

SOCIAL CONFLICT IN THE NOVELS

OF

MARIANO AZUELA

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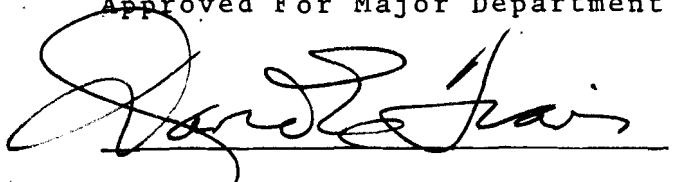
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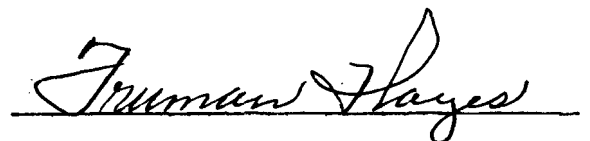
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When Dr. Mariano Azuela died in Mexico City in 1952, Spanish America lost one of its most esteemed novelists of the century. Dr. Azuela is the author of a universally recognized masterpiece, Los de abajo. He was born in Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, on January 1, 1873. Here he learned about the life of the country and small town which was to be the setting for many of his novels. He pursued the study of medicine in Guadalajara and in 1899 began his practice in his native city of Lagos. In 1900 he married Carmen Rivera, niece of Agustín Rivera, priest and historian of Lagos. Five sons and five daughters were born to this union. Not one of the children followed in the father's footsteps either in medicine or in writing.

Azuella wrote from his own experiences or from observations beginning with a series of sketches of the life of a seminary student in the provinces. In his first literary effort he reveals interests and trends that will characterize all of his future writings: an interest in types, especially in the poor and unfortunate, and in character study.

Social conflict is his main theme. He was chiefly concerned with the problems and conduct of the people. In this

study, some of the aspects that grew out of the social conflict during Mexico's critical period will be examined: lust, savagery, and hypocrisy. Since Azuela had a first-hand contact with different types which he observed in real life and the Revolution, he was able to clearly reveal to us the life of his country. We shall see how he treats these injustices as they existed before, during, and after the Revolution, and whether he feels there is hope for Mexico.

His concern was already evidenced in his earliest literary efforts, for he had already begun to think about the problems of Mexico: political "bossism," social and economic domination of the peon by landowner, religious bigotry, and intolerance. There is a touch of humor and of satire. Also, there is a touch of pessimism and fatalism in most of his novels. He directed his animosity against corrupt men rather than against the ideas of the Revolution.¹ This is known from short stories written in the first years of the century and from the first three full-length novels: María Luisa, Los fracasados, and Mala yerba.

Then came the Revolution. Azuela boldly struck out at those responsible for plunging his country into a class war without any clearly defined program of social reform. In a very short while, he saw quite a bit of gun-waving, proclaim-

¹Robert E. Luckey, "Mariano Azuela," Books Abroad, (Norman, Oklahoma, Autumn, 1953), p. 370.

ing of loyalties, and political chicanery. Nauseated by the insincerity about him, he wrote a novel, a hard, nasty novel about a cynical and spineless turncoat in Andrés Pérez, maderista, his first novel of the Revolution. Although artistically an inferior work, ideologically it is considered one of his most significant novels. He attacks the type that he later characterized as "las moscas" in the novel by that name. Because of them, Mexico would continue to suffer from her age-old wounds: a feudal land system, military dictatorship, a spineless abject press and intellectual class. Azuela believed that revolution was sometimes necessary for the sake of evolution. He believed, however, that in itself, revolution did no real good. Azuela's views with regard to the futility of revolutions are expressed in the words of Andrés Pérez:

Los pueblos han derramado siempre su sangre
por arrancarse de sus carnes a los vampiros
que los aniquilan, pero no han conseguido
jamás sino substituir a unos vampiros por
otros vampiros.²

In other words, revolution usually changes only oppressors. In spite of this, Azuela believed that the Mexican Revolution did arouse the people. In Bernard M. Dulsey's words, "Azuela has hope for the future of Mexico and thinks that the revolution did awaken the people. This awakening, Azuela believes, is the

²Mariano Azuela, Andrés Pérez, maderista y otras novelas (México: Ediciones Botas, 1945), p. 90.

first step toward the redemption of his country."³

One novel appeared between Andrés Pérez, maderista and Los de abajo. It is Los caciques, written in Lagos in 1914 under the Huerta domination and published in 1917, after Azuela had returned to Mexico from his brief exile. In Los de abajo he describes the life of a soldier who fights for personal revenge and booty, without any clear knowledge of the Revolution as a whole.

Las moscas captures "the hour of fear" following Villa's defeat at Celaya at the hands of Obregón. On rereading the book years later, Azuela concluded that he had been overly cruel to them, for they, too, were victims. Las tribulaciones de una familia decente completed the cycle of novels about the Revolution. He was able to show us a clear picture of the great struggle. His humor boils over most of all on the jackals and stool pigeons in the pay of the caciques. In Las moscas, instead of giving us descriptions of battles, he was content with showing us the effects the Revolution had upon the cowards and the shameless opportunists. These opportunists had once been servants of Díaz, then of Madero, later, and finally of Villa. It did not matter as long as they lived and dressed well.

In post-revolutionary Mexico, Azuela had ample oppor-

³Bernard M. Dulsey, "Mexican Revolution as mirrored in the Novels of Azuela, "Modern Language Journal, XXXV (May, 1951), p. 386.

tunity to study and witness at first hand the many unfortunate people whose misery and pleading fell on unsympathetic ears, as is expressed in La malhora. He condemns the cold objectivity of the courts, the commercialism of the medical profession and satirizes the smug morality of those who have never experienced economic want.

CHAPTER II

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

The Revolution of 1910 found Azuela in Lagos. He had opposed the Porfirio Díaz regime from his student days in Guadalajara. He was a follower of Madero from the time Madero entered the Mexican revolutionary scene. He had been under suspicion by Díaz officials because of certain writings and because of his open opposition to the corruptness of the regime. With the triumph of the Madero movement in 1911, Azuela was appointed to minor political offices in his home district, but he soon gave them up, convinced that the state authorities under whom he worked were opportunists. During the reactionary Huerta domination of 1913-1914, Azuela lived under strict and nerve-racking surveillance. He became the director of public education for the state of Jalisco in 1914.

Villa and Carranza went separate ways in 1915, and Azuela joined the Villa group under Julián Medina as chief of the medical service. He left his family in Lagos and joined the Medina band on marches and counter-marches. He moved northward through Chihuahua with a contingent of wounded after the crushing defeat of Villa at Celaya on April 16, 1915. It was during this flight that Azuela took notes and planned his best-known novel, Los de abajo. He was finally forced across the border to El Paso, Texas, along with other Villa men. He wrote the novel there and read it to a group of compatriots. It was pub-

lished and first appeared in print as a serial in the Spanish newspaper, "El Paso del Norte," from October to December of 1915.

Early in 1916 Azuela returned to Guadalajara, and that same year he moved his family to Mexico City, where they lived the rest of their lives. While exercising his professions of medicine and writing, he continued to come in daily contact with the poor to help them. These experiences also helped him to make the setting and characters of his novels vivid and realistic. He also obtained first-hand information about the treatment of the people by the courts where he served as a juryman in 1921 and saw much of the sufferings of the poor in a public medical clinic in 1922.

In 1950, the government gave Azuela Mexico's highest award for letters, the "Premio Nacional de Literatura," in recognition of his literary achievements. His life spanned the stormy years of the dissolution of the Old Regime and the Revolution. He was one of the many thoughtful men who had rebelled against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and who looked to Francisco Madero as the prophet of a new Mexico, a Mexico of freedom and democracy.

