PROSE WRITINGS OF JOSÉ RUBÉN ROMERO

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PROSE WRITINGS OF JOSÉ RUBÉN ROMERO

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By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

José Rubén Romero, Mexican poet, novelist, diplomat, and academician, was born September 25, 1890, in Cotija de la Paz, a remote pueblo of Michoacán, Mexico. His father was don Melisio Romero, who owned a store in Cotija. As a child Rubén spent much time in his father's store, listening to the discussions held by the visitors to the shop. The political ideas of Rubén's father were quite liberal, and although at that time young Rubén was not interested, it is evident that the father's political leanings affected the son's life and writing. William O. Cord cited two stimuli that helped shape Rubén's destiny.

De joven en Cotija Rubén Romero vivía en medio de una nueva sensibilidad a la vez política y literaria, una época singular en la historia mexicana. Por toda la república se sentían murmuraciones, las esperanzas de los llamados liberales que atormentaban mucho las contusiones de la vida política mexicana, la gente que buscaba una vida menos muda, menos ciega al clamor de los humildes. De la nueva época literaria iban desapareciendo las llamas iniciales del modernismo. Buscaba el joven mundo artístico hispánico un nuevo estilo con que manifestar el desasosiego e inquietud que tanto vibraba tremulosamente en México. Son dos, pues, los estímulos que dentro de poco se fundirán resultando uno que habría de labrar una expresión literaria sin rival en el mundo contemporáneo. 1

Because of his liberal political views, don Melisio's business failed, and the family moved to the capital for a brief period of time. Young Rubén acquainted himself with the city, but always wished for his native Michoacán. Here he and his family knew Amado Nervo, the poet, who gave Rubén an autographed first edition of one of his books. Romero said of Nervo: "Guardo de él como un grato recuerdo, unas Místicas, primera edición, con esta sencilla dedicatoria: 'A Rubén Romero, un niño que hace versos, Amado.'"

Soon Rubén's father received an appointment as prefect of a district in Michoacán, and the family returned to the province, settling in Ario de Rosales. Young Rubén was fourteen at the time, and it was here that his literary interests began to assert themselves. He had time to read, and he enjoyed the classic Spanish books of Alarcón, Galdós, Valera, Pereda, and especially those of Cervantes, whose feelings in regard to the dignity of the individual were so close to those of Romero.

While living in Ario de Rosales, Rubén and a young friend published a periodical which they called Iris. In it were published some of Rubén's verses, and soon he was sending his poems to other magazines in hopes that they would

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2José Rubén Romero, José Rubén Romero, Obras Completas (México, 1963), p. 67.
be published. He devoted himself entirely to poetry in
the early days of his creativity, not writing any prose
until he left his native land many years later.

Young Rubén frequently traveled about the province with
his father, and on these trips he came to know well the
countryside and its people. This was to serve him as the
foundation for his future writing, all of which would be
based on his own actual experiences and acquaintances.

Antonio Castro Leal, in his prologue to Romero's Obras
Completas, says

En estos pintorescos viajes lo acompaña
José Rubén, quien va recogiendo visiones de
personas, pueblos y costumbres, y al mismo
tiempo, almacenando experiencias, observaciones
y paisajes. Se familiariza entonces con la
geografía y con las gentes de Michoacán. Todo
lo que ve y todo lo que vive irá pasando después—
apenas retocado por la imaginación— a sus libros.3

The family lived in Pátzcuaro for a time, and then
don Melisio was made Receptor de Rentas in Sahuayo. Here
Rubén came to know some priests, who urged him to read
religious writings such as those of Lacordaire, Boussuet,
Saint Augustine, and Baronio, and who also urged him to
stop writing verses. Then the Romero family moved to Santa
Clara del Cobre, where Rubén became acquainted with the
people who were to become the prototypes of two of his most

3Antonio Castro Leal, José Rubén Romero, Obras Completas
famous characters, Tamborillas and Pito Pérez. Here also Rubén and his father were caught up in the fever of the Revolution, and affiliated themselves with the maderistas. Rubén's father and the sub-prefect, Salvador Escalante, later to become a general, formed a rebel group which at its peak numbered 800. Romero told of his experiences with this group in Mi caballo, mi perro, y mi rifle.

After the victory of Madero, José Rubén was named receptor de rentas in Santa Clara. It was in Santa Clara that Rubén met lovely Mariana García, who would later become his wife, but it was a romantic escapade with another young woman that caused Rubén to have to leave Santa Clara. The influential father of the girl in question misunderstood Rubén's intentions, and used his political influence to force the unwelcome suitor to leave the town. This even doubtless reinforced Rubén's disdain for politicians who used their positions as weapons against the less powerful.

In 1912 Romero's friend, Dr. Miguel Silva, was elected governor of Michoacán, and Romero went to Morelia as Dr. Silva's private secretary. When Victoriano Huerta took over the presidency of the republic Silva renounced his governorship, but Romero stayed on to serve two succeeding governors, until he was advised to flee because he was on the government's black list as a friend of Silva's. He spent a short, unhappy exile in Mexico City, and as soon as he could safely do so he returned to his beloved Michoacán.
From 1914 to 1918 he operated a store in Tacámbaro. These years are recorded in Romero's second novel, *Desbandada*. In 1917 he married Mariana García, and in 1918 he resumed his public life as secretary to his friend Pascual Ortiz Rubio, then governor of Michoacán. From this position he went to work in the *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, where he became acquainted with and was influenced by other Mexican writers such as Artemio de Valle Arizpe and José Juan Tablada, both of whom were also in the diplomatic service. But as yet Romero still considered himself a poet, and had not felt the incentive to express himself in prose.

That incentive came in the form of a case of homesickness that overcame him after he went to Barcelona in 1930, as Consul General under Ortiz Rubio, who was then President of the Republic. Cord told how Romero came to write his first novel, *Apuntes de un lugareño*:

*Llegó a Barcelona. Gozaba mucho de la vida, pero en poco tiempo le venció una nostalgia casi insufrible. Quería regresar pero no le era posible. Recordaba otras horas felices en México, y a los muchos amigos de quienes se había separado. Y un día se sentó y escribió unas páginas en que describió unos días del pasado en Michoacán, días de la juventud. Para Rubén Romero, estas páginas no eran más que una manera de recordar lo lejano, a los amigos y a los pueblos. TanContento estaba de lo que había escrito, y tanto le permitió gozar de aquella vida, que compuso más y dentro de unas semanas resultó su primera novela que más bien era compilación de páginas de memorias aisladas. Y así nació la devoción por la novela en Rubén Romero, género con el que expresaría cuanto sentía, cuanto sabía de lo humano, de México y de los mexicanos...*  

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*Cord, op. cit., p. 29.*
In 1932 *Apuntes de un lugareño* was written, and in that year Rubén Romero the poet became Rubén Romero the novelist. He returned to Mexico City as director of the *Registro Civil*, and continued writing the story of his life in *Desbandada* and *El pueblo inocente*, both published in 1934.

Back in Barcelona in 1935, again as Consul General from Mexico, he received word that he had been elected as miembro correspondiente of the *Academia Mexicana de la Lengua*, due to the influence and popularity of his first three prose works. In 1936 he wrote *Mi caballo, mi perro, y mi rifle*. In 1937 he went to Brazil as ambassador, and in 1938 he wrote his most famous work, *La vida inútil de Pito Pérez*.

In 1939 he went to Cuba as ambassador, where he remained until 1945, dividing his time between Havana and Mexico City. During this time he wrote *Anticipación a la muerte* (1939), and *Una vez fui rico* (1942). He returned to Mexico in 1945, and wrote *Algunas cosillas de Pito Pérez que se me quedaron en el tintero* (1945) and *Rosenda* (1946). *Rosenda* was his last major work.

He became very active in the *Academia Mexicana de la Lengua*, of which he was made a miembro de número in 1950, and after interesting President Miguel Alemán in the proposition, he was instrumental in bringing about the meeting in Mexico City of the *Congreso de Academias de Lengua Española*, held in April of 1951. Leal said that Romero's
becoming a member of the Academy "fue favorable a esta Academia" porque provocó el interés del gobierno por los trabajos de la docta corporación."\(^5\)

José Rubén Romero died suddenly on July 4, 1952. His friend, Ignacio Prieto, had made a compact with him that whichever of the two should die first, the surviving one would write his obituary. Prieto wrote a farewell, but of the obituary he said:

My grief at Ruben's death is too great for me to work serenly at the obituary he entrusted to me. Rubén himself said his whole life is in his books. He who does not know it, and wants to, may read them; he will also come to know Mexico—its landscapes, its customs, its men, its virtues and vices, its people's life—better than in any other text . . . .\(^6\)

José Rubén Romero wrote as he spoke, in the everyday vernacular, as if he were chatting with his reader on a bench in the plaza of one of the hamlets of Michoacán. This conversational style is emphasized by his habit of writing in the first person, creating the impression that he is telling the reader of some incident that happened to him personally, as indeed was the case more often than not.

González y Contreras says "las cualidades de J. Rubén Romero son precisamente las de un gran narrador: la claridad, el

\(^{5}\text{Leal, op. cit., p. xvii.}\)

\(^{6}\text{Ignacio Prieto, "Points of View: ¡Hasta Luego!" Américas, IV, No. 11 (November, 1952), 33.}\)
His habit of writing in the first person is explained by Raul Arreola Cortés as being more an attempt to enhance the medium than to exalt the person. He says:

Romero prefiere ser el cronista de su pueblo, el relator de su provincia, más que el egocentrista que relata aventuras a la manera de Estebanillo González.

Ni tampoco quiere escribir su obra como el incógnito autor del Lazarillo.

En la autobiografía de Rubén Romero, el hombre está como un medio; en la autobiografía característica de la picaresca, el hombre está como un fin.

He wrote things familiar to him, almost always drawing from his actual experiences for his theme. He was twenty years old when the Mexican Revolution broke out; as a result much of his writing is set with a background of the Revolution, and Romero is generally classified with the novelists of the Revolution; Guzmán, López y Fuentes, and Azuela. However, his attitude toward and use of the Revolution differed considerably from that of the other novelists of the Revolution. In his novels the Revolution is subordinated to the lives and commonplace activities of the "little man." He tells of

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7. Gilberto González y Contreras, Rubén Romero, el hombre que supo ver (Havana, 1940), p. 65.
the effects of the Revolution in these lives, using the Revolution as a means rather than an end, a background rather than a subject.

Although classified with his contemporaries of the twentieth century, Romero is most often compared to Fernando Lizardí (1776-1827), El Pensador Mexicano, who is credited with bringing the picaresque style of writing to the New World from Spain in his novel El periquillo sarniento. Romero and Lizardí both used the picaresque novel as a vehicle to satirize the current defects of the Mexico that they knew. Gastón Lafarga compared Romero's famous novel, La vida inútil de Pito Pérez, with Lizardí's Periquillo in his work on Romero.9

Romero is also compared to Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645), famous seventeenth century Spanish satirist, and creator of another famous pícaro, don Pablos, in his Vida del buscón. Both Romero and Quevedo satirize and ridicule the petty foibles of mankind with an ironic sense of humor that is sharpened by a quick wit and caustic tongue.

The humor which pervades Romero's work is an important part of his style and uniquely his. Sometimes it is ironic and cruel, sometimes gentle and sentimental, always earthy and realistic, occasionally to the point of being scatological.

9Gastón Lafarga, La evolución literaria de José Rubén Romero (México, 1939), pp. 103-152.
"Las novelas de Rubén Romero cosquillean hasta la carcajada, a la vez, por su desenfado ilimité, por su desgarrado cinicismo."  

Romero was a poet before he became a novelist, and his prose retains many poetic touches, particularly in his nostalgic descriptions of his beloved Michoacán. "Rubén Romero's novelistic procedure is poetical—each chapter of a novel compares favorably to a canto, which in turn obliges him to restrain the ideological breadth of the different parts of the book."  

Romero wrote, as stated above, of things familiar to him, notably Michoacán and its inhabitants. He knew them both well, and loved them, and enjoyed calling to mind scenes and events from the past, no matter how routine and uninspiring they might seem at first glance. Thus he became known not only as a regional, provincial writer, but also as a costumbrista, one who depicts the everyday customs and lives of the common people. González y Contreras points out the difference between lo regional and lo costumbrista. Se equivocan de medio a medio quienes confunden lo regional con lo costumbrista. Costumbrismo es parte; regionalismo es totalidad. El costumbrismo opera a base de lo exterior y risueño. Lo regional toma las...


11Ruth Stanton, "José Rubén Romero, Costumbrista of Michoacán," Hispania (December, 1941), 425.
costumbres como elemento de matización, supera lo epidérmico y fugaz, adopta lo dramático y se convierte en algo duradero. El costumbrismo es provinciano, en tanto que lo regional busca en semblarse y se integra en el aire mundial.12

Romero's characterizations have been called weak, because he did not consistently develop a character in full. However, he does succeed in quickly sketching a character with a few well chosen lines, leaving to his readers' imaginations and understanding the completion of the image. His characters show Romero's understanding of personalities, whose overt actions are obvious effects of certain traits of character purposely left undelineated. The writer thereby retains some of the mystery and fascination of the study of people and personalities, and at the same time enhances the poetic qualities of his prose.

