or marginalised. This is the cornerstone of a national literature.

55 Carballo, *Historia de las letras mexicanas*, pp. 113-28 (115).
56 Diario íntimo, quoted in Carlos Monsiváis’s prologue to Altamirano’s *Crónicas 1, Obras completas*, VII (1987), 15.
Anfíbal González claims that, ‘It was Nájera who, around 1880, [...] imported the genre of the chronicle from France into Spanish America’ (*Journalism*, p. 87). Gutiérrez Nájera was no doubt influenced by French sources and maybe used them to add to the Mexican definition of the chronicle, but the practice of writing chronicles in Mexico, as demonstrated above, starts with Altamirano and not Gutiérrez Nájera who, although a child prodigy, was only age ten in 1869 when Mexican chronicles became popular. Rafael Torres Sánchez corroborates Altamirano’s seminal role in the development of the journalistic chronicle in his ‘Ignacio Manuel Altamirano: la cotidianidad en perspectiva’, *LJS*, 2 May 1993, p. 18.
57 José Joaquín Blanco, introduction to Altamirano’s *Textos costumbristas, Obras completas*, V (1986), 17.
Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera was the unwilling chronicler and unenthusiastic traveller who further developed these tendencies. Much more so than Altamirano, he had to contend with the increasing split between journalism and literature created by changing modes of production, and the increasing demands of a consumerist audience avid for imports. His complaint in 1893 that, ‘la crónica [...] es, en los días que corren, un anacronismo. [...] Ha muerto a manos del reporter quien es tan ágil, diestro, ubicuo, invisible, instantáneo, que guisa la liebre antes que la atrapen’ (author’s italics), sold himself rather short. Although journalistic writing did inevitably lose in literary quality as the market grew and the pace of reporting speeded up, Gutiérrez Nájera kept the chronicle going as a literary element in modern journalism.

Refreshing in comparison with his poetry, Gutiérrez Nájera’s chronicles are entertaining, unassuming, impressionistic accounts; incisive, laconic, and highly readable, with access to some social awareness as well as plenty of aesthetic sensibility. Maybe exhaustive and authoritarian texts of the type that Payno and Prieto wrote were, by the 1880s, things of the past, but this lighter chronicle of ‘notas’, ‘apuntes’ and ‘impressiones’ took its place. In retrospect, there was a boom in the production of this sort of chronicle in the modernista period, and to this day the practice of the genre retains these references to brevity and subjectivity. This paring down of the text also made it an experimental zone - as Adolfo Castañón has noted, it is precisely this brief, marginal text which is most open to innovation. In his travel-chronicling Gutiérrez Nájera found a solution in which he could infuse a diluted version of his poetic experiments with his some of his best jokes and favourite quotes. The concoction is lent stability by a more substantial, accessible subject matter: travel.

In the preservation of his embattled artistic integrity Gutiérrez Nájera’s greatest resources are irony and fiction. Despite being a staunch supporter of the Porfiriato, he is not enthralled at being a pawn in a market economy. Taking care not to bite the hand that feeds him too hard, his access to irony and fiction within the texts speaks clearly of his critical distance from the role he is being forced to play. Through self-irony he creates the figure of the eccentric and unreliable literary traveller who is fond of fictionalising his personal experience, and who, suffering from a chronic dose of mal-de-siècle, is disinclined to abandon the area of Mexico City currently known as the Centro Histórico. ('Guanajuato es un país lejano que está más allá, mucho más allá del Bosque de Chapultepec.' All further quotations from Gutiérrez Nájera’s work are taken from this edition.)

58 Quoted in Carlos Monsiváis’s prologue to A ustedes les consta, p. 39.
59 There is very little human interest in Gutiérrez Nájera’s travel-chronicles; that is, little costumbrismo. It is replaced by an introspective narrative voice whose aesthetic concerns are mainly directed towards landscape and cultural artefacts.
60 ‘Magnitudes del Jibaro: literatura hispanoamericana contemporánea’, Vuelta, 241 (December 1996), 82-85. This essay provides an excellent overview of nineteenth-century Latin American chroniclers such as Prieto, Altamirano and Gutiérrez Nájera, and the innovative role of ‘las formas breves’ in their work.
61 His travel-chronicles are almost always occasioned by an official visit, and, particularly in the later texts of the 1890s, Gutiérrez Nájera sees fit to throw in a few lines of praise for various state-initiated projects. However he never sinks to the sycophantic simpering of so many official travel-chroniclers.
62 Viajes extraordinarios, p. 27. All further quotations from Gutiérrez Nájera’s work are taken from this edition.
his favourite Romantic authors (Lamartine, Musset, Vigny, Gautier, Chateaubriand, Goethe, etc.), plus a good range of Mexican authors (travel-writers and/or poets such as Prieto, Payno, Altamirano, Francisco Bulnes, Gonzalo Esteva, and Roa Bárccena), suits him very well. The travel-chronicles of contemporary Mexican authors such as Bulnes merely serve to dissuade him from making any journeys, in Mexico or abroad: ‘No vayamos a Guanajuato, esperemos a que Guanajuato venga a nosotros’, he protests petulantly (p. 28). (His taste for this kind of absurd humour is in itself a novelty in Mexican literature.) Prone to camp exaggeration, he finally overcomes his disinclination to travel, advising himself, ‘No lo hagas por ti: hazlo por Théophile Gautier, que viene a México y desea leer tus crónicas’ (p. 28)...

This is the tone of his first travel-chronicles, written in the early 1880s, when Gutiérrez Nájera is still in his early twenties. Once he gets on the road, however, his aesthetic appreciation of Mexico is extremely positive. Its mountains are better than the Alps, its cities at least equal to their European twins, and Xalapa is as white as the dove’s feathers in a poem by François Coppée. The comparisons with Europe might be over-exercised, particularly in his later work of the 1890s, but the result is the creation, through literature, of a superlative land of beauty and civilisation in Mexico itself. France has been brought to the mountain, as it were... Altamirano certainly recognised Gutiérrez Nájera’s techniques as ‘la cumbre de la literatura patria’.

Furthermore, the fact that Gutiérrez Nájera never travelled abroad serves to undermine this arsenal of comparisons between Mexico and Europe, thus partially relieving him of the burden of being the subservient bearer of cultural imperialism. Ostensibly he was feeding the general public with what it wanted, yet through the repetition of this repertoire of images of dubious authenticity, his journalism imports French culture and simultaneously comes very close to turning it into a kitsch aesthetic, in a similar vein to Lawrence Sterne’s invention and derision of sentimentality in A Sentimental Journey.

Gutiérrez Nájera’s final contribution to the practice of travel-chronicling in Mexico concerns his mode of travel. Altamirano might herald the dawn of leisure travel, but Gutiérrez Nájera practices luxury tourism. Writing in 1880, he claims that,

En esta época de los caminos de hierro, los viajes son un mito. Saie usted y llega. No hay aventuras, no hay incidentes. La maleta y el viajero deben experimentar las mismas sensaciones. No puede uno ni siquiera quejarse de la dureza del carruaje. Un excelente sillón à la Voltaire convida al sueño. (pp. 60-61)

This Romantic show of disappointment in modern technological advances is evidently ironic coming from someone for whom the experience of physical discomfort is ‘¿Cosa rara

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63 Francisco Bulnes, a scientific travel-chronicler, wrote about his trip to Japan to record the passage of Venus, and also about another trip to Italy, excerpts of which may be found in his Páginas escogidas, ed. by Martín Quirarte, Biblioteca del Estudiante Universitario, 89, 2nd edn (UNAM, 1993), pp. 155-59.


65 See, for example, the tearful opening lines of ‘De México a Guanajuato’, p. 27.
para un turista como yo!’ (p. 61); who expects to be able to read on the train; and who, on arrival at his destination, requires the best food, wine and accommodation in town - ‘Creo que estoy en el mejor hotel de Puebla’ (p. 67). Gutiérrez Nájera knowingly accepts those elements of modernity which make this mode of travel possible, happy that these signs of prosperity indicate at last the potential of recreating a better kind of France in Mexico. Yet despite his ‘afrancesamiento’ he is apparently very contented in Mexico, not a ‘desterrado en tierras americanas’ as many of the modernistas have been described.66

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66 See José Emilio Pacheco’s introduction to his Antología del modernismo: 1884-1921, Biblioteca del Estudiante Universitario, 90, 2 vols (UNAM, 1970), 1, p. xiv.
Justo Sierra & Amado Nervo

This sudden possibility of leisured travel, both at home and abroad, is a trademark, in politics, of the Porfiriato and, in literature, of the birth of modernismo. If the first years of the Porfiriato are marked by the internal travel-writing of Altamirano and Gutiérrez Nájera, making ‘el verdadero sueño nacional’ of travel towards modernity a reality, at least in literary terms, it falls to a younger generation of writers and politicians to live out that ‘sueño nacional’ abroad, in the United States or Europe, in the late 1890s and first years of the twentieth century. The two most significant travel-chroniclers of this period are Justo Sierra (1848-1912) and Amado Nervo (1870-1919).

Much research could be done on how the literary works of the modernistas (mainly poetry) relate to their extensive practice of journalism, including a vast amount of travel-chronicles; and on how, in the 1890s, a growing network of Latin American travel-chroniclers spread modernismo first within South and Central America, and later in Europe. Of note, are José Martí’s travels in Central and North America, including Mexico, between 1875 and 1888, which helped pave the way for the initial development of the movement in Latin America itself. Rubén Darío’s lifelong travels in the Americas and in Europe from the mid-1880s through to 1916, the year of his death, significantly increased the dissemination of the movement, particularly in Spain. Darío did not go to Mexico until the unfortunate year of 1910, but by the turn of the century Mexico was able to go to Darío. Nervo and Sierra both met Darío in Europe: Nervo in 1900 in Paris where they were both correspondents for the Universal Exhibition; Sierra in Madrid in 1901 at the Congreso Social y Económico Hispanoamericano. In fact, Nervo met Sierra properly for the first time in France in 1901.

The fact that travel within Latin America in the last decades of the nineteenth century was still incredibly difficult on an international level, plus the increasing ease of transatlantic travel and the attractions of Europe mentioned earlier in this chapter, made France, Spain and Italy the top destinations for fin-de-siècle Latin American travel-chroniclers. Ironically, in reaching out for Europe, for personal reasons and/or as representatives of their

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67 Rafael Pérez Gay, introduction to Gutiérrez Nájera’s Viajes extraordinarios, p. 9.
68 Sierra dreamt of travel to the United States and to Europe from his childhood onwards (see José Luis Martínez’s introduction to Sierra’s Viajes (in Sierra’s Obras completas, 1st repr., 14 vols (UNAM, 1977), VI, 7-8)); Nervo ironically claimed on arriving in Paris for the first time, ‘Por fin puedo hablar francés, estoy en mi patria: “Hacía treinta años que no la veía!”’ (Cuentos y crónicas, p. 202). All further quotations from Sierra and Nervo’s work are taken from these editions.
individual nations' foreign policies, Latin Americans found each other. *Modemismo* is the first literary movement to display the characteristics of Panamerican consciousness.

*Modemismo* is simultaneously the first Latin-American movement to exercise its influence over Spanish culture. The development of Spanish *modernismo* and the boom in the production of Spanish travel-writing at the turn of the century must be, at least in part, related to Latin Americans' presence in, and texts on, Spain: Miguel de Unamuno, José Ortega y Gasset, Pío Baroja, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Ciro Bayo, Azorín and others were all aware of, and involved in, the growing Latin American literary presence in Spain. Dario's *España contemporánea* is in fact considered part of the writing of the Spanish Generation of 98; a 'manifiesto estético e ideológico del Modernismo español'.

Justo Sierra was not a full-time *modemista* writer but the fact that much of his writing was contemporaneous with *modernismo* (1884-1921) meant that certain similarities were inevitable. More important as a politician and a pedagogue than as a creative writer, he really carried on the work of Ignacio Altamirano. In his politics he developed Altamirano's nascent positivism into full-blown *ciencia*. In his travel-chronicles he updated and extended Altamirano's repertoire: they are mostly external rather than internal, but instead of letting aesthetics blur his politics like some of the *modernistas*, he blended the two in the highly readable series of articles published as *En tierra yankee: notas a todo vapor* (1897-1898), and *En la Europa latina* (1901-1903, posthumously collected for publication in book form).

In his series of chronicles on the United States Sierra displays the sources of his knowledge of the country in his passing references to other Mexican travel-chroniclers, such as Lorenzo de Zavala and Justo Sierra O'Reilly, his father; and to the travel-writing of other well-known authors such as Chateaubriand, José María Heredia, the Cuban Romantic poet, and John Tyndall, the popular Irish natural historian. In particular, in his reference to his father's chronicle written in 1848 (pp. 153-54), Justo Sierra at once confirms the existence of a tradition (something which is handed down from father to son) and rejects this tradition as being too cumbersome (there is, in fact, a fifty year gap between accounts, enough for three generations' worth of tradition...). In his struggle to see for himself he tries to forget all these previous accounts, yet they inevitably cloud his vision with their increasing pessimism about North American society and politics. On leaving the States

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73 Dates given in Pacheco's *Antología del modernismo*, I, p. viii.
74 José Luis Martínez also suspects that Sierra had read Prieto's *Viaje a los Estados Unidos* (in his introduction to Sierra's *Viajes*, p. 5).
75 Sierra O'Reilly also travelled in the footsteps of Zavala, whose work he edited in 1846 (see p. 28, footnote 46). Despite Justo Sierra's reservations, the tradition also continues up to the present day: the politician and writer Héctor Pérez Martínez edited Sierra O'Reilly's diary in 1938 (*Diario de nuestro viaje a los Estados Unidos: la pretendida anexión de Yucatán*, Biblioteca Histórica Mexicana de Obras Inéditas, 12 (Antigua Librería Robredo / Porrúa, 1938)); and Silvia Molina, Pérez Martínez's daughter, re-edited Pérez Martínez's own travel-chronicle, written in 1939-40, in 1994 ("En los caminos de Campeche", in *Obras completas*, 5 vols (Gobierno del Estado de Campeche / Corunda, 1994), V: *Periplo*., 233-85). This in turn affects Molina's own travel-writing (Campeche, imagen de eternidad, Cuaderno de Viaje (CNCA, 1996).
Sierra writes: ‘Todos estos pesimismos [acerca de la democracia estadounidense] me vienen de los libros que he leído sobre la sociedad americana, son “librescos”; yo no vi bien, entreví un gran pueblo... y adquirí una convicción, que la libertad es un aire respirable’ (p. 192).

This unspontaneous, stifled vision of the United States is contrasted by Sierra’s description of his train journey in Mexico itself before reaching the border with United States - some of the best pages in the history of the genre. Seemingly unfettered by the well-established tradition of travel-chronicling in Mexico - probably because he was not really intending to write about travel in Mexico on this trip, and had not read up on the subject - Sierra makes succinct descriptions of the Mexican landscape and takes verbal snapshots of passing faces, advised by a very economical use of modernista literary innovation (‘la piel de las montañas [...] se tigrea con frecuencia con las sombras rápidas de las nubes’ (p. 17)), conscious of the subjectivity of his vision and of the literary metamorphosis to which writing subjects reality. Sierra’s personal voice and political consciousness come through well in the following reflections on the desert regions of Zacatecas:

Seguimos a todo escape hacia las regiones inhabitadas, seguimos bajo un cielo color de plata viva, por un suelo que se levanta hacia nosotros, se disuelve en átomos infinitos y nos envuelve y nos engulle en su silencioso huracán de polvo. [...] Las cercas de piedras blancas, colocadas prehistóricamente, parecen más bien denunciar un antiguo “paraje” chichimeca, que una aldehuela en nuestro siglo. Pero nuestro siglo está ahí presente en forma de telégrafo, cuyas altísimas cruces grises, unidas por las fibras metálicas, parece que hayen a grandes zancadas kilométricas hasta el confín del desierto; nuestro siglo va y viene con el tren de vapor... Alguna vez en esta triste tierra que jamás ha bebido agua, el agua vendrá del pozo, de la presa, del oasis, y con sólo eso podrá una nación acampar cómodamente en estas soledades y abonar con su guano estos páramos... Lo triste y lo encantador en nuestro país, son estos contrastes de civilización refinada y de incultura absoluta, de climas que se apetecen en una escalinata de montañas, de ciudades y soledades, de desertos muertos de sed que se puedan contemplar paladeando un vaso de limonada fría y deliciosa. (p. 21)

Sierra’s style is halfway between the baroque flourishes of romanticism and the succinct imagery and verbal innovation of modernismo. His analysis of Mexico is a realistic blend of history and modernity which puts his aesthetic vision of landscape and lifestyle at the service of his politics. The trip to the United States, by taking Sierra far beyond the borders of Mexico, helps him to further refine this symbolic image of Mexico, through contrast and absence. The distillation of the essence of Mexico is further amplified through the emotional register of Sierra’s search for himself - his “yo” casi perdido’ - finally relocated on reentering Mexico (pp. 191-93).

In Europe Sierra is ostensibly happier, less inhibited by the writings of other Mexican travel-chroniclers. Although somewhat disappointed by France and Spain, he appears to feel at home on the ancient roads of cultural pilgrimage through Italy, paying homage to the historical investigations of Ernest Renan and the Italian travel-writing of Castelar, Goethe, Taine and others. But even here he frequently protests that he ‘cannot see’ the monuments he has waited so long to visit. What disturbs his vision in Europe is not so much travel-writing, but the ubiquitous presence of the Baedeker guidebook and its carrier, the tourist:
‘El rojo Baedecker a un tiempo útil y odioso; toda la Italia artística me pareció enferma de escarlatina...’ (p. 261). The presence of tourists disturbs Sierra mainly because he does not want to be classed as a tourist himself, albeit as a cultural one. Of course, Sierra twists the issue, pointing out that most of the tourists are North American and the trip which was supposed to place aesthetics above politics becomes entangled in his vision of North American society. His disappointment in Europe is thus largely a transference of his disappointed, or at best ambivalent, reaction to the United States.

Amado Nervo’s travel-chronicles from Europe (collected in El éxodo y las flores del camino (1902), plus the posthumously collected articles covering the period 1900-1913) are a classic example of modernista overseas travel writing. Nervo - a full-time journalist and diplomat - is an astute and critical observer of himself and others. In line with Gutiérrez Nájera, he keeps his travel-chronicles brief, informative, well-written and witty. Their style is taken from the more accessible range of his poetics, using mainly simple constructions and vocabulary, with rather less whimsy and preciosity than Gutiérrez Nájera. He also provides more dialogue and anecdote in exchange for Gutiérrez Nájera’s interior monologue and literary speculation, plus more direct political criticism.

Nervo’s stock of intertextual references to his French idols and his Hispanic contemporaries are what further define his texts as pertaining to the modernista movement - like most movements it was more of a club or a literary network than a particular style and subject matter, although the poetry was admittedly more homogeneous than the peripheral chronicles. However, what is notable about the intertext to Nervo’s chronicles is the absence of references to previous generations of Mexican travel-chroniclers in Europe - the texts of Ocampo, Payno and others. Like Sierra, Nervo seems to have preferred to avoid references to the ‘tradition’ in order to get a fresher view.

Although ostensibly chronicling life in Paris, or elsewhere in Europe, Nervo keeps his eye out for the relevance of his observations to life in Mexico primarily, and to Latin America in more general terms. Aware that comparisons with home are inevitable in external travel-chronicles (‘Saliendo de México todo es Cuautitlán. / Saliendo de París, todo es México. / Para no hacer comparaciones, mejor quedarse en Cuautitlán’ (p. 90)), he resolves to use them to Latin American advantage. He points out the errors of Latin Americans’ views on Europe, and also signals the developments in Europe which could be of use in Latin America.

Even before setting foot in Europe Nervo dedicated a number of articles to the great Latin American inferiority complex: ‘Los franceses valen infinitamente más que nosotros, porque a nosotros, a todos los latinos que no somos franceses, se nos ha ocurrido que valen mucho: porque hablan mucho, porque declaman mucho, porque dogmatizan mucho, pero con elegancia’; and, ‘Odio mi idioma y lo revuelco, a semejanza de mis compañeros, con

76 These chronicles cannot, however, simply be dismissed as not part of modernista literary practice. Recent reappraisals of the value of modernista chronicles may be found in González’s Journalism (pp. 83-100), and in Monsiváis’s introduction to A ustedes les consta (pp. 34-36).
This might be just sour grapes at not having managed to travel to Europe yet, but even after travelling in Europe, Nervo’s attitude is still happily flippant. Paris might be the home of his literary idols, but his view of Latin American idolisation of everything French is still scathing.

The ‘good things’ he has to point out about Europe are its technological advances and its marketing of itself. It should not come as a surprise that modernismo is inherently bound up with travel-chronicles when the novelty of new modes of travel, the increasing speed, and the fantasy of flight are all part of the fascination with modernity. Nervo wrote about cars, speculated about planes, and marvelled at the facilities of train stations. These developments in infrastructure which made mass tourism a viable activity for Europeans were one of the things that Nervo singled out for application in Mexico, along with all the marketing and opportunism that goes with them:

¿Por qué en México no se explotan nuestros admirables paisajes? Aquí hasta en la cumbre de la más alta montaña hay un suntuoso hotel. Y todo, merced a un hábil plan, rinde cuantiosas utilidades. ¿Que se quiere pasar el Rin? Medio franco. ¿Que se quiere entrar al castillo? Un franco. ¿Que se sube a la cámara obscura? Medio franco. ¿Que se vuelve a pasar el Rin para tomar el tren? Medio franco. Y luego las tarjetas postales ilustradas y el no menos próspero comercio de recuerdos del Rhein fall, marfiles, maderas, piedras de los Alpes, fotografías, abanicos..., cuanto hay en el mundo.

Los funiculares (que son aquí de lo más atrevido del orbe) dejan un dineral, un dineral los hoteles, todo un dineral. ¡Cuánto no daña entre nosotros un funicular a las cumbres del Popocatepetl, del Iztaccíhuatl, del Orizaba; cuánto una empresa de vaporcitos de recreo en Chapala y en Pátzcuaro, ahora que es tal la afluencia de excursionistas! (‘Las caídas del Rin: nuestros maravillosos paisajes mexicanos’, p. 233)

In retrospect, Nervo sounds like an extremely dangerous visionary. No doubt there is some irony in his recommendations - he attempts to be a ‘cultural pilgrim’ and a ‘traveller’ in his own travels rather than a tourist - but he is still a lot more positive in his view of the applications of tourism than Sierra.

The European experience also helps Nervo reevaluate the question of exoticism. If earlier texts by Altamirano and Gutiérrez Nájera had struggled to create an image of Mexico that was at once civilised and exotic, the equal of France, with a little more besides in terms of nature and climate, Nervo, who has experienced Europe for himself, has the freedom to state: ‘Los mexicanos, por nuestra parte, gozamos del privilegio de un alto exotismo. En general, se nos toma por todo menos por latinoamericanos’ (p. 224); and again ‘Chez nous es un país fantástico que todo latinoamericano lleva en el bolsillo para uso inmediato’ (p. 286). Europe turns out to be less civilised than it might seem from a distance, and the exoticism of Latin America the fantastic result of cultural ignorance. Nervo makes fun of transatlantic cultural misconceptions, revelling in his newfound role as the interesting stranger with a carte blanche for uncivilised behaviour. It is with this ribald challenge to the Old World that Latin American culture enters the twentieth century.
The Tradition

This, then, is the tradition of Mexican travel-chronicling. It is a tradition which is deliberately created as a tradition, fostered by the great patriots of the nineteenth century. It is sustained by the enduring influence of romanticism and realism, and by the consistency of its use of intertextuality. Starting with the friends Manuel Payno and Guillermo Prieto who created a travel-chronicling network through their references to each other's work, each successive travel-chronicler refers back to an updated list of his Mexican literary antecedents, as well as drawing from the stock of travel-writing on Mexico by foreigners, and from an eclectic selection of examples of world travel-writing. These reference points create a map of 'commonplaces' - Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico City -; of monuments, historical figures, stock activities; in short, a 'guide-book' which may be plagiarised or subtly reworked by each author in turn. At its height the tradition allows for the intensely literary travels of Gutiérrez Nájera; travels which are simultaneously a first attempt at tourism: he goes to literary places ('commonplaces'), with literature in hand and head, only equipped to see what he has been prepared to see, and to appreciate it in an aesthetic rather than a political manner. The intertextual basis for the tradition only starts to waver with the European travel-chronicles of Justo Sierra and Amado Nervo.78

The value of the travel-chronicle, at whatever stage we choose to view it, is that it offers the possibility of negotiating identity through events rather than through a theoretical discussion of abstract terms. Authors recount anecdotes, give examples or illustrative descriptions, initiate symbolic systems. There is obviously the possibility to go on to analyse the material presented or to interrogate the terms of discourse, but more often than not this theorisation is left latent. In the nineteenth century this is so because the aim is to exert influence over as wide an audience as possible in order to make the texts perform the creation of a national consciousness. In the twentieth century it is left latent because the theoretical discussion of the question of identity now pertains to the specialised discourses of the social sciences.

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78 Other travel-chroniclers who have not been mentioned in this chapter for reasons of space but whose works are listed in the bibliography are: Alfredo Chavero, Luis Gonzaga Urbina, Vicente Riva Palacio, José Juan Tablada and Francisco Zarco; Manuel Mier y Terán and Luis Berlandier (in Mauricio Molina’s anthology, *Crónica de Tejas*), and all those listed in the anthologies of travel-writing edited by Teixidor, Carballo and Tavera Alfaro. The recent publication of María Teresa León de Martínez’s *Cartas* is also of interest.
CHAPTER 2

Anthropology and Tourism in the Twentieth-Century

Whereas it is now generally acknowledged that travel-chronicling in nineteenth-century Mexico was a common practice which had a specific role to play in the generation of a national culture, it is also generally assumed that the travel-chronicle fell into disuse in the twentieth century. The reasons most often given are the demise of costumbrismo, followed by the sea-change in narrative heralded by Rulfo, Fuentes and others which entailed a crisis in Realist representation and the Romantic sense of self; or simply that technical developments over the course of the century (plane-travel and mass media) have rendered literary accounts of travel obsolete. However, the stream of travel-chronicles produced in the twentieth century has continued unabated.

It is possible to pick out four big names in twentieth-century travel-chronicling (José Vasconcelos, Salvador Novo, Fernando Benítez and Jorge Ibargüengoitia) and to relate their work to the general currents of travel-writing from which they stemmed or which they influenced (travel narratives of the Revolution, the high cultural tourism of groups such as the Contemporáneos, committed documentary travel-writing, and the anti-travel-chronicle respectively). Yet beyond these apparent differences in inspiration, all these travel-chronicles acknowledge the 'master narrative' of the modern era: anthropology.2

A practical use of anthropology is to employ it as a tool in the continued search for national identity, in a discourse of mestizaje and mexicanización, or in one of indigenismo which promotes the preservation of ethnic individuality within national identity. The inescapability of the discourse of anthropology in discussions of national identity is, however, not always accepted by the writers in question. Many go out of their way to turn the science of anthropology into a farce of itself. Running parallel to the topic of

1 The anthropological study of customs made an attempt to replace costumbrismo. Nevertheless, costumbrista description recurs in later epochs in more discreet doses, more carefully blended into an overarching narrative: it asserts its literariness.
2 Roberto González Echevarría outlines a series of ‘master narratives’ for Latin American narrative in his Myth and Archive. For the Colonial period he cites the legal document, the chronicle; for the nineteenth century, the text of the naturalist travel-writer (this is borne out in my analysis of the most important texts influencing the production of nineteenth-century Mexican travel-chronicles in the previous chapter); and for the twentieth century, the anthropological study and its ability to alternately digest and generate the ‘myths of cultural beginnings, and authority itself’ (p. 143). This, according to González Echevarría is the only way to evaluate the importance of non-fiction narratives in Latin American literature, and this obviously includes the production of travel-chronicles - all of his master narratives are strongly linked to travel and the writing of chronicles.
anthropology in these texts, one frequently finds a critique of tourism which threatens to undermine the discourse of anthropology by fusing and confusing the two practices, rendering everything a question of spectacle and superficiality.

Anthropology and mass tourism technically stand at opposite ends of the spectrum of travel practices in the twentieth century; however, their distance is blurred by their similarities. Both are practices which, although they have antecedents at least as far back as the Roman era (tourism⁴), and the Conquest (anthropology⁵), were developed in the last third of the nineteenth century as more subtle tools of imperialism than outright invasions; they both boomed in the first half of the twentieth century (anthropology in the 20s, 30s and 40s; mass tourism from the end of the Second World War), and they have both come into crisis since the 60s and 70s with the decolonisation of the ‘Third World’.⁵ In their travels, the practitioners of anthropology and tourism all ostensibly seek ‘authentic’ experience, privileging the sense of sight in the reception of such experience (the development of photography in the nineteenth century accompanies the establishment of anthropology as a science and tourism as a leisure industry for the masses); and both anthropologists and tourists have a knack of destroying the object of their attentions, rendering it unauthentic by their very presence.

One difference between the two practices is a question of timing: anthropologists tend to precede tourists in their access to particular sites of experience - in fact they often act inadvertently as the scouts for the tourist industry, opening up the possibility of visiting ‘typical Indian villages’, and preparing national anthropology museums for the dazed perusal of the tourist. The other important difference is one of response to the experience: the anthropologist seeks to understand and interpret societies, and the information gleaned either contributes to the improvement of living conditions in such societies, or helps destroy them more effectively (through contact with ‘civilisation’). The tourist views society as spectacle, willingly suspending all critical faculties. Nevertheless, bad anthropology that fails to interact with the object of its attentions can easily end up being a kind of ‘ethnic’ tourism.

Anthropology is a form of travel while the fieldwork is being done. After that it becomes a textual practice, in its description of findings and its frequent narration of journeys to substantiate the authenticity of those findings. Tourism also has a textual side to it: the production of guidebooks. Early guidebooks tended to be personal accounts such as Calderón de la Barca’s *Life in Mexico*; the modern guide is a compendium designed to be as complete as possible for a particular type of tourist (budget, executive, eco-, adventure, etc.). In the twentieth century, two more specifically textual practices have developed from the specialisation of disciplines at the end of the nineteenth-century to compete with the

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⁴ Williams, *Keywords*, pp. 38-40.
⁵ Anthropology has questioned its imperial raison d’être and recognised the right of the subaltern to counter its theories; tourism has become somewhat ‘thoughtful’ about its own behaviour, and increasingly package tourism has diversified into ecotourism, cultural tourism, revolutionary tourism etc.
anthropological account and the guidebook: literary travel-writing and journalistic travel-writing. Whereas an early nineteenth-century account could have been at once proto-anthropology, guidebook, and informative personal narrative, once the first two subjects are separated off, a personal narrative is left containing information of either trivial or news-worthy proportions. With the development of journalism on a massive scale in the latter years of the nineteenth-century, this text splits again, taking matters of news-value to the press, and more personal matters are forced to become 'literature' to have a raison d'être. Despite this definition of different fields the resultant texts in the context of Mexican travel-chronicling are still a mixture of literature and journalism, anthropology and tourism. This chapter explores in more detail the measures of these ingredients in the work of some of the most prominent travel-chroniclers of the twentieth-century.6

Foreign Influences

As in the nineteenth century, the foreign travel-writers who have exerted their influence in Mexico have been mainly French, British or North American. The groups into which these writers fall are roughly: professional anthropologists (mainly French or North American, and mainly interested in the least 'civilised' social groups in Mexico); spectators of, and participants in, the Mexican Revolution (mainly North Americans and mainly writing for journalistic purposes); Surrealists (mainly French and mainly enthusiastic about Mexico's potential for indigenous Surrealism); novelists as expats, on holiday or on a special mission (mainly British and mainly disenchanted with Mexico); and members of the Beat Generation and affiliated movements (mainly North American and mainly interested in Mexico's offer of a safe haven for acts considered criminal offences in the United States - either those already committed, or those planned for realisation in Mexico).

Anthropological enquiry into Mexico's most 'primitive' indigenous communities officially started with the work of the Norwegian Carl Lumholtz in the company of the Tarahumara and Huichol Indians. His book, Unknown Mexico, was published in two volumes in 1902. Archaeologists had previously studied the past glory of the 'civilisations' of the Mayans and the Mexicas - anthropologists tended to direct their attentions to the least 'civilised' groups in the North of Mexico, although eventually attention was even paid to real live Mayans living in squalor in the shadow of their past civilisation. The investigations of Lumholtz and other academic anthropologists were encouraged by Porfirio Díaz who, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, paid lip-service to anthropological investigation in order to keep up with the scientific endeavours of Mexico's capitalist competitors, and also to see how the 'problem' of the indigenous communities could be removed to further Mexico's modernisation. Other important foreign anthropologists who are remembered in Mexico are Frans Blom, Oliver La Farge, Gutiérre Tibón and Oscar Lewis. Their lasting commitment to life in Mexico accounts for the extent of their impact (positive or negative) among Mexican writers. In fact, the more integrated a foreign anthropologist becomes into Mexican life, the more his work tends to become sociological rather than anthropological: Lewis, for example, moved from the anthropology of primitive ethnic groups to the anthropology/sociology of the urban poor.

Although Lumholtz's work has been of lasting inspiration to Mexicans and foreigners alike, triggering multiple journeys to visit the Tarahumaras (Artaud, Tibón, Benítez, Carlos Montemayor etc.), the anthropological works with most impact in Mexico have been those which deploy the most literary imagination, and the most salacious content: Artaud and Tibón's experiences of taking peyote with the Tarahumara, R. Gordon Wasson's research into magic mushrooms and chocolate in the sierras of Oaxaca, Carlos Castaneda's attempts to become a brujo in Sonora. (Malinowski's and Boas's fieldwork in Mexico had

7 There were a great many Spaniards who came to Mexico in the wake of the Spanish Civil War, a number of whom, such as José Moreno Villa and Luis Cernuda, wrote of their experiences in the country. However, this travel-writing is not frequently commented on in the works of Mexican travel-chroniclers.

Much of the information in this section has been culled from Iturriaga de la Fuentes's Anecdotario de viajeros extranjeros.
repercussions only with Mexico's professional anthropologists). Anthropology in Mexico has become almost synonymous with drug-culture. The Surrealists' interest in other realities was not ignorant of those other realities induced by psychedelic drugs, although dissidents from Breton's school of surrealism also had more serious anthropological interests. The Beat Generation came for the Acapulco Gold, bringing the LSD with them; Mexico's equivalent of the Beat Generation - *La Onda* - went on to take magic mushrooms with María Sabina and peyote in the deserts of San Luis Potosí.

But it is not, of course, only the specific works of named individuals that have made anthropology into a 'master story', but rather the pervasiveness of its discourse in other fields such as literature. The writer Artaud's 'anthropological' work has already been mentioned; conversely the anthropologist Oscar Lewis's work teeters on the brink of literature. André Breton also visited indigenous communities in Mexico, although his approach was not to try to understand but to spectate (as a Surrealist, yet also as a tourist). D.H. Lawrence acknowledged the importance of anthropological discourse in his scorn for anthropologists' attempts to make sense of Mexico. His conclusion was a vision of racial fatalism, where no *mestizaje* would be possible. Traven's novels take a more sociological than anthropological approach, indicative of his greater penetration into the country.

Lured by the politics of the Revolution, the excitement of armed struggle and/or the promotion of the country's folklore and handicrafts, the first wave of literary tourists reached Mexico in the 1920s. Where, for the anthropologists, Mexico was a land of illusion, full to the brim of ethnic groups in need of preservation (at least in text), for the foreign writers Mexico seems to have largely produced a feeling of disillusionment, or at least of radical ambivalence. Their texts do not seek to fully describe or explain the country and its cultures, but to capture a deliberately fragmentary perspective, highly coloured by the author's personality and experience. Graham Greene dismissed the ruins at Palenque for being uninteresting simply because he had dysentery, and claimed that he hated all Mexicans because they were over-demonstrative. William Burroughs was equally as racist for similarly petty reasons. D.H. Lawrence acknowledged that *Mornings in Mexico* was made up of the limited number of mornings he spent sitting at a desk in a courtyard in a small town in Mexico, although he still extrapolated wildly to encompass the whole country in his fatalistic vision. A few authors made a more conscientious attempt at understanding Mexico: along with Traven, there is John Reed's comprehensive documentary of the Revolution (*Insurgent Mexico* (1914)) and Malcolm Lowry's vision of Mexico as simultaneously a paradise and an inferno in *Under the Volcano* (1947).

Mexican interest in the views of foreigners is almost overwhelming in the twentieth century. It started slowly with the backlog of translations of nineteenth-century works: Calderón de la Barca was published in translation in 1920; Federico de Waldeck's *Voyage pittoresque...* in 1930; and John Lloyd Stephens's *Incidents of travel in Yucatan* in 1937.

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Brantz Mayer’s *Mexico: As It Was and As It Is* appeared in 1953 in the Fondo de Cultura Económica’s ‘Biblioteca Americana, Serie de Viajeros’. Translations were perhaps slow in coming because readers were still expected to be able to digest works in French or English at the beginning of the twentieth century, but from the 1970s onwards the printing and reprinting of foreign travel-writing has become a major enterprise for Mexican publishers. To date, practically every text of this nature has been and/or still is published in Mexico in Spanish translation: Humboldt and Calderón de la Barca; Morand, Traven and Lawrence; and today Tom Miller, Alma Guillermoprieto and Italo Calvino. From the obscure to the massively popular, and from the overly enthusiastic to the libellously negative, a sizeable percentage of the two thousand six hundred authors listed in Iturriaga de la Fuente’s extensive bibliography of foreign travel-writing on Mexico has been published in the country.

In recent years, the publishers at the forefront of this enterprise have tended to be the exponents of official Mexican culture: specific federal government departments, state governments, and cultural organs of the government. Certainly there is a logic in this in that only the government-subsidised publishing houses can afford to publish a back-dated catalogue which is unlikely to break even in terms of its sales. Yet all authors are included in this project, regardless of their attitude to Mexico and its government at the time of writing. The two volume series *Viajes en México* was first published in 1964 by the Secretaría de Obras Públicas with a view to demonstrating the changes they had wrought in Mexico’s road network since the mid-nineteenth century. Examples of state governments who have published anthologies of foreign travel-writing are Veracruz: *Cien viajeros en Veracruz: crónicas y relatos*, edited by Martha Poblett Miranda, 11 vols (1992) and Tabasco: *Viajeros en Tabasco: textos*, edited by Ciprián Aurelio Cabrera Bernat (1987). There are also anthologies on Guadalajara, Colima and Saltillo.

In an enterprise which, during the 1970s and 80s, involved the Secretaría de Educación Pública, the Fondo de Cultura Económica and now the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, the series ‘SepSetenas’ and ‘Sep/80’ included a number of travel-chronicles and anthologies in their catalogue including a reedition of the Secretaría de Obras Públicas’s *Viajes en México* anthology, an anthology of foreign travel-writing on Mexico by Héctor Sánchez, a study of Anglo-Saxon women travellers in Mexico by Alicia Diadiuk, plus travel accounts by writers such as Ernest de Vigneaux. The focus of both series was generally more sociological and anthropological than it was literary.

The Fondo de Cultura Económica has published more literary accounts in its ‘Colección Popular’ series with print runs between two and twenty thousand copies, including texts by Artaud, Castaneda, José Moreno Villa and Emilio Cecchi; and more historical works in the

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10 To the best of my knowledge, this is the first initiative to publish a ‘series’ of foreign travel-writing.
11 *Anecdotario de viajeros extranjeros*, I, 251-314; IV, 327-59.
first of its three ‘Cien de México’ series, published in conjunction with the SEP.\textsuperscript{13}

In the 1990s the CNCA has taken over the combined role of the SEP and the FCE. It is now responsible for the third series of ‘Lecturas Mexicanas’; however, this series is dedicated specifically to Mexican literature, and a separate series now accounts for translations of foreign travel-writing of various different types: ‘Mirada Viajera’. Thus far they have published, in luxurious annotated editions, texts by Charnay, Waldeck, Flandrau, Gage, Greene, Lawrence, Traven and Waugh.\textsuperscript{14}

Recently, too, the literary journals \textit{Vuelta} and \textit{Nexos}, the magazine \textit{Proceso} and the cultural supplement \textit{La Jornada Semanal} have made a significant effort to cover the writings and biographies of foreigners in Mexico, including both the big names and the more easily forgotten exponents: Lowry, Greene, Huxley, Lawrence, Flandrau, Calvino, Breton, Burroughs, Bierce, Morand, Juan Larrea, Pedro Salinas, and Benjamin Péret. They even cover the writings of authors who have a particularly tenuous link with the country such as Georges Bataille and Bertold Brecht, although they have also been strangely silent about the Mexican journeys of writers such as Jack Kerouac and Paul Theroux.\textsuperscript{15}

In the early twentieth century the foreign writers on Mexico with most impact on Mexican travel-chronicling were Lawrence, Morand, Marc Chadourme, Huxley, Stuart Chase, and Ramón del Valle-Inclán. In general, their opinions met with some hostility in Mexico. A more positive source of inspiration may be found in travel-writing which does not concern Mexico directly: the works of Darwin, Eça de Queiroz, Blasco Ibáñez, Verne, Duhamel, and Ortega y Gasset, plus a number of older texts by Romantic writers. In a succinct overview of the importance of foreign travel-writers in Mexico from the time of the Conquest to the 1990s, Hermann Bellinghausen has noted,

\begin{quote}
En general, los extranjeros no han entendido a México, pero lo han mirado con una atención que se agradece: Madame Calderón de la Barca, D.H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, Malcolm Lowry, Max Frish (sic), Humboldt, Lumholtz, Artaud, Kerouac, Huxley, Calvino. Pero sólo aquellos suficientemente locos como para parecer mexicanos dieron en el clavo: Bernal Díaz, John Reed, y algún otro (como los cineastas Eisenstein y Buñuel). Los demás cronistas que importan, sin excepción, son mexicanos.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{13} Texts by Paula Kolonitz, Charles Étienne Brasseur and Henry George Ward. The series also includes a study of Traven by Michael L. Baumann, and an abridged version of Drewey Wayne Gunn’s overview of travel-writing on Mexico by British and North American visitors.

\textsuperscript{14} This last text, \textit{Robbery Under Law}, only ever had one brief but notorious edition in English. Its reedition was prohibited by Waugh himself.


\textsuperscript{16} ‘Testigos del caso’, 17. (Traven and Gutierrez Tibón might be added to the list of those crazy enough to become Mexican.) In a similar line-up Carlos Fuentes has deemed Artaud to be the writer who comes closest to understanding Mexico (prologue to Fernando Benítez’s \textit{Los indios de México: antología}, edited by Héctor Manjarrez (Era, 1989), pp. 13-14).
José Vasconcelos: Andanzas y pasiones

The statesman and 'philosopher' José Vasconcelos (1882-1959) recorded his memoirs in four volumes which were first published in the years 1935 to 1939 by Editorial Botas (Ulises criollo (1935); La tormenta (1936); El desastre (1938) and El proconsulado (1939)). The scope of these 'memoirs' is undoubtedly greater than that of the average travel-chronicle, covering Vasconcelos's life in general from his early childhood to his exile in France and Spain during the Maximato (1928-1934) and Cárdenas's regime (1934-1940), yet it is also greater than that of the purely historical value of the autobiography of a famous statesman. Many critics of these texts have considered them from a literary point of view, as novels. Vasconcelos, himself, wrote his memoirs 'as novels': 'Una novela, y ¿cuál mejor que la de las propias andanzas y pasiones?... Comencé a borronear el Ulises criollo' (El proconsulado, p. 1141). Furthermore, although the style, political views and subject matter inevitably vary in the memoirs, the narration of travel remains a constant: Vasconcelos made claims to have spent half his life 'de viaje', starting with the 'leitmotif familiar' of his childhood migrations - Ulises criollo is a telling title for the first book of memoirs. These memoirs constitute travel-chronicles of epic proportions.

The narration of travel is also a leitmotif in Vasconcelos's more philosophical works: La raza cósmica (1925), purported to be an essay on mestizaje and after only a brief introduction switched to the narration of 'notas de viaje' of his trip to Argentina and Brazil. Many other texts also include an element of travel narrative: Divagaciones literarias (1919), Indología (1927), Pesimismo alegre (1931), Sonata mágica (1933) and Qué es la revolución (1937). Towards the end of his life Vasconcelos published one book which was unashamedly a collection of travel impressions: Temas contemporáneos (1955).

At the date of their publication and for quite a while afterwards Vasconcelos's memoirs were the most read books in the Mexican Republic. As Antonio Castro Leal noted in 1940:

No hay actualmente escritor mexicano más leído, dentro y fuera de nuestro país, que José Vasconcelos. Después de los éxitos de Francisco Bulnes - importantes para las condiciones de su tiempo - ningún libro ha alcanzado el tiro de Ulises criollo, ni siquiera de La tormenta. Su autor es tan conocido como lo fue en su época don Ignacio Ramírez y tan leído por todos como lo fue Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera. Es sin duda el único autor mexicano vivo que logra mantener durante quinientas páginas la atención de amigos y enemigos, del hombre culto y del 'hombre de la calle', del escritor y del político, del estudiante y del mercader, del provinciano y del habitante de la capital. Los suyos son los únicos libros de quinientas páginas que han leído y releído muchos.

This is as popular as travel-writing gets... Castro Leal went on to suggest that the reason for this success was not the accessible style of the memoirs, nor the notoriety or theories of

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17 Now published as Memorias, 2 vols (FCE, 1993), I (3rd repr.): Ulises criollo & La tormenta; II (2nd repr.): El desastre & El proconsulado. All further quotations from the memoirs are from these editions.
their outspoken author, but their display of emotion. This emotional approach accounts for
the narration of Vasconcelos's turbulent love-life, and also for his appeal to nationalist
sentiment: his Romantic affiliations are clear.

Yet Vasconcelos's memoirs and other pieces of travel-writing signify a turning point in the
history of the travel-chronicle. To a large extent his work still reads as part of the
nineteenth-century tradition (back-tracking on the advances of the modernistas to the style
and purpose of Payno, Prieto and Altamirano), yet it also responds to the challenge of the
Mexican Revolution both in terms of its formal composition, and in terms of its discourse
of mestizaje and myth in which a veiled acknowledgment of the importance of
anthropology is discernible.

The Tradition
The sheer volume of Vasconcelos's memoirs and the prominence of his desire to narrate his
travels (as a politician and as a cultured tourist, or writer at leisure), which spills over even
into his philosophical works, is indicative of his assumption of the role of an all-round
statesman (politician, philosopher, writer, and personable 'character'), who makes a
package of the narration of his itinerant life and works as part of his contribution to the
formation of a nation: it is his duty to narrate his travels in order to educate the 'pueblo'.

The narration of travel also attests to his writerly concerns, particularly in his descriptions
of landscape. Vasconcelos's style is generally forthright and unh hampered by literary
preoccupations beyond those of clear communication, although he does betray some
'ironic' concern for the style of the travel-chronicle in his first attempt at narrating a
journey:

Lápiz en mano, intenté fijar en mi cuaderno siquiera algunas de las impresiones
tumultuosas del día. No me guiaba la vanidad, sino el deseo de guardar de algún modo la
emoción venturosa del viaje. Pero me estorbaban los adjetivos. En vez de apuntar las
cosas, me empeñaba en calificármelas. Cada montaña tenía que ser alta; las ciudades me
merecían el mismo epíteto de bonitas y cada paisaje resultaba encantador. Con plena
conciencia de que traicionaba mi sentir, escribía y acusaba al lenguaje de llevarnos por sus
caminos trillados, pese a la virginidad de la percepción. [...] Recordaba las narraciones
amenas de un libro de viajes alrededor del mundo, que en Piedras Negras leyera, y me
sentía apocado. (Ulises criollo, p. 67)20

However, despite this false modesty, in his narration of specific travel episodes he excels
in the sketching of brief portraits of people and places (towns and countryside), and in the
description of his personal emotional response to the stimuli of travel itself. The influence
of Humboldt, Chateaubriand and Antonio García Cubas - three authors whom Vasconcelos
admired greatly - is clearly perceptible in his descriptions of nature.21 In Ulises criollo he
devotes a number of pages to an intense description of his first railway journey from

20 The book referred to is probably Jules Verne's Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours (1873).
21 Although Vasconcelos was not very disciplined with his intertextual references, the frequency of his use
of intertextuality also links him to the nineteenth-century tradition: his travels are very bookish.
More contemporary writers of whose opinions he was generally critical are Azorín, Blasco Ibáñez, Valle-
Inclán and Chadourme, especially where they concern Mexico. By the time of El proconsulado, D.H.
Lawrence's fatalistic opinions met with a more positive response (p. 1074).
Mexico City to Veracruz (pp. 84-88). His entire attention during the journey is dedicated to what he can see from the train window - not to the state of the train itself, nor the company with whom he is travelling. His description is hyperbolic (and not just a bit repetitious), accentuating the impossibility of capturing in language the beauty of the landscape and the national pride that Mexican civil-engineering inspires in him. Life in Mexico, as seen *en route* (the human landscape), is also of interest to him: he thus balances *paisajismo* and *costumbrismo* very much in the manner of the nineteenth-century travel-chronicles. Vasconcelos is a long-winded nationalist, traditionalist and pedagogue in the best tradition of Payno and Altamirano, illustrating the attributes and potential of Mexican nationality in his descriptions of the country, and in comparisons with other countries. Octavio Paz has called him 'el gran creador o recreador de la naturaleza y los hombres de América'.

Nevertheless, despite all these signs that Vasconcelos’s memoirs constitute a continuation of the nineteenth-century travel-chronicling tradition, he, personally, would have refuted any suggestion of a link. Vasconcelos hated Ignacio Ramírez and Altamirano so much that he refused to be buried in the same graveyard as them. His criticisms of Justo Sierra’s contribution to education in the provinces are clear in *El desastre* (p. 177) - Sierra is found to be ‘extranjerizante’. Vasconcelos was vehemently anti-traditional, casting himself in the role of prophet and martyr sent to redeem Mexico by starting again, *ab initio*.

The Revolution
If the overall design of Vasconcelos’s memoirs links him strongly to the nineteenth-century tradition in spite of his protestations, he was undoubtedly also affected in the composition of at least parts of his memoirs by the narrative developments of the novels of the Revolution. Many of these ‘novels’ bear a close resemblance to the travel-chronicle: they narrate barely fictionalised episodes of the Revolution and they structure this around the travels of the revolutionaries, on foot, on horseback, or on trains. The two best examples of this are Mariano Azuela’s *Los de abajo* (1916, but not made famous until 1924 by Francisco Monterde) and Martín Luis Guzmán’s *El águila y la serpiente* (1928). Guzmán’s first reaction to the Revolution was exile in the United States: textually this resulted in *A orillas del Hudson* (1920), a series of philosophical reflections and political commentaries, rather than the travel-chronicle that one might expect. His novel *El águila y la serpiente*, however, is more clearly related to the travel-chronicle in its homodiegetic narratorial position and in its specific focus on travel: chapter titles are ‘Camino de Sonora’, ‘Andanzas de un rebelde’, and ‘Viajes revolucionarios’. Schooled in the *costumbrista* tradition, Guzmán set out to depict ‘cuadros’ of the protagonists of the Revolution, in particular the leaders. To do this he realised that he needed what Domínguez Michael has

22 The first signs of *modernismo* in his style appear in his ‘snapshots hondureños’ at the end of *El proconsulado* (pp. 1047-53).
23 Quoted in Domínguez Michael’s ‘Diccionario de Octavio Paz’, *Vuelta*, 259 (June 1998), 68.
24 See Domínguez Michael’s *Tiros en el concierto: literatura mexicana del siglo V* (Era, 1997), p. 56.
25 In fact these novels were possibly influenced by Álvaro Obregón’s early revolutionary travel-chronicle, *Ocho mil kilómetros en campaña: relación de las acciones de armas, efectuadas en más de veinte estados de la república durante un periodo de cuatro años* (1917).
termed ‘una suerte de palco móvil’ from which to observe the movements of his characters: ‘El águila y la serpiente es una vertiginosa narración donde la revolución es una comedia humana en movimiento que se va adueñando de inmensos espacios donde geografía y personalidad configuran una nueva época’.26

This merger of geography and personality does not imply Romantic-style description of natural landscapes coloured by personal feeling, but rather that the protagonists of the Revolution come to stand in for landscape. The description of a journey in *El águila y la serpiente* consists of a social diary of who was on the train and what state the train was in, rather than any observations of the natural dimensions of the route. Where landscape is described, it very occasionally has a symbolic function (El Popocatépetl, Iztaccíhuatl, and el Ajusco all cast shadows of power), but by and large it is simply strategic: the topographical features of the terrain which the leader and his men must negotiate to get from one position to another. Azuela's text makes more use of symbolism and metaphor in its depiction of landscape, but again these ‘cuadros y escenas de la Revolución actual’27 tend to portray the landscape of humanity rather than that of nature.

No doubt as a consequence of the success of these novels, in the 1930s, 40s and 50s a huge number of ‘novels of the Revolution’ of varying nature and quality were published. Of particular relevance to the history of the travel-chronicle are the texts written by a number of the military commanders and statesmen who played an active role in the Revolution and who decided to pen their memoirs in the format of novels, autobiographies and/or travel-chronicles in the years that followed. Travel-chronicles were written, for example, by Francisco L. Urquizo (*México-Tlaxcalantongo: Mayo de 1920* (1943), and later Ramón Beteta (*Camino a Tlaxcalantongo* (1961)). These texts, like Guzmán’s, focus more on the human landscape than the natural. They are generally considered solid, although not brilliant, journalistic narratives of the Revolution. Their main focus is the balance of power rather than the experience of the man in the street. Urquizo, in particular, was a military strategist who had little time for the evocation of atmospheres and the description of landscapes. None of these revolutionary travel-chronicles has any time for intertextual reference to the ‘tradition’ of travel-chronicles in Mexico: the contingencies of Revolution, it is felt, make overt literary consciousness obsolete.28

All four volumes of Vasconcelos’s autobiography were written in the 1930s, well after the events described in them. Nevertheless, Vasconcelos alters styles as he writes to better convey the epoch. The first volume describing his childhood during the Porfiriato is more clearly related to the nineteenth-century tradition. In his narration of his role in the Revolution in *La Tormenta*, he shifts gear to offer a text which is similar in impetus to these narratives of the Revolution: the pace quickens; travel data becomes more strategic; description is more of a social than natural order, or gives way entirely to narrative action. Even his enduring concern with good food and comfortable beds is part of his

26 Antología de la narrativa mexicana, 1, 44.
28 Guzmán also published some fully-fledged travel-chronicles later in his career (*Crónicas de mi destierro* (1964), and other individual articles).
revolutionary survival strategy! Only when exiled from the fray does he turn his attention to leisure pursuits, aided and abetted by the Reinach travel guide.

The concern to narrate travel in Mexico in detail, with an eye for emotive evocation, social commentary and topics of touristic interest and national pride (colonial cities) returns in El desastre and El Proconsulado where he relates his experiences as Secretary for Education and ill-fated presidential candidate. Towards the end of this last volume Vasconcelos, exiled once again in Europe, decides to make the best of it and give in to his penchant for fine art by touring Italy, France and Spain with his Guide Bleu proudly in hand. (He fully endorsed cultural tourism, just as long as it was not taking place in Mexico...)

Following on directly from the accounts of the Revolution by statesmen such as Vasconcelos are the accounts of the travels of statesmen in the post-Revolutionary period by contracted travelling companions; texts which read rather like the chronicles of royal tours of previous centuries. This is where the rot sets in in terms of the literary quality of the travel-chronicle: these texts tend to be sycophantic and trivial. A classic example is Alfonso Taracena’s Viajando con Vasconcelos (Botas, 1938) where the great man is described repeatedly as so approachable, so human, yet so great that he can drop his trousers in front of the humble Taracena ‘con naturalidad, platicando siempre’ (p. 26 and p. 32). Other examples are Pedro J. Almada, 99 días en jira con el Presidente Cárdenas (1943); Agustín Yáñez, Proyección Universal de México: crónica del viaje realizado por el Presidente de México Lic. Adolfo López Mateos a India, Japón, Indonesia y Filipinas, el año 1962 (1963); and Javier López Moreno, Diálogo con el sur del mundo (1975), on tour with Luis Echeverría. The value of these texts seems to be as a personal memento for the statesman in question rather than as news or literature.

30 This may be countered by Vito Alessio Robles’s Mis andanzas con nuestro Ulises - published in the same year and by the same publisher as Taracena’s account - which airs his differences with Vasconcelos.  
31 The journalist Elvira Vargas covered the same tour as Almada in the company of Cárdenas in a much more stimulating manner in her Por las rutas del Sureste ([1937?]).  
32 Other ‘official’ travel-chronicles of dubious literary quality were commissioned by various Mexican institutions with a view to illustrating their work. The best examples are Pablo C. de Gante’s La ruta de Occidente (Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Publicidad, 1939), promoting the newly inaugurated road from Mexico City to Morelia; and M. Peyrot G.’s Un viaje a Baja California, with the Mexican Navy, on a mission to establish the wealth and potential of the area (Litorales, 1968).

