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The Cycles of History and Memory: *Las vueltas del tiempo*, a Novel by Agustín Yáñez

I. Structure and Purpose of the Novel

While he was Professor of Literary Theory at the National Autonomous University of Mexico,[1] Agustín Yáñez sat down and wrote *Las vueltas del tiempo*, a novel which, according to the author himself, was unlike any other one he had written.[2] The novel was completed between March 1948 and August 1951, while the first notes for it were jotted down in July 1945.[3] *Las vueltas del tiempo* was begun only months after *Al filo del agua* had been completed. The lives of three characters are followed up from the one work to the next.

The principal event in the novel is the state funeral of Plutarco Elías Calles, historically dated October 20, 1945. Curiously, the novel was not published until 1973—fully twelve years after its completion, and twenty-eight years after the death of Calles. There may be two reasons for the delay in publication. First, the author may have wanted to wait until those who were related to that epoch in Mexican history were deceased, since the novel mentions many historical personalities in a less than flattering light. This political caution is better understood in the light of the fact that, after completing the writing of the novel, Yáñez served as Governor of Jalisco and then as Secretary of Public Education: he was not politically retired until 1971. Secondly, the author may have been insecure in 1951 about the reception his novel would receive for its radical structural experimentation; by the time he decided to publish it in 1973, such experimentation had become the fashion in the Latin American novel. In short, the two possible reasons for the inordinate delay in the publication of *Las vueltas del tiempo* point to two basic purposes of the novel: to give an uncompromisingly realistic interpretation of Mexican history, and to create a structurally complex and innovative form of narrative, focusing on the manipulation of time and memory.

Let us take a closer look at the author's reasons for choosing Calles' funeral as the focus for his interpretation of Mexican history. A minor figure during the Mexican Revolution between 1910 and 1920, Plutarco Elías Calles entered President Obregón's cabinet during the early 1920's. He served as President from 1924 to 1928, during most of the Cristero Civil War, and was the maker and unmaker of Presidents until 1935, when he was exiled by President Lázaro Cárdenas. He was the most powerful man in Mexico for at least a decade and the politician most associated with the anticlerical policies of the 1920's which led to the Catholic reaction and three years of fighting against the State. One of Yáñez's principal themes of Mexican history is the conflict between an-

ticlerical liberals and Catholic conservatives, so that he chooses the most potent political leader of his own epoch to symbolize that polemic, which he traces back one hundred years. The main historical framework of the novel, then, is from the 1840's to the 1940's.

While the historical memory of the characters of *Las vueltas del tiempo* focuses on the previous century, the direct action of the narrative is compressed into the course of one afternoon and one evening on October 20, 1945. Certain key clock-times during the day serve as signs to the reader that the narrative is constantly returning to the direct action of the funeral, while the memories of the characters are the instruments through which Mexican history is explored. The key clock-times move forward inexorably from the hour of the wake at the funeral parlor (3:00 p.m.); the commencement of the funeral march (3:35 p.m.), which proceeds through the streets of Mexico City toward the cemetery, where funeral orations are to be given at 4:30; the burial at 5:00 p.m., and the dispersal of the witnesses to various places in the evening. The fact that there are just a few places and times of convergence for most of the characters forces the narrator to repeatedly turn the clock back to those key hours of the day as he focuses on different groups of characters. Of the fourteen chapters, the first three focus on the funeral parlor; Chapters Four through Nine cover the time of the funeral procession in the streets; Chapter 10 takes place during the burial; and Chapters 11 through 14 deal with events in the aftermath that same evening. It sounds simple, but it is actually hard to reconstruct because of the labyrinth of flashbacks.

Yáñez underscores the historicity of the events by rigorously following the clock-times which were reported in the newspapers. He even respects the names of the streets which were used for the funeral procession and the man (Sr. Bandala) who called to order the commencement of the funeral speeches at the cemetery.[4] The authentic use of details sets the tone for the believability of the author's entire synthesis of history. Yáñez intends to present a serious philosophy of history rather than just use the dramatic material of history as putty that could be reshaped for the artistic purposes of fiction. Interestingly, the author avoids transcribing the funeral speeches in the novel, using instead that half hour to delve into the streams of consciousness of the main characters. In a sense, he wants to portray the intimate history of Mexico, not the official one.

Yáñez finds that one of the most convenient and interesting ways of interpreting Mexican history is through the narration of biographies of the characters and their ancestors. Since these biographies are given in fragmented pieces through the memories of different characters, the reader must actively reconstruct the whole picture as if working on a jigsaw puzzle. All of these biographies concern people who represent authentic types. The historical personalities (such as Calles, Obregón, Villa, Vasconcelos) remain in the background as secondary characters,

but their relationships with the main characters remind us of the true historical framework of the entire novel. There are ten principal charaters; none is protagonist. Close to one hundred other characters lengthen the roster. This lack of a dominant perspective can confuse the reader trying to follow the fragmented narration, yet by the same token the multiplicity of perspectives assures a complex presentation of Mexican history, with different ideological points of view fleshed out.

Just as the cycles of clock-time are replayed to reconstruct the direct action of the novel on the day of the funeral, so also Mexican history itself is cyclical according to Yáñez' synthesis. Cyclical time, both microcosmic and macrocosmic, defines the structure of the novel, and its reason is twofold: it is a philosophy of history, and it is a convenient way of delving into the minds of ten characters in the course of a day, all of whom are recollecting the past by virtue of the fact that the key figure of an epoch is laid to rest. Luis Leal is quite right in pointing out that memory and historical *emotion*, more than historical fact, are major themes in *Las vueltas del tiempo*.[5]

Agustín Yáñez is able to explain in part his purpose of historical interpretation in writing *Las vueltas del tiempo* by introducing within the novel a character named Eugenio Cumplido who discusses with another writer, Joaquín Lizardi, his plans for writing a novel. It is significant that Cumplido is a journalist by profession, a reporter of facts. His nineteenth-century homonym, Ignacio Cumplido, was also a liberal journalist, with the distinction of having defended Mexico against the U.S. invasion of 1847.[6] Joaquín Lizardi, the other writer in Yáñez' novel, has an obvious homonym in the nineteen century: the novelist and journalist, José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, a harsh critic of the Spanish colonial system in Mexico who portrayed social types and captured an historical epoch in his novels, much like Yáñez. The fact that two principal characters of *Las vueltas del tiempo*, both journalists, discuss the purpose and problems of writing an historically-rooted novel like *Las vueltas del tiempo*, points to Yáñez' idea that the writing of literature and the writing of history do find common ground in journalism. In this sense, a novelist reports the harsh realities of society and history—a goal with which the author of *El Periquillo Sarniento* would be in accord. Cumplido states:

> es estupendo pensar en una novela, nada menos que con el tema de la vida mexicana, desde los ídolos hasta Cantinflas, y cifrada en unos cuantos personajes representativos, invariables a través del tiempo. (p. 34)

