

6-7-2017

Six Short Stories from Juan Maya Avila's La venganza de los aztecas (mitos y profecias) in English Translation with Translator's Commentary

Yvonne Lybiet Herrera

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SIX SHORT STORIES FROM JUAN MAYA ÁVILA'S *LA VENGANZA DE LOS AZTECAS*
(*MITOS Y PROFECÍAS*) IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION WITH TRANSLATOR'S
COMMENTARY

A Thesis

by

YVONNE LYBIET HERRERA

Submitted to Texas A&M International University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2018

Major Subject: Language, Literature, and Translation

Six Short Stories from Juan Maya Ávila's *La venganza de los aztecas (mitos y profecías)* in

English Translation with Translator's Commentary

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Approved as to style and content by:

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December 2018

Major Subject: Language, Literature, and Translation

ABSTRACT

Six Short Stories from Juan Maya Ávila's *La venganza de los aztecas (mitos y profecías)* in
English Translation with Translator's Commentary (December 2018)

Yvonne Lybiet Herrera, Bachelor of Arts in English, Texas A&M International University;
Chair of Committee: Lola Orellano Norris

This thesis encompasses an English translation of six short stories from the collection titled *La venganza de los aztecas (mitos y profecías)* by Juan Maya Ávila. Each of the stories can be read to entertain the reader but also to gain insight into many interesting aspects of Mexican history as historical events and people have been fictionalized. The thesis, however, does not provide a literary analysis of the stories, but rather a translation analysis of the challenges faced by the translator during the process. In addition to the translation and analysis, the translator's methodology, a summary of the history of translation, and translation theories relevant to the translation are included.

The translation of a literary work involves countless revisions, corrections, and alternate decisions as part of the translation exercise. It is a decision-making process that seeks to form the best translation from a creative text. Despite this effort, numerous challenges can arise for the translator as they did in this instance for this thesis. Issues as varied as translating the humor of the author's culture, ambiguities in the source language, and how exactly untranslatable fit into the translation vexed the translator. The author has supplied his artistry to the work. It is the translator's job to re-create the text in another language and to provide accessibility to readers who do not know the author's language but would still like to be able to enjoy his work. These

stories stem from Juan Maya Ávila's language and culture; therefore, to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the author's culture, his beliefs, and his short stories, it is important to incorporate a short biography of the author as well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks and admiration to my thesis advisor and committee chair, Dr. Lola Orellano Norris. Her patience, understanding, and guidance during this thesis writing process has been boundless. Her invaluable input not only helped me complete the thesis, but also, I believe, made it better. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from Dr. Norris. She is the person who taught me that translation is the most challenging enjoyment one could ever have.

I would also like to thank the rest of my committee: Dr. Manuel Broncano Rodriguez, Dr. John Emory Dean, and Dr. Aaron Alejandro Olivas for their suggestions. Their perspectives provided me with new insight that allowed the ideas to develop into a thorough thesis.

And thanks to my family who was there to support me.

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INTRODUCTION

Thousands of languages exist today around the world. Some of them are unique to a culture, while others are shared by various cultures. Though many of these languages are related linguistically, the various cultures that speak them can be unrelated to one another in other aspects. These differences among cultures may, at times, cause such division that they lead to a point of complete incomprehension. Misunderstandings among peoples occur not only due to differences in culture, however, but also due to differences in language. Where the Tower of Babel story describes language as a force for division, translation of language can be used as a force for union, or at least, as an opportunity to learn from and about other cultures, in addition to sharing knowledge.

Literary works depict and represent a culture and its value system as well as its history and, as such, are worthy of translation if only to serve as a satisfaction for a curiosity about an unfamiliar culture. Despite cultural sensitivities and good faith efforts attempted in a translation, it must be said that not all words or ideas can be translated. Some languages have invented words for concepts or situations not known to other cultures. Others may simply have never had to invent words or expressions to name or describe situations, objects, or concepts that exist in another culture but not theirs. The word *tingo*, for example, from the Pascuense language of Easter Island, means “to borrow from a friend until he has nothing left” (betterthanenglish.com). The situation that the word *tingo* describes may not occur in many other cultures. However, this does not mean that literary works with such words should not be translated. On the contrary, offering an equivalence, the closest approximation of an unknown foreign term or a paraphrase of a culturally bound expression, will bring the reader closer to the text and allow him or her to

gain insight into another culture and its history.

The Present Project

The purpose of this thesis is to fashion an English translation of six short stories from a notable short story collection written in Spanish, *La venganza de los aztecas (mitos y profecías)* [The Vengeance of the Aztecs (Myths and Prophecies)] by Juan Maya Ávila. These stories bring Mexican history alive by describing characters, settings, and events in a style that looks to create myths from truth, not to obscure or propagandize the truth but to memorialize it and to explain that which is not known or that which is not understood. The stories are the author's fictionalized creations of the origin stories of today's Mexican people. The attempt to retell the history of Mexico in a creative way does not disrespect that history. By using actual historical figures in some of the stories, Maya Ávila provides a view into the past that makes it relatable to contemporary Mexicans and readers interested in other cultures alike. The author seeks to illuminate different stages of Mexico's history for everyone, but it is memories of the pre-Hispanic times that he fears are most in danger of being forgotten. For this reason, the stories of Maya Ávila can be claimed as expressions of *indigenismo*, the "diverse political, economic, and cultural movement that celebrated indigenous people and their traditions" (Giraud and Lewis, 3). Maya Ávila does not seek to merely eulogize Indian customs however, he wants to keep the practice of those traditions and customs ongoing. More than history lessons, his stories serve as a recognition of the universality of human frailties and shortcomings.

The Stories Selected

The six short stories that are being translated herein were written for the modern-day people of Mexico. It is their heritage that is in danger of being forgotten. When the old traditions and customs of the ancient indigenous people are lost, then that will signify the completed

conquest of the foreigners who came to exploit their land. Maya Ávila reclaims the history of the Mexican people, but he is also trying to teach lessons that will allow readers to learn from the mistakes of the ancestors. Some of these lessons come in humorous or tongue-in-cheek form such as the character of the *Infante* Pedro who vows to destroy the city of the invaders in Mexico. Every Mexican of a certain age will recognize the allusion to Pedro Infante, the crooner and heart throb actor of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema from the 1940s through the 1950s. And, the poet of Dolores, from the supposed excavated poetry fragment in the title story, is none other than José Alfredo Jiménez, the renowned Mexican singer and composer whose works make up an essential part of Mexico's musical history. Maya Ávila plays games with the names of popular figures, but he also describes the names of the ancient Aztec gods in various ways. For example, Huitzilopochtli, the hummingbird god of war, and the possessor spirit inside of the *Infante* Pedro causes Pedro to be known variously as Luis Lobos, as well as, Güicholobos, a compound of the words, Güicho (a nickname for Luis) and Lobos. Huitzilopochtli, in fact, was called Güicholobos by the Spaniards because it was easier for them to pronounce or because they wanted to denigrate the Aztec god (tradicionviva.es).

Although Maya Ávila uses humor as a technique, he raises serious points about the history of the Mexican people. The first story translated for this thesis, "Ixnahual," takes place forty-eight years before the Aztecs were conquered by the Spaniards and demonstrates the already deteriorating civilization of the Aztecs through the failure of communication among the Aztec royalty. The ancient Aztec beliefs failed to be comprehended by the next generation, thus leading to tragedy. The catastrophe continues in the next story, "Tepotzotlán (Corazón de Monte, Jorobado) [The Mountain Heart, Hunchback]." It, too, follows the path of the first story in that it describes the loss of recognition of the ancient Aztec gods by the younger generation. However,

in this story, the fall of the Aztec Empire has already occurred. The proud past slips away from the people who have been conquered and are now afraid. They want to believe that their condition will improve. The title story, within a story, since Father Álvarez's allegorical story is detailed alongside the leader Luis's story of "La venganza de los aztecas" [The Vengeance of the Aztecs] is a characterization of the steps taken by the people towards regaining their self-respect. The inhabitants of Mexico City place their faith in the *Infante* Pedro from the allegory written by the insane priest Bernardino Álvarez which may, really, be based on the factual person, Luis Lobos (according to Maya Ávila). In any case, the city is destroyed along with its physically and spiritually infected people so that it can be rebuilt as a better city free from any destructive influence of the foreign conquerors.

Remnants of the downtrodden remain, however, despite their attempt to improve their situation. The story "Amor y terror" [Love and Terror] is about Mexico's war for independence from Spain. Mexicans want their own identity; they want to be independent and free from the rule of the Spanish King. The insurgent captain Juan Aldama fights valiantly and ferociously but is captured and executed. His beloved, in her grief, becomes Mexico's newest idol, *La Santa Muerte*. The people are now presented with something that they can believe in and worship which is not from Catholic Spain, but which is also not part of the old Aztec gods. She, *La Santa Muerte*, is for those people who have nothing and will never have anything unless they break the law. She is the saint of last resort, much like the fight of last resort that has nothing to lose and that continues under the banner of the battalion of death.

After some years have gone by, Mexico is again at war. However, this time it is at war with itself. The story, "El hombre detrás de la incógnita," [The Man Behind the Mystery] is, at face value, about a wrestling match, or *Lucha Libre*. However, it is, in truth, about the struggle

between the reforms of the Mexican president Benito Juárez of Zapotecan descent and the Cora rebel, Manuel Lozada, who refused to give up his lands to the government. The Lozada representative wins the wrestling bout legitimately; but he is executed by the government. There is no end to injustice.

There will always be unjust cases that unsettle the reader. The last short story selected for translation, “Tanto signo y yo sin ojos” [So Many Signs and I Without Perception] could be staged to take place at any time and would still be troubling. It concerns the loss of remembrance of the Mexican past. That is, the founding Mexica people with their gods have been forgotten by modern-day Mexican people. Hércules Laercio is the victim of that loss, but it is the narrator who comes to realize that he, as a supposed enlightened person, has become distanced from his own ancestral history.

The fact that these short stories inform and entertain the reader are only two of the reasons that the stories deserve to be translated into English. They are a call for remembrance and pride in one’s Mexican-American ancestry, not to boast or to stifle other ancestries, but to learn one’s past and metaphorically build upon it.

Biography of the Author

Juan Maya Ávila was born in San Miguel Cañadas, Tepotzotlan, in the state of Mexico in 1980 (Maya Ávila, front cover). According to the website, realidadoaxaca.com, he continues to live there and frequently takes walks in the countryside where one can still see candles, offerings, slaughtered animals, and feathers. These are sights that could have been seen in pre-Hispanic times. The indigenous presence is felt in the town because its traditions have been retained by the people. Such is the place that inspired Maya Ávila to write [The Vengeance of the Aztecs (Myths and Prophecies)]. He states, “En mi pueblo se fue perdiendo la lengua, pero

en contraste hay un afán por aferrarse a los mitos, a las leyendas, a las costumbres y a bebidas como el pulque, que es vital” [In my town, our language was gradually lost, but, on the other hand, there is an eagerness to hold on to myths, legends, customs, and drinks like pulque, which is vital] (realidadoaxaca.com). Instead of teaching at the university, Maya Ávila does his part in preserving the town’s heritage by writing stories and making pulque (a fermented drink from the maguey plant). What matters to him is to continue the old customs and traditions and to be able to walk among some of the people of that place such as the *naguales*, witches, and other beings that were inherited from the pre-Hispanic cultures and that cannot be taken away again by anyone.

Juan Maya Ávila wants the Mexican people to remember their indigenous roots. Too often, the modern-day Mexican is caught up in the hustle and bustle of the big city. It is they who have forgotten that there was a different life and culture in Mexico before the conquerors came. The twenty-first century in Mexico is a necessary time to come to an understanding of the place of the present-day Mexican in his world. With the fall of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) [Revolutionary Institutional Party] in 2000, the egalitarian hopes for justice from the Mexican Revolution are finally dead. Poverty-stricken Mexicans do not have the same opportunities as their more affluent compatriots. And, a new reality has emerged in Mexican society that places the urban over the rural and the superficial over the profound. All things rural are, therefore, believed to have more value for the disheartened Mexican. More than treating the rural as an homage to the past however, Maya Ávila actively remembers and appreciates his small hometown where the old sights, rituals, food, and drinks are still seen, practiced, and eaten. He lives in a quiet place close to nature. In one interview, he admits that he does not feel the effects of globalization in his small town because he does not own a cell phone or communicate

on social media (Ruiz). Because of this fact, the thesis writer was unable to contact Maya Ávila to consult him regarding any questions she may have had about his text. Nonetheless, the author's isolation from the outside world may be what allows him to find the inspiration and imagination necessary to write his stories.

