

lose the position their parents had achieved for them, a relatively privileged position for the time. I would like to close this point by adding that Garciadiego combines and links the biographies of hundreds of individuals with the university's process as an institution to describe and explain the collective without ever forgetting the individuals.

Another of the work's important hypotheses deals with the basis for the university. The author says,

The destruction of the old regime and the emergence of a new social order after the revolutionary struggle had a great impact on the National University, to the degree that we can say that by 1920, its nature had changed radically. We could even say that the institution was really born in 1920 and not in 1910, and that the heritage of the *porfirista* Justo Sierra is smaller than that of the revolutionary José Vasconcelos.

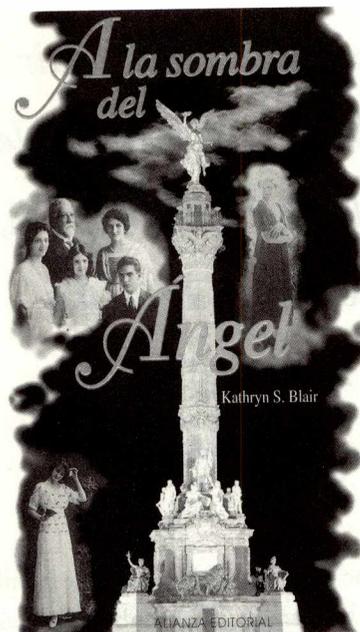
What was the nature of the university that underwent this change? According to Garciadiego, the answer may be that it became an institution interested in and which actively sought to solve social, political and contemporary problems. But what is absolutely clear is that at that time—and perhaps even more so today—the university had to struggle and change in order to endure.

Finally, a comment on the title of the book: *Rudos contra científicos*. I think it is an attractive title, even captivating, that makes a beeline for the dynamic of what we already know about the spectacle of wrestling matches, and undoubtedly, in pejorative terms. To continue with the author's playfulness in giving his book this title, we might ask ourselves who are the *ruffians* and who are the *scientists* or *technicians* in the story? Were some of the players truly “the good guys” and others “the bad guys”? Is that impression valid? What did they fight for: in favor or against the university? What did they have riding on the struggle? The Mask vs. Samson? Who won?

To find the answer, you have to read the book. I have no intention of telling you the outcome of the battle. You would miss the wonderful adventure of sitting down to a good read of an original and extraordinary book by an intelligent, rigorous and critical historian. ❧

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**A la sombra del ángel**  
(In the Angel's Shadow)

Kathryn S. Blair

Editorial Alianza

Mexico City, 1996, 554 pp.

Stories abound in Mexico of men and women who have stood out in social, political or cultural life. We only know most of them from the outside, their public activities. We do not know the private, intimate side: who they shared their life with, who influenced them or whom they influenced. *A la sombra del ángel* (In the Angel's Shadow) is a historical novel, the result of more than 10 years of painstaking research. Its purpose was to study the life of Antonieta Rivas Mercado, a woman from the beginning of this century, who dedicated her life and fortune to promoting culture and change in the Mexico of her time.

This historical novel written by Kathryn S. Blair, the wife of Antonieta's only son, starts, paradoxically, with Antonieta's death; she killed herself in Paris, before the image of Christ, in Notre Dame Cathedral. The author then takes us back to the dawning of the twentieth century, to the moment of Antonieta's birth, explaining events which would eventually lead to her suicide.

*With vivid descriptions, Ms. Blair leads the reader through the whole city: the Zócalo (the main square), the Metropolitan Cathedral, the Church of La Profesa, the Alameda Park, the Jockey Club...*

Ms. Blair divides the book into three parts: The Family, The Revolution and The Campaign, describing in detail Antonieta's family life, social situation and relevant events in which the leading characters were involved.

In the first part, the reader meets the Rivas Mercado family, who adhered strictly to the rigid unwritten rules of the social conventions of their time. The father figure was to have an enormous influence on Antonieta's life. Her mother's apparent passiveness is also described, but she actually transgressed the rules of submission attributed to her sex, abandoning her husband and children. At that point Antonieta took responsibility for home and family, very probably stoking in her the rebellion that was to be a marked and growing trait all her life.

Antonieta's early years coincided with the last years of the Porfirio Díaz regime. Antonieta's father, the architect Antonio Rivas Mercado, was commissioned to design and build in Mexico City a column to commemorate the centennial of Mexican independence from Spain. The monument is now known as the Angel of Independence, and Antonieta was to grow up in its shadow.

The bourgeois society to which the Rivas Mercado family belonged enjoyed Mexico City. With vivid descriptions, Ms. Blair leads the reader through the whole city: the Zócalo (the main square), the Metropolitan Cathedral, the Church of *La Profesa*, the Alameda Park, the Jockey Club, Reforma Avenue with its horse-drawn carriages, Mexican Indians in the streets selling all sorts of things, and the flower market, to name but a few.

However, all this was shattered by the Revolution, which takes up the second part of the book. Those were turbulent years when groups with different political ideals and concerns sought the end of the Díaz regime, unleashing a bloody struggle for power. During this time, Antonieta married a puritan American adventurer, Albert Blair, who was to be the father of her only child. The marriage was a failure, and Antonieta travelled to Europe, where she developed intellectually, something she was never subsequently to give up.

The horrors of the revolutionary struggle were experienced in all their depravity in Mexico City. The Rivas Mercado family, forced to live with the servants, sharing discomforts and scarcities, were no strangers to the changes. Violence was an everyday occurrence, and the Rivas Mercado family took in and sheltered fugitives.

On the death of Antonio Rivas Mercado, Antonieta inherited a sizeable fortune. She became a patron of intellectuals and artists, sponsored ambitious projects in theater and music, as well as in publishing and art. This made her a central figure in the cultural world of the Mexico of the 1920s.

Ms. Blair describes the social gatherings held in the city, gatherings that Antonieta attended and out of which came her friendship with painter Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, a known homosexual. This relationship developed into a profound emotional dependency on the part of Antonieta, which made her emotionally unstable.

The third and final part of the book relates Mexico's political situation during the aftermath of the revolution. Antonieta met intellectual and politician José Vasconcelos, the opposition candidate for the presidency. She fell in love with him and became deeply involved in his campaign, financing it and participating directly. The election results were a farce, and Antonieta found herself in financial ruin and utterly demoralized.

Alone, with no money, and on the point of losing custody of her son, Antonieta Rivas Mercado lost her emotional balance.

*A la sombra del ángel* is an intense journey through the life of Antonieta Rivas Mercado. It is also a very pleasant way to get a glimpse of Mexico City as it was at the beginning of the century. ❧

*Maria Fernanda Riveroll*  
Editorial Advisor