

A STUDY OF MARIANO AZUELA'S TRANSLATIONS
INTO ENGLISH AND HIS REPUTATION IN
THE UNITED STATES

by

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The recent publication in 1963 of a paperback edition in English of Los de abajo seems to indicate a growing awareness of the late Mexican author Mariano Azuela. This awareness is testified by three translations--Marcela (1932) by Anita Brenner, translated from the Spanish Mala yerba--and Professor Simpson's translations, after Azuela's death, of Los caciques and Las moscas (1956). An article for the 1960 edition of The Encyclopedia Britannica written by Luis Leal, shows that only very recently is Azuela becoming available to the ordinary reader in English. Nevertheless, neither the inexpensive paperback edition of Los de abajo, Azuela's internationally recognized masterpiece, nor the translations of the three other novels give a full picture to the English-reading public of this author who wrote twenty-three novels and various short stories and plays.

The objectives of this report are to investigate Azuela's reputation in the United States as seen by the reviews and criticisms the translations were awarded, to see how adequate are the existing translations, and to study the special problems they offered to the translator and how these were met. The problems of translation were seen in the light of the changes a translator must make to render intelligible in another language the peculiarities of speech, the customs, and the psychology of the people presented in the original work. A fourth objective is to recommend the possibility and advisability in the light of criticism by authorities in Azuela's total works, other novels to be translated in order to make Azuela's achievements and

literary development better known to the American public who can now buy his masterpiece for less than a dollar.

CRITICISM

Little had been published on Azuela in the United States even by such literary-oriented magazines and journals as PMLA and Hispania. The English-speaking authorities on Azuela are very few--Jefferson Rea Spell, John E. Englekirk, Robert E. Luckey, and Bernard Dulsey. Professor Simpson from the University of California should also be included because of his translations. Some other Americans have written book reviews of the translated works, one being the novelist and Hispanist Waldo Frank; but even these are rare. Up to 1962 only two dissertations (Luckey's and Dulsey's) and a few master's theses have concerned themselves with Azuela's literary production. This fact indicates that Azuela has not been sufficiently translated nor studied in the United States.

As was to be expected, Los de abajo has received more criticism and book reviews than any other of the three translated novels. All the reviews in 1929 were favorable and pointed out the translation as excellent on the whole. Only one objection was made: Waldo Frank, reviewing the book in a thousand-word article for the New Republic, objected to the translated title of The Underdogs, on the grounds that it lacked the Christian-Catholic overtone shaping the spirit of the novel and present in the Spanish title. Marcela, Anita Brenner's translation of

Mala yerba, was reviewed by most of the magazines which reviewed The Underdogs. The criticism was unanimously kind to Azuela, but not all agreed to the accuracy and propriety of the translation. The section on Books in the New York Herald Tribune excused Miss Brenner by saying her task "was well-nigh impossible" and the book surely was likely to be "better than any English reader will ever know." The Nation and the New Republic found the translation good and classified the rendering of the Mexican idioms into American slang as appropriate. But the reviewer of The Saturday Review of Literature differed strongly. He wrote:

A tiger is bloody and cruel, but it could scarcely be vulgar, and the unspoiled Mexican is somewhat in the same case. And to hear the simple country folk of Marcela kidding each other in routine Broadway slang can scarcely fail to send a shiver down the back of anyone acquainted with the real thing. The intention of the translator is understandable, and it is, of course, always difficult to turn colloquial dialogue from one language to another, but the resulting connotation is fatal to illusion.¹

Waldo Frank wrote the Preface to the English edition of Marcela but did not mention the translation.

Mala yerba and Los de abajo have also been translated in Europe while Los caciques and Las moscas have been translated only into English. This may explain the scarcity of book reviews on Professor Simpson's translation under the name: Two Novels of Mexico--The Flies, The Bosses. Reviews appeared in The New York Times and The American Book Collector. Again Azuela was praised, but Professor Dulsey writing for The American Book Collector, objected to the use of the past tense

¹"Marcela," Saturday Review of Literature, (September 24, 1932) p. 9 (unsigned book review).

instead of the Spanish present and thought the second Spanish edition of The Flies would have made a better basis for the translation. Since these translations were published four years after Azuela's death in 1952, after his tempestuous fame of 1929 had many years to cool off, the meager recognition this last volume received is easy to understand. Nevertheless, as seen by the review of The New York Times, Azuela in 1956 had a sure place in the American view of Latin American letters. The reviewer evaluated Azuela's work as living documents "unequaled in their own time" and full of the life force which made him "Mexico's first novelist."

The reviews make it clear that Azuela's place as a distinguished writer of the Mexican revolution has won him a secure place among people interested in Spanish-American and Mexican letters. He has found a place in the magazines which cater to the international and Hispanic literari. His position is grounded in the revolutionary interest, shown in his work. But Azuela's work has not been reviewed extensively in the United States (his Spanish works have been reviewed in Books Abroad) and the translations are not widely known. A second look into the reviews shows that all the criticism has been favorable and all the novels translated have been accepted and recognized as valuable artistic and literary works.

THE TRANSLATIONS AND THE WHOLE PRODUCTION

There is no universal agreement among scholars as to which

of Azuela's twenty-three novels constitute his best work. Nevertheless after Los de abajo is mentioned, most agree to include Las moscas, Los caciques, La Malhora, and La luciernaga. Many would also include Mala yerba. Torres-Rioseco says that Los de abajo, La luciernaga and La Malhora constitute Azuela's best work² and so does Englekirk, adding the other three works although he neglects to mention La Malhora.³ Bernard Dulsey agrees to Rioseco's choices but thinks El desquite should be added to the list.⁴ Among other Hispanic scholars from the United States La nueva burguesia (1941) merits a place among the best works.⁵ La nueva burguesia is listed among Azuela's principal works in the Cyclopedia of World Authors edited in 1958 by Frank N. Magil and it substitutes La Malhora among the top six works.

From what the critics say the bulk of Azuela's major works has already been translated into English. The only possible choices left would be La luciernaga, La Malhora and La nueva burguesia or El desquite. Of these La luciernaga and La Malhora present new stylistic problems since Azuela was experimenting with new modes of expression which related him to the school of psychological revelation and exposition, and obscure, overwrought construction. La nueva burguesia offers no new challenges

²Torres-Rioseco, Novelistas Contemporaneos de America (Santiago de Chile, 1939), p. 32.

³Stroup and Stoudemire, ed., South Atlantic Studies for Sturgis E. Leavitt (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 135.

⁴Letter to Angeles J. Almenas, Dated: June 15, 1963.

⁵Fernando Alegria, Breve historia de la Novela Hispano-americana (Mexico, 1959), p. 151.

since by 1941 Azuela was concentrating on the use of satire and social criticism rather than on stylistic effect. He had returned to the clear, forward style of his early period keeping some of the journalistic techniques of his second period.⁶ Since the major works have merited attention and translation the author of this report has tried to do a brief re-evaluation of the top six novels taking in mind the critic's opinions but studying the translations, when these exist, rather than the Spanish original.

A SECOND LOOK INTO THE MAJOR WORKS

The first translated work of Azuela in order of composition was Mala yerba or Marcela. It was written in 1909 and therefore belongs to Azuela's first period.⁷ The translation emphasizes a love story between Marcela, the peasant wench, and Gertudis, the groom. To Waldo Frank the love story is the essential element but he sees the novel as a "class-conscious melodrama" too.⁸ It is the portrayal of the two classes--the landowner and the Indian peasant--which constitutes the main interest of the novel. From beginning to end the reader sees these two classes interacting with one another and standing apart from the outside world represented by the court. The court, personified in the zealous sergeant, is the force of law and civilization trying to force its way into the feudal life of the ranch. All to no

⁶Stroup and Stoudemire, p. 135.

⁷Ibid., pp. 133-135.

⁸Mariano Azuela, Marcela (New York, 1932) p. x. All subsequent references to Marcela are from this edition.

avail since the Master preserves his ancestral hold over the peasant and the other members of the court show signs of corruption in the form of complacency and desire to let alone and be left alone. Of this attitude the judge is the major exponent. Azuela presents him worrying about his orchard and his goats rather than with administering justice.