Maya Ávila received the Andrés Henestrosa International Prize for Story, Myth, and Legend in 2012 for his work, [The Vengeance of the Aztecs (Myths and Prophecies)]. This is a prize created to honor the Mexican author, Andrés Henestrosa, a person of Zapotecan descent and proponent of preserving indigenous heritage and culture. Having received this important award solidifies the book's place as a significant contribution to the world of literature. A translation of this work into English allows Mexican-Americans and outsiders a view into a rich and complex culture that advances understanding and appreciation among peoples.

A Brief History of Translation

For the purposes of this thesis, and because it does not involve a literary analysis of the stories, it is important to create an appropriate context for the translation. This includes, but is not limited to, exploring the history of translation by illuminating significant translators such as Cicero and St. Jerome whose work began the history of translation theory because they decided to write about their thoughts regarding the translation process. Additionally, an analysis of the translation process of the work and the challenges faced will be provided within a translator's commentary.

Octavio Paz stated, “aprender a hablar es aprender a traducir” [learning to speak is learning to translate] (qtd. in Cámara Aguilera 47). The great Mexican writer may have been referring to children translating their own sounds or symbolic gestures into words when they learn to speak (Child 7). However, if his statement is taken at face value, the more accurate

statement would be, “aprender a hablar es aprender a interpretar” [learning to speak is learning to interpret] because translating and interpreting, as academic terms, are not interchangeable.

Interpreting (the transmission of an oral text from one language to another) has been practiced since time immemorial and most likely began when humans from different groups first interacted with each other orally and had no writing system. In contrast, translation, which is always written, has been a necessary endeavor since humans developed the earliest writing systems because it is dependent upon one culture’s thoughts, ideas, and stories being communicated to other people by means of written texts. It is vital for the members of a different culture to translate texts from other languages so that they may acquire knowledge.

There is no better example of this exercise than the Romans’ work in translating the philosophy, literature, science, and mathematics of the ancient Greeks. The Greeks’ accomplishments included many breakthrough intellectual observations that allowed them to form a civilization intent on excellence, although, they, themselves, shortsightedly failed to translate from other languages into Greek (Barnstone 219). They believed that their language and culture was the greatest in the known world and, therefore, had little regard for other languages except for a few important works in those languages (Child 23). Their nationalism and ethnocentrism prevented them from accepting that they could learn something valuable from other cultures. The Romans, according to Susan Bassnett-McGuire, “perceived themselves as a continuation of their Greek models” in that they, too, wanted to excel, but the Romans were more inclusive about the peoples they conquered, so they were able to reap Greek knowledge while simultaneously acknowledging and adopting insights from whatever culture they found them in and, in this way, preserved and furthered knowledge to the advantage of Roman society (43). The example of striving to be the best of Western Civilization, or that civilization

consisting of the lands west of what would today be the Middle East, was set by the Greeks, but it was the Romans who transformed the Greek tradition of excellence by embracing other cultures and translating from the Greek and other languages into Latin.

During and after the collapse of the polytheistic Roman Empire, the rise of monotheistic religions in the world necessitated that the Word of God be spread to believers and potential believers, alike. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars set out to translate important works believed to have been dictated by God, Himself, and which were their respective religions' bases of belief. Each religious group held that the texts were sacred and did not want to seem as if they were attempting to change or interpret God's Word. Nevertheless, these translations of the holy books of the three major religions of the world were subject to intense scrutiny from God's representatives on earth who knew the original and target languages. Any word that appeared to deviate from God's message was called heresy and blasphemy and brought mayhem, injury, or death to the translator (Child 41). The translator's death was not sufficient, however, to pay for the offense, so his translations were also destroyed. The strict and eager judges not only destroyed lives, but also any knowledge that may have been offered by the translator. The opportunities to learn from cultures with different languages were stifled by those judges with their narrow-mindedness.

The life of the translator became somewhat less perilous during the reign of Alfonso X, el Sabio [The Wise] in thirteenth century Spain because of his willingness to accept different people of different beliefs in his kingdom in the name of peace and the furtherance of knowledge. People of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths lived peacefully in his realm because the king decreed it. King Alfonso X was a scholar who appreciated knowledge and "mandated translations and compilations aimed at fusing all knowledge in the vernacular"

(Britannica.com). It was during King Alfonso's reign that the renowned Toledo School of Translators flourished (Child 34). As people lived and worked beside each other in the city, the school was the home of academic pursuits that involved cooperation between the practicing translators of different religions and languages. Translators of Latin, Arabic, Hebrew, and Castilian translated into and out of their native languages and thrived in their pursuit of scholarly progress. In fact, the endeavor of translation lent prestige and recognition to the emerging Castilian language. Texts as varied as those pertaining to philosophy, literature, and mathematics were translated by the Toledo School of Translators when one translator translated a text into his language and then another translator who had knowledge of the first translator's language translated this already translated text into his own language to create another translation and so forth with subsequent languages, thus creating a circular chain of translation.

One may view this spirit of cooperation to be a positive turn for humanity. When this spirit is absent, however, confrontation causes disorder which does not allow for knowledge to be disseminated. Only when there is patient multi-lateral listening and translation can knowledge and friendship be shared among potential enemies. The time spent with a foreign friend is invaluable for this reason. However, when one cooperates with an invader who has come to exploit one's land and people, translation and/or interpretation becomes a negative pursuit. A case in point is La Malinche in Mexico, long considered a traitor to her people because she helped Hernán Cortés communicate with the indigenous peoples of Mexico by interpreting for him from the Mayan and Nahuatl languages into Castilian, thus allowing Cortés to conquer the Aztec Empire (Todorov 123). A young, enslaved girl with no personal power, she was blamed for the conquest of Mexico. Translators and interpreters have had to bear these types of accusations, injustices and worse throughout history. Yet, the practice of translation continued

because it was recognized by the intellectually curious for what it was, a way to advance knowledge and stimulate the acquiring culture into progress and innovation.

Summary of Translation Theory

Despite the hardships that many translators may have experienced over the course of history, the practice of translation endures and has generated influential thinkers who have brought forth several translation theories. Theoreticians work towards creating ways to explain the processes and motives of translation. During the early days of translation, Cicero, the Roman statesman and orator, wrote a carefully considered explanation of the individual translator's translation process. As he translated Greek works, Cicero described his method of refraining from translating literally, or word for word, by stating, "I did not think I ought to count them out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were" (Cicero, trans. Hubbard 365). He did not believe that it was appropriate to translate quantitatively, but rather qualitatively. While Cicero did not produce a formal translation theory, he recognized the importance of explaining the reasons behind his word choices; his translations from the Greek could be questioned and criticized by any educated Roman male citizen since most cultured Romans were Greek-Latin bilinguals (Child 24). Therefore, he made certain that his translation reasoning would be available through his writings to prevent any possible misunderstanding of his translations.

With the rise of Christianity, it became evident that for believers to be able to read and learn God's Words for themselves, not in ancient biblical languages, but in Latin, the prevailing language of the educated, a translation of the Bible needed to be undertaken. And, several translations of the Bible were, indeed, produced in Latin. However, many had been translated almost word for word in the belief that they were remaining "faithful" to the Word of God. The Catholic Church sustained that any change from the literal word meant that the translation would

be an interpretation and not the true Word (Bassnett-McGuire 46). This strict adherence to Bible text for fear of accusations of blasphemy caused translations to be awkward and frequently led to a loss of meaning (Child 13). One translator who, in 384 AD, dared to translate with the meaning of the text in mind, rather than the individual words was St. Jerome. He read Cicero and agreed with the Roman orator's thoughts on translation. St. Jerome's intention was to make the Bible readable, not exact. This could only be possible if he translated "sense for sense, not word for word" (Child 14). His procedure as well as the practice of translating into common Latin, rather than formal Latin, allowed readers who were not necessarily ordained into the Holy Orders access to a Bible that would later become known as the Vulgate Bible for this precise reason (Child 14). Translation into the language of the educated, if not yet the vernacular of the common people was, nevertheless, an advancement towards spreading God's Word.

As Christianity continued to spread around the world, the translation of the Bible served not only to proselytize, but also to educate (Bassnett-McGuire 50). The followers of the new religion learned morals and modes of behavior that brought order to a chaotic and incomprehensible world. In the British Isles, Christianity had been introduced to the people in the first century AD by the Roman craftsmen and traders who had arrived there to do business when they told stories about Jesus as well as stories about their own Roman gods (BBC.co.uk). But it was not until 597 AD when Augustine was sent to the island by Pope Gregory I that a true effort to convert the Anglo Saxon people to Christianity was undertaken (BBC.co.uk). He soon converted many to Christianity and by the ninth century, King Alfred the Great, in an attempt to rally and unite the downcast spirits of his people who had survived the destruction of their island's monasteries by marauding Vikings, declared that the reason to translate was to recover and rebuild the books and knowledge that had been lost (Bassnett-McGuire 50). Translation

served as the conduit to the writings that included both the religious and secular because King Alfred recognized that his county could only progress if philosophical and scientific advancements from other countries could make their way to Britain. In the process, “Alfred urges a revival of learning through greater accessibility of texts as a direct result of translations into the vernacular, and at the same time he asserts the claims of English as a literary language in its own right” (Bassnett-McGuire 51). Under Alfred’s leadership and influence, England was able to regain what it had lost while simultaneously creating royal subjects who were no longer excluded from scholarly literature previously only written in Greek and Latin.

Many years later, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, translators’ written thoughts on their processes of translation were still the only efforts that established some sort of translation theory. As was previously mentioned, the School of Translators in Toledo, Spain, active at this time, was innovative in that its translators translated among several languages: Arabic, Latin, Hebrew, and Castilian because these were the languages of the inhabitants of the city, namely, Muslims, Jews, and Christians. These translators represented specific religious segments of Toledo society. However, there was no animosity between them. On the contrary, typically working in groups of three, each translator had at least a general knowledge of the languages of the other two translators and cooperation permitted translations to be produced in the spirit of learning.

It was not until the Renaissance, which occurred in the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries, that a set of rules or guidelines about the process of translation was written down (Child 41). These procedures included ideas such as: the translator having to fully understand the text and know the author’s intent, the translator having an excellent comprehension of both the source and target languages, the importance of translating towards

conveying the meaning of the text, not the literal word, the use of common language, and the translator having the ability to produce the tone of the original text in the translation (Child 42). These principles were developed in the sixteenth century by Etienne Dolet, a Frenchman who unfortunately suffered the consequences of the practice of translation. He was tortured and killed for allegedly mistranslating a work of Plato in such a way that seemed to point towards the denial of man's immortality (Child 42). Dolet's translation, according to the Catholic Church, was heretical because it went against the Christian teachings about Heaven and life after death. Christian doctrine still dictated in the world of the Renaissance.

As time went on and the Age of Enlightenment, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, placed its emphasis on reason and science, rather than on religion, translation theory was evolving and received new ideas from practitioners of translation. John Dryden, an Englishman, organized translations into three types: metaphrase (word for word), paraphrase (sense for sense) and imitation (Child 101). The last type is technically not translation since the translator is changing or adapting the text; he has, in fact, become an author, not a translator. Dryden believes that conveying the sense of the text is more important than translating every word. He states his view in his essay, "On Translation" this way: "A translator that would write with any force or spirit of an original must never dwell on the words of his author. He ought to possess himself entirely and perfectly comprehend the genius and sense of his author, the nature of the subject, and the terms of the art or subject treated of. And then he will express himself as justly, and with as much life, as if he wrote the original: whereas he who copies word for word loses all the spirit in the tedious transfusion" (qtd. in Schulte, Rainer, & John Biguenet 31). Dryden's recognition that a translator must thoroughly understand what he is about to translate so that his translation may sound, not like a translation, but like the original and that translating

word for word makes a translation awkward furthers the initial attempts at translation theory by Cicero and St. Jerome.