El método de J. Rubén Romero—método de la región—consiste en escoger un ambiente, una familia, en los que hace un corte para describir las impresiones de los protagonistas y para informarnos de ellos mediante lo que dicen o ejecutan. Desde el primer momento los hace hablar, los perfila, sin hacer esfuerzos para caracterizarlos. Tomamos contacto con estos seres un poco a la manera con que conocemos al pasaje de un barco o de un ferrocarril: montándolos, pieza a pieza, mediante sus conversaciones.13

12González y Contreras, op. cit., p. 69.
13Ibid., pp. 70-71.
CHAPTER II

SUMMARIES OF ROMERO'S REVOLUTIONARY NOVELS

Apuntes de un lugareño

Apuntes de un lugareño, published in 1932, was Rubén Romero's first prose work, and was an immediate success when it was published. Ermilo Abreu said that the success of Apuntes de un lugareño was sufficient to quiet the critics of his poetry, and it is commonly said that he entered the Mexican Academy of Letters in 1935 through the window opened to him by this work. Said Abreu, "La literatura mexicana se reaprovinciana, se rehumaniza, se ahinca en la entraña de lo propio y de la tierra."\(^1\) He wrote Apuntes de un lugareño in Spain, and it is primarily a series of autobiographical reminiscences of his life in Mexico.

Part I: Recuerdos lejanos

He described his home, his school, and his family as they were when he lived in Cotija de la Paz, where his father owned two stores. He gave characteristic incidents concerning the members of his family, instead of merely describing them. He mentioned his grandmother, whom he later eulogized in his lament at the time of her death. He told of his uncle Pancho,

\(^1\)Ermilo Abreu, Sala de Retratos (México, 1946), p. 257.
perhaps a bit of a pícaro, who spent his days wandering drunkenly from store to store, strumming his guitar, sometimes sadly playing alone in his room. He described his friends and people of the town with quickly drawn but vivid sketches.

After his father's business failed, due to a boycott by fanatic conservatives opposed to his father's liberal views, first the father, then the family, moved to Mexico City. The trip from Cotija de la Paz was a long and difficult one in those days, begun on horseback, continued on a ship, and finally completed on the train.

After traveling on horseback all day, the family camped on the banks of Lake Chapala, which they crossed the next morning on a steamboat. Romero described this crossing, his first encounter with a boat, as seen through a child's eyes. They boarded a train at Ocotlán, and he wrote of his childish impressions and antics during the remainder of the trip to the capital.

He described in detail his first day in the capital; then he told of the school he was sent to, giving quick vignettes of his teachers there, including his favorite, José María Morelos, a poor mestizo who had earned his education cleaning the potrero by day and studying from borrowed books by night.

Romero gives indication that he personally was something of a pícaro, as evidenced by his account of some of his pranks at school:
En materia de estudios nos apretaba sin consideraciones, pero yo encontré un truco para librarme de sus exigencias. A la hora de las lecciones hacía alguna diablura, llenaba de escupitinas las paredes, daba algún garauchazo al vecino o tiraba cáscaras de naranja con un resorte.

—¡Romero, a la tarima!—rugía el señor Casas. Y yo me acomodaba lleno de mansedumbre, a las plantas del maestro, mientras los demás canceaneaban su lección.

Este pequeño ardid sólo tenía una quiebra; al profesor le olían los pies en una forma que asfixiaban.

Of his pranks at home:

Un bonete viejo que adquirí por unos cuantos centavos, de un monaguillo de Santa Catarina, me servía para confesar metido en una cómoda desvencijada y para predicar sermones entreverados de latines falsos y de gangosos padrenuestros.

Mi hermana, diariamente, me decía sus pecados:

---Acusame de que le saqué la lengua a la abuelita.

---Pues te doy como penitencia, que me traigas el pan de tu merienda.

El sistema de todos los curas.

This is the first instance of many in Romero's work in which he ridiculed or satirized ignorant or insincere clergy. The first part of the novel ends with the failure of his father's business in Mexico City and the family's move back to the provinces.

Part II: Juventud, divino tesoro

Rubén and his family settled in Ario de Rosales when he was about fourteen years old. Here he and his friends
published a paper called Iris, to which Romero contributed poetry. He joined a group of poets in Morelia, and here he met and made friends with other young writers. He traveled around Michoacán with his father, who was prefect of the province, and here he saw much and learned much about the people and life in the rural areas that he loved.

Soon they were forced, again by the conservative political element, to leave Ario de Rosales, and they settled for some time in Patzcuaro, and afterward moved to Sahuayo. Here Romero told how life in the pueblos differed from that in the city. The villagers treated sudden death lightly, and the author related how his friend Isidoro killed his own brother in a quarrel over inheritances. When Rubén fell in love with a rich man's daughter in Sahuayo, the girl's father used his influence to get Rubén's father transferred to a post far from Sahuayo, in order to "save" his daughter from her penniless suitor. Of necessity, the author bade farewell to Sahuayo, and to his juventud. "Sahuayo, bucólica fiesta de tres años que dejó en mi espíritu el aroma del heno, todavía me acuerdo de tí y evoco tu paisaje soleado y tranquilo como un abrevadero de alegría y de juventud!"  

Part III: Panorama

The family moved then to Santa Clara del Cobre, to an old and dilapidated house which they enjoyed in spite of

4Ibid., p. 74.
its defects. Here the author first mentioned his famous pícaro, Pito Pérez: "No tenía razón el Pito Pérez cuando decía que si el Mundo tuviera culo, Santa Clara sería el culo del Mundo." Then he went on to describe Pito Pérez as the town drunk, modelo de truhanes y de buscones. Santa Clara was a small town where everyone knew everyone else, and the author soon became acquainted with several interesting characters.

His companion on his ventures in courtship was Tamborillas, an urchin with many of the attributes of a pícaro. Romero described him thus:

Tamborillas parecía el xocoyote de Sancho Panza. Diez años escasos, malicioso, glotón, dicharachero, ventrudo como una tambora, para hacerle honor al remoquete. A su edad ya conocía todas las asperezas de la vida: hambreastrasadas, fríos bajo la camisita hecha pedazos. Y todas las asignaturas del vicio le eran familiares, desde el alcahueteo callejero, hasta el insomnio resignado y triste, en el umbral de su troje, cuando la hermana se entregaba por 50 centavos al primer peón trashumante.

Romero gave an emotional farewell to his dying grandmother, later criticizing the passage in his "Breve historia de mis libros," saying "Yo quería dedicar a mi abuela un canto emocionado y resultó un modelo de cursilería."
Romero became secretary to the prefect, Salvador Escalante, and the two became very close. The disillusioned old man and the youth without hopes united in rebellion against destiny. On one occasion, after discussing liberties of men, Romero persuaded the prefect not to put Pito Pérez in jail for joyfully ringing the tower bell to announce his drunken return after a long absence.

Later Romero went with his father, Escalante, and a friend, Alfonso, to join the revolutionaries as maderistas. His is a personal view of the revolution and he has no illusions about the motives of most revolutionaries:

¿Por qué nos hemos levantado en armas? Por la redención de las masas, por la igualdad, por que tenga fin una dictadura oprobiosa. Pero una voz interior me grita: hipócritas! no se han alzado por eso. Tú, porque eres un ambicioso; Escalante, porque es un amargado; Alfonso, porque es un triste y todos, porque son pobres.8

After the fighting Rubén's father was given a post in the civil administration under Madero, and Rubén took his father's place in the Receptoría de Santa Clara, and later became secretary to doctor Miguel Silva, a prominent supporter of Madero. When Huerta rose to power, Romero's name was on the "black list" because of his association with Silva, and he had to flee from Morelia and lose himself in the crowds of Mexico City.

8Ibid., p. 89.
As he boarded the train for the capital he saw a statue of Justice, and observed that apparently "... la Justicia quería arrancarse la venda de los ojos, tirar en malahora las balanzas y emprender también el camino, sin rumbo, con el anhelo imposible de encontrar un país donde no se le venda o se le burle."9

Part IV: Senda tortuosa

In Mexico City Romero lived at first in hiding with a relative. Later, hearing that his old friend Dr. Silva was in Mexico City also, he came out to visit his ex-employer, and found him leading a nearly normal life, even though as a maderista he was being denounced on all sides by the government.

The author described his first visit to a fashionable brothel, then a visit from a cousin from the provinces who made all the mistakes such rustics usually make on their first visit to the city, but was treated with great respect in a restaurant when Romero told the waitress they were foreigners. In this incident Romero, rather than ridiculing his rustic relatives, satirizes the ignorance of the waiters in the restaurant. Of this passage John F. Koons says, "Es aquí donde se revela [Romero] como provincial y humanitario,

9Ibid., p. 122.
con humildad de un hombre de dignidad y lleno de respeto por los suyos. 

The refugee eventually ran out of money, and lived miserably for a time. Finally he pawned his watch and with the proceeds he went back to the provinces, though with certain fears for his safety, not altogether unfounded.

When he arrived in Morelia, he and his father were entertained at the home of friends. While they were there, soldiers came to arrest Rubén. They conducted him to the cemetery, and would have executed him without trial if the daughter of his hosts had not intervened and convinced the authorities that Romero was no longer involved in the Revolution, and that his arrest was a case of mistaken identity.

After his narrow escape Romero was happy to be able to relax in Morelia, and he regarded the future with more optimism.

El alba, con su inocente caricia, despertaba en mi espíritu la alegría de vivir, y a mi vida nueva cantaban un himno de resurrección todas las cosas: los árboles, que antes me parecieron sospechosos espías, y después, esponjados y finos plumeros, limpiando la mañana de las últimas sombras de la noche; las milpas maternales que arrullaban sus rubias panojas; el franco cantar del molino que iniciaba su diaria faena; la esquila madrugadora,

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10John F. Koons, *Garbo y donaire de Rubén Romero* (México, 1942), p. 34.
desgranando su risa infantil desde la capillita blanca de los Dolores ... 11

Apuntes de un lugareño is primarily an autobiography, containing reminiscences of the author's life, with poetic descriptions of scenes that remained vivid in his mind through the years.

Although Pito Pérez is his most famous pícaro, Romero introduces us in this work to another, Tamborillas, who, like Pito, figures in several of Romero's books. Koons compares Tamborillas with Gil Blas and Lazarillo:

Uno de los personajes de esta novela, que más impresiona al lector, es el chico Tamborillas, hermano de sangre de Gil Blas y del Lazarillo de Tormes. Romero habla de él con seriedad y con ternura. Habla del fondo de su propia experiencia cuando dice de Tamborillas y semejantes criaturas: "Con cuanta fuerza deben odiar estos pequeños hombrecitos del campo, a los niños ricos de las ciudades, a esos de bucles dorados, de cuello de encaje y de pantalones de terciopelo!" 12

Romero's picaresque humor is evident in such passages as the descriptions of his youthful pranks as mentioned above. His uninhibited realism in his humor contrasts greatly with the delicate poetry of his descriptions, such as the picture of the dawn that he gives us at the end of his story.

The Revolution figured only briefly here, as a dramatic finale to his story, when he was mistakenly apprehended and

11Romero, Obras Completas, p. 147.
12Koons, op. cit., p. 29.
almost executed, an event which made the beauties of his native countryside even more apparent to him.

**Desbandada**

Romero's second novel, *Desbandada*, a continuation of his autobiographical reminiscences, was published in 1934, the same year that *El pueblo inocente* was published. Romero says that *Desbandada* was "una sucesión de cuadros que conservé en la memoria fidelísimamente, como un recuerdo de los cinco años que viví en Tacámbaro, generosa tierra de promisión."  

*Desbandada* is divided into three major parts with several cuadros in each section. In the first part, called "Perspectiva" he described Tacámbaro, his store, his home, the people of the town, and the discussions the townspeople had in the store. In the second part, "Paréntesis retrospectivo," he recalled how he came to live in the town, and portrayed some of its memorable inhabitants. In the last part, "¡Aí vienen!," he told how in one horrible night the peaceful village and its innocent inhabitants were pillaged by bandits in the name of the Revolution.

As mentioned above, *Desbandada* is, in the words of the author, *una sucesión de cuadros* and as such can best be summarized as separate and distinct topics.

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Perspectiva

**El pueblo.**—The first cuadro sets the stage for the work by describing Tacámbaro and its environs. The pueblo nestled at the foot of a mesa, with twisted, steep streets that were not suitable even for ox-carts. Each street had its own particular flavor and personality, with little stores of different types on each, described by the author as if seen by a bird flying over them.

Sobre las rojas tejas que con la lluvia huelen a jarrito nuevo; sobre los campos moteados de azucenas; sobre el divino espejo de la Alberca en donde los siglos peinan sus cabelleras grises; sobre los trapiches crueles que lo mismo chupan la sangre del peón que la miel de caña, se extiende este cielo maravilloso de Tacámbaro, como un cortinaje de zafiro; y en las noches tranquilas, claveteado de estrellas, parece un arnero infinito por donde se filtra la luz de otros mundos! . . . .

**La rama.**—The author's store, "La fama, tienda de ropa y abarrotes," was centrally situated so that the town's inhabitants often dropped by to discuss the events of the day. He sold clothes, drugs, wine, and many other things. If he did not have what his customer asked for, he would quickly slip out of the store and run down the street to a neighboring shop and return shortly with the needed item. He made wine at home and put it into bottles with different labels, selling the same wine at different prices according to the label. Sometimes he would sit and take mental inventory

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14Romero, Obras Completas, p. 154.
of his goods, and reflect on how his fortune had improved from his hungry days in the capital, and on the fact that now that he had money he was considered a respectable and intelligent member of the community.