The novel is unified by the two characters of Don Julian and Marcela and by the cycle which goes from Spring to Spring and murder to murder. As the novel opens we see the provincial setting and are introduced to a crime of passion. Don Julian kills one of Marcela's lovers when he, although a peon, dares to hit the master in order to liberate Marcela from his embrace. This is the flame which starts the action of the novel and provides the light which illuminates the background of the Andrade family, those Spanish masters who are the bad seed planted and flourishing in Mexican soil. Because of Julian's cowardly attack on the peasant, Marcela changes her attitude toward the master and she begins to despise him in her heart and to torture him with the denial of her body. Julian reacts strangely. He begs and cries in Marcela's presence and finally seeks forgetfulness in the care of his fine race horses. But after Marcela runs away with an American engineer and ends by settling down in a house with Gertrudis, Don Julian's own groom, Don Julian lets one of his peons talk him into a sure-proof murder. As a result Don Julian has Gertrudis killed and he himself disposes of his helper Marcelino, who had the audacity of asking for Mono, Julian's favorite horse, as his pay. Marcela guesses Gertrudis'

murderer and finally rebels against her subjection. She tries to outwit Julian and murder him. But her strength fails her at the crucial second; she faints and gives Julian the opportunity to collect his wits and kill her instead.

The characterization of Julian is very good. He is the picture of decadence even in his outward, physical aspect. He had a "pasty face, splotted with patches of rotten watery blood." Azuela describes him in definite unflattering terms: "an overgrown fop with sandy mustache and womanish syrupy eyes," "small bluish eyes, pale cheeks," "flesh of a rotten and degenerate line." His diversions are women and horses and his strength is seen in the rodeo where he shows himself as a remarkably dextrous cowboy. It is this physical power of the male, seductor of women, to whom Marcela can offer no resistance for he is the product of a coarse, vigorous and lustful race. Although a "rotten twig" who is weak enough as to beg Marcela for love and stand the jibes of Mariana, Julian has redeemed himself as a worthy offspring of the Andrade house by committing two first-degree murders while still in his teens. True, Julian did not kill the peon face to face, allowed himself to be beaten by the American engineer, and even grew afraid of Gertrudis' steady glance, but at the end he is the winner for he is still free to roam around and accept the advances of the peasant girls who, spurred by their own mothers, will try to fill Marcela's place. In spite of all this outward show of power, Julian earns the contempt of his own servants who can see into his weakness and notice some of the primitive, brutal force of the Andrade family

reduced to excesses of emotion and feeling.

Marcela, the other principal character, is made to come alive in her lust, amorality, and sensitiveness for Gertrudis' love. Azuela says she had "never yielded to any urge but wish or mad whim," she had a "fresh, fine body." In Marcela "was essenced all the eroticism of her sex," but she also represents the downtrodden race, "the peasant girl who in adolescence already knows that the one luck at her door is a libertine master; that her body can cast a fortunate spell." Thus Marcela is both powerful and weak. She is powerful because of her potent and ardent femininity and weak because her race had for centuries served a master and let itself be exploited by him without raising a word of protest. Even when Marcela awakes from her ancestral lethargy and tries to revenge herself, she is not able to do so. At first because Julian's gaze reduces her to a state of servility and impotence and then, after she has outgrown her fears by living in the city and allowing her personality to enrich itself with a sincere and meaningful love, because her nerves fail her. The only revenge possible for Marcela, her father, and for all the other Indian peasants is to criticize and complain among each other. Thus the old Pablo revenges his godson by exposing the true story of the Andrade family to the eager ears of the other peons and Marcela gets her highest and only revenge by insulting Julian when he is listening, hiding in her house, to her chat with the other women. Later on she slaps him only to have Julian fall on his knees and give Marcela a feeling of accomplishing a "sublime revenge for all her unhappy

race." The conflict at that instance was only on the level of the male and the female facing each other in the light of their biological relationship but Azuela's comment quoted above, raises the conflict and victory to the plane of slave and master. By doing so he suggests a possible uprising of the Indian peasant and presents him, naked in his revengeful spirit as Marcela was naked in her flesh, looking as a supremely beautiful and strong savage made of bronze. The figure for which Marcela stands is the reverse of Don Julian's. She shows the downtrodden and exploited becoming strong and gaining stature. Another example of the new Indian who refuses to submit and lower his self esteem for the sake of a decadent master, is Gertrudis. It may be that Gertrudis' stay in the United States helped him to assert his own worth and to realize his rights as a human being. At any rate, when he is shown among other Indians, Gertrudis stands out by his skill in work, arrogance, determination, and independence. For example, when Don Julian orders him to report the murder as a case of a high fever "Gertrudis alone dared mutter an oath in his teeth and refused to obey the command." His triumph is not complete as later on Don Julian will get him killed. But Don Julian alone is not able to do this, he has to ask Marcelino, another peasant, to fool and murder the young Gertrudis. By himself the master would have been unable to take his revenge since he was awed by Gertrudis' aggressive and fearless masculinity. In this fashion the main characters are both symbols and individuals. They present the social scene just before the Revolution and stand for two major forces: the landowner and the peasant.

The plot although called melodramatic by some, is basically realistic since it touches the relationship between master and peasant mistress. These "irregularities" were regular in the ranch. What was not ordinary was the exquisite sensual mistress born of the people, who completely subjugates her master and is flagrantly unfaithful to him. Marcela's love affair with Gertrudis is idealized until they live together and Gertrudis' scruples begin to offset his original love and to draw him away. Marcela loves Gertrudis devotedly and sincerely. Nevertheless she can't change her nature of a female who knows her power and likes to see it work on men, and once again falls into Julian's clutching arms. But her change is momentary and due to the appeal of the man who can bring all the sensuality out of her. She loves Gertrudis and it is because she loves him that she refuses to marry him and give him the shame of picking up the spoils of the ranch hands. This situation may seem overstrained and perhaps it is, yet it serves to bring out many facets of life in a land estate before the 1910 Revolution. Since Azuela's main purpose was exposure and not literary achievement, it is right to say the novel accomplished its purpose and did so artistically.

From the purely literary standpoint the quality of character portrayal must be recognized as excellent. Also there are moments of deep feeling and emotion which the author has communicated with remarkable skill. One of these is the song episode where Mariana and Gertrudis realize how apart from each other they really are. The song here becomes a symbol larger

than the people. Azuela writes:

Gertrudis and Mariana do not know that the song is a unique and supreme moment of their lives; quintessence of their desolate plains and of a folk hopelessly sorrowful, of a race martyred and passive. A dry accord closes the melody and they look at each other in strangeness. A chasm has opened between them. (Marcela, p. 150)

Again there is deep sympathy and skill in describing how Gertrudis and Marcela finally get together and go away to their own plains to consummate their long repressed love. The style here becomes lyrical and Azuela shows he can communicate as well the meaning and atmosphere of a spiritual union as he can the grossness and primitivism of a purely biological one:

Gently they lie on their earth, on the infinite desolation of the plain glittering with moonlight; and January flutters down on them hymeneal blossoms of light snow. (Marcela, p. 170)

The novel also does very well in the portrayal of customs. After a short while the reader learns some of the formalities in handling a rural funeral, is aware of the weekly rationing among the peasants, experiences a rodeo and a horse race and learns quite a few things about the hierarchical composition of the rural estate. He sees how the masters are above, and near in authority are their unconditional and corruptible servants who become the heads of the peons and get the best shares as the owner mistress does also. The mistress is outside the master's family group and outside her own since she occupies a higher place, although envied yet criticized, as the master's favorite. All the peasants serve humbly and obediently the master and his family, although they may let out steam behind his back complaining about his autocracy. Regardless of this, they see the

Master's follies and vices with tolerant eyes and because of the strict organization, keep their own peripheral places at all times. Morality is not standard. There are girls like Mariana who keep their virtue as something precious, even though old age may be creeping on, and girls like Anselma, who having lost their virtue, are eager to attract the favors of the masters and become their mistresses. Anselma is driven by an anxious, eager mother whose values are so confused that she prays to the Holy Child and offers Masses so that her daughter's seduction by the master may be accomplished.

In summary it can be said that even though Marcela may not come up to the artistic level of other works, it does present an accurate picture of rural society and through a slightly over-worked plot, Azuela manages to create convincing characters, a believable atmosphere, and a pleasant story. It is Torres-Rioseco's opinion⁹ that the picture of society is done with powerful, strong colors and may impress the reader as if the action did not flow naturally. It seems to this reviewer that the action does follow naturally and easily. Because of the point Azuela was trying to put across, the sequence of events becomes natural and the only arbitrariness present is the one in choosing the particular story told.