While Dryden's categorization of three types of translation, as well as his thoughts on the translator's freedom to rewrite or create, were important advances in the translation field, a subsequent different approach to translation was innovative and revolutionary. In the eighteenth century, "Wilhelm von Humboldt made the vital connection between language and culture, language and behavior" (Snell-Hornby 40). It was he who recognized that language was what made an individual capable of expressing his culture while simultaneously experiencing that same culture. This does not mean that language sprung from the individual's experience as a mere combination of words grouped together, however. Language, for von Humboldt, is fluid, not inert. It is a living thing that creates and adopts some words, while it rejects others for reasons as varied as not being in current use. Language is also what allows an individual's personality to be revealed through his choice of words and his behavior. In effect, the individual acts as his culture prescribes and then uses his language to demonstrate. Culture, then, is presented through language. Von Humboldt's concept meant that "each language by its structure and formation was able to represent a specific view of the world (plato.stanford.edu).

Translation theory progressed into the twentieth century when Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf started from von Humboldt's breakthrough and developed their own theory which concludes that translation is not possible because language is inextricably linked to culture and two different peoples from different cultures cannot understand the other's world view if they have two different languages. In their view, language simply cannot accommodate that which it cannot experience. So, because the Inuit's language contains multiple words for snow, a

translator into Swahili will not be able to translate them because sub-Saharan Africa does not understand the concept of snow if one accepts the concept of Sapir and Whorf (Washbourne 7).

The term, “intercultural communication,” coined by Edward T. Hall, challenges Sapir and Whorf in that it states that it is not impossible to communicate among different cultures (Katan 74). The fault of miscommunication is not due to language, but rather to “other, silent, hidden, or unconscious yet patterned factors” (Katan 74). These factors undoubtedly include culture. Culture cannot be divorced from language. The translator must be able to recognize or learn to identify the cultural contexts of both languages he works with so that he may produce a good translation and thus, be able to engage in intercultural communication. Nonetheless, in Hall’s perspective, translation is possible if the translator is diligently aware of the elements within that other culture.

Even with Hall’s theory of communication between cultures, other theorists believe that different languages are interconnected despite cultural differences. For example, the Romance languages which include Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and French may be spoken by different people who have distinct cultures, but, nevertheless, at times seem to employ similar sounding words or use analogous concepts. Languages flow from one into another based on their relatedness. That is, a person who speaks French may have an easier time learning Spanish than Mandarin because Spanish is related linguistically to French. The poet Ezra Pound “thinks not in terms of separable languages, but of a mesh or interweaving of words that bind people regardless of nationalities” (Gentzler 19). Pound may have been familiar with Miguel Cervantes’ writing in *Don Quijote de la Mancha* where Cervantes describes the process of translating as a Flemish tapestry where the threads are loomed to create images but are seen from behind. The words of a translation can be considered as being worked on a loom in the head of the translator in order to

create a beautiful translation. Cervantes, however, warns that a translation, much like a Flemish tapestry, is in danger of having loose threads in the back (Child 88). Translation for Cervantes is not a perfect or finite art.

Subsequent theories grew out of the work of Eugene Nida who believed that translation was possible by discovering the deeper meaning of a source text, finding the equivalent deeper meaning in the target language, and then clothing this meaning in the appropriate words in the target language thus allowing the translation to be accomplished (Child 16-17). Further theories include Roman Jakobson's own development of a classification for three different types of translation: intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic. He identifies intralingual translation when it happens within the same language, such as when the register of a language is changed, that is, writing formally to one's future boss to invite her to the company picnic and then writing informally to your coworkers to invite them to the same company picnic; the same ideas are being communicated but with different words of the same language. Interlingual translation, according to Jakobson, is translation proper, meaning translation from one language into another, such as from English into Spanish (Child 64). Finally, intersemiotic translation can be defined as the rendering of a text, of verbal signs, as non-verbal signs; for instance, a nod to signify the word "yes" or the rendering of a novel as a ballet performance (Child 64). What is commonly thought to be translation can actually be categorized as interlingual translation.

Methodology of the Translator

The six short stories selected for translation from the original Spanish source text into an English target text are examples of interlingual translation. The aim of the translator was to try to convey in English the world of the stories which covers a range of time in a specific place, Mexico. The stories are presented chronologically from pre-Colombian times to the modern day.

The topic was very interesting to the translator, but it was also challenging in that some of the subject matter and situations were explicit regarding how horrific, shocking, and crude they are. Maya Ávila does not sanitize the truth of the history he is portraying. But he does offer his humor to lighten the mood. His are very vivid stories that come metaphorically to life the more times they are read, something that is also required of the translated text.

When initiating the task of translating, the translator first had to read the text and then read it again and again, until she was certain that she had understood it thoroughly. Once the text was read, the translator wrote down any words, phrases, or concepts that were unknown for dictionary consultation. There were several words that the translator did not recognize. This was usually due to the fact that words like *tecpan*, *pulque*, *nahual*, or *calmecac* were from the Nahuatl language, but there were other words or concepts that she was unaware of as well. Terms such as: *llamar a degüello*, *las artes del pancracio*, *Tepito*, *jicarero*, and *chingüirin* needed further research. Several dictionaries such as monolingual and bilingual resources were utilized in addition to several webpages to find information. The first source consulted was the *Oxford Bilingual Spanish/English Dictionary*. When that resource was lacking, the monolingual *Pequeño Larousse Spanish Dictionary* was consulted. This dictionary was particularly helpful in describing terms. With a description obtained, the translator then looked in a monolingual English dictionary, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, to find the described term or concept in English. When these resources failed, web pages such as: mobile-dictionary.reverso.net, aboutworldlanguages.com and babel.hathitrust.org (for the H. M. Hubbard translation of Cicero's *De Optimo Genere Oratorum* from the Latin into English) were very useful.

In addition to the research involved regarding unknown words and concepts, the decision to translate the footnotes was also important because they are essential to the tone of the short

story collection. These footnotes are provided by the author tongue-in-cheek to make the collection appear to be a serious and straight forward academic work, but they are much more than that; they are a humorous dig at the absurd futility of the upper-class intelligentsia of Mexican society at the turn of the twentieth century, especially in the story, *La venganza de los aztecas* [The Vengeance of the Aztecs]. Although the footnotes include real people in history such as José María Marroquí, the name of his published work in the footnote is exaggerated. Marroquí did, in fact, publish a work in three volumes (*La ciudad de México* [The City of Mexico], published in 1900) about the significance of the street names in Mexico City, but it is not called *Plano milimétrico de la nobilísima capital de México* [Millimetric Plans of the Most Noble Capital of Mexico]. The author, Juan Maya Ávila, is making fun of the meticulous nature and subject of Marroquí's actual work.

THE TRANSLATIONS

Ixnahual

Yayauhqui tlazolli, iztac tlazolli, Xoxouhqui tlazolli
Onihualla ni tlamacazqui
Ni nahualtecuhli

[Pardo amor inmundo, blanco amor inmundo, celeste amor inmundo;
he llegado, yo, sacerdote,
Yo, señor nahual]

[Dun and dirty love, white and dirty love, blue and dirty love;
I have arrived, I, a priest,
I, a lord nahual]

(a Nahual incantation compiled by H. Ruiz de Alarcón in 1629)

Tlatelolco, 1473. Yesterday, the morning was hazy; today, the day broke full of blood.

The women, concealed within the light fog, entered the *tecpan*, or royal house, readying themselves for war. Moquihuix ordered us, his soldiers, to block the path of that throng. He feared that his children in the innermost room of the palace would hear the commotion. When the women left the *tecpan*, Moquihuix entered the oratory of the spirit animal, the Ixnahual and, there, he searched for the sacred animal. It was behind the altar, with its eyes open, calm, slowly wagging its tail. The emperor stroked its head once and then again while repeating the propitious spells.

The sun's shadow slid across the stonemasonry wall. The children were playing in the courtyard. Usually, at this time, the teachers would be instructing them. The presence of our lord interrupted their amusement.

“Princes of Xaltitlco, this is the Ixnahual,” said Moquihuix and raised the sacred animal before them. “Guard him.” Our enemies are about to disembark. They called themselves our brothers; their fathers never forgot that we were pilgrims on the same road. Today, taking

advantage of the dawn, they want to attack us. The villages on the shores have become their allies. The obsidian breaks, arrows fall from the sky...”

Moquihuix noticed his children’s bafflement. At that moment, they would have preferred to have been far from the *tecpan*, bathing in the springs or running through the forests along the edge of the lake. The sounds of the drums alerted Moquihuix. The lookouts had spotted the first canoes on the horizon. There was little time to waste. The lord of Tlatelolco hurried to make his entreaty:

“When our people arrived from the northern lands, the most urgent issue was to find a place to build our temples and houses. Three priests looked for a favorable sign among the bulrushes; and, on the way to Zoquipan, they discovered a hole in the middle of the lake; the water was bubbling from the hole. It was dense, as if from a deep wound. It spat out fish, snails, frogs, and nutria and then the sacred animal, which glided over the waves. It reached our grandparents’ feet. They had never seen such a creature before and led it to the shore to light a fire in front of it. Ixnahual, captivated by the blue and gold flames, smeared his snout with clay, recited magic spells and first became smoke, then man. He ordered that a house be built at that very place, one that we came to call Ixnahualtonco. He ceased being a man and became a vessel. Inside, there was water and, in the water’s reflection, a full moon. The three priests were imprudent and drank from that water. In the following days, the skin on their jaws peeled off...”

Someone called to Moquihuix with alarm. Our lord ordered the children not to move. They looked out and, despite the distance, were able to discern something. It was one of the dark Ixnahual’s priests. His jaw had been broken; he was bleeding from his shoulders and bore a knife wound in his side. Moquihuix returned to the courtyard with a bundle. He called his oldest son and asked him to open the package. Inside, there were replicas of the Tlatelolcan generals’ suits. He made him give one to each of his brothers: hides, feathers, quivers and arrows, shields, maces, darts, and blow pipes. Finally, the lord and his heir perfumed the Ixnahual with incense on the household altar of that courtyard. Moquihuix, before leaving, looked his firstborn in the

eye and implored him with strong words: “This is my nahual. Should our enemies reach all the way here, exact a high price for it.”

Moquihuix left with us. Shouts and drums could be heard from far away. Smoke sullied the sky. The clouds were stained with blood. A rain of arrows came down. The women who had burst into the *tecpán* fell at the feet of their sons. We, Tlatelolcan warriors, fought the rest of the day. In the afternoon, our army lost the beaches that surround the island.

Moquihuix's Death

Some people say that they saw him die drowning in tears, curled up in his dirty clothes, his will having failed him. However, those who tell those tales of disgrace are not Tlatelolcan, they come from the other city. The Tlatelolcan warriors of this land saw him die at the hands of Axayacatl. They found each other face to face at the Great Temple. The jades shined brightly.

After throwing rocks, sticks, and arrows, they started with their knives half way up the steps, injuring each other in equal measure. The combat became fierce. But strangely, within seconds, at the top of the temple, Moquihuix fell to his knees, threw down his weapons, and wrapped his arms around himself in anguish as if the unbearable chill of death was already upon him. Axayacatl took advantage of the moment and hit him on the head with a club. The war ended there. At that very spot, his murderer had him quartered. Arms, legs, entrails, and sexual organs were left scattered on the temple stairs. Before twilight, on orders from Axayacatl, the head of our lord was buried at the summit of Xitle, the volcano called “the navel”, more than seven leagues from both cities. Moquihuix was feared; it was said that he was a great sorcerer. Even now, our cowardly enemies can see his shroud in the corn fields or flying over the neighborhoods of their wretched Tenochtitlan.

While Moquihuix was being beheaded, his wives, some old priests and we, the warriors, ran to the palace; we had to protect the princes. As they entered the courtyard, the elders began to cry at the scene they were witnessing. Later, far from Tlatelolco, they pierced the children's tongues and forced them to inhale chile for their stupidity. They opened the chest of the oldest, the heir, spilling his blood. The children of the great nahual of Tlatelolco had blood on their hands: Moquihuix's firstborn, the actual murderer of his father, full of ire, was holding an obsidian knife in one hand and, in his other hand, his war trophy: the head of the sacred animal. He had sacrificed him with rage. The younger brothers pulled and held the nahual by the extremities; and the firstborn decapitated him on the altar. The blood was dripping in a trickle from the Ixnahual's mouth. He was the brother of the god of death. But like any other dead being, his tongue protruded; and he did not come alive again.