There are also accounts of journeys to international events written by Mexico’s selected representatives: Salvador Novo’s international travel-chronicles fall under this rubric, as do Fernando Benítez’s and some of Jorge Ibarriengoitia’s (see later sections in this chapter). These narratives tend to be of journeys to countries such as the USSR and the People’s Republic of China on account of their political insularity with respect to the non-Communist world and hence of the news-worthiness of such trips in Mexico. Examples of journeys to the USSR are: José Revueltas’s trip as a representative of the Partido Mexicano Comunista at the VII International Communist Congress (1935) and the VI International Communist Youth Congress, published as ‘Notas de un viaje a la URSS’ in Merida’s Diario del Sureste in 1938; José Mancisidor’s ‘Ciento veinte días’ (1937) covering his trip as part of a committee sent to celebrate the International Day of the Proletariat in 1936; Jesús Romero Flores’s account of the same event in Un mexicano en la Unión Soviética (1979); and René Avilés’s Las estrellas rojas (1967), an account of a visit sponsored by the Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Mexicano Ruso. These accounts are generally well-written. Others, mentioned later in this chapter, are of more dubious value.
However, Mauricio Magdaleno - one of Vasconcelos's supporters in his bid for presidency - wrote a number of independent, literary travel-chronicles, collected as *Tierra y viento* (1948, written 1936-1946): these offer a more balanced view of Mexico than Vasconcelos does, valuing colonial cities as well as Indian villages. Magdaleno travels in search of the essence of Mexico which he finds distilled in colonial cities such as Oaxaca - Vasconcelos's birthplace -, and in symbols such as the cactus and the taciturn Indian conditioned by his austere habitat. He also displays an ironic consciousness of Mexico as an incipient tourist destination. In his later collection of essays, *Agua bajo el puente* (1968, written in the 1950s and 60s), Magdaleno turns to a more intertextual kind of high cultural travel-chronicle, visiting the poet López Velarde's hometown and the setting for Azuela's *Los de abajo*. The intention is to provide a literary guide to the provinces - frequently to the sites of the Revolution - for an educated tourist.33

Memoirs of *Mestizaje*

The inclusion of the Indian as an integral part of Mexican national identity - seen above in Magdaleno’s work - is one of the most significant contributions of the popular uprising which was the Mexican Revolution, both in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. The ideology of the Revolution stimulated a Golden Age in Mexican national anthropology from the end of the Revolution onwards, with the foundation of the Dirección de Estudios Arqueológicos y Etnográficos in 1917 (later the Dirección de Antropología), of the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía in 1919 (later the Museo Nacional de Antropología), the Instituto Nacional Indigenista in 1948, and finally, the move of the Museo Nacional de Antropología to its prestigious setting in Chapultepec Park in 1964. Although informed originally by foreign anthropological interests and investigations, Mexican anthropology quickly moved to the forefront of the field.34 Vasconcelos was inevitably associated with these developments, and although he tried to play down his involvement with the discourse of anthropology, his writing is imbued with his ambivalent reactions to the new discipline.

In the long run, Vasconcelos’s theory of racial mixing owes more to nineteenth-century versions of national identity (social Darwinism) than to those of the post-Revolutionary period. *Mestizaje* for Vasconcelos meant ‘mexicanización’, privileging Hispanic genes over autochthonous American ones. The indigenous population needed to be absorbed into the mainstream of Hispanic-orientated Mexican society, leaving as little trace of their ethnic identities as possible. However, at the time of publication of his *La raza cósmica* in 1925 most people did not read *mestizaje* as anything more than a call for a healthy mixing of races, and the theory was endorsed by numerous left-wing groups. *Mestizaje* became the watch-word of post-Revolutionary developments in Mexican politics: Vasconcelos’s educational reforms were intended to bring the indigenous peoples of the country into the mainstream through literacy campaigns (in Spanish) and ‘social’ education. Vying for a

33 Magdaleno’s brother, Vicente, also wrote some literary travel-chronicles collected in his *Paisaje y celaje de México* (Stylo, 1952).

role in the implementation of these ‘misiones’ were anthropologists such as Manuel Gamio, director of the Dirección de Antropología. Accounts of the period consider Mexican anthropologists (whose aim was to provide reliable information for Mexico’s leaders on the indigenous groups in order to better involve them in national life) to have been strongly influenced by Vasconcelos’s theories and campaigns. Yet Vasconcelos was not unaffected by their work: his projects and those of the Dirección de Antropología were at least parallel and occasionally complementary, despite the antipathy between Vasconcelos and Gamio.35

At best the anthropologists’ groundwork paved the way for Vasconcelos’s policies.

However, Vasconcelos generally related the work of professional anthropologists and ethnologists to the North American ‘reservation’ system which counteracted his mestizaje theory by keeping ethnic groups separate from the mainstream. In fact what he was really fighting against was the reverse side of his own coin, indigenismo, which aimed to incorporate the indigenous people into national life, but without forcing them lose their ethnic identity. This more subtle project was that generally endorsed by the anthropologists. Vasconcelos thus continued to view anthropology in Mexico as an interfering foreign implantation, and dismissed it out of racial prejudice against the North Americans and as a political project in direct opposition to his own (Marentes, pp. 170-71).

In El proconsulado Vasconcelos is dismissive of the writing on Mexico of French anthropologist Marc Chadourne and of the writer Blasco Ibáñez’s sociological work, El militarismo mexicano (p. 1075). Nevertheless, Vasconcelos actually wrote for the French anthropological/sociological review, L’Humanité, and maintained friendships with North American sociologists when it suited him. Despite his quibbles with the Mexican anthropologists, his theory of race benefited from their research. Even if he refused their terms of discourse (referring to ‘estudios americanistas’ rather than anthropology, for example), and the tenets of their enterprise, in his travels around Mexico and Latin America he conducted a deliberately unscientific study of the Panamerican ‘race’. He described the different ‘razas’ and ‘gentes’ that he encountered, yet repeatedly rejected classification or detailed study, thus distancing himself from the anthropological enterprise. Already in La raza cósmica he describes himself as a tourist, content to just look at the ‘único espectáculo humano que compite con los esplendores de la Naturaleza’ and at the ‘tipos inclasificables’ passing in the street.36 In fact the travel-narrative of La raza cósmica, in its refusal to theorise about real people, manages to partially undermine the racial theory of mestizaje sketched out in the introduction.

Again, in his use of the discourse of ‘myth’, Vasconcelos managed to benefit from anthropology while keeping it at arm’s length. An enthusiastic reader of Frazer’s The Golden Bough, his manipulation of the myths of Mexican history (‘No hago historia; intento crear un mito’ (El desastre, p. 132)) and his creation of himself as a mythical figure

36 La raza cósmica: misión de la raza iberoamericana, Argentina y Brasil, Austral, 802, 16th edn (Espasa-Calpe Mexicana, 1992), pp. 97-98.
(a 'romántico místico' 37) attest to his awareness of the power of the discourse. 38 His refusal of the science of anthropology simply suggests that rather than analyse myths as an anthropologist, he took a more intuitive, imaginative approach to myth, thus creating other myths in the process.

Increasingly, in the idiosyncratic map Vasconcelos traced of Mexico in the latter volumes of his memoirs, his concept of a cosmic race devolved into outright hostility towards the indigenous population and exaggeration of the value of colonial Mexico and its culture. Ironically, at this juncture his attitudes become more those of the aesthetes of the Ateneo de la Juventud with whom he had parted ways at the beginning of the Revolution. 39

37 César M. Arconada classified him thus in his review of Indología in La Gaceta Literaria, 1 May 1927, p. 52; quoted in Perea's La rueda del tiempo, pp. 424-25.
38 His appreciation of Lawrence's The Plumed Serpent is dependent on his awareness of Lawrence's pertinent use of myth and mysticism, as well as his fatalism (El proconsulado, p. 1074).
39 The contradictions in Vasconcelos's racial theories are both diachronic (he changed his political colours radically after the failure of his presidential campaign in 1929), and synchronic (the seeds of his racism are apparent even in his early work). This is the basis of Marentes's dissertation.
Salvador Novo: *Poltrón mal turista*

The cultural formation and bureaucratic livelihood of Salvador Novo (1904-1974) were largely provided by Vasconcelos in his role as director of the Secretaría de Educación Pública in the early 1920s, and the legacy of state-run education projects which he left behind him. Under Vasconcelos the 'virile' literature of the Revolution was promoted, but so too was a less politically committed branch of literature, just as long as it respected the European literary models of which Vasconcelos was so fond. In the period running from the outbreak of the Revolution in 1909 through to the early 1930s a whole string of elite literary groups were formed and dissolved. Each was strongly influenced by Vasconcelos's support of the arts, and also by his promotion of travel as a vehicle for cultural exchange. The journeys made by members of these groups may be brought together under the heading of high-cultural tourism.

Vasconcelos was personally involved in the Ateneo de la Juventud in the period 1909-1913, along with Martín Luis Guzmán, Alfonso Reyes, Julio Torri, Mariano Silva y Aceves, Carlos Díaz Dufoo and the ex-modernista José Juan Tablada among others. The upheaval of the Revolution meant exile for many members of this group and as a result there is a substantial body of travel-writing associated with these writers. The texts tend to be accounts of travels outside of Mexico, often coloured by nostalgia for the lost fatherland. Much of it forms part of a larger project: the author's memoirs. The best examples of travel-writing by a member of the Ateneo are Reyes's *Visión de Anáhuac: 1519* (1915) and *Cartones de Madrid* (1917). In line with the particularly academic and philosophical aims of the group, these texts tend to focus on anything but the personal travels of the author. *Cartones de Madrid* includes brief impressions of places and people (especially famous cultural figures), plus some more philosophical passages, yet no orientating data about the author's personal circumstances bar a few lines in the introduction. *Visión de Anáhuac: 1519* is a reconstructed historical narrative of Cortés's journey, designed to reveal 'Mexico' to the Spaniards, from a Mexican point of view. That is to say, it is clearly a response to his experience of travel in exile, but not a direct narration of it. Both texts display Reyes's highbrow stylistic and thematic repertoire, plus his laconic, sober approach to his work. Although he feared that *Cartones de Madrid* would be felt to be nothing more than superficial impressions, his work is a far cry from the high-spirited frivolity of Nervo, or the ironic introspection of Gutiérrez Nájera.

*Visión de Anáhuac* is, in a way, a precursor, in date of composition and in historical epoch covered, of the next literary generation to appear in Mexico. The colonialistas were contemporaries of the Ateneístas, and shared many of their aesthetic ideals. Slightly younger and with less official backing, they generally did not get a chance to opt for exile during the Revolution, and instead chose to direct their attention to the literary reconstruction of the colonial period in novels and chronicles, rather than tackle the

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40 See Domínguez Michael's *Tiros en el concierto*, pp. 63-74.
41 Reyes also wrote a text concerning a road journey to San Francisco: *Berkeleyana, 1941* (published 1953).
instability of contemporary Mexico head-on. While this archaising impulse was of brief
duration for most authors (1917-1926), the interest in the Colonial period continued in their
studies of the history of art (Manuel Toussaint) or of literature (Francisco Monterde and
Ermilo Abreu Gómez). Nevertheless, a writer such as Artemio de Valle-Arizpe made it into
a lifetime's work.

By the time of the heyday of this new generation, Vasconcelos was in a position to promote
their work. At the end of the Revolution in 1920 Vasconcelos was successively named
director of the National University and then head of the newly created Secretaría de
Educación Pública - a post which he held until 1924. During this time - and even after his
departure from office - Vasconcelos exercised a massive influence over the creation of a
revolutionary culture for the new Mexico. With respect to the writing of travel-chronicles,
he not only took many a budding young artist or writer (such as Diego Rivera, Jaime
Torres Bodet and Carlos Pellicer) on his official travels around the Mexican Republic and
abroad, but also sent others abroad to conduct archival research on Mexico's 'ancient
history', or to represent Mexico at international cultural events.

The most important colonialista associated with Vasconcelos's promotions, both at home
and abroad, is Manuel Toussaint. In 1920 Vasconcelos hired him as his personal
secretary. In 1921 he was sent to Spain to substitute Artemio de Valle-Arizpe as head of
the Comisión Paso y Troncoso which conducted research into Pre-Columbian codices. As
a result of this journey, Toussaint produced his first travel-chronicle: Viajes alucinados:
rincones de España (1924); a text which has much in common with Reyes's Cartones de
Madrid. Back at home, Toussaint started to produce personalised high-cultural guidebooks
to Mexico's most renowned colonial centres: Tasco: su historia, sus monumentos (1931),
Paseos coloniales (1939), Pátzcuaro (1942), and La catedral y las iglesias de Puebla
(1954). There were also the texts Oaxaca (written 1926) and Tasco: guía de emociones
(written 1928), which were published together for the first time in 1967 as the now famous
Oaxaca y Tasco. These last two texts, together with his first one on Spain are more
fanciful, impressionistic accounts of cities with very little practical travel information or
even homodiegetic narrative included. The texts published from the 1930s onwards tend to
be more serious studies of colonial art and architecture, but they also include more
orienting, guidebook material.

In a similar vein to Toussaint, Francisco Monterde published Perfiles de Taxco (1932) and,
much later on, Momentos de Oaxaca (1967), which blend rather more evenly than
Toussaint's texts, the academic with the impressionistic, with orientating information. This
obsession with colonial cities which is dominant in Toussaint and Monterde's work is
symptomatic of their colonial interests: they produce highly cultured vignettes of Mexico's
colonial centres, unaffected by any revolutionary conscience or comments on current
affairs. Travel narrative is relegated to second place: the essayistic and impressionistic
recording of archaeological remains and the past glory of baroque façades is paramount.

42 It has been claimed that this may be another approach to establishing a sense of Mexican identity
(Martínez, Literatura mexicana, pp. 32-33), but the nationalist impulse is not very strong in their work.
Following on from the Ateneo de la Juventud and the colonialista movement there were numerous groupings of intellectuals around academic institutions and literary reviews during the 1920s. There was a second Ateneo de la Juventud formed in 1919 by artists and writers too young to have been involved directly in the Revolution. Many reviews such as *La Falange* and *Ulises* also channelled writers into Vasconcelos’s Panamerican projects. This culminated with the group of poets which formed around the magazine *Contemporáneos*, published from 1928 to 1931. The group included a number of the second-generation Ateneístas or young writers promoted by Vasconcelos in the early 1920s, such as Carlos Pellicer and Jaime Torres Bodet. It also included newcomers to the cultural scene such as Xavier Villaurrutia, Gilberto Owen and Salvador Novo.

While the impetus of the group was mainly directed towards poetry, there are examples of travel-chronicles which accentuate the similarity between the *Contemporáneos* and the Ateneístas: they are generally texts of international high-cultural tourism. The decision to travel for this group is, however, an informed choice, rather than an obligation:

> Viajaron a veces porque el servicio exterior les ofrecía un puesto en Londres (Gorostiza), en Nueva York (Torres Bodet), y simplemente lo aceptaban. Pero también salieron con el fin de estudiar, como Xavier Villaurrutia en New Haven o Carlos Pellicer en Italia. […] Viajaron también como turistas y por placer, a veces buscando lugares remotos desde donde enriquecer su experiencia del mundo. Salieron de México a una edad temprana, hicieron del viaje una profesión en el doble sentido: como desplazamiento físico para ver y sentir nuevos estilos de vida y como parte de una geografía de la imaginación que se volvió esencial en su quehacer literario.

Their sense of discomfort, of belonging nowhere, tinges their texts with a feeling of ‘nostalgia’ for a place that they might call home: in this their texts reaffirm their parentage with those of the Ateneístas.

Vasconcelos notably encouraged Pellicer, taking him with him on his trip to South America in 1922 which resulted in the writing of *La raza cósmica*. Pellicer, however, did not publish travel-chronicles, preferring to record his distilled experience of travel and homesickness in his poetry, and his more ‘trivial’ comments in his letters to fellow *Contemporáneos*. The same is true of Villaurrutia and Owen. Torres Bodet, Vasconcelos’s secretary after Toussaint’s departure for Spain, did pen a series of articles in the early 1930s: ‘Notas de viaje y de lectura’ on Spain and Italy. However, the writer


More recently an academic and lawmaker who was originally associated with these movements (in particular the second Ateneo), Luis Garrido, has published a whole series of travel-chronicles of high-cultural tourism. Originally published as journalism, these chronicles have been anthologised as *Trasuntos de Egipto* (1951); *Voces de Francia* (1957); *Evocaciones de Italia* (1958); *La sonrisa de París* (1962); *Venecia, la incomparable* (1966); and *Días y hombres de España* (1966). Garrido has made the writing of this kind of text into a formula: the books are educated, personalised guides to the urban centres of the old world. In a similar vein, see also Ramón Xirau (*Ciudades* (1969)), Felipe Garrido (*Viaje continente* (1973)), and Guillermo García Oropeza (*Viaje mexicano* (1979)). Felipe Garrido’s tour of the Old World is now published in the Biblioteca Joven series with a print-run of thirty thousand copies. García Oropeza’s equivalent tour of Mexico has also met with considerable success (six thousand copies in its second edition).
who dedicated himself most frequently to the production of travel-chronicles was Salvador Novo.

Vasconcelos and Novo

Novo’s travel-chronicle do and do not fit in with those written by other Ateneístas and Contemporáneos. In general Novo played down the high-cultural aspect and highlighted that of introspection and nostalgia. This keeps his contemporaries at arm’s length. Nevertheless, the person from whom he most wanted to distance himself was Vasconcelos.

In the early 1920s Vasconcelos was indirectly Novo’s employer at the SEP.46 Novo took part briefly in Vasconcelos’s ‘misiones’ to send teachers to rural areas, and then held various administrative posts in the SEP and taught in a number of school and university programmes in the capital. It was in his bureaucratic role that he made his journeys within the Mexican Republic and abroad. Return Ticket (1928) narrates his trip to Hawaii as a part of the Mexican delegation sent to the First Pan-Pacific Conference on Education, Rehabilitation and Recreation, and Continente vacío: viaje a Sudamérica (1935) concerns a journey to South America to attend the Seventh International American Conference. On both occasions he was sent by José María Puig Casauránc, twice director of the SEP after Vasconcelos. Jalisco-Michoacán (1933) covers a trip to the provinces to visit rural schools in the company of Narciso Bassols, another post-Vasconcelian director of the SEP. Este y otros viajes (1951) collects a series of occasional pieces written over a longer period of time, detailing Novo’s presence on many more SEP-sponsored trips throughout Mexico.47 In these travel-chronicles Novo portrays himself as an unwilling and unprepared traveller/travel-writer (an anti-travel-chronicler), unenthusiastic about his role as a cultural representative of his country and more concerned with the gossip of fellow travellers, the trivia of cultural institutions and the pleasures of good living, than with the description of landscape, current affairs, or the customs of the people (except those of the Mexican upper classes and the foreign tourist in Mexico).

Both Vasconcelos and Novo published the bulk of their travel-chronicles in the period stretching from the mid-1920s to the early 1950s. Vasconcelos’s demagogic influence over Mexican culture in the 1920s and 30s was practically inevitable. His self-contradictions also made any attempt to mount a serious dissension from his programme difficult. Novo, however, tried to take a stance. This results in texts which negate almost everything, and unwrite continents on a whim. One might find Novo thus superficial, trivial and pessimistic, but understanding the desire to counteract Vasconcelos which permeates his entire travel-chronicle output redeems its value. He literally could not adopt a stable

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47 All quotations from these texts are taken from Novo, Toda la prosa (Empresas Editoriales, 1964).

Novo’s first work on Mexico City: Nueva grandeza mexicana: ensayo sobre la Ciudad de México y sus alrededores en 1946 (1946) is also couched in the form of an ironic tour-guide for provincial Mexicans. He later became the official chronicler of Mexico City, publishing a number of less interesting works on walking tours of the Federal District and an anthology of its chroniclers.
ideological position from which to counter Vasconcelos, even if he had wanted to.48

Two instances where Novo’s anti-Vasconcelian stance can be clearly seen are in his treatment of anthropology and tourism. Before looking at these areas, it is worth noting that Novo had yet another axe to grind. He did not only want to distance himself from his contemporaries and from Vasconcelos: he also did not want to be seen to be directly linked to the work of nineteenth-century writers such as Gutiérrez Nájera or the earlier Romantics. In his rejection of the tradition, he inadvertently allies himself with Vasconcelos’s position.49

Novo was no doubt inspired by the modernista travel-chronicles of Gutiérrez Nájera and Nervo,50 but he also strove to distance himself from any involvement in a Mexican travel-chronicling tradition. Aware of his close affiliation with Gutiérrez Nájera, Novo, in Return Ticket, created for himself the character of the farcical old dandy in a send-up of the older writer. In the opening lines he announces, ‘Tengo ventitrés años y no conozco el mar’ (p. 161), yet only a page later he ironically laments, ‘Ya no me tienta la aventura. Si yo hubiera tenido fuerzas a tiempo... Pero ahora ya gordo, con anteojos, con poco pelo...’ (p. 162). The pastiche of Gutiérrez Nájera’s travel-writing is clear.

Novo flaunts his sense of humour and his addiction to all things ephemeral, frivolous and risqué to distance himself from the modernistas. In his travels he concentrates on recording his personal impressions and experiences in the places visited rather than matters either more transcendental or more ‘of the day’. He also speeds up his prose style: it becomes ‘una prosa lanzada a cincuenta kilómetros por hora’,51 yet one cannot help see these changes as anything but an intensification of the modernista enterprise. Furthermore, the modernistas had already rejected the tradition of Payno, Prieto and Altamirano: where Novo also rejects the older Romantic travel-chroniclers, he simply manages to ally himself more closely with the modernistas.

48 However, he was also as ambivalent as Vasconcelos, and, like Vasconcelos, he also grew more conservative with age.
49 Other similarities with Vasconcelos are also evident. Both writers used the leitmotif of travel as a vehicle for writing their memoirs of their public and private lives: the recording of personal data and the development of self as a character is a privileged topic for both. Both wrote travel-chronicles instead of novels for which they either felt they did not have time or were not naturally suited. And both achieved massive dissemination of their work (Vasconcelos on account of his public notoriety; Novo on account of his own, more private, kind of notoriety, and also through his practice of publishing his work in journals and reviews rather than in books), and hence they were two of the most popular writers of their day.
50 Luis Miguel Aguilar notes that ‘Los viajes fueron un estímulo central de la experiencia modernista: permitieron la consecución de poemas y postales que habrían sido imposibles de otro modo; cambiaron el rumbo de obras vivas, potenciándolas, y revivieron obras muertas o estancadas. [...] No sólo los viajes prestigiosas a Europa o los espectaculares a países lejanos; también los viajes más disponibles: de la provincia a la capital y de regreso (La democracia de los muertos: ensayos sobre poesía mexicana, 1800-1921 (Cal y Arena, 1988), p. 164; quoted by Antonio Saborit in his introduction to Novo’s Viajes y ensayos, 1, ed. by Sergio González Rodríguez, Antonio Saborit, Mary K. Long & others (FCE, 1996), p. 607). Saborit explicitly mentions Gutiérrez Nájera and Nervo in the following paragraph.
A page after his send-up of Gutiérrez Najera in *Return Ticket*, looking from the window of the train as he travels out of Mexico City, Novo dismisses the picturesque Mexicans - 'buenos para los cuadros de caballete' -, that he sees along the route as vulgar. He has no interest in the nineteenth-century model of the 'cuadro de costumbres'. Again in *Continente vacío* he deliberately distances himself from the travel-writing of Prieto: 'El pobre don Guillermo Prieto, cuyo *Viaje a los Estados Unidos* nadie que hoy lo emprenda debe dejar de leer, sin que en haciéndolo corran el menor riesgo sus impresiones, ya que resulta tan ajeno a 1934 como los viajes de Gulliver' (pp. 224-25). He pokes fun at Prieto's obsessive love of documentation, noting that even when he does not manage to describe a place from first-hand experience, he still includes any documentation he has collected previously. Novo boasts: 'Encuentro espléndido mi falta de documentación ferroviaria y estadística, complemento de mi falta de cuaderno de apuntes' (p. 224). He above all does not want to write a 'libro documental':

Escribir el libro de un viaje puede representar la contribución de un importante documento que las generaciones futuras consulten. Pero en mi caso personal no tiene sino el limitado valor de una conversación conmigo mismo ni obedece sino al impulso de referir cuanto hice, como "en vía de consulta", a una persona mayor a quien hubiera de rendirle cuentas y la falta de la cual reconozco humilde que por todos conceptos me ha hecho tanta. (pp. 219-20)

Ironically he laments the lack of paternal guidance which would have perhaps made his account more 'valuable' and 'responsible'. This is probably a reference to the loss of his mentor, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, yet it also seems to be an indictment of the fact that no older models are suitable for his needs: he wills himself into disinheritance. He also refuses to take any other travel-books along with him on his trip as guides (p. 224).

In all this, Novo behaves in a similar way to Vasconcelos, at once continuing and breaking with the authority of the nineteenth-century tradition. Ironically, Novo actually seems to like Vasconcelos's travel-chronicles precisely because they fail to be the authoritative works they set out to be: *La raza cósmica* is not a philosophical treatise but 'unas “notas de viaje” que [...] se comen todo el volumen y no le dejan espacio al texto que anuncia su portada' (*Continente vacío*, p. 299). That tradition is made up of many small ruptures and backlashes is, of course, true: it is clear in the nineteenth century in the work of the *modernistas*. However, Vasconcelos and Novo are simultaneously the most vehement and the most ambivalent in their break with tradition.

**Anthropology and Tourism**

Novo follows the hegemony of Vasconcelos's racial discourse in his writings, rather than that of modern anthropology. Nevertheless, there is some tacit awareness of the science of anthropology in his work. Essentially, both Novo and Vasconcelos share the same attitude to anthropology and the indigenous-versus-national identity question: they both condemn anthropology as a tool of imperialism, and they both have precious little interest in the indigenous communities of Mexico *per se*. Nevertheless, where Novo sets out being negative about the Mexican race and its worthiness for attention, literary or otherwise,
Vasconcelos displays himself as vigorously nationalist and proud of it. And where, at a later date, Vasconcelos condemns the indigenous peoples for their lack of civilisation and unsuitability for mestizaje, Novo turns into an advocate of indigenismo.

In the first instance Novo distances himself from any display of patriotism and finds the average Mexican vulgar:

*Va el tren por la ruta tan conocida de San Juan del Río, Querétaro, Irapuato, en donde sucesivamente venden limas, canastas, cajetas y camotes. A toda esta gente ya la conozco. Estos tipos desconocidos, oscuros, pintorescos, buenos para los cuadros de caballete, son de lo más vulgar que pueda encontrarse. No hay realmente nada que apuntar en el diario. (Return Ticket, p. 163)*

Only a few years later, Vasconcelos made the following enthusiastic description of his first visit to Mexico City, arriving by train from the north of the country:

*En cada parada consumábamos pequeñas compras. Abundaba la tentación en forma de golosinas y frutas. Varas de limas y cestos de fresas o de higos y aguacates de pulpa aceitosa; cajetas de leche en Celaya; camotes en Querétaro y turrones de espuma blanca y azucarada [...] Los vendedores de comestibles ofrecen también a gritos tacos de aguacate, pollo con arroz, enchiladas de mole, frijoles, cerveza y café. Y del seno de la algarabía, tímidamente y, sin embargo, permeándola toda, la voz del ciego ambulante, que improvisa corridos, tane la guitarra y recoge limosnas. Doce mas de chiquillos descalzos, trigueños, piden: 'Un centavito, niño; un centavito, jefe.' Con el cuerpo fuera de la ventanilla, todo lo vemos, deseándolo; adquirimos baratijas y dulces, repartimos cobres. Mucho he viajado después, pero nunca he visto en las paradas de ningún ferrocarril semejante animación abigarrada y fascinante. (Ulises criollo, pp. 66-67)*

Vasconcelos here is much more positive in his outlook than Novo: the ‘pueblo’ is an integral and picturesque accompaniment to the ‘golosinas’ on offer, worthy of description in a travel-chronicle.

Later in their careers, when Vasconcelos became radically unsympathetic towards the indigenous communities in particular (rather than the ‘pueblo’ at large), Novo developed a more concerned attitude to their plight. Specifically in the case of the Mayans in Yucatan, in 1938 Vasconcelos described the women as ‘pintorescas si se quiere, pero totalmente incultas’ (El desastre, p. 95), the ruins of Chichén Itzá as ‘uniformemente bárbaro, cruel y grotesco. Ningún sentido de belleza [...] Decoración utilitaria que, por lo mismo, no nos causa emoción estética alguna’ (pp. 106-07), and summed up: ‘Una sensación de fracaso domina al visitante y se piensa con alivio y con orgullo en Mérida y en Valladolid, las ciudades creadas por los españoles’ (p. 108). Novo visited Yucatan in 1943 and in the impressions of his trip he turns into a latter-day Las Casas:

*Me gustaría profundizar en el tema de los indios. Cualquier aspecto de su actualidad o de su tradición en que se medite, ofrece los mayores atractivos, y conduce a conclusiones que desenmascaran y echan por tierra la superioridad de que con respecto a ellos se jactan los blancos. (Este y otros viajes, p. 397)*

A dialogic pattern between the alternating publications of Vasconcelos and Novo is
For both Novo and Vasconcelos the science of anthropology was something which came from Europe or the United States. Novo comments, 'El mundo europeo, conmovido hasta sus bases por la Gran Guerra, ávido de renovación, volvió sus ojos a la pureza vigorosa de las razas primitivas'.\(^{53}\) This promotion of indigenous Mexican cultures and their handicrafts inevitably brought foreigners to Mexico. Some were anthropologists, others were writers, still others were tourists; for Novo, they were all tourists. As Guillermo Sheridan has noted of the *Contemporáneos*, in 1928,

> El turismo intelectual norteamericano o europeo [...] comenzaba a deprimirlos y contra el [...] habrán de reaccionar en las revistas posteriores. Pocas cosas sublevan más a los Contemporáneos que la caricatura de México que los "viajeros" civilizados propalaban en libros para el consumo de los europeos aún fascinados por la aventura del "primitivismo" o hechizados por el posible "laboratorio de la Revolución".\(^{54}\)

In *Continente vacío* Novo complains specifically about the writer-tourists visiting Mexico: 'Mi pobre México, sanguinario, de raza niña y débil, que se deja palpar por Lawrence, odiar por Huxley, admirar por Chase...' (p. 322). Vasconcelos might have written the same phrase at an earlier date...

Despite not being fond of foreign tourists in Mexico, Vasconcelos, particularly when he was travelling in Europe, was quite happy to be a cultured tourist, consulting his guidebooks and describing the best of the Old World in detail and with emotion. Novo, when travelling in Mexico describes himself as a bad tourist: a ‘poltrón mal turista’ (*Jalisco-Michocán*, p. 419). And when travelling abroad, although he refuses to take up the cause of the conference, he also manages to avoid tourism: in Hawaii he skips narration of the Pan-Pacific conference, ironically covers a couple of the commonplacest of tourism in the islands (poi and ukeleles), and dedicates himself to scrutinising his own navel and the behaviour of the people with whom he makes casual contact along the way. He refuses to use travel-guides, he fails to equip himself properly, and he deliberately avoids doing the done thing (for a tourist): in Hawaii he prefers his bathtub to the sea ('Siempre he preferido la imaginación a la realidad' (p. 211)). He also refuses the Romantic, emotive description of landscape still favoured by Vasconcelos. His attitude is supremely detached, 'sin emoción ninguna' (*Return Ticket*, p. 184), and he generally manages to get away without more than a one-line comment on his natural surroundings. Chroniclers like Novo specialise in urban and cultural landscapes, not natural ones. The travel-chronicles that result are acerbic and witty social diaries.

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\(^{52}\) The dialogism between Vasconcelos’s *La raza cósmica* and Novo’s *Continente vacío* has been studied at length by Long in her ‘Salvador Novo: 1920-1940’ (pp. 259-92). Long is particularly interested in Novo’s un-writing of a sense of Panamerican identity in his decision to record mostly trivial details about himself and his social life, rather than describe what he sees en route (Pan-Americans) or narrate the news-worthy events that take place during the trip (the discussion of Pan-Americanism). In so doing, he also refuses to credit Vasconcelos’s confidence in the power of the written word and his use of literature as a political tool.

\(^{53}\) ‘El arte popular mexicano’, *Biblioteca de México*, 5 (October 1991), 36; originally published in 1932 for an ‘Exhibición de objetos destinados a la formación de un Museo de Arte Popular Mexicano’.

\(^{54}\) *Los Contemporáneos ayer*, 1st repr. (FCE, 1993), p. 244.
“Cvltvra”, Botas and Costa-Amic

There have been several publishing houses which have promoted the production of travel-chronicles in the twentieth century, just as El Renacimiento stimulated their production in the late nineteenth century. The opportunistic role of some of these publishing houses has also contributed to the diminished literary reputation of the genre in the twentieth century.

Editorial “Cvltvra” was founded in the second decade of the new century by Agustín Loera y Chávez and Julio Torri with the aim of publishing the works of ‘de buenos autores antiguos y modernos’. Around this publishing house there congregated the last exponents of modernismo, the majority of the members of the Ateneo de la Juventud and a number of prominent colonialistas such as Manuel Toussaint. “Cvltvra” published travel-chronicles in the period 1917 (Alfonso Reyes’s Cartones de Madrid) to 1959 (Manuel Maples Arce’s Ensayos japoneses): the out-put, though only numbering some eleven volumes, was relatively balanced between texts covering national and international travel, and also included the accounts of foreign authors travelling in Mexico such as Paul Morand’s Viaje a México (1940), translated by Xavier Villaurrutia. Of particular note was its celebrated innovative publication of Novo’s Return Ticket in 1928 which was sold in a box designed to look like a suitcase complete with stickers and seals. It also published more scientific travel-writing such as the Mexican anthropologist Pedro R. Hendrichs Pérez’s account of the indigenous populations of the River Balsas region in Guerrero state (Portierras ignotas: viajes y observaciones en el región de Río de las Balsas, 2 vols (1945)). Whether the bias was literary or scientific, the quality of the work published was consistently high. However, in its illustrated, bilingual re-edition of Toussaint’s book on Tasco as the Guía ilustrada de Tasco (1935) it began to negotiate the transformation of the erudite high-cultural touristic account produced by Ateneístas, colonialistas and others into the more mundane format of the travel-guide.

Simultaneous with the endeavours of Editorial “Cvltvra”, Ediciones Botas, run first by the Spaniard Andrés Botas and subsequently by his son Gabriel and his grandson Andrés, made its first publication in 1911. It established itself as a successful publishing house with the erudite works of Luis González Obregón, and the immensely popular novels, memoirs and chronicles of Federico Gamboa, Gregorio López y Fuentes, Martín Luis Guzmán, Mariano Azuela, Maurice Maeterlinck, Mauricio Magdaleno, Heriberto Frías, Julio Jiménez Rueda and José Vasconcelos. It made a speciality out of the novel of the Revolution, and in the period from 1911 to the 1950s published more than three thousand titles. Although the publishing house still exists, its heyday came to an end in 1968 with the death of Gabriel Botas.

55 See Martínez, Literatura mexicana, pp. 28-29.
56 The dates are approximate with respect to the time period during which travel-chronicles were published.
From at least 1920 (Carlos González Peña’s *La vida tumultuosa: seis semanas en los Estados Unidos*) to 1965 (Ermilo Abreu Gómez, *Andanzas y extravías: memorias*) Botas edited a steady stream of travel-chronicles, with most titles being published in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. There was generally a balance in the coverage of journeys in Mexico and abroad, and several influential travel-chronicles by foreign writers were also published, most notably Chadourme’s *Anáhuac o el indio sin plumas* (1935) and Eça de Queiroz’s *Visiones de Oriente* (1940). The quality of these travel-chronicles is variable, however, ranging from Vasconcelos’s memorable memoirs to Taracena’s *Viajando con Vasconcelos*.

Taracena’s text stems from a trip made with Vasconcelos at Gabriel Botas’s suggestion. That Botas also published Vito Alessio Robles’s *Mis andanzas con nuestro Ulises*, in the same year (1938), and Vasconcelos’s memoirs in the period 1935-39, surely betrays his eye for commercialising books associated with the Mexican Revolution, in particular those on the subject of Vasconcelos, from any and every critical angle available.61 The critic Rafael Solana ironically referred to Editorial Botas in 1938 as the ‘establo de Botas’ on account of the publishing house’s commercialisation of novels of the Revolution.62 The fact that all the above texts concerning Vasconcelos and the Revolution also systematically involve travel reveals Botas’s awareness that the travel-chronicle might function as a successful commercial formula for almost any kind of material. In later years Botas went out of his way to publish travel-chronicles, whatever their literary merits.

Botas’s catalogue included a number of texts covering official tours and proto-tour-guides to Europe. Already in Felipe Teixidor’s introduction to his anthology of *Viajeros mexicanos*, written in 1939, he noted that contemporary Mexican travellers were having no problem in financing the publication their travels: ‘Algunos viajan con sus propios recursos; por cuenta del Estado, los más, y con facilidad se encuentran editores dispuestos a perder dinero en el “viaje”’ (p. 5). The incipient commercialisation of the travel-chronicle had not gone unnoticed. By 1955 the editor of Vasconcelos’s *Temas contemporáneos* found it necessary to distinguish his client’s work from these touristic travel-chronicles by appealing to the qualities of the author himself:

> ¿Un libro de viajes? Ciertamente; pero muy distinto de las crónicas que improvisan los turistas o se fabrican para los turistas. En un viaje lo que más importa no es la calidad de los paisajes, de los climas diversos o de los hoteles monótonos, sino la calidad del viajero. El puro paisaje pueden darlo el cinemascopio y las tarjetas postales. Pero la interpretación de los paisajes, el panorama humano y espiritual, solamente pueden ofrecerlo quienes tengan el sexto sentido de la expresión, del ritmo y la videncia. Es decir, el artista que sea al mismo tiempo poeta, filósofo, y en este caso, periodista.63

59 The dates are approximate with respect to the time period during which travel-chronicles were published. I have found evidence of twenty-four titles in total, plus several academic studies of travel writing on Mexico (see bibliography for some of these titles).

60 Other titles of note are Querido Moheno’s *Cartas y crónicas* ([1920?]), María Luisa Ocampo’s *Diez días en Yucatán* (1941), and some of Luis Garrido’s European high-cultural-tourism travel-chronicles.

61 It also betrays Vasconcelos’s complicity with this project.


With the rise in Mexican tourism (both at home and abroad) in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, promoted by presidents Miguel Alemán and, in particular, Luis Echeverría, the commercialisation of touristic travel-writing would increase.64

B. Costa-Amic Editor is the most notorious example of this commercialisation. Bartomeu Costa-Amic was born in Catalonia in 1911; his Communist affiliations brought him to Mexico as an exile of the Spanish Civil War in 1940. Previously he had visited Mexico in 1937, as a member of Barcelona’s only baseball team - ‘México’ - which included several militant members of the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista: Costa-Amic apparently came bearing a letter from Andreu Nin to Lázaro Cárdenas requesting asylum for Leon Trotsky. Besides his diplomatic and sporting activities in Mexico, he had time to note ‘una inexplicable carencia de editoriales privadas y librerías en un país tan dotado en escritores y revistas literarias.’65

His publishing endeavours in Mexico went under the name of Ediciones Quetzal and B. Costa-Amic Editor. Ediciones Quetzal was originally the publishing house of exiled writer Ramón J. Sender who sold it on to Costa-Amic and two other exiled friends. Together they created a catalogue of rescued and/or translated works of universal culture - especially French and Spanish -, and essayistic works of an overtly political nature. Many of the exiled members of the Surrealist group were also associated with Quetzal, providing cover illustrations and advertisements. In his single-handed enterprise as B. Costa-Amic Editor, Costa-Amic was astute enough to publish the first edition of Miguel Ángel Asturias’s El señor presidente in 1946, plus translations of Gérard de Nerval and Jean Giraudoux, Antonio Mediz Bolio’s La tierra del faisán y del venado, and several of Luis Spota’s novels; yet, as far as his catalogue of travel-chronicles is concerned, the quality has been even less assured than that of Botas’s publications.

The travel-chronicles were published from 1961 with the safe bet of Francisco L. Urquizo’s Madrid de los años veinte to 1988 with the most bigoted and laughable text: María del Carmen Márquez de Romero Aceves and Ricardo Romero Aceves’s México y el mundo - not so much a travel-chronicle as an extremely paternalistic travel-guide for Mexicans going abroad.66 Indeed, most of the chronicles cover travel abroad, and, perhaps not surprisingly, Costa-Amic has published anything and everything about Communist states such as the USSR and China. The motivation for these texts ranges between reports of international conferences (the banal and uncritical text of Margarita Paz Paredes’s Viaje a la China Popular (1965) and the better documented and written text of René Avilés’s Las estrellas rojas (1967)) to works focused on encouraging tourism - generally cultural tourism - in Europe. On Mexico Costa-Amic has tended to publish specialist guides and

65 See Fabienne Bradu’s ‘Bartomeu Costa-Amic’, Vuelta, 253 (December 1997), pp. 41-45 (43).
66 The dates are approximate with respect to the time period during which travel-chronicles have been published. There are approximately twenty-six of these Mexican travel-chronicles (see bibliography for some of these titles.)

All three publishing houses have tended to produce first editions of these travel-chronicles with print runs in the region of one to three thousand copies which is standard for Mexico. While a handful of the more successful works have been reprinted, the first editions of almost all of these travel-chronicles are still on sale in Mexico City in the warehouses of Botas and Costa-Amic, some of them over fifty years old and with their pages still uncut. What this proves is that despite Botas and Costa-Amic’s attempts at commercialising the travel-chronicle, it clearly has not achieved the popular appeal which they thought it would. The problem seems to be that while some of the faster selling texts have negotiated a deal between the criteria of ‘high literary’ creations and popular texts to produce a successful chronicle which betrays the characteristics of good journalistic writing (the style contributes to the expedient communication of information, rather than hinders it or poses as a red-herring to disguise the lack of content), those travel-chronicles that have not sold, have not lived up to their literary pretensions and thus constitute ‘bad literature’ rather than popular reading matter. These latter texts have seriously damaged the reputation of the travel-chronicle as a literary genre and are no doubt part of the reason why, in present-day Mexico, most authors interviewed for the purposes of writing Section 2 of this thesis, claimed that the travel-chronicle had ceased to exist (as a literary genre) in the 1930s.

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México Desconocido: Popular Travel-Chronicling

Besides the unreliable literary quality of the publications of Botas and Costa-Amic, it should also be noted that the tendency to publish travel-chronicles directly in book form started with their endeavours, and that part of the reason for their failure might lie in the fact that the primary context for the travel-chronicle in Mexico has always been as a journalistic practice. Mexican travel-chronicling has retained its role in this forum, and it is here that it has achieved a truly popular appeal. Developing out of its involvement with journalism, it has also found another popular forum in television.

The most important focus for the travel-chronicle in Mexico since the early 1950s has been the magazine México Desconocido. It started life as a weekly supplement to the newspaper Novedades (c.1952/53), written and produced by the Mexico City-born advertising-agent Harry Möller, and probably taking its name from Lumholtz's Unknown Mexico. Möller had been inspired to start making excursions out of the capital by an exhibition on Humboldt's travels in Mexico. This, in conjunction with the arrival in Mexico of two German-made luxury camper-buses, had given Möller the idea of starting a travel business, but when this could not be achieved because of bureaucratic problems, Möller decided to continue making excursions and write about the experience with a view to inspiring other Mexico City residents to get out into the countryside.

Moving on from being a weekly supplement to Novedades, México Desconocido also became an occasional half-hour television programme on Canal 13 from 1971 to 1980 (approximately). From this an 'annual' was published in book form by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática: México desconocido: un país de exploradores. This material was then reworked as a magazine, also called México Desconocido, aimed at young people and published by the Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales para los Trabajadores del Estado. Owing to the success of all these enterprises, Möller and his team, finally decided to concentrate their attentions on an independent magazine: the first edition was published in full colour in November 1976. It has been published monthly ever since, reaching a peak print-run in 1995 of eighty thousand copies per edition.67

On the basis of these statistics, the texts of México Desconocido constitute 'popular' travel-chronicles. The reasons for the popularity of México Desconocido may be found in the overall concision of texts and their conscious aim to facilitate the communication of information and 'sensations'. The tacit in-house style-book recommends the use of vivid descriptions, amply supported by quality photographic material to provide the sensations - the magazines are currently collector's items. The news-value of many of their subjects

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67 México Desconocido has also had an impact on Mexico at a political level: President Luis Echeverría, prime promoter of Mexican national tourism, used to read it and, when seeking new Mexican tourist sites for promotion, his counsellors sought the advice of the México Desconocido team. (Anecdote reported by one of the founding members of México Desconocido, the photographer Antonio Mercado Rojano. Much of the information in this section concerning México Desconocido stems from personal interviews with its present editor, Beatriz Quintanar Hinojosa, and with Mercado Rojano, 28 June 1996.)
(submarine discoveries, exploding volcanoes, dinosaur footprints in the Sierra Gorda, etc.) and the clarity of the supporting historical, anthropological, statistical and scientific documentation of even the most recondite areas of the Republic (often following readers' suggestions) should provide the information. Added pertinence to the reader comes in their exposure of environmental disasters as well as sites of exceptional beauty, coupled with a not too oppressive rhetoric of national pride; and in their retention of the personal, yet not patronising, guiding narrative (with photographic evidence), linked to their provision of the necessary practical information for the reader to 'follow in their footsteps' and get the most out of his or her visit. Communication is assured by the use of short sentences, uncomplicated syntax and a very literal use of language. There is no evidence of intertextuality.68

The aim of México Desconocido in all its different forms has been consistently the desire to encourage a Mexican audience, particularly Mexico City-based, to get out and get to know its own country. The editorial note in the first edition read thus:

ADVERTENCIA. Mucho del material gráfico y escrito que contiene esta edición, es estrictamente inédito nunca antes, nadie, en ninguna parte, había dado esta información, y no figura en textos escolares ni universitarios, ni aún en enciclopedias. Es el producto de muchos años y centenares de miles de kilómetros recorridos en este país, uno de los trece más extensos del planeta.
La intención: aportar al lector conocimientos y sugestiones para su recreo y para acrecentar su amor al país. Sea usted bienvenido a las maravillas de su propia patria.69

In the first years of the existence of México Desconocido the magazine, it focused more on 'green', 'ethnic' and educational tourism: hiking, camping, indigenous communities, off-the-beaten-track places. Presently, catering to a much wider audience, it selects places of cultural and natural interest which are more accessible to a car-driving public, although without sacrificing its environmentally and anthropologically-friendly (considerate tourist) approach. Keeping abreast of the times, México Desconocido now has its own website, 'a content-rich and visually appealing archive of some of its most popular issues',70 and, most recently, Harry Möller, his son Carlos and others have started to market videos under the generic title Imágenes Desconocidas.

In the wake of México Desconocido there are now a number of publications which seek to promote travel in Mexico: there are those with a specifically cultural bias such as the historical review México en el Tiempo (published by the same company as México Desconocido, Editorial Jilguero) and Arqueología Mexicana (published by the Instituto Nacional de Arqueología e Historia) which includes an excellent 'guía de viajeros' at the

68 México Desconocido's texts correspond clearly to the tenets of popular literature suggested in Anthony Easthope's Literary into Cultural Studies (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 89. Nevertheless the magazine occasionally also publishes texts by popular authors and reputed academics, such as María Luisa Puga and José Iturriaga de la Fuente respectively, thus backing up on the quality of this prose without losing its popular appeal.
69 México Desconocido, 1 (November 1976), 5.
Many of the more tourist-orientated publications are bilingual, aiming at a national and international market; however, GeoMundo, published by Editorial Televisa, frequently concentrates on locations within Mexico for a specifically national readership.

Television’s involvement in the popularisation of travel (and its narration) in Mexico is clear from México Desconocido’s time on the air and Televisa’s sponsorship of GeoMundo; however, few programmes have offered as balanced and committed a vision of Mexico as México Desconocido. Canal 13, inspired by the production of México Desconocido as a television programme, produced its own travel programme: Rolando Ando, in 1994-1995, which was then taken up by the Instituto Politécnico Nacional’s Canal Once, under the title Mochila al hombro. The format of these extremely successful programmes is still based on the narration of a travel diary, rather than any more fragmentary documentary style: the personal guide is still more effective in Mexico than the anonymous compendium approach. Mochila al hombro uses its narrator/mentor to teach a younger budget-traveller audience how to explore Mexico and concentrates almost exclusively on the beauties of Mexico’s colonial architecture, thus promoting cultural tourism over purely leisure tourism. Nevertheless, it lacks any real critical consciousness, or concern for the environment and ethnic diversity of Mexico.72

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71 In 1990 the literary review Textual (supplement to El Nacional) also published a special edition on world travel-writing (‘Viajes: el tiempo de mundo finito’, Textual, 18 (October 1990)). This edition included texts by Matsuo Basho, Gerardo Deniz, Eduardo Vázquez Martín, Paul Theroux, Fabio Morábito, V.S. Naipaul, Albert Camus, Jaime Moreno Villarreal, David Martín de Campo, Elsa Cross, Conrado Tostado, Fernando Fernández, José Luis Rivas, Pablo Piccato, Aurelio Major, Josué Ramírez and Antonio Deltoro.

By the late 1950s Mexican travel-chronicling was in crisis. No sooner had Octavio Paz’s definitive *Laberinto de la soledad* been published in 1950, than the search for ‘lo mexicano’ - the *raison d’être* of the nineteenth-century travel-chronicle - suddenly lost impetus. Simultaneously, the austere, modern approach of later novels of the Revolution such as Agustín Yáñez’s *Al filo del agua* (1947) and Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (1955) managed to (temporarily) empty the provinces of their literary ‘charm’. As Domínguez Michael notes of Yáñez:

> Al destruir [...] la provincia como ambiente pintoresco, al penetrar en ella con la modernidad de la novela, acabó por vaciarla como proyecto holístico. Sus sucesores renunciaron de principio a recorrer la nación con la ambición cartográfica de fijarla adáncamente en toda su dimensión humana y natural.73

Furthermore, the commercialisation of the travel-chronicle sponsored by Botas and Costa-Amic which boomed in the 1930s, 40s, 50s and 60s damaged its literary reputation; and the beginnings of modernism in Latin America, particularly in the writings of the ‘Boom’ authors, also counteracted the basic principals on which the genre of the travel-chronicle had been constructed.74 Modernist writings promoted form over content, and the ‘método mitico’ over the procedures of realism; they also had recourse to specific techniques such as:

> La ruptura radical del flujo lineal de la narración; la ruptura de las expectativas convencionales sobre la unidad y coherencia de argumento y personajes y el consecuente ‘desarrollo’ del tipo causa-efecto; el despliegue de yuxtaposiciones irónicas y ambiguas, capaces de poner en duda el ‘significado’ moral y filosófico de la acción literaria. [...] La adopción de un tono de autoburla epistemológica contra las ingenuas pretensiones de la racionalidad burguesa; la oposición de la conciencia interior al discurso objetivo, racional y público; y una inclinación a distorsionar subjectivamente para mostrar cómo se desvanecía el mundo social objetivo de la burguesía del siglo XIX.75

The travel-chronicle had thus far been a conventional linear narrative, written in an accessible style which privileged content over form and which had little in the way of epistemological self-consciousness or metatext. The modernism of the ‘Boom’ writers looked set to render the travel-chronicle extinct. Indeed, Carlos Monsiváis notes that by the 1950s neither Novo, nor Renato Leduc, nor José Alvarado was able to avoid ‘la nostalgia embellecedora y las insistencias comparativas entre el Ayer Diáfano y el Hoy Angustioso’ in their chronicles, and that ‘como género, la crónica se obstina en parecer reaccionaria: suyas son las evocaciones que construyen una realidad alternativa’.76

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73 *Antología de la narrativa mexicana*, 1, 1016.
74 The terms modernism, and later postmodernism, written in English in this thesis, are distinct from the Spanish term *modernismo* used to identify the turn-of-the-century Latin American literary movement.
75 Modernism, in Latin America, roughly equates to the Latin American ‘Boom’ period of the late 1950s and 1960s, and postmodernism to the ensuing ‘post-Boom’ period.
76 *A ustedes les consta*, pp. 57-59 (58).
Travel-chronicling in Mexico survived these challenges, and it did this by reinforcing its links to journalism, becoming ostensibly more opaque in its style, more concerned with the effective expression of news and ideology. The popular success of México Desconocido, the weekly newspaper supplement of the 1950s and 60s, may well have been a source of inspiration, although, in the case of Fernando Benítez, the inspiration was most probably reciprocal: Benítez's historical travel-chronicle La ruta de Hernán Cortés (1950) was echoed by México Desconocido's coverage of the same itinerary in one of its first editions of the early 1950s.77

The **Ensayo Reportaje**

Fernando Benítez (1912- ) is one of a group of writers (including most notably José Revueltas) whose heyday lasted from the early 1940s to the late 1970s and whose contribution to Mexican culture was the successful combination of literary creation and journalism. Revueltas brought literary quality to the humble 'nota roja' in his journalism, (although he did not immediately achieve popularity with his innovations).78 Conversely, Benítez's novels on the Mexican Revolution (El rey viejo (1959) and El agua envenenada (1961)) read more as documentaries than novels.79 In a further obscuration of the generic boundaries between literature and journalism, Benítez and Revueltas managed to blend the literary facets of the 'crónica' with the documentary demands of the 'reportaje', creating what Benítez has denominated the 'ensayo reportaje', a committed and denunciatory, active and interpretative, nationally-conscious form of chronicle.80 Travel was a prominent feature in their 'ensayos reportaje' since the personalisation implied in a travel-narrative helped these writers offer a closer, more perceptive perspective on the subjects of their reports. Ruiz Abreu notes of Revueltas,

> Recorrió el país a pie, a caballo, en trenes de segunda, para concertar asambleas en las misiones impuestas por el Partido [Comunista]; también recorrió ciudades, sierras incomunicadas, comunidades indígenas, barrios populares, diversos países (de Estados Unidos al Perú) para relatar lo que sus ojos miraban. (José Revueltas, p. 303)

A parallel itinerary might be established for Benítez.

77 Benítez, to best of my knowledge, has never been actively involved in México Desconocido.
78 See Álvaro Ruiz Abreu, José Revueltas: los muros de la utopía (Cal y Arena / UAM-Xochimilco, 1992), pp. 301-29. Ruiz Abreu likens Revueltas's journalism to that of John Reed (p. 303), Altamirano, Riva Palacio and especially to Guillermo Prieto's Memorias de mis tiempos (p. 310). The bad reception of Revueltas's work he attributes to the hegemony of Novo's style by that point in time (p. 320).
79 Benítez was also influenced by Altamirano's journalism (Gustavo García, 'Fernando Benítez: hijo de la Revolución', Letras Libres, 3 (March 1999), 94).
80 See Federico Campbell, Periodismo escrito, pp. 74-78. For a history of the term 'documentary' see William Stott, Documentary Expression and Thirties America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). According to Stott the genre was coined by the British film producer John Grierson in 1926, possibly taking the term from the French 'documentaire' or travelogue (p. 9). Although documentaries deal in facts, Stott examines the difference between those documents which are made up of unadulterated, objective facts (passports etc.) and those which identify themselves as 'human documents', whose facts have immediate emotional impact and deal with the ironies of 'la condition humaine' in general. Halfway between the two lies 'social documentary'; a form of emotive, subjective documentary which, unlike the human document, presents its subject as a temporary, man-made condition which may be revoked through committed action (pp. 18-25). This kind of 'social documentary' was much practised in the United States from the 1930s onwards, and is perhaps the real ancestor of Benítez's 'ensayo-reportaje'.
The journalistic careers of Benítez and Revueltas converge at times: both wrote chronicles of the trip they made to Peru (also in the company of Luis Spota) to see the eclipse of the sun in 1944: Benítez published his work in El Nacional, Revueltas in Así. Revueltas also wrote ‘Notas de un viaje a la URSS’ (Diario del Sureste, 1938), ‘Visión del Paricutín’ (El Popular, 1943), ‘Viaje al noroeste de México’ (Así, 1943), and ‘Marcha de hambre sobre el desierto y la nieve’ (Hoy, 1951). Documentation concerning the exact place of first publication of some of Benítez’s chronicles is still vague. Nevertheless, in book form, he has recorded his trip to China in 1952, sent by the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores for the Asian-Pacific Peace Conference, in China a la vista (1953), and again in La Nao de China (1989). His more extensive travel-chronicles concerning the Mexican Republic were only ever published in book form as the individual publications Ki: el drama de un pueblo y una plantá (1956), Los hongos alucinantes (1964) and En la tierra mágica del peyote (1968) for example. These studies along with many others were organised into the five volume set of Los indios de México from 1967 to 1984 and finally edited down for a single-volume anthology under the same title by Héctor Manjarrez in 1989. The historical La ruta de la libertad was published in 1960, the sociological Viaje al centro de México in 1975 and the environmental El libro de los desastres in 1988.