Yáñez reveals his own reservations about the limitations of such a novel through the mouthpiece of Lizardi, who criticizes his friend's project:

> Tendrías que partir de ideas preconcebidas, limitadas por la realidad histórica, y a ellas ajustarías el tema, el plan, los personajes y los episodios. No es así como se hacen la novelas. (p. 34)

Lizardi believes that characters must take on their own life in a novel, without preconceptions imposed by the author. The danger of artificiality in a novel with a thesis is ever-present in the mind of Yáñez. But his is outweighed by his (and Cumplido's) purpose of understanding the past through the present, and vice versa: Cumplido states it as if it were the thesis of Yáñez' novel:

> a través del presente, intuyo con gran claridad el pasado; comprendo nítidamente la composición social de hace muchos años; no tienen para mí secreto las intrigas de los conservadores para lanzar a Iturbide o para traer a Maximiliano. Bien, esas pasiones dominantes a lo largo de nuestra historia, pero vividas en algunos tipos que podemos tratar ahora, pueden darnos el conjunto buscado. (pp. 34–35)

This tantalizing confusion between levels of reality (Cumplido the novelist vs. Yáñez the novelist) has its parallel in the convergence in *Las vueltas del tiempo* of historical personalities and fictitious characters whose surnames have antecedents in Mexican history (such as Cumplido or Lizardi). The net effect is that the boundary between fiction and history is blurred. In this interior duplication of the novel within the novel and reflection on the purpose of literature, Yáñez is indebted to Cervantes and Galdós.

To better understand the structure and purpose of *Las vueltas del tiempo*, we should compare it to other novels of Yáñez' epoch. William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930) comes to mind as we look at Yáñez' central idea of presenting a multiplicity of perspectives concerning one funeral through the abundant narration of interior monologue. *Al filo del agua* has already been compared in detail to *As I Lay Dying* in relation to the concept of time, the use of interior monologue, the emotive force of the past in the present, and the setting in a small town which has universal implications.[7] *Las vueltas del tiempo* continues the first three points of comparison with Faulkner's novel and adds the thematic similarity of the funeral as the principal event of each novel.

Gabriel García Márquez' *El otoño del patriarca*, has two facets—imminent or actual—in common with Yáñez' novel: each work takes as a point of departure the death of a Latin American dictator as a means of critically exploring his unwieldy influence during his rule; both works use a cyclical structure to narrate extensive interior monologues. The differences are also notable: García Márquez' novel focuses on the archetypal dictator's own perspective to satirize his style and influence, while Yáñez' novel deals less with the dictator himself than with life in the society under his repressive rule as a culmination of the entire process of a concrete, national history. In this respect, *Las vueltas del tiempo* has more in common with *El Señor Presidente* by Miguel Angel Asturias. The Guatemalan novel was published in 1946, the year after Calles' death, and two years before Yáñez began writing *Las vueltas del tiempo* in earnest. Much like Yáñez in his later work, Asturias studies the

gruesome impact that one tyrannical Guatemalan president, Estrada Cabrera, had on the lives of many characters who are not immortalized in history textbooks but who are nevertheless modelled after people who really existed.[8]

Yáñez once compared *Al filo del agua* to John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*[9] in his purpose of studying the lifestyle in a town over a limited period of time from the perspectives of many characters, offering a psycho-social cross-section of the town—although, admittedly, the provincial stagnation of Yahualica contrasts with the metropolitan dynamism of Manhattan. Following up on the Mexican author's tribute to John Dos Passos, I would suggest that the novel most similar in its overall purpose and structure to *Las vueltas del tiempo*, and a probable source of inspiration for Yáñez, is *Nineteen Nineteen* by Dos Passos, first published in 1932. In this second volume of the trilogy *U.S.A.*, whose intent is to capture the essence of American society through the exploration of certain periods of its history, Dos Passos interweaves the biographies of the history makers, (President Woodrow Wilson; the radical, Jack Reed; the financier, J. P. Morgan) with those of the unchronicled people (a common sailor, a literary young lady of means) whose lives are fictitiously recreated. These biographies are fragmented, intercalated, and juxtaposed to give a dramatic relief of the differences of social origin and opinion amongst them, in a fashion very similar to the structure of *Las vueltas del tiempo*. The net effect in both the American novel and the Mexican one is a varied account of a society witnessing the end of a major conflict during one year (World War I in 1919 for Dos Passos; World War II in 1945 for Yáñez)—a conflict which has brought to a crisis the radical heritage of each society (Wobblies and socialists for Dos Passos; the Mexican Revolution for Yáñez). Whereas Yáñez relies primarily on the interior monologue to explore the inner emotions of characters affected by historical events, Dos Passos goes to the other extreme of objectifying the impact of history on the masses by inventing two types of sections in his novel: "Newsreels," which give headline glimpses of the U.S. involvement in World War I, juxtaposed with snatches of popular songs and sayings; and "The Camera Eye," which zooms in on close-ups of the sensorial experiences and interiorized experiences of the anonymous, average citizen. While Yáñez presents the same sociological diversity in his novel, he does so always through dialogue, short biography, and interior monologue; he does not imitate Dos Passos' use of "Newsreels" or "The Camera Eye."

In sum, the influence of Faulkner, Asturias, and Dos Passos on the total conception of *Las vueltas del tiempo* cannot be doubted, while García Márquez' later novel, *El otoño del patriarca* is a good example of coincidence, rather than influence, in the structure and theme of the two cyclical novels about dictatorship, reflecting a certain vogue in contemporary Latin American literature and a very real political problem in

Latin American history. The antecedent to them all, both in the theme of the dictator and in the experimental narrative structure, is Valle-Inclán's *Tirano Banderas* (1926).

II. Narrative Techniques in Manipulating Time and Memory

Agustín Yáñez employs an impressive repertoire of narrative techniques to elicit the desired multiplicity of perspectives concerning history and memory. John L. Walker, in his doctoral dissertation, *Time in the Novels of Agustín Yáñez*, lists a series of such narrative techniques found in those novels published before 1971;[10] this list, in a revised and expanded form, can be profitably applied to *Las vueltas del tiempo*, which was published after the completion of the dissertation. First, Walker notes Yáñez' predilection for flashbacks, both in the first person and in the third person. These forms of interior monologue concerning recollections of the past are effectively entwined with interior monologue of thoughts in the present. Let us consider Camacho, the attendant in the funeral parlor who must prepare the cadaver of Plutarco Elías Calles. A family tragedy unfolds in Camacho's interior monologue, at first focused on his duty in the present, evoked in the third person:

> Quería verlo. Repentinos deseos violentos de verlo. No renunciaría al servicio. Llegaría al Hospital Inglés. El mismo que fue Comisario. ¡Tanto oír hablar de él con horror, y ahora! . . . En sus manos. En sus manos. En sus manos. (p. 42)

