



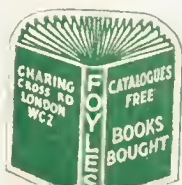
NUNC COGNOSCO EX PARTE




TRENT UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

PRESENTED BY

DR. STUART A. SELBY





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

QUE VIVA MEXICO!

by S. M. Eisenstein

T h e F i l m S e n s e

F i l m F o r m

by Ernest Lindgren

T h e A r t o f t h e F i l m

QUE VIVA MEXICO!

by

S. M. EISENSTEIN

with an introduction by

ERNEST LINDGREN

VISION

VISION PRESS LTD

Callard House

74a Regent Street

London W1

Made and printed in Great Britain by Balding & Mansell Ltd London & Wisbech

MCMLI

Introduction

by

Ernest Lindgren

The greatest and most many-sided intellect to have devoted himself to the cinema in the half-century of its history to date, is unquestionably the Russian director, S. M. Eisenstein. *Que Viva Mexico!*, had he been allowed to complete it, might have been his greatest work. All that remains of it is a formidable quantity of uncut film of superb photographic quality and a few sketchy drafts of what he intended to fashion out of it, of which the following script is the most complete. The rest has died forever with Eisenstein, one of the sad, stillborn masterpieces of the world.

* * *

Sergei Mikhailovitch Eisenstein was born in 1898, in Riga, of Jewish descent. At the time of the Russian revolution he was nineteen years old, and a student of architecture. In Moscow he became associated with the Red Army Theatre, and it was at this time that he met the two men who were to be associated with him in nearly all his film work — G. V. Alexandrov, later his assistant director, and Eduard Tisse, son of a Swedish sea-captain, who was at this time working as a cameraman in newsreels.

It was Eisenstein's thirst for realism in the theatre that led him to the cinema. Having undertaken the production of a play called *Strike* he tried to give it a sense of actuality by setting it in a real factory. The experiment was a failure; he discovered that this kind of thing can be done only in the film. So he repeated the experiment and in 1924 made his first film, *Strike*.

He then engaged himself in the production of a projected epic of the events of 1905. One of these events, the

mutiny on the battleship *Potemkin*, originally intended as a single reel in the longer film, outgrew its original plan to such an extent that it finally appeared, in 1925, as a feature film in its own right, the now famous *Battleship Potemkin*.

Battleship Potemkin, the story of a revolution, itself created a revolution in the film world, and Eisenstein suddenly found himself internationally famous. *Battleship Potemkin*, in addition to being a great film in its own right, established several important innovations. It was made without professional actors of any kind; it had nothing to do with the individual characterizations of fiction, being concerned primarily with the behaviour of men in the mass, as elements in a social group; it was made outside the studio, on an actual battleship and in the town of Odessa, and had the realistic quality of a newsreel. The most direct influence of all these attributes is to be found in the films of the documentary school, but their indirect influence has spread widely and incalculably throughout the whole subsequent history of film-making.

This sense of realism was not achieved without art, and that an art of the most complex and highly-disciplined kind, which was itself something new in the cinema. Here it is necessary to explain briefly that before 1925 the film had been carried to its highest point of achievement by the American director, D. W. Griffith, who first understood that the representational method, peculiar and proper to the film, involved something vastly more than simply photographing the dramatic scene; it involved building it up by the combination of film shots in such a way that not only the selection of these shots, but the variety of viewpoint and variety of tempo they made possible all became pliable elements in the director's hands. Griffith's methods were, of course, widely imitated in America

and Europe, but nowhere were they so intelligently analysed and applied as in the Soviet Union. Here it was recognized that fundamentally Griffith's method was the assembly of fragments of film to create an association of ideas, and the mere recognition of this fact at once opened up a whole new world of possibilities. By the combination of shots it was possible to represent events that had never occurred, to create a filmic space and time independent of real space and time, to suggest overtones of comment by comparison and contrast, and to play upon the mind of the spectator as well as upon his emotions.