The leitmotif of many of Benítez’s travel-chronicles is of a clearly anthropological order: the Indians of Mexico. He travels in order to study and write about Mexico’s indigenous communities. Nevertheless, his approach is not neutrally scientific - he is not officially an anthropologist -: instead it is both politicised and personalised. On the political front, Benítez, unlike most Mexican anthropologists, clearly takes the side of the indigenous people: he does not study them in order to supply the government with statistics to facilitate their easier co-option to the mexicanización project, but to denounce abuses against them and to support their right to negotiate the retention of their ethnic identity within that of the nation. This is the project of indigenismo; a project which the Mexican government under Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) actively promoted, but which has more frequently been no more than a foil for projects of mestizaje.

Benítez’s project was not well accepted by the Mexican anthropological establishment (he was persistently viewed as an amateur dabbler), nor by the literary establishment (his subject was too political, and written in too opaque a style for real literature), nor by the caudillos of journalism (his denunciations risked offending the government and, as a consequence, the publication in question might be closed down). Benítez had immense problems finding a publisher for his first text, Ki, a history and denunciation of the contemporary situation of the Mayan labour force on sisal farms in the Yucatan stemming from an investigative journey made c. 1952. Despite Benítez’s prominent role as founding editor of México en la Cultura, he complains that, ‘Ningún periódico quiso publicar[lo]. Incluso dos miembros de la junta de gobierno del Fondo de Cultural Económica objetaron la publicación de Ki […] porque mencionaba los nombres de los gobernadores que se
habían enriquecido haciendo grandes negocios con el henequén. When it was finally published by the FCE in 1956, it was total failure in Benítez’s terms (it did not change the lives of the Mayans it studied). It did not achieve real fame until the 1960s and was not reprinted until 1985. Undeterred, however, Benítez continued to write about the isolated indigenous communities of Mexico, and kept the manuscripts in a shoe-box until publication could be arranged.

Political convictions, together with boredom with the drawing-room politics of the Federal District and a desire for adventure, were what most obviously first pushed Benítez in the direction of the indigenous communities. Even where, in the first chapter of *Ki*, he flaunts the studied objectivity of his work, he is using scientific rigour as a political tool:

> He tratado que este libro sea ante todo un documento […], mera compilación de testimonios, de encuestas, de conversaciones que recogen con la mayor objetividad posible el sentir del hombre de la calle.

Benítez is trying to take on the anthropological establishment on its own terms and simultaneously to use those terms to emphasise his own political truths.

By the time of the publication of *En la tierra mágica del peyote* in 1968 Benítez clearly wanted to refute the ‘amateur anthropologist’ claims made about his early work once and for all. In the introduction and the section entitled ‘¿Por qué estudiamos a los indios?’, he launches a three-pronged attack: he deliberately weights the text with an overview of structuralist anthropology, including footnote references to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes tropiques*, Carl Lumholtz’s *Unknown Mexico*, Jean Cazeneuve’s *L’ethnologie*, and subtitling sections ‘lo sagrado y lo profano’ or ‘el sexo y el exceso’ thus demonstrating his command of the science. But, like Vasconcelos and Novo, he deems scientific anthropology something of a foreign importation which he cannot reject completely, yet cannot help but feel to be another tool of imperialism: ‘el imperialismo estructuralista’. Finally he runs down the efforts of Mexican anthropologists, claiming that they are too content to be subservient assistants to foreign anthropologists and too interested in archaeology rather than real live anthropology. They are also too content to simply serve the state for Benítez’s liking.

Alongside Benítez’s politicisation of anthropology stands his personalisation of the enterprise as a further validation of his creation of an original role for himself in the field. In *Ki*, while playing down his personal input in the work (‘un libro en el que yo no intervenía casi para nada’ (p. 39)) - , he simultaneously offers his travels in the field as the factor which confers the most value on his work:

82 Quoted in Campbell, *Periodismo escrito*, p. 77.
85 Benítez places emphasis on the unadulterated factual nature of his documentary, although, as Stott has pointed out, in most cases where a writer does this, what he or she is really trying to do is enhance the human or social dimension of these facts by reiterating their truth value.
Although this advocacy of the value of ‘being there’ is a classical anthropological move, Benítez is adamant that the travel aspect of his anthropological work is, in the long run, his most important contribution to the field: other anthropologists, he feels, have not travelled and experienced things for themselves, or at least not thoroughly enough.\(^\text{87}\) Admittedly, in *Ki* only the first chapter consists of personal travel-narrative, and the remainder are based on historical, and anthropological analysis, but this first chapter is substantially longer than any other in the book: it really is more than just ‘una regla del juego’.\(^\text{88}\) The opening chapter of *Ki* is an excellent example of a contemporary travel-chronicle in itself: the narrative is fast moving, unencumbered by lengthy explanations and descriptions; it picks out for comment both touristic sights and ephemeral, idiosyncratic images of daily life in Mexico; and it makes effective use of literary imagery in its impressionistic review of the route taken from Mexico City to Mérida. The narrator, though obviously knowledgeable, also depicts himself as an approachable person through the narration of personal data; someone who is able to blend in with the ‘pueblo’.\(^\text{89}\)

Again in *En la tierra mágica*, intercalated with the serious scientific rubrics and references of the introduction are footnotes which bicker about plagiarism,\(^\text{90}\) and throughout the text Benítez cannot resist his travel-writerly impulses to describe ‘escenas del desierto’ (a chaotic mix of botany and impressionism) and to detail ‘los sentimientos y [...] las reflexiones del viajero’ (p. 16).\(^\text{91}\) In this book, more than in any other, Benítez the traveller is in evidence. He notes in the introduction that he prefers to publish this journal of his travels rather than spend time refining it into a purely scientific study. This he claims is in order to beat the foreign anthropologists with the news of his peyote experience (p. 11); however, the desire to narrate his own story is clearly in competition with any scientific urges.

Benítez’s ostensible acceptance of indigenous myths and his sharing of the experience of a peyote trip also take him well beyond the realms of anthropology into those of literature. The description of the psychedelic effects of peyote, though brief, rank with the work of

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\(^\text{87}\) Personal interview with the author, 7 February 1997. In the introductory chapter to *Ki* Benítez makes an impassioned plea for Mexicans to travel and write about their own country (he gives special mention to the work of Mexican archaeologists Miguel Ángel Fernández, Alberto Ruz L’Huillier, and to his friend Héctor Pérez Martínez). Mexicans should try to counter the works of foreign travellers, both anthropologists and writers: in the prologue to the first volume of *Los indios de México* (pp. 30-31) Benítez specifically criticises Lawrence’s *The Plumed Serpent* and Greene’s *The Power and the Glory* and *Lawless Roads*.

\(^\text{88}\) Carlos Monsiváis, interview.

\(^\text{89}\) Carlos Fuentes actually considers Benítez to be one of the world’s best travel-writers together with Bruce Chatwin and Peter Matthiessen (introduction to *Los indios de México: antología*, pp. 11-21).

\(^\text{90}\) The debate still rages for Benítez on whether he was really the first non-indigenous person to go on a peyote pilgrimage, and how he was exploited and plagiarised by the photographer he took along (see Peter Furst’s introduction to Benítez’s *In the Magic Land of Peyote*, trans. by John Upton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), pp. xi-xxii, where Furst claims that he actually beat Benítez to it by a year. See also Benítez’s own prologue to the same text.)

\(^\text{91}\) Description of natural landscapes and displays of emotion make a partial comeback in Benítez’s work.
William Burroughs (*En la tierra mágica*, pp. 180-87). Benítez’s attempt to balance political ideology with science with concrete real life experience devolves into literature: in his introduction to the first volume of *Los indios de México* he discusses the development of the role of the indigenous people in his work, moving over the years from political journalism in *Viaje a la Tarahumara*, through anthropology (*En el país mágico*), to ‘drama’ (*La última trinchera* and *En el país de las nubes*): ‘Otra vez me dejé arrastrar por la intensidad de su drama relegando a un segundo término los aspectos meramente antropológicos’ (pp. 65-66). He finally gives up the struggle to ‘equilibrar la denuncia con el documento etnográfico’ in preference for a more literary approach (p. 66).92

Again, in his description of indigenous communities, the people and their customs, what appears clear in Benítez’s work is the easy slippage from costumbrista description to anthropological analysis and back to costumbrismo. As Benítez tries to distance himself scientifically from costumbrismo, his analysis of social situations is quite frequently overcharged by his literary ‘style’ and his desire to make value judgments: Benítez the anthropologist observes, ‘En la mañana, los hombres están en el campo y las mujeres son las dueñas de los pueblos’ (*Ki*, p. 27), but instead of continuing with a study of the roles of the sexes in Mayan society he goes on to comment on the ‘majestic’ gait of the women and to describe the scene before his eyes with neither scientific analysis nor interpretation.

The conflict between anthropology and politics, literature and journalism in Benítez’s writing is the source of its richness and its innovative quality. Indeed, Benítez’s chronicles have turned out to be massively popular: his five weighty and expensive volumes of *Los indios de México* have now been reprinted over seven times.93

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92 This is actually where his work achieves the full dimensions of ‘social documentary’.
93 More recent examples of more or less politically-committed documentary travels which benefit from the literary affiliations of their authors are: Vicente Leñero’s articles on Michoacán, published in *Claudia* (1966) and his ‘Viaje a Cuba’, published in *Excelsior* (1973), both now collected in *Talacha periodística* (1989); Ricardo Garibay’s *Acapulco* (written 1978, published 1979) and *Chicoasén* (written 1979, published 1986) - ‘Acapulco es, quizá, la crónica mural más ambiciosa del periodismo mexicano en los años recientes’ (Monsiváis, *A ustedes les consta*, p. 358); Hermann Bellinghausen’s articles published in *Nexos* and *La Jornada*; Sergio Mastretta’s articles published in *Nexos*; Verónica Volkow’s excellent *Diario de Sudáfrica* (1988); and Carlos Montemayor’s record of his attempts to run poetry workshops in the sierras of Oaxaca in 1981/82 recorded in *Encuentros en Oaxaca* (1995). To a lesser degree there is also David Martín del Campo’s *Los mares de México: crónicas de la tercera frontera* (1987) - the personal element is very slim, and the literary quality waivers, but it has still achieved much acclaim in Mexico; and Juan Manuel Leal Apéz’s *Por los Caminos del Sur: redescubriendo el estado de Guerrero* (1995) - a rather badly written anthropological, archaeological and speleological adventure through the state of Guerrero, sponsored by the then rector of the UNAM, Dr. José Sarukhán Kérmez.
Jorge Ibargüengoitia: *Viajes en la América ignota*

Like Benítez, Jorge Ibargüengoitia (1928-1983) creatively balances and blurs journalistic and literary activities: he started off as a dramatist studying under Rodolfo Usigli, then turned novelist, and supported both these activities by a steady stream of articles as a columnist for one of Mexico’s most popular newspapers: *Excélsior*. However, unlike Benítez, this mixture of literature and journalism is used to quite different effect: rather than try to preserve and respect the idiosyncratic facets of Mexican culture, Ibargüengoitia was determined to de-consecrate them.

In many ways Ibargüengoitia is a case apart in the history of Mexican literature which, until very recently, has not really had a tradition of ‘humorists’: Mexico certainly has had a few bitterly or frivolously ironical writers (Prieto and Novo, to mention but two) but this kind of approach is mainly intellectual. The overall impression is of a Mexican literature ‘que registra la vida cotidiana disfrazándola de solemnidad, de historia, intimidad, gradilocuencia y naturalismo, pero pocas veces la vida “tal como es” sirve de motivo literario.’ Ibargüengoitia’s humour has a much more ample range: as Domínguez Michael points out, Ibargüengoitia is a ‘cuentista de excepcional oído para los diálogos tal como se dan y para el chiste sencillo pero infalible’: ‘A veces se trata de un humor situacional, otras se presenta de manera verbal y, las más, por medio de la simple caracterización de personajes y situaciones’. Ibargüengoitia’s range goes from farce and slapstick to parody, satire and an all-pervasive sense of irony.

The butts of his humour are human pretensions and failings. He centres his attention particularly on Mexico and (mainstream) Mexicans, deconstructing the myths of the Revolution, and the tenets of abstract Mexican national identity, offering an absurd inventory of concrete national idiosyncrasies as an alternative. This does not make him anti-nationalist, but rather the *juge-pénitent* of Mexican identity, determined to illicit a confession from his audience. Unlike earlier constructions of Mexican identity as seen through the travel-chronicle, Ibargüengoitia does not find it in the landscape, or in the suggestion that the landscape shapes the people. Rather, he homes in on the trivial details of individual human lives and then extrapolates from the individual to the group to form a deliberately distorted (but still recognisable) vision of life in Mexico: the role of women in

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94 Antonio Saborit, in his review of Ibargüengoitia’s *Autopsias rápidas*, ‘Remedios contra la pesadez’ (*Nexos*, 142 (October 1989), 52-53) lists as potential precursors of Ibargüengoitia the journalistic ‘sparks’ of Fernández de Lizardi, Zarco, Prieto, Sierra, Cuéllar, Gutiérrez Nájera, Frías, Leduc (padre), Campos, Nervo, Micrós, Urbina, and the ‘artículos ligeros’ of Alvarado, Leduc, Novo and others, although he finds that their sphere of influence does not really reach Ibargüengoitia. With respect to Novo in particular, Ibargüengoitia’s approach is much less bookish, his intertext much more culturally diffuse (implicit rather than explicit). Of more influence on Ibargüengoitia’s literary development is the work of European writers such as Evelyn Waugh and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, both proudly prejudiced writers of social satire.


96 *Antología de la narrativa mexicana*, II, 62-63.

97 Significantly he rejects any Vasconcelian discourse of racial identity, attributing this to a North American vision of Mexicans, and prefers to discuss Mexican identity in terms of ‘nacionalidad, idioma y cultura’ (*La casa de usted y otros viajes*, ed. by Guillermo Sheridan (Mortiz, 1991), p. 328).
Mexican society, the civic works of Mexican politicians, the behaviour patterns of Mexican tourists... As Fabienne Bradu has noted,

Ibargüengoitia nunca visita un país con el ánimo de un paisajista o de un historiador: prefiere meter las narices en las enaguas de una ciudad, como quien pretende conocer a sus huéspedes de una noche, no en su conversación sino en la visita furtiva al baño en el momento más aburrido de la sobremesa. Gracias a su curiosidad morbosa, sabemos por ejemplo de todas las extravagancias de excusados y baños que han aparecido en sus peregrinaciones desgananadas por el mundo.98

In Ibargüengoitia’s column for Excelsior (1969-1976), and thereafter for Vuelta, where he professed his opinions on a wide variety of different topics generally associated with the dramas of daily life, he used the subject of his frequent travels in Mexico and abroad as a leitmotif. This is clear in his publication of a collection of these articles in book form under the title Viajes en la América ignota (1972). Subsequent collections of his articles, selected posthumously by Guillermo Sheridan and others, have taken the lead from this: La casa de usted y otros viajes (1991) and ¿Olvida usted su equipaje? (1997). The interest in, and impact of, his travel-writing has grown to almost cult proportions in the last ten years.

The title Viajes en la América ignota is clearly an ironic reference to the works written by so many anthropologists in search of ‘Unknown Mexico’. The irony is redoubled when the reader realises that the ‘unknown’ part of America for Ibargüengoitia is actually the United States. Again, in the same anthology, Ibargüengoitia includes a ‘comic strip’ called ‘En busca de la moscardeta’ (pp. 133-45) which uses a selection of nineteenth-century lithographs and engravings (possibly pastiches) to narrate a parody of the naturalist traveller in search of the rare tropical bird, ending with the caption ‘Manos a la obra: la descripción de la moscardeta’ under an image of a Humboldtian figure writing in a notebook. The local inhabitants - ‘los bembos’ - appear in the same exotic supporting role as they did in nineteenth-century travel-chronicles. Ibargüengoitia is ostensibly deconstructing the naturalist travel-chronicle, but at the same time he pokes fun at the function of early anthropology in his descriptions of the locals’ dances and games. In another article in the same collection he even proposes a couple of new degree subjects which underscore his irreverent approach to the study of Mexican life ways: ‘Misanthropología Mexicana’ and ‘Mitología Aplicada’.99 That Ibargüengoitia is deliberately ironising the discourse of anthropology and its myths is clear from these examples and many more in the later collections of his work.

What Ibargüengoitia tends to do is pick a topic suitable for sociology and then use the terms of anthropology to describe it. The disproportionate distance implied between the narrator

98 Review of La casa de usted, Vuelta, 181 (December 1991), 45.
99 Viajes en la América ignota, 4th repr. (Mortiz, 1992), p. 130. For the first subject he suggests ‘un curso de Historia de Nuestra Canción Vernácula, Historia del Poder Legislativo, tres cursos progresivos de Genios Mexicanos que se Malograron, una Historia de las Relaciones Sexuales Mexicanorobéamoamericanas, una investigación de campo sobre las Causas de Nuestro Subdesarrollo, que deberá incluir una visita a una tienda de refacciones de artículos fabricados en México, un curso de Falsos Valores y una Introducción a la Burocracia’.
and the object of narration creates the irony. For example, a discussion of pollution levels in the Federal District is couched as ‘El fin de estas tribus’, rather than the end of the (human) race. In another example which makes explicit his send-up of anthropology, Ibargüengoitia turns his attention to the French - the subaltern finally counters the ur-source of anthropological knowledge:

Yo tengo prejuicios con respecto a Francia. Uno de ellos está basado en la teoría antropológica de que cada vez que los franceses descubren algo que les interesa de origen extranjero, lo malpronuncian primero, después lo malinterpretan, y acaban creyendo que es invento francés.

Exceptionally, Ibargüengoitia also turns the tables and provides a sociology of readers’ receptions of anthropological works: in ‘Regreso a Azteca’ he extrapolates from Oscar Lewis’s account of Tepoztlán (‘¡Lo que es la antropología!’) to consider how the work would be read by a housewife in Milwaukee, and how a working class Mexican family - if they could read - would be equally horrified at the banality of the life-style of a middle-class Milwaukee housewife...

Where Ibargüengoitia excels in his travel-chronicles is in his treatment of tourism and tourists. He is not an advocate of tourism as a healthy alternative to anthropology; rather, it seems a suitably unsuitable subject to act as a counterpoint to his send-up of anthropological discourse. In the years of Echeverría’s, and later López Portillo’s, promotion of mass national tourism (the 1970s), Ibargüengoitia concentrated his attentions on the leisure activities of the mainstream of Mexican society - on the beach, in the hotel, touring in their cars, and in so doing he took apart the mythical ‘package’.

Tourism in Mexico is a mystery to Ibargüengoitia:

Va uno a provincia para conocer mejor la “realidad mexicana”, o para no olvidar nuestra verdadera apariencia. Aunque uno de los efectos de estos viajes tiene exactamente el sentido contrario. Cuando va uno a provincia el éxito de nuestra industria más importante, la del turismo, se vuelve un misterio indescifrable.

El error fundamental de nuestra técnica ha consistido en tratar de presentar a México como un paraíso. Lo que es peor, se ha tratado de convertirlo en un paraíso. Ni es paraíso, ni hay dinero suficiente para transformarlo en semejante cosa.

The smog of the Federal District, the rubbish along the roadside and the uncomfortable proximity to other Mexicans on buses are Ibargüengoitia’s real Mexico. The tourist industry struggles to avoid these eyesores and discomforts, yet even the real beauty-spots of the Republic must also be glossed with wilfully incorrect anecdotes: ‘No importa que

100 Viajes en la América ignota, pp. 197-200.
101 La casa de usted, p. 216.
102 La casa de usted, pp. 336-38.
103 ¿Olvida usted su equipaje? (Mortiz, 1997), p. 59. He even uses ‘misterios turísticos’ as a title for whole groups of his articles, now collected in La casa de usted.
104 Viajes en la América ignota, p. 26. The same is true of Egypt according to Ibargüengoitia (La casa de usted, pp. 280-82).
Ibargüengoitia’s chronicles on tourism consist in a deconstruction of the modern myths of Mexican beach games, public transport protocol, airports, public toilets, and the behaviour of Mexicans travelling abroad. Much of this is reminiscent of Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* (1957): this is deconstruction’s approach to *costumbrismo*.106 But more than providing a semiotics of tourism, Ibargüengoitia is interested in playing with his subject, sending it up and perversely enjoying the spectacle of it all. He presents himself as an anti-travel-chronicler, greatly put out by his undue proximity to the masses when forced to travel. Yet he also deliberately takes Cook’s package tours to Egypt and second-class buses from Mexico City to Guanajuato: he seems to enjoy the martyrdom of group travel. The passivity and innate sedentariness of the tourist experience allows him time to assume the role of ‘l’écrivain en vacances’ (a tourist, but not quite...),107 sending home articles under rubrics such as ‘Manual del viajero’ and ‘Nueva guía de México’. In fact the anti-travel-chronicler and the bad tourist come to be practically the same thing in Ibargüengoitia’s work.108

Ibargüengoitia’s closest contemporary in terms of the tone of his writing is cult-chronicler Carlos Monsiváíás who, although much more intellectual and cliquey in his humour, shares the same desire to document Mexican daily life in all its quirks and commonplaces. More so than Ibargüengoitia, Monsiváíás limits his study of Mexicans to the urban domain. He diversifies, however, in his selection of Mexicans to be studied, displaying a particular interest in marginal groups and popular culture.

True to his urban persona, Monsiváíás’s excursions into the provinces are uncommon (he actually refuses to acknowledge his practice of the travel-chronicle form (interview)). Nevertheless, he does narrate his personal reactions to travel in a number of his chronicles: he justifies this by presenting himself as unequipped for the provinces, and forced to go in order to cover ‘la noticia’.109 Like Ibargüengoitia, he is an anti-travel-chronicler (perhaps even more so...). Recalcitrant, he claims to be unable to interpret the rural landscape of Guerrero. On the subject of the ‘vasto desconocimiento de un hijo de la ciudad en torno a la nomenclatura de plantas y de árboles’, he affirms,

> Del horizonte sólo ha extraído la esperanza del transporte. En su recuerdo, el verde siempre se asociará con la línea camionera Lagunilla-San Juan de Leetrán; el azul con la línea Zócalo-San Lázaro. Le corresponde entonces asumir el viaje con fijación

105 *Viajes en la América ignota*, p. 27.
106 See, for example, ‘Conozca primero México, II: hábitos pintorescos’, *Olvida usted...?*, pp. 62-64.
108 See also the section on Novo earlier in this chapter.
109 The travel is justified by the subject: Monsiváíás has really only written fully-fledged travel-chronicles when he has had a moving subject to chronicle (a pilgrimage, a demonstration, etc.). See ‘7 de marzo de 1970: Dios nunca muere (crónica de un eclipse)’ and ‘2 de octubre / 2 de noviembre / día de muertos: y era nuestra herencia una red de agujeros’ in *Días de guardar*, photographs by Héctor García, 13th repr. (Era, 1991), pp. 91-114 and 295-305, respectively. See also ‘Crónica de una Convención (que no lo fue tanto) y de un acontecimiento muy significativo’, in *EZLN, documentos y comunicados: 1 de enero / 8 de agosto 1994*, proli. by Antonio García de León, 2nd repr. (Era, 1995), pp. 313-23.
arqueológica: ¿qué ha dejado el hombre a su paso, cuáles son las huellas de la presencia humana? (‘Dios nunca muere’, pp. 92-93)

And continues,

La vida ribereña se le ofrece, realista, como un haz de impresiones fijas: más que cinematográfica la miseria es atemporal. Esas chozas taimadas, con esas mujeres que calientan tortillas (al abrigo de la superstición gastronómica que indica como supremamente deleitoso lo más barato), con esas niñas de ojos interminables fugitivas de un cuadro de Diego Rivera, con esos perros de la desesperanza y ese borracho pintoresco que musita sin término la misma frase en inglés: -Ey, Mister, lend me your irs, lend me your irs, lend me...

bien pudieron ser consignados por Francisco Rojas González en sus cuentos antropológicos, quizás fueron asimilados por Emilio Fernández en las vivencias escenográficas de La Perla. No puede haber gran variedad de cronistas en México. La serpiente se muerde la cola. ¿Qué tanto difiere la mentalidad observada por la marquesa Calderón de la Barca de la comentada por Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera de la elogiada por Salvador Novo? Las constantes del ser humano, dirá alguien. Otro enmendará: las constantes del ser colonial. (p. 93)

Neither art, nor anthropology, can offer more than a superficial reproduction of the misery of provincial life: travel-chronicling in its ‘encrucijada’ between the two disciplines is thus a futile, repetitive activity. Monsiváis, like Benítez (to whom Días de guardar is dedicated), requires political commitment: his humour is at the service of his politics.

Where Ibargüengoitia centred his attention on mainstream leisure tourism, Monsiváis chooses the ‘ethnic tourism’ of Mexican ‘onderos’ and foreign beatniks. In his treatment of ‘ethnic tourism’, anthropology and tourism finally fuse together into the same practice and both are revealed to be sterile. In another chronicle of the movements of Mexico’s hippy tourist circuit, Monsiváis describes the Day of the Dead celebrations of 1968: ‘México ha vendido el culto a la muerte y los turistas sonríen, antropológicamente hartos’ (‘Y era nuestra herencia una red de agujeros’, p. 295). Anthropologists such as Oscar Lewis stand side by side with ‘las tribus de la Zona Rosa’ who are now professional tourists of themselves.

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110 See Section 2, Chapter 2 for more detailed study of the travel component of the novels of La Onda.

111 Other writers of the ironic anti-travel-chronicle as created by Ibargüengoitia and Monsiváis are María Luisa Mendoza (Crónica de Chile (1972) and Raza, Ree, Rii, Rooney, Rusia (URSS) (1974)), Abel Quezada (Imágenes de Japón (1972)), Fernando Curiel (¿Que viva Londres! (1973), or the second edition, La vida en Londres (1987)), Mónica Mansour (‘Reconozcase quien pueda’, in the book that she co-authored with María Luisa Puga, Itinerario de palabras (1987)), José Joaquín Blanco (‘Boarding Pass’, in his Cuando todas las chamacas se pusieron medias nylon (y otras crónicas) (1988)), Dante Medina (Sólo los viajero saben que al sur está el verano: un viaje por Francia, Italia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria y Grecia (1993)), Guillermo Sheridan (Cartas de Copilco, y otros postales (1994)), and the two writers studied in Section 2, Chapter 1 - Juan Villoro and Francisco Hinojosa.
La tradición continúa...

The travel-chronicle has continued to exist throughout the twentieth century, despite claims to the contrary. In essence it remains the same practice that was inaugurated in the early nineteenth-century. It is still largely realist and linear in its construction, and it still narrates and describes journeys made by a real person to real locations at a precise point in history. Its forum for publication is still primarily that of newspapers and magazines.

Some changes are noticeable. The dominant reason for the narration of travel in the twentieth-century is tourism rather than politics. This is so even if other reasons such as anthropological study or journalism actually motivated the journey in the first place: what gets narrated is more often the generalised touristic impressions of the traveller; not his or her scientific or political observations. The nationalist impulse to the travel-chronicle still exists but in a more concrete form. As Carlos Fuentes noted in 1965, the writers of the second half of the twentieth century are no longer ‘delving into the abstract idea of “Mexicanness” but rather into the concrete nature of Mexicans, socially or individually considered’. This move from abstract identity to concrete human lives may be neatly perceived in the travel-chronicler’s treatment of landscape: nationalist works of the nineteenth century described the landscape to illustrate the greatness of Mexico and hence it functioned as a symbol of Mexican identity; in the early twentieth century landscape received a treatment which became increasingly functional; by the late twentieth century description of natural landscape is barely possible without referring to the human hands that have shaped it and, in general, the authors prefer urban, and more specifically human landscapes. Most authors also make great claims for their originality and independence from any sense of tradition, yet as Carlos Monsiváis has commented, Mexico is ‘un país experimental donde las tradiciones por excelencia son la improvisación continua y el rechazo de la tradición’.


113 'Notas sobre la cultura mexicana en el siglo XX', Historia general de México, ed. by Daniel Cosío Villegas, 2nd edn, 4 vols (Colegio de México, 1977), IV, 309.

114 A number travel-chroniclers have had to be left out of this chapter because of restrictions of space; their works, nevertheless, are listed in the bibliography. Names that should be mentioned for their substantial publication of travel-chronicles either in whole books or in newspapers and reviews are: Miguel Covarrubias, José Luis Cuevas, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, Andrés Iduarte, Fabio Morábito, Jaime Moreno Villarreal, Sergio Pitol, Enrique Rivas Paniagua, and Juan Gerardo Sampedro. Writers who have used the leitmotif of travel for more fictional or metaphorical purposes are: Héctor Orestes Aguilar, José Agustín, Alberto Blanco, Gonzalo Celorio, Carlos Chimal, Manuel Gómezperalta Damirón, Saúl Juárez, José de la Colina, Hernán Lara Zavala (El mismo cielo), David Martín del Campo (Delfines y tiburones; El año del fuego), Dante Medina (Ciudades de por sí), Jesús Morales Bermúdez, Pablo Soler Frost, Juan Manuel Torres, and Roberto Vállarino (Las aventuras de Euforión).

An excuse should also be made for the general lack of attention to works by women writers: unfortunately, no woman has yet achieved critical acclaim for her travel-chronicling on a par with that achieved by the male writers studied in this chapter. Also, although a number of women have dedicated works to their travels (Elena Garro, Mónica Mansour, María Luisa Mendoza, Rosa Nissán, and Verónica Volkow), the general impetus is that of autobiography and/or metaphorical, fantasy travels (see also works by María Victoria García, Ana García Bergua (El umbral), Margo Glantz, and Ángeles Mastretta).
SECTION 2

The Contemporary Travel-Chronicle
INTRODUCTION

Postscript

Posts

In the late 1980s the postmodern era officially reached Mexico, welcomed in by Octavio Paz in his journal Vuelta. That is to say, the debate on postmodemity (the historical era) and postmodernism (the accompanying cultural practice) started extremely late in the day in comparison with its discussion in Europe or the United States. This does not mean that cultural expressions which might be deemed part of this postmodern era did not exist before (La Onda of the late 1960s is usually cited as a postmodern cultural expression); rather, that it was only in the late 1980s that Mexican cultural practitioners started to give the new era a name and to consciously address the conundrums it presented.

Much has been written already about the difficult relevance of postmodernism to Mexico and other Latin American countries. While a number of critics and practitioners of ‘high culture’ associated with Paz have welcomed the new era, the majority of critics in Mexico have tended to be much more cautious of postmodernism’s appeal for the country. A series of interviews conducted by Magali Tercero and published in Sábado, the cultural supplement of the newspaper Unomásuno, from 10 July to 23 August 1988, and reprinted under the rubric ‘¿Existe el postmodernismo?’ in Casa del Tiempo, 81 (January 1989), plus a number of articles in the magazine Nexos over the same period, respond to the positive interest shown by Paz and friends in 1987, displaying a more sceptical, although not entirely dismissive, approach to the postmodern.

Sergio Zermeño, in an article entitled ‘La tentación posmoderna’, gives the most succinct overview of the postmodern debate. At his most dismissive he writes that, ‘No existen las coincidencias de lo latinoamericano con las tesis del posmodernismo’ (p. 7). An imperfect modernisation project has left most Latin Americans, particularly in rural areas, in a state of premodernity, and only a very small sector of the population has full access to the infrastructure of postmodernity. This eclectic mix of very different stages of development might look like a postmodern social collage (‘América Latina es posmoderna y nunca

1 See Vuelta 127 (June 1987), especially Paz’s editorial (‘¿Postmodernidad?’, p. 1) which claims to have been introducing postmodernity to Mexico since at least 1981.
llegará a ser moderna’ (p. 7) he comments ironically), but, for Zermeño, looking postmodern and being postmodern are two very different issues. Western postmodernity’s ‘politically correct’ cult of popular culture, rescuing traditions, and privileging marginalised voices is a choice; a choice made largely by a sector of society removed from the realities of life in the margins and with full access to the perks of postmodernity: the consumerist lifestyle, the ‘spectacular’ option on Weltanschauung. Latin Americans, for the most part, are left to pick up the scraps of postmodern fallout: the narcotics trade offers about the only hope of ‘independent life-style’ for the man in the street. Exceptionally, however, Zermeño does allow that cultural practices such as architecture, or art, may have developed a postmodern form without reference to a pre-existing state of postmodernity in Latin America.

Carlos Monsiváis has also been extremely cautious in his dealings with ‘postmodernity’. While it is indisputable that he is the cultural critic most keen on reflecting (on) new social trends in Mexico: movements, icons, rituals, displays, many of which would appear to be part of the postmodern mood (Gloria Trevi calendars, La Onda, Superbarrio, etc.), he has clearly resisted the temptation to use this hold-all term in his vade mecum to contemporary Mexican society. For the most part he restricts himself to analysing the facets of Mexican ‘modernidad’ more in line with the thinking of radical social theorists such as Guy Debord (la Société du Spectacle (1967)) than with any of the theorists of the postmodern such as Jean-François Lyotard or Jean Baudrillard. From the 1990s onwards he displays a ‘post’-consciousness, but reserves usage of ‘post’-terminology for disparaging or parodie critique. In 1992, in his introduction to the anthology El fin de la nostalgia: nueva crónica de la ciudad de México, he comments on the ‘desmadre que ordena el universo postapocalíptico’ of the Federal District (p. 25). In Proceso magazine in August 1994 Subcommander Marcos is described as ‘acosado por la posmodernidad’. In Los rituales del caos (1995), Monsiváis coins the terms ‘postnacionalismo’ to ironically describe the display of patriotism sparked in so many Mexicans by soccer matches, and queries the continuing existence of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe in ‘un mundo posttradicional’. Monsiváis here displays the predominant attitude to postmodernity in Mexico: it is something to play with, to tease, and, if possible, to estrange; that is, to treat as a foreigner.

Zermeño and Monsiváis are among the large group of theorists and critics who judge that postmodernity is a phenomenon born of the economic structures of late capitalism in the most economically powerful countries of the first world, primarily North America as far as Latin America is concerned. It manifests itself in Latin America as a transnational epidemic: postmodernity is a tourist in Latin America, benefited by an extremely favourable exchange rate. Latin America has, however, generated its own tourists from among the upper and upper-middle classes. Many have made postmodernity their own, in what is generally seen

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4 Reprinted in García de León’s EZLN, documentos y comunicados, pp. 320-21.
5 (Era, 1995), p. 37 & p. 40. We are also arguably now in the era of post-anthropology where the old myths are defunct and culture itself has absorbed anthropological discourse to the extent that it has become ‘anthropological culture’ (Baudrillard, America, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1996), p. 100); and that of post-tourism where tourists travel in search of the unauthentic spectacle of tourism itself (see Section 2, Chapter 1).
as a crass sellout to the American life-style. This homespun postmodernity comes in for even more harsh criticism from commentators such as Monsivais.

Whether postmodernity is from the North American head office, or from a Latin American branch, it is understandable that many commentators see it as something to be resisted and that, at best, a response to postmodernity must be an intensification of the give-and-take process of transculturation. That this response is called generally referred to as ‘postmodernismo’ is one source of confusion. Santiago Colás’s theory of ‘un posmodernismo resistente’ is perhaps a way of clarifying the issue.6

Modernism / Postmodernism

Supposing some kind of postmodernism to exist in Latin America, one of the major debates concerns whether it constitutes a continuation and intensification of modernism, or a break with the project of modernism altogether. This is particularly relevant to the survival of the travel-chronicle in the ‘post’ era.

If postmodernism is a continuation of modernism, then the conditions for the survival of the travel-chronicle become extremely adverse: the characteristics of modernist literature enumerated by John Barth7 simply intensify, rendering the genre of the travel-chronicle either obsolete or unrecognisable. If, however, postmodernism is a rupture with, or implosion of, modernism, and an ever-so partial return to the projects of realism and romanticism, then the travel-chronicle will be revived also. Roberto Echevarría, in Laruta de Severo Sarduy, notes that for him the main characteristics of postmodernism are the ‘regreso de las historias’, for the sake of telling stories; the general lack of totalising, authoritarian projects and values; a renewed interest in ‘relatos locales’ (p. 251), stories from the margins of society (women, gays, indigenous people), and from the provinces in a country as centralised as Mexico; a distinct lack of metatext;8 and a concern with superficiality, ‘literatura lite’: ‘Ni el lenguaje en sus giros y juegos, ni los personajes, ni la figura del autor, prometen un conocimiento profundo. Todo es color, narratividad, acción’ (p. 252).

In the event, postmodernism is both a continuation and a rupture with modernism, simultaneous or alternating; a development and up-dating of some of its features and a reevaluation of other less ‘modern’ literary strategies. In general postmodernism is characterised by its extreme heterogeneity of styles and subjects. Nevertheless, the majority of prose being published in Mexico today would seem to err on the side of the rupture with modernism detailed above.


7 Quoted in Section 1, Chapter 2, p. 73.

8 Some would argue that postmodernism does still include a metatext, but one which tries to ‘posit [a] critical distance and then undo it’; one which is doubly ironic (see Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 15). This appears to be a plausible refinement of Echevarría’s definition.
Baudrillard / Kapuscinski

In the case of the travel-chronicle, a project which would seem to be illustrative of the postmodern subject, yet couched in still fairly modernist terms is Jean Baudrillard’s *America* (1986). After a brief introductory paragraph which suggests more than establishes the situation of a driver-narrator on holiday in the American South-West, engaged in interior monologue on the subject of how best to recreate the experience of travel in other media, the text becomes a series of images presented as independent fragments following the capitalised place-name to which they relate: San Antonio, Grand Canyon, Monument Valley. There is practically nothing in the way of anecdote; no further indication of homodiegesis than the use of the first person plural in the opening paragraph; and no dialogue - just the transcription of road signs, advertisements, graffiti, repeated over and over again: ‘I did it’, ‘Tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life’, ‘Mileage Unlimited’. It is only after this series of images that the narrator identifies himself in the most laconic of terms (he’s French) and offers a metatextual discussion of his objectives in his travels in America.

The book’s six chapters go on to deal with various different aspects of North American life-style. Frequent repetitions of material, combined with little or no link-up between chapters, and even between paragraphs, suggest that these chapters, or subdivisions thereof, appeared as journalistic articles prior to their assemblage as a book, and that they were not then edited down for the coherent, succinct book version. However, repetition and discontinuity may also be seen as indicators of a modernist/postmodernist style which refuses to edit raw material. Increasing speed and comfort in travel (smooth, straight roads and the anaesthesia of multiple plane journeys) leave little room to edit on the road, and the collection of verbal snapshots of the American South-West with which the book opens ironically provides the most verisimilar account of a writer’s experience of travel in the late twentieth century: laconic, ecstatic, compulsive, and incantatory.

However, an overall assessment of the text reveals that Baudrillard’s main objective in writing the text is to develop a sociology of the postmodern, rather than a personal travel narrative in postmodern terms - travel is only justified by his perception that first-hand experience of the acme of postmodernity that is the United States will enhance his analytical capabilities. Chapter 2 ends abruptly with the statement ‘The journey is over’ (p. 24). His raw material is thus increasingly mediated by the hegemony of the academic voice, dependent on very few quotations or intertextual references to support its authority. Yet Baudrillard’s academic discourse does not appear to follow the argumentative structure of intellectual debate either. He spreads out an associative network of ideas, observations, routes and detours of the American way of life. This idea of a network as opposed to an itinerary is, perhaps, a key to postmodern leisure-travel-writing. Travel-writers, at least those who travel for pleasure rather than out of necessity, are no longer seeking to reach specific destinations, nor are their travels in search of history, or its making.
Baudrillard remains a 'hyper'-modernist in his totalitarian discourse, in the highly fragmented and experimental nature of his text, in his frequent use of metatext coupled with a certain bashfulness about narrating his own life, preferring to remain a spectator rather than a protagonist, and, perhaps also in his snobbishness about travel with reference to tourism à l’Lévi-Strauss (‘La fin des voyages’). In this modernist vein he notes the demise of the travel-chronicle: ‘You are best advised, then, to land discreetly, to come back politely into this world [Europe] keeping anything you may have to say - along with the few sights still gleaming in your memory - strictly to yourself’ (p. 73).9

Nevertheless, the object of his travels (The USA) is clearly postmodern, and so too are some aspects of his narrative style. He goes in search of what he terms the ‘fiction of hyperreality’: spectacle, superficiality, lack of authenticity; the banal, the kitsch, the blurring of high/low cultural divisions. With particular reference to the travel-narrative form, the prevalence of the network ‘chronotope’ which allows for a loosening of chronological organisation in the text, plus the increasing lack of actual narrative of travel and its tendency to devolve into virtual and metaphoric forms of displacement, plus the obsession with speeds so high as to convert location in time and space into pure space (no dates or durations are given), are all indicative of the postmodern travel-chronicle. This is really all the scope that exists for formal innovation in the construction of the travel-chronicle to keep ‘apace of the times’, without jeopardising the distinction between it and any other narrative practice.

Baudrillard’s style of travel-chronicle has had demonstrable influence over the production of a number of contemporary Mexican travel-chronicles. Nevertheless, it is a very different kind of travel-writer who is actually held up to contemporary Mexican writers for emulation: the Polish journalist, Ryszard Kapuscinski.10 Witness to twenty-seven different revolutions and coups in Africa, Asia and Latin America from the 1960s to the 1980s, chronicler of the emergence of the Third World in books such as The Emperor (1978), The Shah of Shahs (1982), The Soccer War (1990) and Imperium (1993), Kapuscinski has been in print in Spanish in Mexico since 1980.11 He is given a chapter to himself in Federico Campbell’s El periodismo escrito (1994) and his texts have frequently appeared in translation in Nexos and La Jornada Semanal.12

Kapuscinski does recognise a debt to Baudrillard’s thinking, and even to his travel-writing: ‘En mi opinión, Baudrillard es uno de los autores contemporáneos más relevantes’.13 Like

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9 No doubt also following in the disgruntled footsteps of Lévi-Strauss, in 1974 Jorge Ibargüengoitia complained, ‘Me he dado cuenta de que a nadie le interesa, a nadie le da envidia y nadie se admira de que uno se vaya de viaje. Ya no es como antes’ (La casa de usted, p. 259).

10 The Catalan Josep Pla is also something of a cult travel-writer for Mexican authors (see articles by Antonio Deltoro, and Ernesto Hernández Busio listed in bibliography).

11 Federico Campbell, Periodismo escrito, p. 132. His first translation and publication in Britain did not occur until 1983.

12 See articles listed under Kapuscinski in bibliography. Also see bibliography for critical appraisals of Kapuscinski’s work, under Jaime Avilés and Leon Bendesky.

13 ‘Apuntes nómadas’, part of interview by Frank Berberich, repr. from Letra Internacional, Nexos, 226 (October 1996), 59-69 (p. 63).
Baudrillard, Kapuscinski is fascinated by a place such as Los Angeles, yet his response to the experience of postmodernity is much less nihilistic. Where Baudrillard’s critique of America, while insightful, is also a call to mass suicide, Kapuscinski finds hope in the cultural collage of different races creating what he refers to, in a perhaps ingenuous recycling of Vasconcelos’s terminology, as ‘la raza cósmica’. Kapuscinski, unlike Baudrillard, displays a sense of commitment to humankind and a hope for its continuing history in a postmodern era.

The writing of Kapuscinski’s overview of human strife and brutality in Africa, Asia and Latin America is necessarily different from Baudrillard’s synthesis of the land of plenty. In ‘Apuntes nómadass’ Kapuscinski details what might be held up as the new style-book for travel-chroniclers with a commitment to the developing world. He bases his work on a solid foundation of travel, reading and reflection (p. 59) where his personal presence, feelings and thoughts are essential to the ‘reality’ and the ‘emotive charge’ of the resultant text, yet not over-bearing or authoritarian (p. 60). He aims to be as concise yet as expressive as possible (p. 61/63), and he moulds his writing - its rhythm, its lexicon - to fit new surroundings (p. 60). He breaks down the definitions of literary genres to suit, although chronologically-ordered, realist travel-narrative is almost always his structuring principle (p. 62), and he aims to put literature at the service of history-in-the-making (p. 63). Although he sometimes refers to his texts as ‘Cubist collages’, he is adamant that his use of polyphony, for example, is designed to promote comprehension and poignancy, rather than fragment understanding and frustrate pathos.

Kapuscinski’s techniques have occasionally been identified with those of the American New Journalists, although Kapuscinski himself, would refute this genealogy. As Campbell has noted,

[Kapuscinski] se distingue de Southern, Wolfe, Mailer, Thompson, porque su estilo es más llano y menos experimental, porque su actitud ante el acontecimiento es más distante [...] Su narrativa es más lineal y se muestra, digamos, más respetuosa de la realidad.
(p. 130)

Kapuscinski also claims that his is a much more risky enterprise (a death-defying ‘mission’, not a writerly ‘vocation’), and that the resultant texts constitute a ‘New Literature’ altogether.  

In terms of his style of writing, then, Kapuscinski appears considerably removed from the innovations of modernism or postmodernism. A good, straightforward story is only rarely interrupted by stylistic experiments or the introduction of epistemological self-consciousness; history is far from dead; strongly homodiegetic travel-writing is the most appropriate genre for the narrative of history-in-the-making; the travel itself is still clearly

15 For this reason he comments that his text on the war between El Salvador and Honduras ("The Soccer War") was written in a Baroque style to capture the essence of the Spanish language (p. 60).
16 Interview by Bill Buford, Granta, 21 (Spring 1987), 97.
goal-orientated; and the goals are only accessible after a rough ride (one perhaps more worthy of narration than that proportioned by the super-highways of the United States). But none of this makes Kapuscinski’s work out-dated, because his subject matter is inherently new and important. His enquiry into historical changes on the periphery of the developed world is perhaps only postmodern if we choose to view the ‘margins’ as an integral part of postmodemism, but the terminology of postmodernism is really irrelevant to Kapuscinski’s enterprise.

Very little of Mexico’s contemporary travel-chronicling actually lives up to Kapuscinski’s standards: the leisured conditions and the lack of commitment or urgency experienced by all the authors studied in Section 2 of this thesis ironically push the resultant travel-chronicles into Baudrillard’s camp, rather than Kapuscinski’s. Nevertheless, several authors do refer to Kapuscinski as a mentor.17

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17 In the words of Alvaro Ruiz Abreu, ‘Uno de los rumbos más visibles de la narrativa contemporánea es su pertenencia a géneros híbridos en los que se intercal aba la poesía y el ensayo, el reportaje y la semblanza, la crónica y la entrevista. Una crónica de Ryszard Kapuscinsky (sic) es más literaria que una mala novela, y su propuesta es la multiplicidad de formas, estilos y contenidos’ (‘Novela de la crisis y crisis de la novela’, Nexos, 241 (January 1998), 184).
Despite the difficulties posed by modernism for the chronicle, it is generally understood that the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 helped stimulate a revival in its creation with the urgent demand for some straight talking and the need for a write-up of events that had not appeared in the national press. In 1980 Carlos Monsiváis concluded his definitive overview of the history of the chronicle, *A ustedes les consta*, with a call for an increase in the production of chronicles: ‘Hay un nuevo país que se empieza a cronicar y documentar: el México de masas y desempleo, de frustración y esperanzas bajo la tierra. Todo está por escribirse, grabarse, registrarse’ (p. 76).

Again in 1981 the editors of Porrúa’s second edition of Teixidor’s *Viajeros mexicanos* concluded their foreword with Altamirano’s statements concerning the lack of travel-writing by Mexican authors, and added their own plea: ‘Quizá la lectura de los juicios de Ignacio Altamirano, estimulen a nuestros autores, y al sencillo viajante, para que nos obsequien y trasmitan sus impresiones como *viajeros mexicanos, en México*’ (p. xii, authors’ italics). Most recently, the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas which took place on 1 January 1994 and has continued ever since, intermittently arranging seminars for the international press in the middle of the Lacandón jungle, has helped stimulate the production of chronicles and travel-chronicles concerning that region.

Section 2 of this thesis examines in detail the results of two series of travel-chronicles which have been commissioned by Alianza Editorial Mexicana and the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes since the late 1980s. In 1989 Alianza Editorial Mexicana (AEM) announced the publication of a series of travel-writing by Mexicans in Mexico. On the back-cover of the first title - Juan Villoro’s *Palmeras de la brisa rápida: un viaje a Yucatán* - the editors noted:

> En un país como el nuestro, pródigo en paisajes naturales y humanos retratados con abundancia durante el siglo XIX, extraña no encontrar hoy en día una literatura igualmente copiosa que lo describa, acote y reflexione sobre él. [...] Con este volumen, Alianza Editorial Mexicana inicia una colección de relatos de viajes que pretende cubrir las notorias ausencias en este género.

The series was the idea of editor and writer Sealtiel Alatriste, supported by the vice-president of the publishing house, René Solís. Both Alatriste and Solís considered that the field of travel-writing on Mexico ‘había sido monopolizado por viajeros extranjeros que escribieron sus observaciones y experiencias de viaje, de Thomas Gage hasta Lawrence, Greene, Waugh, Paul Theroux et al.’ Furthermore, both had recently enjoyed reading Camilo José Cela’s travel-chronicles of journeys in his native land (such as his *Viaje a la Alcarria* (1948)), and considered that something similar should be possible in Mexico. In early 1988, they contacted Juan Villoro with the proposal that he should write a travel-chronicle for their new series. Villoro accepted both the proposal and a comfortable travel

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18 Quoted as an epigraph to the introduction to this thesis.
19 Personal letter from René Solís, 8 November 1995.
grant, and was dispatched to Yucatan for a month. The book was well received on publication, requiring an almost immediate second edition of two thousand copies to add to the three thousand already sold.

Five months later a second volume in the series was published - Rafael Ramírez Heredia’s *Por los caminos del sur: vamonos para Guerrero* (1990) - with a print-run of three thousand copies. The book was also generally well received, and was entered in a literary competition. After this, however, the series slumped: the publishing house was in financial difficulties; Alatriste left for Editorial Alfaguara, and later Solís also moved on to direct Publicaciones CITEM. The lack of any kind of publicity or marketing except one or two unassuming adverts in *Vuelta* did not help the matter. A text which Margo Glantz had been commissioned to write was never submitted. A competition which was planned to stimulate the production of travel-chronicles in Mexico by Mexicans was never organised.

In the event, a prize-winning documentary by Tom Miller – *On the Border: Portraits of America’s Southwestern Frontier* (1981) - translated by Federico Patán as *En la frontera: imágenes desconocidas de nuestra frontera norte*, was added to the series in 1991, and a humorous text by Dante Medina – *Sólo los viajeros saben que al sur está el verano: un viaje por Francia, Italia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria y Grecia* - in 1993, both with print runs of two thousand copies. However, neither of these two books bears reference to the travel-chronicle series on their jackets - only inside information links them to the texts by Villoro and Ramírez Heredia. Indeed, the spirit of the series had been lost with these two texts: the rules of nationality were squarely bent with the decision to include a book by a North American author, and Dante Medina’s text related a journey in Europe not Mexico.

The Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (CNCA) was created in December 1988 at the very beginning of Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s *sexenio*, replacing the SEP’s Subsecretaría de Cultura and taking under its wing other organisations such as the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes and the Instituto Nacional de Arqueología e Historia. It is a government institution aimed at promoting Mexican culture in all its different forms. It hands out a large number of grants to writers and artists each year via the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA) and the Sistema Nacional de Creadores. The awarding of grants is not, however, in the hands of government officials, but in those of well-known intellectuals, in order to try to preserve freedom of speech. One of the main aims of the CNCA since its inception has been the decentralisation of Mexican culture, with

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20 This is despite Solís’s acknowledgement that books need marketing as well as publishing (‘El libro debe venderse’, *Libros de México*, 3 (April-June 1986), 47).

21 Interestingly, a Catalan publisher (Ediciones B), in conjunction with Iberia airlines, has recently launched a travel-writing competition for its ‘Biblioteca Grandes Viajeros’ series. No Latin American author has yet won the prize, although submissions are encouraged (Carlos García-Tort, ‘Escriba (una crónica de viajes) ahora, viaje (con un premio) después’, *LJS*, 23 May 1999, p. 11).

22 It is for these reasons that Medina and Miller’s contributions to the series have not been included for detailed study in the following section of this thesis.

23 ‘Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes’, *Libros de México*, 13 (October-December 1988), 72.

24 Nevertheless, José Agustín has pointed out the partiality of some of the intellectuals who award the grants (Tragicomedia mexicana III: la vida en México de 1982 a 1994 (Planeta, 1998), pp. 257-262).
the creation of cultural institutes and grant-awarding bodies in most state capitals. In 1992
the Coordinación Nacional de Descentralización (CND) was created as a sub-division of the
CNCA in order to oversee this area of its work. Nevertheless, several critics continue to
dispute the CNCA/CND’s success in this field.25

Undiscouraged by the failure of the AEM series, the idea of commissioning young but
known Mexican authors to write travel-chronicles about the different regions of the
Republic was taken up again in 1994 by the CNCA, in conjunction with the CND, as a
complement to other series of theirs which cover historical travel-chronicles, both Mexican
and foreign (‘Lecturas Mexicanas’), and foreign travel-chronicles (‘Mirada Viajera’). The
CNCA, being a government-funded organisation, is also under no particular obligation to
make a profit - indeed, they are famed in Mexico for the lack of effort they make to
distribute their books once published -; hence the financial difficulties of AEM and the slow
sales were of little importance in comparison with the ‘good idea’ of shaping up a new
vision of Mexico.

Impressed by Juan Villoro’s account of Yucatan, the editors at the CNCA invited him to
produce a chronicle for their new series; an offer which Villoro turned down despite the
increased financial incentives in terms of a FONCA travel grant and payment for the
resultant text. Instead, in the first year’s batch of travel-chronicles, the CNCA published:
Fernando Solana Olivares’s Oaxaca, crónicas sonámbulas (November 1994); Hugo Diego
Blanco’s Ángelus (July 1995); Francisco Hinojosa’s Un taxi en L.A. (August 1995); María
Luisa Puga’s Crónicas de una oriunda del kilómetro X en Michoacán (September 1995);
Luis Zapata’s Paisaje con amigos: un viaje al occidente de México (September 1995); and
Orlando Ortiz’s Crónica de las Huastecas: en las tierras del caimán y la sirena (October
1995). The production of chronicles then slumped for the period of almost a year until the
publication of Silvia Molina’s Campeche, imagen de eternidad (July 1996); Héctor Perea’s
México: crónica en espiral (September 1996); and Álvaro Ruiz Abreu’s Los ojos del paisaje
(October 1996). All of these texts except the first - by Solana Olivares - have had print
runs of two thousand copies, and all are expected to take three to four years to sell out.26

In making commissions, one of the editors at the CNCA - Aurelia Álvarez (series editor) -
acknowledged that,

Pedimos una crónica al estilo de los viajeros [...] sobre la región de la que estamos
hablando con ellos [los autores]; que tenga un estilo literario, que no sea algo como

25 Agustín, p. 261, and Renato Ravelo, ‘Avances y postergaciones, signos del CNCA en la gestión de

26 Solana Olivares’s text had a print-run of three thousand copies.

Other texts which have appeared in the series since I began writing this thesis are Ana García Bergua’s
Postales desde el puerto (December 1997) on Veracruz, Hernán Lara Zavala’s Viaje al corazón de la
península (March 1998) on Campeche; José Martínez Torres’s Chiapas: crónica de dos tiempos (June 1998);
and Adolfo Castaño’s anthology of Lugares que pasan (October 1998). All except Martínez Torres’s text
constitute interesting proposals, although Castaño’s travel-chronicle includes no mention of travel within
the Mexican Republic or in Mexican communities abroad.

Francisco Hinojosa’s second contribution to the series covering the Mexican population of Chicago is
due to be published shortly, and other commissions are still being made.
It was also intended to be a kind of 'literary fingerprint' of the author in question. Nevertheless, given the variety of texts which were submitted as a result of their commissions, the editors rephrased the definition somewhat for the inside front cover of the books themselves:

El diario de viaje, el relato que abreva en el pasado, el testimonio del viajero que se convierte en lugareño, la descripción poética de ciudades o pueblos, se reúnen en esta colección para retratar un México múltiple y evocador, cuya singularidad oscila entre lo entrañable y lo extraño.

It would appear that, with respect to the first six titles, 'el diario de viaje' - the original commission - accounts for only three texts (Hinojosa, Zapata, and Ortiz); 'el relato que abreva en el pasado' for one (Solana Olivares); 'el testimonio del viajero que se convierte en lugareño' for one (Puga); and 'la descripción poética de ciudades o pueblos' for one (Diego Blanco). This stretching of the definition seems acceptable in that all of the texts retain vestigial traits, or a consciousness of, the travel-chronicle. Even the stretching of the boundaries of present-day Mexico to include Hinojosa's trip to Los Angeles does not ostensibly detract from the unity of the series in that there is a sufficiently strong Mexican presence in that city to allow Hinojosa to concentrate his travels in the Mexican 'quarter' of town, providing a valuable portrait of Mexico as seen by Mexicans from north of the border.