Camacho's great predicament is that Calles, many years ago, when he was Commisar in the town where Camacho grew up, was directly responsible for the death of his father; and now, the funeral parlor attendant must serve the cadaver of the assassin. As the inner conflict between revenge and servility grows in this pathetic character, the narration shifts from a third-person interior monologue in the present to a first-person flashback into the past. The transition is interesting in the use of italics to underscore the introduction of first-person flashback; as Camacho contemplates the face of the cadaver he remembers the same face published in newspapers many years before:

> Vago recuerdo de retratos, vistos, estropeados en los periódicos. —*Este es aquél.* Con heredada furia rotos, pisoteados, arrojados a la basura o al excusado. Una vez quemó uno en rotograbado, grande. Hace muchos años. Creía que se habría muerto. ¡Quien habría de decirle que lo conocería, que lo tocaría! Por su culpa . . .
>
> *Este es aquél. Sí, la cara dura que salía en los periódicos. El mismo. Gesto de mandón. ¿Qué haría mi madre? Nunca lo perdonó. Por el que mataron a mi padre. También mandó matar a mi tío. Corrimos de Sonora. Allí andamos de aquí para allá. Muchas veces tuvimos hambre. Mis hermanos. Mi padre. Mi padre.* (pp. 43–44)

In the flashback that continues, Camacho recalls the words of his mother, introduced in the narrative as a dialogue fragment in italics:

> —*Lo mataron por nada, no debía nada, ¡me la pagarán! ¡ese Comisario me la pagará!* (p. 44).

In this case also the use of italics denotes the shift to a first-person voice of *another* person remembered in the stream of consciousness of Camacho. What follows is not in italics because it is a third-person summary of the emotion of both mother and son over the years, as Calles' political career ascended:

> Las mismas palabras durante muchos años. El mismo gesto rencoroso de la madre. La venganza cada vez menos posible. Gobernador. Ministro. Presidente. Rencor violentamente retoñado al reconocer la cara . . . (p. 44).

In this chapter, entitled "Retoños," two phrases are repeated often in italics—"Este es aquél" and "Me la pagará": they become signals to the reader of the cyclical nature of the character's memory and his obsession with revenge. The sprouting to which the chapter title alludes is precisely this hatred which demands revenge, a memory relived through psychological free association with an image. This classical technique used in stream-of-consciousness literature could not be more apparent.[11]

Walker points out that Yáñez often uses *time shifts* in his novels, by which the time of the action is changed to another frame, such as minutes or months earlier or later; and *cross-sections*, through which different actions or conversations occurring at the same time are shown, as in a slice of life. In *Las vueltas del tiempo*, time-shifts and cross-sections are two sides to the same coin, because the clock-time of each chapter is set forward or backward to capture what different groups of people are doing and thinking in regard to the same events. Yáñez does not, in this novel, attempt to present on the same page or in the same chapter two conversations which occur simultaneously in different places. However, he does often alternate fragments of a dialogue between two people with fragments of flashbacks of a third person who has lost the drift of the conversation and has become lost in his own thoughts (pp. 52–54; pp. 81–82). Walker calls this technique *superimposition*. The effect is reminiscent of counterpoint in music.

There is the technique, borrowed from cinematography, of the *fade-in* and *fade-out*, in which leave is taken of one action, often indicated by the uses of ellipses, to show another action, giving the impression that the first action goes on as usual even though it is no longer observed. Most notable in this regard in *Las vueltas del tiempo* is the history of Miguel Osollo, interrupted and renewed over several chapters through different narrative voices which pick up the history where it has previously been left dangling (pp. 83, 114, 116).

Yáñez uses *time-expansion* and *time-contraction* in *Las vueltas del*

tiempo, by which the fictional clock either runs more slowly or more quickly in comparison with its average relationship with the reader's clock. One entire chapter, for example, is devoted to the inner thoughts of most of the principal characters during those five minutes when Calles' coffin is descended into the grave, while the National Anthem is being played. The twenty-two pages of this chapter cover five minutes. Twenty-five pages of another chapter focus on one family history, through successive generations, covering the period 1848 to 1941, or ninety-three years.

In addition to the interior monologue, which by definition is silent thought, the novelist employs what we should call exterior monologue, by which a character narrates past events out loud to others at great length. This type of narration is interrupted or ended by a shift to dialogue; for example, the person who has been listening to the narrator asks a question or makes a comment (pp. 63–65). This type of exterior monologue is reminiscent of some of the *novelas intercaladas* in the *Quijote* which are narrated orally as forms of entertainment in the *posadas*.

Yáñez also plays with the fact that the character, Cumplido, is planning to write a novel very similar in purpose to his own. Cumplido's interior monologue about the past of Miguel Osollo begins as stream of consciousness based on the memory of another character:

> Cumplido volvió a perder el hilo de la conversación. Las palabras de don Santos le hicieron pensar otra vez en Osollo, muchos de cuyos antecedentes conocía precisamente por Munguía, que ahora recordaba el periodista: Miguel Osollo pasó por las aulas del Colegio . . . (etc.) (p. 99).

It is no accident that Cumplido is a journalist, for his thoughts on Osollo's biography are continued without interruption by a citation of his written notes on the same subject, based on interviews (p. 100). The implication is that memory as interior monologue is the springboard for a written history. The reader is tempted to think that he is reading portions of Cumplido's projected novel, making the reader feel that there is not much distinction between levels of reality (Cumplido's written notes as the basis for his novel vs. Yáñez' novel). Yáñez thus creates the illusion that the actual memory of history is the basis of his own novel. The narrative trick of introducing Cumplido's written notes is also a convenient way of relieving the reader's skepticism about how Cumplido could go on for so long and in such an orderly fashion in his flashback concerning the biography of someone he hardly knew.

Yáñez masterfully captures the emotive quality of a flashback released in another character, María, when she spots an old beau, Damián Limón, at the funeral of Calles. The chance encounter brings back a flood of memories—"el depósito de sensaciones intactas"—which impose themselves with *pertinacia*, as if she had no control over them. In the period of exactly one minute, María is able to relive the dramatic

epoch when she enlisted in the Revolution as a *soldadera* in 1910 while she impatiently awaits the arrival of her husband in 1945. There seems to be an inverse relationship in the qualitative duration of the two times, as she comments to herself: "Qué rápidos recuerdos o qué tiempo tan lento." (p. 225). María remembers events in 1915, and her recollection is so vivid that she remembers herself in 1915 remembering events which had occurred in 1910. In other words, Yáñez creates a flashback within a flashback, or the interior duplication of streams of consciousness.