CHAPTER III

PRE-REVOLUTIONARY MEXICO

Mariano Azuela was able to recognize the problems of his people very early in life, his main concern being that for the poor and unfortunate. Occurrences of Azuela's youth opened his eyes to the hard conditions of life around him. One instance was the execution of don Pepe for having killed another man to whom he owed a debt he could not pay. The whole affair, particularly the circumstances of the night before the execution and the sound of the shots at dawn, aroused in Azuela such sensations of distress and dismay that he became ill. Another dramatic recollection grew out of a demand made of his father for 500 pesos by one of the bold bandits threatening the security of the region. A brave employee offered to meet the bandit and, instead of paying him, struck him on the head. The ridicule suffered by the bandit for his cowardice led Azuela to conclude that a valiant death would have been preferable.

Azuella was becoming conscious of the basic principles that guided his career, particularly concern for the truth. On returning to Lagos to take up his medical practice, Azuela found that his long absence, interrupted only by vacations, had changed his relationships with those whom he thought he had well known. This did not apply, however, to his childhood sweetheart, Carmen Rivera, whom he married.

Of the many problems of society that Azuela dealt with in his novels were those of lust, savagery, and hypocrisy. These injustices moved him to write about and criticize and condemn them. In Azuela's María Luisa and Mala yerba, is found his idea of an inescapable heredity which may cause degeneracy, a strong moralizing tendency which is usually brought out by satire. Although problems of concern such as alcoholism, sickness, poverty, abandonment and death are evident in earlier novels, they appear stronger in later works, particularly in those of the Revolution, and also in some works in post-revolutionary Mexico.

María Luisa, in the novel by that same name becomes involved with Pancho, a medical student. She is unable to resist him since she truly loves him and never intended to deceive him. After eventual abandonment, feeling disgraced, she turns to alcoholism for consolation and ends up in prostitution. She becomes very ill and lies, friendless and unrecognized by Pancho, in the hospital where he is called to pronounce her dead. Pancho is an example of the lust portrayed by many of Azuela's characters. Although he did like María Luisa very much, he had no intentions of marrying her or of becoming involved in any future responsibility.¹

Azuela considered his second novel, Los fracasados, in

¹Mariano Azuela, María Luisa (México: Ediciones Botas, 1938), p. 16.

many ways a form of reporting of the disposition of the middle classes to sacrifice every ideal in order to gain wealth and power. In it he shows the ruthless drive of the middle class to enrich itself without regard for morality or suffering of the poor and in the process to reveal the disillusionment of an idealist in the midst of a social crisis in a provincial town. The Álamos of the story is the author's own native city of Lagos, and Azuela directs his satire against the ambitious and unscrupulous politicians he knew personally; against the conservative, hypocritical upper classes; and against the influence of the church. Against these age-old forces working to preserve the status quo of the Díaz regime, the young lawyer Reséndez, fresh from his studies in the capital, meets only with frustration. And Consuelo, loved by the frustrated idealist for her intelligence and for the freshness and joy of her youth, is also abused and driven out by these same deadening forces.

Like its predecessor, Mala yerba is an implicit protest against the desperate sufferings of the humble; a cry against oppression by the caciques and landowners, strongly emphasized later, especially in the novel Los caciques. Mala yerba is a novel of national customs, a novel of rural Mexico in the days of Porfirio Díaz. Don Julián Andrade, "tierno vástago de una raza de chacales, de ladrones, de bandidos de camino real," is the degenerate proprietor of the vast hacienda of San Pedro de las Gallinas, who, like the other hacendados of his day, rules supreme and unmolested by the law. On the other hand,

he is protected by the law in his dastardly work as oppressor and assassin of the long-suffering peons whose life and honor are of no concern to him as long as his appetites are satisfied. Marcela, beautiful daughter of Pablo Fuentes, dean of the servants of the farms, becomes the prey of don Julián's sexual appetite. She is described as a working woman of the hacienda, illiterate, humble, and oppressed, both economically and physically. She sometimes ridicules her master but eventually this type of woman would accept her fate. There was jealousy among the women, and, as described in Chapter III, they were not concerned about being morally lax if they could gain materially by it.² Marcela is finally the victim of don Julián's mad jealousy when he plunges into her heart the very dagger with which she hoped to rid herself of him. And rural justice decrees, in the face of irreputable evidence, that there is a greater crime than this of killing a mere woman of the people, that of defaming the character of a wealthy hacendado.

The brutal conduct of the hacendado is more strongly brought out in Mala yerba. The assassins of Marcela's lovers, because she did have a great appeal for men, were arranged with some peon, and he in turn was also killed so that there would be no witnesses. In one instance, after the assassin of a peon, Marcelino instructs Gertrudis, another peon, to testify in

²Robert E. Luckey, "Mariano Azuela as Thinker and Writer" (unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1951), p. 99.

court that he had died of fever.³

One does not feel sympathy for either the Andrade family or for peons. They are both miserable, disgraced and cowards. In Azuela's words: "son una raza enferma de siglos de humillación y de amargura."⁴ Although the peons of the haciendas did suffer from poverty, mistreatment and abuse by the rich hacendados, they, too, were to be considered shameless in their behavior. Just as their patrones deceived them, they, also behaved likewise. When someone was killed and was being mourned, the peons were really feigning since they had their minds on better things:

Los peones rezaban por el alma del difunto; pero con pensamiento distraído: el matrimonio a vuelta de pizcas, el marrano para engorda, la compra anhelada del caballo o del borrico, la apuesta para las carreras del borrico, la apuesta para las carreras del año nuevo: todo lo que se podía soñar de una próspera cosecha.⁵

Azuela believed that the whole town was suffering from the same diseases, the same vices. The Andrade family and the peones who live and work are the protagonists. The tyranny and oppression of the two, respectively, are the theme stressed.

Julían's brutal conduct is consistent throughout the story, which shows Azuela's great concern for this problem.

³Mariano Azuela, Mala yerba (México: Ediciones Botas, 1945), p. 34.

⁴F. Rand Morton, Los Novelistas de la Revolución mexicana (México: Editorial Cultura, T. G., S.A., 1949), p. 37.

⁵Azuela, Mala yerba, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

One of the most brutal scenes takes place when Julián finally murders Marcela with her own knife.⁶ Azuela voices great concern over the behavior of the caciques and the perfect incompetence of rural justice. Lack of concern for the poor and oppressed is described perfectly in a scene after Marcela's death. Although there are various witnesses to the horrible crime, the judge seems to be too preoccupied with other matters to worry about the trial over the death of Marcela, and says to don Petrolino, his assistant:

Pero, dígame, don Petrolino, ¿usted quiere hacer de la justicia un juego de muchachos? ¿Cree usted que se puede proceder por meras conjeturas que son del dominio interno de un particular? Don Petrolino, no se le olvide que hay un delito muy grave que se llama "de difamación" y que ese delito se castiga fuertemente. Don Petrolino, mucho cuidado, que se meta en las once varas de la camisa.⁷

According to these statements, the defamation of the character of the hacendado was a worse sin than murder!

After don Petrolino's repentance and his decision not to get involved further in complicated matters, the judge finishes, and again showing no concern says:

Dígame, don Petrolino, quédese usted acabando de enfriar; yo ya tengo mucho sueño y me voy a acostar. Mañana, muy tempranito, me va a ordeñar las chivas, y quiero también que me saque unos camotes del surco para María Engracia. Hasta mañana, don Petrolino.⁸

⁶Ibid., p. 255.

⁷Ibid., p. 261.

⁸Ibid., p. 262.