However, not wanting to refuse any of the texts submitted, the 'fácil' in 'algo fácil, agradable para leer' might at times be interpreted as 'facile' rather than 'straightforward' or 'accessible' for the average reader: Alfonso de María y Campos, director of publications at the CNCA, acknowledged this lack of literary quality in some of the works (Zapata, Ortiz, Puga). Part of the problem with the literary quality of the texts submitted are the conditions set by the CNCA in their commissions: the authors of the first batch of chronicles were given, on average, three months to make their journey and write it up. Almost every author regretted not having had the time to work more on the conception and literary style of the work. Those who acquitted themselves best either submitted work that they already had written (and which only barely fitted the commission) or extrapolated liberally from their first-hand travel experiences into their own personal fictional world.

A reason why the travel aspect may be dropping out of the commissioned chronicle is the drying-up of expense accounts for the second and third batches of travel-chronicles. The CNCA are now claiming that they want texts written only by authors who already know the places that they are writing about, hence obviating the need for any travel, but also creating

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28 Personal interview with Alfonso de María y Campos, 21 May 1996. It is for this reason that I have omitted to study authors such as Puga, Zapata and Molina. While all three texts have redeeming features - some of which ally them more closely with the genre of autobiography - they are all tainted by a placid and banal narrative voice; a travel-chronicle structure which is either overlooked or completely dull; and contents which are superficial and/or run-of-the-mill: commonplace.
an ellipsis of the travel-chronicle form. It does, however, seem possible that ‘una mirada totalmente ajena’ is as good a way for a Mexican to review Mexico as the vision of someone who grew up in a place, thus obtaining ‘lo extraño’ as a counterpart to the vision of ‘lo entrañable’.

Regardless of whether the authors of these travel-chronicles were paid a travel grant or not, they were all asked to write something which followed the blueprint for the genre as it was practised in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the implication being that they should merely up-date the content of the chronicle, rather than worry about the form, or the *raison-d’être* of the genre itself. Not everybody adhered to these guidelines; however, the content is necessarily up-dated in all texts. In general the texts focus on issues such as how people live in certain places; what is quirky or typical about a particular region; what fellow travellers say and do; and/or the personal drama of the author outside his/her normal milieu. They tend to concentrate on intimate dramas rather than social classifications (psychology rather than anthropology), and the traditional issue of national identity is replaced by that of personal identity, if at all.

Up-dated texts mean texts that acknowledge the arrival in Mexico of aspects of postmodernity. But the question of postmodernity is not simply a function of content: postmodernism simultaneously spreads over into the domain of form and style. What does this look like? And does it affect all travel-chronicles produced from the late 1980s onwards? On the one hand, Villoro and Hinojosa have produced chronicles which include postmodern metatexts on the subject of how to write a postmodern travel-chronicle, and which ironically posit postmodernism as a problem, while consciously going in search of the postmodern subject. On the other, Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz have written a more traditional type of travel-chronicle; one whose access to the superficial and the commonplace surprisingly fails to transform it into a postmodern offering on account of its lack of internalised criticism. In a more postmodern vein, Perea and Ruiz Abreu opt for the narration of increasingly metaphorical and ‘virtual’ forms of travel, in particular travel through literature, memory and imagination. This is an approach which is stretched to the limit in the work of Solana Olivares and Diego Blanco who create fictions which have only the most skeletal consciousness of the shape of a travel-chronicle. In fact, this latter pair of texts constitute a move towards ‘archival fictions’ which use previous travel-chronicles as an ‘archive’, rather than as models for form and content.29

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29 'Archival fiction' is way of classifying recent Latin American narrative proposed by Roberto González Echevarría in his *Myth and Archive*. See Section 2, Chapter 4 for a full explanation.

Although Section 2 of this thesis starts with Villoro's text, these approaches to the contemporary travel-chronicle should be considered as simultaneous options: as yet there is no real sense of development in the approach taken.
CHAPTER 1

Postmodernity in Yucatan and Los Angeles

The literature of travel has become measly, the standard opening that farcical nose-against-the-porthole view from the plane's tilted fuselage. The joke-opening, that straining for effect, is now so familiar it is nearly impossible to parody. [...] There is nothing much to say about most aeroplane journeys. Anything remarkable must be disastrous, so you define a good flight by negatives: you didn't get hijacked, you didn't crash, you didn't throw up, you weren't late, you weren't nauseated by the food.¹

When Juan Villoro was commissioned to write the first travel-chronicle for the Alianza Editorial Mexicana series in 1988, he felt that he was being asked to reinvent the travel-chronicle ab ovo. The works of Benítez and Ibargüengoitia, although written not so long before (both authors were still publishing travel-chronicles in the early 1980s), were either completely over-looked or not considered important enough exponents of the genre to be considered as guides. The travel-chronicles of earlier Mexican writers who were still fondly remembered, such as Novo or Prieto, were seen as works of a past era whose recreation in contemporary Mexico would have seemed a futile exercise in nostalgia. The recent works of foreign travel-writers travelling elsewhere in the world appeared more valid projects, but ones which, with few exceptions, had little application in present-day Mexico.

The metatext of Villoro’s chronicle, Palmeras de la brisa rápida: un viaje a Yucatán (1989), gives a full account of his dilemma. This also includes a significant number of comments about the problematic role of intertextuality as subject matter in contemporary travel-chronicles. Faced with a reductio ad absurdum of the travel-chronicle where, despite physical displacement, the author feels he has nothing ‘first-hand’ to narrate, it is ultimately the condition of postmodernity which provides Villoro with his subject matter, as well as his style. A similar case can be made for Francisco Hinojosa’s travel-chronicle Un taxi en L.A., published in 1995 in the first batch of texts written for the CNCA series.

Juan Villoro (Mexico City, 1956) is, by turns, a writer, journalist, translator, editor, teacher, radio presenter and cultural attaché. In literary circles he is known as much for his novels and short stories as for his steady output of chronicles. His earliest publications (La noche navegable (1980) and Albercas (1985)) showed a clear preference for the genre of the short story. More recently, however, he has also started to publish novels (El disparo de Argón (1991) and Materia dispuesta (1996)), although the short story out-put has

continued into the 1990s with La alcobadormida (1992), and La casaperde (1999). Most of his fictional writing takes contemporary, middle-class Mexico City as its setting, and hyperrealist dramas of the individual psyche as its subject matter. It also displays a taste for precision prose and the subtle games of detective fiction.

Contemporary, middle-class Mexico City and the hyperrealist dramas of teenagers growing up there in the period running from the year of the student movement to the year of the earthquake (1968-1985) are also at the heart of a series of ‘imaginary chronicles’, published as Tiempo transcurrido: crónicas imaginarias (1986). Veracity, for Villoro, is not necessarily a prerequisite of the chronicle genre:

A tres décadas de que Tom Wolfe asaltó el cielo de las imprentas con sus quintuples signos de admiración, la mezcla de recursos del periodismo y la literatura es ya asunto canónico; a nadie le asombra la combinación de datos documentales con el punto de vista subjetivo del narrador; el criterio de veracidad, sin embargo, es un ingrediente misterioso.

In the case of the ‘crónicas imaginarias’, the tautology of their title flaunts their conflicting claims to read both as fact and as fiction. Many of Villoro’s more obviously ‘truthful’ chronicles also aim at the status accorded to fiction in their careful composition, their use of intertextuality, and their development of the role of the homodiegetic narrator.

Dating from as early as 1980, Villoro’s ‘truthful’ chronicles cover an extensive range of ‘popular’ subjects including rock music, football, literature, boxing, comic-books and the Zapatista uprising. A number of these texts have recently been published as an anthology, Los once de la tribu: crónicas (1995). Hundreds of other chronicles remain uncollected in the folds of their original publications: Nexos, Vuelta, Proceso, Unomásuno, Siempre!, La Palabra y el Hombre, and most importantly La Jornada Semanal, the cultural supplement which Villoro directed for a number of years during the mid-1990s. Villoro’s journalistic work is where his ironic talents come most clearly to the fore through his self-styled ‘mirada oblicua’ and his status as a ‘testigo incomodo’ of events.

Villoro’s commission for Palmeras was perhaps more circumstantial than it was dependent on any proven interest or ability in the field of travel-writing. He had, of course, written many chronicles, and he was known and admired by the editors at AEM. Sealtiel Alatriste, in particular, chose Villoro for his sense of irony, an essential component of a travel-chronicle in Alatriste’s opinion. Nevertheless, the commission was something of a shot in

2 He has also written a number of radio, theatre and/or film scripts such as El mapa movedizo (1995), and several very popular children’s stories.
4 Los once de la tribu, p. 12. Villoro has commented that he is frequently commissioned to write chronicles on subjects about which he knows nothing, ‘con el sereno argumento de “necesitamos a alguien que no sepa nada y se sorprenda”’.
6 Personal interview with Alatriste, 19 July 1996.
the dark for both the author and the editors. Francisco Hinojosa (Mexico City, 1954) also owes his commission for a travel-chronicle in the CNCA’s ‘Cuaderno de Viaje’ series more to circumstance and his established literary reputation than to any previous incursions into the genre.

Like Villoro, Hinojosa is a chameleon-like figure on the Mexican cultural scene, working simultaneously as a writer, journalist, editor, and teacher. He has achieved his literary reputation largely through the publication of a number of short, cynical and absurd parodies/parables of the lives and life-styles of the middle and upper-echelons of Mexican society, the style of which has been compared to the work of Lewis Carroll,7 Raymond Queneau,8 or to a heady mixture of the writings of Georges Perec and Raymond Chandler.9 The resulting collections of short stories are: Informe negro (1987), Memorias segadas de un hombre en el fondo bueno, y otros cuentos hueros (1995) and Cuentos héticos (1996). This last collection won the San Luis Potosí prize for short stories in 1993. Nevertheless, Hinojosa also published two volumes of poetry in the early 1980s (Tres poemas and Robinson perseguido10), and has written at least ten extremely successful children’s stories, some of which have already been translated into foreign languages including English and Japanese.11

At the time of the CNCA commission Hinojosa had published very little on the subject of travel. The extremely brief series of poems which make up Robinson perseguido do blend the stories of Crusoe and the Aeneid. A brief, obtuse article entitled ‘Crónica prepostolímpica’ does concern a trip to Spain at the time of the 1992 Olympic Games, one which avoids visiting the Games at all, instead commenting on the tourists visiting the Games and the effects that they were having on the people of Barcelona.12 However, these poems and articles are less convincing as a stimulus for the commission than the fact that Hinojosa was known to the editors at the CNCA for his highly entertaining children’s book Una semana en Lugano (1992) which they had recently published, in a co-production with Alfaguara, in their ‘Botella al Mar’ collection. When asked to write the travel-chronicle, Hinojosa was invited to make the text suitable for a ‘younger’ reader. Also, Hinojosa had done some investigative work for an anthology of Mexican and foreign travel-writing about the state of Tabasco.13 This was the area which was originally put forward by the CNCA editors as a suitable destination for his travel-chronicle.

As (travel-)chroniclers in a Mexican tradition, albeit unacknowledged, both Villoro and Hinojosa might fairly be considered the literary descendants of Salvador Novo, Jorge

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8 Fabienne Brada, ‘Trivio en la narrativa mexicana’, Vuelta, 130 (September 1987), 47.
10 Now published as one volume under the title of the second collection (Cuadernos de la Orquesta, 12 (SEP / Consejo Nacional de Recursos para la Atención de la Juventud, 1988)).
11 His publications in newspapers and magazines tend to be excerpts from his books.
12 Vuelta, 190 (September 1992), 53-54.
Ibargüengoitia and Carlos Monsiváis, three writers whom Villoro has lauded as exceptional and inspiring examples of the humorous and/or ironic mood in Mexican literature.  

Hinojosa also defined his travel-chronicle as having ‘algo de Monsiváis, algo de Ibargüengoitia’ (interview). With respect to Monsiváis, Villoro and Hinojosa’s choice of subject matter and generally ironic stance is similar, although neither attempts to practise the intense, baroque style of Monsiváis’s chronicles, and the overall attitude expressed in their texts is not the terse, critical-but-committed stance of Monsiváis, but one apparently more frivolous, trivial, and ‘private’. Their realm is generally the representation of domestic drama via absurd naturalism, and their predilection for adventures in personal trivia is often apparent in their travel-chronicles.

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14 Villoro, ‘La literatura, arte del disfraz y el engaño’, interview with Angélica Abelleyra, LJ, 5 February 1997, p. 27.

15 Villoro has attempted to vindicate the role of humour and irony in literature without its presence necessarily turning a text into ‘light-weight’ literature (‘La literatura, arte del disfraz’); Hinojosa has ironically rejoiced in the criticism (Un Taxi, p. 70).
¿El viaje a un estilo?: Metatextuality

Villoro and Hinojosa have both written travel-chronicles which are easily identifiable as such: they narrate verifiable journeys to real places, giving enough data for the reader to believe that they made the trip and to be able to trace the author’s footsteps, should they so desire. Nevertheless, both writers intersperse their narrative with a metatextual discussion of what might reasonably be expected of a travel-chronicle written in ‘las postrimerías del siglo’ (Palmeras, p. 30).

Así las cosas...

After a circumlocutory introduction which establishes a putative reason for his journey, Villoro ostensibly drops the charade and offers a review of his ‘real’ circumstances:

Cuesta René Solís y Sealtiel Alatriste me propusieron escribir un libro de viajes no me costó trabajo encontrar un destino emocional: Yucatán, el mundo de mi abuela y el lugar donde nació mi madre. [...] Me entusiasmó tanto ir a ese ‘país dentro del país’ que olvidé pensar en los retos literarios del asunto. Sólo hasta el día de la partida reparé en que los Grandes Viajes son testimonios del coraje: ahí están los cuadernos congelados de Scott y la caligrafía de Magallanes, modificada por la humedad del naufragio en turno. Aun en pleno siglo XX el viaje literario supone un singular arriesgo: Graham Greene a punto de morir de disentería en Tabasco, Frigyes Karinthy tomando notas con el cráneo abierto o Saul Bellow discutiendo todos los temas espinosos del Cercano Oriente. Así las cosas, un viaje a Yucatán parece demasiado plano. Como que faltan trincheras, enfermedades, zonas en disputa, el Ayatola iracundo, el terrible mosquito. (p. 29)

This might be read as a red-herring set up to distract the reader’s attention from the fact that Villoro took the travel grant and had a very nice holiday, but could not really be bothered to complete his ‘assignment’, all this achieved by paradoxically drawing the reader’s attention to the fact. Or it might be the formulaic display of self-consciousness without which Villoro feels he will not be considered modern, let alone postmodern. However, these disruptive statements might really be an honest acknowledgement that with the commission for a revived Mexican travel-chronicle he has been set a nigh-on impossible task. Good, old-fashioned travels and adventures are increasingly difficult to find, especially when one’s destination is within one’s own country, and most renowned today for being a tourist’s paradise, over-exposed to all those technological and sociological features of (post)modern society which have threatened the travel-chronicle’s existence.

However, it is not just the content of the travel-chronicle in a postmodern era (matters such as the journey’s purpose, means of conveyance, itinerary, and the search for novelty, adventure or even ‘reality’) which gives Villoro trouble: spaced at intervals throughout the text he includes metatextual ‘white flags’ to cover a number of the traditional base elements of the travel-chronicle’s composition: the construction of the homodiegetic narrator’s character; the description and/or reconstruction of people, places and events; and issues of...

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16 The ‘sentimental’ grandmother connection is startlingly similar to Bruce Chatwin’s introduction to In Patagonia (1977) ((London: Picador, 1979), pp. 5-7). There are other significant similarities with Chatwin’s travel-writing in Villoro’s fragmentary structure and in his use of history.

17 Frigyes Karinthy wrote A Journey Round my Skull (1939), the narrative of a journey from Budapest to Stockholm to have a brain tumour operated on, without general anaesthetic.
interpretation and ascription of significance. This type of metatextual problem is a backed-up reaction to the modernist crisis in realist representation.

Villoro's metatext ironically foregrounds problems concerning verisimilitude, authority, and the lack of meaningful sign systems in an attempt to overcome the hurdles of modernism. With respect to verisimilitude he cites, on the one hand, Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan* as a circumspect example of how linguistic tropes (such as the expression of incredulity, or the stereotypical image or commonplace) can create the effect of believable, realist narrative without necessarily conveying 'the truth' (p. 110). Villoro, on the other hand, depicts himself as struggling to stick to 'the truth': 'el cronista va demasiado rapido, distingue un arquetipo antes que una gente' (pp. 40/41). He repeatedly shows his reader that he is at pains to keep the pace of his narration compatible with our expectations of realist narrative, despite the antiquated notions of composition that this supposes: 'Desde que Joyce agobió a Leopold Bloom con un día que no resistiría ni un medallista de decatlón, la literatura sólo es moderna si tiene un desorden temporal. Volvamos al anticuado tiempo lineal' (pp. 51-52).18

As a source of authority in the text, Villoro queries his own certainties, and his ability to convey them through the medium of language: 'Parto de la base de que mi propia opinión es falible, insegura, y me burlo un poco de ella'.19 He also does not feel that, for want of more substantial subject matter, he has the authority to offer himself as an interesting subject for the chronicle: 'La sensación de estar en una ciudad tan historiada reforzó mi idea de escribir un viaje literario, es decir personal. Sin embargo la personalidad no siempre es tan extensa como uno quisiera' (p. 57), particularly if one aspires to be a 'viajero sentimental' who tries not to seek out personal adventure, but to just 'let life happen' (p. 40).20 Although, as he notes, 'A diferencia de las guías, las crónicas no proponen un estilo de viaje sino el viaje a un estilo' (pp. 57-58), he feels that the journey to a style of writing is dependent on his personality, and hence something to which he cannot aspire. Nevertheless, he immediately backtracks, hankering after a more old-fashioned type of travel-writing, one less dependent on the personality of the author and more dependent on the role of the author as a figure of authority:

Apenas me convencí de esto [escribir una crónica personal], opté por el recurso contrario. Ya no me importó que la ciudad estuviera mil veces descrita. ¡Al diablo la personalidad y sus vanidades! Pensé en las virtudes de los datos llanos, agua que corre sobre piedras lisas. (p. 58)

Finally, Villoro notes that 'el siglo XX ha inventado los símbolos vacíos' (p. 64): the ability to create and sustain meaning is permanently undermined. To accentuate this sense

18 Nevertheless, it might also be argued that, '[t]he fictions of linearity and chronology function as the truth of travel narrative' (paraphrase of the ideas of Mary Louise Pratt, in David E. Johnson, ""Writing in the Dark": The Political Fictions of American Travel Writing", *American Literary History*, 7:1 (Spring 1995), 6).

19 Personal interview with the author, 19 February 1996.

20 Villoro also chose not to return to Yucatan after Hurricane Gilbert in September 1988, stipulating that, on a level of personal experience, his trip should be a 'viaje repetible' (interview).
of emptiness and linguistic inadequacy that the metatext of *Palmeras* exudes, Villoro's favourite stylistic devices are the simile and the understatement (litotes). The simile displays a great suspicion towards the symbolic register (metaphor), and the transcendental nature of language that this implies, by keeping all interpretative options in a state of suspension, while also revelling in its own heavy-handed, pedestrian nature. Understatement, an ironic trope, puts a permanent check on the writer's power to utter clear statements and betrays an underlying inability to say anything. Nevertheless, Villoro's use of language is not a modernist *mise-en-abîme* of meaning: he has an irrepressible desire to tell stories, however fraught the circumstances. The previous quotation ("Apenas me convenci...") also demonstrates his desire for a type of language which does hold meaning fast, and which can tolerate metaphor.

In a few brief sentences, then, Villoro offers the epistemological crisis of modernism to his readers and largely dismisses it. The issue of representation is not so very problematic for Villoro; it is the reality of his circumstances which causes him most of his problems in writing a present-day travel-chronicle. Other metatextual remarks attest to these more postmodern problems. He repeatedly comments that contemporary Yucatan has little to offer by way of novelty or adventure: it has already been done to death by previous travel-writers, and by the 'literature' of tourism which its major industry generates. Furthermore, reality in the peninsula is compromised by this tourist industry which corrupts everything it touches, turning everything into a spectacle of reality. Ironically exaggerating his lack of subject matter, Villoro notes that Yucatan is also a place of inherent inactivity: 'en el Paseo Montejo nada es tan vulgar como un suceso' (p. 67); the strength of the sun appears to impede his descriptions: 'el calor aconsejaba ahorrar palabras' (p. 36). Not even the cockroaches will oblige him with any activity: 'nunca he estado en el tropico sin tener escaramuzas con insectos; por lo visto escribir un libro es el mejor repelente' (p. 194). He concludes on the subject of elusive, unreliable 'reality' by paraphrasing Nabokov: 'esta palabra ya solo dice algo si va entre comillas' (p. 56).

The bottom-line when it comes to the purpose of the journey in any of the travel-chronicles commissioned in the AEM or CNCA series is that the narrator has been commissioned to write a travel-chronicle of a literary nature. The sense of quest common to the vast majority of travel writing the world over is thus replaced by that of a random selection of goals. Villoro recognises the fact of his literary commission on a number of occasions: 'No estaba ahí por gusto' (p. 40); 'No estaba en el mejor estado para iniciar la ruta Puuc, pero el libro no se podría detener en la página 107' (p. 107). In fact his reference to the material conditions of publication are also a complicit nod to the fact that he cannot be a truly 'independent traveller' since he is tied to the postmodern market-place by a commission. Villoro reacts by offering two other purposes for his journey: the personal quest (the traveller going in search of lost roots and personal identity), plus a complementary documentary travel motive (an up-to-date overview of life in Yucatan), including a literary-history travel option ('going in the footsteps of' previous travel-writers). Villoro is thus offering too many motives for travel so that any leitmotif of quest so common to previous travel-writing, and even to much contemporary travel-writing by non-Mexican authors, will
necessarily be obscured. The reader is lost in the random selection of Yucatecan daily life, and this is intentional. There is deliberately no strong sense of progression to a goal, material or abstract, but to a whole network of off-beat goals.

Increasingly the structure of the journey for contemporary Mexican travel-chroniclers such as Villoro consists in a plane journey to another urban centre outside of the Federal District, followed by a series of short trips out from that point. The linear itinerary from start to finish common to quest travel-writing is thus rendered problematic by the fact that plane journeys are not considered worth narrating (Theroux), and the ensuing trips constitute more of a network or web than an itinerary (Baudrillard). With no sense of progression towards a goal, be it a recondite place or the completion of a personal feat, the chronological narration of the chronicle becomes arbitrary or irrelevant, and the point of continuing to narrate the journey suffers an equal fate. The structure of the chronicle tends towards the assemblage of fragments of narrative with little or no link between them. Villoro’s comments on the pointlessness of narrating plane journeys echo those of Theroux in *The Old Patagonian Express*:

> En los antiguos viajes el medio de transporte era un primer acceso a la aventura: el barco a punto de zozobrar, el tren descarrilado, el asalto a la diligencia. Para quien viaja en avión, la única posibilidad de combinar el riesgo con la supervivencia es el aerosecuestro. Pero entonces el libro ya sólo puede tratar del secuestro. El rehén es un personaje excesivo que pierde interés apenas lo liberan. ¿A quién le interesa que luego visite una pirámide? (p. 29)

The structure of his chronicle is only slightly more chronologically orientated than that of Baudrillard’s *America*. As Villoro has commented, ‘La estructura es totalmente fragmentaria de manera que tú no puedes trazar una historia; no hay una historia real en el libro [sino] un sentido de unidad y de conjunto [que se consigue] por el tono, por la atmósfera’ (interview). He clutches at scraps of narratable reality in order to create ‘un álbum de imágenes dispersas’ (p. 54).

Villoro also constantly mediates his experience and knowledge of Yucatecan reality through other genres and media. He only gets up steam for some good old story-telling when he is telling other people’s (hi)stories; that is to say, when narrating an already mediated reality, related to him by other, more qualified, chroniclers of Yucatan whose names he withholds until the end of the chronicle. Furthermore, he repeatedly offers these (hi)stories as narratable through lens of another (mass) medium - the cinema, the popular press, or photography -, thus diminishing the sense of appropriating of them as material for a travel-chronicle. Villoro tries to distance himself from what ‘reality’ he encounters; a choice which is also clear in his stance as a passive ‘viajero sentimental’. If ‘reality’ is going to be evasive, Villoro will react by evading it.

Villoro’s metatextual journey in and towards a style of writing which doubts, undermines and ironises itself, places Villoro stylistically on the side of the postmodern: this is a metatext which ‘posit[es] a critical distance and then undo[es] it’. It might be the postmodern era which is causing Villoro most problems with the composition of the travel-chronicle, especially in terms of subject matter, but Villoro ironises this as well, giving a postmodern response to the postmodern.

Lo que sigue...

Like Villoro, Hinojosa begins by foregrounding the era in which he is writing by way of a heavy-handed riddle which also sets the playful, irreverent tone of his approach. He writes,

Esto crónica abarca nueve días y ocho noches - como suelen manejarlo las agencias de viajes, del 21 al 29 de junio, cincuenta años después de que partiera el Escuadrón 201 a tierras lejanas y apenas diez del mundo imaginado por George Orwell. Y también a doscientos trece años (1781) de la fundación de La Reina de Los Ángeles de Porciúncula, el pueblo en el que los gabrielinos y otras tribus del sur de California llegaron a establecerse y a proyectar su futuro. (p. 13)

The reader grasps that the date is 1994 and the destination Los Angeles, an undeniably postmodern combination. Hinojosa makes further nods to the ‘post’ era through his style with the deliberately ham-fisted, playful prefixing which he had previously used in the title of his ‘Crónica prepostolímpica’: ‘las culturas yuppies y posyuppies’ (p. 16), ‘casas estilo posiglú (p. 39), ‘el DF posnafta’ (p. 73), and even ‘ese diseñador preposmoderno de ropa deportiva’ (p. 25). Hinojosa’s liberal use of other prefixes, especially ‘pre’, amounts to an absurd mimicry of the ‘postmodern’ fashion for getting more out of one’s adjectives and is one way Hinojosa has of signalling his unwillingness to follow trends and his unpolitically-correct attitude. He simultaneously acknowledges the postmodern and denies it by relegating it to being simply the ‘in’ prefix; one which is permanently liable to be superseded and negated.

Hinojosa also provides a brief metatext (neatly tucked into the prologue and double postscript) which, while not as overtly concerned with the travel-chronicle’s grand history and current quandary of options as Villoro’s, does address some of the key issues to do with the fusion of the travel-chronicle and postmodernist literary practice, in particular the use of fiction and textual games. Nevertheless, before looking at the metatext itself, it is worth noting that many of the matters which Villoro externalised in his metatextual enquiry remain embedded in the form and style of Hinojosa’s text. The assumed purpose of the journey - the desire to interview a third-rate popular Chicano singer - is obviously insufficient, thus implicitly revealing the lack of purpose of these commissioned travel-chronicles. The structure of the itinerary is the same as Villoro’s, but instead of quibbling about the lack of interest in narrating plane journeys, Hinojosa exaggerates the personal circumstances of his departure in the paranoiac visions of the fugitive. Instead of lamenting

22 Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism, quoted on page 88, footnote 9, of this thesis.
23 Hinojosa revels in the question of political-incorrectness - another example of his playful attack on fashions which he undoubtedly associates with postmodernism.
the obsolescence of chronological ordering in the random-selection itinerary he structures
his narrative along the all too obviously chronological progress of the 1994 World Cup
football matches. Instead of balking at the lack of possibilities of anything new to describe
he invents neological adjectives (‘el camino de Oz color verde dólar’, ‘rojo-cátus’,
‘amarillo-queso-para-untar’) and the absurd statement which conveniently inverts causality,
thus investing the uninteresting and unauthentic with fresh vigour: of Alfonso Morales,
Hinojosa writes that, ‘cantaba como Chelo Silva mientras la susodicha trataba de imitarlo
desde el tocadiscos’ (p. 22); of ‘dos montañas de comida’ he comments that they were
‘apenas suficientes para alimentar a dos familias de cuatro miembros cada una’ (p. 58).
Hinojosa also narrates much of his chronicle from a childish point of view, thus reviewing
the ordinary adult world with a ‘mirada fresca’ (interview), while criticising certain of the
experiences of modern travel for treating adults as children. Everything has the potential to
turn into a game, to be re appropriated for play and this ubiquitous presence of games has
implications for Hinojosa’s text at all levels.

To return to the metatext, like Villoro, Hinojosa has problems with reality: the dearth of
interesting reality, the triviality of daily life, the inherent mediation of it all through other
texts and other media. The two quotations which Hinojosa places as epigraphs to the
chronicle reveal his attitude to these problems. Both quotations underline the fictional
liberties with reality which are the preserve of all literature, including non-fictional and
inherently realist travel-writing (‘En la calle se aprende lo que realmente son los seres
humanos, de otro modo, o más adelante, uno los inventa. Lo que no está en medio de la
calle es falso, derivado, es decir literatura.’ (Henry Miller); ‘No hay libros que menos
confianza inspiren que los libros de viajes; ningún rigor histórico les resiste; ningún drama,
ningún personaje los acapara; sino el capricho.’ (Jorge Cuesta)). Both serve as warnings
not to take Hinojosa’s chronicle too seriously (including the metatext); not to expect from it
the same kind of factual information that travel-chronicles had previously claimed to offer.

In the prologue Hinojosa reiterates these fictional liberties, making clear the playful
relationship he wishes to establish with the conventions of the old genre:

Lo que sigue, páginas abajo, es un diario de viaje que narra muchas cosas vividas y otras
tantas soñadas, leídas o inventadas; reproduce la voz de muchos entrevistados y entrevista
a otros en ausencia, viaja al pasado y se deja seducir por la ciencia ficción, imprime y
retoca las instantáneas tomadas, calla lo necesario y exhibe los secretos amables que
algunos de sus informantes le han confiado en exclusiva, le hace guiños a la academia y
luego desconfiá de ella, teje y zurce chambritas al tiempo que un sastre de Dolores
Hidalgo le confecciona un traje a la medida. (p. 19)

Hinojosa is here demonstrating his knowledge of what is expected of him and how he
hopes to disappoint these expectations.Unlike Villoro, he does not find it necessary to reel
through the history of travel-writing to ascertain what other people are doing and compare
his insufficiencies with their achievements - or, at least, he silences his research into this
matter. Whereas Villoro is tempted to offer his lack-lustre life as the truth of his chronicle,
Hinojosa reiterates his warning about the lack of truth in his (the retouched descriptions,
the invented documentary evidence); challenges the assumptions of what should be
included (the 'necessary' lacunae in opposition to the indelicate details normally missed out of even the most naturalist representations of reality - visits to the toilet, for example); and alludes to the slippery relationship that the discourse of his chronicle establishes with that source of authority and truth that is academia.24 His inclusion of the second postscript, supposedly written by his travelling-companion Alfonso Morales, also reiterates the dubious claim to truth of the chronicle, by making an appeal for Hinojosa to have opted for a more flattering fictionalisation of his own 'reality'.

Hinojosa goes on to define his travel-chronicle as a 'relatoria' - a word which he appears to have adapted for his own purposes, meaning a collection of anecdotes, sketches of characters in motion. Aware that the 'historia [de los Chicanos] ya ha sido investigada y escrita' (p. 15), he resists the travel-chronicler's desire to research and revise the (hi)stories of his target society and concentrates his entire chronicling field of investigation on what can be gathered about Chicano Los Angeles from the limited point of view of a visitor (tourist) who is only 'disfrazado de cronista' (p. 25) and for whom the Angelino authorities have not catered. His decision to include only what information can be gleaned in situ accentuates the limitations of personal experience, forcing the chronicle to depend more on fiction, and hence on literary style.

Reiterating Henry Miller's statement about the literary depiction of human subjects, Hinojosa asserts that while some of his characters have real, live counterparts in East Los Angeles, 'Los demás son ficticios, falsos, derivados: yo a la cabeza' (p. 20). Although the border between fact and fiction is one of the most fruitful generators of travel-narrative, Hinojosa's chronicle never stops looking inadequate, even if it is does also qualify as 'light entertainment' for the thirty-second-attention-span generation, which is a category the postmodern cannot deny. Yet even Hinojosa recognises in his postscript that he has produced a disappointing chronicle, despite its initial proposal to disappoint:

Ya en prensa esta crónica gruyère, sus editores accedieron a una súplica del autor, que pedía meterle algo de sustancia a la pompa de aire más vistosa. Supongo que la decisión no fue difícil: era preferable parar las máquinas y retrasar la publicación con tal de que el cocinero le echara un poco más de liebre al guisado de gato. (p. 121)

Hinojosa suddenly back-tracks and displays a desire to give his travel-chronicle some historical weight: his literary finger-print is manifestly not enough...

However, the fact that this metatext appears only in the prologue and postscript to Hinojosa's chronicle should be fair warning that it is an afterthought, a means of signalling the chronicle's failures and oversights in order to exempt them from criticism. In fact it is a stylistic feature as duplicitous as any other in Hinojosa's writing: if it is fashionable to have a metatext, he will include one that deliberately overstates, and in so doing, undermines its own validity. Again, it is a postmodern metatext.

* * * * *

24 Academia might also refer to the standard literary format for the travel-chronicle as analysed by literary critics.
¿Un estilo de viaje?: Intertextuality

Villoro comments in his metatext that he wants to find a new style in which to write travel-chronicles, rather than suggest a style of travel for his reader to emulate. Nevertheless the intertextual practice of travelling 'in the footsteps' of previous travellers and travel-writers seems to be a permanent imposition of 'un estilo de viaje'; one which also places limitations on the author's search for a new style of travel-writing. Where can a contemporary travel-writer go to avoid the footsteps of his predecessors? And how can he or she describe and narrate the experience in terms which are substantially different from those of previous travel-chronicles? Intertextuality, then, poses one of the most serious hindrances to the creation of 'new' travel-chronicles, threatening to deprive them of both original style and content.

It is, however, inevitable that intertextuality should remain a part of the travel-chronicle as the generic definition of the practice becomes more diffuse: it has always been one of the defining characteristics of the literary travel-chronicle. Villoro and Hinojosa, thus, select intertextual relationships which give them critical leverage on their sense of lack of 'real' experience; and which, although at times threatening to swamp the new chronicles, actually provide them with the means to define themselves in a new era.

For both Villoro and Hinojosa, intertextuality is a game. Moreover, literature in general is a game. In '¡Hombre en la inicial!', his brief chronicle on how he became a writer, Villoro plays on an extended metaphor between baseball, voyages of discovery and literature, asking, '¿Cómo pasamos de un libro a otro, quién tiene el mapa de todo el archipiélago, las bases dispersas que forman nuestro juego?' His use of intertextuality is at once a voyage of discovery and a game of literary dexterity. Hinojosa plays a similar game, but on a rather more cynical level. He does not want to guide or teach anyone anything: for him the game resides in his ability to confuse his reader about the relationship between fact and fiction, and in the case of intertextuality, about the relationship between originality and plagiarism.

Neither Hinojosa nor Villoro has much time for specifically Mexican travel-writing. These works, in most cases, appear to be outweighed or superseded by works written by non-Mexican writers. Nevertheless, Villoro actually stays in the same hotel in Mérida (Posada Toledo) as did José Revueltas in 1950, and the same hotel in Río Lagartos (Hotel María Nefertiti) as did Mónica Mansour only two years prior to his visit - he is apparently unaware of these facts. Villoro comments in his metatext on his desire to avoid what has already been written (pp. 57-58), yet faced with a lack of anything more interesting, more personal to narrate, the 'estilo de viaje' of nineteenth-century archaeological travel-writers,

25 In interview Villoro contradicted himself, claiming that his chronicle offered both a 'viaje a un estilo' and 'una propuesta de un tipo de viaje'...
26 Las once de la tribu, p. 20.
27 See Revueltas, Las evocaciones requeridas, I, 291; and Mansour, 'Reconózcase quien pueda', pp. 76-77. Other illustrious Mexicans to write about the peninsula, not mentioned in Villoro's text, are María Luisa Ocampo, Martín Luis Guzmán, José Vasconcelos, Salvador Novo, Octavio Paz and Fernando Benítez.
such as John Lloyd Stephens and Frederic Catherwood, proves inescapable.

In his postscript to Hinojosa’s travel-chronicle, Alfonso Morales indicates that Hinojosa has no aspirations to contribute to the literary tradition of Mexican travel-writing: ‘Por mí no quedó para que esta crónica se sumara al robusto árbol que cultivaron madame Calderón de la Barca y el Duque Job, antier la prosa de Guillermo Prieto y hoy la de Jaime Avilés’ (p. 134). Neither is he apparently interested in taking on board more academic views of the inhabitants of Los Angeles: ‘Se quedaron sin abrir las tesis doctorales sobre flujos y reflujos, pizcas y transculturizaciones’ (p. 134). This postscript may or may not have been written by Hinojosa’s travelling companion. In either case, by virtue of its inclusion in the book, it ironically indicates that Hinojosa knows well what the Mexican travel-writing tradition is, and what literature has been written specifically about Los Angeles: he ostensibly goes out of his way to avoid all this intertextuality. However, two brief references to Baudrillard’s America reveal a much more substantial intertext.

Incidents of Travel in Yucatan

After Villoro’s discussion of the writing of ‘grandes viajeros’ worldwide (p. 29) which occupies him on his way to Benito Juárez airport, he goes on to say that, ‘En ese momento en que la gente bebía cafés destenidos el la sala de espera, mi mayor problema se llamaba John Lloyd Stephens’ (p. 30). After giving an outline of the adventures, discoveries and general heroism of Stephens and the artist Frederic Catherwood on their journeys to explore the archaeological sites of the Yucatan peninsula, recorded in Incidents of Travel in Yucatan (1843), Villoro indicates that as a ‘cronista posterior’ the best he can hope for is to look for traces of Stephens (and Catherwood) in Yucatan, rather than of the ancient Mayans themselves:

Just as Stephens imagined the images of the red hands as ‘welcome’ signs which brought the past into contact with his present, Villoro finds the mass-produced copies of Catherwood’s engravings as welcome signs in his hotel bedroom in Mérida (p. 35); a ubiquitous icon of a past age of adventure travel in Yucatan.

As a ‘cronista posterior’ to Stephens and Catherwood, and to the many illustrious travel-writers who have written on Yucatan since (Sir Eric S. Thompson and others), Villoro formats his descriptions of ‘places of interest’ as a commentary on previous texts and drawings. Typically, ‘places of interest’ rarely live up to the expectations created by the ‘Grandes Viajeros’: ‘Las delicadas configuraciones que había visto en los grabados de Catherwood carecían de relieve bajo el sol acuchillante’ (p. 115). Reality is continually mediated, displaced by these authoritative texts. Villoro does not see the monuments themselves so much as their potential for future appropriations:
For Villoro the interplay of texts and engravings is the reality of contemporary Yucatan.

Villoro is not particularly critical of Stephens and Catherwood’s travels. Indeed, it would be difficult: Stephens’s account of Yucatan is extremely well-informed on an encyclopaedic range of subjects concerning the peninsula, and remarkably liberal for the work of a barely ‘post-colonial’ travel-writer. He is admittedly complicit with colonial institutions such as slavery in that he ‘quite naturally’ uses the Mayan Indians to carry both himself and his luggage, and he also presences scenes of peons being disciplined with anthropological sangfroid, but he does record the situation, and the massive success of his writing did contribute to knowledge and action on ‘human rights abuses’ in Yucatan. Certainly Justo Sierra O’Reilly’s almost immediate translation of the chronicle (2 vols, 1848 and 1850 respectively) was at pains to try to cover up Stephens’s revelations of the darker side of life in Yucatan (Palmeras, p. 71).

Villoro, too, is concerned to reveal the harsher ‘realities’ of present-day life for the Mayan communities of Yucatan, not just reiterate the past glory of their ancestors as evidenced by the ruins. Stephens is thus a positive role model, although his passage through the peninsula has inevitably turned even the present-day Mayans into a simulacra of themselves, and authentic ‘reality’ is thus even more scarce. But Villoro uses this example of an annotated text to underscore the transitory and only partial authority of all travel-chronicles, his included (‘De manera semejante, estas cronicas podrian estar enmendadas por algún parroquiano del Express’ (p. 72)). There is a process of transculturation at work: the Yucatecans simultaneously absorb and distort the text of their ‘reality’. This process continues in the era of mass tourism: the intertextual presence of Stephens and Catherwood highlights the on-going machinations of the tourist industry, revealing the constructed nature of all claims to knowledge and reality.

This travel ‘in the footsteps of’ is Villoro’s ‘estilo de viaje’. It does not take the form of an historically accurate reenactment of Stephens’s journey or of a conscientious chronologically-ordered retracing of steps with a view to ‘discovering’ fresh data about the traveller or his circumstances. Ironically, Villoro’s actual style of travel is informed by Stephens’s in its acknowledgement of its shortcomings: the potential drama of running out of petrol on the road to Teabó, the potential torch-light exploration of the caves at Loltún, the potential encounter with the cockroach in Mérida. His literary style is more obviously informed in its plea for linear temporality, a narrative style which advances apace with displacement, and ‘good-old’ story-telling. In so doing, it reveals a sense of resignation and an embedded ‘post’-consciousness within the contemporary chronicler; at the same time as an awareness that the real journey, the real game, is indeed through literature, not ‘reality’. It is a nod to the impossibility of completely original contemporary travel-writing.
Nevertheless, Villoro also attempts to counterbalance the weight of such grand intertexts of travel-writing with his own historiographical reconstructions of the itineraries of undervalued Yucatecans; Yucatecans who demonstrate their adaptability to new, postmodern circumstances.

**America**

One of Hinojosa’s quotations from Baudrillard concerns Disneyland and the film studios: he uses Baudrillard’s comments on the symbolic status of Disneyland and the Hollywood film studios as an epigraph to his chapter on his visits to studios and theme parks: ‘If you believe that the whole of the Western world is hypostatized in America, the whole of America in California, and California in MGM and Disneyland, then this is the microcosm of the West’. Hinojosa thus uses Baudrillard to support his interpretation of mainstream America, and especially of the organised touristic experience.

Later in the chapter, Hinojosa also comments that, ‘Los Universal Studios son una ciudad confeccionada para los amantes del cine, siempre y cuando no hayan llegado a la edad crítica de la adolescencia’ (p. 42); and, ‘Padecimos, en el metro inexistente de Los Ángeles, un terremoto y una inmensa cabezota de King Kong que amenazó con asustarnos’ (p. 48). Here there is no reference to Baudrillard, yet *America* contains the following statements:

> In fact what you are presented with in the studios is the degeneration of the cinematographic illusion, its mockery, just as what is offered in Disneyland is a parody of the world of the imagination. The sumptuous age of stars and images is reduced to a few artificial tornado effects, pathetic fake buildings, and childish tricks which the crowd pretends to be taken in by to avoid feeling too disappointed. (pp. 55/56)

Even the blueprint for Hinojosa’s playful *mise-en-abîme* verbal constructions (‘amenazó con asustarnos’) can be found in Baudrillard (‘pretends to be taken in by’).

Baudrillard continues his analysis:

> The American city seems to have stepped right out of the movies. To grasp its secret, you should not, then, begin with the city and move inwards to the screen; you should begin with the screen and move outwards to the city. It is there that cinema does not assume an exceptional form, but simply invests the streets and the entire town with a mythical atmosphere. (p. 56)

Hinojosa follows suit:

> Sin embargo, si el cine es capaz de trascender la vida, no es allí precisamente, en los Universal Studios, donde esta trascendencia se gesta. El cine se vive en las calles, que sí tienen la fuerza espontánea de remedar la ficción cinematográfica, y no en el propósito infantilizador de los empresarios que venden mediocres hamburguesas servidos en platos que ostentan el rostro de Eliot Ness. (p. 43)

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28 *America*, p. 55; *Un taxi*, p. 41.
This quote-for-quote saga could continue. Without doubt, Hinojosa is plagiarising Baudrillard, not word for word, but rather in terms of his ideas. Perhaps the pressure to say something new in his travel-chronicle has put too much pressure on Hinojosa’s artistic integrity.

However, Fabienne Bradu, writing in 1987, predicted that,

Francisco Hinojosa no inventa temas, situaciones, estilos, géneros: los toma de una tradición y los explota descaradamente, al tiempo que imprime un sello suyo en esos tipos de “remake”. [...] Faltaría poco para que Francisco Hinojosa hiciera suya la actitud postmoderna de trabajar únicamente a partir de y sobre “revivals”, mezcla de canibalismo y de burla.

Hinojosa’s plagiarism might perhaps be recouped as a postmodern extrapolation of intertextuality, set in his cynical style of cannibalism and mockery. Thus he is furnished with ready-made content without having to fully acknowledge intertextual dependency: in the mere act of rewriting, Hinojosa makes the text his own. (He later refers to himself as a Pierre Menard figure (p. 108).) Villoro also comments that his text sometimes employs the technique of ‘pavo huido’ (p. 191), a Yucatecan dish where the turkey has been removed and only the stuffing is left. What content fills his chronicle is not necessarily his own, but the stories of ‘native informants’ whose names have often been omitted. It is the acceptable face of plagiarism today.

Nevertheless there is an important sense in which Hinojosa distinguishes himself from Baudrillard rather than simply absorbs him. Hinojosa cites Baudrillard’s claim that, ‘If you get out of your car in this centrifugal metropolis, you immediately become a delinquent’. Baudrillard goes on to make explicit an ethnic slant on pedestrianism in Los Angeles:

As soon as you start walking, you are a threat to public order, like a dog wandering in the road. Only immigrants from the Third World are allowed to walk. It is, in a sense, their privilege, a privilege that goes along with that of occupying the empty hearts of the big cities. For other people, walking, fatigue, or muscular activity have become rare commodities, ‘services’ costing a lot of money. [...] The signs of the most utter poverty always have at least a chance of becoming fashionable. (p. 58)

Baudrillard’s ironic reversal of the question of privilege is what occupies Hinojosa, and possibly affects his ‘style’ of travel: Hinojosa ostensibly sets out on the trip to test whether travelling without access to private transport in Los Angeles is possible, fashionable and/or a specific means of access to his target community. He tries to experience grass-roots Chicano life, although, in a sense, his success can only be partial: he has access to monies

29 See also their parallel descriptions of freeways (America, p. 53; Un taxi, p. 19), and Baudrillard’s discussion of ‘anorexic culture’ versus Hinojosa’s ‘cultura light’ (America, pp. 39/40; Un taxi, pp. 70-72).
31 In particular he depends on the local historians Rodolfo Ruz Menéndez and José Luis Sierra (p. 179 & p. 189, respectively).
32 America, p. 58; Un taxi, p. 35. Villoro also makes a potential reference to Baudrillard’s definitive expression of Los Angeles in his statement that, ‘En Los Ángeles, donde el simple hecho de caminar es un signo de fracaso, no puede haber nada más deprimente que un recorrido de muchas cuadras rumbo a una extraeconómica lavandería coreana’, with a hole in one’s boot (Palmeras, p. 172). Villoro follows this with the information that such ‘failures’ are referred to in Los Ángeles with a pseudo-Spanish term: ‘desperados’. 
which allow him entry into the United States by air, rather than via the Río Grande; which allow him to stay in a hotel; and which allow him to take taxis whenever possible. Many other factors also affect his ‘image’ and life-style in Los Angeles: he does not look latino, he does not look particularly poor, and he is not looking for work.

Hinojosa claims that he is not trying to be fashionable by touring downtown Los Angeles on foot: he is simply caught out by Los Angeles’ cultural extremism (sink or swim, drive or walk). Yet, by turning this experience of limbo into the leitmotif of his chronicle he also finds a way to introduce a sense of belligerent ‘Third World mentality’ to counter Baudrillard’s experience. Even if Baudrillard claims that travel on foot is getting to be fashionable in Los Angeles, Hinojosa tries to show that the ‘realities’ are not so romantic, and where Baudrillard subsequently sticks to driving himself round Los Angeles and environs as the only way to experience the ‘Gigantic, spontaneous spectacle of automotive traffic. A total collective act, staged by the entire population, twenty-four hours a day’ (p. 52), Hinojosa goes ‘out of his way’ to point out that it is not the entire population of Los Angeles which has full access to the American way of life.

Douglas Kellner, in his Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond, notes that,

Baudrillard comes to California, and he sees the natural splendor of the desert and the eccentricities of its joggers, intellectuals, yuppies and freeway and media culture. His California is lily-white, Reaganized and yuppified. There are no migrant farm-workers, no Chicano barrios, no Central American refugees, no Vietnamese refugees or Asians, not even any blacks. Baudrillard hears that mental asylums have released some of their patients and sees some of them wandering in the streets; he does not, however, see the homeless, the hopeless underclass, so evident in the Reagan era, and does not mention that it is very specific political policies that have produced this suffering in the interest of a specific class of individuals.

Hinojosa arguably does try to contest this wall-eyed vision of Los Angeles by focusing on Chicanos and homeless people. Ultimately he balks at Baudrillard’s postmodern style of travel: Baudrillard’s text on Los Angeles may be inescapable, but Hinojosa finds ways to use and abuse this monolith of postmodern travel-writing in his insidious intertext.

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33 Al Morales notes that the experience of taxis in Los Angeles - the lack of them - was Hinojosa’s only experience of unmediated reality (p. 134).

Guisado de gato: Postmodernity

The function of Villoro’s and Hinojosa’s intertexts is ostensibly an illustration of what options are not open to the travellers in question, because of era, background or both. If metatext and intertext were all these travel-chronicles had to offer, we would have reached the *reductio ad absurdum* of the genre: they suggest a lack of real, first-hand content; a lack of novelty, authenticity, ‘reality’. At worst the main body of these texts advertises itself as an uninged series of lightning character sketches, non-events, pseudo-events, personal trivia, and self-satisfied, frivolous commentary to fill in the gaps. Hinojosa refers to his text as ‘guisado de gato’ (p. 121), implying that it should be read as a confidence trick, a swindle in terms of its content.

At best, however, these chronicles may be seen as collages of different texts, genres, styles, registers, and languages, clearly trademarked as postmodernist writing. They use and abuse their sources, acknowledging the tradition of travel-writing and accepting its challenge in their use of irony, parody, pastiche and plagiarism; they blur the divisions between fact and fiction; and they render problematic the telling of stories (the role of the teller) without stopping telling them.35 As tellers of stories Villoro and Hinojosa also acknowledge that they are inextricably bound up with postmodemity in their condition as leisured travellers (tourists) and hence are limited to an experience of reality which corresponds to their condition. They inevitably find the postmodern subject on their travels.

Both of their destinations bode well for an enquiry into the postmodern: they are places particularly open to the process of postmodernisation; border zones where the process of transculturation and demographic transhumance is escalated to extreme levels. Los Angeles has frequently been signalled as the postmodern place *par excellence*, for its exuberant display of economic power and self-promotion (the dream industry), on the one hand; and for its multicultural melange and its s(t)imulation of counter-cultural resistance movements, on the other. Ryszard Kapuscinski has described it as ‘un collage vasto, ruidoso, gigantesco, un espectáculo de fragmentos: coches, calles, casas, culturas, razas, lenguas’.36 Yucatan, because of its long-term isolation from highland Mexico and its consequent openness to foreign influence; because of its nineteenth-century boom in sisal hemp production which attracted international investment to the area; and because of its current experience of ‘maquiladoras’, ‘se ha convertido en una economía fronteriza, como si colindara con los Estados Unidos’ (*Palmeras*, p.178). It is a ‘frontera portátil’, a ‘travelling metaphor’ of the Mexico-United States border.37 In both places tourism and migration are also significant forces of postmodern influence, promoting the interaction of different cultures.

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36 ‘La raza cósmica en Estados Unidos’, 53 (author’s italics).
Both writers do make some show of seeking out the sectors of Angelino and Yucatecan society ostensibly least exposed to postmodernity, Mexican immigrants in East Los Angeles and Mayan Indians in remote areas of the Yucatan peninsula. Nevertheless, even here, they comment only on the postmodern transformations of these people. An elderly Chicano’s appearance is a ‘simulacro de pachuco’ (p. 51), although his authenticity ironically stems from his willingness to talk without a television camera to record his every move. Mayan children beg in three languages and ask the soft-drinks seller, ‘Diet coke, ¿ba hux?’ (p. 111).

Los mayas en tiempo presente

Villoro spends more time studying the elements of Yucatecan society most exposed to the heightened syncretisms of postmodernity, writing an ‘anecdotario’ of their (hi)stories, past and present: the itinerant lives of the rock musician Gabriel Ocampo, the once famous chess-player Carlos Torre Repetto (a distant relative to boot), and the ‘transnational’ businessman Luis Iturbe. He also includes accounts of recent settlers in Yucatan (the Lebanese, ex-residents of Mexico City, and others). Past contact between Yucatecans and the residents of New Orleans and Miami is offered as a positive sign of Yucatan’s openness to foreign influence: John Lloyd Stephens and John Kenneth Turner, both Americans, made their way in Yucatecan high society with very little difficulty. In present times, the movement between Yucatan and Los Angeles of Luis Iturbe in his commercial enterprises, or Gabriel Ocampo in his musical itinerary are viewed positively: they are both enterprising ‘postmodern’ Yucatecans. Again, the architecture of the Paseo Montejo or of the henequen estates belongs to a past era of wildly eclectic transculturations: Villoro appreciates the effect, as well as his local guide’s ingenuous interpretations. The vernacular architecture of the assembly plant buildings and of the Hotel María Nefertiti in Rio Lagartos is an example of Yucatecan ‘syncretism’ (p. 151), of the local ability to absorb and subvert outside influence. This is postmodernism in a positive sense: Mexican postmodernism; something which Villoro seems particularly predisposed to take in.

However, even if Villoro had wanted to avoid postmodernity in the Yucatan peninsula, he suggests that this would have been impossible. He sees the vast majority of Yucatecans as being irreparably altered by the impact of mass tourism in Yucatan. Certainly as a result of exposure to tourism, the ubiquitous hammock sellers in Mérida, the Yucatecan minibus-driver with his ‘don de lenguas’, the guide to the Hacienda Yaxcopoil, and the Mayan who makes reproductions of Thompson engravings all betray signs of adapting to tourism in a way that Villoro finds partly fascinating, partly frustrating. The Yucatecans might be a hotchpotch of multicultural influences but Villoro at least hoped to be able to see them without the imposition of implicitly North American influence. He also slates constructions such as those of the Holiday Inn chain, which no matter how much they might be tailored to suit the individual location, reek of North American imperialism, not of any stimulating postmodern intercultural contact.
The worst example of adaptation to North American tourism has implications for Mexico as a whole. In a café in Mérida local men try to seduce North American tourists, and in so doing, turn themselves into national stereotypes:

_Era difícil no ver a esos ultralatinos con ojos de D.H. Lawrence, Malcolm Lowry o Carlos Fuentes: se refan como mexicanos, miraban como mexicanos, ligaban como mexicanos, sus pies ya se mezclaban con las sandalias arenosas y las alpargatas griegas; para seguirlos viendo hubiera sido necesario cambiar de pasaporte; eran tan insosportablemente mexicanos como zapatistas con ates de Morelia en las cananas._ (p. 42)

**¿Qué son chicanos, qué son mexicanos...?**

Hinojosa apparently can find no Chicanos who are not radically affected by the experience of postmodernity. Initially the problem is one of finding Chicanos. Although he artfully stretches the boundaries imposed by the editors of the CNCA series in his choice of Los Angeles by insisting that he is intending to visit the authentic Chicano neighbourhoods of the city in search of the singer Jonny Chingas, Hinojosa realises once in the field, that downtown Los Angeles is not the place to start, and that, 'Tampoco era fácil recibir la mínima información adecuada que requiere un cronista para conocer la ciudad' (p. 26). He is inadequately prepared. He also insists on the problems he and Al Morales have finding a taxi or any form of transport that will take them to East Los Angeles ('En cualquier ciudad del mundo, un mapa le es útil al viajero para orientarse y no depender de nadie. En Los Ángeles, la fórmula no se cumple del todo.' (p. 25)); and on the problems they have even finding the inhabitants of East Los Angeles once they get to that part of town.

In their search for Jonny Chingas they first come across Valentín Ojedas, the 'simulacro de pachuco' (p. 51). The irony initially appears to target the dated nature and inadequacy of Octavio Paz's theory of Chicano identity: the 'pachuco' as expounded in _El laberinto de la soledad_ (1950). There are no real pachucos left (or perhaps never were any), just a semblance of some in response to Paz's definition. But secondly, the choice of 'simulacrum' - that keyword of Baudrillard's study of postmodernity - suggests that Chicano society might be seen as hyperreal, as a spectacle of itself. What Hinojosa appears to be saying is that where Chicano culture meets United States national tourism in downtown Los Angeles, around La Placita and Olvera Street (which is where they meet Valentín Ojedas), Chicano culture is a simulacrum of itself, on a par with anything Disneyland has to offer. The restaurant Las Golondrinas is described as 'un lugar ad hoc para el turista gringo que todos escondemos pero que llevamos dentro' (p. 27). The implication at this early stage in the book is that there might be a more 'authentic' Chicano culture in ghettoised East Los Angeles, if only they could get there and find it.

Nevertheless, even the Chicanos in East Los Angeles seem to be affected by the spectacular possibilities of the United States, permanently ready to drop what they are doing to be on television; even ready to fake what they are doing to make better television. They are described as permanently deceiving themselves about what they might be, recasting themselves as hyper-Mexicans, as simulacra of Mexicans. Ultimately there is no difference between these 'real' Chicanos in their native habitat and the fake 'pachuco' in tourist-
orientated Chicano old-town.