The stream-of-consciousness technique of psychological free associations which well up from the memory is evident in *Las vueltas del tiempo*. In this novel, Henri Bergson's concept of real time as duration is the most important influence on Yáñez' use of memory, more important than Proust's techniques in *Remembrance of Things Past*. Yáñez' curiosity about Bergson is evident in his bibliography;[12] we can be sure he was familiar with the Frenchman's philosophy. In fact, in the year when he began writing *Las vueltas del tiempo*, in 1945, Yáñez conducted a survey of twenty-eight leading intellectuals in Mexico concerning their opinions on the most important authors of their time. The result: Henri Bergson was first, followed, in order of importance, by Einstein, Freud, Marx, and others. It should therefore not surprise us that Bergson's philosophical theories of memory and time paralleled and influenced the emergence of the stream-of-consciousness novel.[13]

According to Bergson, real time is not the mathematical time of a ticking clock or the days counted on a calendar; "it is heterogeneous in character. We are aware of it in relation to ourselves, for it has reference not to the existence of a multiplicity of material objects in space, but to a multiplicity of a quite different nature, entirely non-spatial, viz., that of conscious states."[14] This intuitive understanding of time Bergson calls "duration": "pure duration is the form which our conscious states assume when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present from its former states."[15] Bertrand Russell explains Bergson's meaning of "duration" thus: "it forms the past and the present into one organic whole, where there is mutual penetration, succession without distinction."[16]

Yáñez applies Bergson's intuitive understanding of memory and time to his own creative synthesis of Mexican history in *Las vueltas del tiempo* through the multiplicity of memories of numerous characters from both the past and the present which are fused and confused in the same conscious state concerning the funeral of Calles. Characters of the novel intuitively understand history by their use of homonyms and analogies of personalities of different historical periods. Time-expansion and time-contraction as narrative techniques are but two examples of how real time, or duration, is a subjective process of the mind rather than an objective movement of the clock.

Yáñez also has a more novelistic source for the idea that characters

might understand themselves by evoking history and finding their counterparts in other centuries: Azorín uses this technique of "eterno retorno" in his novel, *Doña Inés*, in which there is repetition through remembrance.

III. The Pattern of Mexican History

In an interview conducted in 1960, Agustín Yáñez explained one of his goals in writing *Las vueltas del tiempo*: "Aspiro a que sea una síntesis de nuestra historia. Más aún: la idea de la Historia como eterno retorno."[17] It is in the chapter of the novel entitled "El eterno retorno" that he elaborates further on the concept, whose source he recognizes to be Nietzsche. As many political personalities are gathered at the funeral parlor for Calles' wake, one of them comments on the group of mourners present:

> Te digo que sin salir de aquí podremos hallar las vidas paralelas de todos nuestros héroes y nuestros rufianes; habrá quien sea la viva persona de Pedro de Alvarado y de don Félix Calleja, de Vicente Guerrero y de don Santos Degollado. (p. 30).

In other words, certain invariable types recur in the process of Mexican history, which implies that the same conflicts and the same problems persist without solution. This cyclical philosophy of history is essentially pessimistic. The author's principal literary method of developing this idea is through the abundant use of analogies and homonyms.

Just as there are parallel lives, so also there are parallel epochs in Yáñez' scheme of Mexican history. Yáñez sees much in common between the nineteenth-century period of the War of the Reforma, the intervention of Maximilian, and the liberal Republic which followed it, on the one hand, and the twentieth-century period of the Revolution followed by the Cristero Civil War and the radical reforms of President Cárdenas on the other hand. The Reforma led by Benito Juárez produced the Constitution of 1857, while the Revolution of 1910 helped bring about the Constitution of 1917: both magna chartas prescribed anticlerical reforms, among many other points, and the aggressive enforcement of this anticlericalism led to conflict. One of the axioms in Yáñez' view of Mexican history is the perennial polarization between liberals and conservatives, and the question of the Church looms large in this struggle. Miguel Osollo, who fights against Calles' government in the Cristero War, reveals in a single thought the association between two historical epochs: "acepto como clarinada del destino, el destino de acabar con la Constitución [de 1857]; valía decir, con la Revolución [de 1910]." (p. 273).

The same polemic is pondered by the young character of Yáñez' novel, Francisco Javier Lerdo, who identifies with his liberal ancestor, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, the President of the Republic after the War

of the Reforma. Francisco Javier Lerdo, listening to a debate on October 20, 1945, silently reviews a series of political antinomies typical of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Mexico:

> *—Reaccionario: revolucionario. Liberal: retardatario. Anarquista: sinarquista. Chinacos: conservadores. Blancos: rojos. Gentes de orden: sans culottes o descamisados. Yorkino: escocés.* (p. 74)

As if to bring home the idea of a contemporary application for 1945, the young intellectual adds the Communist/Fascist opposition to the list as well as totalitarianism vs. democarcy. Francisco Javier considers the harm done by such terminology which degenerates into name-calling:

> *El efímero poder de las palabras y, sin embargo, sus efectos irreparables. La incomprensión, la prevención contra los que tratamos de superar lo parcial y permanecer alejados de contiendas que no nos convencen, y sin embargo hallamos partículas de verdad en los pensamientos opuestos.* (p. 76)

It is Francisco Javier Lerdo, the young leftist liberal, who equates the anticlerical stance of Calles with the reformist liberalism of Benito Juárez in the 1850's and the proletarian radicalism of President Cárdenas in the 1930's: these three leaders so different in their specific careers, are compared as if to underscore the concept of "parallel lives" and History as eternal return. On the conservative end of the spectrum in Mexican history, we are presented with padre Miguel Osollo, the twentieth-century Catholic activist and organizer of the Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana, widely known as the A.C.J.M. The name of Miguel Osollo, a principal character of the novel, does not figure in actual history among the leaders of the A.C.J.M., but rather is a fictitious archetype who is compared in the novel to two historical personalities: padre Pro, the twentieth-century leader of the National League in Defense of Religious Liberty, and Miguel Miramón, the nineteenth-century general who defended the conservatives and Santa-Ana against Benito Juárez and Santos Degollado. (Santos Degollado, a liberal who participated in writing the Constitution of 1857, fought in battle against not only Miguel Miramón, but also against Luis Gonzaga Osollo, the conservative general).[18] Santos Degollado reappears in *Las vueltas del tiempo* as a minor character, a contemporary of Calles. There is also an eclectic family pun in the fact that Agustín Yáñez' maternal surname is Santos Delgadillo.[19] Yáñez apparently chose the fictitious name of Miguel Osollo as a half-breed homonyn of *Miguel* Miramón and Luis Gonzaga *Osollo*. Furthermore, it is revealed that, at times, Miguel Osollo used a pseudonym, as many underground activists of the A.C.J.M. actually did during the worst days of religious persecution; his "alias" turns out to be Luis Osorio. This choice of names is not random, for Osorio figures in twentieth-century Mexican history as the pseudonym of a leader named Luis Vázquez of the National League in Defense of Religious Liberty, the

parent organization of the A.C.J.M.[20] Given the fact that Agustín Yáñez himself was active in the A.C.J.M. during his adolescence in Jalisco and was familiar with the Catholic leaders of that time, we can assume that the symbolic character of Miguel Osollo is based on somebody Yáñez knew personally.