It is difficult to criticize The Underdogs in view of the bulk of favorable criticism it has received. There is no question that this novel is in addition to being Azuela's masterpiece, one of the twentieth century Hispanic American

⁹Torres-Rioseco, p. 38.

masterpieces. Its high place is well merited and one only needs to go throughout the novel in order to accumulate a long list of excellencies. In Azuela's literary development it stands for the second period and his best single work. The novel was written in 1915 while in exile at El Paso, Texas. Nevertheless, it was not until the 1920's that it was recognized for its literary, social and historical value. Yet it had then deep repercussions in the Mexican literary world and caused a new vogue in novel writing: the novel of the Mexican revolution.¹⁰ In the larger field of the Hispanic novel in general, The Underdogs (Los de abajo) represents a growing of roots into the existing realities of the day, and a departure from foreign themes and attitudes, plus an awareness and integration of art in the world of novel writing. The Underdogs stands then for a historical achievement in the world of novel writing not only in Mexico but in Hispanic America.

Even though everything merits praise in The Underdogs, it is the portrayal of the men who shape the action which must be noted first. Azuela's men are real and alive and like in Marcela are types without ceasing to be individuals. The two types portrayed by the two main characters are the young intellectual who exploited the revolution for his own advantage and the peasant turned revolutionary leader who gets nothing out of the struggle but a few moments of pleasure and power. Luis Cervantes, the medical student from the capital, and Demetrio Macias, the Indian

¹⁰Robert E. Luckey, "Mariano Azuela: 1873-1952," Books Abroad XXVII (Autumn, 1953) p. 369.

farmer from Limon make concrete the two types. Their characters are masterfully revealed through the novel by the use of dialogue. To universalize them their physical features are not stressed, in fact Cervante's looks are a complete mystery. Macias is described enough to be identified as an Indian; he is "tall and well built, with a sanguine face and beardless chin." Macias reveals himself as a born fighter who does not hesitate to kill his enemies in battle but who is gentle and shy before women. His ambitions are simple and steadfast, "a house, his family near, his cows and a patch of land" with something to drink once in a while. Clearly Demetrio is the simple, unspoilt Indian who is goaded to raise in arms and show some of the primitivism of his uncared for race. He fights because he has to, and once fighting is like a stone which cannot stop its downward course. In him is also seen some of the "hopeless sorrow" mentioned in Marcela. This sorrow is patent in his endless repetition of the song celebrating Camilla's tragical death: "The blood flowed out / Of that mortal wound./ Did he know why?/ I don't know why./ Maybe he knew,/ I never knew." But Azuela has created in Macias, not the ordinary Indian, but a noble, epic figure to stand for the best in the Mexican Indian and serve as an elevating symbol of their race. (All this while still being realistic and not idealizing the character out of life proportions.) This is why the last glimpse the reader has in the whole novel shows Macias as a fixed symbol of struggle and power set within a world of solemn beauty:

At the foot of a hollow, sumptuous and huge as the portico of an old cathedral, Demetrio Macias, his eyes leveled in an eternal glance, continues to point the barrel of his gun. (The Underdogs, p. 149)¹¹

Luis Cervantes is the nondescript intellectual who reveals himself as an opportunist, flatterer, and hypocritical individual who nevertheless fools the peasants because of his knowledge and makes a place for himself among them. His true reasons for joining the revolutionaries are hatred for authority and desire for self-advancement, but he masks them under idealistic sounding statements as to the nature of the revolution and his selfless motives:

"I thought that you would welcome a man who comes to offer his help, with open arms, even though his help was quite worthless. After all, you might perhaps have found some use for it. What, in heaven's name, do I stand or gain, whether the revolution wins or loses?" ...

"The revolution benefits the poor, the ignorant, all those who have been slaves all their lives, all the unhappy people who do not even suspect they are poor because the rich who stand above them, the rich who rule them, change their sweat and blood and tears into gold." (The Underdogs, p. 37)

Cervantes' visions of the underdogs seeking justice have a prophetic and epic grandeur that passes for sincerity. He preaches culture, restraint, and respect for property and people while acting just like the rough peasants and low-class city men whose excesses he deplures outloud. Cervantes sacks, drinks and tries to seduce young girls as much as the more primitive and elemental members of the troops, but he tries to cover them under the mantle of propriety. His actions betray what he says is the

¹¹Mariano Azuela, The Underdogs (New York, 1963). All quotations are from this printing.

revolutionaries' sacred call: to be "the tools Destiny makes use of to reclaim the sacred rights of the people." In order to get a watch and chain Demetrio promised him if he could bring Camilla to the camp, Cervantes convinces Camilla, who loves him, to run away from home with him and then gets her so drunk she does not realize it is Demetrio who spends the night with her. Such actions and his final desertion of the cause when he has gathered enough money to settle in Texas give a full picture of Cervantes' character. Azuela leaves no doubt as to Cervantes' hypocrisy, disdain, and lack of concern for his former associates when he sets down Cervantes' answer to Venancio's letter:

You know I like you very much, Venancio; and I think you deserve a better fate. But I have an idea which may prove profitable to both of us and which may improve your social position as you desire. We could do a fine business here if we were to go in as partners and set up a typical Mexican restaurant in this town. I have no reserve funds at the moment since I've spent all I had in getting my college degree, but I have something much more valuable than money; my perfect knowledge of this town and its needs. You can appear as the owner; we will make a monthly division of profits...
(The Underdogs, p. 132)

The reader gets to know quite well other characters besides Demetrio and Luis. In addition to character, Azuela individualizes them by precise, detailed physical description:

Pancracio was pock-marked, blotchy, unshaven; his chin protruded, his forehead receded obliquely; his ears formed one solid piece with head and neck--a horrible man. The other, Manteca, was so much human refuse; his eyes were almost hidden, his look sullen; his wiry straight hair fell over his ears, forehead and neck; his scrofulous lips hung eternally agape. (The Underdogs, p. 35)

The plot of The Underdogs is well manipulated. It consists

of a cycle of events taking two years time. During their course Demetrio grows from the leader of a dispersed band of rebels to be a general in Villa's army and slowly decreases in size and importance until he is defeated with a handful of men in the same sierra where his first victory was won. Thus Demetrio rises and falls in time with the energy and ideological disruption of the revolution itself. He is caught within its circle and only death sets him aside from its vortex. Luis Cervantes is the only one of the original band to escape the fatal cycle but he manages this because his alliance to the cause was a false and momentary one. Within the larger circle of the plot stand the episodes which show different aspects of the larger revolutionary picture hinted at, but not specifically dealt with in the novel. Through the episodes the reader gets glimpses of customs, factions, battles, looting parties, and the gradual ravages resulting in poverty, scarcity, animosity and sadness which accompanied the revolution "to right the wrongs of the oppressed." In these episodes men and women act and talk, giving Azuela data from which to analyze "the psychology of the race."

The Underdogs has been called a revolutionary novel. This is mainly because it deals with the revolution of 1910 and concentrates on the downtrodden who populated its files, not because it exalts the revolution. More appropriate would be to just call The Underdogs a nationalistic-oriented or just plainly--a Mexican novel. This is so because Azuela's major concern is not the revolution, but its final outcome in terms of Mexican life and history. What he is searching for is to understand the psychology of his people. Azuela is consciously and painstakingly

trying to analyze the character of the Mexican personality and to study the forces motivating it into certain channels of action. At one point he names as the basic expressions of this collective personality the desire for robbery and murder. These desires showing themselves into destructive actions, are to Azuela due to a lack of ideals and basic tyrannical tendencies. It seems that a blacker picture of Mexico cannot be painted, but Azuela escapes the charge of being entirely pessimistic. The final picture of Demetrio is one carrying light and hope. It seems to say there is a possibility of redemption if only the country is properly guided and hearkens to the voices pointing out its evils.

In addition to the forceful social picture Azuela draws in The Underdogs and his masterful characterization, the poetic atmosphere he creates makes the novel a favorite of people from many cultures and of many languages. This poetical note pulsates in his style and comes to the fore in the lyricism of his descriptions of nature:

When he reached the summit, he glanced down to see the sun steeping the valley in a lake of gold. Near the canyon enormous rocks loomed protrudent, like fantastic Negro skulls. The pitaya trees rose tenuous, tall, like the tapering fingers of a giant; other trees of all sorts bowed their crests toward the pit of the abyss. Amid the stark rocks and dry branches, roses bloomed like a white offering to the sun as smoothly, suavely, it unraveled its golden threads, one by one, from rock to rock. (The Underdogs, p. 18-19)

It is the force of the lyrical note which keeps the novel from becoming a sociological thesis and gives it a note of universality. By the aid of the lyrical and poetic note the Mexican underdog becomes the universal underdog whose basic human

dignity must be asserted. Demetrio Macias thus stands for a Mexican and a universal type potentially brave and good, although degenerate because of long slavery.

