

The change, then, would retain the defense of these basic principles with the awareness that sometimes—as an exercise in our own self-determination, never as a result of external pressure—it is necessary to transfer part of our sovereignty to be able to participate in the global economic tendencies of today's world.

Astié-Burgos dedicates the last chapter of his book to analyzing the origins of the North American Free Trade Agreement and its advantages and disadvantages for the signer countries. His balance sheet is positive: he says NAFTA is the recognition by the Mexican people and government that a harmonious and fruitful relationship with our inevitable main partner is preferable to aspiring to isolated survival in a globalized world. However, he does warn that it is also essential to set up agreements and similar links with other regions to which we are tied for reasons of geography, history and culture: he emphasizes the European Union, the countries of the Pacific Basin and, above all, Latin America.

Relations with the United States are condemned to complexity. According to Astié-Burgos, "Perhaps the very nature of such a close relationship implies difficult, conflictive relations" (p. 414). However, the determination does exist, in part due to the efforts of Mexican diplomacy, to build an atmosphere of productive collaboration. Problems like illegal migra-

tion, drug trafficking, the border, etc., must be looked at from a different point of view, not of mutual recrimination, but of joint collaboration. This will only be possible if mutual respect is cultivated and old, uninformed, often ambiguous, attitudes about each other—not at all representative of the general feelings of either people—are modified in both countries.

This study is important reading because it is well documented and broadens out the vision of the historian. The author's grounding in diplomatic circles—concretely his work as general director for North America of the Foreign Relations Secretariat and alternate Mexican ambassador to the United States—provides the reader with more than an erudite study; it gives us a fresh, first-hand look at the difficult relationship between Mexico and the United States. This is neither the work of a historian nor of a diplomat. It is a synthesis that incorporates both dimensions and achieves a full vision of the past, present and future of our relations with our powerful neighbor. This is a book that will join the ranks of other classic works on the topic like those by Jorge Castañeda, Isidro Favela, Robert A. Pastor, Alan Riding, Lorenzo Meyer and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez.

Diego Ignacio Bugada Bernal
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Confesiones de Maclovia

(Confessions of Maclovia)

Martín Casillas de Alba

Ediciones del Equilibrista,
Mexico City, 1995, 429 pp.

IN THE LIGHT OF MEMORY

"I went to Chapala because that is where Grandmother Maclovia lived before she died." This is how Martín Casillas de Alba opens his novel *Confesiones de Maclovia* (Confessions of Maclovia), and it is from that phrase that the light of memory—which is invented and intuited, which recreates and investigates—is cast upon us. In the book's "Overture," Martín puts us in a mood appropriate for the journey through the novel's 435 pages: tranquility. A slightly melancholic tranquility. A tranquility of withdrawal and recollection. A re-examination of what has been lived, desired and dreamed.

The first thing one notices is the versatility of the light. Its constant movement, the way in which it moves our emotions, as if they were clouds on a windy day. That revealing light will not abandon us. It will penetrate our own memory and will cause us to lose a feeling of reality, of our own reality, because the show is about to begin. In the Overture's present-day Chapala, the noise of our modern world disappears, giving way to a silence populated by other sounds, other ways of passing the time and space of what was the nineteenth century. The landscape comes upon us overflowing with health and color. Rumors arise from the lagoon, and from the people as well. Not everything from the past was better. The novel does not evade the political turmoil, the violence, the asphyxiation, above all, of the beliefs and traditions which were fought with life itself, with solitude and often with humiliation. No, it is not that the world of before was ideal; but it is not in the present that the novel will unfold. It is in the past, in the passage of a specific past which is moving toward its future. It is in the present of that past which had the same conflicts and the same hopes as this one.

In that present the dominant forces are love, the struggle for freedom, art, death. The story of Maclovia revolves around these themes and the atmosphere of the writing is that of falling in love: the intensity of perception felt by a person in love.

The atmosphere of the writing is not only the story being told, the language of the storyteller, the epoch in which the events occurred. It is the attitude of the writer. It is with that attitude that Don Juan Bautista listens to the confessions of Maclovia, a woman much older than he, a woman who in her youth was a startling beauty, an intelligent beauty. The chronicler —apocryphal or not, but undeniably a character in his own right— is just as seduced by the idea of writing about this woman as Martín is by writing the story of his grandmother.

Being in love with the idea, with what one writes with love —this must lead to falling in love with what we read.

In her own voice, Maclovia narrates her youth. The chronicler's voice provides the narrative of the older woman. The magic of the novelist succeeds in encompassing a life which is coming to an end. But since it is being told by the old woman, the novel's atmosphere has an evocative power so intense that only Chapala can hold it. Only Chapala, because that is what the author calls it. It could be anywhere in the world. It is just that Casillas takes us to Chapala and thus, we are Chapala. We know its changes in mood and temperature as though we had never left.

