

# Beyond the Blood Sacrifice: Literary Explorations of Latin American Mestizo Culture

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**Abstract.** *The thought-provoking vision of blood sacrifice as the common ground of pre-Columbian American and European Judeo-Christian societies is reflected in two opposed views of Spain's conquest and colonization of the "New World": Bartolomé de las Casas' *Historia de las Indias* and Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*.*

*Notwithstanding the bloody conflicts between the Spaniards and the pre-Columbian aboriginal people, their meeting engendered a Mestizo population, composed of people of "mixed blood", which constitutes a positive affirmation of the common ground shared by European and pre-Columbian cultures. The almost metaphor-like emergence of a Latin American Mestizo culture as a new distinct society is explored in Latin American literature, from the time of the Spanish Conquest until the twentieth century.*



The principal character of Carlos Fuentes' short story *Chac Mool* suggests that Christianity, in its "bloody, sacrificial sense" ("en su sentido cálido, sangriento, de sacrificio y liturgia", Chang, 1988: 493) is a natural prolongation of pre-Columbian indigenous religions, and for this reason, the aboriginal people were readily converted to Christianity ("Qué cosa más natural que aceptar un sentimiento tan cercano a todo su ceremonial, a toda su vida", *ibid.*). This thought-provoking vision of blood sacrifice as the common ground of pre-Columbian American and Judeo-Christian European societies is reflected in two opposed views about the Spanish conquest and colonization of the "New World", expounded in Bartolomé de las Casas'

*Historia de las Indias* and Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*. Unlike the bloody conflicts between the Spanish and the pre-Columbian aboriginal people which gave birth to them, Latin American "mestizos" —people of "mixed blood"—ironically are a positive affirmation of the common ground that European and pre-Columbian societies shared. The almost metaphor-like emergence of Latin American mestizo culture as a new distinct society has been explored in Latin American literature from the time of the Conquest to the twentieth century.

Bartolomé de las Casas was a Dominican monk whose *Historia de las Indias* protested against the bloody excesses of European colonization. He described the indigenous pre-Columbian culture as an idyllic world of innocence (De las Casas, Libro 1: 231) replaced by cruelty and exploitation with the arrival of European colonists (De las Casas, Libro 2: 89-90). According to his English translator John Phillips, Las Casas's *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* was "an Historical and true Account of the Cruel Massacre and Slaughter of above Twenty Millions of innocent People; Committed by the Spaniards in the Islands of Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica, etc. As also in the Continent of Mexico, Peru and other Places of the West Indies, To the Total Destruction of those Countries" (De las Casas, 1959). As the self-appointed voice of conscience for Spain, Bartolomé de las Casas dedicated his life to fighting for justice for the conquered aboriginal people, but from the perspective of a Roman Catholic missionary. In the introduction to his translation of *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, Nigel Griffin asserts that "some of Las Casas's many identities have been devised to serve political and moral interests he would not have shared and may not even have understood". The "Black Legend" resulting from the widespread English translations of Las Casas's accounts of brutality and slavery in the New World was, according to Griffin, "largely an instrument of Anglo-Dutch propaganda and (Las Casas) would have been

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horrified at the uses to which the despised Protestant heretics had put his work... For all his insistence that the Crown had seriously mismanaged its colonies and that the behavior of the colonists had given reason for the name of Christ to be loathed and abominated by countless people, Las Casas never once denied, as many of his fellow Dominicans effectively did, that the Spanish crown was the legitimate ruler of the Americas and he persisted until his death in the belief that the indigenous people had, in ignorance but in good faith, voluntarily surrendered their natural sovereignty to the King of Spain" (Griffin: xiv-xvi). Griffin emphasizes that, in Las Casas's view, Columbus "had been chosen by God for his learning and virtue to bring the Gospel to the New World" (xv; *cf.* Díaz, 1984: Tomo I, 27) and Spanish settlers unfortunately had transformed "a trading and evangelizing mission" into "genocidal colonization" (xv). Las Casas called for justice, reminding Spain that the conquered people were subjects of the Castilian crown and that "to treat them like animals" was "against God's laws, against the laws of nature and a violation of the laws of Castile" (xvii). He saw their harsh treatment as a denial of the aboriginal peoples' humanity "which all men, whatever their beliefs or cultural preferences, shared" (xvii).