Mi casa.—His home was sunny and spacious, but not richly furnished. It was a pleasant place, shared with his parents and his sister. With the earthy humor typical of Rubén Romero's writings, he wrote that the most notable part of the house was the retrete. He described it in the following passage:

Tiene la forma de una mesa cuadrada, con capacidad para cuatro personas que, si lo usan simultáneamente, se dan la espalda, lo mismo que los frailes que rodean la estatua de Colón, en la ciudad de México.
Los ruidos serán perceptibles, pero ninguna mirada indiscreta sorprende el gesto de satisfacción en el momento culminante del desahogo. En tan propicia postura mi padre y mi madre, mi hermana y yo, glosamos cotidianamente los sucesos del día.15

Parroquianos.—The people of his town came into the store for advice, as well as to buy. Sometimes they came to ask Romero to write a letter for them, sometimes to hear him read from Les Misérables, with everyone weeping at the death of el señor Magdalena.

La tertulia.—Groups of men gathered at times at La fama to discuss politics and town gossip, and frequently the store went unattended until Rubén's father came in and reminded his

15Ibid., p. 158.
son that "el que tiene tienda que la atienda, y si no, que la venda." Often heated discussions of the Revolution would spring up, with Romero always defending the revolutionaries. When one of the group accused him of being a profiteer who sold vinegar for wine, Romero defended himself by dis- coursing on how he had suffered privations and had worked to build up his business, and how the generous land had given bread to the hungry.

Paréntesis retrospectivo

Efemérides.—In four years in Tacámbaro Romero's interests changed from those of a disillusioned and penniless revolutionary and would-be writer to those of a small-town storekeeper interested more in the daily affairs of the pueblo than in the Revolution or in world events.

Disquisiciones de un pequeño filósofo.—His nephew Tití spent the winter with him, and entertained everyone with his childish wisdom and naiveté. On his way to Tacámbaro Tití was pelted with hail, and on the way back home he was shot at by bandits. Afterwards he reflected that he preferred the bullets to the hail, because none of the bullets hit him, and the hailstones did.

Una "Tosca" rural.—A young wife saved her husband, awaiting execution for killing an officer, from the horror

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16Ibid., p. 163.
of anticipating his death by telling him that they were merely going to frighten him by taking him before the firing squad. She stood where he could watch her and hid the anguish in her heart so that her husband would take courage from her as he was about to be executed.

María del hospital.—María was an Indian girl who began working at the local hospital as a maid, learned nursing through the years, and stayed on to work at the hospital alone when the government withdrew all funds for its support. This is another example of Romero's respect and admiration for the humble people whose heroics usually go unsung.

Apodos.—Many of the village's inhabitants had nicknames bestowed for one reason or another. A representative selection of them will serve to indicate the author's sense of humor and preoccupation with the ridiculous. Romero himself was called El Becerro by María del hospital, "Por la voz de sonoro balido, o por mis rasgos fisonómicos." Others received nicknames by virtue of some memorable event, physical defect, or special idiosyncrasy.

Blanca Nieve es una señora de color bastante moreno; su marido y sus seis hijos forman el grupo de los Siete Enanos, de los cuales el más espigadito no pasa de medir seis cuartas ....... A un comerciante que mueve los brazos al andar, con el ritmo cadencioso de unos remos, apodan Sobre las Olas ....

17Ibid., p. 175.
El Santo Pecador es un individuo que se vive en la iglesia y se sopla todas las ceremonias del culto, desde la misa primera hasta la Hora Santa, en compañía de su coima, a quien exige el fiel cumplimiento de ayunos y abstenciones en todas las fiestas de guardar.

Por La Cuajada conocemos a un viejo carlancón, que padece diarrea y que cuando le preguntan como sigue de males, contesta desconsoladamente: —¡Esto no cuaja! 

Navidad: Dona Praxeditas había un nacimiento that in addition to the traditional figures, included some from every part of the Bible, a locomotive, and even Satan himself, who appeared to be inviting prospects into Hades. Here Romero first mentioned some of the social ills that he was later to satirize in La vida inútil de Pito Pérez.

Satan seemed to be shouting to the four winds:

¡Entrada a módico precio para las doncellas que por arte de birlibirloque dejan de serlo; para los que envidian, para los amigos infieles, para los falsos sacerdotes que no predicen con el ejemplo; para los gobernantes engreídos y despotas; para los poetas de vanguardia que involucran en el arte cuanto hay de bello; para los sodomitas; para las mujeres que se refocilan con sus maridos pensando en otros hombres y cometen espiritual adulterio y, sobre todo, preferencia para los ricos avaros, orgullosos y necios con cuyos escudos relucientes convertiránse en ascuas vivas del Infierno!

Here the book changes its tone from one of humorous nostalgia to one of tragedy and heartbreak. Up until this point the reader had a rosy picture of life in the provinces, untouched by the Revolution, ignorant of and uncaring for its

18ibid., p. 176.
19ibid., p. 181.
ideals. But abruptly the little town and its inhabitants are thrown into the maelstrom of death and destruction.

¡Ay vienen!

La paloma de tía Casilda.--Word came that Inés Chávez, an infamous revolutionary bandit, was headed for Tacámbaro. The men at Romero's store discussed the atrocities that Chávez had allegedly committed. Romero had known him before he became an outlaw, and had commented at that time that he appeared temperate and discreet. But Chávez' superior, Colonel Valladares, told Romero that he had been deceived by appearances, because Inés Chávez was like Aunt Casilda's dove which after its death was found to have its craw full of hawks' claws. The colonel's words were a prophecy, as evidenced by the actions of Chávez commented on above.

Desbandada.--The novel gets its name from the moment the author spoke to the chief of the local guard and realized that the badly armed, untrained ranchers were incapable of defending Tacámbaro from the assault of the bandits, and that the town was at their mercy. At that moment the cry ¡Ay vienen! went up, and panic seized the author.

Oraciones y tiros.--Rubén hid himself in a crypt of the church, along with two women, leaving his family and store unprotected. Here he stayed throughout the day and the night, hearing only the prayers of the priests and the shots of the bandits in the streets.
Noche triste.—The next morning the sacristán came for Rubén saying that he was needed at home. Immediately shame and remorseful anger overcame him for having hidden himself like a woman, instead of fighting for his family. His mother was hysterical, having seen her husband dragged off by the outlaws, and her maid's hands cut off before her eyes. She gave her son a vivid account of the horrible happenings of that sad night.

No es ésta la Revolución.—Romero's business was completely wiped out, since everything in the store and in his home was either stolen or destroyed, as was most of the town. As he sat in the silence of the ruins he realized that everything he had worked for those four years was lost in that noche triste. Romero again showed his disdain for the rich when he commented that after the attack only his poor friends came in to console him, because the rich had no desire to know other people's troubles. His friends told him of other cases of tragedy all over the village. When his old friend Perea asked him what he was going to do next, the ensuing dialogue revealed Romero's abiding faith in the Revolution in spite of his personal suffering.

—Comenzar de nuevo a subir la cuesta . . . .
—Pero maldiciendo por fin a la Revolución, ¿no?
No, compadre Perea, pillaje y saqueo no son Revolución. Revolución es un noble afán de subir, y yo subiré; es esperanza de una vida más justa, y yo me aferro a ella. Hoy más que ayer me siento
revolucionario porque de un golpe volví a ser pobre. La Revolución, como Dios, destruye y crea y, como a Él, buscábamosla tan sólo cuando el dolor nos hiere...

Exodo.—Rubén said goodbye to his promised land with tears in his eyes, leaving it as he came, a penniless refugee, riding a jogging donkey.

Desbandada is one of the most poetic of Romero's books.

Ruth Stanton says

The novel, Desbandada, shows perfectly the poetic procedure of Rubén Romero: As a writer of customs he not only describes vividly the villagers and their problems, but he also succeeds in capturing the soul of an episode, the spirit of an attitude, and in identifying himself with the characters he creates—all without resorting to the use of a cohesive plot.

The cuadros of his nephew Tití, of María del hospital, and of the rural "Tosca" are examples of his brief characterizations, where the personalities of his protagonists are divulged through their actions and words.

Es más bien un film, es decir, una cinta cinematográfica en la que aparece una serie de proyecciones desconectadas entre sí, pero bien sorprendidas por este diestro cameraman que es José Rubén Romero. Lo que más agradablemente sorprende en el libro es cierto sentido de humor —aunque no siempre evidencia buen gusto en el autor—, una rica sensibilidad literaria que se traduce en profusión de imágenes y metáforas delicadamente poéticas.

20Romero, Obras Completas, p. 196.
21Ruth Stanton, "José Rubén Romero, Costumbrista of Michoacán," Hispania, XXIV (December, 1941), 426.
Mi caballo, mi perro, y mi rifle

Mi caballo, mi perro, y mi rifle (1936) is the only one of Romero's works in which the Revolution is the central theme. Through the protagonist, Julián, Romero gives us some of his experiences when he was a member of his father's rebel band, and unfolds his gradual disillusionment by the discovery that the high ideals for which he fought were all for naught, and that "los de abajo" were still neglected and oppressed just as before.

Julián was a sickly child, cared for with love and tenderness by his widowed mother and their old servant, doña Concha. His rebellions against the injustices of life began during his long lonely days as an invalid, when he was depressed by the thought that God should visit such tribulations on an innocent child.

When he had recovered sufficiently to attend school, his mother enrolled him in a private school in an effort to surround him with "decent" children. But as the child of a poor widow he was discriminated against by both the students and the masters. The teachers were not fearful of him because his family was neither rich nor influential. Here he learned to despise the rich, and he envied the children of the public school, who recognized and accepted their poverty without comment.
Romero's disdain for the rich is equalled by his aversion to hypocritical clergymen, and in nearly all of his works he creates an opportunity to comment caustically upon the type of ecclesiastical behavior he deplores. It was his encounter with a particularly bigoted bishop which created a situation resulting in his expulsion from the detested school.

Julián and another poor friend were sent by the schoolmaster to take a dish of delicacies to the bishop. The two boys accidentally overheard the bishop berating a venerable priest for baptizing the son of an influential citizen instead of arranging for the bishop himself to do it. Romero expressed his repugnance in the following observation: "¡Crimen horrendo, espeluznante! Y, para expiarlo, era preciso que se arrastrara en el suelo un anciano de canas venerables, humillado, flagelado por las palabras rencorosas de aquel soberbio príncipe de la Iglesia."23

Thus ended his days of formal schooling. He helped his mother at home, and began to occupy his idle hours writing stories. He borrowed books at every opportunity and felt considerable dejection at his inability to read the ones written in a foreign language.

Julián grew to maturity at home, hating the rich, and having known only his mother and their maid, fearing most women.

23Romero, Obras Completas, p. 277.
An exception was a friend of his mother's who was a regular visitor to their home. He was scarcely aware of her presence until one fateful day when in a passion he seduced her, and subsequently paid no more attention to her until she came to him with the news that she was pregnant. He numbly agreed to marry her, and they were married secretly as soon as possible. Andrea, his wife, came to live with him and his mother.

Julián and his wife went nightly to the plaza, though they were avoided by the people because of the circumstances of their marriage. From an obscure bench they watched the goings and comings of the pueblo's inhabitants, and listened to their conversations. Romero uses this scene for more of his typical vignettes of people and their foibles and virtues.

Julián would listen to the discussions and financial intrigues of the town's three richest inhabitants, don José María, don Filiberto, and don Tiburcio. These three were nicknamed by the poor townspeople El Rey de Oros, El Rey de Bastos and El Rey de Copas. The prefect was El Rey de Espadas, because he executed all the evil schemes that the other three conceived. These three always had plenty, but even when there was hunger in the village they would not share their stores of goods.

A prime example of Romero's scatological humor is contained in the following account:
Only once did it appear that don José María's star was descending; one year when the harvest was lost, he had the only grain in the village. The women begged him to share with them. He refused, laughing at their plight, and told them they could eat dung. Soon afterward don José María, El Rey de Oros, was travelling and stopped at an inn to spend the night. On arriving he jumped hurriedly off his horse and rushed towards the outhouse that stood in a shadowy corner of the grounds. No one had a chance to tell him that the floor had been removed in order to clean the deposits of excrement.

Empujó don José María la puerta y dio unos pasos en la obscuridad; mas de pronto no tuvo punto de apoyo y se hundió en aquel tanque corrompido de excremento. Pateó y gritó, revolcose en la suciedad, tragó su caldo nauseabundo hasta que unos arrieros fueron en su auxilio y lo sacaron de aquel pozo.24

When doña Concha brought the rumor that the Revolution was coming to their village, Julián was immediately enthralled and transformed from a quiet boy to a man with outspoken ideas and an intense interest in the Revolution.

Me da gusto que una fuerza superior a nosotros esté en marcha y pueda arrasar todas las cosas que yo odio. Deseo que haya revolución y que venga hasta nuestro pequeño mundo a remover viejas miserias. Si los demás lugares de nuestra República están organizados como el nuestro, con su jefecito político que aplica la ley fuga al miserable

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24Ibid., p. 291.
por el hurto de una gallina y, en cambio, manda las mañanitas a don Tiburcio, ese ladrón parapetado detrás de la escritura de retroventa; si los frailes de los otros pueblos son tan orgullosos como los de aquí, que sólo alargan la mano para recibir la limosna del pobre; si los jornaleros del resto del país ganan los consabidos dos reales como en nuestras haciendas, y trabajan de sol a sol, me extraña que tarde tanto la revolución y que estén aún con vida capataces, curas y leguleyos de pueblos.25

From then on Julián took a part in the political discussions around the plaza, expressing his support of the revolution, and collecting and dispersing news of it.