From two episodes in The Underdogs the reader gets a preliminary view of Azuela's next two major works which have been most recently translated: Los caciques (1917) and Las moscas (1918). A cacique, Don Monico, is the person who has forced Demetrio into the ranks of the revolution by declaring him an outlaw. From him Demetrio seeks revenge. Demetrio's hatred and final act of justice in burning the house of the cacique as his own was burnt, are seen as fully justifiable. Not very much is foreshadowed of Las moscas (The Flies), but the essential setting and atmosphere is shown:

Locomotives belched huge clouds of black dense smoke rising in columns; the trains were overloaded with fugitives who had barely managed to escape from the captured town. (The Underdogs, p. 82)

The Flies and The Bosses are closely related to The Underdogs since they complete the picture of the violent effects of the revolution while the revolution was going on. Their plot deals with some of the social turmoil caused by the revolution's destruction of established government, genteel life, and secure city living. On the other hand, these two stories are different from The Underdogs and from Marcela because the rural community of Indian peasants and farmers is no longer the focus of attention. The interest has become urban and bourgeois. It is the conservative middle class which is shown, trying to preserve its social balance in spite of change and the upsurge of the lower class.

The Bosses is a masterful little story whose point, the dangers of caciquism, is driven home forcefully. As in the novels, the characterization is excellent. Don Juan Viñas, Rodriguez, Esperanza, in fact, all the characters are clearly and realistically drawn, although the clarity may be due to some oversimplification of types. The plot is focused on the head family's relationship to the well-off Don Juan Viñas and to Rodriguez, a clerk with liberal views. Stroke by stroke Azuela fills in the picture of the many exploitations the Del Llano family does under the façade of untouchable honesty and perfect respectability. The first picture--the funeral of the father--serves to show the high, preferred place the family occupies in the town and Don Juan Viñas' desire to please and be in good graces with the clan. From this episode onward the reader gets more and more facts into the Del Llanos' business practices. The family buys corn at low prices, builds a monopoly and then fixes their own prices in the market. Their younger brother Jeremiah, who loves to drink more than is proper and loves to be sick with love, uses his priestly influence to make nuns and old women leave their possessions in the sure care of the Del Llanos who will give them back to the church. This is the way to prevent the government--so full of nonbelievers--and the over-anxious relatives from pouncing on the money of the deceased women. Father Jeremiah is exploiting the government and the family of the donor. Worse yet, he is fostering lack of civilian and familiar responsibility and is, in an indirect way he may not himself realize, corrupting and corroding the bases of organized

society. The woman of the family, Teresa, is extremely pious and of a strict conscience. She sorrows for the poor but lacks real understanding and sympathy. Thus while insisting that her father's last wish to donate fifteen thousand pesos to the poor must be obeyed, she can be cajoled into doing it without the family spending a single cent and still making profits from their show of charity. Teresa, who can be moved to tears by the thought of the poor, cannot stand "the sight of a constant stream of gloomy faces at the door." This ambivalence is obvious in her version of Marie Antoinette's "If the poor do not have cake let them eat bread," which is "The poor who lack corn and beans can always get prickly pears and are perfectly happy." There is then no reason for having any unrest because of the high prices of the basic necessities. Don Ignacio is the solemn, royal and respected head of the family. He takes care of all major decisions and handles all the business of the house. He lends money with a friendly smile but when making good a deed of mortgage sticks to unshakable principles: business is business.

Rodriguez and Don Juan are played before the Del Llanos. Rodriguez is the man who has deep insights but no talent for effective leadership. His denunciations of the caciques are as ardent as the editorials he writes for the local newspaper and bring him the ostracism of the "liberals and maderistas" of the town. After twenty years of hard work and criticism of the plans which made other people rich, he is still a simple clerk. In his private, sentimental life he is also a practical failure. Though in love with Don Juan's daughter Esperanza, he is not brave

enough to let her know. Rodriguez is fired from his job and killed by a government policeman without his having ever realized the profound love Esperanza had for him, nor having told her about his. Rodriguez is not an all-around failure. He stimulates the intellects of others by his perceptive words. His thoughts plant fruitful seeds in Esperanza and Juanito and his speech drives away the city delegate who came to awe the provincials into making him their representative in the new government. Azuela's own ideas are seen in the forceful words Rodriguez directs to the city opportunist:

We think that the most ignominious depravity that the Revolution of 1910 has exposed is an abject intellectual class that drag their bellies through the mire and lick the boots of everyone in high place. We know that there are two kinds of slaves in Mexico: the proletarians and the intellectuals; but, while the proletarians spill their blood in torrents to win their freedom, the intellectuals fill the press with their nauseating slobber. The ignorant poor command our admiration; the intellectuals make us hold our noses! (The Bosses, p. 159)¹²

The opposite of Rodriguez is Don Juan Viñas, a veritable pathetic figure in his blind trust and simplicity. He is infinitely grateful to the Del Llanos who are protecting his hard-earned capital and whose every opinion is gospel truth to him. Don Juan is a perfectly honest man who by hard work and sacrifice has become a moderately rich merchant. When the story opens he is investing all of his capital into building a low-cost village to rent to workers. It is his pride and joy and he envisions the little white houses with all the necessary

¹²Mariano Azuela, The Bosses (Berckley, 1956). All quotations are from this edition.

commodities standing in rows. But the Del Llanos are backing him up and by lending him money when he runs short of cash secure a mortgage on the project. This mortgage they ruthlessly foreclose "to save Don Juan the shame of bankruptcy" and so they take all the rights of owners of the "modern village" and by taking all the articles in Viñas' grocery store and all the furniture of his house, accumulate enough money to finish the construction without spending a single penny of their own. Don Juan is left literally on the streets and with an acute heart condition, as poor as when he started working in his long-lost youth. But such a rude change does not affect in the least Don Juan's attitude toward the señores Del Llano. His defense of the cacique's actions is a very naive and pious one: "It is the will of God. Who are we to oppose the workings of His Divine Providence? Blessed be His Holy Name!"

Obviously Don Juan is another victim of the Del Llano's economic hold in the community. He dies because his heart refuses to work any more, visited by a charity worker in his miserable shack, but still not grasping the true nature of the Del Llano clan and siding with them against the people who dared challenge their power during the Madero regime. Even when the lack of attention the Del Llano pay him has made him feel sore, he still "had no opinions. More accurately, his opinions were those of the señores who knew." Nevertheless, Esperanza and Juanito open their eyes during their father's misfortune. They perform the one avenging act of the whole story by burning the new house of Del Llano Bros., Inc. in the confusion of the arrival of the revolutionary troops.

Jefferson R. Spell criticizes The Bosses as lacking "singleness of purpose and coherence."¹³ That this is not so is clear from a close reading of The Bosses. All the characters and their experiences throw greater light on the study of the caciques and their dangerous effects. The plot is focused on one of the victims of caciquism and his family, and they constitute the main point of interest from beginning to end. Even Rodriguez who moves into the larger world of the towns' liberal politics and the still larger one of ideas, is summed to the Viñas story-interest by his frustrated love affair with Esperanza. Thus the interest revolves around the Viñas family who in turn revolves around the caciques. The title can be no more pointed or more indicative of Azuela's singleness of purpose in writing the story. This singleness of purpose is, in Leal's opinion, reflected in an over-simplification of the structure of society and the character's actions so as to expose the cacique's injustices.¹⁴

The Flies is the other short story intimately connected with the violent phase of the revolution. From the title itself the reader is struck with the satirical flavor. Spell praises this work highly and classifies it as just a sketch if not a long essay.¹⁵ It is in fact sketchy as was Azuela's work since The Underdogs. Nevertheless, the series of sketches made a coherent and unified snapshot in progress of the Reyes-Tellez family who is escaping Mexico City in a train of Villa's army.

¹³Jefferson R. Spell, Contemporary Spanish-American Fiction (Chapel Hill, 1944), p. 79.

¹⁴Luis Leal, Mariano Azuela: Vida y obra (Mexico, 1961), p. 47.

¹⁵Spell, p. 80.