On the other hand, Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España* describes some of the Aztecs' blood-thirsty social customs that ironically mirror the crimes against humanity attributed to the Spanish colonists. Díaz del Castillo was a soldier in Hernán Cortés's army who witnessed first hand the conquest of the Aztec nation, one of the largest pre-Columbian American empires. He vowed that he wrote his *Historia Verdadera* from an unbiased point of view: "yo lo escribiré con la ayuda de Dios con recta verdad" (Tomo I: 8) without flattering anyone. As well as describing the almost fairytale-like splendor of the Aztec capital city on the lake—the city of Mexico—and the highly evolved social structure that the Aztec nation represented (*ibid.*: 215), Bernal Díaz provided graphic accounts of the cult of blood sacrifice on which the Aztec empire was based. He describes the Aztec emperor Moctezuma's devotion to Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli (the gods of war and of hell) and to the principle of human sacrifice as his prime method for maintaining favor with the gods while simultaneously keeping neighboring aboriginal nations in a state of constant terror of Aztec power. Díaz writes that, after the arrival of Cortés, Moctezuma sacrificed many aboriginal boys for divination purposes. If the Spaniards did not leave in their ships, the Aztec emperor had hoped that he might capture and breed them for sacrificing too:

... como Moctezuma era muy devoto de sus ídolos, que se decían Tezcatlipuca e Huichilobos; el uno decían que era dios de la guerra y el Tezcatlipuca el dios del infierno, y les sacrificaba cada muchachos para que le diesen respuesta de lo que había de hacer de nosotros, porque Moctezuma tenía pensamientos que si no nos tornábamos a ir en los navíos, de nos haber todos a las manos para que hiciésemos generación, y también para tener que sacrificar, según después supimos... (*Historia*, Tomo I: 92)

For the reason of "la guerra florida" that the Aztecs waged constantly to maintain a constant supply of human sacrifices, Cortés discovered that he could find allies in the aboriginal nations who wished to throw off the subjugation and terror of the Aztec empire, seeing alliance with Cortés and his marvelous weapons as a possible solution to their problems. In *The Buried Mirror*—his video commentary documenting the living presence of pre-Columbian culture in México—Carlos Fuentes has emphasized that the Aztecs "wanted power and they achieved it through force and cunning; creating an empire based on terror, tribute, fear and 'la guerra florida'." An endless supply of victims was required, as the Aztecs believed that they were living under the fifth (and last) sun, which could only be kept in the sky by the continuous sacrifice of human lives" (Video at 12:20 min. from 00:00). In his *Historia Verdadera*, Bernal Díaz de Castillo described the bustling markets of the great Aztec capital city, full of color and overflowing evidence of prosperity (*cf.* Tomo I: 215) adjacent to the temples of human sacrifice:

E en aquella placeta tenían tantas cosas muy diabólicas de ver, de bocinas y trompetillas y navajones, y muchos corazones de indios que habían quemado, con que sahumaron a aquellos sus ídolos, todo cuajado de sangre. Tenían tanto, que los doy a la maldición; y como todo hedía a carnicería, no víamos la hora de quitarnos de tan mal hedor y peor vista. (*ibid.*: 217)

Díaz mentions big pots filled with water where the Aztecs cooked (for their priests' consumption) the bodies of captives who had been sacrificed (*ibid.*: 218).

After his tour of the Aztec gods and their places of sacrifice, Cortés expressed wonder to Moctezuma why such a "great prince and wise man" ("gran señor y sabio" *ibid.*: 217) as he was had failed to realize that idols demanding constant human sacrifice were not gods but evil things. Cortés's suggestion that they drive away the devils with an image of the Virgin Mary was met with a quick rebuke by Moctezuma:

"Señor Malinche: si tal deshonor como has dicho creyera que habías de decir, no te mostrara mis dio-

ses. Aquestos tenemos por muy buenos, y ellos nos dan salud y agua y buenas sementeras e temporales y vitorias cuantas queremos, y tenemoslos de adorar y sacrificar; lo que os ruego es que no se diga otras palabras en su deshonor." (*ibid.*: 217)

The Aztecs' holy books had predicted their nation's fall in 1519, the year of the arrival of Cortés on the shores of Mexico. When the fighting started (after Moctezuma's initial investigative discussions with Cortés), those among Cortés's men and aboriginal allies unlucky enough to be captured by the Aztecs had their hearts torn out as human sacrifices and their roasted body parts thrown with taunts into the midst of Cortés's men to discourage and unnerve them (*cf.* Tomo II: 70-71). Although vastly outnumbered in many long fierce battles, Cortés and his allies finally were victorious and brought to an end the Aztecs' reign of terror (*ibid.*: 89).