Perhaps being Chicano implies an inherent awareness of oneself as 'the ecstatic membrane that has come away from the real object' in Baudrillard's terms (p. 37), like a Polaroid photo of real Mexicans. Ironically, too, the excess of 'Mexicanness' is what ultimately accredits Chicanos as United States citizens:

The model that seems likely to emerge is that of an ideal of performance, of the genetic fulfilment of one's own formula. In business, in emotional life, in their projects and their pleasures, everyone will seek to develop their optimum programme. Everyone will have their own code, their formula. But also their 'look', their image. (Baudrillard, p. 48)

It is this excess that Hinojosa seeks in stereotypical images of hyper-Mexicanness within the Chicano community. Chicanos, he finds, are as guilty of postmodern transculturation as Anglo-Americans, or as enterprising Yucatecans, permanently seeking to benefit from the best of both worlds. In their limbo state between two strong cultures, they distil an identity which is pure spectacle and Hinojosa revels in it.

**Hasta los turistas posmodernos...**

If Villoro and Hinojosa's study of their target cultures generally reveals a positive attitude to the autochthonous postmodernity they uncover, the fact that a considerable amount of this postmodernity is propelled by the tourist industry, provokes them to offer quite a different image of tourists. Villoro displays throughout a consciousness of Yucatan's current vocation:

Para quien viaja en grupo, Yucatán es el avión, el Holliday Inn *(sic)* decorado con los mejores muebles de plasticuero y terciopana, la cafetería que ofrece la jugosa hamburguesa con tocino y queso amarillo, el camión con aire acondicionado para ir a las ruinas, es decir, todo lo necesario para que uno se sienta como en Florida sólo que con pirámides. (p. 35)

'Quien' here is implicitly North American, and Villoro underlines the fact that when North Americans travel *en masse* they take their life-style with them; a life-style which Baudrillard has pointed out as being the crux of (North American) postmodernity. Villoro sees this kind of postmodernity as an imperial imposition in Mexico.

Villoro effectively creates racial stereotypes when dealing with North American tourists: the fat man on the bus to Chichén Itzá who claims that the lack of air-conditioning is 'the only real thing'; the multi-culturally dressed girls in the Café Express; the recently-operated plastic-surgery patients in the Museo de Antropología; the sunburnt woman in the large black smock at a concert of popular Yucatecan music are the exclusive subjects of Villoro's use of the grotesque:

La norteamericana sentada frente a mí llevaba el único huipil negro que vi en Yucatán. Su atuendo luctuoso era ideal para quien padece una maldición, y ella la padecía. Su piel estaba aquejada de mal de pinto y de una alarmante proliferación de pústulas y llagas. (p. 77)
Villoro’s negativity towards North American tourism is subsequently extended to include a rejection of postmodernity as a North American imposition, too:

Al terminar [el concierto] hasta los turistas posmodernos que llegaron con miradas de fin de milenio, vestidos en todos los tonos del negro, tenían los ojos arrasados de lágrimas. Se fueron de prisa, como si hubieran sido víctimas de una traición emocional, en busca de algo que los hiciera reconciliarse con una vida sin sentido. (p. 79)

North Americans are blamed for all the short-comings of Villoro’s trip in a turn of phrase which succinctly distinguishes himself from them. Nevertheless, what Villoro really seems to resent is the fact that inadvertently North American tourists do get treated to the ‘real thing’ in Mexico, and that they also prove that transculturation works both ways, and always has done.

Hinojosa, despite offering ironic comments on fellow tourists of a great number of nationalities, few of whom are actually North American, also dedicates some time to a sketching out a farcical overview of the North American tourist industry, at home and abroad:

Los norteamericanos han logrado no sólo que el turismo que acogen se entusiasme con sus gustos, sino que el que exportan se sienta en casa al arribar a Mozambique, Sevilla o Morelia. [...] No está lejos el día en el que tengamos que importar de Colorado los sombreros de mariachi que los turistas norteamericanos adquieran en el aeropuerto para exportarlos de regreso a su país. O el día en el que los voladores de Seattle sean el principal atractivo turístico del noroeste americano. (p. 69)

He is ironic about this North American tourist industry which manipulates everything it touches and somewhat critical of its effect in Mexico where it is being religiously adopted as the way of doing things. Yet he finally concedes that, particularly where Chicanos are concerned, this kind of tourism is a way of life. As Ryszard Kapuscinski has commented, because of the unhomogenised collage of different cultures in Los Angeles, ‘Los habitantes de esta vasta ciudad se convierten en turistas del lugar en el que viven’;38 tourists of themselves. Thus Hinojosa resolves to play the game, to enjoy the absurdity of the postmodern tourist industry’s prodigious, reversible ethnic eclecticism: it is what he terms the ‘juego de la viceversa’. Looking at all the ‘Mexican’ trinkets in Olvera Street market he comments:

En una sola calle conviven los mercados de artesanías de Taxco, Oaxaca, Toluca y San Pedro de los Pinos. Un mercado de souvenirs administrado y manejado por mexicanos, mitad Fonart y mitad CTM, con un chorrillo de exotic market y otro chorrillo de aeropuerto. (Le importó a mi hijo, por cierto, uno de esos juguetes que exportamos para que luego nos (los) importen; lo hice sólo por jugar un rato al juego de la viceversa, o del *nafta*, como le llaman los enterados,) (pp. 28-29; author’s italics)

Como turistas que somos de nosotros mismos...

Both Villoro and Hinojosa are critical of tourism's potential for cross-fertilisations of North American postmodernity, yet also very aware that, in their condition as travellers writing chronicles about travel for no other purpose than the commission for a book on the subject, they are indistinguishable from other tourists, whether they like it or not. Furthermore, visiting 'other' Mexican communities does not help them to overcome the tourist barrier. The world is not divided into Mexicans and tourists as Villoro has recently claimed.39

Villoro, distressed by the lack of opportunities for action on his post-Stephens trip, begins protesting that, 'Según todas las probabilidades yo visitaría Yucatán sin operar a nadie de estrabismo ni descubrir sitios arqueológicos; pero si la aventura era imposible, al menos podía viajar sin hacer “turismo”' (p. 35). Yet only hours later, after a preliminary stroll around Mérida and a few observations of other tourists in cafés around town, he returns to his hotel room saying,

\[
\text{Los viajeros aéreos llegan con tobillos de paracaidista. Ya no sabfa adónde conducir mis pasos inseguros. Regresé, sintiéndome progresivamente turista. Había caminado con la prisa de otra ciudad; ningún propósito tropical requería esa desmesura. Pensé esto al ver los pasos económicos de los demás paseantes. ¿Adónde podía conducir mi empapada celeridad? A comprar hamacas. Al menos esto juzgó el tercer vendedor que me salió al paso. (pp. 38/39)}
\]

He looks like a tourist, despite being Mexican, hence he is one. His choice of writing his journey hardly exempts him from the classification when taken alongside the reading and writing of other tourists in the cafés he visits.

Hinojosa is aware of the same contradiction in his trip to Los Ángeles. Unlike Villoro, though, he does not display disappointment at this impossibility of asserting his 'real' identity, but chooses to take advantage of the deceptiveness of appearances. In a parody of Lévi-Strauss’s famous statement (‘Je hais les voyages et les explorateurs...’40), he writes,

\[
\text{Detesto a los turistas. Eso no quiere decir que me odie a mí mismo, ya que disfruto mucho cuando el turista soy yo. Pasear por las calles y mirar todo como si fuera algo único me causa una gran alegría. Asumo a la vez, con la segura complicidad de esos otros hermanos a quienes también les repugnan deplanadamente los turistas, que yo soy uno de esos que no soporta a la gente que ve el mundo a través de la mirilla de una cámara de video (esa subspecie de homo sapiens, llamada homo videus, que ama tanto a su cámara que duerme con ella por si se le presenta la oportunidad de grabar un sueño). (p. 55; author’s italics)}
\]

Pages later he again simultaneously denies and asserts his identity as a tourist:

\[
\text{Y la verdad es que es muy distinto ver a un ente de bermudas y camisa floreada - oriundo de Seattle, dentista, cinco hijos pecosos - asombrado por el enigma cultural que le plantea Chichén Itzá, que mirar - con las mismas bermudas y la misma camisa - durante algunos minutos la torre anodina de Los Ángeles que sirvió de fondo neoyorkino para la filmación de King Kong. [...] Hay de bermudas a bermudas. (pp. 55-56)}
\]

Of course, what Hinojosa is saying, is that tourism is a wonderful escape from one's day-to-day sense of identity. Elsewhere he makes it clear that he would be quite happy to just enjoy the trip and not have to write the travel-chronicle at all. Villoro also comments that, 'Hay muchas maneras de amargarse la vida y una de las favoritas del viajero es pensar en la historia de los lugares que visita, en los hechos de sangre y oprobio que justifican los palacios' (p. 50). Yet Villoro accepts much of the traditional content of the travel-chronicle simply because, in its scope for the discussion of a wide range of materials, from history and politics to economics and questions of group identity, it does provide him with an escape valve from his present personal situation as a tourist. Hinojosa, on the other hand, plunges in, providing his reader with precious little information that could not be found en route by the average tourist; viewing everything he sees through the lens of tourism, even when he is no longer on the beaten tourist track; and treating all situations as tourist games even when real guns are involved (p. 116). In either case, though, the amount of space dedicated to tourism in these travel-chronicles attests to these writers' preoccupations with postmodernity, whether it be of a brand which they approve of, or not.

Post-Tourism

Travel in the late twentieth century is inseparable from tourism. Being a professional observer of tourists as Monsiváis has tried to be in his few chronicles concerning travel, does not look significantly different from being a common or garden sort of tourist, dedicated to life on the pleasure periphery. This is especially true in these days of specialised tours, where all variations on the theme of travel are valid tourist options. (Presumably there might even be travel-writing tours available for students of the genre.) An acceptance, and even enjoyment, of this situation is what recent sociologists have defined as the post-tourist approach.41

The post-tourist firstly 'does not have to leave his or her house in order to see many of the typical objects of the tourist gaze', because they are available through mass media, thus redoubling the framing of the tourist's gaze. Secondly, 'the post-tourist is aware of change and delights in the multitude of choice': he/she may swap from sun-bathing to educational museum visits in an instant, and his/her souvenirs may be simultaneously valued as 'pieces of kitsch' and 'socially revealing artefacts'. And thirdly, the post-tourist 'knows that they are a tourist and that tourism is a game, or rather a whole series of games with multiple texts and no single, authentic tourist experience'. He or she 'is above all self-conscious,

41 The sociological post-tourist debate starts in Maxine Feifer's Going Places: The Ways of the Tourist from Imperial Rome to the Present Day (London, MacMillan, 1985), and is taken up again with few changes in John Urry's The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies, 6th repr. (London: SAGE Publications, 1996). Paul Fussell's post-tourist classification in his anthology of travel-writing The Norton Book of Travel (New York: Norton, 1987) is a literary boundary-post and he makes no reference to Feifer's earlier uses of the term. Fussell's term does not strictly adhere to the limits of what, in other genres and media, has been termed postmodernism, tracing his post-tourists back to the 1920s. In fact the literary histories of 'Touristic Tendencies' and 'Post-Tourism' appear to run apace in Fussell's view: what he actually understands by post-tourism, made manifest in these parallel histories, is anti-tourism. While anti-tourism is no doubt a part of the post-touristic attitude, it is not the whole story according to the sociologists.
"cool" and role-distanced'.

The post-tourist's multiple framings of his or her raw material is evident in the post-tourist travel-chronicler's filtering of the text through the prism of other media. The post-tourist's self-consciousness which allows him or her to acknowledge both complicity with and distance from tourism reinforces the post-tourist travel-chronicler's need for a metatext. It is ironic, role-distanced, and 'cool'. The post-tourist's interest in multiple choice and variety translates in the post-tourist travel-chronicler's use of fragmentation and unstable interpretations. The post-tourist's awareness that tourism is a game reiterates the post-tourist travel-chronicler's use and abuse of intertextuality, and, in terms of content, ratifies his or her narration of futile searches for authentic local culture, and the consequent turn to 'playing the tourist game': the post-tourist travel-chronicler becomes a tourist of tourism.

Alongside, and contradicting, their search for real Yucatecan or Chicano culture, Villoro and Hinojosa both choose at times to 'follow the crowd', to go on organised tours of Paramount Studios or Chichén Itzá. As Urry notes,

One interesting game is that of the tourist as child. This is especially clear in guided coach tours. One is told where to go, how long to go for, where one can eat, how long one has to visit the toilet, and so on. The group (or class) are also asked inane questions and much of the discourse consists of setting up imaginary hostilities between people visiting from different places. And yet such tours seem much appreciated even by those who understand that they are 'playing at being a tourist', and one of the games that has to be embraced is that of 'being a child'. (p. 101)

This post-tourist game is evident in the 'childishness' of Villoro and Hinojosa's texts, most especially Hinojosa's. It is clear in the use of childish language - 'caca', 'revoltijo' - and of the grotesque in Hinojosa's chronicle, and in the frequent recourse to childhood memories to interpret the present, and the use of ingenuousness in Villoro's. Perhaps only the adoption of the 'imaginary hostilities' between tourists (Mexicans versus North Americans) fails to be understood as part of the game by Villoro.

The Irony of Leisure

Irrony, it has been argued, is at least partly dependent on the historical precondition of 'a certain degree of leisure': 'ease and security' are necessary in order to 'reflect on a situation as being ironic' instead of catastrophic, and time is required 'in order to indulge in the circuitous and often time-consuming mode of interplay called ironical'. This is typical of 'advanced civilisations'.

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42 Paraphrased from Urry, pp. 100-01. This is a summary of Feifer's definition.

43 Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L'ironie ou la bonne conscience*, glossed in Jonathan Tittler's *Narrative Irony in the Contemporary Spanish-American Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 20. Tittler does also allow for the fact that irony may be used 'inappropriately' for doubly ironic purposes. This would be a particularly postmodern mode of expression. Such is perhaps the explanation for the literary impact of the speeches and writings of the EZLN leader, Subcommander Marcos.
That the production of literature always presupposes a degree of leisure is, of course, true: most travel-chronicles are written on return from the journey, so that regardless of what material conditions the author experienced on his or her trip, the precondition of leisure is available for writing-up, and hence the writer’s post hoc access to irony is unremarkable. Yet in the cases of the writers of the AEM and CNCA series, the ‘degree of leisure’ is significantly heightened, to the point where, as Sealtiel Alatriste has claimed, irony is the only conceivable literary response to the travel-chronicle.

Villoro and Hinojosa are both acclaimed writers, with jobs within the intellectual circuit of universities, publishing houses, and the press, and they are both resident in the well-heeled districts of Mexico City (Villoro) or other large, highly-developed, urban sites such as Cuernavaca (Hinojosa). They partake of the ‘easy and secure’ life-styles of the upper middle-classes. They might not have quite the same access to money and power as do the real elite of Mexico, but they do constitute the intellectual power of the nation, and hence have a higher than average access to status and money. Their budgets for their travels are thus generous enough not to force any undue experiences of strife through penury. Villoro stays in hotels marked ‘middle of the range’ in the 1994 Lonely Planet guide to Guatemala, Belize and Yucatan, and he can afford to hire a car. Hinojosa, also stays in a hotel, rather than a hostel, and can afford to pay exorbitant taxi fees whenever a taxi is available. And ultimately, both writers undertake their travels with no greater motivation than the royalties they will receive for a book of literary travel-writing on the subject of their leisured experiences. Both writers can afford to be ironic: they are leisured travellers; tourists.

But they are also post-tourists: their access to irony is doubled, turned upon itself, postmodern. For better or worse, the mood of postmodernism is ironic:

In general terms [postmodernism] takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or ‘highlight,’ and to subvert, or ‘subvert,’ and the mode is therefore a ‘knowing’ and an ironic - or even ‘ironic’ - one. (Hutcheon, p. 1)

Postmodernism is ‘knowing’; that is, it somehow needs to display a consciousness of its postmodern status. Even when no irony is apparent, straightforward ‘reading for the facts’ has ceased to be an option. Postmodernism is a critique of postmodernity which is aware that it cannot entirely separate itself from the postmodernity of its own circumstances of production:

Postmodernism’s distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale ‘nudging’ commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. (Hutcheon, pp. 1/2)

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Villoro and Hinojosa are inextricably attached to the postmodern in their personal circumstances. Through irony they provide a critique of postmodernity, challenging its validity in their parodies of the figure of the North American tourist. However, that they should be ironic is predetermined by their leisured circumstances and by postmodernism’s response to postmodernity. In the instances in which they let the reader see their complicity with their postmodern circumstances, their irony also reveals itself as postmodern: it posits a critical distance and then undoes it. At its most extreme, ‘El humor en Hinojosa no necesita [...] de la ironía.’ It is ironic, but it also goes beyond irony, undoes irony. In so doing these two travel-chronicles propose a ‘viaje a un estilo posmoderno’, one which uses and abuses the new cultural paradigm.

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La brisa rápida de la crítica

Villoro’s pioneering travel-chronicle, despite causing quite a furore in the Yucatan peninsula on account of its irony, has received overwhelmingly positive reviews in Mexico City’s literary circles. Even before its publication, *Nexos* published an excerpt entitled ‘Hotel Nefertiti’. Shortly after publication one favourable article appeared in *Textual* signed by Noé Cárdenas, and two more in *Nexos*, written by Alberto Román and Fabrizio Mejía Madrid. The book was also translated in its entirety into Italian, and a fragment into English; a review appeared in France on the occasion of a festival of Latin American writing. The metaphor of the book’s title has been taken up and reworked by the critic Fabienne Bradu; and Villoro’s metatextual definition of the travel-chronicles of the ‘Grandes Viajeros’ has been quoted verbatim by Jesús R. Cedillo. It was the text which inspired the CNCA series of travel-writing, and Villoro’s highest accolade for the book has been penned by Álvaro Ruiz Abreu:

> Creo que su libro de crónicas es excepcional por el estilo inteligente, mesurado y sobre todo transparente. ¿Qué vemos? Una sociedad yucateca, de máscaras y olvidos, de mitos más que de realidades; y un narrador de regreso al país natal que poetiza el mundo observado, el que recupera y el que describe. Se lee de manera deliciosa y cálida como el mundo del sureste que rastrea. *Un viaje a Yucatán* me parece un relato desatendido, en comparación con el análisis que han merecido sus novelas.

It is a classic of its kind.

Hinojosa, on the other hand, has received much less published praise for his travel-chronicle. Nevertheless, he has been an editorial success: he has written a second chronicle for the CNCA series, this time on the Mexican community of Chicago, and he plans to write a third on the Mexican community of New York in the near future. Both travel-chronicles may thus be said to be successful examples of the new Mexican travel-chronicle.

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46 *Nexos*, 131 (November 1988), 21-23.
47 "‘Toma el Llavero, Abuelita’", *Textual*, 2 (June 1989), 52-53; untitled, *Nexos*, 141 (September 1989), 64-65; and ‘Diet Coke, ba hue?’, *Nexos*, 146 (February 1990), 73-74, respectively.
48 The Italian version was published by Il Valscello in Rome (c. 1990); the English fragment appeared in the bilingual magazine *Tameme* in Mexico in the summer of 1990; and the French article was written by Florence Olivier for the catalogue to the *Belles Étrangères* festival in 1991 (data provided by the author).
49 Review of Nathalie de Saint Phalle’s *Hoteles literarios, viaje alrededor de la tierra*, *Vuelta*, 208 (March 1994), 44; and ‘Viajeros en el norte de México’, in *Ensayistas de Tierra Adentro*, ed. by José María Espinasa (Fondo Editorial Tierra Adentro (CNCA), 1994), p. 201, respectively.
50 ‘Novela de la crisis y crisis de la novela’, 191.
51 Bruno Hernández Piché, ‘¿Qué coños con el ser mexica?’, *LJS*, 16 June 1996, p. 17. This is the only review of Hinojosa’s chronicle, to the best of my knowledge.
52 The first is due to be published in 1999 (interview).
CHAPTER 2

Commonplaces in Guerrero and Las Huastecas

‘Wonderful!’ [Dr Watson] ejaculated.
‘Commonplace,’ said Holmes.¹

Strictly speaking, the literary term topos refers to ‘a conventionalized expression or passage in a text which comes to be used as a resource for the composition of subsequent texts’. Initially used to describe ‘a standard line of argument based on generally accepted logical probabilities’, its semantic field has been extended to include stock metaphors such as the ‘world as a stage’, and topics such as the invocation of the Muse, or the description of the ideal place (locus amoenus). Certain topoi are specific to the type of discourse in which they occur - legal, demonstrative, etc. (eide); others part of a stock common to all types of discourse (koinoi topoi, or, in Latin, loci communi) - hence the term ‘commonplace’.² The term topos is usually used in a neutral sense to denote areas of general concurrence in linguistic expression, essential for effective communication. However, since the rise of the Romantics, the connotations of the term ‘commonplace’ have come to be much more derogatory: it is ‘something dull and trite, especially a remark, platitude; truism’ (Collins English Dictionary). In the terms of Svetlana Boym, it is the difference between ‘ancient good taste’ and kitsch mass reproduction. The commonplace is the antithesis of creativity in language, a fossilised piece of rhetoric used to mask the writer’s lack of imagination, on the level of individual expressions or in the conception of a piece of writing as a whole. In the realms of intertextuality, the use of topoi may be seen as a creative and respectable/respectful approach to the literary canon, whereas the use of commonplaces is often only one step away from the charge of plagiarism.

The travel-chronicle is a genre which is, to a large extent, defined by its standard contents or topoi: it seems pedantic to insist, but a travel-chronicle has to include the subject of travel

as a first condition of its generic definition. Section 1 of this thesis gives an overview of the development of themes, of topoi, in the Mexican literary travel-chronicle: the creation of stock characters, the description of landscape, the question of national identity, comparisons with Europe, and so on. It also covers the development of a traditional structural ‘format’ for the travel-chronicle. This chapter looks at two contemporary texts—Rafael Ramírez Heredia’s *Por los caminos del sur, vámonos para Guerrero* (AEM, 1990) and Orlando Ortiz’s *Crónica de las Huastecas: en las tierras del caimán y la sirena* (CNCA, 1995) - which have ostensibly opted to stay within the traditional mould of the literary travel-chronicle, both in terms of their formal composition and their thematic contents.

This choice of tradition simultaneously makes both texts the most easily recognisable and ‘balanced’ pieces of travel-writing produced under the auspices of the AEM and CNCA commissions, and the most prone to failure as pieces of literature on the grounds of their lack of creativity and innovation. Nevertheless, one might enquire whether these travel-chronicles function effectively as popular literature. One might also investigate whether their dependency on commonplaces is a conscious postmodern strategy or not. This chapter reviews the traditional ‘package’ offered by these two travel-chronicles (their aims and procedures, style and structure, and their thematic contents). It then examines similar travel-chronicles in order to establish the more negative aspects of their use of commonplaces. It concludes by addressing the questions posed above.

Ramírez Heredia (Tampico, Tamaulipas, 1942) and Ortiz (Tampico, Tamaulipas, 1945) are prolific and successful authors: they have both won prizes for their work, and both are able to live exclusively from their writing, whether it be literature, journalism, criticism, or educational works. Besides his work as a journalist, a university lecturer in Spanish literature and Mexican history, and a teacher of creative writing in his own workshop, Ramírez Heredia has published over twenty novels and short stories, plus several investigative works, a play, an autobiography, and, to date, three travel-chronicles. He has won at least nine prizes, from the Premio Nacional de Teatro (PROTEA) in 1976 for his play *Dentro de estos ocho muros*, to the most recently awarded Premio IMPAC-Monterrey 1997 for the novel *Con M de Marilyn*. He achieved fame and/or notoriety in the 1980s with the prestigious Premio Internacional de Literatura Juan Rulfo (France, 1984) awarded for his collection of short stories *El Rayo Macoy*. Many of his books have also been translated.

Of all the contemporary authors studied in detail in Section 2 of this thesis Ramírez Heredia is the one with the most accolades and publications to his name, and with the most numerous reading public, across the widest slice of the social spectrum. An average novel by Ramírez Heredia is accorded a print run of two to three times that given to most other novelists’ works (five to seven thousand copies, instead of the standard two to three), and

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3 The *Princeton Encyclopedia* entry notes that, ‘Although certain kinds of topoi are related to certain literary forms or genres, the forms and genres are not themselves topoi, since the term refers to a standardised content rather than a structure or regular sequence of events’. However, even though a genre does not in itself constitute a *topos*, in the case of the travel-chronicle the genre ‘chronicle’ is described by the term ‘travel’ which relates specifically to the content of such ‘chronicles’.
El Rayo Macoy is now in the Secretaría de Educación Pública's second series of 'Lecturas Mexicanas', with a print run of thirty thousand copies. Ramírez Heredia's 'reportaje' on trade-unionism and the petrol industry, La otra cara del petróleo (1979), sold an estimated one hundred and twenty thousand copies over several editions.4

Ramírez Heredia has become accustomed to the experience of being a 'popular' author in the style of Luis Spota - Mexico's most widely read author to date. He has effortlessly transformed himself into a cult-figure, in his public appearances, his literary workshops, and in his increasing number of autobiographical texts, starting with Por los caminos and De cuerpo entero (UNAM / Corunda, 1990), written one after the other and published almost simultaneously, and followed by the travel-chronicles En un lugar de la mancha... urbana: Iztacalco (Mortiz, 1993), and Con gusto le canto a Hidalgo (Diana, 1995). He writes about himself frequently in the third person, as 'el escritor' - a very self-conscious projection of his place in society. From an early age, in De cuerpo entero, he describes himself as primarily interested in 'Tragos, toros, libros, amigas, viajes' (p. 25). This style of self-presentation and these themes are reiterated in his most recent autobiographical texts: lest one should forget, he is a writer with character; 'un compadre' as he is known to his friends.5

Orlando Ortiz potentially has a reading public at least equal that of Ramírez Heredia for his work on the scripts of top-selling comic-books, although he recognises that he is not likely to ever receive attention from the public as the author of these works.6 Like Ramírez Heredia, too, he has, over the years, produced a steady out-put of journalistic articles in a wide range of top-selling Mexican newspapers and periodicals, and he has also taught literature at several national universities, as well as giving creative-writing workshops. He has published several volumes of essays concerning contemporary Mexican society and several anthologies of literary texts. While he is a respected member of the literary community in Mexico, his reputation is doubtless more dependent on these essayistic, journalistic and didactic works than on his five volumes of narrative fiction. Nevertheless, Ortiz’s first novel, En caso de duda (Diógenes, 1968) won the newly-formed Editorial Diógenes prize for the best first novel, surprisingly beating Parménides García Saldaña’s Pasto verde and Margarita Dalton’s Larga Sinfonía en D.7

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6 He was the writer (under his full name of Jorge Orlando Ortiz) of the popular comic-book Torbellino in the early 1970s. This comic took advantage of the increasing freedom of speech in the post-Tlatelolco era to work overt social criticism into its storyline. It sold approximately seventy thousand copies a week. (See Julia Emilia Palacios, ‘Torbellino: Toward an Alternative Comic Book’, Studies in Latin American Popular Culture, 5 (1986), 186-95). Ortiz also wrote the scripts for three SEP-sponsored comic-books of Mexican history in the early 1980s: the project was directed by Sealtiel Alatriste Lozano (father of Sealtiel Alatriste Batalla, editor at AEM) and Paco Ignacio Taibo II, and the print run for each was fifty thousand copies.
7 This prize was accorded by both the reading public and by the critics (José Agustín, ‘El rey criollo, medianamente, soy yo’, LJS, 25 May 1997, p. 10). The importance accorded to the general public’s opinion in the awarding of this prize perhaps accounts for the ‘surprise’ element for the critics.
En caso de duda is undoubtedly part of the literary production of La Onda, the late 1960s Mexican youth movement of which the writings of García Saldaña, José Agustín and Gustavo Sainz are most often cited. (This kind of literature is typically full of juvenile high spirits and Weltschmertz, sexuality and humour. It is experimental in style, making copious use of free associations, sexual innuendoes, and the middle-class slang of the times. It also obsessively exploits the changes of narrative perspective premiered by Fuentes in La muerte de Artemio Cruz.) Ortiz’s literary reputation has stretched to his inclusion as a minor figure in several anthologies concerning La Onda, yet more general and more recent critical works and anthologies barely mention his name, despite his continuing publication of novels and collections of short stories, written in a style generally in keeping with that of his experimental first novel, and taking as their theme the unsatisfying fates of the onderos of the 1960s as they reach middle-age.8

Even more surprising is the silence of the critics surrounding Ramírez Heredia’s literary productions, despite the prizes - the critical attention has been in the form of reviews; immediate opinions rather than meditated appraisals. His first novels and short stories are influenced by the colloquial, associative style of writing developed by the members of La Onda. Ramírez Heredia diverts this style from its original focus on the lives middle-class youths in the big city, and uses it as the most effective tool for creating oral portraits of the full spectrum of Mexican society, but especially the lower classes. The structure and theme of his narratives, however, generally belong to the realm of detective fiction, popularised in Mexico by Paco Ignacio Taibo II. (Ramírez Heredia’s investigative journalistic background has stood him in good stead in this instance.)

The mixture of these two sources for his fiction - La Onda and la novela policiaca - has resulted in the creation of a particularly vivid, psychologically subtle form of realist narrative, which balances action with description rather better than writers of detective fiction such as Taibo II. It is further validated for the literary establishment by the use of experimental techniques; techniques which, nevertheless, do not make his writing a daunting challenge for the ‘average’ reader. This blend has formed the blueprint for his work ever since its conception in the 1970s. However, Ramírez Heredia is never associated with La Onda by the critics, only with the detective novel, and he repeatedly

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8 Ortiz is included in Margo’s Glantz’s watershed anthology Onda y escritura en México: jóvenes de 20 a 33 (Siglo XXI, 1971), pp. 329-49; in the anthology Narrativa de hoy: técnica e identidad, Textos de Humanidades, 13 (UNAM, 1979), pp. 213-24; in Inke Guría’s ¿“Cuál es la onda”?: la literatura de la contracultura juvenil en el México de los años sesenta y setenta (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt-am-Main: Vervuert, 1994), passim.; and also, very briefly, in Sara Sechovitch’s México: país de ideas, país de novelas, p. 172. He is not mentioned at all in the following anthologies and critical studies of his contemporaries’ work: Christopher Domínguez Michael’s Antología de la narrativa mexicana; Héctor Perea’s De surcos como trazos, como letras: antología de cuento mexicano finisecular (CNCA, 1992); Mario Muñoz’s Memoria de la palabra: dos décadas de narrativa mexicana (UNAM / Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1994); Adolfo Castañón’s Arbitrario de literatura mexicana; and José Joaquín Blanco’s Crónica literaria.
slips the net in anthologies and critical overviews of the era as a whole. The general opinion of the literary critics appears to be that Ramírez Heredia is a ‘popular’ author who is all too ready to cash in his narrative talents in exchange for the mass production of books designed to appeal to a large sector of Mexican society. He is what one might call a serial novelist.

The ondero roots of Ramírez Heredia’s and Ortiz’s literary formation are no doubt of importance for their selection by the editors at AEM and CNCA respectively. The writers of La Onda, like those of the Beat Generation, endorsed a new, freer life-style, and were obsessed with the experience of travel. Nevertheless, the resultant texts of the movement tended not to be travel-chronicles, but dealt with travel on a more metaphorical level:

En coche, en avión, a pie, a caballo, la onda se desplaza. Hay una gran diferencia entre este deambular obsesionada, errático, y los viajes de los románticos alemanes. La onda inicia el viaje dentro de lo concreto y su movimiento es real, es decir, el protagonista de la onda se mueve al unísono con su cuerpo. Se mueve cuando viaja en el sentido más literal del término; se mueve al son de la música que lo obsesiona, se mueve cuando anda en busca de las chavas, y se mueve por incapacidad de quietud. Pero el viaje concreto -simplemente un desplazamiento en el espacio con velocidades reguladas por el vehículo en que la onda se transporta - se vuelve un viaje interior, una especie de descenso dentro de sí mismo, a instancias de la droga. El viaje psicodélico, el de marihuana, el del sexo, el que entrencruza sexo y baile y droga y bebida, se vuelve el viaje hacia adentro: así el viaje concreto se vuelve de pronto viaje inducido. (Author’s italics)

As a result of their associations with La Onda, Ortiz and Ramírez Heredia undoubtedly had a sizeable stock of personal travel experiences within the Republic which might be usefully appropriated in the form of memories. Their prose style might also give a novel slant to the travel-chronicle narrative, bridging the gap between introspective ondero travel narratives, and the more conservative realism of much traditional travel-writing.

Ramírez Heredia was the second author to be commissioned for the AEM series. Initially it was suggested that he should concentrate on the area surrounding his home-town of Tampico, on the petrol-rich Gulf coast; an area which he had also studied in depth for La otra cara del petróleo. The approach to the reportaje evident in La otra cara del petróleo, and its obvious success, were also factors affecting the choice of Ramírez Heredia as a chronicler: he was someone who could combine journalistic investigation with personal associations. Nevertheless, he chose to avoid his home territory and travel to Guerrero; a state in which his only real experience was of the well-trodden tourist-track as an ondero.

9 He does not appear in any anthologies or critical studies of La Onda, but rather as a minor figure associated with the production of detective fiction (see Vicente Francisco Torres, El cuento policial mexicano (Diógenes, 1982), and Ilán Stavans, Antiheroes: México y su novela policial (Mérida, 1993)). He is included as a 1980s short-story writer in Mario Muñoz’s recent anthology; and as a ‘popular’ novelist in Domínguez Michael’s (see footnote 8). Domínguez Michael classifies him as ‘un narrador muy hábil’ (II, 997), but also as ‘un escritor desigual que se permite concesiones al público que no se vengan desde Luis Spota’ (II, p. 546). He gets no mention in the works by Blanco, Castañón, Perea and Sefchovich mentioned in footnote 8.

Ortiz was not the original writer chosen to cover the Huasteca region in the CNCA series: the editors had previously asked Ortiz’s old friend, Saúl Juárez; a native of Hidalgo state and at that time director of the Comisión Nacional de Descentralización. Juárez suggested Ortiz as a true native and connoisseur of the Huasteca region. Furthermore, Ortiz had just finished preparing an anthology of literature from the state of Tamaulipas for the CNCA’s ‘Letras de la República’ series (Tamaulipas, una literatura a contrapelo: poesía, narrativa, ensayo y teatro, 1851-1992 (1994)), and was hence eminently well informed on the history and literary background to at least part of the region to be covered. The editors of the series also expected to see the experimental literary style that he uses in his fictional works reflected in the chronicle.11

11 Personal interview with Alfonso de María y Campos.
The Traditional Format

As a result of interviews conducted with both Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz for the purpose of writing this thesis, it is clear that both authors gave some serious consideration to the aims, form and content of the travel-chronicle they had been commissioned to write, before setting out on their travels. Both wanted to stay well within the parameters of the traditional literary travel-chronicle.

Aims and Procedure

Despite taking the opportunity of the commission to write up fragments of his travels as young *ondero*, thus reviving his forgotten link to that generation, Ramírez Heredia was clear that the point of the chronicle was to give ‘una visión global del estado’ (*Por los caminos*, p. 16) through his travels. Ortiz also aimed to transmit to the reader his ideas and feelings about the area of the Huastecas, although he did not feel obliged to formally define their ‘essence’, or turn his work into a didactic exercise.

In accordance with this principle aim, Ortiz believes that travel-chronicles need to be kept simple in their conception and execution, and to be written within the parameters of the traditional design, so that stylistic innovations do not detract from the main communicative aim of the text. In interview, he defined himself as a ‘cronista clásico’, ‘sin pretensiones estilísticas’, who simply struggles with the literary limitations of the genre in order to convey information and impressions to his readers:

La crónica de viaje es difícil por la responsabilidad que requiere: por un lado, la mirada; la mirada que tiene que abusarla uno para captar todo. Algo, también, que debe uno tratar de conseguir es la objectividad, es decir no llegar con prejuicio hacia algo. (Interview)

He did not aim, in any way, to be identified by his ‘style’, although in retrospect he considers that the chronicle does conserve some of his literary fingerprint: ‘una síntesis de lo que ha sido mi trabajo; por una parte, la cuestión narrativa; por otra, la preocupación histórica, social, etcétera, y estilística también’ (interview).

In terms of the structure of his text, he was aiming at a ‘fully-integrated’ type of travel-chronicle, where everything would stem organically from the experience of travel itself:

Manejo el tiempo del viaje con lo que voy encontrando, lo que sean las evocaciones, los recuerdos de cuanto yo conocí en mi infancia, adolescencia en aquella zona, y también, lo que sería la Huasteca conocida a través de los libros. (Interview)

In fact, according to Ortiz, these stylistic and structural limitations on the literary elaboration of travel-chronicles are ‘un reto literario’ in themselves; one which he feels he can execute successfully.

In the case of Ramírez Heredia, while the chronicle is still clearly identifiable as a piece of his writing, sealed with his literary fingerprint, this show of idiosyncrasy does not affect

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12 Personal interview with Ortiz, 24 June 1996; with Ramírez Heredia, 16 July 1996.
Yo me enfrento con un problema. [...] La técnica que yo uso es muy simple: agarro una grabadora, y agarro un bloc de apuntes, y voy; y voy, a caminar, a ver, a preguntar, a hablar con la gente, 'A ver, ¿qué sabes tú de esto?', a requerir información. Esto lo voy pasando en la computadora y cuando tengo todo listo yo digo, 'A ver, ¿qué hago con esto?' Pues lo armo de esta manera, lo arreglo de esta manera. [...] Yo creo que el principal objectivo de una crónica de viaje es que otro, él que la lea, te acompañe en esa crónica, es otro viajero igual que tú. Y para eso hay que usar una fórmula, una forma que tiene que ir acompañado de un fondo para que no sea pura palabrería, para que también tenga un basamiento. [...] Conozco el fondo porque es lo que yo he visto, pero la forma no sé como escribirla, sino que la escribo en el orden en que lo siento que deba de escribirse. Es decir, me pongo un poco en el papel de un lector. (Interview)

Ramírez Heredia goes out of his way to feed his reader something that he or she will identify without problem ('una fórmula') and devour without hesitation (as a travelling-companion). He would like people to think that the formal composition of his travel-chronicle is spontaneous and natural. However, if he is at all concerned about getting through to his reader, he is obviously also interested in holding on to the traditional format, 'whatever that maybe'.

Of clear influence in Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz's conception of the travel-chronicle outlined above is the audience for which it is destined. Ramírez Heredia commented in interview that, 'En última instancia, los autores clásicos de las crónicas de viaje, lo que pretendían era dar a conocer a otra persona lo que ellos habían aparentemente descubierto... y yo parto de este principio'. He intended to provide, on the one hand, a non-authoritarian guidebook for the potential traveller to the area, complete with information concerning the practicalities of travel, and on the other, a memory-jogger for someone already familiar with the region. In either case, his description of his reader is of an 'average' Mexican, not highly educated, but curious and patriotic... like himself. Bearing this in mind, the chronicle should be written so that 'él que la lea, te acompañe en esa crónica, es otro viajero igual que tú'. Ortiz, too, wanted to stimulate his readers to get to know a region which he loves dearly: 'No era mi preocupación el inquietar o el seducir a semiólogos, o críticos literarios, o semiotistas, o filólogos, o eruditos, sino yo quería que la gente lo leyera y si sintiera inquietud podíamos ir a conocer este lugar' (interview). Here, it is even more clear that the intended reader is not highly educated, but one of the people - 'la gente'; that is to say, the 'average' reader in Mexico.

Both writers understood that the commission to write a travel-chronicle required something different of them; that, to a large extent style was to be at the service of content, and that the content was something they were going to have to go out of their way to acquire. They both thus set out to accumulate the base materials for the chronicle: regardless of how well they knew the region for which they had been commissioned, and regardless of the fact that time out in the field would compromise the time left to edit and polish the resultant chronicle, they enthusiastically made as many trips as they deemed necessary to cover their area, complete with notebook, tape recorder and guides (friends more often than books),
eager to benefit from the chance to exercise their profession in the open air - ‘escribir al sol’, as Juan Villoro has described it. Ramírez Heredia commented:

De la crónica me gustan muchas cosas: me gusta primero que no tengo que escribir todo el tiempo el libro en mi casa sino parte del libro lo escribo en la calle, caminando, en las cantinas, oyendo música, viajando - cosa que a mí me gusta mucho. (Interview)

And even in a place such as Acapulco which he knew eminently well he took to the streets ‘con ánimo de ver sus entrañas para saborear sus entreteclas’ (p. 97):

Es que no quiero sólo recorrer las poblaciones, no deseo ser un testigo indiferente de una tierra llena de matices, y para conocer los lugares no basta con recorrer las calles, o ver los parques, y las iglesias, se debe uno meter en donde está la gente.Entrar, si se puede, a sus casas, tomarse unos tragos en las cantinas de los pueblos, ver a sus mujeres, escuchar sus cantos y su música. (Por los caminos, p. 71)

Ortiz also emphasises in the text itself the importance of ‘being there’, of gathering fresh personal experience: ‘Siempre vemos lo que queremos ver, lo que necesitamos ver; por eso, aunque conocía todas estas tierras, necesitaba verlas de nuevo antes de escribir algo sobre ellas’ (Las Huastecas, p. 73). It would seem that in the traditional travel-chronicle there is no excuse for not going out of one’s way to get this fresh vision of a place: the reader will be able to tell if you make it up, either through gaps in your display of up-to-date personal experience, and/or in the standardised nature of the materials gathered. ‘Being there’, experiencing the daily life of the region and adding your personal touch, is felt to be an effective way to parry the threat of commonplaces.

Identifying, analysing and experiencing the particular nature of a region - what holds it together as a region, what different facets threaten to destabilise that bond - appear to be the principal aims of these two texts. Furthermore, they should be able to serve as sensitive and subtle guides to the region for potential travellers to that region. These aims and procedures outlined so far are coherent, practical, balanced and in keeping with what the editors of either series were aiming at with these commissions. Given that both writers are aiming at an ‘average’ reader, it seems reasonable to want to keep within the overall structure of the traditional travel-chronicle and to make some concessions with one’s style to privilege good communication, but what needs to be established is whether they avoid the trap of being either over-didactic or patronising, in the form and content of their texts.

Structure and Style

The overall structure of these two travel-chronicles coincides perfectly with the traditional form of the travel-chronicle: they narrate a non-fiction journey through a homodiegetic narrator. This narrative provides the backbone to the chronicles, branching off from which are the ‘themes’ of the standard travel-chronicle. The thematic narrative advances apace with the narrator’s displacement, often being subjected to the presumed contingencies of travel. The only major change in structure, symptomatic of the contemporary travel-chronicle in general, is the tendency to narrate a series of short trips branching out from a focal point or points.
In terms of their style, Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz do incorporate some innovations, but nothing which seriously affects the readability of the resultant texts. Where travel-chronicles usually use the past tense for their narratives, both writers use the present tense in order to convey a heightened impression of immediacy, of ‘frescura’, in these accounts which very much want to keep their readers with them ‘on the road’. They both make frequent use, and references to the use, of sexual innuendoes (‘albures’) in colloquial speech. This is possibly a hang-over from their days travelling with *La Onda*, and also a way of addressing the ‘average’ reader in his/her own terms. They do also include some metatextual comments. This is not at all unusual in contemporary fiction, even if it is relatively innovative in the travel-chronicle. However, these writers do not use the metatext as a way of providing a model-kit of the travel-chronicle, but as a way of emphasising the character and role of the self-conscious narrator. This is, of course, yet another way of appealing to the reader as a friend and travelling-companion.

In the first chapter of *Por los caminos* Ramírez Heredia offers an exemplary metatextual digression: he announces that in his trip to Guerrero,

Ahora no es sólo recorrer el camino y saber de nuevas y viejas historias sino es mirar todo, cada detalle y cada ritmo para llenar el tiempo y los sabores. [...] Recuerdo mientras veo el valle de Cuernavaca y me hago muchas preguntas en relación con mi trabajo de “cronista”, y en medio de las dudas me llegan los retumbares de los pensamientos porque los pensamientos no son ordenados, no son coherentes, van de un lado a otro y salen sin saber por qué están ahí, o por qué llegaron en el momento menos propicio.

Se requiere pues establecer un plan determinado. Tener a la mano los elementos necesarios. Tener una visión global del estado. [...] ¿Así se debería de iniciar este viaje? Digo, no sarazón, sino en esta forma de ir a Chilpancingo y que esa sea la primera etapa. No lo sé, porque nada sé hasta que no llegue al sitio, *in situ*, y vea, escuche y me dé el pálpito porque uno es de muchos palpitos, de muchas actitudes salidas de una intuición, de sentimiento, cómo percibo a la gente, cómo siento a las personas... (pp. 15-17)

True to form Ramírez Heredia opts for a stream-of-consciousness metatext which attempts to justify his obsessive use of the stream-of-consciousness technique in the rest of the text, and to plaster over the fact that for the most part he appears to just throw information at the page without worrying too much about its ‘composition’. But the reader will excuse him: he is, after all, just a chatty, scatty traveller, no more coherent or knowledgeable than his ‘average’ reader.

On occasions, however, his metatext is more obviously superior, in order to fully validate his role as writer. Referring to the conflict between real-life experience and the stylistic composition of a literary text, he comments:

Ya sabemos que a los personajes tenemos que hacerlos vibrar siempre porque si no los lectores se aburren. [El escritor] recuerda que alguien dice: el personaje puede ser aburrido, pero no se puede relatar la vida de éste de una manera aburrida. Por eso en ocasiones se debe de colocar a estos tres personajes que andan brincoteando por Guerrero en ese pinche VW azul, como si todo el día anduvieran acelerados, y eso no es cierto, hay momentos de cansancio, de güevas, como se dice, hay momentos en que lugares o
The metatext here might be read ironically as a form of condescension to the reader.

Ortiz makes much less use of metatext than Ramírez Heredia, saving the announcement that he is travelling because he has been commissioned to write a travel-chronicle until Chapter 3 (p. 47). Indeed, he seems to have largely tried to stifle his desire for metatextual comment, so rife in his other work, limiting it to one or two asides concerning his aims and procedure in writing the travel-chronicle such as,

Quiero dejar constancia de que las líneas anteriores únicamente son un manujo reducido de todos los cabo de vivencias e historias que recolecté en mi recorrido por las huastecas. Lo hice para actualizar mi visión e impresiones de sitios ya conocidos, y descubrir otros que confirmaron mi idea de que en la huasteca está el ombligo del mundo. (p. 128)

Where he is tempted to digress from the narrative of his journey into the fields of history, toponymy, or ethnography he uses metatextual asides to fully anchor these digressions to the travel-narrative: ‘Pienso en todo eso mientras voy contemplando el espléndido paisaje...’ (p. 48) thus keeping himself centre-stage; yet he also allows himself the liberty of not following through the argument of an essayistic digression if it gets ‘too complicated’ for his captive audience (his friend Felipe, and/or his intended ‘average’ reader). Ortiz’s metatext, like that of Ramírez Heredia, tends to belittle his reader’s reading ability, while simultaneously offering the narrator’s role as that of a paternalistic regurgitator and censor of information; an understanding friend who recognises the reader’s limitations.

The metatext in Ramírez Heredia’s and Ortiz’s travel-chronicles might ‘appeal’ to the reader, but it simultaneously condescends to him/her. It also has a tendency to read as redundant verbiage, part of the modern formula. Ironically, it is where both authors display their consciousness of the proximity of ‘commonplaces’ to their style of writing that the obsolescence of the metatextual consciousness is most obvious:

Santa Prisca se ve desde cualquier parte de la ciudad y otro yo, igual de citador de lugares comunes, diría que es la representación y el símbolo del sitio. (Por los caminos, p. 121)

Salimos a lo sofocante de la calle. Lugar común, dirían algunos al leer esto de sofocante, pero lo es, hay un calor más allá de lo soportable y eso que este escribidor se precia de amar el calor. (Por los caminos, p. 209)

Ya en los puestos exteriores, una jovencita preciosa y de cuerpo - valga el lugar común - espléndido atiende un estanquillo de pan. (Las Huastecas, p. 97)

It is not the banality of the expressions used which means that they would be a commonplace in anybody’s mouth, but the frequency with which such expressions - often of an effusive or superlative nature - are used in Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz’s texts. Of most frequent repetition are words such as ‘precioso’, ‘espléndido’, ‘maravilloso’, and ‘de primera’. It is also the context in which such expressions are used: they tend not to be
substantiated by any more subtle analysis of the situation.

But despite the general redundancy and commonplace nature of the metatext, it does emphasise the role of the narrator; a role which oozes out of the seams of both texts. Both Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz are very conscious of their ubiquitous presence in the text; of the fact that they themselves must appear as interesting, accessible characters to hold their readers' attention. Ramírez Heredia worries about boring the reader; Ortiz about abusing his 'mirada' as the means of capturing the subject of his narrative, and hence also about boring the reader. They thus resolve to try to balance their general overview of the region visited with an entertaining account of their personal experiences, their likes and dislikes. (Ortiz likes trees and pastries and his pet hate is slot machines; Ramírez Heredia also likes trees and rivers and his pet hate is pigs.) Ramírez Heredia achieves this through his chatty style of writing and the gusto with which he undertakes his travels and the experiences they offer. Ortiz also opts for an enthusiastic approach: 'Yo casi siempre trato de ver lo positivo, lo bello, lo nuevo, lo inquietante, lo exótico, todo' (interview). Rule number one appears to be that you have to enjoy yourself and let the reader know that you're having a good time: 'Yo escribo como creo que se deben de decir las cosas pero no tengo ninguna técnica para hacerlo... Sale por gusto' (Ramírez Heredia, interview).

Furthermore, Ramírez Heredia repeatedly shows himself in the company of his numerous friends and immediate family, and in the process of making friends with the locals, as proof of the fact that he should be considered a 'compadre' and an honorary citizen of the areas visited. This is also true of Ortiz who travels with his old friend, Felipe, and his wife, Carmen. Nevertheless, his narrative is less overbearing, less cliquey than Ramírez Heredia's which frequently ends up sounding like a court circular.

In both cases Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz present themselves not just as the chroniclers of the text in question but as professional writers. Their friends are also frequently other more or less well-known Mexican writers. Both writers let their readers know that they have been asked to write travel-chronicles in their capacity as writers and thus they are travelling in the areas specified, on the look-out for material. Ramírez Heredia refers to himself repeatedly as 'el escribidor' - a chatty, colloquial expression -, but in his use of the third person to refer to himself he simultaneously sets a distance between himself, in his professional capacity, and the 'average' reader. Once again, a taste of condescension.

**Themes**

Both *Por los caminos* and *Las Huastecas* cover a range of subjects which come up in the vast majority of travel-chronicles, whatever period they were written in: matters particular to the region visited such as geography and history, flora and fauna, foodstuffs, dishes and drinks, previous travel-writing and chronicles of the area, ethnic groups and customs, dialects and accents, festivals and religious rites, monuments and museums, art and architecture, the tourist trail and out-of-the-way places, the reading of place names and inscriptions, and of the landscape itself, the practicalities of travel, the nature of local women, the prominence of popular music, and sundry idiosyncrasies, discussed with a
view to defining and/or exemplifying regional identity. Other themes are more specifically related to the portrayal of contemporary Mexico: the influence of the United States as seen in material goods, changing customs, signs and graffiti; linked to this, a critique of tourism and of postmodernism (especially in architecture); a generally ironic vision of Mexican politics in all its shapes and forms (administration, infrastructure, conflicts, authoritarianism), in particular in the theme of social issues such as bad roads, marginalisation of ethnic groups, poverty, prostitution, drugs-trafficking and alcoholism within indigenous communities. The quirks of modern-day Mexico, apparent in many contemporary travel-chronicles, also have their place: Volkswagen Beetles as the single most popular means of transport; rubbish lining the roadsides of all the highways in the country; and the enthusiasm for soccer incarnated in the omnipresence of the World Cup in texts written in 1994. Finally, other all-time Mexican ‘values’ make an appearance; ‘values’ such as the importance of the family and of personal contacts, and the conflict between personality and titles (‘el licenciado’ and friends).

All these themes constitute what might be referred to as the commonplaces (in a non-judgmental sense) of the contemporary Mexican travel-chronicle in terms of its subject matter. No matter how tiresome it might be to read of the beauty and sex appeal of a region’s women, it rarely fails to come up as a cameo of male desire (except, of course, in travel-chronicles by women or gay men who never seem to find it necessary to assess the men of a particular region...). Contemporary travel-chronicles also tend to want to illustrate ‘average’ daily life in the areas visited rather than exceptional moments in the regions’ present situations: a ‘viaje repetible’. The inclination is to stay in the realm of the commonplaces of quotidian existence. However, this thematic trend is supposed to be mitigated by the way in which is narrated, and/or its counterpoint with the quirky features thrown up by the contingencies of daily life. What is clear from Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz’s accounts is that they aimed to counterbalance the ‘viaje repetible’ with ‘personajes irrepeticibles’ (themselves and others), a common theme in contemporary Mexican narrative. Nevertheless, the real value of Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz’s travel-chronicles lies in their provision of the full range of subject matter in their chronicles, whereas many of the authors studied in Section 2 of this thesis opt to concentrate on only a selection of these themes, often those specific to high art rather than popular culture.

There is one thematic issue, however, which places Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz’s work more clearly on the side of the popular, rather than the literary, travel-chronicle: their use of intertextuality. Although traditional literary travel-chronicles have not been afraid to display the textual sources of their research, comparing and contrasting them with their personal experiences, often using them as a means of displaying a sense of progression in the state of the country, and on occasions turning the resultant text into a veritable ‘commonplace book’, the popular travel-chronicle has shied away from such intertextual dependency, preferring to see itself always in the role of pioneer, adventurer, forerunner in the field. Both Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz choose to cast themselves in the role of pioneering

13 ‘Una de las aportaciones de la narrativa [reciente] esta precisamente en la creación de sujetos irrepetibles; en otras palabras, de individualidades’ (Muñoz, Memoria de la palabra, p. 25).
investigative journalists, setting store on their most recent travels in the area made expressly to write the travel-chronicle, and counter-balancing them with their memories of previous visits. They are generally more interested in what locals can tell them about their area, rather than detailed scientific, historical or literary documentation. Ortiz notes in his chronicle that, ‘Desde un principio mi idea ha sido ver y sentir la huasteca, no “saberla”’ (p. 21).

Both writers do possess a wealth of academic knowledge concerning their chosen areas, but very little is made of these texts in the travel-chronicles themselves. Ortiz does make reference to previous travellers in the Huasteca and specialists in the regional culture, such as the English Navy captain, G. F. Lyon’s *Residencia en México, 1826: diario de una gira con estancia en la República de México*, the French botanist Jean Louis Berlandier’s *Diario de viajes de la Comisión de Límites* (1850), works by the local historian Carlos González Salas, the chronicler Alejandro Prieto, the missionary fray Bernadino de Sahagún, the archaeologists Guy Stresser-Pean, Richard S. MacNeish and Joaquín Meade, the writers and lithographers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and several of the diaries of the conquistadors. He also includes more associative references to writers and artists such as André Breton, Max Ernst, Antoni Gaudí, Alejo Carpentier, José Luis Borges, and Edgar Allan Poe. On the basis of this list, Ortiz has not sold himself short in terms of the display of his intellectual sphere of reference. Nevertheless, the presentation of these writers, artists and their works is done in a very flippant manner, more often simplifying and paraphrasing their ideas: ‘Pero si mal no recuerdo, Berlandier habla de...’ (p. 13), and it often concentrates more on the writers and artists as historical figures (anecdotes of their life and times) than as sources of intellectual comment. There are no quotations from any of the works cited.

Much more importance is conceded to names and works proceeding from popular cultural sources, in particular the music of the area. The chronicle itself opens with an analysis of what constitutes the Huastecas (which states of the Republic), as determined by the lyrics of *huapangos* and *sones*, citing songs by Nicandro Castillo and Elpidio Ramírez. He also makes reference to the texts of comic-books and local newspapers, and to the deeds of a great many figures from Mexican history and today’s political panorama, as well as a number of friends and acquaintances from his youth and present situation. The people he quotes extensively are the locals who he talks to en route. He also tends to focus his overview of life in the Huastecas on manifestations of popular culture such as the *voladores de Papantla*, the local dishes and dresses, religious practices, and the ubiquitous presence of the World Cup.1

Ramírez Heredia is even more inclined to make reference to materials proceeding from popular rather than high culture: ‘la comida (el pozolazo verde), el lenguaje típico, las manías de sus habitantes, la entrada de la modernidad (los bares gay) y de mucha,”

14 The editors at CNCA accepted Ortiz’s book precisely because it did contain a good dose of popular culture in the Huastecas, in particular the region’s gastronomy. They also appreciated the thematic approach to the Huastecas as an ethnically defined region (‘un estado de ánimo’), in contrast with the federal administrative units which it encompasses.
muchísima gente que el autor reencuentra en el transcurso de [su] viaje’. Even the title of the chronicle and of each of its seven chapters is taken from a local corrido. On the level of the individual chapters, each corrido is quoted further as an epigraph to the chapter, the theme of its lyrics is incorporated into the material of the chapter, and the lyrics themselves are often echoed in the last paragraph of each. Furthermore, on several occasions Ramírez Heredia describes listening to these corridos during his travels in Guerrero (p. 28 & p. 211-12).