How can it be argued that Yáñez posits objective axioms of Mexican history—such as the conflict of liberals and conservatives—if there does not exist an objective narrative voice serving as the author's mouthpiece? Among the subjective perspectives of numerous characters who are not always in agreement, a consensus is nevertheless formed on certain points; the author establishes his axioms through repetition and emphasis using the voices of numerous characters.

A second axiom in Yáñez' scheme of Mexican history is that Mexico has been subjected to a series of foreign conquerors who have found allies among the natives, and that these allies are usually the conservatives, not the liberals. This pattern is seen from the time of the Spanish conquest, when Cortés and Alvarado found support among Indian tribes hostile to the Aztecs. Next is Iturbide, the conservative Catholic creole who crowned himself Emperor of Mexico after independence was won from Spain. His twentieth-century parallel, according to one character of *Las vueltas del tiempo*, is René Capistrán Garza, leader of the A.C.J.M., perhaps because of his staunch Catholic conservatism. Following the succession of imperial dynasties in the nineteenth century, Yáñez seeks a contemporary parallel for Maximilian, the Habsburg prince who is invited by anti-Reforma Mexican conservatives to reign as Emperor and to reside in Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City. His twentieth-century counterpart is cast as the fictitious archetype of the Yankee businessman and filibusterer in Mexico, symbolically named Max Goldwyn. Jokingly, one character dubs him Emperor of Clasa Films, the movie production company which he owns in Mexico. There is a not-to-subtle echo of that duo of Hollywood movie moguls: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The emphasis is, of course, on the gold, the economic motive. Furthermore, *Max* Goldwyn is another *Max*imilian, another foreign conqueror. Indeed, his *curriculum vitae* includes many of the U.S. economic interventions in Mexico dating from the support given to Madero's revolution of 1910 by U.S. oil interests. He is the Yankee who has adjusted to the Mexican milieu, has settled down there, has learned a grammatically atrocious Spanish, and has taken a liking to Mexican culture and people—much like Maximilian.

Yáñez is aware of the bizarre implications of some of his analogies in history. When Goldwyn is compared to Iturbide as well as Maximilian, one character points out the outlandish conclusion dictated by standard logic: that Goldwyn must also be another Capistrán, although they have almost nothing in common (p. 112). What is most salient in the Goldwyn-Maximilian analogy is the idea of the foreign invader aided by conservative Mexican interests. Although Goldwyn represents economic and cultural penetration of Mexico by the United States, rather than a

direct political of military take-over, Yáñez does bring out a political implication in a further analogy in the chapter entitled "Chapultepec"—significantly, the palace of Maximilian and summer residence of Mexican presidents up to the time of Calles. Around the time of Calles' death, in October 1945, a presidential campaign was begun in Mexico, and one candidate, Ezequiel Padilla, the Secretary of Foreign Relations who supported the U.S. cause fully during World War II, especially at the Chapultepec Conference of 1945, openly courted the sympathy of U.S. interests to win the nomination and the election.[21] Thus, Padilla, becomes another conservative like Miguel Miramón, while the U.S. President is cast in the role of Maximilian (p. 182). To carry the analogy to its ultimate implication, the political campaign of 1945–1946 is pregnant with the meaning of a cyclical recurrence: keeping in mind that the terms *siglo* and *ciclo* could be interchanged, we note that exactly one hundred years had passed since the war of 1847 between the United States and Mexico, which had culminated in the loss of half of the Mexican territory to the Yankees. It is no coincidence that the first date mentioned in the pertinent chapter, "Chapultepec", is 1847, and the first place mentioned is the street along the funeral procession route which is named after one of the young cadets who had sacrificed their lives in defense of Chapultepec Castle against the assault by American soldiers in the year 1847. The victory in 1946 of the presidential campaign of Miguel Alemán did, in fact, open further the door to U.S. investments and tourism in Mexico. Perhaps Yáñez was being cautious in substituting Padilla for Alemán, since Alemán was still alive and very powerful in Mexico in the year *Las vueltas del tiempo* was published. According to this symbolic scheme, then, Chapultepec was in danger of being overwhelmed once again in 1946, a century later.

A third axiom in Yáñez' pattern of Mexican history is that liberals tend to become conservative over time, while conservatives tend to become more tolerant of ex-liberals. The cause of this evolution is a desire for accommodation; the effect is an abandonment of beliefs. A good example is shown in the case of Porfirio Díaz, the reformist liberal who fought on the side of Juárez, only to become a conservative dictator using repressive measures to stay in power and favor foreign investors. It is the young leftist liberal, Fancisco Javier Lerdo, who ponders on this general phenomenon in the succession of generations:

> Para estas gentes decentes, los eriquecidos en anteriores administraciones, que disfrutan monopolios, bancos, latifundios, empresas en grande, todavía son unos pelados, con los cuales no deben rozarse; pero ellos pasan ya la pelota: pelados, los que van llegando: rojillos, comunistoides, a quienes, cuando consoliden su fortuna, les llegará el turno de sentirse gente decente, como aconteció a porfiristas y liberales, en relación con los monárquicos y conservadores . . . (p. 67).

Francisco Javier, however, being too closely identified in sympathies with the anticlerical liberals of the Calles' administration, does not recognize the parallel between Porfirio Díaz and Plutarco Elías Calles in their evolutions from liberal to reactionary positions once they become firmly ensconced in power. Instead, this comparison is made in a conversation between two losers of the Mexican Revolution, two major characters in *Las vueltas del tiempo* who do not count in Mexican politics of their time. One is Pablo Juárez, the minor bureaucrat and frustrated statesman with a strong indigenist ideology and overt sympathies for Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of war. This Indian identity associates him with his homonym, President Benito Juárez. The other loser is Damián Limón, the revolutionary soldier who fought against Pancho Villa, later went into exile in the United States, and returned to Mexico to find all the doors of opportunity closed, regardless of his active participation in the Revolution. It is Damián Limón, painful of Calles' failings to put the goals of the Revolution into effect, who draws the Diáz-Calles parallel in the creation by these two despots of a new, exclusive élite:

> No me negará que fue a la sombra del callismo como comenzaron a amasarse tantas fortunas, ni tampoco que se ha formado una . . . ¿cómo le dicen . . . aristocracia? . . . sí, meritamente igual a la porfirista; por eso los ricos callistas no pueden ver a Cárdenas, que trató de hacer efectivo el verdadero programa de la Revolución. (p. 15)