Despite Hernán Cortés's protests that his God was good and Moctezuma's gods were evil, the above-mentioned historical documentaries provide ample evidence that European and Aztec societies shared a common thirst for power, conquest, and human blood, even though their precise manner of spilling the latter and their justifications for doing so apparently were different. Ironically, the Spaniards and the Aztecs both felt their imperialistic endeavors to be spiritually and morally justifiable. Both societies envisioned human sacrifice within the context of "holy" war as a laudable activity giving rise to a state of spiritual transcendence of the victim. Serge Gruzinski (1992: 36), in *The Aztecs: Rise and Fall of an Empire* suggested that "the most enviable fate, and the one closest to Aztec vocation, was to die in combat or on a sacrificial stone. By such means one would join the sun in its triumphant march. This belief was the justification for a century of the Wars of the Flowers". Similarly, the European Christian tradition has condoned the death of thousands of Christian warriors during the Crusades against the Moors in the "Holy Lands" during the Middle Ages; each Christian and Moorish soldier finding comfort in their mutual belief that to die in a war defending their religion was to assure themselves a place in the Kingdom of heaven after life. Just as the Aztecs believed that they were honoring their captive victims by sacrificing them to their gods, so the Spanish Inquisition as well as Northern European witch hunters felt that they had the right (and possibly even the obligation) to torture a "heretic's" physical body in the higher interests of saving the victim's "immortal" soul through confession of his/her "crimes" against Christian doctrine. Gruzinski contends that, for the Aztecs, "the sacrificed prisoner was no longer an enemy being killed but a messenger sent to the gods, himself

invested with an almost divine dignity. When a man took a prisoner, he said: 'Here is my beloved son', and the captive said, 'Here is my beloved father'" (40). In view of the parallels established between European and Aztec societies, it is very significant that the symbolic father/son relationship (described above) linking the earthly Aztec captor with his soon to be sacrificed prisoner is reminiscent of the bond between God and Jesus Christ in Christianity. Just as God allowed his only Son (who had assumed the image of man) to be sacrificed, in order that humanity would be saved through him, so the Aztec conqueror sacrificed his "son" in order that the sun maintain its position in the sky and by consequence that humanity continue to exist. Dressed in the clothing of the god, the executioner and his sacrificial victim both were the images of the god ("ixiptla", Gruzinski: 54); a situation strangely evocative of the Judeo-Christian belief that God created man in his own image. Gruzinski further asserts that "In ancient Mexico, human sacrifice was an offering to the gods of peoples' most precious possession—their blood. The custom that most startled the Spaniards, ritual cannibalism, was in fact the attainment of a spiritual ideal. It was a true communion" (49). Drinking the blood of the sacrificed one and eating his flesh is performed symbolically in the Christian ritual of Holy Communion, wherein the celebrant, following the example and instructions of Jesus Christ himself, drinks wine (symbolic of the blood of Christ) and eats bread that has been broken (symbolic of the body of Christ).

Just as European and Aztec religious rituals and beliefs shared some surprising innate parallels in spite of gross external differences, so both cultures employed their religious beliefs in the service of their political and economic agendas of expansion. In the case of the Aztecs, Gruzinski contends that "human sacrifice was an instrument of government, upholding a policy of terror and at the same time enabling the physical elimination of the most dangerous conquered people, that is, leaders and warriors (52) ... the annihilation of vast numbers of human lives was, in its own way, a form of conspicuous consumption aimed at impressing subject peoples and neighbours" (54). In a similar vein, Gruzinski also proposes that "Cortés's conduct was inspired as much by gold and by a love of power as by a desire to propagate the Christian faith, because this faith both justified his enterprise and, in the spirit of the times, gave it a goal and a meaning" (92). Christopher Columbus's (Cristobal Colón's) letter to Luis de Santangel, dated February 15, 1493, clearly summarizes fifteenth century Spain's search for new avenues to economic prosperity, sanctified by Christian evangelicism:

[...] Así que, pues nuestro Redentor dio esta victoria a nuestros ilustrísimos Rey y Reina [...] adonde toda la cristiandad debe tomar alegría y hacer grandes fiestas y dar gracias solemnes a la Santa Trinidad con muchas oraciones solemnes, por el tanto ensalzamiento que habrán en tornándose tantos pueblos a nuestra fe, y después por los bienes temporales que no solamente a la España, mas todos los cristianos tendrán aquí refrigerio y ganancia. (14)

Be it as it may, critical speculations about innately similar cultural and religious traditions shared by fifteenth century Spaniards and the pre-Columbian people whom they conquered are of little consequence compared to the common ground that resulted from their meeting—mestizo culture.

In his conclusion to *The Buried Mirror*, Carlos Fuentes asks the questions “Who won? Who lost?”. By way of an answer, he suggests that “a catastrophe is truly catastrophic only if nothing comes out of it”. For Fuentes, the Conquest and all that ensued was not a catastrophe because “out of those sometimes bloody, sometimes merciful events, something was born—we were born—the Spanish Americans” (Video, 56 min. from 00:00). In the nineteenth century, the Mexican historian Lucas Alemán emphasized the positive values of the original “mestizo” culture that arose from the amalgamation of the European and pre-Columbian cultures after the Spanish conquest (*cf. Del Solar Hispánico*: 404). Similarly, in an interview with Jason Weiss, Carlos Fuentes has proclaimed that Mexico is a country that has many social and economic injustices, but racism is not one of them, as “whom would you discriminate against?” (111). Fuentes contends that there is no snobbish pride for “pure-blood” Spanish ancestry because “pure whites” make up only three percent of the population. “We’re all mestizos”, he declares proudly. Unlike the United States which tended to nurture a homogeneous culture in spite of its racial/cultural “melting pot”, Mexican culture is characterized by the co-existence of many cultures and many times. Fuentes states: “this is the nature of the country and it is a value. I think it is a great value and it has to be protected” (111).

In *The Buried Mirror*, Fuentes reaffirms the positive values of mestizo culture—the fruit of cultural amalgamation that emerged “as the conquerors and the conquered intermingled” (Video, 49 min. from 00:00). The birth of this new society that was neither aboriginal nor European was facilitated by the Roman Catholic church providing a common ground for the sharing of cultural traditions. One previously mentioned common element was the concept of ritual blood sacrifice as a vehicle for salvation, albeit from a different perspective. Carlos

Fuentes suggests that “one can only imagine the astonishment of the hundreds and thousands of Indians who asked for baptism, as they came to realize that they now were to adore a God who sacrificed himself for men, instead of asking men to sacrifice themselves to the gods, as the Aztec religion had demanded”. Fuentes stresses that the conquered peoples embraced the new religion, but they did it in their own way, merging their prior customs with European-based religious traditions: “Spanish instruments play Indian rhythms”. During the festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe, aboriginal dancers are an essential part of the ceremony commemorating the brown-skinned virgin, who is like the “mother” of mestizo culture. Fuentes further contends that “this new world (of conquerors and the conquered) wanted a father. It did not find him in the figure of the Conquistador, but in that of Christ” (Video: *The Buried Mirror*, 49 min. from 00:00).

The cultural amalgamation that the church encouraged was the natural culmination of the genetic merger resulting from Spanish soldiers and colonists mating with aboriginal women to produce mestizo offspring—children of mixed blood—such as the son of Hernán Cortés and his aboriginal lover and translator Marina (La Malinche), whom Díaz del Castillo described as the daughter of the great chieftains of Tabasco (*cf. Tomo I*: 80-81).