This family ready to change loyalties at any appropriate time, makes up the main group of flies. In the work Azuela shows himself capable of creating humor. The best character to show Azuela's humorous vein is Don Sinforoso, the mayor of Turicato who goes around dressed as a colonel of the federal army. After having been saved from a possible fight with a soldier but having successfully advertised his courage, Don Sinforoso meets the soldier again under most delicate circumstances:

Don Sinforoso felt a sudden and imperious urge and begged to be excused. He crawled under the couplings between two cars and was lost to view. He had hardly pitched camp when he sensed the presence, at no great distance, of a soldier similarly engaged. In the middle of the operation the soldier had the unhappy notion to look up and found himself face to face with his neighbor. Don Sinforoso had a sudden cramp. Christ! It was the same soldier he had rowed with that morning! Still squatting, Don Sinforoso bowed and gave the soldier a most polite and amiable salute. (The Flies, p. 61)¹⁶

Soon afterward Don Sinforoso twists the facts in order to save face with his friends who have seen him shaking hands with the soldier: "It's all right friend," I said. 'I'm not going to hurt you.' He was too scared to understand me. He couldn't stand up and, just to reassure him, I shook hands with him.'"

Since the Reyez-Tellez family is the main group of "flies," they are satirized constantly. The mother, devoted and religious to the extreme, has been the Governor Izaguirre's close intimate friend and this explains her daughter Rosita's resemblance to the latter. This devoted mother, on the threat made by her eldest daughter Matilde, of throwing away the money and

¹⁶Mariano Azuela, The Flies (Berkeley, 1956). All quotations from this edition.

passes they have to reach Ciudad, Juarez, allows that her son be forced to stay behind and face the coming of Carranza's army in order to try to get positions for his family under the new administration. The Mother sends him out of the moving train with a blessing. This family is representative of the many opportunists who are escaping in the train. The family uses the doctor to get a way to reach the city, but when they see his poor means of transportation decide to switch over to General Malacara's protection as soon as he gives them half a chance. Soon afterwards, left stranded by the General, they rush again to get a place in the doctor's car with cries of: "Oh, doctor, you knew we'd look you up, didn't you? One is either a friend or one isn't. What did you think of us! When we're friends we're friends for keeps!" The family has the gift of lying with as much facility and gusto as Don Sinforoso:

Those others insisted on our going with them this morning, but we said: "Never! What! Leave the company of our dear friend the doctor? We started out with him and we're going to stick with him." (The Flies, p. 84)

Another person skillfully and delightfully satirized is Matilde, the eldest daughter and leader of the family. Matilde is the forceful one, the brain who works as a school teacher and glamorizes her brilliant intelligence by her tender care of the canary which travels with her. Her character is strong and temperamental and she has the gift of speech. This she exploits to call attention to herself and family. An example illustrative of her character is her staged tragic reaction to the untimely death of her pet:

Subconsciously Matilde sensed that her scream had transcended the merely beautiful and attained the sublime. Her grief revealed depths of feeling hitherto unsuspected even by herself, and she let herself go and did the whole chromatic scale of pain, while Moralitos caught her as she fainted in his arms. (The Flies, p. 37)

The sketches are loosely tied up to the larger picture of the revolution although they contribute to give an idea of what was happening to the middle class of the day. Only the last episode presents one of the primary figures of the Revolution, General Villa. Azuela, who served in Villa's army himself, describes Villa not so much physically as symbolical of a force:

A thickset man..a man with square, broad shoulders, ruddy face, and eyes that glowed like coals under heavy lids, stepped out on the vestibule. His watchful glance missed nothing. His great lion's head with its crisp hair was indomitably erect. His movements were slow and undulating, panther-like. (The Flies, p. 87)

In this last picture Azuela's views on the revolution's future are expressed with subtle irony:

From across the warm breath of night came a distant, low, mysterious murmur, a murmur as solemn as the voice of the sea: "Mexico is saved!" And on the eastern horizon the white-faced, cross-eyed moon, laughing, laughing ...

Both The Flies and The Bosses show Azuela's powerful writing. They resemble the style of The Underdogs in their episodic, and journalistic selection of telling scenes and revealing dialogue. Through this dialogue the characters show themselves with their own personalities to the reader. The reader understands the character when he forms in his mind a composite picture of the character's speeches and actions in all the episodes presented by the author. The style of The Flies is favorably described as

"terse and artistic prose."¹⁷ It has been also said to be "staccato or even telegraphic...admirably suited to suggest the jerky movement of the train, the nervousness of the fugitives, their naked fear."¹⁸ In these two pieces Azuela is no longer presenting the Mexican Indian as the representative of Mexico but concentrates on the middle class. This middle class also carries within itself the seeds of destruction: servility, rapacity on the part of the powerful and rich, hypocrisy, opportunism, and injustice. The total picture highlighted by the revolution is one of corrupted men, whether sophisticated or primitive. The primitive peasant has for the first time unlimited power and position within the larger group, two things the Indian does not know how to use. The Indian abuses his opportunities during the fervent years of the revolution but falls back to the same underprivileged position as if there had not been a revolution. The only direct impact is in a new awareness of his race and culture in literature and art. Azuela sympathizes with the Indian farmer and the low classes but not with the middle class. To him its members are seekers of money and a secure place regardless of how justifiable the social change and upheaval are, for these people lack social consciousness and social responsibility. It is the middle class, represented by Teresa Del Llano in The Bosses and the Reyes-Tellez in The Flies, which Azuela enjoys satirizing and attacking as the true causes of much of

¹⁷Bernard Dulsey, "Review of Two Novels of Mexico (The Flies and The Bosses)" American Book Collector (Feb., 1960) Vol. I, No. 6, p. 5.

¹⁸Mariano Azuela, Two Novels of Mexico, (Berkeley, 1956), p. viii.

the social unrest. The Flies and The Bosses share this common theme, "how the bourgeoisie corrupted the revolution."¹⁹

THE TRANSLATIONS

The two translations which present similar problems have received disparate criticism. Munguia's translation of Los de abajo has been classified as excellent by both Spanish and English-speaking scholars. Anita Brenner's, as was mentioned already, received some harsh criticism. The common problem was to translate the speech of the Mexican peasant, a speech Azuela reproduces faithfully and which is filled with grammatical mistakes, provincialisms, homely sayings, dialect, and slang. In Charleton Beals' opinion, expressed in his Preface to the 1929 English edition of Los de abajo, Munguia did a reliable and appropriate job in translating. Beals wrote:

It would be ridiculous to turn the thoughts process of an Indian pelado trekking over the desert and crags of Mexico, into the mental equivalent of a Bowery bum. This difficulty the translator...has met with singular ingenuity, here and there twisting the American slang expression into a slightly unusual form, here and there keeping a Spanish word. Where it has been impossible to translate provincialisms Munguia has suggested their meaning in the context...the translation humbles itself unpretentiously to the original text and thus conserves the abrupt, rapid, almost brutal stylistic qualities of the original.²⁰

After the reader has looked into both the English and

¹⁹Bernard Dulsey, "The Mexican Revolution as Mirrored in the Novels of Mariano Azuela," Modern Language Journal XXXV (May, 1951), p. 383.

²⁰Mariano Azuela, The Underdogs (New York, 1929), p. xvii.

Spanish versions, he can verify Beals' statement. From the first line where Munguia writes "dog" instead of the sole name "Palomo," clear enough for a Spanish reader not to be confused, and "human being," instead of "Cristiano," the translator's technique of simplification and changing the text to make it easier for a solely English-reading public, is obvious. Soon afterward he uses the technique of substitution in order to avoid a Mexican word whose meaning when translated would not give an exact idea. Thus instead of "federales," Munguia writes "soldiers" even though later on, when the context is clear and the reader has grown familiar with the struggle between the peasants and the government soldiers, he will just write "the federals." Also instead of translating the word "cuclillas," he writes "Indian-fashion" so as to give a clearer visual image related to the reader's previous experience. In order to avoid the footnoting which was necessary even for non-Mexican Spanish readers, Munguia instead of using the exact Mexican name gives an English explanation that is equivalent to a footnote. This is why instead of "guaraches," "leather sandals" appears on the text. At other times the translator keeps a Spanish word like "cantaro" even when the English equivalents of "pitcher" or "water jug" could be used. But this he does very seldom.

To keep some of the Spanish flavor Munguia has allowed the characters to use a grammatically unsound language. This is the reason forms like "ain't" and "you had better" have been employed. At other times words not used at all in the Spanish have been added. These are coarse, somewhat vulgar words which Azuela

avoided using for the most part, and only hints at by the use of suspension marks. The word "damn" is freely and generously inserted, "bitch" is spoken out, and "swine" and "Goddam" supplemented. The descriptions, nevertheless, have been left intact, Munguia describing the Mexican scenery in Azuela's exact words. The keeping of the exact words used in describing scenery while still changing some the nature of the dialogue, shows Munguia trying to preserve as much of Azuela, the artist, as possible while supplementing his character portrayal for the sake of a foreign public. Because of the use of the words "damn," "bitch," and "swine," the English public finds more familiar and is more understanding of the nature of the crude, elemental men Azuela presents.