The protagonist, don Julián Andrade, who tries to live up to his ancestor's customs, "hombres de pelo en pecho",⁹ is painted by the author thus: "Era un seco grandullón forrado de gamuza de los pies a la cabeza, de alazando bigotillo y ojos dulzones, un tanto afeminados...como niño mimado a quien sorprenden los mostachos todavía a las faldas de la nana..."¹⁰ But when Marcela appears on the scene, Azuela gives the following description of Julián: "a Julián no le cabía el furor en el cuerpo.... Sus ojillos azulosos flameaban, un cerco rojizo brotó en sus carrillos paliduchos de producto degenerado, podrido; y en su rostro se expandieron manchas amoratadas de sangre descompuesta."¹¹

Marcela's beauty deserves the author's following description:

El rebozo tornasolado envolvía sus redondos hombros y su ancha espalda; la blusa transparente orlada de encajes, dejaba a trechos, desnudos llenos y bronceados, las manos delgadas y nerviosas, el cuello ondulante en suaves estremecimiento, los brazos tersos y bien modelados...aquella boca plegada a veces por un gesto de natural coquetería, aquella nariz levemente entreabierta y hecha a las tremulaciones del pecado...sus ojos matreros que encontraban refugio y simpatía mal disimulados, tornáronse francamente provocativos.

⁹J. M. Gonzáles de Mendoza, "Prólogo," Mala yerba, Mariano Azuela (cuarta edición; México: Ediciones Botas, 1945), p. 12.

¹⁰Azuella, Obras Completas de Mariano Azuela, Volume I primera edición; México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958), pp. 114-116.

¹¹Azuella, Mala yerba, op. cit., p. 21.

Dio a sus palabras acento dulce en armonía
con su gesto sensual, el movimiento de hombros
y caderas y con la suave ondulación de su pecho.¹²

Thus a brief description of our flirtatious Marcela.

Mala verba must be considered Azuela's first important work and must be classed among the best of his novels. Melodramatic it is, yes, and none too original in plot, but it has splendid characterization and a vigorous, artistic portrayal of rural customs and types. Somewhat given to over-drawing his main characters because of the intensity with which he exposes and condemns the social weaknesses and vices of the country, Azuela is especially adept in his delineation of minor types such as Pablo Fuentes, "servidor de los más apegados a la casa" but never so beaten or cowed as not to speak out boldly against masters, and the local judge, who rebukes don Petrolino, his secretary, for wishing to make child's play of justice by accusing don Julián as the obvious perpetrator of Marcela's death without first examining the circumstantial evidence that bring him acquittal. Other minor characters of importance are: don Anacleto, drunken uncle of don Julián, doña Poncianita, the latter's wife, a smart woman who is always trying to solve family affairs, and "la triste Mariana, que vio agostarse su juventud en la inútil espera del amor honesto..."¹³

¹²Ibid., pp. 49-51.

¹³González de Mendoza, op. cit., p. 8.

The rest of the characters are not independent of the two protagonists, Julián and Marcela, with the exception of Gertrudis, who neither plays the part of a lover of Marcela nor as a rival of don Julián. There is doña Marcelina, the mother of Julián, who believes that her son can do no wrong. There are also doña Cuca, Julián's oldest sister and her daughter Refugita. And there are tía Melquíades, an ambitious lady who is always seeking favors, and her daughter Anselma, a girl who also gives in easily to physical love.

In Mala yerba, the action is quickly developed in the first chapter with the assassination of a vaquero, lover of Marcela. Later, there are to be other assassinations. Don Julián is not even brought to court since the only witness to the crime helps him make fun of the law by lying for him the next day. Azuela describes a storm already building up outside which can also be described as a preview to the reader of what is in store throughout the novel. The following description is given right after the assassination:

La tormenta se cernía ya en la negrura de la noche; el relámpago abría su boca de fuego y con estrépito avanzaba la tempestad, desencadenada, por las cimas de los árboles y por las penas de la Mesa de San Pedro.¹⁴

Probably Marcela's one true love was Gertrudis, friend and companion from childhood days. When he proposes marriage to her, he is shocked to find out that she thinks she is unworthy of the love of someone as pure as he. She is of the idea that

¹⁴Azuela, Mala yerba, op. cit., p. 24.

in the end, her destiny is to fall prey to the clutches of Julián.

After the death of Marcela's old father, she leaves the ranch with Mister John, an American engineer, to go to the nearby village of San Francisquito. At the same time, she is doing this to try to save Gertrudis from a woman of her type. She lives in this situation and hopes that someday her true love, Gertrudis, will come for her. When they do eventually meet again, she gives in to him. Julián, being jealous as he was, arranged for the murder of Gertrudis.

The tragic story ends with the persecuted Marcela when she discovers the other assassinations had also been done by Julián. He takes easy advantage of Marcela's state of mind. He stabs her with her own knife, and the crime goes unpunished, for the judge even fears the power and influence of the hacendados.

We have seen pictures of pre-Revolutionary days in the Mexico of Porfirio Díaz which called for Revolution. When Azuela wrote this novel on the eve of the Revolution, he shared the simple Mexican's hate for the rich landowner: he is passionately on the side of the exploited classes. Mala yerba superbly reveals the social conflict. The girl stands for her unhappy race; Julián is the symbol of a dying ruling order. Mala yerba, then, is a class-conscious melodrama: but it is much more. It is a portrait of Mexican life, accurate, racy, and true. The reader experiences something of the mysterious soul of the Indian peasant. Yet above all, Mala yerba is a

love story.

In theme and manner, Sin amor reverts to those of the pre-Revolutionary period. The satire is more relentless, directed against those whom the growing movement had failed to convert to its cause. It attacks the Mexican bourgeoisie, "la del puro dinero, la burguesía brutal y nada más,"¹⁵ whom he characterizes as hypocritical, presumptuous, unprincipled and immoral. Sin amor, published in 1912, is the portrayal of the decadent society of a provincial town in the Díaz era. To him it was less satisfactory than his works about the poor and disadvantaged, and out of harmony with his normal frankness and spontaneity. Perhaps his being a part of the middle class obscured his vision of it. Azuela stated that Sin amor, finished just as Madero's revolt began, was the last in his first cycle of novels.

Sin amor, is an imaginary story of a girl who puts off true love for riches and social prestige by marrying Ramón Torralba, a rich, and most sought-after young man in town. Ana María did not love Ramón, although she remained loyal to him. After a few years she lost whatever ideals she might have had and took on the manners and customs of the overbearing Torralbas.

¹⁵John E. Englekirk and L. B. Kiddle, "Introduction," Los de abajo, Mariano Azuela (edited with introduction, notes and vocabulary; New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1939), p. xix

Ana María's mother put her efforts into giving her every educational opportunity and getting her accepted by the aristocratic society. Ana María returned from the capital after being educated and found with open arms the good society.¹⁶

Después de cuatro meses del advenimiento del primer vástago, Ana María estaba en apogeo de vigor y belleza. Esa tarde vestía una falda de lana de color verde olivo, tan ajustada que hacía restallar sus caderas y sus muslos; sus brazos desnudos, muy blancos y sus senos pujantes tras la albura de la blusa de encajes la hacían tentadora.¹⁷

After four years of marriage to Ramón, the image changes:

...Pomposa y frondosa, ha perdido la delicadeza de sus líneas...Su rostro se funde en una capa homogénea de grasa que le empequeñece los ojos y le abulta párpados y carrillos. Aparte cierto aire de infantilismo chocante, reproduce con fidelidad a la buena Lidia...¹⁸

True, she was rich, but had become very fat and unattractive.

Azuella presents two contrasting types in Sin amor. The opposite of Ana María is Julia Ponce, ex-sweetheart of Ramón. She is a girl who always obeys the dictates of her heart. María Luisa, after five years is a fat, displeasing

¹⁶Mariano Azuela, Sin amor, (segunda edición; México: Ediciones Botas, 1945), p. 35.

¹⁷Mariano Azuela, Obras completas de Mariano Azuela (primera edición; México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958), I, p. 305.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 309.

and pretentious lady, and a mother of four children. Julia, having married her cousin, Enrique Ponce, and after losing a fortune to a userer without scruples, reappears after five years, still beautiful, with her romantic husband and a beautiful child. It is evident that Azuela wanted to give us a moral example, but the reader may ask why the woman that married without love is converted into a fat matron and loses interest while the other lady maintains her beauty and other enchantments.¹⁹

¹⁹Arturo Torres-Río seco, Grandes Novelistas de la America Hispana (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1941), pp. 33-34.