Thus, the Spanish conquest of the Americas that constitutes for some historians and critics cultural genocide is perceived by others as an historical development that gave birth to a new culture, manifesting the fruit of the meeting of pre-Columbian and European civilizations in its art, music, literature, social structure, traditions and genetic makeup. The positive affirmative values as well as the “growing pains” of Latin-American mestizo culture have been explored over the course of five centuries



in numerous literary commentaries such as El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's "Comentarios Reales", Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga's "La Araucana", José María Heredia's "El Teocalli de Cholula", José Hernández's "Martín Fierro", Rubén Darío's "A Roosevelt", José Martí's "Nuestra América" and Nicolás Guillén's "Mis dos Abuelos" and "Dos Niños" (to name only a few).

El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega was the first great Latin American mestizo writer to explore the phenomenon of cultural amalgamation. Born in 1539 in Cuzco, Peru, of an Incan princess and a Spanish captain, he went to Spain as a young adult to complete his classical education. His *Comentarios Reales* offer an extensive vision of the origins and development of the Inca civilization, including the cruel reality of the conquest and colonization. His *Historia General del Perú* discusses events after the Conquest that occurred in his own lifetime. As if attempting to resolve the duality of his cultural roots, Garcilaso's literary vision suggested a fatalistic collaboration between the advances of Inca culture, the Spanish conquest of the Inca empire, and the introduction of Christianity, seeing the first as the facilitator of the latter. Donald E. Castanien suggests that "one need only read the preface to the *Historia* to be completely convinced, if he were not before, that the only justification needed for the Spanish conquest of the New World was the Christianization of the natives" (124). As the child of two cultures, Garcilaso emphasized the positive values of both heritages. Raquel Chang-Rodríguez and Malva E. Filer suggest that "A través de la escritura, el Inca, siempre entre dos culturas, supo darle sentido al pasado incáico y al presente colonial, enaltecer sus dos estirpes, honrar a la princesa Chimpú Ociló y al capitán Garcilaso de la Vega" (*Voces*: 56). Garcilaso's style of writing reflects his dual heritage too, insofar as that he describes Incan anecdotes, myths, fables and history in the classical European heroic epic model.

A similar mixture of American pre-Columbian reality with European classical literary style is manifest in Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga's epic poem, "La Araucana"; published in Chile in three parts in 1569, 1578 and 1589 respectively, and describing the rebellion of the Araucana nation against the Spanish. Ercilla y Zúñiga was a Spanish soldier who voyaged to the new world to fight against the Araucana. Though their author was Spanish in origin, his verses can be regarded as mestizo, insofar as that they represent a meeting of Spanish and Aboriginal realities in their subject matter and their imagery. Zúñiga's frank admiration for the Araucana (his adversaries) expresses itself in direct speech ("la gente que produce es tan granada tan soberbia, gallarda y belicosa" *Voces*: 39; ll. 29-30) and in numerous comparisons that

link the Araucana to characters in ancient Greek, Hebrew and Latin mythology. Zúñiga's mythological comparisons negate the cultural, racial differences apparently separating the Spaniards from the Araucana, and emphasize the two cultures' common values of the brave warrior with natural nobility: "Venús y Amón aquí no alcanzan parte/ Sólo domina el iracundo Marte" (*Voces*: 39; ll. 39-40).

The origins of Latin American mestizo culture is implied in Canto XX, when Tegualda, the daughter of Chief Brancol of the Araucana, asks permission to bury the body of her dead Araucanian husband fallen in battle. She begs mercy for herself as she is a woman and has never offended anyone. Respecting the blind love that she manifests for her fallen husband and moved by compassion for her, the poet-soldier listens to her story and tries to console her.

By the nineteenth century, three hundred years after Zúñiga's poems were published, the genetic and cultural merger of the Spanish conquerors with the conquered aboriginal people had given rise to a society different from either its European or aboriginal roots, which consequently was attempting to gain its independence from Spain and manifest to the world its own cultural identity. Ironically, the wars of independence between Spain and Latin American revolutionary armies sometimes took place in the same locations as Spain's previous battles with the pre-Columbian people; suggesting once again that the opposing sides of the bloody struggles had more internal similarities than external differences.