When a band of revolutionaries under Colonel González reached his village, Julián and two other men were the only ones to join the band. One was Nazario Patiño, a bachelor who said he was joining only to protect his beloved horse, who otherwise would be confiscated and taken away from him. The other was Aurelio Guevara, a rancher of some means who traded a cow and some corn for the necessary equipment to become a soldier.

Don Ignacio Oropeza, blinded in an accident in a sugar mill and then abandoned penniless by his employers, joined the group also. Though he could not fight, he had no home nor livelihood, so he cast his lot with Julián and his comrades in arms, to aid in whatever way he could.

The colonel gave Julián the rifle of a soldier who died in the battle for Julián's village; "El arma en cuestión

25Ibid., p. 292.
era un máuser reglamentario de caballería, pavonado y reluciente, presumido y orgulloso como si comprendiera los méritos que había adquirido en campaña.\textsuperscript{26} Julián had great respect for and even fear of it. He and his companions confiscated a fine horse from the wealthy Rey de Oros. The animal was so spirited that Julián had some trouble overcoming his fear of it and making it do his will.

Soon word came that the federal troops were coming, and the band of revolutionaries were ordered to take up positions outside of town. Julián passed a cold night on a hilltop, waiting for the enemy to appear. Romero discussed the local aspects of the Revolution, and compared the different types of peasants of the pueblo.

The soldiers ate at a ranch, and while they were eating, a stray dog begged some morsels from Julián. Julián felt compassion for the mongrel, regarding him as an outcast and rebel just as the soldiers were. When the soldiers left the ranch, the dog followed Julián. Thus Julián acquired the three items in the title of the work, the horse, the dog, and the rifle. They were his constant companions in the months to come. The dog was named Centinela, because he guarded their sleep at night and alerted them at the first sound.

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 302.
Their first taste of battle came when they slipped into a village during Carnival, disguised as troubadors. They had their guns hidden inside the figure of a bull that they carried with them. They skirmished briefly with the federal troops in the village, inflicting some damage due to the surprise of the attack. Soon the streets were apparently deserted; then blind don Ignacio came running down the street shouting "¡Abajo los ricos! ¡Vivan los pobres!" The old man was felled by a rifle-shot, and the fleeing revolutionaries had to leave him in the street. For him the wet caress of the dog's tongue was the only farewell.

Next they attacked a magnificent hacienda, left unguarded and open either through negligence or lack of a sense of danger. As Julián ran through the corridors of the mansion, a beautiful woman burst out of one of the rooms, half dressed, crying a warning to her husband not to show himself. As she ran toward Julián and his companions, a shot from behind stopped her flight. The man who shot her stepped from the room and stood unprotected in the hallway. Before the revolutionaries could kill him, their Colonel appeared with a peasant who pointed out the man, saying he was a lieutenant of the federales. Asked why he killed his wife, he replied that he did it to save her from being violated by the attackers,

\[27\textit{Ibid.},\ p.\ 318.\]
and begged the captors to kill him also. The colonel ordered that the officer be held prisoner rather than killed, and when the band was ready to move on, he had the brave lieutenant set free, saying he had been punished enough. As they rode away the officer was calling after them, begging to be killed.

The revolutionaries' luck soon changed, and the band was ambushed and scattered by a group of federal troops. Thrown into panic by the attack, Julián turned his back on the enemy and tried to escape. He was wounded as he fled, and lay unconscious until nightfall. When he regained consciousness, his only companion in the dark was his faithful dog. In the delirium caused by his wound he imagined he heard the voices of his dog, his rifle, and his horse. His fine horse, taken from don José María, the "King of Diamonds," became the personification of the rich and powerful, and the dog became the voice of the humble peasant, who, like Julián, put his faith in his fellow revolutionaries, following their leadership in the hope of improving the lot of the underdog. The rifle personified the impersonal, unfeeling cruelty and death that goes with the conflict. The horse argued that the leaders of the movement would become proud and greedy when they gained the power they were fighting for, and that the underdog would still be the underdog, with a new master. Throughout the conversation the rifle was laughing derisively at the dog and the horse.
Mi Perro:—¡No te rías más, amigo, que tu risa me despedaza los nervios!
Mi Rifle:—¿Amigo? No, no lo soy tuyo ni de nadie. Yo soy un insensible; un irreflexivo, un impulso ciego; la reja que abre el surco en la carne, sin pararse a saber qué mano la guía; un camino de luz que conduce a la sombra . . . .
Mi Perro, aullando desesperadamente:—¿Quieren decir que estoy perdido? ¿Que mi lucha es estéril? ¡Cómo podré avanzar así, si me acecha el odio del poderoso y voy del brazo de la misma muerte! . . . .
En el vapor espeso de mi delirio, mi caballo me pareció un centauro, con las facciones de don José María, "el Rey de Oros," y en mi perro vi aparecer toda mi cara, cenicienta, triste, como la de un hombre que se va de la vida y ve las cosas desde ese puente en donde la verdad empieza . . . .28

A poor farmer found Julián and took him in until he could travel again. While he was in the home of the farmer, he swore to fight on until such poverty could be alleviated, and the good people could have a chance at a happy life.

The farmer went to Julián's family to give them the news that Julián was alive, and returned with a letter from Julián's wife, saying that the federal troops had burned their sugar mill, and that Julián's mother had been forced to sell their little farm. She begged Julián to return and care for his family. But he determined to go on fighting.

Julián found his old group in a village celebrating the birthday of their chief. His old companion Nazario had been promoted, and had become proud and distant, no longer his friend. His friend Aurelio, however, was overjoyed at seeing

28Ibid., p. 326.
him, having believed him dead. During the festivities a boy brought him the message that his mother was ill and wanted to see him.

By the time Julián could reach his home, his mother had died, and he had to remain hidden and watch the funeral cortège take her away without his farewell. His wife blamed him for his mother's death, saying he killed her by abandoning her.

When the revolutionary forces triumphed, Julián and his friend returned home. But they found no great joy at the triumph of the revolution. As they passed through the streets of the town, the rich were still closed in their homes, away from the dust and misery of the poor. When they reached the plaza the governor and a group of his assistants were gathered on the balconies of the palace, applauding the soldiers as they approached. And there, shouting "¡Allá van los míos! ¡Arriba mis muchachitos!" was his former enemy, the rich King of Diamonds, from whom he had acquired his horse when the revolutionaries took the town and he joined the band. He was waving affectionately to the soldiers as if he had spent the days of the revolution helping the cause and sharing his goods with the needy. The same people were still rich, powerful, and proud, and their lives were going on as before.

Romero closed his novel with the following ironic passage:

29Ibid., p. 344.
Pensando en ellos, mi rabia no podía contenerse cuando llegamos al Cuartel. Me representaba a mi madre muerta, mi molino incendiado, mi cuerpo tundido por los golpes de la pelea. ¿Y todo para qué? Para que don José María, don Filiberto o don Tiburcio sigan medrando y los mismos hombres de la revolución, un Nazario cualquiera, apadrine su entrada en el nuevo régimen, tan sólo por la vanidad de codearse con quienes antes los miraron con tanto desprecio.

Descendí del caballo como un autómata y arrojé con violencia, lejos de mí, el pesado rifle. Disparóse al chocar con las piedras del patio y una bala, silbando indiferente, fue a destrozar el cráneo de mi perro. Mirándolo rodar sin vida, exclamé lleno de congoja: ¡Mi perro! Hubiera querido gritar con el dolor enorme de mi alma: ¡Mi carne, mi pueblo, que la revolución ha hecho pedazos para que los caciques sigan mandando!

Y aquella risa que oí otra vez en el delirio de una calentura, salió de la boca de mi rifle: —je, je, je!—como un responso cruel, irónico, sarcástico, a una grande ilusión muerta en mi pecho repentinamente . . .

Julían's friend Nazario, who became proud and arrogant when promoted, personified Romero's disillusionment when, "after so much suffering and blood-letting he realizes that his very companions-in-arms have been fighting not to do away with the hated cacique but to rule in his stead."31

Ernest R. Moore said of the allegorical episodes involving the horse, the dog and the rifle: "Ellos le dieron la clave para comprender la Revolución: La Revolución que, como su rifle, se apoderó de vidas sin razón ni discriminación.

30Ibid., p. 345.

los pobres, igual que perros, la siguieron por hambre; y el rico recibió su merecido."³²

³²Ernest R. Moore, Novelistas de la Revolución Mexicana (Havana, 1940), p. 32.
CHAPTER III

OTHER NOVELS

El pueblo inocente

El pueblo inocente (1934) continues Romero's life story; however, it deals with only one portion of his life, that of his youth, when he was going to school away from home and would return for vacations to his hometown. He takes a portion of his life and enlarges it for his reader, as he tells of one incident in his life that serves as a means to depict the virtues and faults of small town existence.

In his speech before the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists Rubén Romero said that in El pueblo inocente he put the most autobiographical material: "Yo fuí ese Daniel alegre y juguetón," and of don Vicente he said, "existió de carne y hueso, su boca desdentada diome profundas lecciones para saber vivir." Earlier in his speech he called don Vicente "el más querido para mí de todos mis personajes reales o novelescos."

The book began as the old man don Vicente waited at the railroad station for the arrival of the young student, Daniel,

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2Ibid.
3Ibid., p. 52.
for the latter's usual vacation in the pueblo. Don Vicente was described by the author as a picaresque type who indulged in periodic drunkenness, using any day of fiesta that was conveniently near on the calendar as an excuse to celebrate. He had worked as a muleteer, a customs collector, a groom, a horse breaker, a swineherd, and as a castrator of livestock for the ranchers. The reflective mood of the old man is succinctly portrayed in the following observation by the author:

Tal vez el pensamiento de don Vicente, esperando a Daniel aquella mañana, bajo el regaderazo de luz de un sol meridiano, entreteniéase en evocar recuerdos confusos de su existencia, tristes los más, de miseria, de soledad, de abandono, jalonados por unas cuantas borracheras fugaces y onerosas.4

After the arrival of Daniel, the two men went on horseback to the village where Daniel's family awaited him. Don Vicente brought Daniel all the news of the town as they rode toward home, and then told him of all the lessons he had learned from his different occupations, each one teaching him something of value, with the exception of that of groom or mozo de estribo, "que me hace sufrir cuando tengo que agacharme pa' poner a otro hombre las espuelas, y lo odio cuando tengo que andar detrás del amo en el camino, como un perro viejo."5

A rather lengthy description of Daniel followed, unusually detailed for Romero. He probably was describing

5Ibid., p. 206.
himself in his youth as he spoke of Daniel, generous, fun-loving, a mediocre student, known in his hometown as a diablillo familiar in the two months that he was home from school.

Tal era Daniel: arca en donde guardábanse los más variados objetos: junto a las rosas de su compasión, puñales de venganza; junto a los blancos cirios de la fe, rojas imágenes de una sensualidad pervertida.⁶

Daniel and his friend, Alfonso, took advantage of the first opportunity to go out into the town to visit with the inhabitants and shopkeepers, renewing acquaintances and joking with them. The costumbrista tendencies of the author are clearly apparent in his accounts of Daniel's brief encounters with old friends.

Daniel and don Vicente began discussing the double standard of the moral law that the Church preached, in which a priest would readily pardon a young man for adultery without asking questions, only imposing a few prayers as penitence. But should a young woman confess to no more than entertaining an impure thought, the priest, first asking her name and subjecting her to an intensely personal and intimate interrogation, would so threaten her with all the fires of hell that she would believe herself condemned forever, and that the earth was going to open up and swallow her. For those

unfortunate girls who fell into sin one time, there was denunciation from the pulpit and later a forced departure from the town. A young man who had recourse to prostitutes was soon the object of public scorn. But such things as incest were always hushed up by the clergy, and the guilty ones sheltered from scorn.

This is another of Romero's attacks upon faults of the Church, which he consistently fought both in this and in other works. As did the picaresque writers of Spain in the siglo de oro, he scorned the dishonest or ignorant priest.

Then Romero became again the costumbrista, in his description of the celebration of the Día de Difuntos, when the people of the pueblo prepared feasts to be symbolically shared with their departed ones, to be enjoyed at the graveside. Here young Daniel first saw the two nieces of the new priest. Later:

Pasaron frente al curato y Daniel dijo a don Vicente:
—Oiga, viejo, si yo le trovara a una de las sobrinas del cura, ¿cree usted que me diría que sí? Porque me gusta la morenita.
—El que boca tiene, a Roma va. Tú, además, cuentas con unas manos tan largas, que no le arriendo las ganancias a esta niña. De hoy en delante, ya no tendrá botón seguro en el vestido.  

In the style typical of the provinces, Daniel posted himself in front of the priest's house, hoping for a glimpse of Esther, the niece he had chosen for himself. He employed

7Ibid., p. 221.
his friend, Tamborillas, to deliver to the girl a note stating his feelings toward her. Soon Rubén had the whole town aware of his courtship, and aiding him at every step, while the priest and his sister, the mother of the girl, guarded her jealously. But young Esther was so modest and chaste that she dared not even answer his letter for some time. Finally Daniel arranged it so that he could see her alone and speak to her personally. She promised to return when she could to visit again with him. The promised visit did not occur, however, and Daniel occupied himself with other interests.

Another of Romero's favorite targets was the corrupt politicians, and the next incident in El pueblo inocente told of the meeting of the neighborhood, called by the president, in which the president nominated a successor to his office. He insisted patriotically that it would be against the principles of the Revolution to suggest that a relative of his, such as his son, succeed him. So instead he presented the name of his houseboy. This technique of lip-service to the law in maintaining control of political machinery has not entirely disappeared from the contemporary scene.