The priests subdued Moquihuix's oldest son and separated him from his brothers. The firstborn's mother tried to prevent the Xaltilolcan heir's death and argued that Axayacatl was also a powerful nahual and may very well have bewitched the prince. The priests paid her no heed. After they opened the assassin's chest, all of them smeared themselves with the noble blood of the prince and cast themselves forth to fly in circles over Tenochtitlan to curse the city from the heavens.

Ixnahualtonco, the *tecpan* of *nahuales*, still stands among the houses of mist. It will continue do so until the two Mexicos come to an end.

Tepotzotlan (The Mountain Heart, or Hunchback)

In the east, at daybreak, there appeared one, two, three spheres in the sky. They began to burn, dimly, like lit pieces of coal. The portent terrified those who were awake and crowded into the main square of the recently destroyed Mexico City. Three equal suns. And of the three,

which was the one that had received the many prayers and offerings of humanity? The theologians saw it as God being flanked by two identical ghosts.

At noon, that triple omen shone on the domes of the churches and the cathedral. An ethereal fire threatened to choke the hundreds of witnesses. At one in the afternoon, the sun that faced north and the sun on the south side started to turn black, like smoking mirrors. The north sun became dark at 2:00 p.m. The southern sun suffered the same fate at 3:00 p.m. The real ball of fire remained in the center. It was enormous. It spread its tentacles of light and was approaching the earth.

II

He looked like a drunk, limping, dressed as a beggar. He pronounced words and murmurs and the two false suns blackened. He wanted to strike fear in the people and when day broke, that cripple created the signs: two false suns, a grand act of magic. In the end, at exactly one o'clock in the afternoon, tired, he lowered his head, said the spells and his falsehoods were extinguished. He readied his departure. At that instant, the rumor of death sounded everywhere, and his scrawny chest became agitated; far away, he heard a heron squawk, a wave break, the clack of a knife upon a rock. Sounds of another age.

He walked in the direction of what is now San Hipólito. The smell of the slaughter was still present. The blood could not be erased from the dust. Nor could the wind erase the wails of the corpses. The old road ended near Tlacopan. At Azcapotzalco, the beggar covered himself with a tiger skin cloak and selected the mountain paths of the north.

After walking past hill after hill, he stopped many leagues later at the foot of a curved hill. In the times of blood, that little hill was ruled by a hunchback; he had confronted the Spaniards and died, having been hurled from his own temple. The former ruler's house in ruins

could be seen on the top of the hill. Within those ruins, a ridiculous chapel protected a wooden cross.

The Cripple tossed his cloak aside. Night was falling; the moonlight illuminated his limp, a section of bare bone, the leg of a dead man.

III

...the leg of Death, itself. That is how José Quinatzin, son of the hunchback ruler, saw it in his dream. He awoke at that very moment although his fatigue was heavy. The night seemed calm; the sounds of cicadas, frogs and crunching branches. Quinatzin recognized disasters and their signs. As a child, he saw comets (necromancers' omens) and his father rolling down the steps of the *tecpan* with an ax plunged into his hump.

His noble elder's heart, a prince's heart, was disturbed by the presence of those three suns in the sky that day. He felt an even worse uncertainty in his dream about the Lame One with a skeleton leg. He knew, of course, which god it represented. He did not sleep. He left his hut and listened to the languid running of the river. He watched the path lit by the full moon. He was alerted by steps. An animal was coming through from the dark end of the trail. José Quinatzin remained still. A coyote appeared; his fine fur was silvery in the moonlight. He sniffed the ground with his snout and came forward with confident steps. The man thought that the animal would disappear into the darkness. The coyote stopped. José Quinatzin left his hiding place and faced him; as he neared him, the animal retreated hurriedly a few meters. José chased it and the coyote moved aside as they sized each other up this way for a while on the bank of the little stream. José tried to get ahead through a shortcut and turned at a bend. He did not find the coyote, but a man who, when walking, had a limp. José froze as he felt that form come closer; he should have stayed to verify that it was Skeleton Leg, but Quinatzin fled. As he returned home,

the fever cut into his body. He barely made it to his bed. That is how they found him in the morning, burning with fever. Although the doctor tried every remedy, there was no improvement.

IV

He awoke. He could have made three other suns, annihilated the city, increased the lake waters, dyed them with blood... No, they had their sun, rising anew; his gift to them. The world ceased to exist for him. Without blood rites, war poetry, or nights of madness, his spirit was slowly returning to the mountain's echoes, to the sound of the foliage, to the tiger's mystery...

...A rocky path: he followed it until he reached the ravine; he descended at the untamed walls. Below, a sated river advanced in the gorge. Crystalline water. He made out two beaten bodies, rippling in the current. He removed them with some branches. It was two rattlesnakes. Dead. He stretched them out on the sand; their rattles made sounds. "What beautiful animals," thought the Lame One. Both had blank eyes. He planned to light a fire to burn them; at that moment, he sensed an agitation in the water. He turned around and saw a dark body on the surface moving with utmost smoothness. It was a fish. It swam level with the sand so that it could feel the sun's warmth. The Cripple followed it; he envied the peaceful world in which the animal moved, yearned to live there. He felt tired, ready to live in melancholy. His eternal heart wept.

The fish stopped where a ray of sun penetrated the water and made the sand shine like a treasure. The Lame One needed that body; and being a god, he occupied it. In the next minute, he felt the sun on the water warm his scales. He opened his eyes; the crystalline world of the profane, a concert of lights and blue shadows was a mystery no more. He moved on the pond

from end to end. The creatures that lived there recognized him, stopped their movements, and prostrated themselves motionless to let him pass.

The time to leave came so he approached the bank.

Then a shadow moved on the beach. He raised his fish head and made out the distorted image of a man...

V

The youngest son of José Quinatzin asked the Otomies of Capula for a cure to help his father. They described a simple medicine. Once he knew it, he prepared his harpoon and, in the morning, took to the mountain. In a special pond, supplied by water flowing from a spring in the mountains, he found a good-sized carp. He watched it from the bank. The docile prey seemed to surrender to him. His weapon pierced the animal's body; and he drew it in. Out of the water, the fish flapped around a bit and stained the sand with blood.

The murderer, child of an Indian man and a Spanish woman, did not know the identity of the coyote-carp, tiger, or magic smoke. On the margins of the little hunchback hill, among the huisache trees, the mestizo, not yet having taken the cure to his father, came across the damp corpse of a beggar with a fleshless leg, his heart pierced by a spear.

The Vengeance of the Aztecs

Tepito is the heart of Mexico

And Mexico is the Tepito of the world.

(Verses from Tepito)

Brother Bernardino Álvarez wrote in his *Pax et Bonum*: “The archangel Francis devoured the city with his ferocious jaws and blinded the pretentious frilly-collared foreigners. I also know that the *Infante* Petro, a voracious warrior, lies in wait at Siete Cuevas.”¹

¹ *Pax et Bonum*, 12:3.

The archangel Francis character is Brother Álvarez's allegory in which he attempts to expand the apocalyptic nature of his work. Although, really, he is demonstrating the era's depraved character that he foretold, as others had done with Babylon.

In mid-year of 1566, in a lot next to the convent of St. Hipolyte in ancient Mexico City, Brother Bernardino founded the first hospital for the insane in the New World. The friar controlled his sanatorium for thirteen years until he himself became insane. As soon as he began to feel his reason become diminished, he decided of his own accord to confine himself in the convent of San Fernando. In that place, he wrote the aforementioned apocalyptic work where he states, "There will be a leader who will be born very near to where I now write. He will raise the old and humiliated blood of the Indians and bring about the end of the archangel Francis."²

His writings were compiled in 1878 by Don Luis Malanco in the masterpiece titled *Pax et Bonum*.

Thanks to the recent archeological finds in the mythical vestiges of Mexico City, we know that Brother Bernardino Álvarez was correct in some of his visions. Other rarely-read sources also confirm it: the Fernandine Catechumens³, for example, bequeathed to us their interpretations of the aforementioned *Pax et Bonum* and the theory that the heir of the archangels would be chained to the heavens, face-up, by a hero with Aztec blood. We even preserve around a hundred legends that narrate the life of the *Infante* Pedro Güicholobos⁴ who has been linked to Friar Bernardino's allegorical character, Petro. It is difficult to trace the historical origin of Güicholobos. Some devotees faithfully accept the disordered stories about this personage as fact,

² Ibidem, 4:15.

³ The last seminarians of the San Fernando convent of Mexico City, from where missionary campaigns departed toward the northern part of the country.

⁴ Legends disguised as prophecies that were compiled by Don Luis González Obregón in *Verdaderas visiones del Apocalipsis mexicano: Profetas varios*. Work edited by Don Manuel Porrúa in 1935.

swallowing them up like orphaned calves drinking from a bottle, while others may be working on shaping a reliable biography. These notes are for those who may bring something to the table.

Last year, historian E. H. Noriega, a very close friend of mine, worked on a project at the ruins of the crowded Guerrero neighborhood. By chance, he discovered a plaque with the inscription: Magnolia Street. While excavating the area, thanks to the maps of Don José María Marroquí,⁵ my colleague located the foundations of a French-like construction. When first built, it must have been a lovely structure; later when it fell into disrepair, it housed the disreputable. In his subsequent excavations, E. H. Noriega found the element that won him the annual archeology prize: the remains of a wall with a fragment of the verses of “Oh, dear dove” attributed to the poet José of Dolores:⁶

You found me on a black path
 Like a pilgrim
 Without direction or faith.
 By the light of your divine eyes
 My sorrows became
 Joy and pleasure.
 I do not know what my life is worth,
 But I give it to you now.

Some legends from Tepito tell that the savior’s father, haunted by his sins, wrote that poem on the wall before he triggered the tragedy. The historical materials that survived and the correlation

⁵ Marroquí, José María. *Plano milimétrico de la nobilísima capital de México*. La Europea; Mexicaltzingo, 1907. Vol. II, p. 325-326.

⁶ Mystic who has been called the *St. John of the Cross of Guanajuato*. His doctrine is influenced by the philosopher Plotinus. Thus, he demonstrates a clear disdain for life, while similarly enjoying its daily return. Today, this poet has few works preserved. In times past, his verses were sung copiously in bars and brothels. The fragment that was found by E. H. Noriega corresponds to a lyric poem that praises the Holy Spirit and unabashedly exchanges the figure of the white dove with that of a female subject.

with bibliographic sources have made it possible for the location that was excavated by E. H. Noriega to be named as the neighborhood where, in interior 10, Luis Lobos and Tamar Cruz, the *Infante* Pedro's parents, lived. Many people associate Güicholobos' mother with the white dove, which represents the Holy Spirit.

If Tamar is compared to a symbol of such purity, it is because, according to the facts, she is Luis Lobos' victim. Rosaura Hernández, a teacher and E. H. Noriega's grandmother, left a written statement⁷ that Guerrero's survivors were re-located to the Sacred Heart neighborhood of Veracruz after the city's incineration. There they formed a church, where Tamar received complete devotion.

Tamar was born in Peralvillo. She met Luis Lobos in high school. Before they had even dated a year, he deflowered her. They rarely attended school. They played hooky and went to the Chinese Palace, the Alameda, and the steam baths. In time, Tamar Cruz became pregnant. Her parents refused to listen to reason and threw her out. In those moments of tribulation, Luis and Tamar sought refuge in San Fernando. The catechumens, who sensed something because they read Friar Bernardino regularly, allowed them to spend nights in the cemetery's covered walkway.⁸

Luis Lobos began to work as a merchant and they were able to rent a room. After the fifth month of pregnancy, Luis asked Tamar to get rid of the baby. Tamar declined at first; Luis beat her until she gave in. The abortion was done negligently in the Magnolia neighborhood. A clandestine doctor, as can be gathered from González Obregón's compendium of legends, carried

⁷ Hernández, Rosaura. *La iglesia de la Paloma Blanca y su relación con los textos dolorosos*. Mexican Institute of Culture Toluca, New Era.