All this theory Eisenstein avidly absorbed, making it his own, and with his restless and wide-ranging intellect carried it even further, relating the methods of film structure to the dialectical materialism of Marx, and evolving a theory of montage which became for him not only a theory of film-making, but of art in general. He himself writing and working in a Communist state, as well as his left-wing champions elsewhere, have stressed one aspect of his theory, which in its simplest form may be expressed thus: that when two shots *A* and *B* are creatively combined, the result is not simply $A + B$ or even AB , but a new concept *C*, arising out of the conflict of *A* and *B*. In the words of Browning's poem *Abt Vogler* (which Eisenstein, an omnivorous reader of the world's literature, himself quoted) 'out of three sounds he frames, not a fourth sound, but a star'.

To many, an equally important part of Eisenstein's work lay in the attention he paid to the possibilities of formal composition, arguing that visual form in the film consisted not so much in the quality of individual shot compositions, as in the relationships which could be created between the movements and patterns of shots following each other in sequence. His interest in this aspect of his theory was not merely ignored in the

Soviet Union; it was positively discouraged, and the consequent loss to the cinema has never since been repaired.

After *Battleship Potemkin*, Eisenstein and his two colleagues began work on *The General Line* (alternatively called *The Old and the New*) a film to promote the collectivization of Russian agriculture. This was interrupted in 1927 in order to make the film *October (Ten days that shook the World)*, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the 1917 Revolution, and *The General Line* was not completed until 1929.

* * *

At this point in his career came the turn of events which was to lead Eisenstein on to his Mexican adventure. He wanted a holiday, and the Soviet Government agreed to give him and his two colleagues (Alexandrov and Tisse) leave for a year to travel into the world beyond the U.S.S.R., sustaining themselves by their own efforts (they crossed the frontier with twenty-five dollars each). The sound-film was overrunning Europe from the United States, but was not provided for in the Soviet Five Year Plan, so Eisenstein could lose nothing, and might gain much, by studying it abroad.

The three adventurers passed through Germany, France, Switzerland and London, where in the autumn of 1929 Eisenstein gave a course of lectures to members of the Film Society. A short time later he left for the United States, with a Paramount contract in his pocket. Mr Ivor Montagu, who was associated with Eisenstein's party at this time, has related how they tried to work out an acceptable script for three different subjects, but without success. The last was Theodore Dreiser's novel, *An American Tragedy*, in which the criminal act of the central figure, Clyde Griffith, is ascribed to the forces of American society which shaped him, rather than to

individual guilt. Eisenstein's refusal to disguise this underlying philosophy was sufficient to ensure the rejection of his treatment, and with it the end of his arrangement with Paramount. (The film was finally made in a conventionally acceptable form by Josef von Sternberg.)

The suggestion that he should then make a film in Mexico may perhaps have come from a young Mexican film-student, Agustin Aragon Leiva, who acted as his guide and interpreter during the shooting of the film. At any rate, the American left-wing novelist Upton Sinclair was approached for financial support for the idea, and upon assurances from Eisenstein that the film would be non-political (presumably insisted on for commercial reasons) Sinclair and his wife readily agreed to make themselves responsible for obtaining the necessary finance. Eisenstein thereupon left for Mexico, in the company of Alexandrov and Tisse, and armed with letters of introduction from Robert Flaherty amongst others, succeeded there in obtaining official assistance from the Mexican Departamento de Bellas Artes. The latter appointed a supervisor both to ensure accuracy of detail, and also to ensure that Eisenstein did not depart from his approved script. On the other hand he was given the quite exceptional permission to export his film out of Mexico for processing and cutting in the United States.¹

It is clearly no exaggeration to say that Eisenstein fell in love with Mexico. It entirely captivated him, and his mind bubbled over with schemes for the film he was to make there. Into this project, Marie Seton tells us, 'as a mature man in his middle thirties, he poured all of himself. It contained his most intimate thoughts and emotions; his personal philosophy, his idiosyncrasies and his concept of a civilization — Mexico — which moved him more deeply than anything else in his life.'²

Mexico gave him that which he needed above all, namely, not a ready-made story or even story-idea for adaptation, but a rich exciting *milieu* in which his creative fancy could luxuriate and expand and from the observation of which he could build the detail of his theme as he went along. What the script gives us is not the finished film, shot by shot, but merely the ground-plan, a plan which might be varied, exceeded or rearranged, as the work went on.