A latent wish of the translator to make The Underdogs acceptable to an English speaking public makes for omissions, additions or substitutions. For example, instead of listing the two books whose reading has made Venancio the intellectual leader of his group, Munguia lists just one: The Wandering Jew. This he does perhaps not to tax the English reader's knowledge with unknown material and because the mention of only one book better illustrates Venancio's scarce literary background. The simplification of divine names is a similar procedure. Instead of giving the Mexican titles of the Virgin or of God (Virgin of Jalapa, Child-God, Divine Face, etc.), Munguia has put down only "the Virgin" and "Christ." Although this takes away from the cultural flavor of the book it is more in accord with a largely Protestant reading public. Two other cultural notes which are

missing are the use of the word "compadre" (name derived from the godfather's relationship to the child's parents; equivalent to co-father.) and of the possessive "my." "Compadre" is used extensively in the Spanish original and very rarely in the English version. This is justifiable since the English-reading person is not familiar with the strong bonds of loyalty such a relationship implies in the Spanish culture, and thus will miss the psychological appeal one character makes to another by employing the word. The omission of the possessive "my" is not justifiable in the same grounds. When Munguia does not write "My General, look at the mess these boys have made here," some of the intimacy implied and which the English-speaking person can grasp, is lost. Other omissions which are hardly justifiable are when instead of translating "You must not forget that the things a man holds most sacred on earth are his family and motherland," Munguia writes only: "You must not forget that the thing a man holds most sacred on earth is his motherland." Also when "Bury them!" he said," is written instead of, "'Bah! Then bury them!'" Both of these changes subtract from the larger meaning of the person who is speaking and deprive the reader of a deeper insight into the character's psychology, nature, and culture. At times to continue the policy of simplifying to make the text clearer, the specific names of places are skipped or a sentence is added. Thus the names of the two hills fortified by the government in Zacatecas (El Grito and La Bufa) are left out and when Demetrio ironically asks Cervantes, "What are we fighting for?" Munguia adds: "That's what I'd like to know," to make

Demetrio's situation and lack of a definite ideal more obvious. Just as this change, most of the changes made have been sound. They were made to limit the gap in expression and ways of talking between the two languages and thus to make the translation sound more like English. For example, to follow proper English idiom, instead of writing "even if you tried to hide in the center of the earth," it is written "even if you tried to hide in the pit of hell."

Anita Brenner had to face the problem of translating a work full of provincialisms and idiomatic expressions natural to the Mexican peasant. It can be said she faced all the problems Munguia faced before her. But although she uses some of the same techniques, the overall result is different. Like Munguia, Miss Brenner began by translating the title but in doing so she changed the emphasis from the "weeds," standing for the Andrade family, to Marcela, the Indian girl who brings out the passions dormant in the farm. As a subtitle Miss Brenner added "A Mexican love story," indicating her own vision of the novel's intention. The translator used footnotes to explain some of the Mexican words which she left standing in the text. Thus she footnotes "rebozo" (shawl), "charro," and "compadre," words which unlike Munguia, she uses as often as the original does. Other footnotes explain historical references, like those to Porfirio Diaz and the battle of Tuxtepec. But at other times she writes the English equivalent of a name. For instance, instead of writing "gachupines" and footnoting it, she just writes "Spaniards." At other times instead of using the exact original and translating

it, she substitutes or adds. Thus rather than "wolf" she puts down "coyote," rather than just "the eternal type," she writes "Eve" and instead of saying only "like a fierce dog" Miss Brenner adds "like a fine pistol or a fierce dog." Also some things are added to the text to make a point clearer. The most important example is when Marcela refuses herself the ambition of marrying Gertrudis, the groom. Azuela just wrote: "Me the wife of Gertrudis? Never!" but Miss Brenner to make the point more precise since she wanted to stress the love element, writes: "Me the wife of Gertrudis, my only love, my only true pure love...NEVER!" Besides changes of this small but interesting nature some important changes have been made. Changes which amount to mistakes. In a seduction scene "breasts" is put down instead of "waist," and a whole sentence is mistranslated. Miss Brenner translated "Pos si te interesa saberlo preguntaselo a la noche," as "Well, if you're so anxious to know, ask the man in the moon." The appropriate translation should have been: "Well, if you're so anxious to know ask him this evening." The "him" here is the master Don Julian, and the implication of knowledge and intimacy the Spanish sentence conveys is completely lost, making the injured girl's reaction not so well motivated.

A perplexing problem Miss Brenner had was to translate the speech of an American using broken Spanish. She solved it by making most of the Spanish characters talk perfect English, although some she allows to use wrong grammatical constructions, and making the American engineer speak broken English such as when he says: "You no be good friend, no show the best cattle!"

or "Oh, no, people wise, keep the fields clean and...crop big like that!" Closely related to a language problem was the task of translating slightly coarse language. For the most part Azuela just hints at a "bad" word without spelling it out, or he avoids mentioning other things by using an ambiguous yet clear enough statement like "from that which makes us what we are," (men). Miss Brenner spells out words like "bitch," "skirt," "louse," but in one instance does not make a proper English translation of a word considered vulgar both in Spanish and English, a word which Azuela did write down, "shit." It is perhaps the insertion of these vulgar words which prompted the Saturday Review of Literature to criticize Miss Brenner's translation as inappropriate because of its coarse, slum-like language. Granting that Miss Brenner had great difficulty in making the translation colloquial, she did vulgarize the language perhaps more than was necessary, and certainly more than Azuela did. To illustrate this, instead of writing "making mischief" Miss Brenner wrote "raising Cain" and used such expressions as "Do you pipe the pins of your girl?" and instead of "around my waist," "around my guts." Yet in spite of this, it seems Miss Brenner's major concern was to present as fully as she could the culture and the tone of the Spanish version. This is why she introduced Mexican and Spanish words, making them intelligible by the use of footnotes, and why she kept the invocations to the Virgin and the Divinity in their original form such as Holy Virgin of El Refugio (of Shelter) and Holy Child of Atocha. To clarify the action Miss Brenner divided the book into five parts, each named

after the four seasons through which the action develops--from Spring to Spring again.

By way of summary it can be said that Miss Brenner's translation is quite good even if the language fails to capture the true flavor of the Mexican peasant dialect. Her greatest effort was to present the culture shown in the book as faithfully as she could, even if this meant employing Indian-Mexican words requiring footnoting. She may have changed slightly the emphasis of the book by naming her translation after one of the two principal characters rather than after the weeds representative of the feudalism Azuela was exposing. Aside from her stressing the nature of Marcela's love for Gertrudis, the English text does not change Azuela's original emphasis. Thus the translation accomplishes its purpose of presenting a good, reliable version of the Spanish original. The reviewer who found the story not too good after reading Miss Brenner's translation would have thought the same after reading the original. Munguia, on the other hand, did for the most part an excellent job of translating the flavor and the tone of the Mexicans' dialogue in The Underdogs. The title, which he translated and modified, is appealing to an English-reading public and conveys the social concern embedded in the novel. He achieved, as Carleton Beals pointed out, a happy medium between Mexican and English idioms and managed to present as much as possible of the foreign culture by a gradual insertion, within the text itself, of terms foreign in cultural content and historical implication. While doing this Munguia avoided introducing anything too foreign or remote from the majority of the

public he was writing for. This is why he avoided the use of the word "compadre," the many titles of the Virgin, and some of the particular names of places and people which a Mexican could understand, but which would unnecessarily confuse someone not familiar with Mexican geography and history. Also as a note of intellectual gallantry, he omitted from his translation a very ironical and thus disrespectful mention of The Salvation Army made by Luis Cervantes in the letter he sends from Texas.

The other two of Azuela's works which have been translated by Professor Lesley Byrd Simpson, of the University of California--Las moscas and Los caciques--appeared in 1956, in one single volume, as they have in Mexico (1931). Although as said already they received few reviews, all of them were favorable. Arturo Torres-Rioseco's word, quoted in the forepage of the volume, testifies to the quality of the translation. Torres-Rioseco wrote: "Professor Simpson's version is superb. He has been able to keep in the translation the freshness, color and intensity of the original." After a critic of the category of Torres-Rioseco has spoken, little more can be added. But since these two translations presented different problems than Los de abajo and Mala yerba, it is profitable to see how the translator worked. The people in The Bosses and The Flies are no longer the Indian peasants, but the Mexican middle class. Their speech consequently is less rich in provincialisms and vulgarisms. It is closer to the standard Spanish idiom without losing its Mexican flavor. But the fact that this is so made these two novels easier to translate.