In his poem "El Teocalli de Cholula", the Mexican poet José María Heredia developed a parallel between a man-made mountain (the pyramid of Cholula) and Mexico's three major volcanic mountains (Iztacchihual, Pico de Orizaba, and Popocatepetl). The textual contiguity of Heredia's alternating discussions about the pyramid and the volcanic mountains surrounding it allows his reader to discern similarities and differences between the man-made and the natural mountains. The peace that the nineteenth century poet felt ("¡Qué silencio! ¡Qué Paz! *Voces*: 127) while sitting on the pyramid is not at all in harmony with events that took place on it during its pre-Columbian era:

Esta inmensa estructura  
vio a la superstición más inhumana,  
en ella entronizarse. Oyó los gritos  
de agonizantes víctimas, en tanto  
que el sacerdote sin piedad ni espanto  
les arrancaba el corazón sangriento.  
(*Voces*: 130; ll. 134-37)

For Heredia, the visions of pre-Columbian blood sacrifices that the pyramid conjured up were reflected in nineteenth century Mexico's own variety of "bárbara

opresión" and the consequent spilling of more blood: armed clashes were taking place between the conservative forces of Iturbide and the Mexican liberals fighting for independence from Spain. Heredia suggested that this Mexican valley that grows such good corn has not been irrigated with water but with the blood of men; in the first instance because of pre-Columbian superstition and then for reasons of a new society's need for self-determination. Different human cultural groups are not the only players in this common playing field of sacred violence and blood sacrifice, however. Just as the pyramid reflects the basic shape of the mountains surrounding it, so the violence apparently at the heart of human society is reflected in the destructive powers of nature. The Mexican volcano, "velado en vapores transparentes" (*Voces*: 128; l. 75) that has watched common people and kings boil to death at its feet during an eruption ("pueblos y reyes viste hervir a tus pies", (*Voces*: 129; ll. 84-85) is perhaps the natural model that inspired the thick vapours of burning blood that rose toward the "offended sky" from the sacrificial alters of the Teocalli de Cholula:

miró el vapor espeso de la sangre  
subir caliente al ofendido cielo  
y tender en el sol fúnebre velo  
y escuchó los horrendos alaridos  
con que los sacerdotes sofocaban  
el grito del dolor. (*Voces*, 130; ll. 141-43)

Heredia's final stanza expresses his desire that the pyramid maintain its present mute, deserted state, and that the superstition dictating its former pre-Columbian function continue sleeping in the abysses of hell (*cf.* *Voces*: 130; ll. 144-48). Heredia's denunciation of blood sacrifice (be it the result of ritual or of war) extends beyond the physical boundaries of Latin America, however. His final cross-cultural image (which ironically likens the pyramid of Cholula to the Titans of ancient Greek mythology who fought against the gods and were defeated) reminds us that European history, since its origins, is full of events that rival the Teocalli de Cholula's reputation as "ejemplo ignominioso/ de la demencia y del furor humano" (*Voces*: 130, ll. 152-53).

José María Heredia's enlightened perception of the common grounds linking Spanish and pre-Columbian cultures with each other as well as with nature was not a viewpoint shared by Argentina's Domingo Faustino Sarmiento fifty years later. Sarmiento, regarded as the architect of modernization for Argentina, came to believe that the future of Argentina as an independent nation depended on it being modeled on an anglosaxon-type industrialized society. He viewed nature as the enemy to modernization and human progress, and thus, in the name of civilization, he embarked on a campaign to

eradicate cultural groups who were not in tune with his policy of urbanization. The "gauchos" of Argentina were primarily mestizos (of mixed European and aboriginal blood) who lived a simple life in close harmony with nature, similar in many aspects to the aboriginal people of the region. Sarmiento's war against nature in the name of "civilization" resulted in a policy of repression of the aboriginal people of Argentina and destruction of the gauchos' way of life. *Martín Fierro*—José Hernández's epic poem of social injustice—describes the gaucho's greatest glory: to live as free as a bird in the sky in harmony with God and with nature ("Mi gloria es vivir tan libre como el pájaro del cielo" *Voces*: 199; ll. 73-74). Hernández depicts the gaucho as the victim of persecution so extreme that his very existence is regarded as a crime ("el ser gaucho es un delito" (*Del Solar hispánico*, 252). After being conscripted against his will to fight against the aboriginal people of Argentina, with whom he shares a common love of nature, the gaucho Martín Fierro loses his lands to the government, has his family broken up, and finally is a hunted fugitive—an army deserter who decides to seek shelter with the fierce aboriginal tribes to the North, whom he hopes will be more "humane" to him than Sarmiento's urbanization policies. In their Introduction to *Martín Fierro*, Raquel Chang-Rodríguez and Malva E. Filer have emphasized that Sarmiento's rejection of Latin America's Spanish, Aboriginal and African roots and his identification with "anglosaxon" progress were grave limitations in his policy of modernization that history has censured him for (*cf.* *Voces*: 157).

