Reseña

Memories[1]

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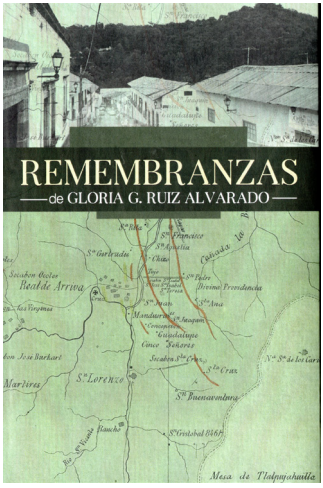
Remembranzas or *Memories* is an apt title for the autobiographical work I am reviewing: It is not an autobiography, which would be a much more meticulous text based on information which its author would review over and over again. These memories are akin to what other authors call memoirs: in them, the author writes what he or she recalls. This is important since memoirs allow us to highlight certain aspects of our lives while minimizing or even omitting others. They are based on what we remember, which may not always be accurate, but can still convey the essence of a "life lived" with a great sense of immediacy. As Seidensticker (1999: 47) puts it, "it is possible to bring private matters into what is essentially the recounting of a public career." I would add that the opposite is also true: memoirs bring public issues into what is primarily a private narrative.



1 Ruíz Alvarado, G. (2024). *Remembranzas*. Puertabierta Editores. ISBN: 978-607-8961-30-6

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The narrative I am discussing becomes somewhat convoluted, as part of what the author tells us is based on stories her mother recounted in her later years. These "memoirs of memoirs" rescue significant events from a period, but downplay processes that could have been just as important. It's up to the reader to untangle events and processes from the narrative. "Memories come to mind in a disordered and spontaneous way," Mrs. Gloria G. Ruiz Alvarado, the author, tells us (p. 41). In addition to being disorganized and spontaneous, memories sometimes contradict each other. For instance, depending on the page, we are told that Mrs. Gloria bought either two or four cows to start a dairy business.

Her family originally came from the State of Michoacán, from a region bordering the State of Mexico, specifically the mining district of Real de Arriba, with its municipal seat in Tlalpujahua. I was fortunate to speak with Mrs. Gloria since I learned that her family came from a line of miners, and I've been particularly interested in tracing the trajectory of the silver miners from southern Sonora who, by mid-19th century, migrated to what was then called Alta California, in search of gold and a generation later ended up in the copper mines of Cananea, Sonora. I wanted to understand this migration in order to explain the anti-Chinese sentiment that developed among the second or third generation of these Sonoran miners living in Cananea during the 1930s.

Mrs. Gloria and I talked about mines, miners, and migrations. In the her native district, people often died under non-natural circumstances: one could, unfortunately, fall into an abandoned mine shaft or be buried alive during a mine collapse. The townspeople could also easily fall prey to unknown outsiders who came to Tlalpujahua in search of fortune or adventure. A distant uncle of Mrs. Gloria, Vicente, was one such victim, possibly kidnapped by one of these adventurers. After a detective searched for him, he found him wandering in "deplorable conditions" in the *zócalo* of Mexico City. His misfortunes did not end there. After recovering in 1900, while walking along the canal where his grandfather Cipriano was working on expanding Mexico City's drainage system, Vicente felt a reptile crawl up his leg. Although it turned out to be nothing more than an *axolotl*, Vicente died after returning home, leaving behind the story of his strange and untimely demise.

Reading such tales, one is reminded of how fragile life was during the Porfirian era. For example, Mrs. Gloria suggests that those from the rural districts enjoyed nature more, compensating for other deficiencies.

However, I wonder whether they also suffered more than city dwellers did from nature's dangers. As a reader of the Latin American literary boom, I increasingly felt that Mrs. Gloria's stories unlocked her writing, reminding me of the characters from Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. A character, nicknamed the Camel "because of his hump," brought Melquiades to my mind, from that novel.

> The Camel was a bearded, dirty man, about 40 years old, standing approximately 1.35 meters tall and carrying a bulky book weathered by time and the elements. He had taken upon himself the task of documenting all the deaths in the region. Despite traveling on foot to distant villages, he always managed to gather the necessary information. I wonder: where is this invaluable record of Tlalpujahua now? (p. 35)

When the story returns to daily life, to "normality," Mrs. Gloria recalls her father "dressed in a black suit with piped trousers, an Andalusian-style jacket embroidered with snowy motifs along with a shirt, a black tie or red scarf, leather boots, and spurs. He tamed wild horses, performed in races, and executed *piales* with great skill" (p. 58).

Then come the marriages or quasi-marriages, often tinged with tragedy: Aunt Carmen married the son of a landowner who suffered from schizophrenia and died of the Spanish flu in 1917. A young foreigner who worked in the San Juan mine met Aunt Maria, the most beautiful of three sisters, had a child with her, and then disappeared. When the child was five, he saw a muleteer riding a donkey, wanted to ride it, and was never seen again: the muleteer claimed that the child fell near Comanja shaft.

Reading these memories, we get a vivid sense of life in the mines, its constant danger, and the ever-present risks, not to mention diseases like silicosis contracted inside the mines or other afflictions contracted outside, such as pneumonia from bathing in cold water after working in hot environments.

Another foreign influence was Capital. The *Las Dos Estrellas* mining company in Tlalpujahua donated the main bell to the town's parish. Mrs. Gloria's parents married in this parish, and her father and one of her brothers worked for *Las Dos Estrellas*. Prosperous times there took a toll on her father's health and as he was forced to work in open-pit mining, the family's income declined. Life in Tlalpujahua continued much like it did in any other town in the region.