CHAPTER IV

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

With the first triumph of the Revolution, Azuela was still not satisfied, for he noticed that in the place of the old Díaz vices and corruption, other evils had erupted, perhaps even worse than before. And thus begins Azuela's second cycle of novels.

It is believed that General Medina influenced the figure of Demetrio Macías in Los de abajo, since Medina was from the state of Jalisco, also. This thought is expressed in the words of Azuela:

"...Pero en mi Estado, solo Julián Medina se levantó en armas, muy lejos, en Hostotipaquillo, al sur de Jalisco..."¹

Azuella had observed the military movements and at the same time observed the fortunes gathered by civilians in search for employment, each time better with each new conqueror in the civil war. Finally, Azuela himself felt the full fury of the Revolution during his flight to El Paso, Texas. But he never sold himself short to any of the politicians. He continued working for a newspaper and as a doctor, without once losing the impulse to relate the truth about the Revolution.²

¹F. Rand Morton, Los novelistas de la revolución mexicana (México: Editorial Cultura, T. G., S. A., 1949), p. 38.

²Jefferson Rea Spell, Contemporary Spanish-American Fiction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), p. 68.

With the death of Madero the Revolution was without course or purpose. Pessimism now began to grow in the soul of Azuela and he wrote his first novel dealing directly with the Revolution: Andrés Pérez, maderista. All in all, it is flooded with deep cynicism and pessimism. In it, Azuela wished to report the situation of some Mexicans during the initial liberation movement of 1911. This novel was published in 1911. It has been stated that if Mala yerba gives ample reason for the Revolution, Andrés Pérez, maderista explains, painfully and realistically, why it failed. And paradoxically, a note of humorism appears for the first time and, for the first time, the story is told in the first person. The "yo" that is speaking, is more than once Azuela himself. Los caciques, or del Llano hermanos, S. en C., Las moscas, and Las tribulaciones de una familia decente can also be considered novels of the Mexican Revolution, since they tell about the corrupt behavior of the people in a position to profit by the Revolution. Los caciques tells about the defeat of the first idealists during the Madero government, all liberals. In Las tribulaciones de una familia decente, Azuela describes the trials and sufferings of an impoverished family due to the Revolution of Madero.

The structure of Los de abajo reflects the scenes and events of the Revolution itself: chaotic, horrifying, violent, disjointed. The course of the narrative illustrates the fu-

tility of destruction and violence. The humble people caught up by the struggle felt only its force and expressed only its violence; they did not know its direction or purpose.

Azuela and an intimate friend, secretary of the local government agency, turned the official offices into agencies of revolutionary propaganda. His friend lost his position and Azuela incurred the antagonism of the local caciquismo. From that time on, to be a Madero supporter was equivalent to being a criminal. In spite of danger, Azuela and like-minded people formed the nucleus of a local movement directed against Díaz. They had support of day laborers, small business owners, farm workers, and enthusiastic youths. Similar developments were under way elsewhere. With the news of Madero's victory, many who had been opponents of his program thought it expedient to proclaim themselves its fervent partisans. Azuela felt a special repugnance for thos maderistas de ocasión which he expressed forcefully in his novel, Andrés Pérez, maderista.

In response to popular demand following Madero's triumph, Azuela became political chief of Lagos. Holding office did not agree with his temperament and ideas, but he felt it his duty to accept the position, especially when the caciques opposed him. The government had confirmed his selection, but local bosses in their newly assumed roles as maderistas sought to prevent his taking office. Azuela had to call on federal soldiers to check thos illegally opposing him.

The Madero movement was nearly a fiasco. Soon intrigue and factionalism began to undermine the movement, and the situation in his state was such that Azuela resigned his post with a vigorous protest against continuing in office by official mandate when his choice had originally been the expression of the will of the people.

Deciding to retire to private life and to his medical practice, he intended to devote his spare hours to writing a series to be called Cuadros y escenas de la revolución. However, he could not use this title for political and editorial reasons.

Andrés Pérez, maderista is Azuela's first novel of the Revolution. For the first time there is a tone of irony. The disillusion and sarcasm that he felt are going to be fully exposed in Las moscas and in Los caciques. Andrés Pérez, maderista reflects the spiritual struggle which led him to a decision, freely taken, to support "the great movement of renovation." He presented an aspect of Madero's downfall showing that it occurred because his regime "did not have time to mature in the conscience of the people."³ Azuela thought that Madero's government, most honest and upright in Mexico's history, was ineffective through inexperience in dealing with the wolves of porfirismo.

³Mariano Azuela, "Introduction," Las tribulaciones de una familia decente, edited by Frances Kellum Hendricks and Beatrice Berler (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966), p. 16.

Andrés Pérez, forced by circumstances to become a "maderista de ocasión," limps confusedly through the initial period of the Revolution, fearful of being identified with a movement that may soon be crushed. Very early in the story one gets a true picture of our protagonist, when, upon seeing the local police use brutality in order to disperse some protesting students, he momentarily wants to sit down and write a true story for the newspaper for which he works, but he soon realizes his silly error:

Me puse a la mesa y escribí: "Gran escándalo provocado por la Policía. Niños perseguidos y atacados como fascineros." Un impulso automático adquirido en mis largos años de reportero de "El Globo" me obligó a corregir prontamente el estúpido encabezado. "Graves desórdenes provocados por los estudiantes. La Policía obligada a tomar medidas de rigor para reprimirlos."⁴

After being denounced as a maderista by his boss, editor of El Globo, and finding himself surrounded by admirers, he still does not show any signs of bravery. Not even the sarcastic smile of don Octavio, true "maderista de convicción,"⁵ who witnesses the tremendous ovation given "Coronel Andrés Pérez," awakens him to the real significance of the movement. Into the hands of such opportunists as these: Andrés Pérez and Colonel Hernández -- "ahora es general el coronel, por no poder

⁴Mariano Azuela, Andrés Pérez, maderista (segunda edición; México: Ediciones Botas, 1945), p. 11.

⁵Englekirk and Kiddle, op. cit., p. xviii.

ser algo más" -- fall the fruits of the "Revolución Triunfante."⁶

Azuela has been able to record in his notes true, vivid pictures of actual events occurring during this critical period. His ever present concern for the disadvantaged is expressed:

Se oye un vocerío por el rumbo del cuartel de los maderistas, luego un disparo...una nueva descarga cerrada hace retroceder a los curiosos que se dispersan. Las mujeres se refugian en los zaguanes, en las tiendas; pero en breve, puertas y ventanas se cierran con estrépito.⁷

Scenes such as these show the confusion, hysteria and fear experienced by the innocent bystanders during the first year of the Revolution and, were scenes which were to be repeated throughout the course of the conflict.

Scenes of the brutality endured are quite a few in number. Almost anyone who protested was in danger of losing his life as was the case with Vicente, a foreman on the hacienda de Esperanza. His protest is voiced in the following words:

Mí patrón será muy leído y escrito; pero sólo sé decirle que si estas tierras que sudaron mis parientes desde que nacieron no eran de ellos, mucho menos podían ser de ese coronel Hernández que llegó aquí de taparrabo y que hoy por hoy no le da por medio millón de pesos su capital. A esos llamo yo ladrones; el amo deles el nombre que quiera.⁸

⁶Ibid.

⁷Azuela, Andrés Pérez, maderista, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

⁸Ibid., pp. 67-68.

Vicente is protesting Mexico's feudal land system, and, as a result of his protests, is brutally killed:

...El coronel se ha presentado exigiendo que se le reconozca como jefe de la fuerza. Vicente fue el primero en protestar con energía. Gritó el coronel Hernández y más recio le respondió Vicente. Aquél amartilla su pistola y éste con infinito desprecio le escupe la cara...el monstruo fascina con sus gritos salvajes a los infelices peones de Esperanza. Y a los propios hombres de Vicente les ordena que lo desarmen, lo aten y le formen caudro. Vicente cayó desplomado con los ojos que nacieron esclavos..., esclavos todavía, esclavos hasta morir...eternamente esclavos!⁹

Azuella's pessimism has begun to grow and the horrible scene is indicative of many more to come in later novels of the terrible Revolution.