Unlike Sarmiento's desire for Argentina, the late nineteenth century reality of the emerging Central American nations was that of distinct societies characterized by the cultural and genetic blending of aboriginal, European and African cultural groups. Having recently gained their independence or still fighting for it, these societies were able to recognize the United States's imperialistic policies of economic appropriation as the real common enemy. In a poem addressed to Roosevelt ("A Roosevelt", published 1905), the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío warned the United States not to underestimate the vitality and inner strength of the Latin American nations, who would emerge triumphant in their struggle because they had God on their side:

Tened cuidado. ¡Vive la América española!  
Hay mil cachorros sueltos del León Español.  
Se necesitaría, Roosevelt, ser, por Dios mismo,  
el Riflero terrible y fuerte Cazador,  
para poder tenernos en vuestras férreas garras.  
Y, pues contáis con todo, falta una cosa: ¡Dios!  
(*Voces*: 268; ll. 46, 48-51)

In "Nuestra América" (published 1891) the Cuban poet and revolutionary fighter José Martí also had voiced concern about Latin America's relationship with the United States: "El desdén del vecino formidable, que no la conoce, es el peligro mayor de nuestra América" (*Voces*: 232). In sharp contrast to Argentina's President Sarmiento who sought the modernization of his country in "anglosaxon" models, José Martí emphasized the distinct nature of Latin American society that necessitated a government born from within itself:

El gobierno ha de nacer del país. El espíritu del gobierno ha de ser el del país. La forma del gobierno ha de avenirse a la constitución del país. El gobierno no es más que el equilibrio de los elementos naturales del país. (*Voces*: 230)

Seeing the indomitable strength of his country residing in its "hombres naturales" (230) who were stronger than imported books, imported academics, and "criollo" citizens who pathetically took pride in their pure Spanish blood, José Martí proclaimed the superiority of the mestizo who had vanquished the "purebred" of Spanish ancestry ("El mestizo autóctono ha vencido al criollo exótico", *Voces*: 230). Martí emphasized that conflict exists not between so-called civilization and barbarity, but between false erudition and nature. He described the "hombre natural" of Latin America as a good human being who had the rosary of the Christian faith as his "feet" (cornerstones), a "white" head (inclined toward Western European ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality), and a "pinto" body (showing the physical traits of a mixed native American and European genealogy): "Con los pies en el rosario, la cabeza blanca, y el cuerpo pinto de indio y criollo, vinimos, denodados, al mundo de las naciones" (*Voces*: 231). Taking Mexico and Guatemala as his primary models, Martí described the wars for independence from Spain as being fought with the standard of the Virgin Mary, with a priest as leader, and with the aboriginal people as the revolutionary army:

Con el estandarte de la Virgen salimos a la Conquista de la libertad. Un cura, unos cuantos tenientes y una mujer alzan en México la república, en hombros de los indios. (*Voces*: 231)

Like Carlos Fuentes one hundred years later, José Martí proclaimed that there is no racial hatred in Latin America because there are no races in the traditional sense of the word ("No hay odio de razas porque no hay razas", 233). In accordance with Rubén Darío's poetical proclamation that God was on the side of the Latin American people, Martí proclaimed that the eternal, equalitarian soul of man emanates from bodies that vary in their form and colour. He

proclaimed racial animosity as a sin against humanity, seeing the universal identity of man as the heart of the concept of natural justice and the child of victorious, natural love (*cf.* *Voces*: 233).