A special feature of the translation is a character list at the beginning. In it Professor Simpson has given the setting and time of the action, plus a brief note about the character's occupation and position. All the important characters mentioned by name in the text are listed. This preliminary list makes the reading lots easier since the reader can check back if the many characters confuse him. There are three footnotes in the translation and all give information of a historical nature, information the reader does not have ready access to. Footnotes were avoided in reference to matters of language. All the pertinent linguistic changes were made when these touched idiomatic expressions but Spanish words so common and familiar as "peso" and "señor" were kept and used freely. Also left in Spanish were names of newspapers, stores, and people. To retain and suggest the difference in meaning between the words "boss" and "cacique" Simpson used "cacique" throughout the text. At another time to keep some of the Spanish flavor, the author quotes a portion of the Hail Mary entirely in Spanish and, after writing a "Long live," gives in and lets the Spanish "viva" and "muera" stand in the text. The reason for writing these entirely in Spanish may have been due to the translator's judgment that most English-speaking people in the United States, among the reading, and movie and TV viewing public, knows or is familiar with the Spanish rendition of the Hail Mary and the words "viva" and "muera" when used in rallies.

Like Munguia's and Miss Brenner's translations, Professor Simpson has added dialogue in certain places or made more

specific a reference already made in the original. For example, two additions were necessary in order to give an accurate reference to the reader. First, instead of writing just "long live!" like the Spanish version, the translator mentioned who, "General Victoriano Huerta," and second, the translator made the reference to a book clearer by mentioning the author, Father Sarday Salvany, when not even the title had been given by Azuela. Unlike Munguia's, the expressions are all in standard English, so some expressions have entirely changed even though the basic thought remains intact. For example, Simpson writes "Don't lose your temper" where Azuela wrote something like "Don't get so hot. Do you want a little water to cool your lips?" The change in this case did not change the basic atmosphere of the thing being said. Unfortunately there are a few places in the translation where a shade of meaning was lost by the exclusion of pointers such as "he murmured," "he whispered," and "(he was) moved."

Professor Simpson follows the 1931 Mexican edition containing both Las moscas and Los caciques faithfully. All chapter divisions remain the same except for his correction of the faulty numeration in the Spanish edition. In the first part of Los caciques the printer jumps from V to VII in his numeration; Professor Simpson correctly calls the chapter following Chapter V, Chapter VI, and thus the English version seems to have one less chapter. Incorrect enumeration of chapters occurs also in the second section of the Spanish. In the Spanish three chapters are called Chapter VI but Professor Simpson numerates them correctly in his translation. In the last section the numeration of Spanish

and English chapters is identical.

The translation of Las moscas follows the same introductory procedure as in The Bosses. A list of contents consisting of chapter names and a list of characters are given. A specific time is mentioned: April, 1915. The changes made are minimal and all consistent with good English usage. Words like "ponchos" and "frijoles" appear on the text while the words "dorado," (the name given to Villa's soldiers) and "soldaderas" (soldier's women) are explained and kept in the text without recurring to the use of footnotes. Some of the changes made are due to a difference in English and Spanish ways of calling things. For example, instead of writing the word "Underwood," Professor Simpson writes just "typewriter," instead of "mauser," he writes "rifle," and for "of the United States," he translates "American." The only big change is when instead of having a character clean his teeth, Professor Simpson has him wiping his glasses. But this change does not alter the meaning of the action significantly enough to be important.

Professor Simpson has tried to present Azuela as faithfully as he was able to do in a translation. This he has done to perfection. The style, technique, language, and structure of the Spanish original, all are present in Professor Simpson's English versions. It seems that he had no other major concern than introducing Azuela to the English-reading public. In order to do this he kept some Spanish words when this was possible due to the North American reader's familiarity with them, and changed phrases only to turn them into close English equivalents. Unlike

Munguia and Miss Brenner, Professor Simpson made no substantial additions or subtractions from the two works. Neither was he compelled to change the tone of the language since the language in the works he translated presented no special difficulties as the language of the Mexican peasant translated by both Munguia and Miss Brenner did.

All of the translators were forced to change Mexican expressions into English and to decide what to do with the words which were untranslatable. Both Munguia and Professor Simpson decided against the use of footnotes and either included an equivalent of the word or let it stand in the text while explaining it in context. Miss Brenner did the same and used footnotes too.

Both Miss Brenner and Munguia made a special effort "to sell" Azuela and his Mexican novels to an English-speaking public. To do this they tried to make the plot and characters easy to understand to their readers. Thus they added a sentence here and there that would make the character's thoughts or background clearer to the reader. For example, Munguia added "That's what I'd like to know" to Demetrio's remark following Cervantes' speech, and Miss Brenner added to Marcela's words to show that the girl really loved Gertrudis. These two translators tried to preserve as much as possible of the Mexican culture, manners and speech as they could without spoiling the text and making it unfamiliar and strange to an English-speaking person. Munguia does this by a happy mixture of Mexican and English idioms and a lessening of strictly Spanish or Mexican elements such as names of mountains and dogs and invocations to the Virgin under various

regional names. Miss Brenner did just the opposite. She substituted Mexican idioms with American slang but kept regional names. Professor Simpson also kept Spanish names of stores and newspapers untranslated and used footnotes to explain historical allusions. He explains Azuela and the two works he translated in his Preface to the translations. Miss Brenner's translation fails to render one sentence correctly and forgets her English verbs and writes "essenced" obviously from the Spanish, instead of a proper English verb equivalent.

All of the translators used similar techniques but stressed different things in the tone and atmosphere of their translations. While Miss Brenner and Munguia had the same language problems, they solved them differently. Yet all three translators were successful in giving the English-reading public the author's thought beyond the words and making it intelligible as Azuela himself desired.

CONCLUSION

After studying the four translations of Azuela, it is evident that he is an author who has merited by the quality of his work to be translated. After writing novels in which the actual revolution was described, Azuela's interest turned toward the people of the cities and the provinces. His novels show then how little the 1910 Revolution has changed the lives of the people. La Luciernaga (1932), presents the destruction of a provincial middle-class family in Mexico City. In it Azuela does

not show the lyrical style of his other works. Here his style is strong and raw. His images are scientific in quality. For example, he writes down Jose Maria's reaction to the words Dionisio whispers in his dying ears as: "It was a magnesium flash to leave one an indelible negative in the brain." These scientific images go hand in hand with the use of a psychological method of analyzation and with the medical observations which fill a large part of the novel. Azuela dexterously builds up the historical case of hard facts and pressures which lead Dionisio to alcoholism. Intelligently and professionally he ponders on its causes:

Is the alcohol the last defense, the last refuge for the virtue of a personality that is crumbling in a sterile fight with itself and destiny? Is it because of the desperation of the one condemned without right of re-appeal, who turns to wine because wine makes one sleep as a rock? The flight before the vision of one's own degeneration and the degeneration of the family. Afterwards one no longer knows if one drinks to be able to fight or because one fought, if one drinks to steal or because one stole, to kill or because one killed. (La Luciernaga, p. 192)²¹

The social preoccupation is essential and obviously a part of La Luciernaga. In it Azuela presents a close and accurate description of the customs of different social classes²² as seen mainly in the province and the capital. He shows the many traps laid down to drain the money of the inexperienced provincial and which gradually reduce him to misery.

²¹Mariano Azuela, La Luciernaga (Madrid, 1932). All quotations are from this edition. The translation made by Angeles J. Almenas.

²²Torres-Rioseco, p. 31.

La Luciernaga is realistic with the realism of a Gorki or a Gogol.²³ It presents abject misery and moral degradation within a frame of psychological revelation. The psychological interest is not concentrated on the "race" but on the individual. If Mexico at large has any part in the novel it is because it provides the social conditions in which these people "flourish." The novel is difficult to read and grasp on first reading it. This is due to the fact that since the author is trying to set down the characters' thoughts as these flash across the mind of the character, the reader is not informed as to the place, the time or the person or persons whose dialogue may be recalled. Since these memories are complete in themselves although somewhat disconnected, the reader gradually accumulates enough facts as to be able to fill in the sequence of events that brought the family to the city and its gradual degeneration. On first reading the reader does not come to formulate a clear picture until he is about half way through the novel.