⁸ Graveyard next to the convent of San Fernando, famous for containing the tombs of Mexico's eminent people of the 19th century. Fifty years ago, José Palestina, an engineer, financed by the National Indigenous Institute, discovered the tombs of Benito Juárez and General Tomás Mejía. Today, those tombs are on display, one of them in Celaya's Museum of History and the other in the Gallery of Distinguished Traitors in Romita, Michoacán.

out the surgery. The physician performed a caesarian section but made the incision too large. Luis Lobos watched his wife, her body open and bleeding out. Remorseful, and in a sort of trance of atonement, he painted José of Dolores' verses on the wall. The doctor extracted a bloody fetus who trembled as if from being cold, but they were death throes. The little body became waxy in the depraved man's hands. However, another fist sprung at once from Tamar's open womb. It was Güicholobos. At birth, he measured 12 inches and looked like a baby Jesus made of porcelain. With one hand he strangled the doctor and with the other snatched the dead twin's body. The first lesson learned by the savior was to recognize his own death in his brother's dead body, a mirror that was provided by the gods. He, himself, baptized his brother with his mother's blood; he named him Monstrous Dog⁹ and then threw him out of a window so that he would be humiliated and torn to pieces in the street. The young mother was still able to see the body of the dead fetus fly through the air; then her eyes swelled up, she stiffened her body, and died.

The miracle child spared his father's life and took his name, Luis Lobos, from which the name Güicholobos derives. However, in the version of the Tepito scribes,¹⁰ the hero killed his father as an act of mercy so that he would not have to carry the guilt of Tamar's and Monstrous Dog's murders. Whether true or not, what is certain is that Güicholobos became orphaned at a young age. In his youth, he lived with the indigent children of San Fernando. When he turned 15 or 16, one of his father's brothers went to pick him up and took him to Tepito. There, he learned the trade of informal merchant. There is no further information about Güicholobos until the age

⁹ Like the Xolotl of the ancient Chichimecs.

¹⁰ Sect of scribes. In reality, they were from around Santo Domingo, but having been struck by faith in devotion to the *Infante* Pedro, they renamed themselves as being from Tepito. They gave themselves over to the task of documenting the life and work of the savior. Their writings were never published. What is known about them has been through the oral tradition.

of 33; by then, he is already a sturdy, olive-skinned, mustachioed, and strong-armed man. He also sang, often at the Garibaldi Plaza. Apolonio of Tepito¹¹ left us a testimonial titled, “I Met the *Infante Pedro*.”¹² “People looked at him, his striped shirt and skipper’s cap drew their attention. He was a handsome man. A woman selling bootleg records shouted: ‘He looks just like *The Idol!*’ And I, recalling the old Fernandine prophecies, lavished his new name around the barrio: *Infante Pedro Güicholobos*.”

Pedro participated in all types of trade, including the dark dealings of La Merced. Before he turned 40, he was the spiritual owner of Tepito and was named leader of the street vendors. Virginal women followed him everywhere; old men marveled as they listened to him speak; and he was respected by his buddies who always regarded him as being brave and witty.

One time he accompanied his uncle to the Zócalo. There, dancers were re-creating ancient Aztec rituals. Güicholobos had his first revelation as he observed the circles and spirals, the fire and the wind restoring themselves in human bodies. The afternoon gave way to the night. Pedro deciphered the wisdom of the ancients in the writings of the stars. A few weeks later, he joined the dance group. At night, he attended the talks of Aztec resurgence conducted among blood and wine rituals in a large house on Jesús María Street, where he began his worship to Quetzalcoatl and recognized the figure of Huitzilopochtli in himself.

Despite his interest in the secrets of the Mexica, he never neglected his obligations as spiritual chief of Tepito; and he was named captain of the dancers’ legions. His fame began to spread. From San Pablo, La Candelaria, Mixcalco, La Lagunilla, San Lázaro, Belén, Tultenco, to a part of Viga, Iztapalapa and its villages of poor people, the tribes of the different

¹¹ Theosophist of the rough neighborhood. He was a friend of the uncle of Güicholobos. Thanks to this fact, he was a witness to the wonders that occurred.

¹² Apolonio. “*Yo conocí al Infante Pedro*”. José María Sandoval Printing, Jesús María Street, Number 4, Veracruz.

neighborhoods found out who that *Infante* Pedro Güicholobos was who had taken dancers to Tepito and vendors to the Zócalo. The Mexico City authorities could do nothing when he reinstated the Parián in the heart of the Plaza Mayor.

The second revelation was also predicted by Friar Bernardino: “The archangel Francis has been discovered; he trembles in the dusty corners; he whimpers; and his tears draw in Güicholobos, who sweetly whispers his vengeance.”¹³ The scribes of Tepito write that on the early morning of the next revelation, Güicholobos woke up in a trance and went out into the street with his member showing. He was seen walking barefoot from his uncle’s house to the cathedral where he walked in and interrupted mass. The priests fled; parishioners from adjacent neighborhoods began to arrive. The *Infante* took a picture of the archangel Francis from the pulpit and broke it on the floor. The crowd watched him, anxiously. Among them, Apolonio could not be missed: “I heard someone ask him in a loud voice, as soon as Güicholobos had smashed the archangel’s picture, how they could conquer Francis and Christ. He responded: with leprosy. He swore that he would infect the great Tenochtitlan and, at that point, asked us to wake our conscience and make ruins on top of ruins.”¹⁴

In effect, any high school graduate of Mexico knows by heart that the ancient capital was devastated in less than a hundred years because of an infallible pestilence. Those who believe in one solitary uncontrollable epidemic of leprosy are wrong. When Güicholobos spoke of leprosy, he made a forceful statement. He did not merely provoke it in a physical sense; rather, he made it into an urban, spiritual pestilence that went beyond the flesh. It can now be affirmed that the archangel Francis symbolizes as one the metropolis proper; he is a metaphor of the collapse, the corruption, the permanence of a convalescing religion. That is why his sword hangs between his

¹³ *Pax et Bonum*, 47:8.

¹⁴ Apolonio: p. 109.

thighs with utter lack of stateliness. The iconographic representations that exist of him demonstrate a return to the dark baroque of unintelligible voids. The Catholic Church had only recently adopted the fabrication of this figure, but he lasted less than half a century on the list of martyrs. Güicholobos knew that the archangel meant depravity and concluded that a God who cures leprosy could only be destroyed with leprosy.

The reinstatement of the Parián meant that Güicholobos would be solidly established in the city's heart. From there, he set off in the four directions, heading long lines of merchants that he guided through the streets and assigning them spots at will. Soon there was no vacant space left at the informal market. However, in the Guerrero neighborhood, the prostitutes, drug dealers, vagrants, and those who were mentally touched denied the savior's name. That heretical mob burned down the main gate of San Fernando, murdered the seminarians and, in the cemetery, threw a wild party over Friar Bernardino's grave. It would be the first neighborhood to be razed.

Five years later the city was overrun by multi-colored tents and numerous ear-splitting noises. The churches and cemeteries were looted, people slept and defecated in the streets, and garbage clogged the neighborhoods. Everything was bought and sold in that enormous open-air market: anyone who was an orphan could buy a mother, or a child, or a body part. Organs such as hearts, livers, lungs, and male genitalia were sold for witchcraft and fetishisms. Deals involved various sorts of drugs, be they mind-altering, common to the neighborhood, musical, or electronic. The possibilities in the sexual domain went beyond anyone's fill in passion and lust. And, finally, when the other leprosy began to emerge, unheard of items were sold: the saliva of an albino pig in two or three-ounce sizes, the jawbone of an amphetamine addict, or backings and chairs with various odors.

When that first leprosy epidemic devoured the city, the stars came together in service to Güicholobos. Someone informed him that the last of the infected had died in the country's last leper colony (located on the border with Chalco). Therefore, clothes, blankets, sheets, and other belongings of the lepers were to be incinerated in the desert. It was not difficult to bribe the health authorities, and so a convoy of fifteen buses traveled from Chalco towards the heart of Mexico. There, the objects were distributed principally in the second-hand clothing market that was behind the convent of San Antonio Abad; in fewer than two days, there was no trace left of the infected pieces of clothing.

The first cases of leprosy recorded by the diminished city officials were linked to some thirty prostitutes who skulked about the Los Angeles plaza.¹⁵ The subsequent investigation found the cause of the disease: those women tended to buy their work clothes in second-hand markets. The thirty streetwalkers were shut away in the San Jerónimo cloister. Despite this, the consequences of their profession had already been spread throughout the Guerrero neighborhood. The indigent took care of spreading leprosy everywhere. In the evenings, the good neighbors of the barrio could be seen walking as if they were real ghosts, scattering pieces of skin all around. According to the compendium by González Obregón, one day those lepers knelt down in the San Fernando plaza and asked the *Infante* Pedro for forgiveness. He had appeared inside the church, blinding everyone with his luminous presence, announcing that they would be redeemed. "This episode can be understood as the installation of the Church of the White Dove. The blind and infected began to cry out Güicholobos' name and their seed was not silenced but half a century later."¹⁶

Leprosy did not respect the imaginary walls of the city. It spread from the region of the

¹⁵ The Guerrero neighborhood's famous plaza which once held a temple to a virgin as miraculous as Guadalupe.

¹⁶ Hernández, Rosaura: p. 14.

lost colonies of Azcapotzalco, Tlatelolco and Colhuacan to the Hills of Chapultepec, Santa Fe, and the towns of Coyohuacan and the Ajusco. A good part of the urban and rural zones of Mexico state were infected, even Toluca succumbed. The archangel Francis lost his flesh daily as Brother Bernardino had foretold: "... in the heart of the beast, the archangel and warrior will fight, and the archangel will be accorded the worst part. He will run naked dodging the debris. His rotting body will be displayed in the streets. His hands will not be enough to hold back the tears of shame that will burn his cheeks. Güicholobos will have no pity and before guiding his people to the desert, he will have torn out the dark liver of the archangel."¹⁷

In the last stage of the pandemic, the federal government decided to set fire to the city, determined to eradicate leprosy, and moved the capital to the port of Veracruz. E. H. Noriega maintains that at this phase, the real *Infante* Pedro Güicholobos, flesh and bone, died from an infection of the very disease he had unleashed. This is true: a group of young archaeologists is confident that it has found an absurd registry of cadavers in the ruins of San Fernando where one name is legible: Pedro, *Infante* of Tepito. Even so, it is impossible to affirm that Güicholobos succumbed to his own plan.

If we pay heed to popular texts, we will find various versions of his end. For example, the scribes of Tepito state that he built a ladder to the heavens from the ruins of the cathedral and the Pure went up with him, cinching headdresses of glossy feathers and breastplates of gold and turquoise. On the other hand, the Church of the White Dove recognized Güicholobos' living quarters on the planet Venus, from where he shed his grace each night. Another very eloquent, if not most veracious story, is that of the blessed Apolonio of Tepito:

"The city was already a tainted remnant where some set bonfires to bring light to the darkness which prevented the sunlight from reaching the surface. The perverse died first. A handful of the members of the Aztec aristocracy held a council

¹⁷ *Pax et Bonum*, 2:15.

meeting under the flag pole in the main square. In the middle of the rubble, they heard the *Infante* Pedro Güicholobos, who was already in the last phase of his revelations, about to reach illumination. He raised his wooden club with obsidian blades, his feathered shield and stated thus: 'Many of you are sick; you will die. I tell you that your death will not be in vain. You will reach fundamental peace. I beseech those who are dying to lose yourselves now in the darkness; try to die in solitude. Far from men, truth breathes onto our faces. Each object or living being we renounce signifies an illusion broken. Die in peace; emulate Quetzalcoatl. He dislocated his bones and came to comprehend all knowledge in the ballgame where he confronted his Twin, the Dark One, in a fight of survival between day and night, wakefulness and dream, life and unequivocal death.' He said goodbye to the lepers, organized his other followers in a line behind him, and walked them north, heading to the desert, to Siete Cuevas. He took a staff with him, with the head of the archangel Francis impaled on top. The hummingbird of legend (?) guided them to his spot and there, they dwell jubilantly, drinking the honey of the divine spring."¹⁸

The mythological Güicholobos was over a hundred years old when he guided a tribe of the Pure, protected by a hummingbird, to the legendary Chicomóztoc, the place of origin, leaving behind the destroyed capital as a sign of his vengeance. Mexico City's devastation occurred during a period of nearly one hundred years. Its end will forever be connected to the figure of the *Infante* Pedro, who made its heart wither.

We will have much more to reason out regarding the *Infante* Pedro Güicholobos, but it is necessary. Only by understanding the poetic allegories emanating from these myths can we finally come to know God.