When Pablo Juárez continues the gist of the conversation by implicating "los cardenistas enriquecidos", Damián Limón confesses a pervading cynicism without wanting to tarnish the popular image of Lázaro Cárdenas as the radical President who lived up to his ideals. Pablo Juárez also recalls incredulously the reports that Calles, who had tried to close down the Catholic Church during the 1920's, in his old age became a devout Catholic and even repented and confessed his sins to a priest before dying. Another great turnabout is the fact that José Vasconcelos pays his last respects to Calles by standing guard at his coffin officially in the company of General Joaquín Amaro, the man who had taken orders in 1929 from Calles to conduct a bloody military repression of Vasconcelos' presidential campaign, which ended in an election fraud. Vasconcelos, who had been Calles' principal antagonist in the press for a decade, made peace with the dictator in their old age. In depicting Vasconcelos at the side of the executioner of *vasconcelistas* in 1929, Yáñez is faithful to the newspaper reports of the funeral.[22]

The analogy of Díaz and Calles as repressive dictators who betray their liberalism can be seen in the very structure of the novel as it is implied in the sequence of chapter titles. The chapter entitled "Retoños," which reveals Camacho's family tragedy at the hands of Calles' ruthless-

ness and the "sprouting", of *retoños*, of hatred toward the tyrant, is followed symbolically by the chapter entilted "Raíces," which generally delves into the history of a wealthy *porfirista* family and specifically relates one of their family member's plans for Porfirio Díaz' lavish funeral, in obvious parallel to Calles' funeral which was proceeding at that time. In other words, the roots of the Calles despotism and his betrayal of liberalism are to be found in the Porfiriato.

The title of the novel—*Las vueltas del tiempo*—gives expression to the axiom that liberals become more conservative over time while conservatives become more accepting of ex-liberals, that old ideals are abandoned and that long-standing animosities are forgiven with the passage of time. It is Santos Munguía, the Catholic activist, who uses the phrase while attending the burial of Calles:

> —qué vueltas da el tiempo, según a cada momento dice la gente. Quién habría de adivinar que yo, que odié frenéticamente a este hombre, al que me catequizaron a odiar, fanáticamente, concurriría, con admiración de las buenas, a su entierro. ¡Las vueltas del tiempo! como luego dicen. (p. 320)

Significantly, it is a popular expression which gives life to the axiom of Mexican histroy which Yáñez depicts in his novel: the author is seeking in philology clues to the philosophy of history. The general trend in Mexican society from the Jacobin radicalism of the 1930's to the Thermidor and the widely commented death of the Revolution in the 1940's must have affected the personal opinions of many of Yáñez' colleagues, and it is this change of attitude which is projected into an axiom of Mexican history in the novel.

IV. The Business of Love and Feminine Archetypes

Through a series of feminine archetypes in *Las vueltas del tiempo*, Yáñez comments on the frustration of love and represents the meaning of Mexican history in concrete circumstances, following to a considerable degree the axiom of Mexican history already delineated. In the chapter entitled "Historias de amor," Miguel Osollo, the young A.C.J.M. activist, falls in love with Cecilia, who is willing to sacrifice all for their mutual cause of defending the Catholic religion in a period of persecution. Cecilia desires to marry Miguel *in absentia*, while he is in prison, in order to strengthen their spiritual bond. Their love will never be physically consummated. The match is frustrated by Cecilia's zealous self-sacrifice, when she leaps off a train rather than surrender to the enemy, that is to say, the anticlerical government. Another young couple is drawn as a parallel by contrast. Luz, the staunchly Catholic daughter of a conservative *porfirista* family, narrates out loud the tragic ending of the love story between Cecilia and Miguel Osollo to her listeners, including her boyfriend, Francisco Javier Lerdo, the young anticlerical liberal. One listener becomes so wrapped up in Luz' dramatic

narration and her intense identification with Cecilia that the two women are confused in the interjection: "Continúa Cecilia . . . digo, Luz." (p. 128). Thus the distinction between two levels of narrative reality is blurred. Yet there is a crucial difference between the two courting couples. The reader is left only with a foreshadowing of the problem at the end of the romantic chapter, "Historias de amor"; Francisco Javier tells his girlfriend, Luz, that he, too, has a history of love to tell, and she, skeptically, inquires, "¿Historia o negocio?". This serves as a bridge over a gap of six chapters, to the chapter entitled "El negocio de amor," which begins *medias res* with the conversation between Francisco Javier and Luz some time later during the same afternoon. The beginning line of the new chapter highlights the crux of the problem in courtship as she sees it: there can be no marriage when religious convictions are not shared. In the time lapsed while the narrative lens focused on other characters during six chapters, Francisco Javier, it can be deduced, had proposed marriage to her. Given Luz' self-doubts about the proposal, it can be deduced that the shared convictions and common cause which had made Cecilia the ideal lover for Osollo were sorely lacking in *this* marriage proposal. It can be surmised that Luz' wealth and social position were attractive to the young anticlerical liberal more than her Catholicism. When Luz, abject in her failure to convert Francisco Javier to her beliefs, turns to writing down the history of Cecilia, her role model, she changes the title of the work from "Historia de amor" to "Negocio de amor"—once again, an obvious confusion in levels of narrative reality caused by her intense identification with the protagonist. In short, the frustration of her love was at least partly due to the perennial conflict between liberal and conservative views concerning the Church. She cannot imitate the feminine archetype which she admires in Cecilia. That archetype is sketched out in the notes she jots down for Cecilia's biography: "Lealtad a las convicciones—la mujer fuerte del Evangelio—La tentación de amor—Amor humano como sacrificio—El desposorio heroico . . ." (p. 347).

Miguel Osollo's own reminiscence of his lover is here instructive. He thinks of Cecilia as "el mito de la perfección femenina. ¡Ah! Cecilia martir" (p. 279). She is the mythic archetype of Saint Cecilia, the virgin martyr of the Catholic Church who, as a Roman in the third century (an era of persecution of Christians), was forced to marry a pagan yet managed to preserve her virginity while converting her husband to Christianity.[23] In other words, her love for her husband and her religious cause were one—just as in the history of Cecilia and Miguel Osollo.

In the same chapter, "El negocio de amor", in which Luz' frustration in love comes to a climax, another drama unfolds which holds true to the chapter title as well as exemplifying the third axiom of Mexican history—that liberals and conservative can come to an accommodation and abandon their differences, if the price is right. Miguel Osollo, an influential Jesuit, arrives at the home of Luz' *porfirista* family to negotiate

plans with Jacobo Ibarra concerning a casino, a social club which would cater to the dating and courting needs of soldiers. Jacobo Ibarra is a wealthy businessman who made his fortune using his good *callista* connections. Many years ago, these friendships, including that of Calles, had been based on liberal, anticlerical convictions. Now, obviously, he was willing to do business with the former A.C.J.M. Catholic fanatic. The profit motive is the prime motive on both sides—or, to echo the chapter title, "El *negocio* de amor."