Romero's description of the celebration in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe gave us a picture of a typical provincial festival. Esther did not appear that day, but her sister Sara did, and obviously was interested in young Daniel. As a result, he began to notice her for the first time.
The citizens of the pueblo were so enthusiastic about the success of their fiesta of Guadalupe that they immediately planned another party, this time a jaunt on burros and horses for a day-long picnic at a place called Zurupio. A priest, the brother of the frequently mentioned Pito Pérez, went along, as did Pito himself, and entertained the young men with amusing stories. In the course of the conversation, don Vicente was asked if he was a non-believer, and his answer again showed the author's interest in los de abajo:

—...Creo en Dios como el que más, pero en un Dios amigo de nosotros los de abajo, y no en el Dios despota y cruel, que han inventado al servicio de los ricos. El Dios que ama y perdona, ese es mi Dios; el Dios que desprecia a sus hijos y los castiga, no es el mío; porque yo arreglo que pa' atormentarnos después de la muerte, un buen Dios no nos hubiera echado al mundo.8

Soon Daniel became the center of interest of the group, and entertained the revelers with tales of his antics at school. On one occasion, when he first arrived at the school, his friends played a trick on him, reminiscent of the hazing encountered by new arrivals at school of some of the classical pícaros. They told him they knew of a place that sold obscene pictures. He went to the store they indicated, and though it obviously dealt in sacred books and pictures, he asked the proprietor if he had any pictures of nude women. The proprietor

8Ibid., p. 245.
was so incensed that he drove him out of the store, throwing things at him and shouting a mixture of prayers and curses.

On the way home from the outing Sara gave Daniel a note, presumably from her sister, Esther. However when Daniel read it he discovered that it was from Sara, and much to his surprise she expressed her love for him and offered to meet him the next night at midnight in a chapel under construction in the church-yard.

Daniel and Sara met every night after that, and each night Sara was more scantily dressed and more amorous. But each night don Vicente accompanied Daniel to his tryst, hiding in the shadows of the dark building without the girl's being aware of his presence. Not even don Vicente was aware that Daniel was meeting Sara rather than her sister Esther. Daniel repeatedly resolved not to bring don Vicente again, but his fear of the dark church always caused him to relent and ask the old man to accompany him. The presence of the old man kept Daniel from gratifying his desires with his sweetheart, even when, on the night before his departure for school, she openly offered herself to him.

After Daniel had been back at school for some time, his friend, Alfonso, paid him a visit, bringing with him the sad news of old don Vicente's death. Alfonso told Daniel that the old man had died as a result of being kicked by a mule,
and Daniel, anguished, cried out that "Esa mula con una coz, hizo pedazos un símbolo, la encarnación cabal de nuestro pueblo, de nuestros pueblos todos, inocentes, ladinos, incautos y maliciosos."  

Then Alfonso casually commented that Sara, the sister of Daniel's supposed sweetheart, was pregnant, and that a young priest had confessed to being her seducer. Suddenly Daniel realized why Sara had been so ardent and seductive. His vanity thoroughly deflated, he knew that he almost became the nominal father of a child that he had not engendered. Only the presence of don Vicente had kept him from falling victim to Sara's designs.

Realizing that the priest was probably a party to the plan to ensnare him, Daniel cried out that the people were pueblos inocentes, robbed and defiled by the churchmen they were taught to revere and honor. But Alfonso reminded him that the pueblos are neither so innocent nor so evil as he supposed, but a combination of both.

---El pueblo inocente no existe, ni ha existido jamás, porque todos los pueblos son obra de los hombres que están sujetos a una dura ley, la carne . . . .
---¿Por qué lloras, Daniel? ¿Qué te pasa?
---El recuerdo del viejo. ¡Pobre don Vicente!
Y don Vicente sirvió una vez más para encubrir los pecados de aquella juventud desatendida.

9Ibid., p. 265.  
10Ibid., p. 266.
Unlike most of Romero's works, *El pueblo inocente* is written in the third person. Nevertheless, as quoted above, it contains excerpts from the author's life.

The *costumbrista* in Romero is seen in this work in descriptions of several of the *fiestas* that each small town celebrates, as well as accounts of how young men of the village courted the ladies of their choice. It is also a tribute to don Vicente, who by his presence kept Daniel from getting into an embarrassing situation, and whose death served as a disguise for Daniel's tears of disillusionment and remorse when he heard the news of the old man's death and Sara's trickery at the same time.

The old man becomes one of Romero's strongest characters, and E. R. Moore says that don Vicente

... ocupa sin duda un alto puesto en la lista de las creaciones de la novelá de la revolución. Pertenece a la misma clase del Demetrio de Azuela, "Ella" de Campobello, "El Refranero" de López y Fuentes y "Don Segundo Sombra" de Güiraldes.11

**La vida inútil de Pito Pérez**

*La vida inútil de Pito Pérez* is Romero's most famous work, written in 1938, shortly after his election to the Mexican Académy. It is based on the life of an acquaintance of Romero's, Jesús Pérez Gaona. Pérez Gaona was a native of Michoacán, and

left his home to become a vagabond salesman of trinkets, then later a beggar. He loitered in stores and cantinas, including the store of Romero's father in Cotija de la Paz, where he amused young Rubén Romero and others with his tales. He always carried with him a reed flute which he played quite well, and his skill with this instrument resulted in his receiving his nickname of Pito.

Romero explained in his Breve historia de mis libros how he came to write the story of Pito Pérez. After his election to the Academy he felt he should write a book that was weighty and confusing, worthy of an academician. When he finished this work and began to read part of it to a friend,

The story of Pito Pérez began when the author-narrator noticed the oddly dressed figure of the protagonist standing

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in the church belfry, surveying the countryside. The ensuing
dialogue brought out that in spite of his strange appearance,
he was an intelligent man, but rejected by his family and
the townspeople for his odd attitudes and habits, which in-
cluded frequent and prolonged drunks. But he told the author
that he was a desgraciado: "Mi mala suerte me persigue desde
que nací y todo lo que emprendo me sale al revés de como yo
lo he deseado. Pero no vaya usted a pensar que por eso bebo;
me emborracho porque me gusta, y nada más." 13

In an incident reminiscent of Lazarillo de Tormes' mode
of stealing wine from his blind master, Pito proudly told
his listener how he would steal wine from a barrel in the
store where he used to visit, without anyone's knowing. The
visitors used the barrels for seats as they chatted, and Pito
bored a hole in one of the casks, into which he inserted a
tripa de irrigador which he passed under his jacket, and
through which he would secretly sip the wine.

The author asked Pito to relate his life story, and sug-
gested that Pito come each afternoon to meet him. He offered
to pay Pito a bottle of spirits for every hour he spent re-
counting his life.

Pito agreed to this proposal, and arrived promptly for
his first appointment. At this time he told his friend of

13Romero, Obras Completas, p. 351.
his mother and his early childhood, when his generous mother deprived him of the milk of her breast to feed a neighbor's child. His only recreation consisted in serving as an acolyte at the church, and it was here that he learned his first picardías from a fellow acolyte, called San Dimás, who taught him to smoke and to steal wine from the communion vessels. One day the two boys conspired to steal money from the poor-box at the church. They were caught in the act, but Pito's friend escaped with the money, and all Pito received was a denunciation from the pulpit and dismissal from his position as acolyte, a punishment which caused him to lose his only opportunity for spending some time away from home.

He fashioned and taught himself to play a reed flute during his long hours at home, and played it so much that the neighbors began to complain, saying "Qué se calle ese Pito!" The nickname Pito stayed with him after this incident. Soon he tired of his sheltered and penurious life, and left home to seek his fortune.

In the fashion of the pícaros of the siglo de oro and later, Pito Pérez successively served a number of masters in the varied course of his life. His first master was a fat druggist, whom Romero used to criticize dishonest, lazy merchants everywhere. This druggist used cheap ingredients

\[14\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 359.\]
in his medicines, and Pito learned to mix them, adding a little alcohol and coloring to them to make them more appealing to the customers. He ate well with the family of the druggist, and occasionally helped himself to a pittance from the cash-box. The druggist's wife seduced him, and when the druggist discovered them Pito was forced to make a hasty exit, lamenting his lost pleasures.

His next position was that of assistant to an amiable but ignorant priest, who in his sermon succinctly and forcefully defined faith, hope and charity for his parishioners. He called his listeners un hatajo de pendejos, and told them he would not retract what he had said "hasta que demostréis que vuestra fe existe, que vuestra esperanza vive y que vuestra caridad se manifiesta con los hechos. Ya sabéis que mi celebración es el 24 de agosto. Id en paz en el nombre del Padre, y del Espíritu Santo. Amen."¹⁵ The priest's none-too-subtle allusion to his approaching birthday, and to his "faith" that the parishioners would be generous, was not wasted on his listeners.

Pito took some words from a Latin dictionary and put them together for the priest to learn. It seemed to Pito that after the priest began using this "Latin" that his parishioners treated him with more respect and reverence. But soon Pito

¹⁵Ibid., p. 370.
decided to go home again, and set out after taking a few
gold milagros, or figurines, as "mementos." He was forced,
unfortunately, to sell these on the way home, but thus he
could say to the incredulous "que he palpado milagros patentes
y aún he vivido de ellos."16

Pito returned home and took a position as assistant to
a minor local official whom he had met in a tavern. He thought
working with his camarada de borrachera would be pleasant, but
was soon disillusioned. He found that his latest master, like
the priest, would take his employee's opinions and ideas and
utilize them as if they were his own, prefacing his remarks
always with "in my humble opinion . . . ." Romero gives us a
picture of politics in an incident that Pito related about a
man who went to see the President, whom he had known well all
of his life in their hometown. The man sat in the anteroom
with the other humble citizens and watched the dignitaries
pass through the room, proud and arrogant, with hardly a word
for the underlings in the anteroom, and into the office of
the President. Finally he was admitted to the inner office
where all the dignitaries were, and he observed a complete
metamorphosis. The haughty officials moved about the room
with bowed heads and lowered voices, with great respect and
humility in the presence of their superior. Pito's experiences

16 Ibid., p. 372.
made him abominate justice with all its frauds and evils.

Said Pito, "Pobres de los pobres! Yo les aconsejo que 
respetan siempre la ley, y que la cumplan, pero que se orinen 
en sus representantes." 17

When asked about love, Pito answered that love, or the 
lack of it, was the incubator of all his bitterness; that love 
could have regenerated him, but instead it ridiculed and mocked 
him. Then Pito compared himself to other pícaros, giving his 
own personal philosophy:

No, usted quiere que yo le cuente aventuras 
que le hagan reír: mis andanzas de Periquillo o mis 
argucias de Gil Blas. Pero, ¿ya se fijo usted que 
mi aventuras no son regocijadas? Yo no soy de 
estípalo generoso, ni tuve una juventud atolondrada, 
de esas que al llegar a la madurez vuelven al buen 
camino y acaban predicando moralidad, mientras necen 
las cuna del hijo. No, yo seré malo hasta el fin, 
borracho hasta morir congestionado por el alcohol; 
enviados del bien ajeno, porque nunca he tenido bien 
propio; maldiciente, porque en ello estúpido mi venganza 
en contra de quienes me desprecian .... La humani-
dad es una hipócrita que pasa la vida alabando a Dios, 
pretendiendo engañarlo con el Jesús en los labios y 
maldiciendo y renegando sin piedad del Diablo. 18

Then he expressed his sympathy with the Devil, scorned 
and deprecated by the world just as Pito Pérez was.

His loves were three, all ill-fated. The first was Irene, 
whom he loved for a year, and whom he serenaded with his pito 
until one night he discovered her kissing his brother. The 
second was Chucha, a cousin. Pito asked a friend to petition

17 Ibid., p. 376.  
18 Ibid., p. 377.
Chucha's father for her hand in marriage, but the friend asked for and received permission to marry her himself. Pito's third love was Soledad, but she also married another. Pito went to her wedding party, and disrupted the proceedings by improvising scandalous verses about the bride, the last of which said:

Le huelen mal los sobacos,
si seguido no se baña.
Al fin de los arrumacos
gime, muerde, grita, araña . . . .19

Next Pito told his friend about the different jails he had known. Instead of criticizing them, he praised them, saying that he had always been well treated there and that he had enjoyed some interesting discussions and had made some good friends. One Easter he even postponed his release so that he could play the part of Christ in a program the prisoners were presenting.

Pito did not appear for his next interview, and was not seen again until nearly ten years later, when he was discovered by the author walking the hot and dusty streets of Morelia, carrying baskets of trinkets to sell. Over a libation in the tavern Pito picked up the thread of his story and told of the things that had happened during the years of his absence, a period characterized by almost continuous drunkenness on his part.

Romero used Pito's alcoholism and periodic attacks of delirium tremens as a vehicle to decry the faults of the

19Ibid., p. 386.
hospitals, which, in the words of Pito, "si no mueren los pacientes de la enfermedad que allí los llevó, sucumben de hambre o en algún experimento clínico."

During one of his frequent attacks of delirium tremens, Pito imagined that he could see into heaven. He found that there were no peasants there, and when he asked a celestial priest where they were, he was told that since there were so many of them they were kept in Purgatory or in Limbo. Pito asked about those who did not merit Purgatory or Limbo, and the priest's answer was: "Los pobres lo merecen todo. Además, ¿qué ganarían con rebelarse? El infierno, como Luzbel." Pito was frightened by that vision of heavenly justice, which was all too similar to that of the world.