Even more intensively than Ortiz, Ramírez Heredia fills his chronicle with references to figures from Guerrero’s history and actuality, and to a eclectic selection of famous faces on a national and international scale: Ronald Reagan, Bruce Lee, Los Huston Oilers (sic), Manolele, Boby Capó, Agustín Lara, Rocky Stallone (sic) and others. It is his professed intention to stay away from the texts of historians, chroniclers, or academics, let alone guidebooks or more literary appreciations of the area, despite the wealth of information available on the state of Guerrero. (The region of Las Balsas river basin seems to have been a site of frequent study, as does the Costa Chica, one of the only areas in Mexico where there are settlements whose inhabitants are almost exclusively of African origin.)

Ramírez Heredia does mention in passing the names of Humboldt, Lowry, Greene, José Agustín, Sealtiel Alatriste (in his capacity as a writer, not an editor), Ricardo Garibay, Guillermo Prieto, Manuel Toussaint, and Renato Leduc (this list is exhaustive). He also notes:

Tengo la impresión de que la Costa Chica (de Acapulco a la frontera con Oaxaca) ha sido tema por demás obligado para estudiosos y espontáneos. Un trabajo serio es el de Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, titulado: Cuñija - esbozo etnográfico de un pueblo negro. Sin embargo, la bibliografía es extensa, va desde un simple folleto hasta la recopilación de los Corridos y su violencia entre los afromestizos de la Costa Chica de Guerrero y Oaxaca, texto elaborado por Miguel Ángel Gutiérrez Ávila. Así que por documentación escrita no paramos, por música menos, por versos tampoco y todo esto me lleva a buscar salida a mis preguntas: ¿Por qué la Costa Chica es tan estudiada? ¿Por qué de una o de otra manera hay tanta gente que se interesa por la Costa Chica? ¿Qué posee ese territorio que es tan mencionado y relatado? (p. 193)

However, what he does is cursorily acknowledge this particular material (important because it refers exclusively to the popular culture of the region) before making his own incursion into the area in the company of several human guides. Ramírez Heredia relies heavily on his personal contacts in Guerrero to provide him with the background information he needs - he even approaches members of the local government for information, suggestions and provision of transport and drivers, although he is careful to

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15 Anonymous review of Ramírez Heredia’s Por los caminos, Nexos, 153 (September 1990), 92.
16 This technique of naming a travel-chronicle after a song from the region appears to be a commonplace of the contemporary travel-chronicle. One might cite Carlos Monsiváis’s ‘Dios nunca muere: Crónica de un eclipse’ in this context, or - less flattering for Ramírez Heredia - the journalist and speleologist Juan Manuel Leal Añez’s Por los Caminos del Sur: redescubriendo el estado de Guerrero, prol. by José Sarukhán (UNAM / Universidad Americana de Acapulco, 1995). Lyrics from another popular song - Nicandro Castillo’s son huasteco, ‘La Hidalguense’ - also form the title of Ramírez Heredia’s travel-chronicle on Hidalgo.
add that this deal in no way compromised his freedom of speech. In particular, two friends from the state of Guerrero to whom the book is dedicated, José Antonio Ayala Ayala and Ángel Jesús Pérez Palacios, are invaluable in the material provision of the subject matter: it is the erudition that they already possess with respect to daily life and popular culture in Guerrero which Ramírez Heredia uses extensively, in preference to that which he could have obtained from books.

Ortiz, in his journey around the Huastecas of Tamaulipas and Veracruz, also takes an old friend from Tampico with him, but here, since he already possesses enough knowledge about both the high and popular cultures of the region the friend serves merely as a guinea-pig 'average' reader on whom Ortiz tries out his discussion of the Huastecas. However, in his trip to the Huasteca regions of San Luis Potosí and Hidalgo - areas with which he is unfamiliar - Ortiz is aware that he does not really possess all the tools necessary to interpret the area, and the locals he speaks to are not the most informed about their own region. In this case Ortiz does his best to elicit information from them regardless of its 'worth' - 'Aquí no hay nada' (p. 100) -, and extrapolate from there to discuss what can only be facets of popular culture and indigenous knowledge: medicinal plants and nahuals (witch doctors), local myths and legends, recipes and watering-holes.

This display of Ramírez Heredia's and Ortiz's preference for 'popular' subject matter suggests that they might have decided, at some point, to opt for a more popular type of travel-chronicle; one similar to that formulated by the México Desconocido team (Section 1, Chapter 2). Certainly this would make more sense of their concern to privilege clear communication with an 'average' reader through vivid description, vigorous narration, and practical information. Nevertheless, the claim to be travel-writers in the process of writing Literature is never dropped. Their allegiances remain torn between the literary and the popular.

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17 Sealtiel Alatriste, however, complained that, 'El problema es que Ramírez Heredia es demasiado complaciente con las personas con las que se entrevista. Es un libro poco crítico. No da una visión de Guerrero más crítica, más que en algunos casos, pero en mucho se siente un poco el compromiso que adquiere con las personas' (interview).
Commonplaces

Thus far this study of 'commonplaces' in the context of Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz's travel-chronicles has been more or less neutral: it has looked at how traditional (literary) and/or popular their intentions were, and how they fulfilled them in terms of the form and content of their works. But in order to get some critical leverage on these travel-chronicles, it is worth examining their high level of 'coincidence' with other writers' works (Ortiz), or with other texts written by the same author (Ramírez Heredia). This is what can transform these travel-chronicles from 'average' examples of their genre into more commonplace scribblings (in a derogatory sense).

Xilitla and Huejutla

The coincidental texts in Ortiz’s case are Mónica Mansour’s ‘Reconózcase quien pueda’ (1987) and Ramírez Heredia’s third travel-chronicle, Con gusto le canto a Hidalgo (1995). This examination of the overlap between one travel-chronicle and another does not aim to prove plagiarism, or even intertextuality. The duplications in destination and literary approach are most probably involuntary, yet by comparing and contrasting these overlapping episodes it is possible to illuminate Ortiz’s role as a travel-chronicler.

Both Ortiz and Mansour visit Sir Edward James’s surrealistic gardens - inspired or designed by Salvador Dalí - in Xilitla, San Luis Potosí. The very fact of visiting James’s gardens is a move away from the commonplaces of the mainstream tourist track: they are hard to get to, and do not feature in many of the standard guidebooks. That is to say, they constitute an incursion into high culture: they are only sought out by the initiated traveller. But in their garden format, near a popular bathing spot, they also constitute part of local knowledge. They may be considered, thus, an example of the theme of the idiosyncrasies of a region.

Both Ortiz and Mansour are recommended to visit the gardens (and the house located in the town of Xilitla itself) by locals, as they are not exactly what the author is supposed to be doing or looking for in the area - Mansour was supposed to be giving poetry readings; Ortiz, seeking out the essence of the San Luis Potosí branch of the Huastecas. Both authors portray their encounter with the gardens as fortuitous: they are taken there by local guides - almost by force in Ortiz’s case, where he presents himself as the reluctant victim of his driver’s tour-guide zeal, heading towards what he believes to be just a local bathing spot -, but both are amazed by the surreal constructions in the middle of the jungle. This is typical of more impressionistic, ‘sentimental’ travel-chroniclers, who purport to relay only

18 In María Luisa Puga and Mónica Mansour, Itinerario de palabras, pp. 41-93.
19 For example, both Ortiz and Ramírez Heredia assured me in interview that, despite being old friends, they did not know each other’s work at the time of writing. In fact the two texts were written almost simultaneously: Ramírez Heredia travelled throughout Hidalgo intermittently from July to November 1994; Ortiz spent a total of twenty days on the road in the Huastecas in August 1994. There is really no way that their texts could have overlapped; not unless the authors had bumped into each other en route and compared notes...
20 Mansour’s account of Xilitla is on pages 51-52 of her chronicle; Ortiz’s on pages 114-27.
what comes to hand once the general itinerary of their travels has been established, rather than go out of their way to find material to comment on. Ortiz includes the factual information about the gardens, provided by his friends David Ojeda and Saúl Juárez, as a future prediction tacked on to the end of his present tense narrative of his visit.

The differences between the accounts far outweigh their similarities, however. Mansour, true to her laconic form, dedicates little over a page to the gardens; Ortiz dedicates an average-sized chapter of his chronicle to them (thirteen pages). Mansour is an expert in recording the quirky and recondite features of an area - monuments and/or people - at lightening speed. She gives none of the practical details of travel or the overarching structural travel narrative of a travel-chronicle beyond the comment:

Si uno va a la Huasteca potosina, no puede dejar de visitar una de sus grandes atracciones turísticas: la casa de sir Edward James en Xilitla. Arriba del monte y cerca del centro del pueblo está la casa de este hombre extraño que, según dicen, trabajó con Dalí... y se nota. (p. 51)

(Of course, this is exactly how a local would describe the region’s attractions and tell you to get there...) Nor does she waste space with personal matters: we do not know who she is travelling with in this section, nor how she is feeling, nor what the weather is like, nor what she is having for dinner. Instead she describes briefly the people who she encounters on her way to the gardens, and in the gardens themselves. Her style is deliberately that of the verbal snapshot. Her tone is simple (no technical architectural vocabulary) but ironic (in her repetition of the fact that all of James’s constructions are made of cement, for example). She brings the surreal constructions down to earth.

In comparison, Ortiz’s approach is far more recognisably that of a popular Mexican travel-chronicle. Besides factual information on the place visited and his personal description of it, he starts the chapter by introducing his gradual approach to the gardens, with standard appreciations of the landscape and his physiological sensations, underscoring the increasing magic of the area, and its indescribable beauty. On the way the car-driver, Rafael - Ortiz is careful to personalise drivers and guides -, Ortiz and his wife, Carmen, discuss local dishes - with recipes -, plant life and indigenous medical practices (witchcraft). Ortiz prepares for the surrealism of James’s gardens with a few comments on Carpentier’s ‘real maravilloso’ carried over from the previous chapter and his personal sensations of déjá-vu, with flippant statements such as, ‘Y lo más inexplicable de esta sensación es que ni una cerveza me he tomado’ (p. 115). He thus introduces an accessible form of humour into a discussion which was starting to get a bit too recondite for the average reader. He also intimates the chronicler’s fallibility; a common topos in these travel-chronicles, part of the stock of bashful approaches to one’s self and one’s superior knowledge. The journey continues complete with personal memories, snippets of history, fragments of rather blank conversation, wildly effusive descriptions of landscape merging with the ‘ethereal’ and the ‘celestial’ (p. 115), settlements like oases (p. 116) contrasting with the reality of road-travel anywhere in Mexico.
On the way into Xilitla Ortiz refuses the suggestion that they should visit ‘Las Pozas’, further delaying the revelation of the surreality of the place. In Xilitla he cannot avoid a standard description of the weather, present throughout his text: ‘El sol cae a plomo a esta hora, el calor es extremo pero no llega a ser torrefactante’ (p. 116). In Xilitla he makes a discreet description of James’s house, apparently unawares, followed by a standard description of the standard church and several other typical buildings: the ones that catch his attention, that move him, that trigger memories or desires. Xilitla is described as a bastion of old Mexican values: the emporium instead of the supermarket, the cantina where women are not allowed to enter.

Back on the road, and the road is bad. Finally Ortiz can no longer ignore the strange constructions in the undergrowth and so they stop for over eight pages of architectural description introduced by an exhortation to the readers: ‘Cierren los ojos y traten de imaginarse lo siguiente...’ (p. 118). Unfortunately, hereafter the narration loses steam in a geyser of architectural terms, completely outstripping any other writer in his desire to name all the conjugations of styles which go to make up the ‘pos-pre-ante-con-contramodernidades’ (p. 120). Ortiz’s approach, then, is sensual, emotional, enthusiastic, vivid and colloquial, although not particularly concise or critical.21

In the second example of coincidence to be studied, both Ortiz and Ramírez Heredia visit the town of Huejutla in the part of the Huasteca region which lies in Hidalgo state.22 In terms of similarities, both writers describe their visit from beginning to end, starting with the journey there and ending with the journey away, thus providing an amount of practical travel information. Both writers deal first and last with their personal situation and feelings: Ortiz repeatedly remarks on the incredible heat he and his wife are experiencing; Ramírez Heredia, ‘el escribidor’, and his friend, ‘el doctor Jorge’, who had also accompanied him on some of his travels in Guerrero several years previously, both attend first to their hunger and their need for suitable accommodation. Ramírez Heredia also comments on the coolness of the weather and the frequent rains during his stay.

Both authors highlight the identity and the mystique of the Huastecas, its inscrutability. Ortiz notes the silence of the markets and the queer feeling of not understanding what is going on around him; Ramírez Heredia the feeling of intensity in Huejutla itself and the indescribable beauty of the surrounding countryside. Both writers also comment extensively on the effect of the process of modernisation in the town, lamenting the construction of ‘ugly’ new buildings and the loss of the more traditional architecture (the pitched roofs and large doorways which they both identify as the typical design of the Huastecas). Ramírez Heredia is particularly outspoken in his desire for the conservation of

21 Jorge Ibargüengoitia also published a brief article about a visit to Xilitla in Vuelta in 1978, republished in La casa de usted y otros viajes in 1991 (pp. 15-16). It is extremely similar to Mansour’s account in terms of its general approach, its brevity and its humour; however, it is very unlikely that Mansour, travelling in 1985 or 1986, would have remembered or had access to Ibargüengoitia’s text. For the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to compare and contrast only Ortiz’s and Mansour’s texts, rather than risk redundancy by including Ibargüengoitia’s text as well.

22 Ortiz’s visit to Huejutla may be found on pages 93-102 of Las Huastecas; Ramírez Heredia’s on pages 130-42 of Con gusto le canto a Hidalgo.
traditional buildings and life-ways, complaining also about the absence of traditional figures of the *huapangueros* in the heart of the Huasteca. Ortiz fancifully tries to put himself in the position of an indigenous man watching the changes in his environment and comments on the clash of values between generations of locals. But despite the process of modernisation, both authors revel in the good, traditional things that Huejutla still has to offer: the local dishes, the music of the *huapangueros*, the ‘panoramica preciosa’ of the trees in the town square and the pitched roofs of the houses that still remain.

Both writers make a tour of the town during their visit. Both draw plentiful portraits of the idiosyncrasies of the local people going about their business on a normal day in their lives (especially their unwillingness to talk to strangers), transcribing extensively examples of the local speech-patterns and accent. Both visit the fortress of a church which they describe amply in technical terms; and the town square with its ‘quiosco doble’, its pillars with the heads of local dignitaries, and its clock-tower.

However, Ramírez Heredia’s account of Huejutla is at least twice as long as Ortiz’s. The main difference is that, where Ortiz views the town from the outside, as a not overly informed tourist, Ramírez Heredia is taking his investigative role - his ‘character’ - more to heart, visiting the offices of the ‘presidenta municipal’ to try to obtain documentation on the area, without, of course, being compromised in his freedom of speech:

> Saber a qué sitios ir, dónde comer alimentos de la región, con qué personajes de la región se debía hablar, y algo de documentación que me hiciera luces sobre la historia, sobre las leyendas, sobre la vida de la huasteca hidalguense. (*Hidalgo*, p. 140)

Although his attempts to gather information from local bureaucrats amount to nothing, he has obviously obtained documentation from elsewhere to flesh out his description of the busts of the local dignitaries and the meaning of the mural depicting Huejutla’s history. The trip to the town-hall also provides him with an inside view of Mexican authorities which he relays with ample social satire: the policemen playing cards and sleeping on the floor, the inefficiency of officials, the mysterious and farcical functioning of bureaucracy and the unpredictable behaviour of secretaries. Ramírez Heredia is implicitly above all this...

What these coincidences are designed to reveal is the middle-of-the-road nature of Ortiz’s travel-chronicle: although it does everything a travel-chronicle should, it is bland, commonplace, an ‘average’ travel-chronicle for an ‘average’ reader. It displays neither the laconic perspicacity of Mansour’s style, nor the flamboyant self-assurance of Ramírez Heredia’s.

**Guerrero, Hidalgo and Iztacalco**

However, it is Ramírez Heredia’s flamboyant self-assurance, bordering on fatuousness, which eventually reveals that the commonplace in his work are almost entirely of his own creation. It is illustrative in this sense to compare and contrast Ramírez Heredia’s three travel-chronicles published to date.
Although neither Ortiz nor Ramírez Heredia had tried his hand at writing a full-blown travel-chronicle before the works commissioned by AEM and CNCA, both confirmed in interview their newly-found enthusiasm for the genre. Ortiz was, however, unsure of being able to complete the travel-chronicles he wanted to write on account of the perennial lack of time and money. Ramírez Heredia, on the other hand, boasted that he was the Mexican writer who had written and published most travel-chronicles to date - a ‘viajero crónico’ and an ‘irredento escribidor’ in one; and that he was more or less in the process of patenting the formula for the contemporary travel-chronicle. What is evident from a close reading of Ramírez Heredia’s three travel-chronicles is that, despite his protest that he doesn’t have a ‘formula’ for writing travel-chronicles, there are some obvious similarities between the texts, at all levels of composition.

The style and structure of his two later travel-chronicles (En un lugar de la mancha... urbana: Iztacalco and Con gusto le canto a Hidalgo) duplicate that of Por los caminos. The tone of the homodiegetic narrative is very nearly as bumptious and colloquial as that of the narrator of Por los caminos. The texts are also as self-conscious (metatextual) and personalised as Por los caminos, although slightly less given to stream-of-consciousness style intimacies. In fact the major difference between the second or third travel-chronicles and the first is the slightly greater sense of thorough-going research in the later texts, including an increase in intertextual references and quotations, in particular from historical chronicles of the areas covered. This is reflected in a more fragmented structural design which intercalates the author’s personal experiences (past or present) with the narration of stories gathered en route, interviews with locals and experts, and the presentation of statistical and historical data. These later travel-chronicles are an improvement on the first in that they better project an overview of the regions visited and also give some respite from Ramírez Heredia’s overbearing personality, while not losing the thread of the travel-chronicle.

The fact that the second travel-chronicle, Iztacalco is based in a working-class area of Mexico City, so favoured by Ramírez Heredia in his other works as the social setting for his portrayal of intimate dramas, helps move him away from an over-excited ondoro-style narrative to a more hard-hitting brand of social realism. This trend continues in Hidalgo. However, with this change in style comes an increase in paternalism: he aims to educate his average middle-class defeño Mexican reader about both the good and the bad aspects of life in provinces and in the ‘untouchable’ areas of the capital itself. And while he is no doubt successful in making Iztacalco ‘human’, and underlining the hidden delights of Hidalgo - so near, yet so far, from the Federal District -, his style becomes heavy-handed and didactic. Hidalgo is by far the most extreme example of this: intermittently during the course of the narration Ramírez Heredia exhorts his reader to get up out of his/her armchair in Mexico City and go for a drive to Hidalgo (p. 183 & 188); to visit the archaeological remains at Tula (p. 203), and/or to check out some of the environmental disasters that the Federal District drains off into the neighbouring state (pp. 204-08).
The aims and procedure, then, would appear to be similar in all three travel-chronicles. In terms of procedure, the author selects a region of the Mexican Republic which interests him and/or with which he has personal ties; contacts the local government for information and material aid; finds a guide or guides (usually an erudite friend or someone provided by the local government); and sets out on a series of journeys with the aim of exhaustively covering the region to capture its essence, conducting interviews, and gaining access to knowledge and experiences usually denied the average traveller (he visits prisons and mines in Hidalgo and hangs out with the *chavos-banda* (delinquent groups of youths) in Iztacalco). Ramírez Heredia is his own best publicist: in *Iztacalco*, he writes, 

> Por espacio de cuatro meses recorrí Iztacalco, y sin llegar al sueño de conocer su totalidad, puedo decir que dejé pocos puntos sin cubrir, pocos sitios sin visitar, y que fue mucha la gente con la cual platiqué.

> Entré a pulquerías y cementerios, a callejones e iglesias, a cantinas y conjuntos habitacionales, a mercados y plazoletas, a estaciones del metro y centros sociales. Visité las obras delegacionales y las ciudades perdidas. Hablé con Pancho de la Cruz, o con un cantante de camión, con el mítico Luis Sandí, o con boxeadores como El Pulgarito o Carlos Zárate, con las autoridades y con la gente del pueblo. Comí sus platillos regionales y bebí pulque adomado con camarones. Asistí a sus fiestas religiosas, y vi lo gris de las calles. Anduve por rumbos donde las patrullas policiales temen entrar. Vi los torrentes de gente aplastar a quienes se atrevieran a detenerla en la estación Pantitlán. Vi a niñas drogadictas, o prostitutas. Asistí a las sesiones del Centro Contra las Adicciones, a los concursos de belleza. Vi lo *barroco* de sus salas de fiestas, a trabajadores en las fábricas. Supe de robos callejeros y de pandillas juveniles. Comí tacos, y bebí en sus cantinas.

> Durante cuatro meses fui un tordo que recorrió los camellones y las calles estrechas, las unidades habitacionales y el polvo de una zona donde las flores y los árboles hace años que dejaron sus verdores. (p. 16; author’s italics)

Judging by the increasing repetition in the last lines of this manifesto, Ramírez Heredia exhausted himself ‘literarily’ as well. It would also seem that this metatextual profession of aims and intentions, present in a slightly more diffuse form in *Por los caminos*, had become a set piece by the time he wrote his chronicle of Hidalgo. In *Hidalgo*, he starts off extolling the value of personal experience on the street (p. 28); he then gives the dates of his visit, and, in a similarly incantatory style to that of the above quotation, lists everything he did during his time in the region (p. 30); and finally he makes more claims for the value of his hands-on, sensual approach in contrast to that of tour-guides or academic studies (p. 49).

Ramírez Heredia’s discussion of the genealogy of his travel-chronicles is another fine example of this repetitious tendency in his writing. In *Iztacalco* he claims that for years the travel-chronicle had been given up for dead, but that in 1989 Alatriste at AEM had decided to revive the genre, Villoro (‘el estupendo narrador’) had written the first of these new travel-chronicles, and he, Ramírez Heredia, the second. He then comments on the failure of the series to continue after Alatriste’s departure from AEM, but argues that these two chronicles had been enough to stimulate other independent efforts (pp. 14-15). Again, in *Hidalgo*, he reiterates Alatriste’s editorial role, praises Villoro’s chronicle on Yucatan, and comments on his own role, up-dating it to cover the book on Iztacalco as well (pp. 21-22). However, Ramírez Heredia is not unaware of the danger of using commonplaces: too much
practice at writing colloquial Mexican Spanish, where tapping commonplaces is essential in order to capture the 'retrato hablado' of different levels of society, has made him over-self-conscious in this respect. Yet, ironically, while his writing is far from free of such tropes, it is usually the metatextual aside excusing the commonplace which becomes a commonplace in his texts through overuse, rather than the statement being highlighted as the commonplace expression. Ramírez Heredia finds commonplaces where other writers simply find the adequate descriptive term.

In *Hidalgo*, he balks at the expression ‘la calle serpentea’:

> Si usted va por una calle grande llamada Mina [...], que serpentea - ahora sí que es válida esta expresión lugarcomunescqa - por entre las estrecheces pachuqueñas, se va a encontrar con una puerta. (p. 49)

Ortiz uses a similar expression in his *Las Huastecas* without any self-consciousness: ‘El camino sube gradualmente, serpenteando’ (p. 114) is the whole sentence. Although Ortiz is not the best writer to take as an example of what is not commonplace, another example, this time from the pen of the poet Verónica Volkow, in her *Diario de Sudáfrica* (Siglo XXI, 1988), vindicates the expression:

> Las montañas de “Los doce apóstoles” junto al mar van bordeando la costa. La carretera serpentea por el acantilado: cara de roca de un lado, del otro, cara de mar. Texturas de las múltiples capas de las rocas, capas de olas una sobre otra. Cristales de las rocas, cristales del mar. (p. 58)

Of course, anything can become a commonplace if it is overused, but language depends on a certain amount of commonplaces being used in order for it to function as a place where communication can occur. Perhaps Ramírez Heredia is simply afraid that the context of a traditional travel-chronicle, and of his simplified, didactic, chatty prose is too bland a literary texture - a few excuses for the commonplace nature of his writing in general seem appropriate. Volkow on the other hand seems confident that the texture of her prose is rich enough to be able to anchor one or two bland expressions.

By now Ramírez Heredia’s favourite themes should also be more than apparent: popular music, architecture, food, drink, and quality-time spent in the company of one’s family and friends. One final example which only really becomes apparent when his three travel-chronicles are placed side by side is his contrivance to get a bird’s eye view of each region from a helicopter provided in each case by the local government. These trips in helicopter are of examples of the most baroque and grandiose facet of Ramírez Heredia’s writing, reeking of the privileged vision, rationalised in the cases of Guerrero and Hidalgo by a commentary on the paucity of infrastructure in the mountainous regions of Mexico, and in the case of Iztacalco by his new-found role as urban semiotician:

> La ciudad de México tiene varias - miles, millones - de facetas, de lecturas, de tal manera que verla desde el aire es una más de ellas, cierto, pero la menos frecuente, porque si bien uno, viajero crónico, sube y baja de los aviones, la velocidad y altura con que viajan éstos
These trips are Ramírez Heredia’s special treat to himself, yet as he elevates his travel-chronicles above the rest, he repeatedly renders them commonplace on their own level.

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23 In fact Fernando Benítez seems to have started the commonplace ‘nose-against-the-porthole’ description of Mexico City from the air in 1975 in his Viaje al centro de México (Colección Popular, 150, 3rd repr. (FCE, 1987), pp. 10-19).
Graphomania

Graphomania (literally, writing mania) is a literary disease, an uncontrollable obsession to write and to be a writer. It is a unique epidemic, a complication of Great Literature. Its grave side effects include feverish plagiarism, genius-envy, and a sadomasochistic relationship with the reader. The graphomaniac is a permanent resident of commonplaces, a kitschman or kitschwoman of letters. [...] Graphomania is about handling literary commonplaces clumsily and inappropriately, and about excess: writing too much, plagiarizing too much, behaving too much like a writer. This excess in writerly practice can be pathetic and parodic, embarrassing and revealing. It can function as a way of self-affirmation and self-fashioning as a writer and a figure of powerful cultural prestige; it can also turn into a self-defeating attempt at aesthetic emancipation. Graphomania poses the problem of the boundaries of literature, of the relationship between writing and the making of the self. The history of graphomania reveals an amplitude of nuances in attitudes toward the commonplace, ranging from parody to imitation and from estrangement to engagement.24

When asked in interview what they felt the failings of their work were, both authors signalled the fact that the travel-chronicle had to be written up so quickly that they did not have time to polish their prose, or even write as much as they would have liked. They both felt that their fieldwork erred on the side of the superficial, and Ramírez Heredia, in particular, commented that, ‘En ocasiones me sentí un poco repetitivo de describir una cosa y luego al rato describir otro igual, y otro igual’. The resultant texts also, to a certain extent, disappointed the expectations of the editors of the series.

However, if these works do not quite meet the literary mark, perhaps the true measure of their value is the extent of their popularity with the reading public. At such proximity to the texts’ publication, popularity is very difficult to establish: neither text - each of an average print run of two to three thousand copies - has yet needed a second edition, for example. Nevertheless, Por los caminos was a runner-up for a minor literary prize.25 Presentations of the book were organised by the state government of Guerrero in Taxco, Chilpancingo and Acapulco, where numerous copies of the book were purchased by said authorities for distribution at extremely low prices in their state. The second travel-chronicle on Iztacalco was commissioned by the publishers (Joaquín Mortiz) as a result of the success of the book on Guerrero.

Ortiz presented Las Huastecas in Mexico City in a small presentation organised by the CNCA, along with Fernando Solana Olivaures and Hugo Diego Blanco (see Section 2, Chapter 4); and again in San Miguel de Allende in March 1996. He has received only a few appreciative reviews of his work in publications with which he has editorial contacts.26 As a result of his presentation in San Miguel de Allende and of the magazine Tierra Adentro’s decision to publish an edition dedicated exclusively to the Huastecas, Ortiz also

26 Dolores Castro, ‘Orlando Ortiz y la magia de las Huastecas’, Fronteras, 3 (Winter 1996-1997), 70; and Juan Domínguez, review of Crónica de las Huastecas, Tierra Adentro, 87 (August/September 1997), 75.
published an article in said publication which part paraphrases and part plagiarises his earlier chronicle.27

Little case, then, can be made for the great popular appeal of these works. It would appear, indeed, that more of a case can be made for the popularity of Villoro’s Palmeras, than for either of these two texts. Perhaps, however, the texts are more literary than they seem; examples of postmodernism’s interest in the superficial and in ‘light’ literature. Following Roberto Echevarría’s definition of postmodernism, these travel-chronicles certainly do display an obsession with telling stories for the sake of telling stories, in particular with ‘relatos locales’ where everything is ‘color, narratividad, acción’.28

However, in a discussion of the limits of postmodernism, in The Politics of Postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon comments that not everything produced in a postmodern era need be postmodern, and arguing against Baudrillard’s contention that television is the ‘paradigmatic form of postmodern signification’, she notes that

Most television, in its unproblematised reliance on realist narrative and transparent representational conventions, is pure commodified complicity, without the critique needed to define the postmodern paradox. That critique [...] is crucial to the definition of the postmodern, whatever its acknowledged complicity. (p. 10)

In so far as Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz do not seem to have any real critical leverage on their own reliance on commonplaces (irony is scarce in these texts, and the metatexts are insubstantial critical tools, designed only to emphasise the role of the narrator), their travel-chronicles cannot be considered postmodern offerings.

Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz appear to be torn between the popular and the literary, yet they achieve neither. Nevertheless, their dominant literary pretensions turn them into what Svetlana Boym has defined as ‘graphomaniacs’; obsessive scribblers, ‘escribidores’. Despite Carlos Fuentes’s claim that travel-writing, by virtue of its reliance on displacement, is an ‘adiós al lugar común’,29 Ortiz and Ramírez Heredia repeatedly fail to say good-bye. Las Huastecas and Por los caminos can, thus, only be classified as bad contemporary travel-chronicles.

“... And when twilight falls on the beautiful old colonial city of Quito and those cool breezes steal down from the Andes, walk out in the fresh of the evening and look over the beautiful señoritas who seat themselves, in colorful native costume, along the wall of the sixteenth-century church that overlooks the main square...” They fired the guy wrote that. There are limits, even in a travel folder...30

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29 Prologue to Fernando Benítez’s Los indios de México: antología, p. 12.
CHAPTER 3

Speculative Cities:
Mexico City and Villahermosa

A mí, de entrada, me da la tentación especular...

In an effort to leave behind worn-out recipes for standard travel-chronicles, the authors included in this chapter choose to travel through the space of dreams and memories, fiction and poetic imagery, academic speculation and virtual reality. These new dimensions do not make their debut in these travel-chronicles, but the authors studied here do take up such alternative dimensions in a more thorough fashion than before, increasingly at the expense of the active, homodiegetic narration of a journey.

This chapter concentrates on the speculative travel-chronicles of Héctor Perea (México: crónica en espiral (CNCA, 1996)) and Álvaro Ruiz Abreu (Los ojos del paisaje (CNCA, 1996)). What defines Perea’s and Ruiz Abreu’s texts is a certain hesitancy to drop the personal travel-diary motif despite evidence that both authors are aware of its insufficiencies, and that they also prefer to explore more metaphorical forms of travel in their chronicles. This tension in the coexistence of a homodiegetic narration of a real journey to a recognisable place, made for the purposes of writing the commissioned text, interspersed in texts which otherwise develop in very different directions, is the stumbling block which gives a rather uneven quality to the work of these two authors.

Both Perea and Ruiz Abreu are primarily known for their academic works and the subject matter of both their travel-chronicles is heavily influenced by their research specialities. Ruiz Abreu (Sánchez Magallanes, Tabasco, 1947) has a doctoral degree in Hispanic literature, and currently teaches literature and journalism at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Xochimilco. Besides the publication of the novel El puerto bajo la bruma (Cal y Arena, 1990), a fictional chronicle of a day in the tropical coastal regions of Mexico where Ruiz Abreu grew up, and his more recent, more experimental novel Ciudadpintada en la ventana (Alfaguara, 1997), he has achieved major renown for his painstaking biographies of two of the most important cult figures on the Mexican literary scene of the mid-twentieth century: José Revueltas and José Carlos Becerra (José Revueltas: los muros de la utopía (Cal y Arena, 1992) and La ceiba en llamas: vida y obra de José Carlos Becerra (Cal y Arena, 1996)).
What is apparent in these biographies is Ruiz Abreu's enduring fascination with the travelling spirit and his increasingly unorthodox approach to the traditional academic genre of biography in terms of personal involvement and of speculative theorising. Despite their very different literary vocations, both Revueltas and Becerra were ardent travellers and Ruiz Abreu explores in detail the relationship between their travels and their literary works. Revueltas travelling ceaselessly both in Mexico and abroad.¹ His Mexican chronicles reveal the continuing attempt to create a self-aware Mexico somewhat in the style of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano and Guillermo Prieto. Ruiz Abreu traces signs of literary inspiration through other travel-writers, such as D.H. Lawrence and John Reed; notes possible sources of material for Revueltas's novels in these texts; and speculates about the possible repercussions of these travel-chronicles on later writers' images of Mexico. He concedes Revueltas's neglected travel-writing an important place in the configuration of his literary world. In so doing, Ruiz Abreu also displays his own criteria for the critical analysis of travel-writing: he addresses the question of how it fits into the literary tradition of travel-writing and how it relates to the rest of an author's work. He deems it a rich and experimental form of writing, valuable for its blending of historical fact with personal viewpoint and literary style.

In Becerra's case, travel is motivated by more personal than social or professional causes: it is 'educational'. Born in Villahermosa in 1936 and, like so many Tabascan poets before him (Gorostiza, Pellicer, Iduarte), anxious to escape the cultural isolation of his childhood in Tabasco, Becerra moved to Mexico City in the early 1960s, and left the country for Europe in 1969, travelling extensively there until his death in a road accident in Italy in May 1970. Ruiz Abreu follows the last months of Becerra's life in minute detail, scanning his previous poetic works for some sense of culmination, of transcendence, of anticipation of death à la Pasolini or García Lorca. He also offers glimpses of fantasy scenarios where Becerra delays his journey in Barcelona in the company of the Latin American Boom novelists thus slowing the pace of his travels and potentially avoiding the inexplicable crash on an empty and almost perfectly straight road near Brindisi. This rather over-dramatic approach to Becerra's life and works reveals the mounting tension in Ruiz Abreu's own work between the creative narrator and the ascetic academic: how to mix life and literature? Conjecture in the absence of satisfying factual data certainly has a place in biographies, but Ruiz Abreu goes further, indulging in what might be deemed unnecessary speculation on irrevocable facts. It is as if Becerra is as much a fictional character of Ruiz Abreu's personal creation as the family in El puerto bajo la bruma. Ruiz Abreu's text itself has the potential, through speculation, to rewrite history. It is a similarly speculative approach which colours certain chapters of his travel-chronicle.

No doubt Ruiz Abreu's fictional approach to the tropics in his novel, and his academic interest in travel and travel-writing, in particular his interest in the travels of other Tabascan writers, singled him out as a potentially erudite and creative travel-chronicler himself. However, his previous commission for the text for Tabasco: una cultura del agua (Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 1985), a short but beautifully presented book of Graciela

¹ See Section 1, Chapter 2, pp. 74-75.
Iturbide's photography dealing with the construction of bridges in the state of Tabasco, was probably the decisive factor in the CNCA commission. These twenty pages of text provide evidence of Ruiz Abreu’s desire to produce a personal narrative on the subject of Tabasco very much in the wake of the older Tabascan poets. It also demonstrates his knowledge of Tabascan history and society, yet the constraints of this commission on the subject of civil-engineering result in an uncomfortable mixture of statistics and poetry, sociology and personal memories. The impression is that, given more propitious circumstances, the nascent travel-chronicler in Ruiz Abreu would be able to develop an innovative, challenging form of travel-writing, balancing more successfully personal narrative and academic knowledge.

Héctor Perea (Mexico City, 1953) is a prize-winning cultural journalist and academic who has exercised his profession in both Mexico and Spain. He currently teaches literature at the Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Like Ruiz Abreu, his friend and colleague, he has also published fictional texts - the experimental short stories of A contraluz (Asbe, 1989), for example - but this fictional urge has largely been overshadowed by the importance accorded his non-fiction texts, in particular his recently published La rueda del tiempo: mexicanos en España (Cal y Arena, 1996) which won the José Revueltas prize for essays on the subject of literature in 1994.

His commission for the CNCA travel-chronicle was almost certainly triggered by Larueda del tiempo,2 a spiralling biography of the numerous illustrious Mexican travellers in Spain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, prior to the Spanish Civil War. The sense of the circularity - or the spiralling nature3 - of the material referred to in the title stems from the fact that Perea is here exploring the influence of Mexicans on Spanish culture in a period which is immediately prior to that of a major Spanish contribution to Mexican culture as a result of the influx of Spanish exiles in Mexico occasioned by the Spanish Civil War. The circle/spiral - is that formed by the reciprocal movements from Mexico to Spain, and then from Spain to Mexico. Smaller eddies in Ibero-Mexican relations are formed by individual figures’ movements back and forth between the two countries in the form of both real journeys and artistic creations. In particular, Perea compares and contrasts the visions of Mexico and Spain produced by writers such as Alfonso Reyes, Andrés Iduarte, José Vasconcelos, Martín Luis Guzmán and others.4

Perhaps the most significant example of this intercultural exchange for Perea’s later texts are the works which Reyes wrote during his time in Spain: Visión de Anáhuac: 1519 (1915) and Cartones de Madrid (1917). Reyes systematically filtered his chronicles on Mexico and Spain through the eyes of others, through literature and art, moving constantly to and fro between his target destinations, even superimposing them, or fusing them

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3 If the dimension of time is applied to the co-ordinates of a circle, the resultant ‘rueda del tiempo’ actually describes a spiral construct.
4 A supplement to this study may be found in Perea’s anthology of the writings of Mexicans on the subject of Spain, and of Spaniards on the subject of Mexicans in Spain (Nuestras naves: imagen de México en España, Colección Cultural Universitaria, 57 (UAM, 1993)).
together. Perea notes that the Visión de Anáhuac is,

Un paisaje visto por los enviados renacentistas de este pueblo [España], recogido a través de la realidad fantástica que significaron las crónicas de la conquista y luego revisado - revisto - por Alfonso Reyes. [...] Es una obra en la que confluyeron los sentimientos encontrados del exiliado, la pasión por la literatura y la eterna necesidad de crear una realidad partiendo de otra sólo existente. (La rueda, pp. 351-52; author's italics)

This might easily stand as an accurate description of Perea’s own procedure in his Crónica en espiral. He is interested, like Reyes, in collating the different perspectives available of a specific place - foreign and indigenous, contemporary and ancient, fictitious and historical - in order to create a collage of ‘los mundos posibles’ that are accessible in ‘un espacio desplegado en la imaginación’ (Larueda, p. 352).

La rueda del tiempo is the obverse of México: crónica en espiral, its companion volume. So many of the proper names which appear in the text on Spain are those that reappear in the travel-chronicle on Mexico City that perhaps this latter text in some way contributes to completing the circle/spiral of the former in terms of Perea’s own literary movement between history and fiction, allowing him to speculate through the historiographic fiction of the travel-chronicle on matters which required a more authoritative treatment in his academic work. His frequent references to the city of Madrid in the travel-chronicle set it up as Mexico City’s ‘other’, its alter ego, where both cities are endowed with an aura of independent protagonism, more vital than that of any individual inhabitant.

Nevertheless, some of the narrative threads and imagery developed in Perea’s chronicle of the Federal District may also be found in his experimental and often fantastic short stories and semi-fictional essays, written in the tradition of Fuentes and Borges. Both quotations used as epigraphs to the short story ‘Ubre Urbe’, in A contraluz, by Díaz del Castillo and Carlos Fuentes respectively, provide images of the city which Perea reuses in his travel-chronicle. Perea’s collections of essays (El viento en fuga (1990) and Océano de colores (1996)), caught between his academic research and his fictional experiments, suggest a permanent consciousness of travel, both real and metaphorical; of alternative and idiosyncratic itineraries through the worlds of art and literature which Perea ultimately proposes as a means of travel in the Federal District of the late twentieth century. His current column in La Jornada Semanal, takes these issues further, dealing with the possibilities of the internet as a means of travel, in particular of travel through virtual museums.

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5 Reyes’ travels are further studied in the section ‘Estancias de Reyes’ in Perea’s collection of essays El viento en fuga (1990), and in Perea’s introduction to España en la obra de Alfonso Reyes (FCE, 1990).
Ahora caminamos por la ciudad...

Thus far in this study of contemporary travel-chronicles there has been no problem in establishing that crucial, if pedantic, criterion of verifiable personal travel, without which the travel-chronicle becomes simply a chronicle of a recognisable place at a given point in time, or drifts off into fiction. In all previous texts there has been ample narration of the experience of transportation and, frequently, too, of the encounter with alterity and novelty typical of the traveller 'abroad'. The chronicles of Ruiz Abreu and Perea generally do not comply with these criteria. Nevertheless, these works are arguably still travel-chronicles: because they were commissioned as such, and, more importantly, because they display an awareness of the genre of the travel-chronicle and consciously challenge and expand this definition.

Estancias de Perea

That major displacements constituting 'travel' within an urban centre such as Mexico City are not only possible but daily necessities for the vast majority of the resident population is something which has already been adequately established by sociologists and anthropologists, chroniclers and historians, novelists and poets. An overview of the multiple faces of travel in the Federal District is provided by a recently published book, La ciudad de los viajeros: travesías e imaginarios urbanos, México, 1940-2000, which integrates the sociological study of such groups of travellers as taxi-drivers and students, young mothers and street-sellers, with a display of photographs charting the changing faces of the urban environment, and with an all too brief evaluation of the changing itineraries of the city's chroniclers from Justo Sierra to Carlos Monsiváis. In the introduction Néstor García Canclini makes clear that, 'La ciudad moderna no es sólo lugar de residencia y de trabajo. Se ha hecho también para viajar: a ella, desde ella y a través de ella' (p. 11).

In fact, Mexico City has been the site of intensive chronicling and travel-chronicling since the time of the Conquest onwards. The city itself has had an official chronicler since the mid-sixteenth century, and the role is currently fulfilled by the Consejo de la Crónica de la Ciudad de México, a whole committee of chroniclers. Even in the early days of the Colonia, Mexico City was a place where travel to, from, and across the city was an important daily concern. One of the earliest chronicles of the city, written in 1554 by the Spaniard Francisco Cervantes de Salazar (later designated official chronicler of the colony), took the format of a tour given by two locals to a visitor from Spain.9

Almost four centuries later, Salvador Novo's prize-winning Nueva grandeza mexicana:

7 Ed. by Néstor García Canclini, Alejandro Castellanos and Ana Rosas Mantecón (UAM-Iztapalapa / Grijalbo, 1996).
8 Founded on 16 February 1987 the council consists of twenty-two chroniclers including Homero Aridjis, Fernando Benítez, Emmanuel Carballo, José Luis Cuevas, Carlos Fuentes, Teodoro González de León, Andrés Henestrosa, José E. Iturriaga, Miguel León-Portilla, José Luis Martínez, Octavio Paz, Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, Ramón Xirau and Silvio Zavala. The general secretary is Ángeles González Gamio. Their quarterly magazine Crónicas de la Ciudad de México has been published since January 1996.
9 See Iturriaga de la Fuente, Anecdotario, II, 52-58.
Since 1946 there have been an infinite number of fiction writers and chroniclers (or writers of fictional chronicles) who have situated their narratives in contemporary Mexico City. There are writers who seek to recreate lost images of the city through memory (Paz, Gonzalo Celorio, José Emilio Pacheco and many of the older chroniclers), others who stick firmly to the findings of their investigations (Benítez, Monsiváis, José Joaquín Blanco et al.), still others - the youngest of the chroniclers - who speculate on the future faces of the most populous urban centre in the world (Óscar de la Borbolla, Fernando Curiel). And among these chroniclers there are a number who, like Novo, have selected the theme of travel as the most efficient way to approach such a large and idiosyncratic city. There are, indeed, so many chroniclers and travel-chroniclers of Mexico City as to make one wonder how and why Perea should go about producing another chronicle of the city, with or without travel as a leitmotif. As Noé Cárdenas noted in his review of Perea’s chronicle: ‘Escribir una crónica de la Ciudad de México es ya una tarea imposible’. Even more so, perhaps, for one of its residents than for a Mexican from the provinces or a foreigner.

Perea was born in Mexico City; however, as Cárdenas notes, his long periods of residence in Madrid during the 1980s do mean that his experience of travel in the capital is heightened: some of the personal episodes which he narrates - his stay in the Gran Hotel de la Ciudad de México, for example - are events drawn from his memories of a series of

11 Chronicles which include a travel element are Ibargüengoitia’s ‘Misterios del Distrito Federal’ (1969-76) in La casa de usted y otros viajes (1991); Benítez’s Viaje al centro de México (1975); Roberto Vallarino’s chronicles of Nezahualcóyotl (1982), in his Crónicas cotidianas (1984); Ramírez Heredia’s En algún lugar de la mancha (1993); Fabrizio Mejía Madrid’s ‘Insurgeâtes en días lluviosos’ (c.1994), in his Pequeños actos de desobediencia civil (1996); and Gonzalo Celorio’s El viaje sedentario: varia invención (1994). Celorio’s text is a deliberately passive travel-chronicle, in the style of Xavier de Maistre’s Voyage autour de ma chambre: ironically, it is to this text that Perea’s Crónica en espiral bears most similarity.

A good anthology of contemporary (travel-)chronicles of the Federal District is Jaime Valverde Arciniega and Juan Domingo Argüelles’s El fin de la nostalgia: nueva crónica de la ciudad de México, prol. by Carlos Monsiváis (Nueva Imagen, 1992). Also see Nexos, 150 (June 1999) and Blanco Móvil, 69 (1996), dedicated to ‘Crónica de un día cualquiera: Ciudad de México’ and ‘Literatura de la Ciudad de México: crónicas y cuentos’ respectively.

12 ‘Otros tiempos y lugares’, Nexos, 233 (May 1997), 99. Gonzalo Celorio’s more recent México, ciudad de papel (Tusquets, 1997), written only a month after Perea’s chronicle was published, appears to confirm that Perea’s speculative, literary approach to Mexico City is the only one currently possible: ‘México es una ciudad imaginaria, cuya historia, más que palparse, se adivina’ (p. 16). Only the voices of its chroniclers remain: ‘Las voces, en suma, que la han construido letra a letra en la realidad perseverante de la literatura. La nuestra es una ciudad de papel’ (p. 17).
return journeys which he made to the capital from his then base in Madrid. 13 This need to rediscover a city capable of changing beyond recognition in the space of one or two years pervades the whole of Perea’s chronicle, regardless of whether the incident narrated is taken from his memories of childhood and of his return journeys from Madrid, or from recent exploratory rambles undertaken to search out material for this particular commission.

His experience of Mexico City, then, is of a permanent struggle to reconstruct, remember, replace the lost faces of the city with the ones he remembers from his childhood, adolescence, and studies in and of the city. Perea knows what should be there, what used to be there, or even what might have been there, and faced with its absence, partial or total, he narrates these lacunas, thus creating his own synthetic vision of Mexico City, which collates the submerged memory of the lake of México-Tenochtitlán with the virtual images of the city floating in cyberspace, and with a thousand ‘espejismos’, ‘ilusiones’ and ‘cuentos de aparecidos’ (p. 29) in between. His synthesis of the city is one in which these different faces of the city can coexist without danger of destruction; one which corresponds to his experience and knowledge of the city, rather than to the reality that a reader retracing his footsteps might perceive.

Complementing his desire to narrate a synthetic vision of Mexico City, Perea opts for a synthetic narration of his multiple journeys through the city, collating the fruits of the full range of his personal experience of the city in a superimposed itinerary which purports to describe the figure of a spiral. But can the reader tell that the thread of the homodiegetic narrative is a fictitious construct, and does it matter if he/she notices? The average reader would certainly be aware that that this spiral journey is not the main focus of interest in the text, that there is very little sense of the narration of a succession of events, and that, plotting the course of the journey on a map of Mexico City, the figure of the spiral in two-dimensions tends to be rather diffuse, capricious (‘un trazo caprichoso’ according to Perea14).

Despite the brevity of the chronicle - barely eighty pages15 - the homodiegetic narrative still takes up comparatively little space: just enough to situate the reader in time and space. There is very little personal life narrated. After barely a sentence or two of orientating narrative Perea switches to a more essayistic type of prose: ‘Cruzo la calle de Durango y me planto frente a una construcción que sigue pareciéndome fabulosa, aunque me haya topado

13 ‘Residente de Madrid durante largas temporadas, el regreso - o los regresos - de Perea a su natal Ciudad de México le exigen un tributo de reconocimiento que el autor resuelve revisitando los lugares que, o bien son los biográficamente suyos, o bien los que se ha apropiado con arreglo a sus gustos, curiosidad y sensibilidad’ (Cárdenas, 99).
15 The mark of an effective synthesis according to Perea.
con ella miles de veces' (p. 72). There follows an extensive quotation from Sergio Pitol’s *El desfile del amor*, and then a discussion of the architectural styles of the Colonia Roma. An even briefer example comes only pages later: ‘De vuelta en Coyoacán. La estampa de Landesio parecería una más de esas cincuenta y tres estaciones de Hiroshigué’ (p. 79).

Many more of Perea’s homodiegetic asides are sustained only by the words ‘recuerdo’ or ‘repito’. These memories and repetitions lend an oneiric quality to his presence in the text.

Although specific places are clearly identified, there is practically no attempt to provide temporal links between ‘visits’. The ‘today’ and ‘now’ of the narrative of *Crónica en espiral* are more likely those of its moment of composition at the writer’s desk, or of the non-specific discursive present of ‘nowadays’, than temporal markers referring to the actuality of the excursions themselves (‘Hoy inicio esta “Crónica en espiral”...’ (p. 15)). Rarely is there reference to a concrete ‘tomorrow’ or ‘yesterday’, to a sense of relativity in this non-specific present of writing. The few events narrated might have taken place in the space of four or five days, in an uninterrupted itinerary along the route of the spiral. However, it is more probable that they are drawn from the six-month period during which Perea wrote the book, and inter-spliced with earlier episodes. Hence causality from one event to another is flimsy.

Finally, the succession of locations detailed in Perea’s text form only the roughest semblance of a spiral shape: starting in the Centro Histórico he describes a route through the city which spirals out from this point to reach areas such as Coyoacán and San Ángel, Texcoco and La Noria, but many interconnecting areas are missed out, presumably because they do not interest the author. Although boredom is one of the contingencies of travel it admissibly does not have to be reenacted in a travel-chronicle, yet with such large tracts of the itinerary of the spiral un-narrated, the design of the chronicle seems flawed. There is also little sense of any real means of conveyance between Perea’s isolated locations. (At best he offers this description of a short walk in the Centro Histórico, ‘Hace un calor de espanto. Y lo sentimos mucho más por venirnos andando desde San Ildefonso’ (p. 26); and at worst this fanciful return journey from Mixcoac to Coyoacán, ‘El sendero líquido, entubado, me devuelve otra vez a Coyoacán, donde reinicio el alejamiento a contracorriente’ (p. 84).)

The overall impression given by Perea’s presence in his narrative, then, is of a lack of verisimilitude. There are, however, other ways of looking at Perea’s ‘character’, which render him a more robust participant in the economy of the text. Despite his secondary importance in terms of the space accorded to him in the text, Perea, the character, reappears at regular intervals throughout the text, particularly at the beginning and end of chapters. Moreover, a sense of personal presence, albeit that of the writer at his desk, permeates the entire chronicle, suggesting a more synthetic linkage of homodiegetic travel-

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16 Technically, they barely even qualify as homodiegesis.

17 However, Perea does also use this ‘form of travel’ to remind the reader of the original waterways of Mexico City.
narrative and impersonal chronicling. It is not so much an appendix as a vestigial early plan designed to be integral to the chronicle as a whole but which was found not to be sufficiently flexible for the finished product.

Postmodern travel-writing does allow for fragmented experiences and a loss of linear chronology. The reference to the spiral-shaped itinerary in the title is misleading in this context as it suggests a continuum, a uniform displacement in time and space which is manifestly not narrated. What postmodern travel-writing does still require is the conveyance of a sense of being there, of personal experience and of the contingency of daily life. There is, admittedly, very little in terms of personal action in the text - nothing particularly idiosyncratic, no interviews, no chance meetings with the man in the street. Instead, Perea comes across as a very aloof spectator of the city who accords a sense of protagonism to the city at the expense of its living inhabitants. He situates and directs his reader’s gaze from a room on the third floor of the Gran Hotel de la Ciudad de México adjacent to the cathedral in the Centro Histórico, from the terrace bar on the roof of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, from the elevated perspective of Bar Mata and Las Sirenas, all also in the Centro Histórico. He looks down not on the multitudes passing in the street below, but on the architectural vestiges of past epochs. He even imagines what might have been there for the spectator of the nineteenth century.

Yet, no matter how flimsy and fleeting they may appear, these episodes of homodiegetic narrative are used to orientate the reader as quickly as possible: they are co-ordinates. Perea ultimately aims to access quite different terrain; terrain in which personal experience and contingency are encapsulated in the ‘readings’ he makes of the city. The fleeting appearances of Perea’s character-narrator belie an extremely artful use of the narrator’s role to direct a chronicle.

*En primera persona*

Ruiz Abreu’s account of Tabasco, too, offers little in the way of narratorial involvement. However, whereas Perea’s elliptical use of homodiegesis is consistent with the economy and poetics of the text, Ruiz Abreu’s sparse personal account appears as a rather feeble *post hoc* attempt at this kind of narrative; one which was never fully integrated with the rest of the material.

Ruiz Abreu admits to having been influenced by the travel-chronicles of both Juan Villoro and Fernando Solana Olivares (whose work is studied in the next chapter). Torn between Villoro’s light-hearted narrative, structured clearly around his experience of his first trip to Yucatan, and Solana Olivares’s acknowledgement that a week’s trip to Oaxaca, a place he had not revisited since his early childhood, was simply not enough to produce a chronicle based on up-to-date personal experience, Ruiz Abreu’s natural inclination is to opt for a chronicle on Tabasco which, like Solana Olivares’s work, deals with the subject of travel and travel-chronicles in and on Tabasco without incurring in a personal narrative. For similar logistical reasons, his chronicle is largely restricted to the state capital,
Villahermosa, and only in more general terms does it extrapolate out to refer to Tabasco as a whole. (Villahermosa is thus used as a synecdochic mirror for the rest of the state.) Yet, despite Ruiz Abreu's recognition that even the trips made to Villahermosa were not sufficiently stimulating to warrant a personal narrative, he is not bold enough to renounce the enterprise altogether. For Ruiz Abreu a travel-chronicle still requires a personal element linked to images of displacement and a sense of the contingencies of 'being there', yet he is unable to sustain the illusion of a fulfilling journey as the basis for the narration of his chronicle. The results are both frustrating and confusing for the reader who is lead to expect a personal narrative in the first chapter, and is subsequently offered a series of imaginative 'lectures' on Tabascan literature, popular culture, industry, history, and lifestyle straight from the writer's desk, interwoven with poetic evocations of the tropical rainforest and the state's great rivers, and with Ruiz Abreu's poetic rewriting of interviews with Tabascans concerning their memories of the state of their childhood.

In fact Ruiz Abreu made three journeys to Villahermosa and environs for the purposes of writing this book (one paid by Pemex, one by the Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, and one by himself). It is, however, impossible to detect the journeys as discrete events in the text itself. What we read is a series of snapshots of Ruiz Abreu's multiple arrivals in Tabasco, refreshed later by the occasional 'street scene'. But the reminder that Ruiz Abreu is 'in the field' comes too late; it is too flimsy and 'pedestrian' a piece of information to hold water against the weight of his other discourses: the most lengthy examples of homodiegesis take up the space of little over half a page, and, on average, each chapter contains only one such personal co-ordinate. (In fact two substantial chapters from the middle of the book contain no evidence of personal narrative whatsoever.)

However, the most serious problem with the credibility of Ruiz Abreu's homodiegetic narrative is the introduction of a female travelling-companion. 'Ofelia' appears at Ruiz Abreu's side at practically every instance of homodiegetic action in the text. Her presence is the only factor which defines Ruiz Abreu's most recent journeys as separate from those of his childhood memories, or of other research trips, and it attempts to make these journeys verisimilar. But who exactly is Ofelia? A friend, guide, mentor, or lover? Villoro mentions his wife briefly, before leaving her behind to continue his journey alone; Hinojosa, clarifies the nature of his friendship with Alfonso Morales in the opening pages of his chronicle; Ramírez Heredia and Ortiz make some of their journeys with their wives, others with friends; even Perea mentions having a beer with his sister-in-law and their respective children on the terrace of Bellas Artes... The status of travelling-companions is made apparent in all texts studied so far. Furthermore, the existence or suggestion of extra-martial encounters is not deemed to have any place in these contemporary travel-chronicles.