Love and Terror

In the church of San Diego de Alcalá, the details always elude its visitors. Only at noon, does some of the light necessary to brighten the altars penetrate and, thus, makes the paintings against the wall slightly visible. When the sun goes down during the afternoon hours, semidarkness begins anew. One could say that it is the same darkness of the morning, but no, the one at daybreak is faint, whereas, the one at dusk makes its weight felt, growing darker until

¹⁸ Apolonio of Tepito: p. 243.

night. At the end of the corridor on the right, there is a chapel, whose floor is tiled with burial slabs. Prominent cadavers who watch over the place. On the most hidden wall, opposite the small altar, there hangs at mid-height, a painting of a virtuous virgin. She is walking along the path, hurriedly, moving away from a burning city that was her prison. Blood flows from her child-like feet, and that blood stains the spiky grass. She wears a dusty tunic that barely clothes her white flesh, white from her feet to her neck to her pallid face. A face that bears the grimace of a skull, but not even that imagined death diminishes it; shadows do not fracture her beauty; they watch over it, perhaps.

That beautiful apparition arrived along with her mother in the Valle de Santiago. The mother was insane. The local people did not like the women's presence who, to top it all off, occupied a cave in the Siete Luminarias, those small pearls of volcanoes mid-valley. For six days, they were walking around the little villages, begging for food. One morning, as the market was setting up its booths in the Valle de Santiago, the mother took her daughter to be sold. A priest was the first to notice the situation. Instead of reprimanding the mother, which would have done no good, he approached her and offered a few coins for the girl and this way got in ahead of any pervert. The crazy mother fled down the dusty paths and disappeared into the depths of her cave, never to come out again.

The clergyman took the orphan to the convent of Irapuato where the nuns baptized and named her Blanca. For six months, Blanca carried out monastic chores in silence, lost within herself. The nuns thought that she suffered her mother's illness. They feared her cadaverous appearance and the pallor of her skin during those nights when she wandered through the garden, pale and patient.

On one of those nights, the grasslands surrounding Irapuato thundered with three

successive culverin roars followed by the noisy racket of an uproar. Ragged militia led by priests and renegade captains encircled the town. Irapuato surrendered without resistance. One of the captains of that new army, Juan Aldama, had important places searched, gathering military supplies and provisions. This is how he came to the convent, and when he entered that courtyard became captivated by Blanca's gloomy gaze. Perhaps he saw his destiny or recognized some hidden secret. The daughter of Madness left with that horseman. The nuns were outraged but more than one felt a peculiar sense of relief.

As soon as the army arrived in Guanajuato, it set out to storm the Alhóndiga, the grain exchange. The Spanish families had taken refuge there. Juan Aldama, before leading his division, wanted to fulfill a desire in case he did not survive the battle, to preserve the image of the woman who had captivated him. He ordered that a master painter be brought to him; and in a small dirty room in San Roque's square, he commanded the artist to create a painting of the orphan girl embodying her holiness. Blanca took her place on a chair while, in the heavenly dimension, they were preparing to gather the wheat about to be reaped at this bloody hour.

At times, the walls of the room reverberated with the roar of the cannons. The faithful artist tried to avoid clumsy brushstrokes with so much shaking, and he only stopped when the bugles called no quarter: for an instant, the images of so many deaths entered his mind. The sky was darkened by dust and gunpowder clouds. A brief silence announced the end of the massacre. It was followed by shouts of jubilation, bursts of mortars. Captain Aldama arrived at San Roque at midnight, his uniform splattered with blood. His soldiers had been brave and some of the firsts to seize the Alhóndiga. He thanked Blanca on his knees and took her by the hand. The artist showed him the painting and although some of the details were still missing, it pleased the captain. Days later, the insurgents started their march. Aldama left his Blanca in the care of

monks of San Diego de Alcalá. The prior of this monastery was none other than the priest who had purchased the girl in the Valle de Santiago.

At night, always at night, Blanca took walks in the orchard, looking at herself in the crystalline waters of the fountain and watching the reflection of a sky she recognized. During the first weeks, the reports always gave favorable news about the rebels. She could not help but feel happy when one of the monks became anguished because the insurgents were about to take the capital of the kingdom. Juan Aldama always wrote to her to thank her for the many times he was able to escape the lethality of a bullet and harness the severity of swords in her name. He remembered the dream in which he had seen her, a majesty of beauty, ruling the horizons, the sole ruler of the land. And he confessed that although his companions still carried the old banner of the church, he only believed in her.

A short time later, the insurgent army was virtually wiped out in two battles. The main leaders were captured during their exodus through the desert. Among them was the recently promoted Lieutenant General Juan Aldama. He was taken to the firing squad before the others. His superiors and subordinates watched him from the windows of their cells. Two of them moved him deeply as he made his way to the wall: General Allende, his good friend, who said farewell with a military salute and his younger brother, Ignacio, whom he had dragged to this war, perhaps taking advantage of their devotion to each other. His brother, however, smiled at him one last time, clinging to the bars like a child.

Juan Aldama informed against no one during his ordeal. So, he died at peace. In fact, during one of the moments of his torture, he thought he could see the earthly eyes of his maiden. In the first volley, one bullet embedded itself in his chest. By afternoon, the others had met the same fate. The fury of his enemies was self-righteous, and they dragged four of the bodies to the

yard at the barracks where, they decapitated them, the main leaders of the revolt. The heads were sent to Guanajuato inside iron cages.

The news spread in the city. The authorities built a platform in front of the Alhóndiga and called the people together. Blanca came through an alley. She watched from afar. A man on the stage was holding a bundle in his hand. The drumroll deafened the throng. Suddenly, the drums stopped, and a loud voice yelled: the traitor Juan Aldama! Blanca made her way through the crowd and came to the front, close to the herald who held the iron cage, inside of which, it was said, was Juan's head. She looked closely and did not want to believe it. She recognized a skull from which some muscles were barely hanging, a bit of skin, an ear, but neither of the eyes. And horribly, as if parts of an old mask, the lips clinging to the skin. Blanca did not move her gaze from that mouth. She followed the man in charge of protecting the remains in a carriage, and before he handed them over to the soldiers, she begged him to allow her a few moments with the remains of Juan Aldama. It made no difference to the herald, so he gave her permission. Blanca leaned over and somehow put her fingers into the cage to bring Juan's head closer as she approached and lightly touched the dead lips.

The executioners ordered that the four heads be hung from each corner of the Alhóndiga. At midnight, the priests sent for Blanca, who had remained under the head of Aldama the entire time. When she arrived at the convent, she entered through the hallway and went to the chapel where she saw the painting with her own semblance on the dark wall. Without rushing, she slipped away to the grove. Her paleness took on premature deep violet tones. One by one, she inspected each tree in the orchard. At the foot of the old elm tree, she took out a rope from within her garments and, in the next moment, her body was gently swinging back and forth.

In the morning, a short time before the first morning prayer, the priests came together in the orchard where they were taken aback at seeing the orphan hanging from the elm. Two of them took her down; and she kept looking around with her sightless eyes. The friars wanted to avoid the scandal that such a suicide would provoke and, above all, they thought about preventing the temporary closure of their monastery. They resolved that it would be best to rid themselves of the corpse, which, moreover, could not remain there on the monastery's hallowed grounds. "Heap of rocks," muttered the dead girl. No one heard her.

The monks waited for darkness to fall. Time passed and the body began to expel a terrible odor. The same priest who had purchased the girl placed the cadaver in a sack. As soon as there was no sunlight to give them away, the friar carried the body through an underground passageway only known to him. That ominous cortege came out from the sewers to the Sirena ravines. The priest carried Blanca over his back and headed for the mountains.

Before the onslaught of the first rays of dawn, they came to a hill. Near the top, the friar felt the bundle twisting and laid it down hoping that he had been carrying a dying person, not a dead one. He undid the bag and the corpse made herself known.

"Lean me against those rocks," the cadaver requested in a cold whisper. The priest, without wanting to acknowledge who was speaking to him, believed that it was Blanca and obeyed. He sat her down tenderly, being careful not to hurt the contorted neck. Like that, with her face turned sideways and her tongue protruding, the figure continued: "Do not grieve. You believe that the tremors on the ground amounted to nothing but leaving fields scattered with the dead. Make a banner with a bloody rag, draw a black cross on it with a skull in front and give it to the first person who stops to ask you what direction his life should take. Many will follow my fluttering banner as they flee across the fields."

She who was speaking had to stop for a moment because her face began caving in on itself, from her cheekbones to her jawbone as well as her eye sockets. Her neck was becoming thin while, simultaneously, a most horrible smell permeated in the air. Not until then, did the priest become filled with terror.

“Embalm this body soon, I cannot take the stench,” she pleaded. “I will rise and from half of the way to heaven, I will better be able to help. Leave the nun’s habit on the cadaver and show this cave to those who survive so that they can come to pray and leave their offerings near the mountain.”

Blanca’s mouth remained open and spoke no more words. Her servant closed her eyes and placed her in a cave near the summit, and as soon as he had preserved the body, he tore a piece of cloth from Blanca’s habit, stained it red and drew a black cross on the bloody fabric. Over the black cross, he painted a cruciform of white femurs and at the heart of the cross, a skull.

He came down from the hill with the flag and walked in the direction that led towards the city. After walking a short distance, near a glen, he saw two horsemen riding with a great sense of urgency. The horsemen halted their wild group on that fork in the road. They were uncertain about which path they should follow. The priest continued to walk on his way, with no intention of stopping to speak with the fugitives. However, one of them spurred his horse in the direction of the ragged walker; and, as he met and stood before him, the horseman asked him for the directions to Salvatierra. All at once, Blanca’s servant understood. After he had offered him the best advice about which roads they should take to avoid being captured, he asked the horseman to take with him the banner of the skull and tried to explain the commands of a dead woman. The other horseman, waiting at the crossroads, called out: “Hurry, Rayón, they’re on our tails and

going to catch up to us!” And the bearer fled, urged on by his companion, with the flag of the Battalion of Death.

The Man Behind the Mystery

Certain historians state that *Lucha Libre* wrestling came to Mexico with Maximilian’s Belgians during the military intervention of 1863. This statement could be taken as true were it not for the always present detractors who have dug up questionable other sources previously unknown. Thus, there are those who assert that during the very baroque eighteenth century, in San Pablo Zoquipan, an indigenous Mexico City neighborhood, the administrators or *calpixques* included evening tournaments in the program of patron saint celebrations where groups of men, usually made up of sets of three or four, would hurl themselves against the members of an equally sized group. The judge of the competition based his decisions accordingly on the barren town that crowned its favorites among shouts and commotion. Said competitions were carried out after the end of the bullfights, enjoying the same plaza that, as it is known, was adjacent to the slaughterhouse, almost in front of the chapel of San Lucas. (Fortunately, this chapel still stands near the current Pino Suárez Avenue). Other more adventurous cryptologists assert that plate 38 of the Fejervary-Mayer codex, better known as *The Divining Book of the Pochtec*, depicts a group of youths, students of the *calmecac*, or school for the Aztec ruling class, fighting man to man. They are wearing jaguar masks and spare no aerial strategies as long as they beat their opponent. These same scholars, to corroborate their theories, always mention the Olmec sculpture called precisely *The Wrestler*.

Within these historical shallows, there is an anecdote about a certain extraordinary joust that occurred in national wrestling. Writers such as Guillermo Prieto, who could have immortalized it, preferred to gain political advantage by making a mockery of it. In the year

1867, a new kind of audience with an every-day taste for attending fights between these “gladiators” emerged. Thus, various establishments on the outskirts of the capital made huge profits presenting such spectacles. The Juárez era brought forth some renowned wrestlers. The most famous of them called himself *El Tragacuras*, The Priest-swallower, and used a mask to conceal his identity. What we know of him does not fit the prototype of a robust combatant: he was weak and short, but he possessed an enviable technique and much agility. It is a mystery how he got that nickname. His peculiar outfit, which, by the way, was very similar to the ones worn by that era’s gymnasts, was made by Madame Rocha y Peña, a famous dressmaker on Roldán Street. His mask was red, red like blood.

In 1875, President Juárez had been dead for three years. His former minister, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, headed a particularly lax government when it came to those street-suitable spectacles. Since theaters had not yet opened their doors to the “arts of the *Pankration*,” small shops and stores made the most of it. They installed a four-sided ring with posts and ropes in those establishments and threw straw on the floor. The legend of *El Tragacuras* was born in these places as well as his fame of invincibility. Maybe his story would have been no more or no less special than those of other wrestlers of the time, had it not been for a certain stranger, also masked, arriving and challenging him to a match where the winner’s identity would be revealed. This was something unusual in the beginnings of the sport, the first wrestling match where a masked man grappled another one wearing a mask.