While reading this book, it occurred to me several times that perhaps the first real decentraliza-

tion to occur in our culture is that of literature. That of the novel, which recreates other, profound identities —such as being from Chihuahua, Baja California, Zacatecas, Durango or Michoacán. Being part of the nature, climate, tastes and smells of a certain place. I am not talking about social classes, cultures or ideologies. I am speaking of flesh that understood the world where it received its first ray of sunlight; of stomachs that received their first nourishment, of languages that defined a first identity: you are a *tapatio* [a person from Guadalajara].

Then I heard the *tapatio* things and that made me want to touch them: the streets, the buildings, the roads. To feel the distances. To smell. To taste.

How strange it was for me to know that the novel was by Martín Casillas [de Alba], whom I had always considered a hard-core *chilango* [someone from Mexico City], who could just as well have been from New York, London, or at least Madrid. A *chilango* like those who...already know everything. They know it all. They are extremely well-informed. They are a desire to be. They are a photocopy of what they would like to be and invariably make the point that they are from somewhere else, but always from the central part of the country.

Well, Martín was able to remove his novel from that way of looking at things. And, I asked myself while reading his book,

how was he able to do this, to conquer this other *tempo*, which is definitely not that of the nation's center?

A narrative peace. A space in which to exercise literary memory.

Cova taught him, I soon discovered. Cova taught him to listen to the passage of time and above all she taught him to understand old age (which I see as one of the novel's most notable characteristics).

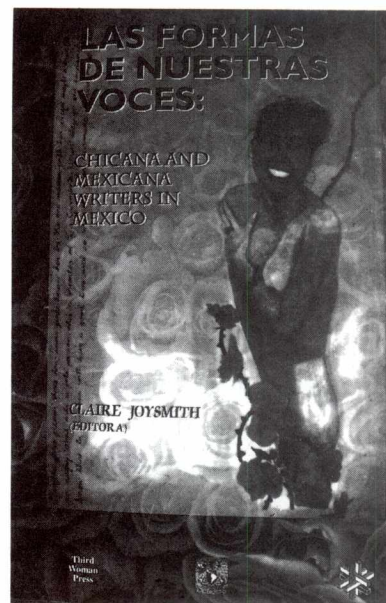
The woman seated on her bed, looking out the window. Leaning on a cane, walking toward the plaza, letting Juan Bautista attend to her, raising her hand to fix her hair, parades the tranquility of a person who has lived and is now awaiting death, the quietness of someone who has thought a thousand times about things that have happened. Someone who is capable of perceiving the distances between one's identity at 20, at 40, at 60... This woman who speaks to a man still young, who looks at her, seeing her then and now, melding these selves into a single whole as he comes to understand her.

A book can sometimes become a place. Reading this book was like entering a comfortable and well-kept room, where I could let myself be and see myself surrounded, not by objects, histories or voices, but by sensations, elusive discoveries between the leaves of my own trees, my own lake, my own history. It was there that I heard, ever so softly, Cova's

brushstrokes in a space, and the agitated breathing of the chronicler in another. I passed through pages and felt the breeze, the rain, nighttime in the city...

For quite some time I have been obsessed with the attempt to define what happens to a person's perceptions when he is told a story through the cinema and when he is told a story through literature. I think that what happened to me with this book is the closest approximation to a definition: the story told by a novel places one face to face with the story, inside the story and nowhere else. One dissolves, becoming the very air of the novel. The room which the book turned into each time I read it was empty, and at the same time I became the room where things happened. What things? Not a story I was finding out about. Not a love that I was witnessing, but rather a quality of the world. A way of remembering. A way of being blind, water, rain. I believe that in a film things don't happen that way. Identification is inevitable; letting yourself be invaded by the image, remaining at the very center of the story. It is not that I consider one thing at all better than the other, but simply that in literature we use the memory of what has been lived. An intuitive memory. A flesh memory.

María Luisa Puga
Mexican writer.



**Las formas de nuestras voces:
Chicana and Mexicana Writers
in Mexico**

(The Forms of Our Voices:
Chicana and Mexican Writers in
Mexico)

Claire Joysmith (Editor)

Third Woman Press, CISAN, UNAM
Mexico City, 1995, 350 pp.

BICULTURAL LITERATURE

If literature unveils a mirror to the soul, then this well-edited anthology of writings about and by Chicana and Mexicana authors lays bare an exciting and provocative bicultural literary landscape known by only a privileged few. Based loosely on a conference-encounter of Chicana and Mexicana writers held in Mexico City in June 1993, and organized by the editor, the study encompasses not only the original presentations but selective interviews with some of the participants, additional comments, biographi-