19 Interview. That two of the trips were paid by bodies with vested interests in the subject matter of his chronicle has an inevitable bearing on his ability to assess his material impartially. Like Ramírez Heredia he loses critical distance: his endorsement of Pemex's role in Tabasco, for example, reads as a rather over-complicit approach.

20 To the best of my knowledge, José Luis Cuevas is the only Mexican writer/artist to have narrated his extensive extra-marital journeys (Historias del viajero (1987)).
So what is Ruiz Abreu, married with one son, doing with a young, attractive and apparently unattached woman? The most generous interpretation is that Ofelia is an echo of the presence of Graciela Iturbide, the photographer who accompanied Ruiz Abreu in his research trips for the book on Tabasco’s bridges - certainly Ofelia is depicted in one instance taking photographs in the place where the Tonalá river is crossed by a new bridge (p. 107). Nevertheless, Ofelia’s ‘magical’ presence suggests that she is Ruiz Abreu’s deus ex machina for the provision of a sense of the contingencies of real life: she is on edge (‘casi al borde de un ataque de nervios’ (p. 107)) and unpredictable. Her relationship with Ruiz Abreu is sexually charged and stormy: anything might happen.

Literary artifice in itself is not out of place in a travel-chronicle. Quite simply Ruiz Abreu handles the figure of Ofelia badly: the artifice is too obvious. Even her name stands out as a literary marker: Ophelia, Hamlet’s muse.21 The lack of introduction to her place in the chronicle leads to a similar lack of verisimilitude. The limitation of her role to that of fey and sultry sex-bomb raises heckles, particularly given the intimation that she is also supposed to symbolise Tabascan women, portrayed as primarily sexual beings in the text. Furthermore the dialogue ascribed to her is a trite and over-programmatic way of changing narrative tack: she has nothing to say that Ruiz Abreu, born and bred in Tabasco, would not know already, and, since he is not posing as a foreigner to the state, her role is obsolete.

This dysfunctional, often heavy-handed style is apparent in the other discourses in Ruiz Abreu’s text: his discussions of literature and popular culture have a tendency to sound as if he is giving a lecture: ‘leemos, por ejemplo’; his own poetic descriptions of the flora of Tabasco, or of its rivers, frequently clash with his hurried inclusion of factual data. Another somewhat dysfunctional way in which Ruiz Abreu attempts to reinforce the value of his present series of journeys is through the inclusion of interviews which he conducted, some expressly for this book, others for his biography of Becerra. Yet these interviews are introduced without warning, signalled only by the use of italics. No names, dates, or other material circumstances relating to the empirical act of collecting data are given.22 Hence, there is no real sense conveyed of the writer, in the field, conducting field-work.

The narrative voice of these italicised passages is also deceptive: the reader immediately attempts to reconcile these more personal recollections of Villahermosa with the image of the text’s original homodiegetic narrator, hoping for some more substantial sense of character for the latter. The first such passage starts with the statement, ‘Nací en Villahermosa no hace mucho tiempo, era el último año del gobierno de Carlos A. Madrazo’ (p. 24). Yet the year alluded to here is 1964, making the speaker only thirty-two years old, whereas the original narrator described himself as ‘un tabasqueño cuarentón’ only two pages earlier. The second italicised passage relates the genealogy of someone who says that, ‘Aunque no nací en Tabasco, me até a esta tierra’ (p. 39); the original narrator is ‘tabasqueño’. The reader who attempts to solve the riddle of these narrators’ identities by

21 In interview Ruiz Abreu confirmed that Ofelia was ‘un invento’, a mirage of companionship.
22 In retrospect, Ruiz Abreu thought that he should have included this information (interview).
reducing them to one coherent life story is frustrated.

There are certainly deliberate similarities between these interview biographies and that of the original narrator, but in fact it is not until chapter 7 that the biography of the author and narrator of the main text is presented, perversely coming directly after the only mention of an interview in the main text, accompanied by all the necessary orientating data. One might then expect the following 'write-up' to be the distilled version of the interview in process. Instead Ruiz Abreu offers his autobiography, yet without any of the author's biographical details on the book's fly-sheet, the casual reader has no way of identifying this part of the text as autobiography rather than biography.

A reader who is familiar with Ruiz Abreu's other work will deduce the identity of the narrator from the references to the town where Ruiz Abreu grew up: Sánchez Magallanes. The only ironic clue for the careful but un-contextualised reader is the longer than average length of this passage, and, above all, the comparative unity and simplicity of its style. That is to say, the other passages resulting from interviews with Tabascans concerning their identity as Tabascans, their memories of the Tabasco of their childhood and the effects of modernisation lose in verisimilitude as interviews through Ruiz Abreu's poetic reworking of them: they become overcharged with literary references (Pellicer's Venice, and García Marquéz's Macondo); poetic images repeat from one passage to the next, and from the italicised passages to the main text and back (see 'las blancas mariposas' and other images on pages 40, 41 and 117), thus erasing the potential of these passages to introduce a degree of polyphony into the chronicle. However, this erudite yet whimsical tone is largely missing from the autobiographical passage which narrates an event - the apparition of the first marine petrol-extraction plant off the shores of Sánchez Magallanes, seen through the eyes of school-children and old men, written in a tone very similar to that of Villoro's humorous evocation of his grandmother. Ironically, the original narrator, whose literary knowledge is most successfully demonstrated in the opening chapter, is likely to be identified with the more erudite interview passages because of the tone in which they have been recast, rather than with his own biography.

Ruiz Abreu's homodiegetic narrative is frustrating for the reader: it is insubstantial, confusing, and not very verisimilar. No doubt he intended to force the reader to make an effort to piece together the different strands of his travels, yet the inconsistency and the artifice inherent in this narrative, make it read as a hurried after-thought rather than an integral component of the travel-chronicle. Overall, he appears more concerned than Perea to mould his travel-chronicle to the postmodern pattern, yet less successful in his attempt.

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Imágenes y lecturas, I

Both Ruiz Abreu’s and Perea’s homodiegetic narrative of their travels is slight. Nevertheless, both writers have produced texts which suggest that tracing a verisimilar journey ‘in the first person’ in a contemporary travel-chronicle is an insufficient tool by which to establish the nature of the text. Perea, in interview, protested that the question of ‘travel’ in a travel-chronicle should be viewed much more metaphorically: imaginative journeys, drug-induced ‘trips’, and audiovisual simulations are all valid ways of travelling. ‘Piensa en el concepto del viaje según los años sesenta. El viaje no es solamente trasladarte a otro país, sino trasladarte a otra dimensión: el viaje del LSD, el viaje que te provoca la marihuana...’ And indeed, the spiral shape of Perea’s journey appears to require more dimensions than those offered by a town plan to chart its co-ordinates.

La esfera de espirales

As noted earlier, Perea displays a predilection for viewing the city from the rooftops, in a ‘mirada giratoria’ (p. 32). He also offers a brief aerial view of the city (p. 62). From these elevated vantage points he compares the perspective he presently has with that of previous spectators from similar positions, referring to engravings, murals, photographs and narrative accounts. Alternatively, his consciousness of sunken gardens, and of waterways and archeological remains, securely buried under concrete and asphalt, offers an imaginary subterranean perspective. These elevated and sunken perspectives constitute a third dimension in which the spiral of his travels might be plotted. Yet even here a degree of speculation is necessary for the reader to envision Perea’s perspective and its correspondences.

A fourth dimension might be the extension of Perea’s personal narrative to include an ‘official’ guided tour of Mexico City in cyberspace (pp. 52-55). García Canclini, in his essay ‘Los viajes metropolitanos’, asserts the ‘reality’ of travel through electronic media as a way of taking on a city too big to be viewed knowledgeably in its totality by any single chronicler: ‘Los “viajes audiovisuales” pasan a formar parte de las travesías por la urbe, de los modos de informarnos, situarnos y estar presentes en el vasto mundo, en la variedad de mundos que es nuestra propia ciudad’.23

Certainly Perea is aware of the limitations of his own vision of Mexico City and strives to include places in his itinerary which take him beyond ‘la parte diaria y cotidiana’ of the city (interview). He is also one of Mexico’s most enthusiastic advocates of the World Wide Web. However, in this central chapter where Perea attempts to explore the overview of the city offered by the internet (The Instituto Tecnologico de Monterrey’s website at <http://www.ccm.itesm.mx/~Irincon/mexico/>), he finds disappointment:

23 In La ciudad de los viajeros, pp. 11-42 (31-33). More recently, Claudio Magris has insisted on the synthetic relationship of the new medium with older ways of travelling: there is always a virtual, speculative aspect to real journeys, and always ‘la promesa, la nostalgia, la exigencia de la realidad’ in virtual journeys (‘El mundo según Internet’, trans. by Héctor Abad Faciolince, Nexos, 237 (September 1997), 26).
Durante este recorrido virtual sobre el país y la ciudad de México voy extrañando cada vez más una visión extraoficial del asunto, algo más de acuerdo con la presunta libertad ilimitada del Internet. [...] Flota por el hiperespacio un México falso; o cuando menos, uno apenas entrevisto, muy, muy apretado y parcial. (p. 54)

The internet does not yet offer an integrated vision of the different perspectives, literal and metaphorical, political, aesthetic, historical and personal, available on the subject of Mexico City. Nevertheless, Perea does contrast this official vision of the city with a more discerning use of the internet to access the city in the following chapter where he visits José Emilio Pacheco’s chronicles at the magazine Proceso’s website (p. 56).

The remaining dimensions of Perea’s spiral continue in his imagination. A fifth dimension is formed by his travels in time to capture the past faces of Mexico City and the speculative traits of the metropolis of the future. As García Canclini also notes,

Las travesías urbanas son también viajes por las relaciones entre el orden y el desorden, donde se activa la memoria de las imágenes perdidas de la ciudad que fue, y se imagina cómo será, por ejemplo en el 2000, la hipermetrópolis que se insinúa a nuestro alrededor. Se accede a través de los viajes a un imaginario sobre la ciudad posible, se construyen hipótesis - o se selecciona entre las disponibles - para explicar el sentido de los dramas urbanos. (p. 24)

In the construction of Perea’s text this dimension of time travel must be viewed in conjunction with a sixth possible dimension: that of his imaginary travels in space to trace the reflections of other cities found in Mexico City.

That these two dimensions are a deliberate part of the architecture of Perea’s impossible spiral is without doubt. With reference to travel in historical time, for example, he writes, ‘la historia no hace más que repetirse en una espiral ascendente en el tiempo’ (p. 49). These historical repetitions are generated in spirals emanating from violent events which have taken place in La Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Tlatelolco in the first half of the book (‘Tlatelolco es el lugar de retomo’, writes Monsiváis; ‘El lugar de partida de esta cronica y el lugar de vuelta en muchos momentos de nuestra historia: la de esta ciudad, la de nosotros mismos’, adds Perea (p. 49)). In the second half of the chronicle, in a more diffuse sense, the historical repetitions are generated by the repercussions of the extremely destructive 1985 earthquake, particularly in the Condesa and Roma neighbourhoods. The two spirals are linked by the virtual explorations of Chapter 10; and, as a coda, the Tlatelolco spiral is reiterated with significant changes in the final chapter.

Many of Perea’s accelerated travels in historical time are accompanied by brusque displacements to other cities with which Mexico City is associated, if only in Perea’s imagination. Moving on from the traditional comparisons between Mexico City and Venice or Pompeii, Perea repeatedly compares the city with Madrid: the Museo San Carlos on the Puente de Alvarado transports him to El Prado (‘Y viene el traslado en el tiempo y el espacio’ (p. 44)); the Condesa de Miravalle’s monument in Colonia Roma is a pastiche of La Cibeles (p. 73); and the backdrop of the Ajusco volcano reminds him of the Sierra de Guadarrama. However, his loci of comparison also stretch to the limits of the Iberian
Peninsula: in other instances he refers to the churches of Andalucía, the statues of La Reforma are the alter egos of statues in Lisbon (p. 34), and, in a more oblique manner he comments:

Es extraña la sensación que produce el inventar una caminata por esta metrópoli del siglo XVII que en realidad podría haber sido otra. O que además, y de hecho, lo es con un poco de imaginación. Cualquier de las arterias peatonales - Motolinía, Palma, Gante - podría contener un ascensor de hierro que llevara a otro nivel de la ciudad...’ (p. 33)

This imaginary street-escalator is surely inspired by that of the Portuguese capital.

Perea uses the plasticity of ‘un ascensor de hierro’ as a metaphor for an imaginary ‘traslado en el tiempo y el espacio’: it is a bridge. Repeatedly in his chronicle he refers to the theme of bridges; bridges which are sometimes real (‘puente auténtico’ (p. 47)), sometimes mythical (el Puente de Alvarado), and most frequently personal, imaginary ones between different historical epochs and places. The cupola of Santa Teresa church, for example, is ‘un puente lanzado entre los distintos tiempos mexicanos’ (p. 31). The maximum function of these bridges is to underscore both the plasticity and the abstraction inherent in Perea’s spiral itinerary, and their specificity as a metaphor for travel in Mexico City.

The spiral also exists in a seventh dimension, in the movement between text and reader. It becomes an image of the light which allows reading to take place, and which also symbolises Mexico City for Perea and so many other of its chroniclers. In the second chapter Perea quotes a passage from Martín Luis Guzmán’s La sombra del caudillo (1929) which describes the play of sunlight on the heroine, Rosario, as she walks under the trees lining Avenida Insurgentes Sur with the mass of the Ajusco volcano dominating the horizon. Perea describes the scene: ‘Ayer, anteayer y hoy, la ciudad ha sido otra vez de pura luz interior (Guzmán). México estaba encerrado ya en la esfera de espirales del primer encuentro de Rosario con Aguirre’ (p. 17). The ‘esfera de espirales’ refers not only to the relationship between Rosario and Aguirre, but also to the cyclical movement of rays of sunlight, trapped in the circular valley of Mexico, and to the introspection that such a climate provokes.

Again, in the epigraph to Perea’s chronicle - Octavio Paz’s prose poem ‘Valle de México’ (1948) -, the spiral is associated with the illuminating movement of the sun’s rays and its battle with the countering ‘gaze’ of the valley (the earth, the lake, or the ‘air’), where the poet is ‘el afilado, quieto punto fijo de intersección de dos miradas que se ignoran y se encuentran en mí’ (p. 11). The sun is metaphorically cast as a bird of prey which attacks the poet; the rays of light as its wings: ‘El sol me arranca los ojos. En mis órbitas vacías dos astros alisan sus plumas rojas. Esplendor, espiral de alas y un pico feroz’. The Valley of Mexico for Paz is a crucible of light, defined by the transparency of its air, as if was for Reyes in 1915 and would still be for Fuentes in 1958. The loss of the clarity of the air in

24 The comparison in question makes reference to the cathedral of Granada (p. 36), although Perea recognised in interview that he had really meant to refer to the mosque in Córdoba.

25 In the sixteenth century the term ‘puente’ was used in Mexico City to refer to the intersection of a road and a canal (‘México, Ciudad de’, Encyclopaedia de México, ed. by José Rogelio Álvarez, 14 vols (Encyclopaedia Britannica de México, 1993), IX, 5242.
Mexico City, associated with the increasing invisibility of the volcanoes from the centre of
town, is a point to which Perea returns repeatedly in the course of his spiral itinerary.

In both quotations, then, the spiral may be understood to represent the sun’s rays, the path
of light. The light is the protagonist. For Perea, too, it is the sun’s rays which illuminate
Mexico City, allowing the dialogue of seen object and seeing subject to begin its
hermeneutic spiral of knowledge, and allowing the lines of a book to be read and
reinterpreted. This spiral of the contemplative act is a recurrent image in Perea’s work:
Océano de colores, his most recent collection of essays concerning the relationship between
art and literature, Mexico and Spain, is described on the fly-sheet as ‘una crónica de la
mirada: un recorrido por una galería de personajes que a su vez observan desde los puentes
de la imaginación y la memoria los planos complejos de la imagen’. In his Crónica en espiral
it is Mexico City itself which has the ability to sustain and return the chronicler’s
gaze, creating the hermeneutic spiral of ‘miradas’ along which Perea travels.

**Lecturas apenas lanzadas**

More than any writer studied so far, Perea is dependent on his extensive knowledge of
representations of Mexico City for his ability to travel in the city. This surplus of
representations of the city is at once the origin of the lack of personal travel-narrative in
Crónica en espiral and a ‘bridge’ to what is perhaps the only form of travel-chronicle which
may be written about contemporary Mexico City. Perea follows the logic of the eighth
dimension of the spiral in terms of his displacement from one cultural area to the next, and
in the relationships which link present-day reality with its past, its future, its fictional
possibilities and its personal resonances. In order to do this he filters every word of his
chronicle through other people’s representations: historical chronicles, novels and poems;
engravings, paintings and photographs. These references might obscure any sense of
physical displacement in the text, yet they are also an invitation to a very different type of
‘intertextual’ journey. The careful reader who seeks to make sense of some of the more
elliptical and obscure references finds before him/herself the unfolding Chinese boxes of a
world part Borges, part Fuentes. Instead of analysing this material, Perea appropriates it
and extrapolates from it. The journey proposed does not draw the reader into the text;
instead it forces him/her to enquire beyond the text in search of a more substantial narrative
than that provided by Perea.

Each reference is a challenge to the reader to establish the link. Perea’s recurrent references
to André Breton ought to signal to the reader that the order of cognition is subliminal,
elliptical, quirky. The names of the writers and artists are frequently given in parentheses
in the text. At first sight this technique looks heavy-handed, over-academic. Nevertheless,
it is an extremely effective shorthand: instead of giving full details, for example, of Óscar
de la Borbolla’s text ‘¡Llueve sangre!’ in his book of fantasy chronicles Ucronías (1990),
the theory and praxis of which has obviously influenced Perea’s style of chronicling, he
notes simply that, in the range of things which Mexico City can represent for its
inhabitants, it can been seen as the place ‘donde llueve sangre y el cielo se colorea como de
incendio, como de miles de reflectores (De la Borbolla)' (p. 16). It is the reader who must discover which of De la Borbolla’s chronicles the paraphrase refers to.

In the first paragraph of the same brief chapter Perea writes,

El parque hondo, hundido: la gran extensión verde creciendo a desnivel junto a la calle. El niño Arturo miraba al cielo que adensado oscurecía la arboleda. El contorno de la espesura, extraño contorno lunar. La humedad parecía escapar del estanque y crecer sobre la arboleda. La gata ahorcada, el minino fantasmal: el preso huído de las manos de Arturo por entre los matorrales. Los ruidos de la noche lo vieron todo. Pues eran las ranas, los pájaros, los grillos los ojos del ruido. Y la gata libre de la sentencia. ¿Qué hubiera sido si no de ella? La ciudad está en un sueño, de terror (Pacheco). (p. 16; author’s italics)

For a whole paragraph Perea keeps the ‘average’ reader in suspense, wondering whose story is being told, or retold. The reference to Pacheco suggests a line of enquiry, and indeed the episode is a précis of a short story about a young boy’s failed attempt to murder his Aunt Florencia’s dying white cat: ‘El parque hondo’ in Pacheco’s El viento distante, y otros relatos (1963). The story’s title is discreetly provided for the erudite reader; the phrase in italics is a direct quotation from the opening paragraph of the story.

However, ‘El contorno de la espesura, extraño contorno lunar’ in Perea’s text had previously been ‘La luna daba a la espesura un extraño contorno’.26 Frogs, birds, and grasshoppers are present in both texts, but in slightly different formations. Pacheco had written of Arturo and his friend’s search for the escaped cat:

No supo [Arturo] cuánto tiempo buscaron, llamaron, abrieron la maleza, rastrearon cada rincón del parque sólo escuchados por los grillos, las ranas, los pájaros: todos los ruidos de la noche que ocultaba a la gata. (p. 18)

In Perea’s version quoted earlier there is a synaesthetic transposition of the noises of these animals for the unseen presence of their eyes, their gaze.27 The sense of guilt is perhaps enhanced. It is obvious that Perea is not plagiarising, nor just paraphrasing and analysing Pacheco’s text. He is actively participating with this text to produce a new version, sealed with his own sensibilities, yet written to be read side-by-side with the old one. In the reader’s flickering eye movements, not just across the page of Perea’s chronicle, but between the pages of his text and Pacheco’s original story, Perea provokes the reader to experience a spiral journey in the fullest sense of the term.28

27 This is Perea’s version of ‘los ojos del paisaje’.
28 A whole generation of writers (‘la generación de los cincuenta’ - those born in the 1950s, including Villoro, Perea, Solana Olivares and others) have been influenced by Pacheco’s work, particularly in their choice of approach to Mexico City. In ‘Caminatas con José Emilio Pacheco’, Vicente Quirarte - another member of the generation and a close friend of Perea’s - notes that his own vision of Mexico City is irrevocably coloured by his reading of Pacheco, and that what has been most influential in Pacheco’s approach has been his treatment of the possibilities of the city rather than its immediate reality. Quirarte also notes the radical effect that the 1985 earthquake had on Pacheco: the implication is that the impact of the earthquake - simultaneously a real event and a metaphor for so many other moments of radical change in Mexico City’s history - has provoked an elliptical, fantastic approach to the city (Enseres para sobrevivir en la ciudad (Coordinación Nacional de Descentralización / Instituto Cultural de Aguascalientes, 1994), pp. 149-53). These are clearly clues to the literary background of Perea’s suggestive reading of the city.
This approach extends throughout Perea’s chronicle. In the chapter quoted above, ‘Cuerpo de piedra y asfalto’ - a text which is little over a page in length - Perea also incorporates references to the fictions and chronicles of Carlos Chimal, Fernando Curiel, Carlos Flores Vargas, and Martín Luis Guzmán. ‘La ciudad es mía’, Perea writes. ‘Es y ha sido de todos. Y lo son estas lecturas apenas lanzadas, como el confeti, sobre un cuerpo de piedra y asfalto’ (p. 17). Other substantial readings of the ‘chronicles’ of Mexico City include references to Fuentes’s early short stories ‘Tlactocatzine, del jardín de Andes’ and ‘Las dos Elena’s’ in Los días enmascarados, and Cantar de ciegos respectively; to Luis González Obregón’s México viejo, 1521-1821 and José Luis Martínez’s Nezahualcóyotl: vida y obra; to Novo’s Nueva grandeza mexicana and Reyes’s Visión de Anáhuac; to Monsiváis’s Días de guardar and to a number of Paz’s poems.

Similarly with other media, Perea provides his own suggestive narrative of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century engravings and lithographs (‘estampas costumbristas’), the murals of Diego Rivera, films by Eisenstein and Buñuel, paintings by Remedios Varo and Antonio Rivas, sculptures by Manuel Tolsá, and photography by Casasola ‘quizás’. The references to so many works of art can be frustrating for the reader who expects to find these images inserted graphically into the text rather than verbally. Nevertheless, it is arguable that Perea has treated these images to the same kind of elliptical narration as the texts mentioned above: he does not seek to reproduce and replace them so much as suggest them poetically, and suggest that his reader go out in search of them in museums, art galleries, in books, or even on the internet.

Una encrucijada de caminos literarios y vivenciales

Many of the dimensions of Perea’s spiral come together in two fragments which frame the text. The opening passage describes a route through the old heart of the city in 1914, from a prison in Tlatelolco to another near the Ciudadela where the prisoners undertaking this ‘excursión’ will be executed (pp. 13-14). The fleeting description of the cloudy night sky and the bloody streets opens a third dimension; comments on the unreal, ghostly nature of the city under curfew suggest a fourth. The spiral of the real journey is made complete in the last chapter of the chronicle where the protagonist is removed from the line of prisoners awaiting their deaths, and returned along the same route to the Santiago Tlatelolco prison (pp. 89-90).

Nevertheless, in the opening passage Perea leaves his protagonist to face the firing squad, brusquely changing to the present, in order to compare and contrast contemporary Mexico City with the one that existed in 1914. Slipped in between these two visions of the city, Perea makes an enigmatic reference to the parallelism between ‘excursiones’ and ‘paseos’ in different times and places. He also contrasts the prisoner’s experience of the city with that of a certain Víctor Nibelungo travelling from Coyoacán to Las Lomas in 1964. The dimensions of imaginative time and space travel are apparent.
However, it requires the addition of an intertextual dimension for the reader to be able to relate the 'excursiones' of Huertista Mexico to the 'paseos' of Republican Spain, to the 'recorrido' of the protagonist of Fuentes's 'Las dos Elenas'. The key to the identity of the 'autor revolucionario' and the relationship between 'paseos' and 'excursiones' lies in Perea's *La rueda del tiempo*. Here, in a discussion of Paz's experiences in Spain during the Civil War, recorded in his *Itinerario*, Perea paraphrases Paz's comments on the term 'paseos' to refer to 'ejecuciones sumarias republicanas' (p. 467). On the following page, Perea makes an explicit reference to the similarity of these 'paseos' with the 'excursión' described by Guillermo Enríquez Simón in his *La libertad de la prensa en México: una mentira rosa* (1967), and paraphrased in the opening paragraphs of Perea's *Crónica en espiral*.

Yet it is only on the last page of his chronicle that Perea identifies his protagonist as 'el abuelo Guillermo', making it clear that Enríquez Simón was his own grandfather. Guillermo's spiral journey is thus an intimate part of Perea's own route:

La ciudad de México es la que recorrió el autor revolucionario, desde Santiago Tlatelolco hasta Belem, para ser fusilado. Es la de Fuentes. Y en realidad no es ninguna ni pertenece a nadie, y la guardamos entre las manos o la seguimos con el dedo sobre un plano. Hoy inicio esta "Crónica en espiral" sobre la ruta que fue la del pelotón y es la mía. Crónica con final incierto. (p. 15)

For Perea, the city is a living organism ('un cuerpo'), a protagonist in its own right. His ability to capture it in his chronicle, to be illuminated by it, is uncertain:

"Ciudad enigmática", dijo Tablada de esta metrópoli extraña y luminosa, a veces translúcida, pero en absoluto transparente. Venecia o Pompeya americana, México se oculta cuando más se muestra. Y siempre deja mucho, lo deja todo por decir. (p. 90)

The 'esfera de espirales' leaves one speculating: the journey of illumination continues.

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29 A footnote also refers the reader to a passage in Vasconcelos's *El proconsulado* for more information (p. 468).

30 Most recently, Carlos Monsiváis has also published his ideas on the ways in which Mexico City may be experienced: "'Uno - escribió el gran poeta Wallace Stevens - no vive en una ciudad sino en su descripción.' Si esto es cierto poéticamente y sociológicamente, uno se domicilia en el trazo cultural y psicológico integrado por las vivencias íntimas, el flujo de comentarios y noticias, los recuentos de viajeros y las leyendas nacionales e internacionales a propósito de la urbe. También, uno se mueve en el interior de las conversaciones circulares sobre la ciudad, sus virtudes (cuando las hay) y sus defectos (cuando se agota con rapidez la lista de las virtudes)' ('Apocalipsis y utopías', *LJS*, 4 April 1999, p. 2). These correspond closely to Perea's approach.
Imágenes y lecturas, II

Ruiz Abreu's epigraph to Los ojos del paisaje is taken from Alfonso Reyes's introduction to Cartones de Madrid:

¿Necesito explicaros que solo he querido reunir, en este cuaderno, esos primeros prejuicios de la retina, esos primeros y elementales aspectos que atraen los ojos del viajero? Poco a poco, me fui convenciendo de que el ibis o la flor de loto eran letras y que, juntas, tenían un sentido que era menester descifrar. Mientras tanto, me entretuve simplemente en mirarlos.31

Ruiz Abreu's text cannot seriously claim to be based on the 'primeros prejuicios de la retina', and his title deliberately revokes the precedence of 'los ojos del viajero', preferring their metaphorical counterpart, 'los ojos del paisaje'. However, he does accord a high value to images in his chronicle, and to the act of observation. He is not content to simply 'look at' these images as Reyes claims he is. Ruiz Abreu, like Perea, aims at producing a synthesised, interpretative vision of a whole range of images; that is to say, a reading. Furthermore, this reading may be seen as the 'real' journey offered by the chronicle. The conceptual movement between individual images, and the journeys proposed by the act of reading, produce a complex itinerary similar to that proposed by Perea's spiral figure: for Ruiz Abreu Villahermosa is a web of images and readings.

Agua de Tabasco vengo

The images which identify Tabasco for Ruiz Abreu, and others, are those of the abundant waters of the region and of the equally abundant vegetation. To a lesser degree he also deals with the strength of the sunlight and the density of the atmosphere. These natural images are all polyvalent, at once welcoming and threatening: 'el agua es de doble signo: un espejismo para los beduinos del desierto, [...] una bendicion para las tierras bajas' (p. 28), a form of torture or destruction, and a life-giving substance. The rain-forest can be seen, one the one hand, as 'la encarnación del mito bíblico de un edén no contaminado por la mirada del hombre' (p. 29). Yet for those who come too close, it can become 'un laberinto en el que el hombre perdía la noción del tiempo y su mente sucumbía ante la idea del infierno' (p. 29). The whole area has 'una fisonomía de misterio, a la vez seductora y amenazante' (p. 31), where a simple reflection can instantaneously transform into a vivid hallucination, and the meaning of any particular image is fluid, unstable.32

Where the water naturally creates reflections and, in the heat, mirages, the flora (and hidden fauna) also have the metaphorical power to return the viewer's gaze, hence the chronicle's title. The Laguna de las Ilusiones, the name of a lagoon which functions as the 'backbone' of Villahermosa, seduces the viewer's gaze in its reflections, provoking a venerational state of mind: it is the town's natural substitute for a cathedral (p. 31). In stark comparison, the few unkempt churches in town 'parecen templos caídos en el silencio del trópico que las

32 The instability of imagery in Ruiz Abreu's chronicle also informs his reading of Tabascan history as fluid, hence the polyvalent interpretations of a figure such as Garrido Canabal (p. 65). Only time can help interpret the uncertain symbols of the present (p. 104).
mira con indiferencia’ (p. 52). Nevertheless, the rain-forest is also described as a mirage, and the water has the capacity to look back (‘Oscura y prolífica [la selva] fue un espejismo para los probadores de fortuna del siglo XIX y parte del XX’ (p. 43); ‘Qué delicia este mar que mira a las palmeras’ (p. 80)). The viewer’s gaze is repeatedly described as being devoured, absorbed or beaten by nature: ‘la mirada se rinde frente a esa luz esmeralda de las aguas’ (p. 37). Or deflected, returned: Tabasco is ‘el mundo que le devuelve su mirada [al viajero]’ (p. 33).

Images of water and vegetation are thus endowed with an inherently speculative nature, and with the fluidity of ‘vases communicants’. The waters surrounding Villahermosa are described as nets (‘redes’ (p. 32)) or as a spider’s web (‘una telaraña’ (p. 38)). Furthermore, these images used to describe the network of waterways correspond to, and even rhyme with, those used to describe the tangle of the vegetation (‘las enredaderas’ (p. 47) and ‘una maraña’ (p. 84)). Nature offers a speculative journey to the traveller in Tabasco; a ‘recorrido físico por la imaginación dulce y precoz de la naturaleza’ (p. 46) which translates into this polyvalent imagery.

The fully speculative capacity of Tabasco’s landscape is frequently associated with the past: the rain-forest used to be dense enough to put up resistance to the traveller; the waters used to be sufficiently unpolluted to offer a reflection. Modernisation has largely destroyed ‘la mitología de los ríos como espejos de agua’ (p. 35), leaving only the sensation that the very existence of such prolific, precocious nature might have been a mirage: ‘El río es pura imaginación’ (p. 34). For the visitor of the 1990s, ‘El agua en Tabasco es una presencia ciega, no es preciso mirarla’ (p. 31): deprived of its transparency, the water is blind, incapable of returning the onlooker’s gaze.

High-rise mirrored buildings now reflect the gazes of the passers-by more clearly than the lagoons. Furthermore, the arrival of Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex) in Tabasco has irrevocably altered the nature of the state and its imagery. Pemex has polluted the waters and destroyed parts of the rain-forest, thus limiting the speculative qualities of these images. Yet today it is Pemex which can exert the power of its ‘gaze’, and transform the network of images with its tubes and ducts:

Sobre las tierras verdes y las aguas eternas de este territorio se yerguen, mirando al siglo XXI, las torres de perforación que se han modernizado en la última década. Hay una geografía nueva que hicieron posible los campos petroleros, las baterías y las compresoras, los sistemas de bombeo y las complejas redes de almacenamiento de gas y crudo. (pp. 93-94)

The new Pemex installations are ‘una ciudad apenas soñada por la ciencia ficción’ (p. 96), a speculative fiction in themselves. They might possibly be the ‘espejo luminoso’ of Tabasco’s future (p. 103), but they are also a deceptive presence, a mirage (p. 100).

Nevertheless, the final chapter of the book takes up the theme of nature in a type of coda in order to confirm that it is still the dominant feature of Tabasco; its qualities as a mirage are a defence mechanism, not proof of its extinction. Despite the suspicion that ‘el paisaje es
más fuerte que la razón’ (p. 112), that it continues to exist in the narrator’s memory alone, Ruiz Abreu describes the Garrido Canabal Park thus:

Villahermosa tiene en este parque un espejo donde mirar su cielo y sus aguas, pues la arquitectura se vuelve también poesía. Espacios y columnas que se abren a una naturaleza que las mira con entusiasmo, las asimila y las devuelve a su sitio convertido en armonía. (p. 114)

A balance has been established. Although the density and unpredictability of these natural features of Tabasco have frequently hindered any sense of real journey, the protagonism which Ruiz Abreu accords them suggests the speculative movement of reciprocal observation which was also a feature of Perea’s spiral. Tabasco is characterised as an independent protagonist in Ruiz Abreu’s chronicle: a sensual, desirable woman, yet a defiant muse.

**Y agua de Tabasco voy**
The landscape of Tabasco is often described as unfathomable (p. 37), inexpressible (p. 46), undecipherable (p. 32), resistant to the traveller’s gaze. Yet in each of these cases, Ruiz Abreu is either quoting or paraphrasing the comments of foreign travellers in the region such as Dimitrievitch Balmont or Arthur Morelet. In the second and third chapters of the chronicle, Ruiz Abreu makes reference to the impressions and memoirs of a large number of foreign travellers including Díaz del Castillo, Stephens and Catherwood, Waldeck, Charnay and Greene. In most cases he displays the changeable nature of these writers’ visions of Tabasco, but ultimately emphasises their limitations in understanding it. Charnay commented that in the rain-forest, ‘El silencio está colmado de voces misteriosas; parece como si la naturaleza rehuyera la cercanía de los hombres para hablar su divino lenguaje’ (p. 47). Ruiz Abreu also concentrates on these foreigners’ means of access to Tabasco, perhaps echoing his own sense of alienation from the state, clear in the narration of his multiple arrivals.

But the influx of foreigners to this coastal state is essential to the identity of the region:

Viajeros han sido muchos de los hombres que vivieron en Villahermosa, lo mismo en el siglo XIX que en el XX. [...] Tal vez la navegación, el medio de transporte por excelencia en Tabasco, produjo este flujo y reflujo de hombre y mujeres de otros mundos. (p. 27)

Like the network of images concerning Tabasco’s waterways and rain-forest, *Los ojos del paisaje* also explores a network of travels and of travel-writing, the conscious or unconscious sharing of imagery and experiences, ‘el fluir de impresiones nuevas’ (Balmont, p. 36). Ruiz Abreu underscores his chronicle’s affiliation with travel-writing through his inclusion of this extensive intertextual delta, through his identification with such texts, and, more tacitly, through the metaphorical journey implicit in the act of reading.

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33 Fernando Benítez’s *Ki* is also mentioned. Many of these references stem from that comprehensive anthology of travel-writing on Tabasco: Cabrera Bernat’s *Viajeros en Tabasco* (1987).
Unlike Alfonso Reyes who chose not to interpret his experiences in Spain, or the foreign travel-writers in Tabasco who did not have the knowledge or the vocabulary to start to interpret their experiences, Ruiz Abreu strives to offer a reading of Tabasco. He finds a key in the writings of Tabascans, particularly poets, who have access to the ‘divine language’ of the state: Carlos Pellicer, Andrés Iduarte, José Gorostiza, José Carlos Becerra, and others. ‘El poeta del trópico no lo es porque vive en medio de la naturaleza exuberante, sino porque siente la necesidad de cantar a lo que sus ojos ven, a los ojos del paisaje’ (p. 75). The Tabascan poet, or popular lyricist, is sensitive to the range of greens which make interpretation of the rivers and rain-forest possible. The subtleties of their local dialect suggest a way through ‘un laberinto cretense casi intransitable que sólo pueden explicar las palabras’ (p. 37). Ruiz Abreu is aware that some of the imagery offered by the poets is commonplace: the river as a snake or ‘una mujer de agua’, as a metaphor for the course of human life, or as an image of the unrealisable desire to return to one’s origins (p. 36); Tabasco as a Garden of Eden (p. 115). Nevertheless, he also values these commonplaces for their communicability, for their fluidity.

Ruiz Abreu also uses the great Tabascan poets and their own travel-writing as a way of approaching Tabasco from another perspective. Echoing the speculative nature of the imagery of the region, the first chapter of the chronicle, ‘Manhattan en el crepúsculo’,34 collates the writings of Pellicer, Gorostiza, Iduarte and Becerra on their stays in New York and their visions of Tabasco to create, through the fortuitous correspondences of language and reality, a mirage of New York in the tropical rain-forest:

Si aparecieran en la tarde, sentados alrededor de una mesa del Manhattan, Pellicer, Gorostiza, Iduarte y José Carlos Becerra, los cuatro hablarían de sus respectivas experiencias en Nueva York y del mundo, tal vez se arroparían en su leve y apetecible cosmopolitismo. (p. 19)

In their errant nature, these displaced Tabascan poets also exemplify the wanderlust inherent in the Tabascan character. This kind of speculative historiographic fiction is an identifiable technique of Ruiz Abreu’s biographical style.

Another attractive feature of the lifestyles of Pellicer and friends is the parallelism between their departure from the Tropics, and Ruiz Abreu’s own sense of being a displaced Tabascan who can only access his ‘patria chica’ through nostalgia; his own and that of others. A permanent need to remember is an essential part of the identity of the Tabascan, who like the citizens of Mexico City, has also suffered moments of acute change - Garridismo in the 1920s and 30s, the arrival of Pemex in the 1970s - and hence must continually strive to relate the new faces and names of Tabasco to those of the past in order to locate a sense of historical continuity.

Ruiz Abreu’s interviews fulfil a similar function: they, too, were mostly conducted with displaced Tabascans now resident in Mexico City. It is quite possible that Ruiz Abreu should have wanted to create a sense of uncertainty as to the identity of the narrators of

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34 El Manhattan is the name of a bar in central Villahermosa.
these passages through a blurring of voices, precisely to extend the limits of his own identity as the primary narrator. Although these interview transcripts do not reinforce a sense of Ruiz Abreu carrying out field-work, they do underscore his identity as a Tabascan, and a sense of Tabasco as a place accessible primarily through memory. Ruiz Abreu travels through his own memories and day-dreams, and through those of others, in his readings and in his conversations, in his research and in his speculations.

A further dimension to the theme of travel and speculation in Los ojos del paisaje may be found in Ruiz Abreu’s enquiry into the nomadic spirit in general. This enquiry gives rise to a series of intertextual references which includes Laou-tsze, Tomás Segovia, Alfonso Reyes, the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, possibly the Koran, and several other undocumented sources. The effect is of a rather disjointed commonplace book on the subject of nomadism, similar to that provided in the ‘From the Notebooks’ section of Bruce Chatwin’s Songlines (1987). Indeed, the appearance of the quotation from the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, sourced in Chatwin’s text, but unsourced in Ruiz Abreu’s, is perhaps indicative of something more conscious than a happy confluence of ideas.

Other references are to a disparate range of travel-writers unconcerned with the state of Tabasco: Jules Verne, Josep Pla, Ryszard Kapuscinski, D.H. Lawrence, Novo’s Continente vacío and others. While some of these references seem appropriate in their context, others tend to make the text top-heavy, over-dense in its allusions to other islands in the archipelago of travel-writing. Nevertheless, the quotation from an interview with Kapuscinski does seem to illustrate the difficulties Ruiz Abreu has experienced in his attempt to ‘read’ Tabasco:

No es nada fácil escribir en un mundo en tan violenta y radical transformación. Todo empieza a tambalearse, el suelo pierde consistencia y a cada paso cambian los símbolos, se desplazan los signos, los puntos de orientación carecen de lugares fijos. La vista del que escribe vaga y deambula por nuevos e ignotos paisajes, en tanto que su voz se extravía en el estrépito de la avalancha de la historia. (p. 89)

Signs and symbols are unstable, the landscape is as hostile as ever, and the writer struggles to communicate some coherent interpretation of it all, albeit speculative.

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35 Ruiz Abreu does not source all of his quotations, despite the use of a bibliography. Unlike Perea’s documentary riddles, such omissions indicate either a lack of academic rigour, a desire to hide something, or both.
36 Still other references, unrelated to travel-writing, are to theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin and his interpretation of carnival, George Steiner on myths, Saint Bonaventura on laughter, Reyes and Novo on gastronomy.
Ciudades de aire y de agua

Ruiz Abreu reworks Reyes's description of Mexico City to define Villahermosa as 'la región más transparente del agua' (p. 41). Yet precisely because of this fluid 'transparency', it is difficult to capture in words. Perea quotes Paz's definitive description of Mexico City, from his poem 'Nocturno de San Ildefonso' (Crónica en espiral, p. 33):

el viento del pensamiento,  
el viento que juega con espejos,  
constructor de ciudades de aire,  
suspendidas del hilo de la razón.

This city of air, conversely, is more interpretation than it is reality. Somewhere between the reality and the interpretation lie the speculative cities of Perea and Ruiz Abreu.

In 'Departures: Travel-Writing in a Post-Bakhtinian World', Sarah C. Blanton summarises the characteristics of contemporary (and tacitly postmodern) travel-writing, using as her models the works of Chatwin, Kapuscinski, Naipaul and others. She finds that travel-writers no longer feel that their own journey is substantial enough to be classed as travel-writing per se. They hence turn to the more subjective, 'circular', inner journeys of dream and memory, to imaginative journeys in time, and to the establishment of a dialogue with other narratives (history and fiction). In the present tense of their journey they tend to establish a dialogue with other real subjects, or at least an exchange of gazes.

Increased focus on subjectivity, she continues, leads to a breakdown in the need for chronology. The dependency on other people’s stories, relayed via dialogue, quotation or paraphrase, further destabilises chronological ordering. These travel-books also display a degree of uncertainty in their presentation of material, blurring the borders between fact and fiction. There is no desire to produce a 'totalising', coherent, authoritative narrative. In a reading of Bakhtin, Blanton asserts that,

The style of these books, then, is carnivalized. The disruption of chronological narrative, the mixing of fact and fiction, the free use of pastiche, dreams and history are all characteristics of a genre turned upside-down. (p. 63)

She concludes that in this topsy-turvy, postmodern genre, self and other are no longer discrete, diametrically-opposed entities, with the latter subjected to the gaze of the former only:

These writers accept the world as a system of relationships between one’s own texts or fictions and another’s. Their object is to 'translate' the web of those interconnections in their travel books. (p. 64)

Much of Blanton’s definition seems particularly relevant to the work of Perea and Ruiz Abreu, despite the lack of transcribed dialogues. In particular, the sense of a more complex itinerary than that suggested by linear chronology is made clear in Blanton’s frequent references to ‘webs’ and ‘circles’. In their choice of itineraries, then, as well as in many other aspects of the form and content of their work, Perea and Ruiz Abreu define themselves, however uncomfortably and despite their failings, as postmodern travellers and travel-writers.

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CHAPTER 4

Dream States:
Oaxaca and Puebla

If the speculative travel-chroniclers of the last chapter seemed reluctant to give up vestiges of the traditional travel-chronicle structure, the implications of Sarah C. Blanton’s definition of the postmodern travel-narrative are taken to their logical extreme in the work of Fernando Solana Olivares (Oaxaca, crónicas sonámbulas (CNCA, 1994)) and Hugo Diego Blanco (Ángelus (CNCA, 1995)). Had both texts not been commissioned for the CNCA’s ‘Cuaderno de Viaje’ series, it is unlikely that they would have been included as travel-chronicles in this thesis: once the leitmotif of verifiable travel in time and space gives way entirely to the subjective journeys of dream and memory, and to imaginative, metaphorical journeys through the world of books, there is really little left to define these texts as anything other than intellectual fictions which use the term ‘travel’ as a hold-all metaphor for life, knowledge, imagination. Nevertheless, the two texts studied in this chapter do retain a strong ‘archival’ consciousness and critique of the travel-chronicle, alternately undermined and reinforced by the oneiric atmosphere of the narrative. It is this ironic self-awareness which justifies their inclusion here.

Fernando Solana Olivares (Mexico City, 1954) is a prize-winning cultural journalist (Premio Nacional de Periodismo, 1993) whose many articles have been published in the newspapers El Nacional and La Jornada; and in the reviews Nexos, Casa del Tiempo and Tierra Adentro. He has also worked as the coordinator of the cultural sections of both La Jornada and El Nacional. In recent years he has held the post of director of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca and subdirector of the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City. At almost the same time as the publication of Crónicas sonámbulas, he published one novel (La rueca y el paraíso (CNCA / Ediciones del Equilibrista, 1995)) and one anthology of short prose pieces, previously published individually in Casa del Tiempo and other reviews (El peso de la esperanza (Breve Fondo Editorial, 1996)). He has most recently published a basic introduction to Buddhism (El budismo, Tercer Milenio (CNCA, 1997)).

The novel shares with the travel-chronicle some of Solana Olivares’s favourite themes: desire and sensuality; time and its perception; reality and its fissures. It also reveals some of his more literary preoccupations: the rigorous, highly experimental, construction of his texts; his private gallery of literary and philosophical referents; and his predilection for pairs of ‘lame’ characters in the tradition of Flaubert’s Bouvard and Pécuchet (Jacobo Cartola and Adolfo Gardea in the novel; Hermógenes Suárez and ‘el licenciado’ Zárate in the travel-
Other literary influences are, no doubt, Kafka and Fuentes. Jacobo Cartola is lost in a
‘bureaucratic’ labyrinth reminiscent of so much of Kafka’s work. The demonic traits of
one or two of the characters and the inclinations towards the fantastic, however, bring the
Fuentes of Aura and Cambio de piel to mind. This premise of the fantastic, whereby a
bleary-eyed Jacobo Cartola, functioning as an automaton on his way to work in the Centro
Histórico of Mexico City, finds that he has unwittingly skipped three years and one day
and been sacked in the interim, lends an oneiric atmosphere to the whole novel. It is, of
course, a crude rationalisation of the text - and only barely intimated in the last lines of the
last chapter -, but the whole story might just have been a dream.

Saint Augustine’s conception of time, where past, present and future coexist
unproblematically in the mind, is the leitmotif of the articles in El peso de la esperanza. In
the first text of the collection, ‘Historia de un deseo’: ‘[Un hombre] camina en tiempo
pese de que él - como todos - vive en el pasado de su memoria y a ratos - como
todos - en el futuro de la esperanza’ (p. 11). In the last text, ‘El peso de la esperanza’, ‘el
presente del pasado ya murió’ (p. 155), and the protagonist, who is shortly to die, is left
only with ‘el peso de la esperanza’. This constant preoccupation with Augustine’s eternal
present serves to create a dreamlike atmosphere: chronological time sequences and rational
causality sink under the weight of philosophical fantasies and distorted memories. A
number of the texts make explicit reference to dreams as an integral part of the riddle of
time.

The articles from which those that make up El peso de la esperanza were selected, were
almost all written as trial-runs for the novel or the travel-chronicle. Nevertheless, El peso
contains mostly those that fit neither category. Only ‘La lluvia en Monte Albán’ bares any
relationship to the travel-chronicle; however, it was first published in November 1992,
over a year before the travel-chronicle was commissioned. Here Solana Olivares narrates
an excursion to the Zapotec ruins, loosely based on his family history, with his grandfather
as the principal protagonist, flanked by his family, and his friends Hermógenes and
Conzatti. Some of these characters reappear in the Crónicas sonámbulas. The genesis of
the idea behind the travel-chronicle thus predates the CNCA commission. Solana
Olivares’s proclivity for fictionalising his personal experience is also apparent.

One or two texts in this collection also fictionalise Solana Olivares’s travels or narrate
‘objectively’ his fictional travels. ‘Ciego en Vasa’ - a play on the title of Huxley’s Eyeless
in Gaza - fictionalises a visit to the Vasa Museum in Sweden which Solana Olivares made
as part of the Mexican delegation to the conference on Colonial art held in Stockholm in
July 1994. The protagonist is a ‘mal edecán diplomático’ (p. 119), a typically lame
character, who has lost his glasses and, as a consequence, is barely able to carry out his

1 ‘Lluvia en Monte Albán’, Casa del Tiempo, 14 (November 1992), 44.
2 See Damián Bayón’s more conventional chronicle of his visit to the same conference, ‘La semana sueca
de un congresista’, Gaceta del Fondo de Cultura Económica, 285 (September 1994), 76-77.
duty as guide to the party of delegates visiting the museum. ‘El templo de febrero’, on the other hand, is a narrative of a journalist’s visit to San Cristóbal de las Casas, in 1994, for the dialogues in the cathedral between Mexican government representatives and Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional rebels. One might presume that this is a straightforward narration of one of Solana Olivas’s trips; instead, as he acknowledged in interview, it is a fiction, based on his knowledge of current affairs and his memory of the region dating from a visit he made almost a year before the Zapatista uprising.

One last text in this collection is relevant to a reading of the Crónicas sonámbulas. Ostensibly a book review, ‘Granos de trigo’ creates the atmosphere of a Borgesian archive: the narrator is a doubting archivist struggling to complete the map of the whole archipelago of books. However, his particular section of the catalogue deals with apocryphal texts such as Pierre Menard’s Quijote. ‘Prosa Anfíbia’ is the classification given to such texts, and in this archive, they are allowed an autonomous life of their own, a right to be self-respecting texts despite their parasitic nature. This attitude to writing as a permanent act of borrowing and distorting ‘reality’, of exploring alternative, imaginative realities, resurfaces in the travel-chronicle.

Hugo Diego Blanco (Puebla, 1959) has spent a number of years working as a librarian and as a researcher at the Centro de Investigaciones Filosóficas of the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. This dedication to the space of the library, is clear in all of his publications: Las esferas de la paciencia (Vuelta, 1992), Tinta china (Heliópolis, 1995) - composed of articles previously published in Vuelta -, Ciudad de libros (Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1997), and El trabajo de las almas (CNCA, 1988). All betray his research interests: arcane publications in varying editions, translations and collections; moral and philosophical questions, particularly with respect to the cultures of the Far East.

Already in his first publication, Diego Blanco’s predilection for imaginative travel within the walls of an ample library was clear: despite his research interest in China, Diego Blanco has never visited the country, nor does he have any strong desire to do so: ‘No existe China, existen libros a partir de los cuales hemos imaginado una cultura’. Instead, Diego Blanco’s visions of China are akin to those of Borges: part academic research, part hearsay, part vivid imagination. He perceives Peking through the traces it has left in Puebla, in its libraries and museums; and conversely, in his reconstruction of Puebla for the first text of Ángelus, China’s presence is felt.

Nevertheless, Diego Blanco has a strong interest in written accounts of other people’s travels: those of Mateo Ricci, Marco Polo, Henri Michaux, Victor Segalen, and of the French Jesuit missionaries whose Cartas edificantes y curiosas - unearthed in a Spanish translation, in the Edificio Carolino of the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla - constitute the

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3 Personal interview with the author, 22 May 1996.

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subject matter of Las esferas. Yet rather than simply reconstruct the journeys made by
these missionaries, Diego Blanco is interested in a more metaphorical, intercultural form of
travel which resulted from the encounters between French Jesuits and Chinese mandarins:

Yo escribí esa crónica, que no es la crónica otra vez de un viaje, sino más bien la crónica
de una aventura intelectual, porque lo que más me llamó la atención a mí de este
encuentro, y de las cartas que encontré, es la conversión de estos hombres que una noche
se acostaron como misioneros que convertían a un imperio como China al cristianismo, y
despertaron como traductores de libros como Euclides, y como traductores de Las análectas
de Confucio al latín. [...] El tema fundamental es un tema filosófico que es el tema de la
traducción entendida como este punto que es capaz de hacer conversar a hombres creados y
educados en culturas radicalmente distintas. (Interview)

The real journey is in the act of translation... and in the act of reading, reinterpreting a text:

Porque unos libros, una biblioteca, también son una geografía, una historia. En ella se
puede navegar y naufragar. Ir de un continente a otro. Cruzar desiertos, ascender
montañas. (Las esferas, pp. 45-46)

Los libros son puentes y caminos, desiertos y océanos; territorios transitables por el
extravío de la inteligencia. (Las esferas, p. 71)

Furthermore, China may only exist for Diego Blanco through its representation in books,
yet in Tinta China he queries: ‘¿Libros leídos o soñados?’ (p. 49). The reality of the book,
of the archive, is undermined by the possibility of dreams and the imagination. This
concept of metaphorical travel alternately through literature and through the imagination,
through the acts of reading and dreaming, is crucial for an understanding of Diego Blanco’s
commissioned travel-chronicle.

Ciudad del libros and El trabajo de las almas, Diego Blanco’s two most recent texts,
generally leave the Far East behind, and delve deeper into the world of the library and the
archive. Ciudad de libros is a brief text, published to commemorate the inauguration of the
Ernesto de la Torre Villar library in Puebla, which elaborates on the metaphor of the library
as a city or as an ocean, where travel-books are bridges between islands. El trabajo
focuses on the book itself, attempting myriad definitions of all that books might represent,
a journey through associative thoughts. In fact it defines books more through what they
are not - not useful, not infinite, not sacred, not fixed, not mirrors of the world -,
concluding, perhaps, that books are living entities with dreams and imagination of their
own, capable of creating the myths, fables and legends which are our reality.

* * * *
Elusions

Decidí no meterme en el género como tal

Oaxaca, crónicas sonámbulas stems, in part, from a brief journey made by Solana Olivares to the place of his early childhood, made specifically to find material to write a travel-chronicle for the CNCA series. During this trip Solana Olivares kept a journal of his experiences and impressions:

Es una especie de escritura automática, muy impresionista que llevo yo haciendo conforme y durante toda esta semana que estoy en la ciudad. Y estoy en la ciudad vagando, yendo a sitios que conocía, a sitios que no conocía, recordando momentos y escribiendo anotaciones. (Interview)

Yet for the reader of the Crónicas sonámbulas there is precious little evidence of this personal ‘cuaderno de notas’. Certainly the text is about Oaxaca, but what the reader is actually reading is an historical novel set in the town, starting in 1928 and concerning the lives of a Spaniard, Hermógenes Suárez, proprietor of a clothes-shop called El Nuevo Mundo, and his life-time companions: Catalina Ochoterena Mori, his wife, and ‘el licenciado’ Zárate, a local lawyer. The narrator takes no part in the action of the novel, and the characters of the novel undertake no journeys in a literal interpretation of the word - the furthest away that Hermógenes and Catalina manage to get from Oaxaca is to Santa María El Tule, about five miles outside of town.

As Solana Olivares recognised in interview, the space of a week - all the time he had to spare for travelling at the time of the commission - was too short a time to create a substantial work of literature on Oaxaca out of his personal experiences. Thus he took the work home with him: ‘La escritura lo hago desde acá [la Ciudad de México]; no es una crónica en el sitio, por eso la necesidad de escribir una obra de ficción’ (interview). With respect to the travel-chronicle form, he decided to ‘no meter[se] en el género como tal’: for travel-writing to have literary value, he feels that a certain distance is necessary, in time, in space, and in terms of the narrator’s role. Solana Olivares specifically mentioned the works of Ryszard Kapuscinski as good examples of contemporary travel-writing: Kapuscinski stays long enough in the field to be able to retain something of a travel-chronicle structure, but he also gives a literary gloss to the works once back at home.

In the event Solana Olivares uses characters and a story-line which he had already been working on in ‘Lluvia en Monte Albán’ as levers to open up facets of Oaxacan history and culture, as intermediaries between the historiography he resurrects and his personal impressions. Indeed, there is much of Solana Olivares’s family history distilled in these

5 Solana Olivares’s father came from a Spanish-orientated family in Oaxaca, his mother from Mexico City. He was born in Mexico City, but the family returned almost immediately to Oaxaca where he lived until age five. After his father’s death, when he was nine, Solana Olivares ceased visiting Oaxaca for many years (interview).