The stranger appeared out of nowhere, one ordinary night, after a bout. He didn’t seem to fear *El Tragacuras*’ prestige or aerial agility, envied by Hermes, himself. They agreed to a match on November 1, 1876, at five in the afternoon, according to programs printed by Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, distinguished great-grandfather of master Kid Vanegas. The news began to

spread in the city's neighborhoods. An establishment on Donceles Street was the stage. Of course, it was packed. The poorly set cobblestone pavement became full of mud because of all the horse and carriage traffic that came to the site. Surprised, the organizers discovered something odd: even government officials and fashionable intellectuals were sitting on the bleachers. After a few hours, the air inside was almost unbreathable as a result of the great quantities of tobacco that the nervous fans were smoking. Some San Gregorio School students smuggled in bottles of booze and passed them around generously from hand to hand to mitigate the long wait. This was a celebration worthy of a drink.

At last, shouts and screams could be heard on the southeast side of the theater as *El Tragacuras* appeared. By contrast, on the opposite side, the arrival of the mystery man only brought out jeers. The two contenders climbed up to the ring and an amateur master of ceremonies explained the details of the fight, stated the rules, and first introduced the fan favorite, *El Tragacuras*. The people went crazy as they heard the nickname. Some ladies shouted at the top of their lungs for their hero. The children tried to pierce, with their eyes, the impenetrable blood-colored mask. The fan favorite climbed the ropes in one corner, lifted his arms as high as he could, and greeted his spectators. He removed his silk cape, leaped in a double somersault, and landed exactly in the middle of the ring.

But who could have believed it: all of that fierceness went to his feet as soon as the master of ceremonies introduced his unknown adversary, a warrior from Nayarit with more than 200 pounds distributed over all of his muscles, and of a lineage that would have threatened even the deceased Juárez. His name reverberated in *El Tragacuras*' ears like a call from beyond the grave. In the opposite corner, *El Hijo del Tigre de Ááááá-lica* (The Son of the Tiger of Aaaaa-lica)!

Manuel Lozada, *El Tigre de Álica*, was misunderstood by the official history, the one written by the “liberals.” He was of Cora blood and had seen his lands threatened by the expropriation imposed by the Laws of Reform. He fled from the hacienda where he was working because he became romantically involved with a woman of a higher class, whom he kidnapped. The Juárez government started to persecute him. Lozada organized a band to fight the army; and, in one of his many raids, took the city of Tepic. With the French invasion, he thought he had found an ally in Maximilian. From the unfortunate prince, he received the sword of general, and by order of Emperor Napoleon, himself, he was awarded the Legion of Honor. Even when the presumed empire collapsed, Lozada, now known as *El Tigre de Álica*, had such power, that Juárez hounded him more fiercely.

President Juárez died on July 18, 1872 without having defeated his fierce adversary. *El Tigre* believed that the awaited peace would come. He was wrong. The government of Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada went after him with even greater fury. They captured him on the hillsides of Nayarit just before he unleashed a class war. Lerdo de Tejada proved to be ruthless. *El Tigre de Álica* was executed on July 19, 1873, exactly a year and a day after the death of Juárez.

Because of this, the same masses who had zealously booed the stranger, cheered when they heard that famous name again, although in different circumstances, in the embodiment of his son. *El Tigre's* offspring, in a feline mask, was notably stronger than his opponent, and had the same fierceness that the newspapers had pointed out in his father. With a leap and a somersault, he fell upon *El Tragacuras*, who despite his initial fear, caught his head with both hands, took advantage of the momentary inertia, threw him against a post and, stunning him, unleashed both knees upon the back of his neck. *El Hijo del Tigre* pulled himself together, climbed with great agility to the top rope; from there, he leaped forward, hitting the red masked

one's chest in a tremendous wallop and applied an armbar on the mat. *El Tragacuras* was able to break free thanks to a counter-move that was enough to knock down *El Hijo del Tigre de Álica*, who by merely twisting himself got out from under him; *El Tragacuras*, knowing that if he released him, it would be difficult to catch him again, gathered all of his strength and lifted him through the air, throwing him out of the ring. The challenger crashed loudly at the foot of the bleachers, where the women stood up, overtaken by fear.

El Hijo del Tigre, his ribs injured, decided to put an end to the fight. He dodged *El Tragacuras'* moves, lifted himself up in one swift movement and demonstrated his mastery of the ropes as he moved on them to all four corners, as if floating divinely. Those briefest of seconds, full of beauty, became fleeting glimpses in the spectators' imagination. Coming full circle, he hurled himself at his enemy's neck and applied the scissors move. Engaging immediately, he took hold of him by the thighs, raised him into the air and dropped him head first on the back of his neck in a move which was thereafter called "the hammer." *El Tragacuras* did not get back up. The crowd cheered, overwhelmed. The master of ceremonies declared *El Hijo del Tigre de Álica* the winner.

But the evening held even greater surprises. Once he was named the victor, *El Hijo del Tigre de Álica* demanded *El Tragacuras'* mask. The master of ceremonies approached in order to reveal the identity of the vanquished. Although still stunned by the hammer, the loser downright refused to give up his secret. After the refusal, a request for help in restraining him was made to the men in the audience. At that moment, several cadets from the military academy came out of nowhere. While some were protecting *El Tragacuras*, others hurried to clear the establishment. In a few minutes, the place was empty. *El Hijo del Tigre* was arrested that same night. He was sent to San Juan de Ulúa, the prison fortress, where he was killed.

The day after the fight, a presidential edict was issued that prohibited wrestling events under penalty of jail to whoever organized or participated in them. That sudden and absurd measure did not last long. Fortunately, Don Porfirio Diaz abolished it a few weeks after its issuance, after making his triumphant entrance into Mexico City having defeated the army of Lerdo de Tejada in that same year of 1876.

As he fled to the United States, after losing to his enemies, the sickly man that was Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, before continuing on his way north, bid his carriage to park outside of the San Fernando cemetery. His face was visibly swollen; he had a blackened eye, and his neck had a kink in it. Walking slowly, he approached the tomb of Don Benito Juárez. He was accompanied by two military men who served as his guards. Lerdo de Tejada took from his coat pocket a blood-red colored mask and, with stinging tears, placed it on the solemn burial ground as a failed offering.

So Many Signs and I Without Perception

If, indeed, one should not abandon himself to the idea
 That we are ruled by destiny,
 The stars and even by the very gods,
 It would not be too much to look at the signs that nature provides
 To warn us of imminent dangers and misfortunes.

(Marcus Tullius Cicero: *On Fate*. Book I)

Juan de Dios Aparicio, a *pulque*-server at Mayahuel's 400 Titties, welcomed me in with a celery tonic: "On the house," he said. That gesture belied something odd, something out of the usual. My senses are never wrong, at least not often. Well, sometimes they get it right. Aparicio set the *pulque* down to one side, trying to make space on the table to open the newspaper, *La Prensa*.

"Hércules Laercio has died on us."

Just like that, with no emotion. He pointed to the news headline: “A low-life dies under tragic circumstances because he was drunk.” The police found him near the train tracks, in pieces. He scratched out “low-life.” He had his vices, yes... like everybody else in the world. Hércules had arrived in Puente Grande only four months ago. Tall, big eyes, big mustache. No luggage, no money. He came to my taco stand and asked for something to eat. By the next week, he was sweeping the streets, getting along with the bar girls or shining shoes, with such warm-heartedness that he was able to earn good tips. One time, I ran into him at Cicero’s Fates; and he bought me a *chingüirin*, a strong sugar cane drink, in appreciation for the tacos. From then on, we were pals.

I asked the *pulque*-server for some time alone. He played dumb at first; he wanted to see me weep. Around here, they know the esteem that I held for Hércules Laercio. I re-read the news; I could not believe it. Why, just early this morning we were at the God Never Dies. There, he confessed something to me that, at first, I did not believe, so I called him a dumb-ass. He had never seemed ignorant or deceitful. But last night, after three jugs of *pulque*, a fermented maguey drink, and in a sort of melancholy, he disclosed that he had recently dreamed of his own death; a snake was killing him. A certain feeling of nesting worms on his back made him wake up drenched in cold sweat. He dreamed the same thing three nights in a row. He consulted an old clairvoyant, and she confirmed it: yes, he would die by an ominous serpent, although she did not specify when or how. Hércules’ mind became filled with all manner of snakes: rattlesnakes, hog-nosed snakes, gopher snakes, and boa constrictors. He was killing them in the open fields. Some of them were really large ones, almost twice the size of a man. These animals are known to enter houses from time to time. They can be found wrapped around the foot of a bed, or dwelling in a

cupboard among the dishes, or even lying on the sheets in the middle of the night. Hércules had decided to leave his village; he followed the train tracks and stayed in Puente Grande.

Of course, I did not believe him. Fear does not grip men of reason as firmly. It is difficult to think that he would be so ignorant. Giving himself up in such a way because of a premonition! Out of respect, I joined him for the fourth jug. At around 6:30, Hércules Laercio said goodbye to me; he was already very drunk. Now I can picture it. He went out into the alley, breathed in the fresh early morning, the bells calling for first mass accompanying him on his walk. He may have been thinking about some wench like those who work at Magdalene's Legs. Who knows? He must have been so preoccupied in thought that he either did not see or fell asleep. Maybe it was in the sudden movement he made as he heard the whistling train. He squirmed in vain. The ground shook, a long whistle drowned out the silence of the country houses. In desperation, Hércules clung to the dirt with his fingernails; he tried dragging himself, but to no avail. Half of his body was left at the disposal of the train. "It was a matter of seconds..." stressed the news of *La Prensa*. The photographs showed the quartered body in detail. The expression on the battered face suggests what it saw last: Hércules was able see the reflection of the morning sun on the metallic scales of the train that slithered along the tracks...

TRANSLATOR'S ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

As a translator sets out to translate from one language into another, the first thing encountered when the source text is read is the different world of the original text. That is, another language represents another culture and one cannot merely change the original word to another word from another language and make it mean the same thing every time. Of course, there are equivalents that stand in for an experience or situation common to both cultures. But the challenge for translators is to re-create that world in another language when an experience or item is not known in the target language. The six stories translated in this thesis present various translation issues which deal with the pre-Colombian indigenous culture and the subsequent post-Conquest Mexican culture. A bit of research of Mexican history was necessary to translate the stories because the stories involved historical figures and events not commonly known outside of Mexico and the translator needed to fully understand the stories to be able to express them into English.

Proper Nouns

After reading each story thoroughly before beginning the process of translation, the translator jotted down unfamiliar words and concepts that required more research. One issue that arose was whether proper nouns should be translated. Several things needed to be considered. First, did the translation of such words help the reader understand the target text better? The answer depends on whether a name is descriptive and would help the reader understand a concept. Since some of the names are in their original language of Nahuatl (e.g. Moquihui, Huitzilopochtli), the translator did not believe that she should translate them. But, the names of bars (e.g. Dios nunca muere, Las piernas de Magdalena) needed to be translated (God Never

Dies, Magdalene's Legs) because they were necessary for the reader to understand their humor. Second, would it be detrimental to the translation if the proper names were left as is and not translated? If the reader could understand the translated text, then the translator believed that it would not hurt the translation. Proper names of people were left untranslated. Names of people are not generally translated, unless they are names of kings, popes or important historical figures (Child 74). For these translations, one of the characters is, indeed, a king. However, because his name is in Nahuatl and does not have an equivalent name in Spanish, it did not seem appropriate to translate it into English. The proper names, Moquihuix (a king) and Axayacatl remained as they are, as did the place names of Ixnahualtonco and Tepetzotlan, words that were formed because of the Nahuatl practice of adding prefixes and suffixes to roots words to describe places and which, can make long words function as whole sentences in other languages such as English (aboutworldlanguages.com). It is not only Nahuatl place names that were left untranslated, however. Places in Spanish were also left as is. For example, Siete Cuevas was not translated as Seven Caves. Most of the pronouns of the source text (ST) were not translated in the target text (TT) because it is not customary to do so if they pertain to people's names or Nahuatl city/town names. Other words, however, cannot be translated because there do not exist equivalents in the target language. The names of the drinking holes in the final story that was translated herein, "So Many Signs and I Without Perception," were translated because the translator believed that it would, in fact, be beneficial to the translation. These names are humorous but they also serve as markers in the story. The names range from Mayahuel's 400 Titties (Mayahuel is the goddess of fertility represented by the maguey plant with its many leaves that metaphorically nurse its young with pulque, a fermented drink made from maguey), Cicero's Fates (which refers to the writings of the great Roman orator, Cicero, about fate and learning to recognize nature's signs),

God Never Dies (can be interpreted as the old Aztec gods or God), to Magdalene's Legs (woman as temptress) (azteccalendar.com). The translator did not add her interpretations to the target text (TT) because a translator should not impose her interpretation. However, she provides her interpretations in the thesis to justify the necessity of translating the names of the bars.