In parallel fashion, Miguel Osollo has forgiven Calles his persecution of Catholics, partly because the aging despot himself repented. The game of homonyms and parallel lives is altered to suit Osollo's new identity as moderate, accommodating, and businesslike Jesuit. This transformation is underscored by the fact that Osollo no longer identifies with his nineteenth-century homonym, the conservative anti-Reforma General, Luis Gonzaga Osollo, so much as with his own father, another Luis Osollo, whom he admits to have been a socialist, a worker who had died in the miners' strike at Cananea of 1906, bloodily repressed by the *porfirista* forces. This strike is often cited by historians as a prelude to the Revolution of 1910—that same Revolution which Miguel had earlier desired to eradicate during the Cristero War. Conveniently, and with apparent pride, the Jesuit priest recalls the radical credentials of his father in front of Jacobo Ibarra, the anticlerical liberal and *callista* with whom he now wants to conduct a profitable business. It does not ring as a two-faced ploy so much as a realignment of his own convictions to the prevailing attitudes of the 1940's, when it became a *cliché* to pay lipservice to the Revolution in government circles, although the revolutionary goals had actually been abandoned by the government.

Another key feminine archetype of the novel is María, the wife of Jacobo Ibarra. She marries this "falso ingenierillo metido a revolucionario de última hora," who becomes a *callista* millionaire businessman. María thus wins fame and fortune as "una de las damas mejor conocidas de México." A central ambivalence to her personality allows Yáñez to portray her as the synthesis of several feminine archetypes. In the very beginning of the chapter, "Las dos historias de María," a title which signals her dual nature, she is described as a Lady Macbeth—ambitious, Machiavellian—as well as a Desdemona—compassionate, strong, chaste, maligned. Having participated in the revolution as a *soldadera* she is rumored to have been the original model for the legendary Adelita, who according to the *corrido* of the Revolution, disdained the love of a soldier. In fact, she does ultimately disdain the love of the soldier, Damián Limón, a character who, like María, is taken from *Al filo del agua*. Limón symbolizes the brute force of the Revolution, a potential liberator from the repressive atmosphere of the Porfiriato. He sweeps into the sleepy town of Yahualica, kills the first woman with whom he falls in love, Micaela, because she rejects his advances, and woos María, whom he sees as Micaela's double—"La mujer que nadie podrá

dominar."[24] María at this stage plays the archetype of the rebel: she runs off with the *maderista* soldier, Damián Limón, with the clear intention of creating a scandal in her home town, whose sexually repressive religiosity she yearns to escape. Up to this point, the two novels, *Al filo del agua* and *Las vueltas del tiempo*, are in harmony. But then Yáñez adds a new dimension to María's development in *Las vueltas del tiempo*. She experiences first-hand the vicissitudes of the Revolution and is disillusioned with Damián Limón, so that she returns to the more calculating and cautious engineer, Jacobo Ibarra. This time, she runs off with Jacobo, not only to scandalize the town, but also to protect herself from Damián Limón's persistent pursuits of passion.

This change of lovers is the crux of "Las dos historias de María", of her change of fortune—fortune in the double sense of good luck and wealth, for her love of Jacobo Ibarra brought her both. Jacobo and Damián, her two suitors, both fought for Obregón against Villa, yet one became a winner and the other a loser. She picked the winner. Inherent in María's personality is the ambivalence of her fortune and her charity. Her husband, Jacobo, tells her: "tu erraste la vocación: debiste ser madre de la caridad." (p. 231). In fact, through two personal interventions of hers, using her influence, first with Calles, then with Obregón, she saves the lives of Damián Limón, her frustrated suitor, and Miguel Osollo, her ideological opponent during the Cristero War. There is much in all of this of the miraculous intercessions of the Virgen de Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico who is all-loving (even of her enemies), and able to save souls. In *Las vueltas del tiempo*, then, María is cast as a kind of secular goddess in tewentieth-century Mexico—"la mujer que nadie podrá dominar." She is a mythic archetype peculiar to the Mexican psyche—the omnipotent woman, the loving Mother, Queen of Mexican Society if not of the Angels. She displays qualities both human and divine, like her namesake, the Mother of God. Yáñez recognizes in her role the vitality of the Catholic belief in the Virgen de Guadalupe in Mexican society, part of the Hispanic heritage, and the perpetuation of this cult by those historically in power.

The Indian heritage finds its counterpart in the myth of Coatlicue, the mother earth goddess, one of the most powerful divinities in Aztec cosmology, all but forgotten in the twentieth century. It is Pablo Juárez, the frustrated *indigenista* bureaucrat, who adores her cult, for she is the mother of Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of war and human sacrifice. Pablo Juárez believes the Revolution failed to live up to its promises to the Mexican Indian because the cult of violence and defiance of authority had been abandoned. A restoration of pre-Hispanic cult of Coatlicue, whose statue is draped with a collar of skulls, would revitalize Indian civilization in twentieth-century Mexico. For Pablo Juárez, Coatlicue symbolizes the apocalyptic purpose of the Mexican Revolution: to destroy a decadent occidental society so that the Indian civilization might once again flourish. Mexican history has repeated itself in the

archetype of Malinche, the Indian woman who betrayed her people to serve Hernán Cortés in the Spanish Conquest. Mexican politicians are no more than *malinchistas* selling out to foreign interests, according to Pablo Juárez. Thus his faith in the cults of Coatlicue and Huitzilopohtli are his answer to that second axiom of Mexican history implied in the novel: that foreign conquerors of Mexico find willing allies among Mexican conservatives, especially among creoles and mestizos who disdain the Indian.

Yáñez plays with Nahuatl etymologies when, in the course of one conversation, he has several characters bring out the analogy between *Huitzil*opochtli, the god of human sacrifice, and *Huitzil*ac, the town where the government forces of President Calles executed a presidential contender, General Francisco Serrano, to end his competition with Obregón's ambitions at reelection. The implication of this analogy is that the Aztecs left a legacy of bloody sacrifice in the political cult of the supreme ruler of Mexico, be he Moctezuma or Calles. Quetzalcóatl, the Toltec god of civilization and learning, opposed to the cult of human sacrifice and prophesied to return, is totally missing form Yáñez' novel—such is the author's pessimism about Mexican history.

Coatlicue and the Virgin Mary represent divine Mother cults, the mother of the principal god in each of the two main religious heritages of Mexico. While the decline of the cult of Coatlicue is identified with the failure of the Mexican Revolution, the cult of María is inextricably entwined with the rise of Jacobo Ibarra and his allies, the revolutionary *caudillos*, Obregón and Calles, who betrayed their cause for a price.