When asked about la Caneca, Pito admitted readily and without shame that the most faithful love he had ever had was a skeleton with which he had been living and sleeping ever since he stole it from a hospital. He compared it favorably to a real woman, saying that the skeleton did not have any of the faults a woman had. He added that Saint Paul said that a marriage terminated with death, but that his began with it, and would endure throughout eternity.

Pito Pérez' cadaver was discovered atop a pile of trash one morning and with the body was a testament written in his

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20Ibid., p. 400.  
21Ibid., p. 405.
hand that expressed his bitterness toward humanity. In part, the testament said:

Lego a la Humanidad todo el caudal de mi amargura . . . .
Humanidad, te conozco; ¡he sido una de tus víctimas!
De niño, me robaste la escuela para que mis hermanos tuvieran profesión; de joven, me quitaste el amor, y en la edad madura, la fe y la confianza en mí mismo . . . .

Much has been written and said about this book, and Pito Pérez has been analyzed and re-analyzed time and again. Romero contradicts himself about the purpose of writing the book. At one time he was quoted as having said that his only purpose in writing the story of Pito Pérez was to entertain his readers, "... es un libro sin trascendencia, y sin más deseo que el de que se rían un rato ... pero no de mí." There is reason to doubt that this was Romero's only reason for writing the book, but at first his public seemed to accept it as just this and no more. Evidently this was what Pérez Gaona wanted it to be, and perhaps this is why Romero dismissed the book as being no more than entertainment. However, in the aforementioned "Breve historia" he admitted to having used Pérez Gaona's life for another purpose, and apologized to the protagonist for having done so. Said Romero:

22Ibid., p. 409.
En mi libro, las travesuras regocijadas fueron de él; la tristeza de su vida es toda mía. De él, los donaires y el ingenio; de mí, la rebeldía y la audacia de llamar a las cosas por su nombre y de dar a los hombres su intrínseco valor.

Pito Pérez se ha servido de mí, y yo he abusado de Pito Pérez. El, desde la eternidad, me dio su vida para que yo la contara como un divertimiento agradable. Y qué hice con tan inocente legado! Servirme de Pito Pérez para gritar por su boca mis propios sentimientos, para llamarle ladrón al rico, déspota al gobernante, avieso al cura, tornazadas a las mujeres y noble y generoso a Nuestro Señor el Diablo.24

La vida de Pito Pérez is often called a modern picaresque novel, although it also fits into the category of the costumbrista, as do most of Romero's works. Chandler and Schwartz list the following as indicative of the classic picaresque novel; it was realistic, satirical, moralistic, tragic and comic at one time, autobiographical, and episodic.25 It was a vehicle by which the author was able to satirize many different situations because of the wanderings of the pícaro from place to place and from master to master. It gave a fairly faithful portrayal of the life and times in Spain of the sixteenth century.

Romero's novel has all of these characteristics, and shows life in the provinces of twentieth century Mexico


without a great deal of embellishment. There was evidently no conscious attempt on the author's part to follow the picaresque tradition; in fact he stated that at the time he wrote La vida inútil de Pito Pérez he had read only four of the books that are considered to be classic picaresque novels; Lazarillo de Tormes, La Celestina, Rinconete y Cortadillo, and Vida del buscón. He also pointed out some differences in the classic picaresque novel and his work. Romero's pícaro was sadder, less humorous.

No debemos confundir las malas artes de los pícaros, con la tristeza de un solo pícaro: "Pito Pérez." Los pícaros no suelen llorar, pero el mío, el que salió del angosto portal de mi pluma, sí lloraba como lloran los débiles mortales, como lloramos todos alguna vez, en la soledad y en la desesperación . . . .

The Spanish pícaro is less bitter, less pessimistic, but interested in no one but himself. Pito Pérez longed for the love and companionship of friends and family, but felt rejected by all. Unable to adjust to life in society, it was his own restlessness that caused him to wander, not hunger, as was the case with the Spanish pícaro. He had no real desire to better himself, and in his later years self-pity and loneliness were his only companions.

Antonio Castro Leal, in his prologue to the Complete Works of Rubén Romero, says of this Mexican pícaro:

Another critic says, "Thoroughly Mexican is this modern pícaro, though he combines the moralizing strain of Guzmán de Alfarache, the resignation of Lazarillo, the rebellion of Pablo, and the crudity of expression of Estebanillo." 27

F. Rand Morton says that Pito has a very important message for Mexico, for "comprender y explicar a los desgraciados es a la vez comprender y explicar los problemas de México." 28 This message is valid the world over, as well as in Mexico, for Pito Pérez' sentiments were not only those of his countrymen, but of unhappy men everywhere. This universality is also expressed by William O. Cord: "The totality of Pito's ideas was at once specific to Mexico and general everywhere. They seemed to reflect the thoughts of many men


28 Willis Knapp Jones, "Books in Spanish; La vida inútil de Pito Pérez," Books Abroad, XII, No. 2 (Spring, 1939), 240.

in many places."\textsuperscript{30} Though Romero wanted to tell the story of only one man, he actually created an anguished picture of humanity.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Algunas cosillas de Pito Pérez que se me quedaron en el tintero}
\end{quote}

In 1945, seven years after his immensely successful history of Pito Pérez was published, Romero wrote \textit{Algunas cosillas de Pito Pérez que se me quedaron en el tintero}. He explains his reasons for writing it in the opening paragraph of the short work.

\begin{quote}
Será bueno dejar asentadas en el papel antes de que la muerte que llevo en el alma descienda a mi mano, algunas travesurillas de Pito Pérez que se me quedaron en el tintero. Tal vez no sean del todo regocijadas, porque la miseria no engendra alegrías y la risa de los pobres, cuando de tarde en tarde se rían, parece mueca de dolor.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

He begins with an incident typical of the kind of ill fortune that always followed his pícaro. Pito found a rooster running loose in the street, caught it and took it to a friend to cook for supper. Later, when he arrived home, he discovered that it was his own chicken that he had stolen and killed for his friend. Pito had often stolen from others, but this was the first time that he had stolen from himself.

\textsuperscript{30}William O. Cord, "Rubén Romero, the Writer as Seen by Himself," \textit{Hispania}, XLIX (September, 1961), 431.

\textsuperscript{31}Romero, \textit{Obras Completas}, p. 411.
At one time he had one young woman willing to marry him, but gradually Pito lost his enthusiasm and before the wedding day came he had very delicately become more and more distant and finally stopped seeing her altogether, being careful that he did not make the girl feel rejected. However, when marriage was not involved he was content with the humblest country maiden's attentions, and paid the lady of the moment flowery compliments. Romero compared Pito to Don Quijote, who

... olía a rosas a las zafías lugareñas, aquel Don Quijote de la Mancha de quien decía la culta esposa de un amigo mío; he leído a Don Quijote de la Mancha; lo hallé un poco trascuerdo, pero no le encontre la mancha por ninguna parte.\(^{32}\)

His constant companion was the old jacket he wore everywhere, and he would tell his jacket about his thoughts and feelings, confiding in it as if it were a friend.

A city official conspired to play a practical joke on Pito and had him arrested and taken to the cemetery, where he told him he was to be executed. Pito, who was quite inebriated, began to weep, and to curse the government, then to beg the soldiers to kill him, rather than make fun of him as they were doing. The official was taken aback by the fact that Pito begged for death rather than mercy, and ordered him left alone in the cemetery. As the soldiers and spectators

\(^{32}\)Ibid., p. 415.
turned their backs on Pito and slowly left the cemetery, he realized that Death, whom he had believed to be his faithful friend, had also deceived him.

**Una vez fui rico**

*Una vez fui rico* (1949) is the story of man's rise to riches and the accompanying degeneration of his soul that Romero decries throughout his works. Romero himself insists that this book also is autobiographical.

En este libro no me aparto un ápice de la verdad y narro hechos que me sucedieron, aunque parezcan trolas . . .

. . . pudiera yo escribir otros libros intrascendentes: "Una vez fui Embajador, una vez fui Académico, una vez fui Rector," pero de las páginas de todos ellos saldría una afirmación categórica, ésta: Lo único que he sido es un pobre diablo.33

Romero begins his book with a quotation from his famous character Pito Pérez, who says, "Si tienes dinero y lo malgastas, comprarás el placer de tu cuerpo y la desgracia de tu alma. Y si no tienes dinero, serán igualmente desgraciados tu cuerpo y tu alma."34

The story begins as the simple story of the everyday life of a white-collar worker without more ambition than to earn enough to buy necessities for an humble existence. The

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33José Rubén Romero, "Fechas y Fichas de un Pobre Diablo," *Cuadernos Americanos*, Año 4, XXII (July–August, 1945), 244.

protagonist worked for a Minister of the government, brought to power by the Revolution, who like most of those newly powerful, had become haughty and heedless of his former "equals." The messenger boy of the ministry had come there to ask for a job, four years ago, and had been running errands without pay ever since, waiting for a chance to speak with the Minister about a job. The author, writing in the first person, tells how he interceded for the boy and succeeded in having his name put on the payroll. But after that the quality of the boy's work fell off considerably. "Soy un empleado del Gobierno—argúía--, que los que no lo son, trabajen como yo trabajé, para acreditarse."35

Everyone applied the theory of Farfán, the messenger boy. The Minister began to "work" at home instead of at the office, which gave the author time to read his paper and flirt with the office girls without fear of interruption.

One day the Minister called the author to his home, and asked him to write a history of the Revolution for him, saying that he had taken part in most of the events and wished to write an important work. The author read and studied but could not find his superior's name mentioned as having taken any part at all in the Revolution. His life went on uneventfully, as he tried unsuccessfully to write the Minister's book for him.

The author's father died, and after the funeral the heir opened a safe he had been keeping for him. The safe was full of gold pieces, a veritable fortune. He decided not to touch the money until he found out what his father had wanted to do with it, or how he could best use it for his own purpose. However, he found that his life began to change, imperceptibly almost, at first. He would loiter on the way home from work in front of the store windows.

He finally got up the courage to order himself some new clothes, and was surprised to find his wife very understanding of his spending. Encouraged, he soon had a vast wardrobe. He began to become haughty and vain, and soon handed in his resignation at the Ministry, thinking himself too rich to demean himself by working.

Next he bought a fine car, and since he could not drive, he hired a chauffeur, with the understanding that he was to have a daily lesson in driving. He and his wife set out in their car to search for a suitable house. By comparison with his old home all the better houses of the city appeared to be mansions. After they had bought a house, he realized that he did not have the proper furniture to put in it, so he bought all new furnishings.

When he moved into his fine new home, he left behind him all his humble beginnings—his relatives, friends, and all his old habits of visiting them and walking the streets of his old
neighborhood and visiting with the inhabitants. Romero lists the ways a poor man passed his time, in order to contrast them later with the diversions of the rich.

The author began to meet rich and influential people, and to go to all the proper places to see and be seen. He would always rush to pay the check in order to impress his new friends. He joined a fashionable men’s club, and began to go there every night to play poker and chat. The group always spoke of the past, but never seemed to be doing anything at the present. Romero described them saying:

Hay tres castas que se parecen en eso de nutrirse de su pasado: los ricos que dejan de serlo, los políticos caídos y los diplomáticos cesantes. Los ricos-pobres exigen del mundo las mismas interesadas atenciones que antes les prodigaban los necios.36

His companions influenced his attitudes, causing him to believe that working men were inferior, and to despise the government in the manner of the rich.

On one occasion he was involved in a dispute about the location of Rodin’s famous sculpture, "The Thinker," with an older member of the Club. After some name-calling, the author arrogantly challenged his friend, don Carlos, to a duel by presenting him with his card and making a haughty exit. The author remained in his home without going out for two days, waiting for don Carlos’ seconds to come. His wife tried to

36Ibid., p. 450.
tell him his money was not important, and neither was the Club nor the man he wanted to duel with. When he did not hear from don Carlos, the challenger went with two friends to his house. Don Carlos greeted him cordially, shook his hand, and said

--Lo pasado, olvidado. ¿No? Aquello no tuvo importancia; usted se exaltó y yo también, pero en mí no es perdonable, por mis años. Quise ir a buscarle para presentarle mis excusas, pero su tarjeta, la que usted me entregó quizás por un error, no tiene su domicilio correcto.

Y don Carlos metió mano a su bolsa y me devolvió la cartulina, en la que yo perplejo, lei esta dirección:

Esther
Masajista reservada.

Recogí la tarjeta y me la guardé rápidamente, antes de que mis compañeros se dieran cuenta del chasco.37

This is the only instance in which Romero attributes noble characteristics to a member of the Club.

The author began to lose regularly at poker, and went one day to the business establishment of a friend to pay a debt. He discovered that the man sold coffins, and saw one, the richest and most ornate one he had ever seen, lined in his favorite color. He could not stand the thought of someone else's having it, so he bought it immediately, and went home very happy with the thought that he would have so fine a final resting place.

He picked up a girl he formerly had worked with in the Ministry, and took her to a restaurant, where he took a

37Ibid., p. 458.
private room. There he seduced the girl, and found to his surprise that she was a virgin. He was so shocked that he had violated someone pure that he sent her home, and to lessen his feelings of remorse, slipped some gold pieces into her purse. A strange thought occurred to him after this incident. "Es una mala cosa volverse rico. Te arrepentirás algún día. Vives como si te hubieran amputado el corazón."^®

He lost so much at poker that his fortune dwindled to nothing. He made excuses at first and feigned illness to avoid invitations to play. Soon he was obliged to begin selling things, a few at a time, in order to sustain himself.