Andrés Pérez had been a coward through most of the novel. He was always avoiding connection with any movement and denied anything of having actively participated in any action. But it began to bother his conscience later, especially after seeing some of the atrocities and the faith in some of the people. But what really made him decide to take an active part in a common cause was his own shame in comparing his attitude with that of the unfortunate Toño Reyes, dead in the first uprising that he, himself, had prepared and put into effect.

Azuella put all his disenchantment into this novel, with its theme of the audacity and cynicism of the enemies of the regime in the very process of destroying it. The work initiated his series of novels written during and about the

⁹Ibid., pp. 114-115.

Revolution; this body of his writings is of the greatest literary significance in its originality of content and technique.

The insincerity of the government is notably expressed in this first work on the Revolution as defined in the words of Toño Reyes:

...el gobierno se ha burlado no sólo de esos maderistas ingenuos y confiados, se ha burlado de la nación entera, sanguinaria y pérfidamente. Pero yo auguro que esa burla va a costarle cara.¹⁰

He further attacks those hypocrites who take advantage of the poor Indian:

El nombre es lo de menos. El partido es el mismo: descendiente legítimo de los encomenderos enriquecidos con el sudor y la sangre del indio ...ese partido que ahora no cree en Dios porque Dios ya no le sirve de nada; pero que si mañana lo necesita irá a buscarlo llenando las catedrales. Siempre el mismo con toda la turba famélica e insaciable de esta raza infeliz mexicana.¹¹

The course of events enabled Azuela to see as never before the degree and extent of caciquismo. A shadow of misery had spread over the country with Madero's supporters victims of brutal and vengeful deeds. Fearful members of the middle class deserted the Revolution and made common cause with the "arrogant caciquismo." The governor of Jalisco, a true gentleman in Azuela's judgment, though he supported the usurper, Huerta, was able to soften somewhat the excesses of the central government.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 21.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 57-58.

Azuella himself was able to save several supporters of Madero from falling into the hands of Huerta's officials.

In these circumstances, beset by uneasiness and anxiety, Azuella wrote Los caciques. In the novel he directs his attack at the local despots who through greed and selfishness, used their power to promote their own interests at the expense of the rest of society. The somber tone found in the novel is as remote as possible from the raucous gaiety of Las moscas. The story is laid two years earlier, during the brief administration of the luckless Madero and the grim reaction of the sinister Huerta. The action in Los caciques takes place in a small western city which is dominated and virtually owned by a merchant-banker-landlord family of parasites, the del Llanos (the caciques, or bosses), who had risen to power and affluence under Porfirio Díaz and who now boggle at no measure, however low or violent, to maintain their privileges. Azuella makes no attempt to hide the bitterness of the victims of caciquismo. Perhaps it is difficult for us at this point to accept the monstrosities of the del Llano family; the cynical priest, Father Jeremiah, and the cold-blooded don Ignacio; but Azuella is writing in white-hot anger against the cruelty and injustice of a system and uses the effective device of extreme caricature to point up his thesis.

The rest of the cast is treated gently. The grocer, Juan Viñas, a kind of Mexican Poor Richard, his saintly wife,

Elena, and his two children, Juanito and Esperanza, victims of the system, are necessarily the opposites of the caciques. The author here runs the risk of oversimplification, of drawing a naive black-and-white picture, but he accepts the risk and through his art makes his picture plausible. He does so by employing the same technique that is so successful in Las moscas, by allowing his characters to portray themselves with all their human failings.¹² He engages our sympathy even for the fatuous, childish, and pigheaded grocer, whose unintelligent loyalty to the caciques brings destruction down on himself and his family. Azuela is equally tender with don Timoteo, the fuzzy-minded freethinker, who is baffled by the second-hand socialism he reads in his radical sheet. The meetings of the revolutionary Twentieth of November Club are as innocent as don Timoteo himself and are reported with the same understanding deftness that makes the dialogue in the hospital car of Las moscas alive and convincing.

The caciques of the Díaz regime continued to be caciques when Madero triumphed. They continued their domination over the ignorant and poor, controlling things as before. Even the people under domination did not know what was happening. Don Timoteo, a "liberal," protests but does not really know in what his protests consist:

¹²Lesley Byrd Simpson, "Preface," Two Novels of Mexico: The Flies, The Bosses, translated from the Spanish, Mariano Azuela (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956), pp. ix-x.

Asesinos y ladrones llaman a los señores de la casa donde estás sirviendo, Mariquita, a los revolucionarios. Así los llaman los caciques. Con razón, Mariquita, si esta revolución es para los caciques cosa de vida o muerte. Has de saber que así como a los frailes les llegó un día con Benito Juárez, a los caciques les ha llegado el suyo con Francisco I. Madero...¿Y quiénes son, pues los caciques, don Timoteo? pregunta Mariquita. Lo oíste, Doloritas, ¡Mariquita no sabe quienes son los caciques! Lo que yo predico a cada instante y momento: la desgracia nacional está en la ignorancia de nuestras masas...Los caciques, Mariquita, son... son la gente más mala que hay en el mundo...son unos hombres muy malos...son..unos malvados; pero no, no sé decírtelo bien; mayor voy a darte unos números de "El País" para que puedas formarte una idea de esos bribones...¹³

Even though don Timoteo does not know it, the del Llanos here are the caciques.

The plot is developed in the early years of the Revolution when, Juan Viñas, whose thinking is guided by that of the Llano family, the gente de bien whose word is law, has laboriously saved, penny by penny, a sum sufficient to keep his family, consisting of doña Elena, whose characterization is another tribute to Mexican womanhood, Esperanza, and Juanito, from economic want in his declining years. When advised by the lust-hungry Llanos to invest his savings in a business enterprise which they assure him will bring in better returns, he does so without inquiring into the obviously important matter of how much capital will be needed to build his model tenement house. Only don Juan's wife and Rodríguez are skeptical about Juan's business venture.

¹³Morton, op. cit., pp. 46-47

As time goes by, Juan Viñas begins to discover that with the amount invested, he is unable to finance the project by himself. He lets the Llanos loan him money. In a short while he finds it necessary to borrow more. This time don Ignacio advances him funds against a mortgage on his grocery store; these, too, fail to suffice. And now the caciques turn a deaf ear to Viñas' plea for further financial aid. The construction stops because Viñas is unable to meet his payments ~~on~~ the loan, and the Llanos take all. Don Juan dies of mortification and grief in the miserable shack that is his new home on the outskirts of the town. Esperanza and Juanito find employment in the grocery store, "La Carolina," across the street from the magnificent mansion being built by the Llanos out of profits realized from the sale of their father's store and his nearly completed "Vecindad Modelo." The anti-huertistas sweep down upon the town, and in the general looting and pillaging that follow, Juanito and Esperanza seek as their share of spoils nothing more than a can of oil with which they set fire to the Llano home.

Don Ignacio was always making it appear as if he was performing some act of charity, especially when there was a good opportunity. For example, he took advantage of those possessing grain by offering them only half the price of what it was worth and later, at an opportune moment, sold it on the market at twice the price that he paid for it. And it never seemed to fail to have someone in the offices explain to a

client of certain procedure to be followed.

The burden of the narrative is carried by Rodríguez, the lonely poet and intellectual, and the only clear head among the small town radicals. He is the noblest of Azuela's creations. Half mad as he is, Rodríguez is a wonderfully attractive personality, with his despair over the human race and his pity for stray dogs and cats and all helpless creatures. The love story of Rodríguez and Esperanza Viñas is heartbreaking in its intensity. She fell in love with an older man, but because he had the virtues of sympathy, tenderness, and understanding. But he was feared by the caciques, and, as a result, estranged him from Esperanza's father. Rodríguez sees the inevitable catastrophe in store for himself and those he loves and can do nothing to avert it, but he goes to his brutal death defying his murderers.