Loan Words

Words in the original language of a text that do not have equivalent words in the target language are necessarily left untranslated. The target text includes these words in the translation so that all information from the source language is given in the target language. Translators cannot omit a word or information in a translation simply because there are no translations for them. Loan words, as they are called, provide the translation with untranslatable text that is then explained in the translation. In this way, a word that cannot be translated can still have its meaning conveyed.

Some examples of loan words in the six translated stories are *tecpan*, *nahual* (*nagual*), *pulque* (Hispanicized from the Nahuatl word, *octli*), and *chingüirin* (slang for *chingüirito*). They generally pertain to the ancient Aztec world and would normally be out of use in modern Mexico. However, contemporary efforts to preserve Aztec spiritual beliefs and gastronomy have saved these words from disappearing from Mexico entirely. They are essential parts of the stories translated herein and, therefore, must be explained by the translator. This is often done in a short expansion immediately after the foreign word.

ST: Las mujeres, ocultas entre la neblina, entraron al *tecpan*, prestas para la guerra.

TT: The women, concealed within the light fog, entered the *tecpan*, or royal house, readying themselves for war.

When explanation is necessary, it is usually given as a footnote so that the fluidity of the story may not be interrupted for the reader. However, since the author has provided his own footnotes (converted into endnotes by the translator) in one of the stories, *La venganza de los aztecas*, those presented by the translator would be confusing. The loan words, themselves, should not be eliminated and substituted with their explanations within the stories because it could make the translations clumsy. The solution to this problem is to add a short description after the word. This way, the reader can see the word, while immediately afterward, know what it signifies.

Recategorization

One of the techniques used by the translator to avoid a misunderstanding in the translation is recategorization, formerly called transposition. Recategorization refers to the different ways a sentence can be translated without changing its meaning (Child 89). Sometimes this can be accomplished by changing the word order in a translated sentence from the order in the source sentence. Other times, the word class or part of speech may be changed from the source text to the target text in the translation. Recategorization, at times, is utilized for stylistic purposes, however, this is not always possible. A literal translation would be:

ST: *Temió que en el aposento más íntimo del palacio, sus hijos escucharan el tumulto,*

TT: *He feared that in the innermost room of the palace, the children would hear the commotion.*

If, however, the sentence is translated using the translation technique of recategorization, the sentence could be translated thus: *He feared that his children, in the innermost room of the palace, would hear the commotion.* When the sentence is translated literally, it appears to say that the children would hear the commotion because the innermost room of the palace is where

one could hear the commotion. But that sentence does not make it clear that the children are, indeed, in the room. The reader learns this fact from reading the previous sentences describing the women entering the *tecpán* noisily. So, in order for there to be clarity in the translation and state that the children are in the room, the recategorized sentence is used in the translation.

An example of recategorization by changing the word class occurs in this example,

ST: *Lejos de reprender a la madre, que de poco hubiera servido, se acercó para ofrecerle unas monedas por la muchacha y así aventajó a cualquier otro perverso*

TT: Far from delivering a reprimand, which would have done no good, he approached her and offered a few coins for the girl and this way got in ahead of any pervert.

The word *reprender* is a verb, but it can be translated and recategorized as the noun *reprimand* in the translated sentence rendering a much more elegant translation.

Modulation

Aside from being able to translate a text using proven translation techniques, it is of utmost importance for a translator to be sensitive to cultural differences. There are instances when a translator is disoriented by the difference in perspective between the cultures of the two languages that are being translated out of and translated into. It is at these times that modulation, the translation technique that reshapes a translated sentence to make it sound natural to the target audience, can be employed. A case in point occurs in “Love and Terror” when Blanca’s appearance is being described by the author. In the Spanish language, she is described this way:

ST: *un sayo de polvo apenas le viste las carnes blancas, blancas de los pies hasta el cuello, hasta el pálido rostro, un rostro que presume la mueca de las calaveras...*

TT: She wears a dusty tunic that barely clothes her white flesh, white from her feet to her neck, to her pallid face. A face that bears the grimace of a skull...

The author is “viewing” Blanca from her feet to her face. This viewpoint is disorienting to an English-speaking audience. English language readers “see” the person’s appearance from head to toe, not the other way around. A translator’s inclination would be to utilize the modulation technique and change the author’s viewpoint from the original text to the target language reader’s viewpoint in the translation so that the translated description would appear “natural” to the reader. That is, the translation would not appear to be a translation to the reader; it would feel as if the text had been written in that language. However, in this instance, and upon further inspection by the translator, it was discovered that the sentence could not be translated using this technique because the author’s description is purposely leading up to Blanca’s face to shock the reader of the sentence. The author begins with the description of the feet first because they are bleeding; and the blood contrasts with the fair-colored flesh that attracts the narrator’s attention, but it is the face’s description that is surprising. The fact that the author/narrator begins his description while looking down and moving his point of view up is the difference between the cultural viewpoints of a Spanish speaker and an English speaker, but sometimes the author has an artistic reason to write in a way that the translation reader may find disorienting at first, but then gradually realizes that there was a literary purpose to the author’s point of view, not only a cultural point of view.

Humor and Sarcasm

In addition to considering whether to remain faithful to the source culture and its source text and translate it from its viewpoint or to try to anglicize the cultural viewpoint, another challenge faces the translator. The difficulty that confronts the translator is how to translate the author’s humor and sarcasm. With this respect, the stories in the collection *La venganza de los aztecas* demonstrate that the author, Maya Ávila, uses much humor and sarcasm in his stories. In

the title story, the author mentions that people think that the *Infante* Pedro looks just like “The Idol.” The *Infante* Pedro is a pun of Pedro Infante, who was known as *El ídolo de México*, but since the story refers to the *infante* as the savior, *The Idol* could also mean Jesus, or an Aztec god, something that the people can worship. The translator can only translate the information, but it is up to the reader to do additional research if he decides to learn more. The reader, of course, could simply read the story and accept that the character is a metaphorical prince who is called an *infante* after the Spanish royal lineage customs and leave it at that without knowing the reference to the singer/actor Pedro Infante. The translator must be careful not to insert her own voice into the translation by appearing to give her interpretation in the translation.

Another example of hearing the author’s voice in a story is his use of sarcasm. A sentence in one of the stories states the author’s sarcastic view of detractors as such:

ST: *Esta tesis pudiera tomarse por verdadera si no existieran los infaltables detractores que han abrevado de otras fuentes, desconocidas en años pretéritos*

TT1: This thesis could be taken as true were it not for the ever-present detractors who lap trough water from other sources, unknown in previous years.

TT 2: This thesis could be taken as true were it not for the always present detractors who have dug up questionable other sources previously unknown.

No exact equivalent exists in English for the word *abrevado* which means to give cattle drink (or lap from a trough) in this context. The author’s sentence could be understood as meaning that he does not take the detractors seriously since he is metaphorically calling them cattle. The translator has various options to translate the sentence. She could translate the sentence without the author’s sarcasm but retain the negativity as: “This thesis could be taken as true were it not for the always present detractors who support dubious claims unknown in years past.” The

translator, however, decided to substitute another metaphor for the author's metaphor because she felt that it would be most appropriate for the translation so TT 2 was chosen for the translation. With a metaphor substitution, the author's sarcasm regarding the detractors could still be re-created for the reader of the translation.

The Untranslatableables

While the translator encountered cultural differences that were difficult to translate, she also found religious references in the source text that could not be translated into the target text.

ST: Algunos escolapios del colegio de San Gregorio contrabandearon botellas de aguardiente

TT: Some San Gregorio School students smuggled in bottles of booze

The phrase presents the translator with challenges regarding how to translate the word *escolapios* which literally translated is *Piarists* (members, be they religious or lay people, or students of the order of the Pious schools, a religious order devoted to providing free education for children). Catholic references are difficult to translate for a Protestant or non-believing audience, so the translator chose to translate the word *escolapios* as students. The source text already mentions that they attend the San Gregorio school, therefore it is not necessary in the translation to mention to what order the students' school belongs. The translation is then, *Some San Gregorio School students smuggled in bottles of booze* where, admittedly, the translator cannot be certain that the source text means students, and not priests or lay people. The author may, in fact, be referring to priests. If the intention of the author is to have priests smuggle booze into the place where the wrestling is occurring, then he is making a strong statement about priests, but the translator does not know because she was unable to contact the author to ask him.

The word *verbena*, another religious reference, was also encountered in the original text. It means a “feast” or “celebration” before a religious observance day, often including street dances, processions, and other events. Because it is a Catholic tradition in a mostly Catholic country and, in an effort, to succinctly translate the word since there is not an equivalent word to translate it into, the translator chose the word celebration as the translation. The translation loses the religious significance of the original word, but it, nevertheless, keeps the atmosphere of the source text.

CONCLUSION

The history of the Mexican people is the inspiration for the short story collection by Juan Maya Ávila, *La venganza de los aztecas (mitos y profecías)*. Maya Ávila describes his country's historical events, while imagining the influences surrounding them and, in the process, creates new myths to inform and entertain with their humor. These new literary creations were intended to educate Mexican children according to Maya Ávila, however, other people with Mexican ancestry, especially those who live in English-speaking countries, may benefit from them as well. These stories are about the heritage of those who migrated to the United States from Mexico although they may have lost knowledge of the dominant language of Mexico, Spanish. It is for this precise reason that translation is necessary. When a reader can recognize himself or come to know another culture in a translation, he is gaining knowledge that he may never gain if he does not immerse himself in the culture itself. Translation can be thought of as being another door to a culture, a separate door that anyone can enter, not merely those who have the time or money to live within a foreign culture. The purpose of translation, then, is to allow cultures to interact and communicate with each other through their writings and not necessarily face to face.

When Cicero and later St. Jerome recognized that the best translations were accomplished when the meaning of the original could be translated not just word for word, but sense for sense, they began a new era for translation. The ability to convey the meanings of the words, phrases, or concepts of a source text was thought by them to be far more crucial than merely substituting a word from the source language with a word from the target language. As long as the translator can transfer the significance of the original to the target, it does not matter that he is using different words. A clear example of this is the translation of idioms such as the Spanish idiom:

ST: *Cada oveja con su pareja*, which translated literally is:

TT 1: Each sheep with its partner.

But which in its sense, is best translated into English as:

TT 2: Birds of a feather flock together

The literal English translation does not make sense to the English reader. However, if the original Spanish idiom is translated into a familiar idiom in English, it becomes: birds of a feather flock together. Both idioms mean the same thing although the words are not translated literally. The translation breakthrough which may seem obvious today was not obvious when Cicero and then St. Jerome practiced it. From that point on, and with much practice, translators became translation theorists who could develop ideas regarding the steps to translating all types of texts well. And, translation was found to be an activity of semiotics (the function of signs and symbols in language) rather than an activity of linguistics (the units, nature, structure, and modification of language) which emphasizes the more profound meaning of a text and not the surface meaning of a text (Merriam-Webster). Thoughtful translators produced translations that were accessible to every reader and inspired other translators with them while theorizing about the practice of translation.

An analysis of the translation process provides an in-depth look at some of the challenges faced by the translator of *La venganza de los aztecas*. Issues such as translating Aztec names, Maya Ávila's use of loan words from the Nahuatl language which for an English translation become loan words in English as well, having the ability to change the original text's point of view to that of the target audience, and whether an author's sense of humor can be translated, are all instances of the translator's dilemmas. These challenges, notwithstanding, the translator strives to produce a translation that is understandable and not clumsy to the reader while staying

faithful to the original. However, bearing in mind that each translator comes to her own decisions regarding translation choices and that each translator is faced with numerous decisions to take when producing a translation, it is certain that translations done from the same source text will not be the same.

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