At a celebration at the Club the author's friends were condemning the Revolution, and he felt called upon to defend the causes of the fighting, admitting as he did that he was nothing more than a poor provincial who was rubbing elbows with the elite only because he had inherited some money, and that if it had not been for the Revolution he would have still been in his village herding his cows. He also announced to the whole company that his fortune was finished, and that he was financially ruined. He left the party when he finished speaking, and walked home, thinking about the life he had been leading as a rich man.

^®Ibid., p. 465.
Trataba yo de recordar si entre tanto dinero dispilfarrado brillaba alguna buena acción, alguna dádiva pequeña, insignificante, que me sirviera de carta de recomendación conmigo mismo. Nada. En la noche de mi egolatria, ni un sólo pobre levantaría su voz implorando por mí y llamándome su benefactor. Había pasado cerca de ellos sin verlos, y a ellos les tocaba, en adelante, pasar cerca de mí, sin darme su limosna de buena voluntad.

Antes que de costumbre, llegué a mi casa. Mi mujer me miró sobresaltada, y dijo:

—¿Te pasa algo? ¿Tuviste algún nuevo disgusto?
—Uno, y muy grande! Anuncié delante de todos que estoy arruinado; así es que, desde hoy, oficialmente, dejé de ser rico.
—Pues desde mañana serás hombre—contestó mi mujer, metida entre las sábanas del sueño. . . .

He gradually sold his fine possessions to pay his gambling debts, until he was living in an empty house. He needed to get a job, but he was ashamed to ask his former associates to hire him or to lend him money, thinking they would refuse him and suspect him of wasting whatever he might acquire. One night a relative told him of a position that was open in a city far away. Needing the money to move to this new life, he remembered his fine casket, still in the store where he had purchased it. He hurried to ask his friend if he would buy the coffin back again. The friend agreed, and the author thanked him, saying he bought the casket for dying, and now he was selling it again in order to go on living.

He returned home happily with the money to begin his new life, to find a new son had been born to him while he was gone.

39Ibid., p. 471.
He was glad to be beginning again. Romero leaves the reader feeling that his protagonist had really lost nothing of value by wasting all his inheritance, but had gained an appreciation of the real values of life.

Probably Romero's main reason for writing *Una vez fui rico* was to criticize the customs of the clubs that cater to the idle rich, and the people who frequent them.

... seres diminutos en quienes la naturaleza ha demostrado que los organismos sin función degeneran; hombres, ex-hombres, que han visitado las más notables capitales del mundo, pero que de todas ellas no han traído sino el recuerdo de las orgías; los snobs tan abundantes en México... 40

The wasted lives of these people are clearly contrasted with the valid and worthwhile existence of the poor and humble.

**Rosenda**

*Rosenda*, published in 1946, differs from Romero's other works. It is less humorous and more tender than his other writings, and contains little of the bitter satire that usually characterizes his literary efforts. One critic commented that:

Y aunque en otras de sus novelas de pronto domina lo imprevisto, lo brusco, lo obsceno y lo desagradable, en *Rosenda* nunca llega a perderse la armonía necesaria para que la obra de arte

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The author precedes the story with a statement that the book lacks literary merit, and that it will be called excessive, immoral, and sentimental, but he adds that it is written to record with tenderness his great love for Rosenda, a simple peasant girl.

The author begins this work by reflecting upon the idea that simple, unnoticed events change the course of a man's life. Such an event was the petition of his friend, Salustio. Salustio wanted to marry Rosenda and asked the author to serve as his representative to the girl's parents. The author was a respected businessman in the village, and had served many times as intermediary to ask a young lady's hand in marriage. On this occasion he asked his friend, Perea (from the pages of vesbandada), to accompany him.

When Rosenda's father heard the proposal, he became irate and ordered his daughter to accompany the men at once. He no longer wanted her in his house because she herself had not told him of her intentions. The author was impressed by the girl's Amazonian stature and placid bearing, and by her eyes, as green and tranquil as the sea. She wrapped her belongings in a cloth and followed the men to the village without a word.

The author and his friend asked Doña Pomposa to take the girl in until arrangements could be made for the wedding, and then went to tell don Salustio that his bride was awaiting him. Don Salustio evidently had a change of heart, because he left town without even seeing Rosenda. Word of this eventually reached the author, who went to see how she had adjusted to her new situation. She had resigned herself to her life at Doña Pomposa's house, and had taken over the housework in order to pay for her meals and lodging. Again the author was impressed by her tranquility, and her quiet acceptance of her fate. The author arranged to give Doña Pomposa a weekly sum for Rosenda's support, and sent some clothes from his store for the girl.

The author suggested that Doña Pomposa bring Rosenda to the plaza at night occasionally, in order that the girl might have some diversion. In the ensuing evenings he promenaded with a friend and chatted briefly with the two women. He became more interested in Rosenda of the tranquil green eyes, a peasant, large and strong, but unaffected and sincere.

One day he called on Rosenda, and she very matter-of-factly told him that her future depended entirely on him, and that he was her father now. He felt that her comparison was unbecoming to his sense of machismo, and preferred to be regarded as a different type of benefactor. He offered to teach her to read, but warned her that to do so would teach
her to suffer also, since not all that she read would be good. In the course of this visit, he learned that Doña Pomposa had given Rosenda her mattress to sleep on, and that the older woman was sleeping on the floor. He promised to send a bed from his store for Rosenda.

Rosenda's benefactor began his visits to teach her to read and write, and sent her a luxurious brass bed, upon which he later seduced her. Rosenda told him quietly and simply that she loved him, and that anything she had was his. Soon the author's visits became a daily affair, and he arranged entry through the back of the property so that his actions would be less noticed, although Rosenda assured him that she did not care what people said of his attentions. The peasant girl and her benefactor-teacher-lover enjoyed the regularity of their routine.

When a travelling troupe came to the village the author bought tickets for Doña Pomposa and Rosenda to attend the theatre. Rosenda had never heard of the theatre, nor did she know what an actor was, so he explained it to her. The ingenuous girl was fascinated by the play, but she was dismayed at the fact that the audience laughed at the misfortunes of the actors. For days afterward she would see in the village people who reminded her of characters in the play, and would point them out and call them by name, so well did she remember the play.
Dona Pomposa died and Rosenda continued living alone in her house, with only the company of the author in the evenings. Neighbors would invite her out, but she would never accept their invitations, preferring to wait for the arrival of her lover.

Finally the fighting of the Revolution grew too near for comfort, and Rosenda's benefactor decided she was no longer safe in the village. He decided to send her to Morelia, and to arrange his business affairs and join her there as soon as possible. He gave her a considerable sum of money, some to spend and some to keep for him, secured a place for her to live, and sent her with a guide to Morelia to await him.

Eventually the Revolution came to the author's village and destroyed his business. He went to other parts, and never saw Rosenda again. He heard once that Salustio had found her and asked her again to marry him, but that she had refused, saying that she belonged to the author, and that some day he would come for her.

The author fell ill, and a newspaper incorrectly carried an account of his death. Rosenda read the obituary of her benefactor, and for the first time her tranquil green eyes filled with tears, and she said, "¿Y para esto me enseñó a leer . . . ?" 42

42 Romero, Obras Completas, p. 517.
Perhaps the author was attempting to express the idea that Thomas Grey felt when he said, "... where ignorance is bliss, / 'Tis folly to be wise." For by teaching her to read, he had indeed taught her to suffer. However, the main point that the story made was the fact that her simple love was constant, and that she never lost faith in her lover. Leal said, "Bajo una abnegación que tiene perfiles estóicos palpita en Rosenda una ternura mansa pero inagotable, que tiene algo de la sensibilidad encubierta del alma indígena." 43

Anticipación a la muerte

Anticipación a la muerte, written in 1939, is Romero's most unusual work, because in it he told the story of his own death and interment. He used this situation as a vehicle to comment upon the story of his life that had unfolded gradually in his earlier works, to praise some of the people he had known, and to satirize others, both specifically and generally. Arturo Perucho says that Anticipación a la muerte "is not a novel in the strict sense of the word: like most works of contemporary Mexican literature it verges on the critical essay. But what narrative there is in it, betrays the scepticism, carefree grace, and downright brass that abound in the picaresque edition of the Spanish novel." 44

43Romero, Obras Completas, p. xxiii.

The satire is bitter, in fact one critic says that the work is "la más satírica y la menos regional de sus novelas, resulta una sincera confesión de opiniones expuesta con diversidad de tópicas, un intento de organizar una filosofía de la vida, y una oportunidad más para hablar de sí mismo."\(^{45}\)

The book began on a note of fantasy as the author pictured himself collapsing unexpectedly and dying, and described the flurry of confusion and despair among his family and servants. Though quite dead and unable to speak or move, he found that he could hear and see what was going on around him. He described how he was dressed in his best clothing and laid in his casket. The coffin was a little long, and the author worried about the possibility of the rats' making nests in it. But evidently his sister had the same thoughts, for she stuffed the unoccupied area with pillows.

His casket was placed in the parlor, and visitors began to appear and pass by it, making the usual trite comments and retelling the story of his death. One quoted Romero's dying words as being "¡He sido un nadie!"\(^{46}\) Romero affirmed this and said that though it was hard to acknowledge, his vanity had been dashed to pieces, and he was forced to admit that his life was worthless.

\(^{45}\)Moore, op. cit, p. 43.

\(^{46}\)Romero, Obras Completas, p. 535.
He pondered on the foolish things that people did when they were at the point of death; things which he had no time to do because his death was so sudden. Some made unrealistic last-minute bequests, some exacted oaths of fidelity from their loved ones or tried to tell them how to live their future lives; others would try to rectify a lifetime of error within the last few minutes of their life. John Frederick Koons said of this passage,

Esto da lugar a un examen de los motivos que tienen distintas personas por aferrarse a la vida. Tales motivos dependen de lo que ocupa primer rango en la escala de valores que constituye la filosofía de la vida que cada quien tiene. Los que señala Romero son por la mayor parte los que se prestan con más facilidad a su ironía.47

Romero's father and his brother, both already dead, appeared and conversed with him, and he asked them about the after-life and about God, and their answers gave some insight into Romero's philosophy of the hereafter. Romero asked his father:

—¿Hay dolor más allá de la muerte?
—Se sufre y se goza. Se sufre de ausencia, de silencio, de temor, de soledad, en el abismo incomensurable. Se goza al sentir dentro de nuestra carne la gestación de todo un mundo de vidas nuevas, el palpitar anticipado de millones de géneros ... .48

47 John Frederick Koons, Garbo y donaire de Rubén Romero (México, 1942), p. 94.
48 Romero, Obras Completas, p. 531.
Romero commented upon this and upon the ending of *Anticipación a la muerte* in his Breve historia de mis libros:
"Confieso que me fallo el aliento divino de Dante para subir al cielo o bajar al infierno, y el libro, muy a mi pesar, tuvo que acabar allí: en la tumba." 49

On this topic Raul Arreola Cortés commented:

Como acendrado liberal, seguramente que no cree en el "más allá" donde las almas se convierten en pasto de las ascuas o en gozosos cefíros, según las obras buenas o malas que hayan realizado en la tierra. Prueba y testimonio de que no cree en esos problemas metafísicos es que su novela queda detenida precisamente en el momento en que acaba de despedirse de sus amigos en el cementerio, cuando los albañiles echan sobre su cadáver las últimas paletadas de tierra bendecida. 50

Romero offered the reader four different types of funeral orations. The first was a short and touching tribute from an old man and his child whom Romero had befriended. They had deprived themselves of food to buy flowers for the funeral, and the child had brought her doll, given to her by Romero, to accompany to his grave.

A communist, mistakenly thinking Romero to be a fallen comrade, gave a fiery speech denouncing capitalism and swearing vengeance for the death of his comrade until he was apprised of the fact that he had the wrong funeral.

49 Ibid., p. 15.

50 Cortés, op. cit., p. 32.
Just as absurd as the misguided worker's speech was the flowery and verbose oration delivered by one of Romero's academician friends. Then Romero wrote his own obituary, put into the mouth of an unnamed attendant at the funeral, who told Romero's life compassionately and sincerely, giving the author's accomplishments and a brief biography. He ended his speech saying

Si queremos que nos escuche [Romero] satisfecho, si aspiramos a conmover su espíritu con un adiós que responda a todas sus ambiciones, repetid conmigo: Pequeño señor, gran señor, ¡fuiste humano en pensamiento y en acción, y como humano te recordaremos!\(^1\)

Then Romero pointed out that the tribute that moved him the most in life had been hearing someone say that he had read one of his books, or ask him if Daniel of El pueblo inocente really existed.

When the funeral was over, and the earth sealed him off from the world forever, he began to think about the kind things the orator had said about him, and determined to tell the truth about some of them "con la irresponsabilidad de un muerto, con la enorme sinceridad de un cadáver que ya no tiene por qué fingir."\(^2\) Ignacio Prieto's translation has evoked the following comment on Romero's thoughts:

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\(^{51}\text{Romero, Obras Completas, p. 546.}\)

\(^{52}\text{Ibid., p. 548.}\)
"From the grave in which I find myself," he wrote anticipatorily, "I can make confessions I would scarcely have made when I walked the earth supported by my two crutches, pride and vanity." These confessions constitute a pitiless self-portrait, in which he unmercifully and unjustly attacks his ambitions as a poet and his standing as a novelist, concluding with this hardly exact résumé: "I was accustomed to converse and laugh without my inner thoughts showing. 'What a good-natured man he is,' they said; 'he spends his life telling spicy stories and talking of frivolous things.' But who could descend the twisting staircase of my feelings to the source of my most secret sadness? Whenever anyone set foot on the first step my soul adjusted its mask and with a pirouette sounded the bells of joy . . . ."53

He told briefly the story of his childhood and youth, recalling that he was happy for the most part during the early years. He was a lazy student, and could never learn the parts of a sentence, but yet became a member of the Academy. This was one of the contradictions of life that would not be explained even in the hereafter.