The story builds up to a dramatic climax. Popular revulsion at the murder of President Madero brings the Revolution to the del Llano's city. In the shooting and confusion, while the children of the deceased Juan Viñas are burning the caciques' home, Juanito suddenly grows up and sees with deadly clarity the cause of his and his sister's tragedy. The new building of del Llano Bros., Inc., was the hated symbol of their misfortunes.

In this novel Azuela must have been especially moved in his creation of Rodríguez, one of the finest characters in his works. No longer young and with little to show in an econ-

omic way for his native ability and clear thinking, Rodríguez towers above all, both oppressors and oppressed, because of the thoroughly human virtues he possessed that serve to enhance his superior wisdom and courage.

Although Los caciques was written shortly after definite steps had been taken to rid the country of local bossism, and when land and labor reforms were being written into the constitution of 1917, the general tone of the novel is one of disillusionment and gloom. However, a gleam of hope flickers upward with the flames of the burning dwelling of the caciques. Azuela symbolically voiced hope that something good might come out of the bloody strife.¹⁴

As Azuela was writing the last chapter, several detached groups of federal forces arrived in Lagos, bringing evidence of their defeat by Villa at Zacatecas (June, 1914). The news of the victory over Huerta released the tensions under which he had been writing. The bloody struggle that would follow, in which he became involved, was not then apparent. The stand Azuela took in favor of the Party of the Convention endangered him when a violent dispute, which broke out between two local factions, put him at the mercy of his enemies.

He soon became active in the Revolution. General Medina invited him to take part in forming a government for the

¹⁴ Azuela, Los de abajo, Loc. cit.

State of Jalisco. He hesitated, but finally agreed. Perhaps his desire to live among the revolutionaries who seemed to him excellent material for a novel influenced his decision, although he had no idea then of the novel Los de abajo, which was to become his most famous work. Late in October, 1914, he joined Medina's forces at Irapuato as chief medical officer, in which capacity Azuela rendered the best service he could, while taking care to keep himself outside the quarrels and intrigues about him.

After Medina's forces moved to Guadalajara in December, the governor appointed Azuela Director of Public Instruction, a post he occupied only briefly, for soon the Carranza armies forced the villistas to evacuate. Azuela was carried along from defeat to defeat until one day he found himself in the United States with a parcel of papers under his shirt. Two-thirds of Los de abajo was written, and he finished the rest of it in the print shop of El Paso del Norte, the newspaper in which his novel was being published serially.

His experiences in that tangle of crime, tears, blood, pain, and desolation and his own sensitivity to them resulted in a novel in which the Revolution itself is the protagonist. For he, himself, had lived in the mountains in the company of assassins and thieves, idealists and cynics. Vivid and realistic, with flashes of poetic insight, the novel is the work of an observant man of acute sensibilities and a strong moralistic bent who had had rich opportunities to observe the Revo-

lution at first hand. Episodic in form, the very structure of Los de abajo reflects the scenes and events it relates. The course of the narrative illustrates the futility of destruction and violence.

In Los de abajo, Demetrio Macías, contented, humble Indian of a little mountain village in Jalisco, incurs the enmity of the caciques of Moyahua, who denounce him to the Federals as a maderista. Demetrio is forced to abandon his family and home and take to hiding. He knows nothing about the Revolution; what he does know is that, like many others who gather about him in his mountain hide-out, he is being hunted by men who are hirelings of the caciques and hacendados, men who have shot his dog and burned his thatched hut, and that capture means certain death. He expresses his complaint to Luis Cervantes, an ex-medical student, in the following words:

...Mire, antes de la revolución tenía yo hasta mi tierra volteada para sembrar, y si no hubiera sido por el choque con don Mónico, el cacique de Moyahua, a estas horas andaría yo con mucha priesa, preparando la yunta para las siembras... Pues con eso ha habido para que me eche encima a la Federación. Usté ha de saber del chisme ese de México, donde mataron al señor Madero y a otro, a un tal Félix o Felipe Díaz, ¡qué sé yo!...¹⁵

Demetrio Macías had been proclaimed chief of a small band and soon wins his first encounter with the Federals in a deep ravine not far from his own land. Others soon flock to

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 35, 37.

join him. Among them is Cervantes, a smooth-tongued, opportunistic intellectual, who urges Demetrio to identify his cause with that of the great revolutionary leaders, Villa, Carranza, and Natera:

...Usted no comprende todavía su verdadera, su alta y nobilísima misión. Usted, hombre modesto y sin ambiciones, no quiere ver el importantísimo papel que le toca en esta revolución. Mintira que usted ande por aquí pro don Mónico, el cacique; usted se ha levantado contra el caciquismo que asola toda la nación. Somos elementos de un gran movimiento social que tiene que concluir por el agrandecimiento de nuestra patria. Somos instrumentos del destino para la reivindicación de los sagrados derechos del pueblo. No peleamos por derrocar a un asesino miserable, sino contra la tiranía misma. Eso es lo que se llama luchar por principios, tener ideales. Por ellos estamos luchando nosotros.¹⁶

Demetrio's rise is rapid; under Natera he becomes a colonel; after his daring action under Villa at Zacatecas, a general. Fighting, pillaging, killing, loving, and drinking, he and his men are swept along the path of the Revolution. It is their hour of triumph. But soon Carranza and Villa go separate ways. Villa is defeated at Celaya, and from that moment on Macías and his men are in retreat.

Demetrio no longer knows why they continue to fight. One time he even returns home to see his family. His devoted wife, not understanding why he must return to fight, is shocked at the thought of seeing Demetrio go off again. In spite

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 38-39.

of his long absence, Demetrio still longed to return home to his family. She pleads with him:

...Hora sí, ¡bendito sea Diós que ya veniste! ¡Ya nunca nos dejarás! ¿Verdad? ¿Verdad que ya te vas a quedar con nosotros?...

Her pleading, more urgent now, continues:

¡Demetrio, por Diós! ¡Ya no te vayas! ¡El corazón me avisa que ahora te va a suceder algo!...¿Por qué pelean ya, Demetrio?¹⁷

Demetrio picks up a stone and throws it to the bottom of the canyon. He thinks for a moment and says:

Mira esa piedra como ya no se para...¹⁸

He is telling his wife that he no longer can stop fighting.

Thus Demetrio continues on. But he has barely left when he and his men run into the enemy, almost in the exact location in which they had tasted their first victory. The following scene gives a vivid picture of raw violence that was experienced in one of the many brutal and horrifying scenes of the Revolution:

Demetrio derrama lágrimas de rabia y de dolor cuando Anastasio resbala lentamente de su caballo, sin exhalar una queja y se queda tendido, inmóvil. Venancio cae a su lado, con el pecho horriblemente abierto por la ametralladora, y el Meco se desbarranca y rueda al fondo del abismo. De repente Demetrio se encuentra sólo. Desmonta, arrástrase por las rocas hasta encontrar un parapeto, coloca una piedra que le defienda la cabeza a disparar. Demetrio apunta y no yerra un solo tiro: Paf... paf...paf. Su puntería famosa lo llena de regocijo; donde pone el ojo pone una bala: se acaba

¹⁷Arturo Torres-Río seco, Grandes novelistas de la América Hispana (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1941), p. 11.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 12.

un cargador y mete otro nuevo. Y apunta...¹⁹

At the foot of this enormous and magnificent hollow like the portico of an old cathedral, Demetrio Macías, his eyes fixed forever, continues sighting along the barrel of his rifle...