6 The state of Oaxaca is thus only accessible by other, less literal, means of conveyance. It is arguable, however, that Solana Olivares does attempt to encompass the ‘magic’ of the state of Oaxaca, rather than just the town, within the parameters of his narrative.
characters and their story. On a purely historical level, two members of the Solana family are mentioned in the book by hearsay. Mateo Solana López, Solana Olivares’s grandfather and a hard-nosed Spanish mill-owner, is worked into the dramatic web of the first chapter of the book as a contemporary of Hermógenes. Secondly, mention is made of Viqui Solana, one of Solana Olivares’s great-aunts who committed suicide in the late 1920s following the execution of Manuel García Vigil with whom she had been having an illicit affair. The local legend of Viqui Solana’s reappearance as a ghost in El Llano, one of the parks in Oaxaca, shortly after her death is transmuted in the text into the fictional Catalina’s vision of her contemporary in the same place over thirty years later.

However, Hermógenes, with his involvement in textiles, his Spanish background and his grudging yet gradual adaptation to Oaxacan life, is clearly a mirror-image of three generations of Solana Olivares’s family, their fortunes and their attitudes. In the final chapter of the book Solana Olivares offers the reader excerpts from Hermógenes’s diary taken from the days shortly before his death, where he sets out to record his impressions of the city for the benefit of his dead wife. Here, his voice blends directly with that of Solana Olivares himself; indeed, these are virtually unadulterated excerpts from the journal Solana Olivares kept during his week in the town.

The journal is also a vehicle used to justify the actual shape of this ‘travel-chronicle’. Some of Solana Olivares’s qualms about the writing of the text are transposed to a metafictional debate about the relative merits of fact and fiction:

¿Qué haré para escribir este rompecabezas? Ficcionar, inventar, fantasear, y entrar a saco a lo que ya fue escrito. ¿Dónde está registrado el pulso de esta ciudad? ¿Cómo verla? Como algo ajeno, como algo próximo, como algo visto por primera vez, como algo visto una y otra vez. (p. 152)

Se me ocurre que estar aquí no es tanto para acumular datos, impresiones, historias, aunque estos paseos dedicados también sean para eso. Pero quizá el sentido de este cuaderno tiene que ver con mi conciencia profunda, con percepciones más allá de la razón. (pp. 159-60)

Although this discourse seems a little out of place at the end of a narrative which had, until that point, eschewed metafiction, it is one way in which Solana Olivares contrives to acknowledge the disparity between his text and the text he was commissioned to write.

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7 Hermógenes’s last days which, from the data given in the course of the narrative, must have taken place in the early 1960s obviously do not coincide perfectly with the data given in Solana Olivares’s diary of his visit in 1994. Nevertheless, the spirit of fusion of voices is perhaps what counts here, not factual accuracy. In fact, Hermógenes is a fictional version of a real friend of Solana Olivares’s grandfather, also called Hermógenes. Catalina and Zárate are more fully fictional characters: Catalina, for instance, stems from Italo Calvino’s description of the lives of Colonial nuns in the Oaxacan Convento de Santa Catalina (in ‘Under the Jaguar Sun’, Under the Jaguar Sun, trans. by William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 3-29).
No quise hacer una crónica como las que conozco...

Hugo Diego Blanco’s Ángelus is divided into three sections, each one independent in terms of subject matter and narrative voice. In fact, the second and third of the texts included in the book were already written at the time of the commission; only the title text was written with the commission for a ‘travel-chronicle’ in mind.

The third text, ‘En papel amate’, is a recognisable travel-chronicle despite its brevity and its fragmentary composition. The destination - Pahuatlán - and its geographical location are announced without delay. It contains fragments which economically indicate the homodiegetic narrator’s principal means of locomotion, his displacements around the settlement, and his travelling companions. There is no apparent problem with associating the narrator of the text with the name of Hugo Diego Blanco. The narrative is filled out with expressions of the narrator’s feelings, and with personal impressions of the surroundings. In fact it reads rather like a pared-down version of André Gide’s Nourritures terrestres.

The second text in the collection, ‘La casa de las palomas’, also has a homodiegetic narrator whose voice can be equated with that of Diego Blanco, but the only travel elements are implicit rather than explicit. Within the space of the first paragraph it becomes clear that the location of the narrative is not entirely real:

No sabría decir cuántos días antes de empezar a escribir este diario llegué a la casa de las palomas. Desapareció el ruido, comenzó otra luz. Una cera roja se consumió la primera noche y no pude dormir. Pero vi el amanecer. (p. 51)

This paragraph describes a stage of transition akin to that which Juan Preciado experiences on his way into Comala in Rulfo’s PedroPáramo - even the disaffected tone of the passage is similar. Insomnia and sensorial disorientation lead the way into a world apart for both narrators. However, whereas Juan Preciado finds hell in the closed world of Comala, Diego Blanco enters the patient sphere of daily ritual in Cholula and Santa María Tonantzintla.

Restless like Juan Preciado, Diego Blanco ‘moves’ around Cholula and Tonantzintla, at least in terms of the subjects of his attention, if not by way of a narrative of physical displacement. He ‘visits’ first one religious establishment then another, listening to the ‘danzantes voces imposibles’ (p. 67), and searching out his memories. Yet he, too, only appears to elaborate a sense of stagnation. The mentality of religious belief is twinned with the experience of insanity: ‘Tal vez la locura sea una influencia de la devoción o un fundamento de la existencia’ (p. 73). The repetition of religious ritual, incarnated in endless processions, annuls any sense of progression in time or of movement in space. The tight-knit communities of Cholula and Tonantzintla close in upon the narrator.

Another feature of this text is Diego Blanco’s riddling introduction of the exact locations being described. The first direct mention of Tonantzintla is delayed until the second page

8 Both date from 1990-92, the period of time when Diego Blanco was writing Las esferas de la paciencia.
of the text; that of Cholula until the fifth (out of twenty-six). Diego Blanco is deliberately side-stepping the conveyance of factual information which has so often been the mainstay of the travel-chronicle, preferring a more allusive tone. In the first text, ‘Ángelus’, this allusive tone is even stronger: the first mention of the city of Puebla occurs on page 20, a quarter of the way through the text. The reader is thus supposed to conjugate the litany of place-names and historical figures associated with Puebla to identify the setting of the narration: Lake Valsequillo, the Museo Amparo, the Casa del Alguacil Mayor, the Edificio Carolino, the river Atoyac, the churches of Santo Domingo, Santa Clara, San Cristóbal and Santa Teresa; Carmen, Máximo and Aquiles Serdán; Manuel Velásquez and others.

However, even when the reference to Puebla is made, the riddle is not entirely solved. The city’s full title - Puebla de los Ángeles - is nowhere mentioned in the text: the opening fragments concerning the legend of the construction of Puebla at the hands of angels, might thus remain a mystery to the reader. Other episodes of the city’s history are presented in a similarly elliptical fashion. The only facts for the reader to consume lie beyond the boundaries of the text, in other texts which the narrator of ‘Ángelus’ signals as being equally as prone to misinformation.

Furthermore, if establishing the identity of Puebla is problematic in this text, that of the narrator is equally elusive. The reader is immediately aware that the text has a homodiegetic narrator, yet the origin of the voice and its ethereal tone are more difficult to pin down. It is not until almost a quarter of the way through the text, shortly before the first direct mention of Puebla itself, that the narrator reveals himself to be ‘un ángel anciano’ (p. 18) who works in the municipal graveyard of the city, a relative of those angels who built the city in the legend.9

As in ‘La casa de las palomas’, the only sense of travel in this text is conveyed by allusion to places rather than by a narrative of the protagonist’s transportation to them. In this text which accounts for over half of the material presented in Ángelus, Diego Blanco, like Solana Olivares, seems to be making a deliberate attempt to steer clear of the genre of the travel-chronicle: ‘Yo nunca lo escribí pensando que era un viaje. [...] Justamente no quise hacer una crónica como las crónicas que conozco de las ciudades’ (interview). Given the disparity between the text of ‘Ángelus’ and the genre of the travel-chronicle, yet also given the fact that it is the only text in Ángelus, the book, to have been written specifically for the CNCA commission for a travel-chronicle, it is this text which will be studied in detail in the remainder of this chapter, in an effort to establish its real relationship with the genre.

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9 The most direct inspiration for the figure of the ‘ángel sepulturero’ stems from Diego Blanco’s grandparents’ home, located in a street near the municipal graveyard of Puebla. His grandparents rented out one of the rooms at the back of their house to a grave-digger who was the source of many of Diego Blanco’s childhood games and fantasies (interview).
Allusions

La red de vínculos oaxaqueños

Despite the apparent lack of travel-narrative structuring either the Crónicas sonámbulas or ‘Ángelus’, both texts still rely heavily on what might be referred to as the ‘archive’ of travel-writing. In interview Solana Olivares noted that besides visiting Oaxaca to refresh his memories, he also spent a considerable amount of the time available reading books about Oaxaca: histories, tour guides, biographies, cultural studies, and travel-narratives: ‘Me traigo bibliografía, busco bibliografía - la bibliografía que hay sobre Oaxaca es vastísima y de hecho apenas me acerqué a una pequeña parte. Me pongo a leer y después de ponerme a leer me pongo a escribir’. In the event, Solana Olivares incorporates references or allusions to a dazzling array of travel-narratives and their authors, starting with the chronicles of the Colonial era, and ending with the most recent accounts of the region by foreign novelists. The list includes all the obvious references, plus a number of more obscure commentators: Cortés, Las Casas, Gemelli Carreri, Clavijero, Sahagún, Motolinía, John Chilton, Thomas Gage, Francisco de Ajofrín, Humboldt, Désiré Charnay, Charles Étienne Brasseur, Johann Wilhelm von Müller, R. Gordon Wasson, Blas Pablo Reko, Aldous Huxley, André Breton, D.H. Lawrence, Malcolm Lowry, Carlos Castañeda, and Italo Calvino. Solana Olivares also includes references to some foreign (travel-) writers, with no first-hand experience in Mexico, let alone Oaxaca (Kipling, Burton, Nietzsche), and to the travel-chronicles of the Mexicans Alejandro Villaseñor, Manuel Toussaint and José Vasconcelos. This mass of travel-writing is partly referred to from knowledge of the primary sources, and partly culled from biographies of the writers and histories of the area. There is, thus, a deliberate blurring of the origin of authority and of authorship at work here: references turn into allusions which are further undercut by their presentation in the story itself.

Solana Olivares uses this stock of references to create a collage travel-chronicle of Oaxaca, which is held together by the life-story of the fictional characters of the novel: it is ‘una novela mosaica’ (interview). In turn, however, the subjects (facts, events, customs, legends, beliefs) introduced by these references are used as the motor for the fictional narrative which advances according to the logic of the literary collage, rather than that of reality, or even verisimilitude. Solana Olivares’s desire to produce an all-encompassing chronicle of Oaxaca works in counterpoint with the intertextual references, and with the fiction of Hermógenes and friends.

In Hermógenes’s ‘cuaderno’ the original mosaic structure of the text, interweaving themes and authors, is made apparent:

The ‘story’ element was then laid over this framework. The result is that in each chapter a travel-writer (or writers) and a theme is selected. These are subsequently set against a concrete historical background, and woven into the fictional thread of the narrative.

The opening chapter, ‘El tedio de Hermógenes’, introduces the main protagonist, his nascent relationship with Catalina Ochoterena Mori, and, through Hermógenes, the presence of the textile industry in Oaxaca. It sets the date at 1928, exploring the relationship between upheaval in the textile industry and the post-Revolutionary situation, and introducing a number of historical characters as points of reference and as actors in the outer circles of the fiction: the mill-owner Mateo Solana López, the socialist activist Jesús Gonthier, the mill-mechanic Manuel González and others. As a contrast to Hermógenes’s initially negative impressions of Oaxaca, Solana Olivares uses the more enthusiastic comments of Francisco de Ajofrín, taken from his Diario del viaje a la Nueva España (written 1763-67), to introduce some of the more general aspects of Oaxaca: its geographical situation and climate, its attractive building materials and city-plan, its inhabitants’ sleepy, good-natured approach to life and its good chocolate! Certain other elements and figures introduced in this opening chapter will recur during the course of the book: Jesús Gonthier will meet with Zarate to discuss legal matters in Chapter 5; the themes of love and chocolate will reappear in Chapter 2.

Chapter 6, ‘El llanto en el Tule’, stages Hermógenes’s marriage proposal to Catalina at the base of the ahuehuete tree in Santa María El Tule. Here, Solana Olivares uses the tree - reputedly the tree with the largest girth in the world and the subject of some considerable attention in most travel-guides and chronicles concerning the area - as a catalyst for the fiction through a discussion of the legends and texts concerning the tree (Calvino, Chamay and others). Through the conversation between Hermógenes and Catalina, the belief that the tree is a petrified lake leads the pair to a discussion of water and alchemy. The subject of water leads Catalina onto the subject of crying and the suggestion that Vasconcelos would have come to El Tule to lament his political defeats, and from there the text moves on to Vasconcelos’s relationship with Oaxaca. Hermógenes’s acceptance of Catalina’s unsubstantiated claim concerning Vasconcelos (‘¿Contamos con algún testimonio de que Vasconcelos se lamentó desde aquí?’ (p. 77)) is an indicator of his growing acceptance of Catalina and her dependence on allusions, and alternative, simultaneous realities, as opposed to concrete references and causalities.

In ‘El tedio de Hermógenes’ intertextual references are generally explicit: they are quoted verbatim, encased within the correct punctuation and with due credit given in the bibliography at the end of the book. Alternately, they are paraphrased, re-dramatised for economy’s sake, without losing sight of their original author, and without being sucked into the fictional narrative (they are used as descriptive aids by the narrator). As the story
advances, these references become less clearly defined from the fictional narrative: the quotation marks remain, but the exact identity of the author is obscured. There is, for example, a reference to Paz's 'Piedra de sol' (1957) at the end of the first chapter: "Inmensa y verdinegra como un arbol." Hermógenes entró a la noche oaxaqueña del poeta (p. 20). Few Mexican readers would have difficulty sourcing this quotation to Paz - he is, after all, 'el poeta' in contemporary Mexico - although he was not in 1928. Already Solana Olivares's fictional liberties with literature and history are evident.

Later, even the quotation marks evaporate. In a passage describing the cathedral: 'fortaleza, espesor de muros, bóvedas rebajadas, escasas cúpulas' (p. 97), all the words and phrases are to be found in Manuel Toussaint's description of 'El templo oaxaqueño'. Whereas earlier in the narrative, the omnipotent narrator comments that Zárate 'hubiera firmado como propias las observaciones arquitectónicas de Toussaint sobre las casas tradicionales del lugar' (p. 64), before quoting them correctly, here the description is woven into Hermógenes's imagined memories of Malcolm Lowry's experiences in Oaxaca, without clear acknowledgement. The standard structure for facilitating Zárate's and Hermógenes's historical interludes is as follows: after nearly seven pages of quotations and reconstructions of the story of the seventeenth-century Indigenous Oaxacan Juan Matías's failed trip to Spain to play before the King, there follows, without any transition: 'Pero ¿qué me dice usted del grande Macedonio? - pregunto Zárate, acodado con pereza en el mostrador vespertino de la tienda de Hermógenes' (p. 109). The link between recorded history and the fiction of Hermógenes and Zárate is established - after the history rather than before, to underline its tenuous nature. This is an efficient way of blending intertextual references with the main narrative. It also undermines the authority of those references and reveals Hermógenes and Zárate as unreliable cultural magpies who 'borrow' liberally from literature and history.

Zárate collects scraps of properly documented Oaxacan history and travel-narrative, and shows them off in his conversations with Hermógenes at the end of the day, over the counter of El Nuevo Mundo. Zárate is described as someone who 'tenía fama de intelectual' (p. 43), and as 'el docto repetidor de citas' (p. 85). His intellectual pursuits include the preparation of a history of Oaxaca, which, in a Proustian fashion, the reader might assume to be the text that he or she is currently reading. Nevertheless, Zárate is Oaxacan, and has a Oaxacan understanding of the multiple realities and chronologies that make up history. This local trait somewhat undermines the 'legality' of his history, although Zárate generally remains a mouthpiece for the Western 'chronicle' approach.

Hermógenes attempts to beat Zárate at his own game; however, the former's aptitude and interest in this activity are different from latter's. Initially Hermógenes is bored by the lack of progress (linear time) in Oaxaca (pp. 11-12), where he, like so many nineteenth-century travel-writers, stumbles over the non-existent chronology of the area (the Tule tree can only be described as 'Egyptian', to indicate the lack of coincidence with the time of Christianity.

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11 The key to this is given in the last chapter of the book (pp. 149-50).
His search for concrete historical truths is frustrated. Nevertheless, although his interest in the works of the ‘viajeros naturalistas’ such as Charnay survives (p. 113), Hermógenes slowly stops worrying about time scales, and redirects his attention to the rituals of daily life, to the all-encompassing present of his soul. He starts to indulge in fully-fledged anachronisms, such as his ‘reading’ and response to Calvino’s ‘Under the Jaguar Sun’. Finally, ‘después de tantos años en Oaxaca’, Hermógenes ‘había remplazado su jacobinismo peninsular por una suerte de antropología estupefacta, dispuesta a aceptar cualquier manifestación que rayara los surcos del día’ (p. 122).

Influenced increasingly by Catalina’s whimsical, romantic approach to historiography, Hermógenes’s contributions to his discussions with Zárate become more tangential and dubious. Catalina herself is a vehicle for introducing material more properly ascribed to legend rather than history, such as the arrival of the Virgen de la Soledad in town on the back of a mule, or the multiple cases of ill-fated love starting with the Zapotec princess Donaji, and culminating with the apparitions of Viqui Solana. In most cases, she also overtly involves herself in the legends, through implied comparison with her own situation, or through dreams and visions.

In two cases in particular, Hermógenes displays a similar desire to invent connections where there are none, and to involve himself in historical matters in which he cannot have taken part. In the first case, the narrator comments that, ‘Años después, cuando la costumbre habría sedimentado los recuerdos [...], Hermógenes afirmó que Malcolm Lowry estuvo en la fiesta de su boda con Catalina’ (p. 85). Nevertheless, Hermógenes was married at the latest in 1929 and Lowry did not visit Oaxaca until 1937. Hermógenes goes further, asserting that he helped Lowry get out of jail and accompanied him around town.

In the following chapter, Hermógenes struggles to relate Macedonio Alcalá’s waltz ‘Dios nunca muere’ to Nietzsche’s theory of the death of God and his desire to visit Oaxaca expressed in a letter to his friend Peter Gast. Hermógenes explains the ‘phenomenon’ as a productive coincidence: ‘Puede deberse a la sincronicidad: dos fenómenos que surgen separadamente pero que son complementarios y entre sí elaboran una realidad más amplia’ (p. 112). Zárate is not entirely convinced, thus revealing the weakness of Hermógenes’s intellectual reasoning, but the fantasy of Zarathustra wandering around Oaxaca still kindles Zárate’s imagination. The scene continues with some more forced arguments on Hermógenes’s behalf and the story of Zárate’s illicit affair with an Indian child-prostitute.

12 Nietzsche’s desire to visit Oaxaca, however slim a fact, has been mentioned time and again in the last few years: see Eliot Weinberger’s ‘El zócalo: centro del universo’, trans. by Magali Tercero, *Artes de México: Oaxaca*, 21 (Autumn 1993), 26; Andrés Henestrosa’s ‘Hechicera Oaxaca’, *Artes de México: Oaxaca*, 43; José Luis Ontiveros’s fictional travel-chronicle, *El Hotel de las Cuatro Estaciones*, Collection Molinos de Viento, 88 (UAM, 1995), especially Chapter 2: ‘El secreto de Oaxaca’; and Mahatma Dandy’s ‘Oaxaca: de luz, de piedra y alharaca (reflexiones sobre la fundación)’, *Hojas de Utopía*, 18 (June/July 1997), 4-5. This last article gives a brief but good overview of travel-writers, historians, poets and musicians who have all taken the city of Oaxaca as their subject (‘II. Los amantes de la ciudad’). This section also praises Solana Olives’s *Crónicas sonambulas* for their reconstruction of Lowry’s experience of the city.

Carlos Monsiváis has also used Alcalá’s waltz as the title and epigraph to his travel-chronicle of a journey to the Oaxacan coast to record the hippy pilgrimage to see the eclipse of the sun on 7 March 1970 (‘Dios nunca muere: Crónica de un eclipse’, *Días de guardar*, pp. 91-114).
As the two characters come to accept each other’s weaknesses (Zárate’s for women, and Hermógenes for academic rigour), so they are more frequently likened to Flaubert’s infamous pair, Bouvard and Pécuchet: ‘Los dos, Zárate y Hermógenes, envejecían y jugaban el juego eterno de todas las parejas, aun las simbólicas: Bouvard y Pécuchet’ (p. 112). It is also implied that the text that is the *Cronicas sonambulas* is a fusion of Zárate’s history of Oaxaca, with Hermógenes’s more associative version of Oaxaca’s ‘identity’ in his ‘cuadernos’, dedicated to the memory of Catalina, ‘para tejer con ellos una red, porque sabía que sólo así se atrapa una ciudad: por sorpresa’ (p. 150).

Of course, Solana Olivares profits from his construction of these ‘lame’ fictional characters to cover the weak links in his own text, to gloss over the insubstantiality of his experience in his week in Oaxaca. Yet the weaknesses of the fictional characters also undermine the authority of the majority of the references. The conversations between Hermógenes and Zárate display the processing of this material as they attempt to ‘reconstruir el mundo a golpe de palabras’ (p. 98). Through constant retellings, the authority and authorship of even the most inaccurate texts gradually become ‘versiones’ of common knowledge: ‘la red de vínculos oaxaqueños parecían (sic) crecer conforme las historias del pueblo eran contadas por el tiempo’ (p. 134).

Furthermore, although certain writers such as Toussaint, Lowry and Calvino are absorbed into the fiction with a twinge of irony but without criticism, the writings of figures such as Aldous Huxley, D.H. Lawrence, and André Breton are overtly criticised, through the voice of the narrator, for borrowing liberally from local sources, for failing to understand Mexico, and for being commonplace, respectively (pp. 30-31, pp. 34-37, p. 42, & p. 145). Most sources are, thus, in some way diminished. Nevertheless, it is clear that the *Cronicas sonambulas* display an acute awareness of the genre which they were commissioned to be.

**Un conjunto de voces**

Diego Blanco’s ‘Ángelus’ suggests an even more oblique relationship with the genre of the travel-chronicle than the *Cronicas sonambulas*. Unlike Solana Olivares’s text, Diego Blanco’s appears to go out of its way to avoid any direct references to the ample reserve of chronicles concerning the city: those written by Hernán Cortés and Bernal Díaz del Castillo who travelled through Cholula, prior to the founding of Puebla; Motolinía and Las Casas; Humboldt, Nebel, Poinsett, Ward, Mayer and Fanny Calderón de la Barca; Payno, Prieto, and Altamirano; Aldous Huxley or even Gutierre Tibón. Admittedly there does seem to be a dearth of contemporary travel-literature on the city and its environs, by Mexicans or by foreigners, but Diego Blanco is hardly short of material.

But Diego Blanco did not want to write a traditional travel-chronicle full of facts and references. In the event, the only direct intertextual reference in the text of ‘Ángelus’ is to

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13 Zárate’s response to Hermógenes’s claims with regard to Lowry and Nietzsche is described as ‘crédulo’ (p. 110). Hermógenes continues to enjoy Zárate’s company even after he is publicly ostracised for his affair.
Isak Dinesen’s *Out of Africa*, an off-beat aside in an elliptical description of Puebla’s safari park, Africam. Nevertheless, there are allusions in the text to travel-writing: the imaginative possibilities of the experience of travel, veiled references to the resultant texts, and also elaborate descriptions of the act and art of writing chronicles.

Rather than look at how the world has seen Puebla, Diego Blanco turns the traditional focus of the travel-chronicle on its head. He explores how Puebla has discovered the rest of the world within itself: the traces of the Far East in the museums and libraries of the city; the traces of Africa in its safari park; the traces of Alaska in geography classes; and the traces of Berlin in the work of a man who preserved the changing names of the town’s streets, and in the cemetery wall. Like Perea, Diego Blanco assumes a dimension of imaginative travels in time and space.

This egocentricity - this assumption that the rest of the world revolves around one’s own restricted field of action - is essentially a childish Weltanschauung, compatible with Diego Blanco’s personal source of inspiration for the ‘chronicle’: his childhood memories. He deliberately seeks out ‘un tono infantil’ (interview): the voice of the old angel fuses with that of the child’s growing perception of the world around him. Furthermore, the angel’s narration of his childhood memories takes the form of travels and adventures. Thus, the ‘ángel sepulturero’ adopts the tone of a travel-chronicler as he explores the boundaries of Puebla. The child/angel ‘navigates’ through the ‘streets’ of Puebla:

He navegado en los ríos de la ciudad. Mi barco partió del muelle construido frente a la tintorería Ticaola y bajó a un afluente de la calle Nueve Sur. Las costas del colegio Miguel Hidalgo fueron vistas con catalejos por los miembros de la tripulación, pero el temporal nos impidió anclar. [...] Mi barco hizo travesías que pocos habían logrado y estuvo a punto de llegar a donde empieza el infinito, pero las llantas de un camión mayorazgo destruyeron la proa y la popa y todas mis intenciones. (p. 47)

The impossible itinerary - part river/part street - of these navigations corresponds to an angel’s lack of corporeality and to the imagination of children; children who return home for lunch ‘fatigados por haber llegado a Alaska en su clase de geografía’ (p. 48). This same voice also narrates the navigations of a miniature, ivory *Nao de China* ‘en la humedad disimulada del Museo Bello’ (p. 33), and from there embroiders on the role of China in Puebla’s history.

Time and space are flexible, ‘circular’ concepts, where all anachronisms and superpositions can coexist. The angels who built Puebla may well have used ‘grúas y tractores’ (p. 11), and Africa and Puebla can be the same place, as they are in the narration of the ‘discovery’ of ‘Africam’, a safari park on the shores of Lake Valsequillo, a few miles outside Puebla:
However, this fragment concerning Africam is also important in its play on the history of travel-writing. It starts with riddling references to the early chronicles of the Conquest and Colonial era - the 'ángel aventurero' and the 'ángel viajero' are possibly allusions to the chronicles charting the discovery of the area such as those by Motolinía or Díaz del Castillo. It ends with similar hints at the work of 'los naturalistas' in the area. In all cases the (truth) value of these works of travel-writing is undermined. The early Colonial chronicles are written in an inaccessible 'angelical' language, hence subject to mistranslations; later Colonial works are full of lies: 'en la narración de sus tribulaciones se encuentran mentiras' (p. 28); in the seventeenth century the inhospitable region still generates more fantastic tales than factual accounts: 'Estas apreciaciones se convirtieron un deleite para fabulistas y hombres de letras' (p. 28); and even the nineteenth-century naturalist travel-writers do not entirely free themselves from these 'fables': 'La imagen del león nos aproxima más a un mito que a una historia' (p. 29). The whole fragment thus functions as a cautionary tale about the status of truth in travel-writing.

Time and again, the text of 'Ángelus' makes reference to the apocryphal nature of (travel-) chronicles. The city is seen to invent its history from the multiple histories of its streets and its inhabitants, recording 'historias irreales' in 'un diario apócrifo' (p. 11): 'La ciudad es un conjunto de voces. Un coro que nunca se afina. No importa la armonía. Interesa la canción. La ciudad no se cansa de hablar' (p. 39). The city cannot be reduced to one hegemonic history. Instead one must seek out the 'guion de las conversaciones' and the inventory of the ever-mutating street-names.

In the light of this approach, perhaps the most important oblique bibliographic reference in the book is to Hugo Leicht's *Las calles de Puebla* (1934). Leicht was a German scholar who spent many years working in Puebla, and who returned to Germany at the beginning of the Second World War. Trapped by the war, he was never able to return to Mexico, and spent his last years in penury in Berlin, longing for the warmth of Puebla. His text is an historical encyclopedia of the streets of Puebla and their frequently changing names. It is ironic, perhaps, that Diego Blanco wrote 'Ángelus' in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin where Leicht would have spent his last years 'in exile', physically and intellectually. 'Ángelus' is also a text written from the perspective of, if not exile, at least distance.

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14 So many other historical figures in the text are introduced in this oblique manner, as angels of one sort or another, or as the person 'quien confundió una confesión sacramental con una delación' (p. 14) and 'un amanuense que falsificó una cédula real' (p. 15).

15 In Wim Wenders's film, *Der Himmel über Berlin / The Wings of Desire* (1987), the Staatsbibliothek is a favourite 'hang-out' for the city's angels. In one scene the two main angels, Daniel (the out-of-work angel) and Cassiel (the archangel), wander through the library listening to the readers' thoughts, to 'dem Chor der Stimmen, der die Staatsbibliothek wie eine Katedrale erfüllt' (Wim Wenders & Peter Handke, *Der Himmel über Berlin* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), p. 23). This is perhaps another viable source of inspiration for the angels of 'Ángelus', although both Diego Blanco and Wenders claim Rainer Maria Rilke's angels as their source of inspiration (Diego Blanco, interview; Wenders, 'Las alas del deseo', *Casa del Tiempo*, 94 (March/April 1990), 80).
Leicht is only mentioned in one central fragment of ‘Ángelus’ (pp. 31-33) where his personal story and his love of Puebla are briefly narrated. He is characterised as the city’s translator, and as such he holds the key to the languages of the city:

Hugo Leicht sabía que el idioma de la ciudad cambia a diario, por eso es difícil entenderla. La ciudad es políglo y conoce las lenguas vivas y muertas. ¡Lástima que no sepamos escucharlas! Necesitaríamos un ejército de traductores para poder entender lo que nos dice. O tal vez sólo sería necesario un hombre paciente que escriba en un libro el lenguaje de la ciudad secreta, un hombre con los ojos de Hugo Leicht, con su oído, con sus manos, con sus palabras, con su corazón. (p. 32)

Leicht has the power to ‘totalise’ the discourses of the city, yet, despite the act of translation, he allows for their plurality. He also has the key to Diego Blanco’s ‘Ángelus’, written with the ‘secret voices’ of the city. ‘Ángelus’ reads as an incantation of the place-names of Puebla, past and present. In it, old names overlap with new ones. Diego Blanco’s reading of Leicht, evidenced in his poem of place-names, pervades the whole text.

Yet Leicht’s influence is even more marked at the beginning and the end of the text. His construction of Puebla on the basis of the language of its streets coincides with the legend of the angels constructing the town from a map of its streets and its languages: Diego Blanco’s conception of ‘Ángelus’ was to ‘construir una ciudad a partir de sus calles y a partir de un libro’ (interview), thus fusing the two narratives, making Leicht’s book one with the book of the angels. In the final fragment of the text the old angel’s and Leicht’s personal histories coincide: the wall of the angel’s graveyard is compared to the Berlin Wall, an arbitrary division between different narratives, those of life, and those of death. The ‘ángel sepulturero’ preserves the different voices of the town in the same way that Leicht did. The figure of the angel, cold, tired, lonely and waiting patiently for death, coincides with the figure of Leicht in Berlin. Leicht in Berlin coincides with Diego Blanco in Berlin: they even share the same first name, Hugo. Diego Blanco is, of course, part-angel, part-child. All three are the guardians of the city’s memory, its faithful archivists who inhabit the graveyards and libraries: the Panteón de la Piedad and the Edificio Carolino; the Panteón Municipal de la Ciudad de Puebla and the Biblioteca Palafoxiana; the Panteón Francés and the Biblioteca Lafragua; the Capilla del Santo Sepulcro and the Biblioteca del Colegio del Estado; the ‘asilo de ancianos Gabriel Pastor’ and the Museo Bello.

Finally, Diego Blanco displays an aesthetic concern for the writing of chronicles: the art of writing and the role of the scribe. The story of ‘un amanuense que falsificó una cédula real’ in the Casa del Alguacil Mayor is told very early in the text (pp. 14-15). In exile he misses ‘su escritorio, la pluma, el papel y la tinta’. Again, in an elliptical description of what might well be Bartolomé de Las Casas’s chronicle he writes, ‘El ángel amanuense que llegó de Sevilla a la ciudad de Puebla sabe que para escribir bien son necesarias tres cosas: una silla cómoda, una mesa firme y luz adecuada en la habitación’ (p. 40). The ideal position in which to ‘desplegar la alas del arte de la caligrafía’ (p. 41) is compared with pictorial representations: ‘la célebre miniatura de Lagarto en donde se representa a San
Mateo escribiendo el Evangelio y a un pequeño ángel que le habla al oído' (p. 42) and a painting of the French chronicler Jean Froissart in the process of writing the history of the Hundred Years War. The scribe, the archivist, is seen in action; the journey is that of his fingers across the page:

Los dedos ejecutan una danza, subiendo, bajando y sosteniendo la pluma. Son cuerpos que se encuentran y reconocen, hábitos de monjas y de niñas vírgenes, aves migratorias cuya orientación es dirigida por la palabra. Los dedos caminan buscando un altar, como los pasos de la peregrina. (p. 43)

Diego Blanco may well have accepted the CNCA commission ‘aunque no cumple yo requisitos del viajero en el sentido estricto de la palabra’ (interview), and with no intention of producing a main-stream travel-chronicle, but, despite these factors, he has secretly infiltrated a consciousness of travel and the travel-chronicle form into his text. Like Solana Olivares, he has also found a way to discredit the ‘truths’ of centuries’ worth of travel-writing by intimating the lack of factual basis for their composition and by diminishing the historical figures of their authors. All that remains is the art of writing, and the intellectual journey it supposes. From his seat in the Latin American section of the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin or the Edificio Carolino in Puebla, Diego Blanco proves that, ‘Para el escritor el verdadero viaje es la escritura. Para el lector el verdadero viaje es la lectura’.16

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Illusions

If Solana Olivares and Diego Blanco manage to retain a consciousness of the ‘archive’ of travel-writing through their references and allusions, and through their characters’ roles as collectors of this kind of material, they also weaken its value in the process. Another important way in which they contrive to retain, yet undermine, the validity of the traditional mould and substance of the travel-chronicle is through their insistence on a more metaphorical form of travel: that of dream.

In their narratives the linear time of the journey from life to death condenses into Saint Augustine’s ‘eternal present’, where concepts of chronology and causality fail: everything is held in balance in the imagination and in memories. Both Hermógenes and the ‘ángel sepulturero’, particularly in old age, display this facility with time:

Años después, cuando la costumbre habría sedimentado los recuerdos, mezclándolos con los tres presentes agustinianos que construyen la memoria de cualquiera: el presente del pasado, el presente del presente, el presente del futuro, Hermógenes afirmó que Malcolm Lowry estuvo en la fiesta de su boda con Catalina. (Crónicas sonámbulas, p. 84)

A veces pienso que el pasado es sólo un recurso de la imaginación que nos permite inventar historias para unirlas a lo único real que es el presente. Es por eso que no sé si recuerdo la calle de Santa Rosa o sólo imagino un patio y unas escaleras, y el ángel que camina detrás de aquel niño es tan diferente a mí que no me reconozco. (‘Ángelus’, p. 18)

This undermining of linear time, substituted by circularity, repetition, and imaginative variations, is also underlined by the prominence of dreams, and dream travels, in both texts. It is a metaphor which allows generous liberties with the concepts of both time and space.

Viajes sonámbulos

Solana Olivares most probably adapted the somnambulist leitmotif of his chronicle from a conjunction of the writings of Toussaint and Calvino. Toussaint opens his series of vignettes on Oaxaca with the following description of ‘El aspecto de la ciudad’: ‘La vieja Antequera se adormece bajo las caricias del calor incipiente. Se anuncia la primavera en la voluptuosidad de esta mañana, ensoñadora’ (Oaxaca y Tasco, p. 9). Oaxaca is sleepy in itself, and enchanting for the traveller in a hypnotic sense. Thus Calvino, in ‘Under the Jaguar Sun’, describes his wife and himself as they approach the opulence of the Oaxacan dining-table as ‘walking like somnambulists, not quite sure we were touching the ground’ (p. 4).

Dreams and the hypnotic magic of Oaxaca are, thus, key themes to be woven into the narrative of the story, on a par with the those of gastronomy and sensuality; themes which have frequently been commented on by visiting writers. Chapters 9 and 10 - ‘Los fantasmas del mediodía’ and ‘El nombre oculto de Monte Albán’ - do just this. ‘Los fantasmas del mediodía’ deals with long-forgotten religious processions and the occasional reappearances of the ‘ghosts’ of Oaxaca (Viqui Solana). The mention of Viqui Solana and
her fated love-affair, loops the narrative back round to the recurrent theme of suicidal lovers, and to the sublimation of sexuality in dream images:

Oaxaca la benemérita favorece a los amantes y a los sueños. No es una ciudad de agua, pero como la piedra con que está construida es camaleónica y cambia de color cuando se moja, la conciencia de quienes duermen entre sus paredes vagabundea con mayor frecuencia. (pp. 119-20)

Following on from this, in ‘El nombre oculto de Monte Albán’, Solana Olivares writes: ‘Son frecuentes los sueños oaxaqueños que tienen por oscuro escenario Monte Albán’ (p. 131). And thus he links together the inevitable discussion of Oaxaca’s greatest pre-Columbian archeological site and all the mysticism that attends it (shamanism, psychedelic drugs, trances and ‘trips’), with the traces of visiting archeologists, anthropologists, hippies and gurus, and with local syncretic beliefs and rites concerning medicine and death, which discussion functions as an omen of Catalina and then Hermógenes’s deaths in the following chapters. The narration of this chapter fully assumes the fanciful links previously developed by Catalina and then by Hermógenes, exploring the ‘red de vínculos oaxaqueños’ (p. 134) and endorsing the probability of one of Hermógenes’s fanciful coincidences: the anthropologist Blas Pablo Reko might be in Monte Albán on the same Sunday that Hermógenes and Zárate visit it - the coincidence is absorbed in the text by an unassuming ‘quizá’ (p. 136). The theme of dreams in this chapter is thus twinned with the magic of Monte Albán, the visions produced by psychedelic drugs, and the myths of the anthropologists. But it is also related to the wandering minds of these two old men, and their fanciful stories - anthropology is ironically relegated to being ‘antropología estupefacta’.

Yet if dreams undermine the truth value of some of the material presented in the text, particularly that from anthropological sources, ironically the theme of ‘sueño’ - dream, sleep and related concepts/disturbances such as ‘ensueño’, ‘ilusiones ópticas’, ‘espejismos’, ‘insomnio’, ‘sonambulismo’ - also functions as a narrative construct to facilitate the conveyance of some of the less factual aspects of Oaxacan culture. Throughout the narrative it is used to introduce material associated with legends, myths, and fables, firstly the preserve of Catalina, then Hermógenes, and then even Zárate. Finally, Hermógenes’s day-dreams, or somnambulistic ‘paseos’ around the city, narrated in his journal, are a chaotic mixture of memory and imagination. Increasingly the three times of the Augustinian soul merge together into ‘ese presente del pasado del día de hoy que para él [Hermógenes], de un tiempo a esa parte, continuaba siendo ningún otro momento que el día de ayer. Y aunque ocurriera mañana: también sería ayer’ (p. 149). What Hermógenes writes, as he loses contact with reality, retreating into his ‘conciencia profunda, con percepciones más allá de la razón’ (p. 160), might be considered the sempiternal essence of Oaxaca; without his dreamy facility with time and space, he may never have been able to capture it.
Una crónica de sueños

Diego Blanco, like Solana Olivares, set out to write a ‘dream-chronicle’. When interviewed he commented, ‘Quería una crónica, pero una crónica de sentimientos, una crónica de recuerdos, una crónica de evocaciones, una crónica también de sueños’. However, he also admitted that, for him, there is a strong affinity between dreams and travel: ‘una cuestión de aire’. On a metaphorical level, a dream-chronicle and a travel-chronicle might be the same thing.

In Ángelus dreams are accorded a central role: the very legend of the city’s foundation, with which the text begins, is based on a dream. The bishop of Tlaxcala, don Julián Garcés, dreamt of an idyllic spot which he had never seen before. ‘In the vision, he saw angels descend from the sky, plant stakes, and stretch cords for the streets of a new city.’ He discovered the spot the following day and erected an altar. This is the ‘postrero relato’ of the city’s origins; origins ‘que se encuentran en los territorios de un sueño de claustro de profesas’ (p.11). Diego Blanco embellishes the legend by assuming that the angels descend with a book under their arm in which the total history of the city is written in the form of a Borgesian map which is the size of the city itself - a metatextual construct which leads to a Chinese Box world of repeating books. The city is at once, then, a real city and a city of paper, a book: ‘Una ciudad en la tierra y otra en el aire, la misma al fin y al cabo’ (p. 12). Furthermore, in the book of the bishop’s dream, not only the history, but also the future dreams of the city’s inhabitants are noted down for the angels to construct: ‘Ángeles nigromantes e ilusionistas. Ángeles magos que dibujaron nuestros sueños y también nuestras penas. Nuestras historias de amor y olvido’ (p. 45).

Legend (or myth) is introduced into Diego Blanco’s narrative through dream or as dream. This both facilitates the presentation of such material, and limits its truth value. The emphasis on dream as the origin of the city counters the value of its ‘history’:

Sólo la ilusión de lo que hemos escuchado o leído nos asegura que no existe un duelo entre la imaginación y la historia. Los arcángeles también tienen fantasías. Pero la ciudad no tiene historia, sueña con tenerla. Inventá un tiempo y un espacio, años y edificios que nunca tuvo. (p. 16)

Travelling through this invented time and space of dream is the ‘ángel sepulturero’. As Wenders has commented about the role of the angels in The Wings of Desire,

Los ángeles lo volvían todo posible, desde el punto de vista de la cámara, de las situaciones, de los encuentros... En general, en una película, se destaca cierta línea, a partir de la cual se crean relaciones o encuentros entre personajes. Con El cielo sobre Berlín, el trayecto estaba en todas partes, podíamos ir a cualquier parte de la ciudad, todo era posible. Podíamos atravesar el muro, entrar en las casas a través de las ventanas, ver a la gente en el metro, cualquier transeúnte se volvía héroe de una eventual película. Esto se volvía angustioso, uno podía imaginar demasiado. [...] Poco a poco, reducimos para no dejar sino lo esencial: la mirada. De golpe, lo que se cristalizó: una mirada libre. 18

18 ‘Las alas del deseo’, 80.
In ‘Ángelus’, too, the angel can travel with impunity across time and space, through ‘la telaraña del tiempo’ (p. 21) and the labyrinth of Puebla’s streets, to chart the changing faces of the city. He knows all the answers; he can see all the possibilities of the city, what is, what was, and what may yet be. Wenders noted that behind his project for The Wings of Desire was the desire to make a film which would give an intimate vision of Berlin, of the idiosyncratic atmosphere of the city: ‘Sentimientos, por supuesto, pero también algo en el aire, bajo los pies, lo que distingue tan radicalmente la vida aquí de la vida en otra parte, en otras ciudades’. Through the voice of his angel, Diego Blanco writes, ‘Los sueños, las ideas, los sentimientos crean una atmósfera sobre tus calles, una nube psíquica que la ilumina y enceguece’ (p. 26). This is what defines Puebla, and simultaneously undermines its definition.

The fragments of the text also assume a kind of angelical displacement in the gaps between them. The ‘ángel sepulturero’ is master of the ‘mirada libre’, and the city responds with a gaze made up of those of all of its inhabitants (p. 27). The terms ‘sueño’ and ‘soñar’ recur throughout ‘Ángelus’ as an incantation, a form of poetic hypnosis. The angel dreams, the city dreams, the bishop dreams the angels and the city. A dream state is achieved.

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19 ‘Las alas del deseo’, 79.
The Archive

In many ways the *Crónicas sonámbulas* and ‘Ángelus’ would appear to fit exactly Roberto González Echevarría’s definition of ‘archival fiction’, outlined in his *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative*. This archival nature simultaneously reinforces the link between González Echevarría’s theory of an archive of master-narratives for Latin American fiction and the travel element inherent in those master-narratives, and defines these two texts as a particular type of travel-chronicle.

In *Myth and Archive*, González Echevarría argues that narrative in Latin America has always been predicated on certain master-narratives: the discourse of the law, projected in Latin America through the chronicles of the Conquest and ensuing Colonial era; the discourse of science, projected through the journals of scientific travellers in the nineteenth century; and the discourse of anthropology - a way of generating stories, myths of cultural origins, thus responding to the twentieth century drive for cultural identity -, projected through the studies of anthropological investigators in the early twentieth century. Latin American writers of each epoch have achieved a critical absorption of each master-narrative, telling the story of their ‘otherness’ in terms other than their own, hence using, yet simultaneously estranging, the code used to define them. The typical Latin American texts produced under the auspices of such master-narratives have devoted much of their attention to masquerading their fictions as legal, scientific and anthropological truths. The travel-chronicle, as studied in this thesis, clearly follows the pattern outlined in this theory of Latin American narrative; indeed, it is central to the theory - so many Latin American narratives are predicated on some form of travel-writing, whether they be fictional creations of verifiable travel-chronicles.

Owing to the breakdown in the imperial bases for anthropology after the Second World War, the anthropological certainties of Latin American narrative also founder, and writers begin to produce works which critique their previous critical works by juggling all three master-narratives at once and hence revealing the insufficiencies of each. These texts advertise themselves, now, as overt fictions, and through metafiction, they also reveal the seams of their own composition. The icon of this balancing act is the ‘Archive’, where dead and nearly dead master-narratives are stored. The kind of narrative that displays these characteristics, and this icon, González Echevarría terms the ‘archival fiction’:

Archival fictions are often historical, and consist of a complex intertextual web that incorporates the chronicles of the discovery and conquest of America, other fictions, historical documents and characters, songs, poetry, scientific reports, literary figures, and myths, in short, a grab-bag of texts that have cultural significance. The organization of the Archive defies conventional classification because classification is at issue, but it does not abandon this basic function of the Archive to generate an inchoate, heteroglossic mass; a mass of documents and other texts that have not been totally, and sometimes not even partially absorbed, that retain their raw, undisturbed original existence as evidence of the non-assimilation of the Other. (p. 176)
Archival fictions, however, still generally come under the sway of anthropological discourse in their attempt to function as the 'myth of myths' (p. 174), to provide a master-key to the cultural origins of Latin America.

The Archive also requires 'the existence of an inner historian who reads the texts, interprets and writes them' (p. 22), an archivist. Indeed, the archivist may synecdochically represent the Archive (p. 170). The archivist is typically an extremely old, nearly dead, or dead person:

Death is a metaphor for the impossibility of knowledge, or about the impossibility of there being any discourse about the Other that is not based on a potentially lethal power. (p. 165)

Senility is a figure for the gaps in these archival characters. [...] Senility is [...] a metaphor for the incompleteness of the Archive, but also for the force, the glue by which texts are bound together. There is a whimsical creativity in these characters' recollections that is parallel to how selection takes place in the Archive in the creation of fiction, and which is found in their lapses of memory. [...] Death stands for the gap of gaps, the mastergap of the Archive, both its opening and closing cipher. (p. 183)

Narrative self-reflexiveness [...] is a figure of death. Self-historicizing brings forth the gap wherein these dead or dying figures spin their web of writing. (p. 184)

Finally, the Archive needs 'the presence of an unfinished manuscript that the inner historian is trying to complete' (p. 22). On account of this race against time to complete the Archive before death, and this 'whimsical creativity' of the archivists, 'The Archive [...] does not add up' (p. 180). What the reader reads, are the 'leftovers' of the Archive.

Solana Olivares's and Diego Blanco's texts both clearly fit the mould of archival fiction. The *Crónicas sonámbulas* are historical in their overall structure, and they make an obvious attempt to balance the three master-narratives of Latin American narrative (legal, naturalist and anthropological) in their mosaic of intertextual references and allusions, undermining these master-narratives through their subordinate relationship to the characters in the fictional narrative. The weaknesses of the three main characters weaken the material of the master-narratives. Zárate, the lawyer, breaks the law in his relationship with the underage prostitute. Hermógenes invents coincidences to complement the timeless of Oaxaca, undermining the naturalist project to fix (natural) history. Catalina, in her dreams, invents and adapts myths to suit herself.

All three characters represent the Archive through their activities in collecting and collating material. As they grow older, the nature of their associations and classifications becomes more fanciful, more creative. In death, only fragments of their knowledge remain: Hermógenes's journal, unfinished and riddled with gaps, is the starting point for the generation of the *Crónicas sonámbulas*; a text which is a collation of Zárate's local history and Hermógenes memories, thus revealing a further archival layer. The metatextual nature of the journal also reinforces the ironic self-awareness which is the crux of archival fiction.
‘Ángelus’ is perhaps more of an archive of the voices of Puebla’s inhabitants over history, than of its narratives per se. The highly allusive nature of the intertextual references and the apparent preference for the chronicles of the Colonial era, with only one or two references to naturalist travel-writing, also limit the scope of the Archive. Nevertheless, anthropological discourse is present in the ‘mythic’ dimension of the text, in its interest in origins:

Figures endowed with founding significance like Columbus and Philip II appear frequently in archival fictions, as well as regions endowed with an originary aura, like the jungle or the village; activities like the founding of cities, the building of monuments, the redaction of histories occupy characters in archival fictions. (Myth and Archive, pp. 174-75)

In ‘Ángelus’, the founding of Puebla and its founders, the building of its monuments and the act of writing its history account for a substantial part of the text.

Although the many archives of the city (libraries, museums and graveyards) are listed in a form of incantation, the figure of the old angel truly represents the Archive. As González Echevarría notes about Montejo, the narrator of Miguel Barnet’s Biografía de un cimarrón,

When a slave became old and infirm, and therefore useless for productive work, he was often made into a guardiero. A guardiero was a keeper of the boundaries who lived on the frontiers between sugar plantations as a guard or gate-keeper. Because of their age and their commerce with many different people these guardieros also became keepers of the traditions. (p. 171)

The old angel is the guardiero at the gates of Puebla’s cemeteries, where he marks, yet simultaneously blurs, the boundaries between life and death, dream and reality, and where he recites the traditions and the history of Puebla. The gaps between memories, his incipient death, his allusive connections between disparate elements of Puebla’s history, his blurring of epochs and figures, all make him the maximum representative of the failing archivist. The founding angels’ impossible ‘total’ book of the city is his unfinished manuscript and his icon of ‘narrative self-reflexiveness’.

However, classifying the Crónicas sonámbulas and ‘Ángelus’ as archival fictions also suggests a couple of problems. With regard to the study of travel-chronicling, as soon as a text, which might otherwise have been a travel-chronicle, starts to delve too deep into the Archive and, simultaneously strays too far into the realms of fiction, it ceases to read as a travel-chronicle. Fuentes’s Terra nostra has no place in this thesis. For a travel-chronicle to exist in the realms of archival fiction, it must select for its archive materials clearly related to travel-writing, and, if it does not retain the structure of a travel-chronicle, it must at least make travel an explicit metaphorical leitmotif. It is arguable that Solana Olivares and Diego Blanco do achieve this, although only just.

The second problem is the ‘dating’ of archival fictions. González Echevarría relates his archival fictions to the Boom era, dating the first archival fictions to Alejo Carpentier’s Los

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20 Although it might still classify as ‘travel-literature’. 
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pasos perdidos (1953), and finding Gabriel García Márquez’s Cien años de soledad (1967) the consummate example of the archival narrative. If Solana Olivares’s and Diego Blanco’s texts are truly ‘archival fictional’ travel-chronicles, this would make them modernist rather than postmodernist texts.

González Echevarría speculates at the end of Myth and Archive about the possibility to move beyond the Archive, suggesting that the discourse of ‘communications systems’ might be the new master-narrative. Nevertheless, in the text where he offers his interpretation of postmodern narrative options in Latin America, published three years earlier, he makes no reference to the presence of the Archive in Boom writings or to its future in the post-Boom era. For a theorist such as Linda Hutcheon the Archive does still play an important role in postmodern narrative in the guise of ‘historiographic metafiction’, a kind of historical narrative which reveals the seams of its own composition through metatextual asides, anachronisms, loss of causality, interference of fiction and history, and so on. This seems very similar to ‘archival fiction’, and, indeed, Hutcheon bases her theory on the assumption that some of the Latin American Boom writings (and even pre-Boom texts) are postmodern. These interpretations, like the Archive, do not ‘add up’.

It is possible to see in the Crónicas sonámbulas and ‘Ángelus’ some sort of a solution to this problem. Where González Echevarría comments that ‘Archival fictions are narratives that still attempt to find the cipher of Latin American culture and identity, hence they fall within the mediation provided by anthropological discourse’ (p. 173), the archival fictions of Solana Olivares and Diego Blanco do not attempt anything quite so grandiose. They do both attempt to capture the ‘identity’, the idiosyncrasy, of Oaxaca and Puebla, yet they achieve this through a ‘return to storytelling’, almost for its own sake. This, of course, is a feature of González Echevarría’s postmodernism. Without appealing to the discourse of communications systems, Solana Olivares and Diego Blanco prove that the Archive continues to exist in postmodernism, but not as a master-key to cultural identity, so much as part of a dream of cultural possibilities.

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21 This would promote Perea’s virtual travels to a position of maximum postmodernism.
22 This may be found in the last chapter of González Echevarría’s La Ruta de Severo Sarduy, paraphrased on page 88 of this thesis.
PALABRAS PASAJERAS

(Conclusion)

¿Por qué escribir cuando se viaja? ¿No viaja tanto el que lee como el que escribe que viaja? Viaje dentro del viaje o alto en el camino, la escritura itinerante es como un reloj interior que permite al peregrino poner un dique a la experiencia fluvial de viajar, construir una presa hecha de mapas en retazos. Desde la escritura, la experiencia no es menos decisiva: se dirá que el ensayista sólo está en sí mismo cuando está en movimiento, descansa en el tránsito y se reconoce en la mudanza. Es un amanuense sumiso de la geografía que va tomando los dictados del paisaje. Transcribe sus pasos en letras, en descripciones sus paseos. Con el pie toma el pulso de la tierra, con la pluma el aire y del agua. El paseante lee con el cuerpo la novela de la geografía, el cuento de cada ciudad. Lugares o ciudades que pasan ante la mirada del visitante y ante sí mismas. Las ciudades viajan en el tiempo, el paseante en el espacio; pero ambos se encuentran en el eje del cuaderno. El cuaderno de viaje es un artículo sospechoso o mal visto en las aduanas de los géneros literarios y aparece de contrabando en el equipaje, en los velajes llenos de prosa, como si fuese un alimento fresco o, peor aún, como un ser vivo, una especie infecciosa y escorridiza. Quizá por eso los cuadernos de viaje son tan escasos entre nosotros y, cuando se dan, aparecen revueltos entre la prosa o bien confinados a una categoría inferior, palabra de segunda mano. [...] 

Los viajes no son el fuerte del mexicano. Es cierto que nuestros antepasados iniciaron una marcha huyendo del frío y del hambre que nadie sabe muy bien dónde empezó pero que concluyó en el antiguo lago del Anáhuac. Cierto que los aztecas fueron comerciantes aventureros que recorrieron inafatigables el territorio mexicano. Cierto que las guerras del XIX y la Revolución - las revueltas - se verificaron como hazañas peatonales. Pero es también innegable que la nuestra, mestiza, no es una nación impulsada por el espíritu de aventura. Hasta donde sabemos no hay en la Antártida ninguna depresión apellidada Pochotitla ni Morelos o Iturbide - o cualquier otro que fuese el apellido del improbable explorador mexicano.

De espaldas al mar y escrutando invariablemente las montañas - como en “Golfo de México”, el poema de Alfonso Reyes - , el mexicano le da la espalda a la aventura. Basta salir al campo el fin de semana para constatar que el leve picnic es imposible, y a la menor provocación se transforma en caravana, carrera de damnificados de guerra. El paseo, lastrado de vituallas, ya parece un preludio de migración. El mexicano - reconozcámolo - no viaja ligero: de ida lo abruman los presentes folclóricos, el tequila, la lata de chiles, el mole en polvo; de regreso revientan los velces de baratijas. Quizás esa incontinencia cargadora sea una de las razones que inhiban los viajes del mexicano o les prestan su peculiar característica de odisea doméstica, de tiflichófora expedición. No es un riesgo decir que el mexicano difícilmente viaja o que hasta hace muy poco no lo hacía: más bien se trasplanta con santos y brebajes, chipotle y “si muero lejos de ti”. Pertrehcado con esas misiones, se asoma a la escotilla y constata “como México no hay dos..., la variedad de nuestro clima..., el esplendor de las fiestas populares..., la cocina...” Pero si logra romper ese sanitario cordón umbilical, de todas formas no irá muy lejos. De Sao Paolo dirá: “Es como Acapulco, pero más grande”; de Houston: “Como Perisur por dentro y por fuera”; ¿Jerusalén?: “Por ahí se parece a la Merced”; ¿Bogotá?: “¿No te recuerda Pachuca?” ¿Y Madrid?: “Ah, Madrid, es como el México de antes...”  

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1 Adolfo Castañón, ‘Palabras pasajeras (Introducción)’, in Lugares que pasan, Cuaderno de Viaje (CNCA, 1998), pp. 17-20.
The place of edition is presumed to be Mexico City unless otherwise stated.

Since Mexican publishers do not distinguish clearly between new editions and simple reprints, full information has been given, exactly as described in the books themselves.

The following abbreviations for publishers and publications have been used throughout:

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