When he was a young man he laughed and joked to cover his intimate thoughts and feelings of sadness. He was forty years old before he had the courage to speak out about his feelings, and ever since he had been considered indiscreet, and a little strange.

Then he reflected on his wanderings from place to place, wondering if he would always be a don nadie. He discussed his preoccupation with the game of jai-alai, his travels, and his many loves, none of which ever became the one great love he sought.

Finally Romero took one final look at life and at his beloved homeland, and summarized his philosophy of life, ending it with this comment:

"Mas si yo volviera a ser hombre y a comenzar de nuevo la vida, la aceptaría tal como ella fue para mí, con sus miserias y sus esplendores, con sus resurgimientos, con el espejismo de mis sueños y la amargura de mis desencantos. Le pediría tan sólo que me hiciera bueno de verdad, inteligente sin vanagloria, resignado en la adversidad, humilde en las alturas, para poder decir, al llegar al fin, lo que no puedo decir ahora; arruíllame, muerte, que quiero dormirme en la paz de una limpia conciencia..."

The work is compared by one critic with that of Quevedo:

"Con Quevedo tiene de común, ese ir y venir de la luz a la sombra. La conversión de lo cómico en trágico, la alusión escatológica y la verba libre, sin tapujos, para asombro de timoratos. Como el gran escritor, es un satirico de las costumbres modernas, como el flagelo a una sociedad en descomposición y dice su mensaje que es de vuelta a los mejores tiempos del cristianismo."

54Romero, Obras Completas, p. 567.

55Julio Jiménez Rueda, "Anticipación a la muerte," Revista Iberoamericana, II, No. 3 (April, 1940), 247.
CHAPTER IV

ESSAYS AND DISCOURSES

Romero made many speeches in the course of his diplomatic and literary careers, although he confessed he did not like to do so. Often his speeches did not follow the usual format, but instead would become an informal chat about some incident in his life. The short works which have been preserved in the volume Rubén Romero: Obras Completas are summarized below.

Alvaro Obregón

"Alvaro Obregón" was a tribute to the revolutionary president in which Romero compared Obregón to the natural elements of the earth of which the hero was always a part. He was humble as the clay, but hardened by the fire of hard work; his character was like granite; his victories were like bronze; and his spirit was light that shone on his fellow man.

Palabras sobre Bolívar

Romero compared Bolívar and his aide, Simón Rodríguez, to don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Bolívar's greatest victory was over the Seven Sins, for he renounced his rich heritage and the opportunity for an easy life to endure the dangers and hardships of serving his people.
Reciprocidad

"Reciprocidad" was a speech on the friendship and cultural exchange between Mexico and Cuba, where Romero was serving as ambassador.

Semblanza de una mujer

"Semblanza de una mujer" was a speech before the Mexican Academy in which he departed from the usual type of discourse and gave a tribute to his mother, describing her as if he were looking at an old photograph album showing the different periods of his mother's life. There were five such periods represented in the album. The first was her childhood with her father and ten brothers. Next was a photograph of a lovely young woman, who was soon to be married. Then came a family portrait of the couple with their children, at a peaceful time in their lives. The following picture was an unhappy one, with sickness, poverty, and Revolution etched into it. The last was of an old woman with gray hair, who died far from her native land, leaving as her fortune a five-peso bill attached to a note saying the money was to pay for a mass to be said for her after her death.

Jorge Washington

Romero praised the hero and quoted from the United States Declaration of Independence, saying that if everyone adhered to the principles advocated there, the world would be a better place.
Libertad para siempre

Romero commented upon the tragedy of China, invaded by the Japanese, and compared the Chinese with people all over the world, who want liberty forever, not conditional freedom for the present, always in danger of being revoked. He pointed out that soldiers who fight for freedom do not fight for any one race or creed, but for all men who long for liberty.

Morelos

Romero described the Mexican hero in the usual personal way, saying that Morelos' heart was forged in the streets by his poverty, and his humility was real throughout all of his military career, but that he warned that when his followers finally secured liberty they must be prepared at all times to die defending that liberty.

A la sociedad cubana de derecho internacional

Romer defined derecho internacional, and claimed that the danger to international peace is man himself, and that the society must protect the small nations from the large, and small men from the powerful.

En torno a la literatura mexicana

Romero claims that Mexico's most important contribution to the world's literature is its indigenous writing, chronicles of the lives of ordinary Mexicans, written by ordinary Mexicans.
Sometimes these authors are criticized by the "learned" for their lack of literary skill and knowledge. They write of real people, rather than creating their own characters, so that they lack literary artistic value because they are merely relating events from real life. Romero's library and workroom were the benches in the Plaza de Armas in Morelia, where he studied the people of the town in the manner in which a more learned author would study Shakespeare or Whitman. He advised young writers to look to the earth, which nurtures life itself, symbolized by a grain of wheat which becomes man's bread, and also a rose, which symbolizes happiness. Bread is sufficient theme for a great novel, and the rose will be the theme for an immortal poem.

Como leemos el Quixote

Children read Quixote first at the age of twelve or fourteen, seeing only the exciting adventures of the knight errant, without giving thought to the underlying theme of tragedy and madness. Romero says children are miniature Quixotes and Sanchos, defending the underdog, loving an unattainable Dulcinea, such as their teacher or some other older woman, and like Sancho, lazy and greedy. A young adult relives the romantic episodes in the book, and sympathizes with Quixote's amorous longings, often as in their childhood, admiring an unattainable local "Dulcinea" from afar, without hope of ever being noticed by her. They think of Quixote
and Sancho as real personalities who actually existed. When they reach maturity they read more carefully, trying to discover Cervantes' hidden thought, rather than his sentiments. They notice the excellent use of the language, and the real philosophy and irony of the work. The idealism of Quixote and the realism of Sancho are each person and in each nation, one tempering the other in order that both may exist in society. In old age the book becomes a constant companion, to be read and re-read in each of its myriad facets, all now very familiar and much-discussed, like an old friend. The old friend finally becomes, not Quixote, but Miguel Cervantes himself, coming down through the ages to be an old man's companion. And man realizes that Cervantes created something all alone that would take dozens of men of diverse talents to create today.

Mis andanzas académicas

In another speech before the Mexican Academy, Romero, always protesting that he is an ignorant, unlearned man, nevertheless speaks of Virgil, Caesar, Diogenes, and Descartes. He described the man whose chair in the Academy he was to occupy, Federico Escobedo, in his usual personal way, telling how he met Escobedo at his first meeting of the Academy. Then he went on to describe the other literary figures that were present on that night in 1935 when Romero was made a miembro correspondente of the Academy. In conclusion he praised the
Revolution for having given him the characters for his books
and for creating the opportunity for a humble provincial
like himself to become a member of the Academy.

Romero's speeches were like his books, simply presented
and easy to understand, and based on the author's personal
experiences and impressions.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it becomes evident that there are certain attitudes and theories that recur consistently in the writings of José Rubén Romero, and that these together make Romero the man and Romero the author.

The most evident conclusion is that Romero's works are Romero himself. His own life, attitudes, and personality pervade all his works and give them unity within each work, and a common thread of continuity of theme and purpose throughout all his prose works. Without this unifying element his novels would probably be so loosely constructed that they might lose some literary merit, for they are not typical of what is usually defined as a novel, with a cohesive plot, a climax, and other characteristics usually associated with prose fiction.

His casual conversational manner is evident in both his books and his speeches, and this characteristic is enhanced by the autobiographical nature of his writing, even when he concocts a literary blend of fact and fiction. Almost all his works are largely autobiographical. The apparent egoism that presents itself at first is later dispelled by the reader's realization that in speaking at length of himself, the author
is not seeking to exalt himself, for he tells of his faults and physical defects repeatedly, almost to the point of self-scorn, and is always humble about his achievements. There is, instead of self-justification, an unexpressed hope that the reader (or listener) will be interested in the things that happened to the author because these experiences were interesting to Romero himself. He consistently protests that he is ignorant and unread, although his speeches, and to a lesser extent his books, are full of allusions to authors and works of other eras as well as his own.

Another interesting observation is the lack of donjuanismo on the part of the author. His attempted conquests of women were admittedly unsuccessful for the most part, and there is a dearth of female characters in his works. The only women who have a notable part in his writings are his mother, whom he eulogized in semblanza de una mujer, and Kosenda, the only love-interest that he shares with his readers, in the novel that carries her name.

His descriptions of his beloved Michoacán and its daily customs, which earned for Romero the title of costumbrista, are tender and poetic, exuding his affection for and abiding interest in the small daily scenes and events which make up the average citizen's life. Here his former life as a poet manifests itself, in making the ordinary scenes and commonplace situations become esthetic delights.
His delicate, poetic descriptions of and obvious love for his native province and its humble inhabitants contrast sharply with his realistic, almost crude treatment of the rich and powerful who prey upon the weak and poor, and for whom his hatred is unrelenting. He portrays the effects of the greed and desires of these people forcefully and without restraint, and makes the reader aware of the fact that often the peasants are innocent victims of circumstances created by the unscrupulous leaders. Although the people benefited from the Revolution, whose cause Komero consistently espouses, they also were the ones who suffered the most, and in many cases derived proportionately little benefit from being on the "winning" side. Romero repeatedly denounces the idle rich, the bigoted clergyman, the unscrupulous politician, and always upholds the cause of the "little man." Although Komero himself had enough wealth to make him comfortable in his mature years, he never lost his sympathy and concern for the poor, and always considered himself a member of their class, rather than one of the privileged few.

Also realistic is Komero's unique brand of humor, Mexican throughout, but freer and more earthy than most. In irony and satire it resembles the typical picaresque humor, but with its own individual flavor and broad range, from tender and almost sentimental to crude and forthright. He described situations that in the hands of a less gifted writer would have seemed
coarse and in bad taste, with an openness that suggests apparent naiveté. His bitterness over the ills of society never blinded him to the inherent humor that existed in almost every situation.

Having lived through the Revolution, Romero was greatly affected by it. But his attitude toward it was like his attitude toward everything that affected his life. It was very personal, formed by his habit, as Romero himself expressed it, of learning through his heart instead of through his mind. He was interested not in the Revolution itself, its battles and political implications, but in its effect on himself and his fellow provincials, and the changes it brought about, both good and bad, in their lives. He repeated time after time that he owed all his success to the Revolution, because it afforded him a source for his literary creation and a means to ascend to a position of importance, as a member of the Academia de la Lengua. Nevertheless, the Revolution always had a secondary place in Romero's writing, as a background for the main events, influencing and altering the course of the action, but never becoming the main theme.

Romero's characters were often vaguely described as to their physical characteristics, but the reader with a modicum of insight feels that he knows what kind of a person each one is through the novelist's skillful manipulation of the action, and the character's reactions. The reader is left with the
feeling that Romero believed that further, more detailed delineation of character would be superfluous, and that the reader would acquaint himself with each character through analysis of his actions. Romero's descriptions were always very personal, giving the author's own experiences and impressions of his characters, most of whom he had actually known. He had no interest in a person's reputation or achievements, and judged everyone on his own merits. This is evidenced by his very personal descriptions of the great men he had occasion to know, and also of the great events in which he participated. They were always looked upon and evaluated from the viewpoint of the little man.

Romero's fame as a picaresque writer is due to his most famous character, Pito Pérez. However, there are picaresque types in his other works as well, showing the writer's interest in the pícaro. Tamborillas, his young friend in Mi caballo, mi perro, y mi rifle, and don Vicente, the old confidant and advisor in El pueblo inocente, are two somewhat picaresque characters, though not in the classical tradition. Pito himself was created by the author to be purely Mexican, but he became a universal type, because the ills of society that Romero satirized through Pito are the ills of the world, as well as of Mexico. The classical pícaro emerged from Spain some three centuries ago to decry the evils of siglo de oro society. Today, half a world away, the problems of mankind
are still the same, and civilization still needs writers like Romero and Quevedo to bring these problems into the open so that the number of such figures as don Pablos and Pito Pérez may remain small.

In reading the works of José Rubén Romero one acquaints himself with the real Mexico and its people, as they really existed, seen through the eyes and heart of one of its provincials. José Rubén Romero has a firm position as one of the foremost Mexican writers of the twentieth century, and the name of Pito Pérez is familiar in almost every literate household in Mexico today. La vida inútil de Pito Pérez has been translated into several languages, including a recent English translation by William O. Cord.

Romero's down-to-earth simplicity and naturalness of style endeared him to the "little man" and made his books very popular with the people. He made a unique place for himself in Mexican letters by steadfastly refusing to try to imitate the learned and artistically refined style of his contemporaries in Mexico or elsewhere. His name should be included in a list of the top writers of several different types; the costumbrista, the regionalist, the revolutionary, and the autobiographer. He maintained that the only way Mexican writers could make a real contribution to world literature was to write of their own unique culture, and that the best genre to achieve the validity and integrity needed is
autobiography. Perhaps this philosophy explains better than any other his consistently autobiographical manner of writing. Because of his insight, sympathy, and optimism, and the obvious affection and admiration which Romero consistently displays for the so-called "underdogs" of his country, and by the genial and uninhibited exercise of his talent, he has made a significant contribution to both Mexican and world literature.
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