José Martí died on the battlefield in 1892 fighting for Cuban independence from Spain. His personal sacrifice reflected the centuries of bloody conflicts witnessed by his homeland (the genocide of the aboriginal people at the hands of the first Spanish colonists, the death and suffering of African men and women brought against their will from Africa to serve as slaves for European settlers) while also affirming the vitality of the new culture that past strife had given birth to—the living fruit of racial and cultural differences that found their common ground in suffering and in love.

Forty-five years after José Martí's death, his countryman Nicolás Guillén published "Balada de los dos Abuelos" —a poem celebrating Cuba's mulatto culture. The poet sees his own body and mind as a meeting ground for European and African ancestors who clash and merge and cry and sing together through him ("Don Federico me grita/y Taita Facundo calla/.../Yo los junto", *Voces*: 400). Guillén suggests that, despite past differences, his European and African roots live in harmony through his being, wherein they are equal partners living under the same stars ("los dos del mismo tamaño/bajo las estrellas altas./los dos del mismo tamaño,/gritan, sueñan, lloran, cantan/ ¡Cantan!", 401). His final word ("Cantan") proclaims the positive values of mulatto culture which transcend the suffering and conflict that gave birth to it.

Like José Martí's "Nuestra América" and Carlos Fuentes' video documentary *The Buried Mirror*, Nicolás Guillén's "Dos Abuelos" (1934) suggests that a tradition of inter-racial sexual unions in Latin America created nations of "mixed blood" citizens (mestizos, mulattos, creoles, garífunas; *cf.* Lizcano, 1996: 139) whose cultural predominance eradicated traditional racism. In "Dos Niños" (1947), however, Guillén cautions his reader that racism is not the only social illness to be overcome: hunger and poverty are common enemies uniting children of different races, like "branches of the same tree of wretchedness" ("Dos niños, ramos de un mismo árbol de miseria... Dos niños, uno negro, otro blanco", Fitts: 265).

In "Dos Niños", Guillén implied that problems of survival in the twentieth century have negated racial differences and forged an unbreakable bond of kinship between black and white children. Both being members of the human community, their bond is a natural one that overrules any cultural differences that human civilizations imposed upon themselves in the history of their



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development. Historical and literary accounts of European colonists' exploitation of aboriginal and black people in the Americas have become the source of profound soul-searching on the part of twentieth century European communities whose ancestors were responsible for atrocities committed against black and indigenous people. On the other hand, historical evidence allows many unfortunate parallels to be drawn between the great pre-Columbian American civilizations and those of Western Europe. Both cultures fostered and thrived upon the traditions of territorial wars, the cult of the warrior, slavery, and an intricate social hierarchy in which the leaders at the top dominated the working class masses who kept the system running. Speaking about the Mayans' richly attired rulers, bureaucracy and army, Carlos Fuentes has commented that "this is Mayan life with an all-too-human face" (*The Buried Mirror*, Video, 6 min. From 00:00). It would appear that cultures on both sides of the Atlantic were and are intrinsically linked by similar intricate political machinations and a lust for power. In view of their common policies of repression, one would not expect to find the keys for humanity's salvation either in the pre-Columbian civilizations of America or in those of sixteenth century Europe.

Gabriel García Márquez has suggested that "la humanidad actual no puede progresar sino en un solo sentido" (Interview with Armando Durán, Barcelona, 1968; *Vistas del Mundo Hispánico*: 91). His words imply that the direction of human progress forcibly is chronologically forward, as humans neither have the power to recuperate past time physically, nor should they want to. Through its long, painful history of cultural repressions, genocides and economic appropriations, the human community has evolved to its twentieth century reality that is no worse in many ways than its ancestors' realities, and in some aspects much better. One of the "better ways" is found in late twentieth century scientific knowledge of the genetic common ground of different branches of the human family. The study of human DNA has revealed differences between "black", "brown", "yellow" and "white" people to be so minimal as to render "racism" a ridiculous concept (*gr. Toronto Star*, "Scientists Find We Are All Same Under the Skin", October 13, 1996). Humanity's future resides in a reaffirmation of its origins—the common ground of the human community. In this regard, some countries of Latin America whose populations are predominantly mestizo, mulatto or both are leaders of their time and a living positive vision; manifesting in their rich amalgamation of cultures and in their very being humanity's only hope for the future.

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