La Malhora (1923) is also concerned with an individual and concentrates on the story of her degradation and partial comeback. La Malhora is the nickname of a girl of the streets who lives among the low class of Mexico City. She is an alcoholic like Dionisio in La Luciernaga. Like he does with Dionisio, Azuela tries to study the causes which brought Altagracia (La Malhora) to her degraded stage and in doing so exposes the living conditions of the low classes, the piety of some ladies of the

²³Ibid., p. 33.

middle class and the lack of concern of doctors whose only interest is money.

The style of La Malhora presents Azuela's conscious efforts to create a novel according to the post First World War revolutionary aesthetics.²⁴ In it he uses free association of ideas, mostly in the pictures related to the half-mad doctor who attempts to cure Altagracia. The plot consists of unconnected episodes which have to be connected by the reader himself. The point of view shifts from the author to La Malhora, to some of the other characters. What Azuela does is mainly to report thoughts, dialogues and actions. The lyricism of his former works is completely gone since now he emphasizes the ugly and cold. He talks about the bituminous sky "like the wet asphalt of the street." The novel is sociological in its interest, plot, and approach and seems deterministic since Altagracia, after years of abstaining from alcohol, fasting and praying, relapses into alcoholism. Through this novel Azuela joins the "estridentista" movement, or "noise makers," who wanted to shock Mexico through their writings into social and political reform.²⁵

Although he was first a physician and only afterwards a writer, Azuela managed to write some very good works in which his medical experiences have contributed in terms of plots, description of physical traits, characterization, and themes (for example, La Malhora). Yet even more vital to the nature of his novels was the personality of the author himself. A devoted man,

²⁴Stroupe and Stoudemire, p. 134.

²⁵Charleton Beals, "The Noise Makers," Bookman LXIX (April, 1930), p. 283.

intelligent, active, and aware, who had served as Director of Education in Jalisco, Azuela was sensitive to the pains and struggles of his people. He understood their search for justice and joined the revolutionary forces to help the masses get their rights. But just like Solis in The Underdogs, Azuela was disappointed and after his exile in Texas came back to serve his country as a doctor and sometimes, writer. After years of lecturing at the university and practicing medicine for the poor in Mexico City, Azuela gained a respected, venerable position. His constant contact with the poor stimulated him to write more novels attacking the evils of Mexican society. Thus his novels are children of deep insights and profound indignation. Although Azuela did not want to be called a novelist, he became internationally famous as one. His best six works are definitely worth reading and have artistic qualities which belie the talent of the self-taught writer. The rest of his twenty-three novels are works which lack some of the artistic and stylistic qualities to make them something more than pleasant and interesting reading, yet they are very interesting to the reader who wants to learn about Mexican life from before the 1910 Revolution, Diaz' regime, until the nineteen-forties.²⁶ John E. Englekirk summarizes the major faults found in Azuela's prolific production.

It

...suffers from defects inherent in the conditions under which it is written: unevenness--moments of true artistic

²⁶Frank Magil, Cyclopedia of World Authors (New York, 1958), p. 61.

inspiration, others of distorted ineffectual expression; much hasty, careless composition; moments when passion and concern either tainted the work with an excess of pessimism and negation or prevented the attainment of artistic unity of subject and style.²⁷

Regardless of the many faults found in the bulk of Azuela's work, they provide veritable pictures of the customs, ideas, problems, and peculiarities of speech found in Mexico. From The Underdogs to La Luciernaga, to name only two of his best known works, the reader can get a good idea of Azuela's great gift of effectual characterization and of his deep sympathy and insight into the lives, problems and psychology of his people. His sociological studies are not only of interest to the sociologist because in his best work (the six novels studied), the sociological interest provides only the basic foundation for a work of art. Seeing his work we notice how Azuela changed his style and technique from Marcela, belonging to his early period before his work was well known, on through his late work; sometimes he indulged in new experimental ways like in La Malhora. His famous novel The Underdogs stands as the best in his literary career although it was written very early (1915).

The four works translated into English have done a good job of presenting Azuela at his best. The Prefaces by Professor Simpson in his translation of The Flies and The Bosses, by Beals in the 1929 edition of The Underdogs, and by Harriet de Onis in the 1963 edition of the same, give the reader ample background about Azuela, the works translated, and about the Mexican history involved in the stories. With a fine translation of La Luciernaga and La Malhora, Azuela would be fully accessible to the English-

²⁷Stroup and Stoudemire, pp. 132-133.

reading public. This public would appreciate the opportunity of meeting another good foreign writer and peering into the heart and culture of one of the United States' closest neighbors. In Azuela's production they will find dramatic evidence of the significance of the Mexican Revolution by a man who took an active part in the military struggle and was conscious and aware of its effect ever afterwards. By reading the four translations already done and a few more, the English reader will see why Azuela has made his name meaningful in Europe, especially in France, both as a portrayer of character and a literary experimentalist. Azuela's characters have a deep well of life to share with the lover of literature and men since, although Mexicans in their speech and problems, the author makes them universal in their powerful and accurately drawn humanity. Luis Cervantes, Marcelas and Altigracias are part of every society.

The scholar of American letters can find a certain resemblance between Azuela and William Carlos Williams. Williams, who himself was half Spanish, was a doctor like Azuela and achieved a considerable reputation as an experimentalist poet. Like Azuela, Williams used the observations he made as a physician of poor people as subject matter for his poetry and prose. Both saw the opportunity to arrive at beauty and truth by looking at the vulgar, the common, and the clinically interesting, and after analyzing it with their scientifically trained eyes, turned it into art for other people to share. The quality of their production is uneven since both men were primarily professionals and not writers. Yet both have a deep poetic temperament and an artistic talent which expressed itself in a literary avocation.

Since Azuela represents a largely unexploited subject worth studying, his production and translations may motivate in the future some scholars and critics in the United States to do further work on him. Some of the ground work has been done by Luis Leal in his book Mariano Azuela: vida y obra published in 1961. But in addition to the fact that this book is written in Spanish, it does not say everything about Azuela that needs and could be said. The English-speaking scholar has then much ground on which to work.

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A STUDY OF MARIANO AZUELA'S TRANSLATIONS
INTO ENGLISH AND HIS REPUTATION IN
THE UNITED STATES

by

ANGELES J. ALMENAS-VELASCO

B. A., Mount St. Scholastica College, 1962

AN ABSTRACT OF
A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1963

The objectives of this report on Mariano Azuela (1873-1952) were four:

- 1) to investigate Azuela's reputation in the United States as seen by the reviews and criticisms the translations were awarded
- 2) to see how adequate are the existing translations
- 3) to study the special problems the original Spanish versions offered to the translator and how these were met, and
- 4) to see the possibility and advisability of recommending, by taking the authorities on Azuela as guides, other novels to be translated

In order to find the extent of Azuela's reputation in the United States research was made of articles in books, magazines, or book reviews published since 1929. The date of 1929 was chosen since it was the date when Azuela's first translation into English was published. The translation was The Underdogs, Azuela's international claim to fame. Very few articles and publications on Azuela were found even in Hispania and The Modern Language Journal; none in PMLA. Yet all the articles and book reviews found gave testimony to Azuela's quality as a writer. By 1956 his place as one of Mexico's and Spanish America's foremost novelists was secured in the United States.

After reading the criticism of the bulk of Azuela's literary production--twenty-three novels--it was found that only six were considered his best and worth studying. There was no general agreement among critics as to which six novels were the best. Nevertheless, all critics mentioned Los de abajo and most agreed

to include Las Moscas and Los Caciques. The other three choices possible were La Luciernaga, Mala yerba and La Malhora or La nueva burguesia. The author of this report then re-evaluated as the top six novels Mala yerba, Los de abajo, Los Caciques, Las Moscas, La Luciernaga and La Malhora. The translated versions were used since these were available.

To complete the study of Azuela the four translations into English were then studied and evaluated. The translations are: Marcela (1932) by Anita Brenner, The Underdogs (1929) by E. Munguia, and The Flies and The Bosses (in one volume)(1956) by Professor Simpson of the University of California. The translations were found to be very good, Professor Simpson's being outstanding in its fidelity to the Spanish original. By comparing both Spanish and English versions some of the techniques and problems encountered by the translators were found. One of the major difficulties was translating the Mexican peasant dialect used in two of the four works. The author of the report also tried to determine the primary consideration of each translator in doing his work. It was thus found that all the translators were consciously trying to make Azuela agreeable to an English-reading public. The translators also tried to preserve the cultural elements present in the books but did this in different ways.

As a conclusion La Luciernaga and La Malhora were recommended for translation. The worth of doing some more work on Azuela was discussed, a simple parallelism with the poet William Carlos Williams was established, and a summary of Azuela's total value and literary characteristics was also made.