The fourth feminine archetype in *Las vueltas del tiempo* is the one most closely associated with the theme of "El negocio de amor." Just as we have seen the opposition of the cults of Coatlicue and María, so also there is a counterpart to the virgin martyr cult of Cecilia: it is the prostitute who sells herself out of economic necessity. In the last chapter of the novel, "Las sirenas: el círculo se cierra," the funeral parlor attendant, Camacho, who has accepted the odious task of preparing the cadaver of Calles on overtime, precisely so that he might earn some extra money to support his daughters, comes home to learn that his impoverished girls have just sold themselves into prostitution. He collapses into a mental crisis, is beaten unconscious by onlookers, and is taken away in an ambulance with screaming sirens. Thus ends the novel: the family tragedy of Camacho comes full circle through the third generation, the third cycle. Yáñez brings home the idea that the Calles despotism permitted the exploitation of this working-class family. The socioeconomic inequities of Mexico have not been solved by the progressive *caudillos* of the Revolution; history itself is cyclical, not progressive. The novel began in the mortuary, with the death of the omnipotent Calles, and it ends on the ominous note of the ambulance sirens: the wail of death for the politically impotent. There is an ironic word-play in the chapter title, "Las sirenas: el círculo se cierra." Yáñez is not only alluding to the cyclical structure of the novel and his cyclical philosophy of history; he is also

referring to the feminine archetype of the Siren, of Homeric lore—the temptress who spells disaster for those men who are seduced by her song and beauty. When his daughters become professional Sirens, Camacho is destroyed. The vicious cycle of poverty means for those girls that love is only a business.

V. A Final Note

We have seen how the author of *Las vueltas del tiempo* constructs a symbolic structure to the novel through the titles and the sequence of the chapters, how he develops a cyclical concept of Mexican history, and how he employs feminine archetypes from mythology and religion to expound on his ideas about love. A brief review will clarify their dialectical meaning of thesis and antithesis. The synthesis, of course, is the totality of Mexican history. Chapter 1, "Ocasión y principio," opens the novel with the pompous wake in the morturary for the once omnipotent Calles, while the last chapter, "Las sirenas: el círculo se cierra," announces the cyclical repetition with the imminent death of the impotent funeral parlor worker whose family was exploited and destroyed by the Calles despotism. "El eterno retorno" (Ch. 2) and "Vidas paralelas" (Ch. 5) refer to the cyclical concept of Mexican history. "Retoños" (Ch. 3) and "Raíces" (Ch. 4) symbolize the nefarious effect of the Calles tyranny and its roots in the previous Díaz dictatorship. "Historias de amor" (Ch. 6), with the idealized archetype of Cecilia, is contrasted with "El negocio de amor" (Ch. 13). The Aztec archetype in "Coatlicue" (Ch. 7) finds its counterpart in the Catholic archetype in "Las dos historias de María (Ch. 9). While "Chapultepec" (Ch. 8) focuses on the palace of the supreme ruler of Mexico and his historic alliance with foreign invaders, "La última morada" (Ch. 10) refers to the fact that all rulers, however powerful, end up residing in the cemetery, pointing to the "Miseria de la grandeza." (p. 239). "En un lugar de Mexico" (Ch. 12) is a close-up of the Jesuit luminary, Miguel Osollo, praying in the Latin language for Calles' soul: this chapter is the one which most resemble *Al filo del agua* in its obsession with Catholic rites and the Catholic mentality, so that it is significant that the title, "En un lugar de México" echoes the alternate title of *Al filo del agua*, explained in the preface to be "En un lugar del Arzobispado, El antiguo régimen." Both titles echo the first line of the *Quijote*, in recognition of Cervantes' influence on Yáñez.

Yáñez' reading of the Italian philosopher of culture and history, Giambattista Vico (1688–1744), in all probability influenced three important aspects of *Las vueltas del tiempo*: the construction of a symbolic structure to the novel through the chapter titles and their dialectical relationship; a cyclical concept of Mexican history; and the employment of

feminine archetypes from mythology and religion to expound on ideas about love, applying some axioms of Mexican history on an intimate level.

Yáñez published an article in 1934 on the "Actualidad de Juan Bautista Vico" and returned to the subject of Vico's theory of history in a series of articles published in 1939.[25] It is therefore certain that Vico was on Yáñez' mind in the decade preceding his writing of *Las vueltas del tiempo*. Vico developed a complex, cyclical view of human history in which he saw a recurrent pattern of the succession of civilizations through inevitable stages of rise, apogee, and decline. He believed that laws to these patterns could be discerned, thus introducing the morphology of history. Yáñez more modestly delves into the recurrent patterns of Mexican history, not of all human history as did Vico. Although the Mexican novelist gives credit to Nietzche for the concept of the eternal return, the German philosopher's view concerning certain constants of universal human nature is less akin to Yáñez' scheme than Vico's idea that each culture must be studied for its distinct characteristics and concrete individuality if it is to be understood.[26]

Vico argued that, to comprehend history fully, to grasp a culture of the past organically, one must study its language, customs, religious rites, myths, monuments, literature, not just the deeds of the key figures in history.[27] To quote Isaiah Berlin in his study of Vico, the Italian philosopher "perceived the formative part played by myths, archetypal images, and symbolic structures before Hamann or Schelling, Nietzche, and Durkheim, or the founders of psychoanalysis."[28] All of the aforementioned aspects of culture are employed by Yáñez in *Las vueltas del tiempo* to give us the psychological, intimate dimension to Mexican society which cannot be perceived in the main events of textbook history. Finally, Vico believed that *fantasia*, or imaginative power, was necessary for the historian to reconstruct the past: "The *fantasia*, which creates myths and rites in which primitive conceptions of the world are acted out, is the faculty that generates our sense of the past."[29] The logical culmination of this idea of Vico, according to Isaiah Berlin, would blur the dividing line between history and myth; James Joyce's novel, *Finnegans Wake*, is cited as a case in point.[30] This is precisely what Yáñez accomplishes in *Las vueltas del tiempo*. The confusion of narrative levels of reality is only one technique which he uses toward that end. Only through the imaginative faculty of the novelist contemplating historical reality, will we come closer to understanding the motives and beliefs and customs which have made Mexicans think and act the way they have throughout history.

The final irony is that the artifice of Yáñez' techniques is so laborious and contrived that he sacrifices the verisimilitude of his characters to the purpose of elaborating the grand synthesis of Mexican history. Only Camacho, the proletarian with the tragic family history, escapes this fate of artificiality; it is he, significantly, who least expounds on the meaning of Mexican history. *Las vueltas del tiempo* will fascinate Mexican history

buffs as well as experts in the structural experimentation of the contemporary Latin American novel. Due to its complexity, the meaning of *Las vueltas del tiempo* will evade the majority of other readers, so that *Al filo del agua* is not in danger of being replaced as Yáñez' most widely read classic. However, it would be no exaggeration to call *Las vueltas del tiempo* Yáñez' most ambitious experiment in the use of time, memory, and history to define novelistic structure. An appropriate analogy could be made to James Joyce's novels. While literary scholars recognize the incomparable complexity and originality of *Finnegans Wake* with its wealth of details drawn from Irish mythology and history, *Ulysses*, the novel by Joyce which is equally creative yet more accessible, will continue to be his most popular work.

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NOTES

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29. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
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