Luis Cervantes has listened to many discussions and has written many editorials, and he believes that the day will come in which the Mexican proletarian will be able to enjoy his labors. And when that day comes there will not be any caciques nor patrones. According to Cervantes, the duty of every Mexican is to fight for his country and his family against the tyranny of the caciques:

...se acaba la revolución, y se acabó todo.
¡Lástima de tanta vida segada, de tantas
viudas y huérfanos, de tanta sangre vertida!
Todo ¿para qué? Para que unos cuantos
bribones se enriquezcan y todo quede igual o
peor que antes. Usted es desprendido y dice:
"Yo no ambiciono mas que volver a mi tierra."
Pero, ¿es de justicia privar a su mujer y a
sus hijos de la fortuna...? ¿Será justo
abandonar a la patria en estos momentos solemnes
en que va a necesitar de toda la abnegación de
sus hijos los humildes para que la salven, para
que no la dejen caer de nuevo en manos de sus
eternos detentadores y verdugos, los caciques?...²⁰

The largest part of the secondary characters in Los de abajo are well studied. Demetrio's wife is kind and humble, satisfied that she has a husband, and child, and a ranch. But when the soldiers burn their hut, all her traditional honor appears and shouts at Demetrio: ¡Mátalos! Camila and La Pintada are soldaderas, those women who followed the soldiers

¹⁹Loc. cit.

²⁰Ibid., p. 15.

sometimes, with their usual vices. Azuela knew such people as Anastasio, Pancraccio, el Manteca, la Codorniz, and Venancio:

Se distinguen en la carnicería Pancraccio y el Manteca rematando a los heridos. Montañez deja caer su mano, rendida ya;...en su impasible rostro brillan la ingenuidad del niño y la amoralidad del chacal.²¹

Azuela had a wealth of material from which to draw.

One of the most picturesque and sadly mocking situations he observed was the shifts in fortune of rival factions as one, and then the other, acquired or lost power. Las moscas gives a clear account of the events following Villa's defeat at Celaya when the hordes of bureaucrats and their families, dispossessed by that event, follow in disorderly fashion after the military forces on whom their positions depend.

The action begins during a panic in a railway station of Mexico City. Politicians, government clerks, generals and officers of the old federal army (the cynical "ex-federals" of the story), doctors, teachers, women of easy virtue, and ladies of shaky respectability, all those, in brief, who had short-sightedly thrown in with Villa, are striving desperately to escape their imagined death at the hands of Obregón's Yaqui Indian troops, who enjoyed a well-earned reputation for ferocity. The frightened refugees crowd into a hospital car, where throughout the night we listen to their wild surmises.

²¹Ibid., pp. 18-19.

Azuella's style in this story is admirably suited to suggest the jerky movement of the train, the nervousness of the fugitives, their naked fear. The choppy, fragmentary dialogue, the drunkenness, the prodigious silliness of the frightened mother and her gold-digging family, together give us an etching of civil war not easily forgotten.

Marta, the mother of the Reyes-Téllez family group, is well drawn. She may well be the only protagonist in the story. The good, Christian mother performs heroic efforts to save her children from the catastrophe that befell their home. Although she worries about her children to excess, she somehow manages to withstand the anxieties encountered during the train ride. She represents the moral support of the generation of parents who had lived in the peaceful era of Díaz, and who now are trying to save their loved ones in the middle of the sea of violent events.

Las tribulaciones de una familia decente completed the cycle of novels of the Revolution. It was published in 1918, which was a fruitful year for Azuella. In it he sought to depict the impact of that struggle on people of property and to show their varying responses to the moral and social issues involved. Therefore, the novel stands as a valuable social document as well as an imaginative work of considerable power. Its literary worth lies in the high degree of dramatic tension it achieves in depicting the conflict between obtuse and materialistic persons who seek selfish advantage, as was the case

in Pascual, the perfect hypocrite, husband of the eldest daughter of the Vázquez Prado family, Berta. She comprehends her husband's true character, staking her virtue to aid him in his rise to power:

El cielo se puso sordo de repente. Don Ulpiano la asía fuertemente por sus exangües brazos. ¡Pascual! - gimió ella. Un gemido ahogado. Le tenía miedo a Pascual y se tenía miedo a sí misma. Pero Pascual, envuelto en el humo gris de su puro, cerrados los ojos, dormía un sueño pesado de ebriedad.²²

Besides creating Pascual, the son-in-law, for the purpose of excoriating those who are grasping and selfish, power hungry, and oblivious to the sufferings of others, Azuela has also included the mother of Berta, and the sons. César, the youngest son in the family, describes his father, Procopio, in this way:

Acerca de la sonrisa de Procopio están divididos los pareceres en casa. Lulú, mi hermana menor, aprueba con entusiasmo esta opinión que es la de su novio: "No hay risa que revele más inteligencia y corazón más noble que la risa de Procopio."²³

Through the father, Procopio, and one of the daughters, Lulú, Azuela develops his theme of spiritual regeneration through suffering.

César goes on and describes his mother, Agustinita, Berta, Francisco José and his brother-in-law Pascual in the following manner:

²²Azuela, Las tribulaciones de una familia decente, op. cit., p. 107.

²³Ibid., p. 35.

Pero Agustinita, Berta, José, y mi cuñado Pascual lo entienden de otra manera. Francisco José, por ejemplo, dice: "Cuando yo río, cuando ríen ustedes, cuando todos reímos, para nadie es un enigma el motivo de nuestra alegría. La risa de papá es a menudo risa de un sólo, de uno sólo, de dos a lo más."²⁴

Azuella is portraying Procopio and Lulú as sensitive individuals who, in troubled times, find the inner strength to face disaster courageously. Azuella's warmth of spirit, affection for the simple life, and moral fervor are essential ingredients of his work. The son-in-law Pascual, on the other hand, portrays the author's scorn for the corrupt elements in Carranza's government and for the men who robbed and killed like the bandits of old but who covered their rapacity and cruelty with the cloak of respectability. Azuella's indictment did not stem from a lack of patriotism, but rather from a deep sense of loyalty and from a deep love of country. It was his view that hope for betterment lay in facing the situation and recognizing its reality, not in ignoring it or glossing it over.

Followers of Huerta who had recently gone north, haughty, proud, spouting boasts, satisfied and insolent, had begun to straggle back to the south after defeat by the villistas. The propertied class, fearing revenge at the hands of the oppressed poor, flocked in panic to the cities in their search for anonymity.

They regarded the crisis as temporary, hoping that some

²⁴Loc. cit.

leader would gain power and restore their property and privileges. Overwhelmed by the harsh and bitter realities of the ensuing years, many of them descended through successive stages of suffering and hardship. Numerous members of the formerly privileged class failed to meet the test imposed by the Revolution, but some discovered in it their "realization as men," finding regeneration in undertaking simple tasks, and ultimately achieving respectable positions earned by their own efforts. Azuela saw them in striking contrast to the crowd of grasping selfseekers suddenly in possession of power and riches.

Although the novel is based mainly on distressing events, it ends, nevertheless, overflowing with hope and happiness. This is laid in the final scene in the deathbed of Procopio:

Aquella cara de asceta, enjuta y amarilla, aquellos ojos oscuros donde acababa de arder intensa llama espiritual, aquella cabeza nimbada de canas hundíase dulcemente en albos y blandos cojines...Entonces se dibujó en los labios del difunto aquel pliegue que le era habitual y brillo un instante mas su sonrisa de bondad y suave ironía. Cuando Archibaldo volió su mirada en torno, sólo Lulú le acompañaba...levantaba la frente, abiertos los ojos al cielo: unos ojos grandes, inmensos, como el universo.²⁵

Azuela observes that, though men had to face in those times the cruelty and destructiveness of suffering, in some there glimmered a spark of energy that could revivify them with unexpected force. Procopio, like the characters in other novels who similarly serve as Azuela's alter ego, is the idealist and intellectual who, though a victim of the evil about him, brave-

²⁵Ibid., p. 154.

ly confronts and comes to grips with his problems instead of succumbing to disillusionment.

The first part of the novel is autobiographical, told by César, "hijo de su mamá," whose death brings his story to a close. César, anything but a "Caesar," is the cowardly, weak, effeminate, spineless, and pitiful offspring of a too long pampered, degenerate social class.

