

Gabriel Zaid— is nothing more than a world; it widens the world. It does not mean that literature is a substitute for science, but rather that it is a form of knowledge which can transcend the empirical and the immediate.

It is clear, on the other hand, that Noé Jitrik's intentions cannot pass as discursive defense of literature. It is an exercise where words no longer are instruments but are passions in life, where personal history finds the written word, where autobiography is the immense desire to live and write.

After *Slow Trolley Cars*, our childhood, family, and friends will never be the same. Perhaps we will better appreciate sugar, coffee, dogs, the neighborhood, Sunday outings in Chapultepec park, matinees, the clothes hanging on the line, trips to the bakery, gossip at the laundry, or the noisy trolley cars which have disappeared but are recorded in our memories. Perhaps our words will be as seductive as the written voice of Noé Jitrik.

Noé Jitrik, *Los lentos tranvías*. Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, colección Nueva narrativa hispana. México, 1988. 120 páginas.

MORE ON THE ORIGIN OF THE AZTECS

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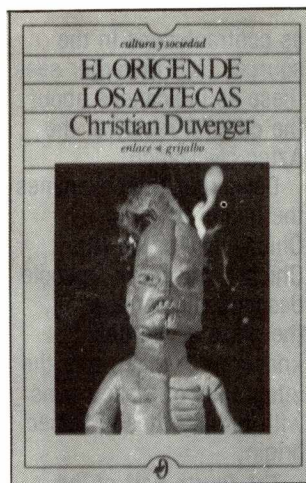
French historians have created a grand tradition for their interest and efforts in discovering the origins of the Aztecs. Faithful to this tradition, Christian Duverger recurred to both hispanic sources and to the few pre-

hispanic codexes and maps that survived the Conquest and subsequent destruction, in his investigation for this book. The author explains in this work, translated by Carmen Arizmendi, how a nomadic people later formed the great Aztec Empire, which fascinated Europe during the Conquest of Meso-america.

Duverger's book comes at an apt moment, shortly before the 500th anniversary of the European invasion, led by Christopher Columbus' expedition in 1492. The French researcher reconstructs the Aztec past from Aztlán — "Place of the Seven Tribes" — to Mexico, from Toltecayotl to Chichimecayotl: he explores the double cultural heritage of the Aztecs or Mexicas. Christian Duverger searches for the origins of this people even in the semantics of the words used to relate their story, and he calls our attention to contradictions in historical documents that were important sources for historians such as Soustelle, García Cubas, Jiménez Moreno, Orozco y Berra and Clavijero, as well as in codexes and other documents written shortly after the Conquest.

These contradictions are explained by Duverger in the light of the ideological positions of the historians of the time, who generally had their own particular interpretation of the history they studied: "Alongside formal or symbolic interpretations, one must consider an element that is extremely important in understanding Aztec history: that is, that it was written in Mexico, after the Conquest, and with ends that today we would not hesitate to call propagandistic"

In the first part of his research, the author remarks that the apparent contradictions are due to



the fact that the Mexican past is a constructed past, and that "the clues got tangled" during the search for origins. But, he adds, "one cannot refrain from studying the conditions in which the historical sources were constituted; the specific conditions which presided at the time when the documents were written illuminate by themselves many obscure points in the manuscripts. These also provide us with important indications about the spirit which inspired these 16th century codexes, which today are wrinkled and yellowed with age". The author also emphasizes the need for reliable editions of certain ethno-historic texts because, due to editorial or historical conditions, some of these texts were modified, or, as in the case of the manuscripts from Quauhtinchan, Puebla, sometimes were not even published.

In the second part of the book, Duverger discusses how the Mexicas sought to legitimate their stay in the Valley of Mexico, and specifically, on the island which the other Nahuatl people of the region called Mexico, through the construction of a circular history. The words Mexico and Aztlán have no written symbols or glyphs in the Aztec writing, and besides,

notes the author, Mexico was an island. These coincidences and others lead Duverger to assert that "the Aztecs wanted to legitimize both their presence and their authority as well as affirm their tribal particularities. This is the context in which the so particular construction of the Aztecs' origins should be analyzed."

After their first attempt to settle in the area of Chapultepec, the Mexicas had to settle on the island of Mexico, and they appropriated the name that the island already had. It is from this point that Mexican or Aztec history is incorporated with myths and stories from neighboring tribes and settlements — a tactic, says the author, that the Aztecs used in their conquest of other peoples: "the merging of ideas and traditions was an essential part of Aztec strategy: instead of unilaterally imposing their rites and beliefs, the Aztecs used to practice a sort of ideological importation, making efforts to assimilate some of the practices in use among the indigenous peoples they conquered."

The Mexicas did not hide their Chichimeca origins, on the contrary, they boasted about their pilgrimage, which they saw as a special strength corresponding to a dominant people. For this reason, says Duverger, dates were more symbolic than successive for the Aztecs, in contrast with the European vision of time: "This interpretation — which certainly has not been justified by any data — shows us a desire to explain an order of history which is totally alien to the Occidental mentality. This system, however, was commonly used in the pre-hispanic era, precisely because it allowed a fusion of history with myth: this alchemy of time allowed a