Mrs. Gloria recounts how Carlos Gieze, a young Protestant, courted one of her sisters, Blandina. Initially, both families approved, but a family friend convinced Blandina's father to forbid the relationship because of the religious differences. The couple continued to meet secretly, with the consent of Mrs. Gloria's mother. When Carlos's family prepared to move, he asked Blandina to elope, but she was too frightened to go. Carlos never married but Blandina did, though she never forgot him.

One notable event in Mrs. Gloria's life was what she calls the catastrophe of 1937, when a large dam of mineral waste from the *Las Dos Estrellas* mining company collapsed on the *La Cuadrilla* neighborhood of Tlalpujahua. It happened on Corpus Christi Thursday, and hundreds of residents were buried under the debris. This caused a famine that led many miners' families to migrate. Mrs. Gloria recalls watching people leaving with their few belongings in jute or blanket bags, heading to Mexico City, Guadalajara, or elsewhere (p. 70). Three of her brothers and a niece ended up at her brother David's house in Mexico City. David had become a goldsmith and two of his brothers followed in his footsteps. The connection between what was, originally a mining family, and goldsmithing, remains an intriguing one to me.

The next pages of *Remembranzas* recount further relocations within and outside Mexico City, eventually leading to the remote municipality of San Vicente Chicoloapan in Texcoco. In 1960, Mrs. Gloria's family arrived there, and within three years, they had built their own house. She was eager to start something in this remote place, and with her brother Angel's help, who was then living in the U.S., she bought several cows to produce milk. She bought them not knowing that President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz had just signed a deal to import powdered milk from the U.S., effectively ruining the national dairy industry. This didn't discourage Mrs. Gloria; she made cheeses and gelatins to sell in nearby Los Reyes and, by 1964, the family owned 12 cows and seven calves. They sold all but one for personal use. She later shifted to raising laying hens, earning a diploma in poultry farming from UNAM, eventually managing 30,000 hens.

However, in 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) devastated the poultry industry, much like Díaz Ordaz had done with dairy. Both leaders, by prioritizing international over local concerns, hurt Mexico's small and micro industries.

Remembranzas contains shorter segments after this broad overview, with some characters becoming figures of magical realism. For instance, Uncle Vitoriano, who had trouble pronouncing the letter "r," lived in Real de Arriba in the 1920s. His wife, Rafaela, had an affair with an unpleasant man known as *El Ajumao* Rafaela's daughter, Chelo, was discovered having a relationship with a local young man which led to her being locked away by Rafaela. Chelo later died, and the townspeople believed she had poisoned herself with a plant from the garden. Uncle Vitoriano did not survive his daughter's death and shortly after his burial, his coffin was found to be missing.

There are tales of mysterious foam expelled from Rafaela's mouth as she lay dying; of haunted rooms, and stories from Mrs. Gloria's childhood. These memories blend personal stories with historical events, offering a valuable historical, biographical, and narrative legacy of life in a Michoacán mining town, and why so many families eventually migrated to Mexico City, Guadalajara, and beyond.

References

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Notes on the AI-Assisted Translation of ‘Remembranzas’ by Servando Ortoll

Effectively and efficiently conveying knowledge is one of the greatest challenges humans face in communicating science. Texts published by authors in books and journals aim to ensure that the results of their research become a pathway or starting point for those who share their objects of study. It is precisely in the decision of what to publish (based, of course, on quality) that the essence of editorial products lies.

In this brief note, I would like to share with you that, from the General Directorate of Publications of the University of Colima (DGP), with the support of its director, Mtra. Ana Karina Robles Gómez, we proposed to Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas conducting an experiment in applying new technologies. After careful evaluation of its results and a highly meticulous review process, the journal’s editorial committee approved the publication of the AI-assisted translation of Servando Ortoll’s review.

The initial intention of the experiment was simply to publish a text in its English translation and measure the reach of both versions. However, during conversations with the author and, knowing his command of the language, I proposed including artificial intelligence as a translation tool. With his skills, he could observe the result, make corrections, and jointly decide on its potential for publication. Servando responded with interest and further proposed that, once the final version was ready, it be sent to a native English speaker for review. It was at that moment that the experiment gained traction and began to take shape. It was clarified that, as with all texts received at this general directorate, it would undergo a style review by Yul Ceballos, a translator affiliated with the DGP. However, I also found it interesting and a good idea to have the approval of the native speaker.

For this translation, ChatGPT 3.5 was employed to refine the text’s syntax and composition as an initial step in the process, producing an initial version, which I reviewed and made a few general adjustments in terms of formatting. I shared this first file with Servando, who also provided comments and sent it to the native English-speaking reader. A few days later, Servando received two suggested changes related to idiomatic expressions. This version, incorporating the suggested changes,

was then sent to Yul, who carefully examined the composition of the text, its change history, and the original version written in Spanish. At the same time, I provided him with the context of the experiment and how AI was used as a tool, asking him to take extra care during the review to identify potential areas for improvement. Yul did a great job replacing some terms, applying regionalisms, and incorporating the human touch that may have been lost in a mechanical translation. At this point, I wondered if AI detection software would identify the text as having likely been generated using AI. Using the TURNITIN tool, I verified whether the text would be flagged for AI-generated content. The analysis showed no indication of AI-generated text. I understood then that AI had been used as a tool to translate a text originally written by a person.

To finalize the editorial process for this English version, I sent Servando Yul's proposed corrections, most of which he approved while rejecting only two: one related to the name of a place and the other to the use of a punctuation mark. Once these details were refined, the text was laid out and prepared for your reading in this issue.

This experiment was based on the Declaration of Heredia, an initiative addressing the use of artificial intelligence in the various roles of the editorial process, under the principles of transparency, responsibility, and minimizing AI bias—all of which were fully upheld in this text.

Jorge Arturo Jiménez Landín

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