Procopio, the protagonist, father of this "familia decente," goes out and works as a cashier when he can no longer stand to hear his wife complaining. She thinks that it is not right for a family of their social status to have to go out and work like common people to earn their daily bread as an unimportant employee. But Procopio has seen the light and is determined to be an example to his family of the realities of life, that the people of the middle class would have to endure some suffering, that they would have to face their problems bravely. This thought can be observed in Procopio's following statement:

Pues ya verás lo que ocurrió, Archibaldo. Después de aquella noche tormentosa cuando tú me salvaste la vida, me sentí otro. Sobría, dignidad, medio, zozobra: todo se acabó. Pero tú puedes imaginarte las tremendas luchas prodecesoras a mi definitiva resolución. ¡Qué difícil es despojarse del maldito orgullo que arraiga tan hondo en quien ha tenido dinero alguna vez! ...Quizá sin la crisis tan tremenda que tuve que atravesar, no me hubiese atrevido nunca. Era preciso un golpe de tal magnitud para despertarme. Solicitar el destino, previa la confesión del dolor, de la humillación de una familia en la miseria, en la runia...²⁶

²⁶Ibid., p. 133.

CHAPTER V

POST-REVOLUTIONARY MEXICO

Azuella paints us a somber picture of post-Revolutionary society, more corrupt and more degenerate than before, for the Revolution has unleashed new forces of evil that until this time had been held in check. In this sense, then, Azuella is the one writer best qualified to be called the "novelist of the Revolution," for he is the novelist not only of the more tragic and sensational movement, the bloody years from 1910 to 1917, but also of the more vital and more significant movement, the social revolution that is still going on and of which the earlier one was but an episode. Azuella was to follow it with the same keen interest and penetration with which he observed and studied the chaotic years out of which the movement for social reform grew. Five years were to pass, however, before he gave us his first picture of Mexico.

Joining the staff of the Consultorio No. III, a public clinic in Mexico City in 1922, again he came into intimate contact with the tragic life of the poor, misunderstood and maligned by those who were best able to help them: the courts and the medical profession. His severe criticism is present in the novel, La malhora, published in 1923. Briefly, it is the story of a girl of fifteen, abandoned by Marcelo and soon the easy prey of vice and sin. Her father is killed by her former lover, who is now enamored with La Tapatía. Marcelo and La Tapatía attempt to rid themselves of La malhora, lest she de-

nounce them. And Epigmenio, a former suitor of La Tapatía, is killed, but La malhora, although gravely wounded, is saved by a "santo médico" and is physically and spiritually healed in the service of three overdevout women of Irapuato. She is now known as Altagracia. But hereditary forces surge again within her, and she reverts to her former life of sin. Unconsciously she knows what is troubling her, but others do not, and by them she is reviled. At last her vision clears, and she purges her hate in blood by killing La Tapatía, "la incógnita de su destino despejada al fin."

In general, it is a picture of proletarian life in Mexico. It is a vigorous satire directed at the capitalist society. It shows us, among other things, the dogmatic activity of the judges of the courts, and also, here, as everywhere else, ridicules the ignorance on the part of the medical profession. The life of Altagracia proves that it is useless to rebel against destiny, and although the poor creature goes to confession and receives communion for years, primitive forces still drive her to vice and sin.

In another novel of postwar Mexico, San Gabriel de Valdivias (Comunidad indígena), published in 1938, we are presented with the theme of the apparent impossibility and the consequential despair that a small town can have a sincere man. The peones struggle with the líder, who promises them honesty and betterment, and in the end, find themselves worse off than

before. They have lost all hope.

San Gabriel de Valdivias had formerly been the hacienda of don Carlos and his son Arturo, reactionary, landholding caciques, and now is a modern agrarian colony, product of the Revolution; but in name only, for the conditions are as bad as or worse than before. It is true that it is now known as Comunidad Quintana and that the hacendados no longer enrich themselves on peon land and toil, but Quintana is the name of a new type of tyrant, the revolutionary líder, under whom the old hacendado system flourishes as never before. Only the old man, Dámaso Campos, had courage enough to growl his eternal discontent: "la misma jeringa con otro palo."¹

As is pictured in these last two novels, it is Azuela's feeling, that in spite of the bloody struggle and postwar reforms, the condition in Mexico had not changed much, some did, of course, abide by the reforms and changes, but it is apparent that many people in a position to profit, personally, continued to do so afterwards. Only the names and titles changed but the oppression of the poor and humble people continued to exist.

¹Mariano Azuela, San Gabriel de Valdivias Comunidad indígena (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Ercilla, 1938), p. 140.

CONCLUSIONS

In reading the works of Azuela, one can feel his true spirit, that of great concern for his people. He has shown us clear, vivid pictures of the mannerisms and customs of the people, particularly of those who practiced immoral injustices. As a result of these injustices, the poor people were the ones who felt the pain and suffering.

The picture that Azuela has given us of the Revolution, is of scenes of the struggle, many of which were written from his own experiences while serving in the army as a medical doctor. Don Mariano was a kind of saint, sometimes a skeptical and severe saint, as seen in some of his works, but full of charity for his people, whose weaknesses he saw, as he saw his own, clear-eyed and unflinching.

No one seems further removed from the violent scenes of his most powerful novel, Los de abajo, than Mariano Azuela himself. Down from the north whirled the men of Pancho Villa, assassination, civil war; hate versus hate. Demetrio Macías, hero of Los de abajo is painted as an illiterate rancher, saloon brawler, assassin of unjust officials, outlaw with nerves of iron, surefooted, lover of battle and cold steel, madly brave, cruel, but filled with a measure of fairplay, a man who never forgets a kindness and never forgets an injury.

Azuella condemns the brutality practiced during the Revolution and deeply sympathizes with those that are injured. He feels that the futility of destruction and violence has

made man lose his true virtues and ideals. In spite of the Revolution, however, Demetrio Macías still finds himself thinking of his ranch, his yoke of oxen, his wife, of the fields on his ranch to be planted, a feeling so strong that on one occasion he sets out on a terrific three days journey to see his wife and his old haunts. But Luis Cervantes by now had given Demetrio a reason, a mission, a goal, an ideal; and at the same time tries to corrupt him with gold, for which Demetrio does not have the slightest use. He is merely a blind agent, the weathered leaf. He is the stone, which he tosses into the abyss shortly before his death; it is powerless to stay its flight. And his story is the story of his kind, of those who, because of the ruthlessness of the Díaz regime, were tossed into the arena of rebellion, forced to fight, without ever really knowing why they were there, yet swept on and on ever faster.

The biggest fault of the revolutionaries, in Azuela's judgment, lay in their killing the best in themselves, forgetting their humble origins and the simple habits they had formed in poverty and even in misery, and then succumbing to the seductions of power and money. Azuela believed that pursuit of the simple life would cure the worst ills of the times without "blood or tears." Although Azuela was pessimistic, this did not mean that he held no hope for the future, because he has demonstrated in his works, that there are good men, and that they are capable of lifting themselves up from their suffering

and misery, to work for a common cause. And he hopes that the injustices suffered will be eliminated and replaced by ideas and ideals.

The picture of the twenties that Azuela paints for us is, if anything, more revolting and more somber than those of the war years. As Azuela puts it: "Porque entonces yo no conocía a sus émulos, los civilizados Carranza, Obregón, Calles y Cía. Francisco Villa, fuerza ciega de la revolución estuvo siempre en su sitio. Mató mucho y aún con sus propias manos. Pero nunca fue el cobarde pálido criminal que dice 'mato en nombre de las Instituciones, mato en defensa de mi dredo filosófico'."

Those who read his novels see that his themes are broad. Actually, questions of a sociological and economic nature, and problems of human conduct, attract much more than the specialized matter of the Revolution. For he is man thinking about Mexico. His own emotions are often involved, and one is always aware of the high mission of the writer: yet he writes always as the objective manipulator of tools, working something out.

Azuela was oriented as was no other writer of our time in the complex life of the Mexican people; and his receptiveness and his highly personal combination of literary resources give a great deal of his work an artistic status which promises permanence.

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