One characteristic of Mexico which he observed and on which he at once seized for the framework of his treatment, was that old and new exist so clearly side by side there, that in a sense the whole history of the country lies spread out in the present. In an earlier version of the present script, sent to Upton Sinclair before production began, Eisenstein uses an image to explain this idea:

Do you know what a 'Serape' is? A Serape is the striped blanket that the Mexican indio, the Mexican charro — every Mexican wears. And the Serape could be the symbol of Mexico. So striped and violently contrasting are the cultures in Mexico running next to each other and at the same time being centuries away. No plot, no whole story, could run through this Serape without being false or artificial. And we took the contrasting independence of its violent colours as the motif for construction of our film; six episodes following each other — different in character, different in people, different in animals, trees and flowers. And still held together by the unity of the weave — a rhythmic and musical construction and an unrolling of the Mexican spirit and character.³

The six episodes which Eisenstein mentions here are developed in our script in the form of a prologue, four novels or cameos, and an epilogue, as follows:

The Prologue appears chiefly designed to establish the link between past and present and thus to set the key

for the whole film. It is set in Yucatan, 'land of ruins and huge pyramids', whose dwellers 'have still conserved, in feature and forms, the character of their ancestors, the great race of the ancient Mayas'.

First Novel: Sandunga. Set in tropical Tehuantepec, a land of dreamlike beauty, this tells a story of the coming of age of Concepción, of her marriage to Abundio, and of her motherhood: a story of the Mexican Indian uncontaminated by alien cultures.

Second Novel: Maguey. In contrast to the first, this is marked by 'aggressiveness, virility, arrogance and austerity', set in the desert lands of the spiky Maguey cactus, under the dictatorship of Diaz, prior to 1910, it tells the story of the tragic wedding of Sebastian and Maria, victims of the Spanish colonial system of peonage.

Third Novel: The Fiesta. This, again, is a tale of the pre-1910 period, but the atmosphere is Spanish, a new contrast of the romance and glamour of Spanish colonial life, in which Baronita, the picador, steals from the bull-fight to keep a clandestine rendezvous with another's wife, and narrowly escapes killing at the hands of the jealous husband.

Fourth Novel: Soldadera. This plunges into the tumult of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, and tells of the soldaderas, the women who follow the armies to tend their menfolk, and of one such, Pancha, who gives birth to her child, and loses one protector to find another; it ends with the victory of the Revolution, and the turning of Mexico 'towards a New Life'.

Epilogue. The epilogue shows us Mexico today, its leaders, engineers, aviators, technicians; but if one looks closer one sees in them the same faces as we have seen in our four stories, the faces that in Yucatan go back to the ancient Mayas. And suddenly 'Death comes along dancing', and we are in the middle of the carnival

pageant of 'Calavera', death day, when the Indians make fun of death. At the end 'a gay little Indian carefully removes his death-mask and smiles a contagious smile — he impersonates the new growing Mexico.'

Even from this bald outline, one can glimpse the grandeur of Eisenstein's design. A comparison with the vast scope of Griffith's *Intolerance* (which also tried to span historical time in four stories) at once suggests itself. Eisenstein's film was designed to range through the changes of Mexican history, and through the varieties of the Mexican scene, simply by photographing present actuality as it lay around him. And all this was to be held together 'by the unity of the weave — a rhythmic and musical construction.' It will be noticed, for example, that although the stories are so sharply contrasted, each one concerns the love of a man and woman. The mood of each one is characterized by a single piece of music (the *Sandunga*, *El Alabado*, *Adelita*). And different though the stories are, they carry forward a single concept from the beginning of the film to the end.

Those working with Eisenstein were no less enthusiastic than himself about his ideas. Aragon Leiva, writing later in the newspaper *El Nacional*, said 'In Eisenstein's film there were no professional actors, no scenes or artificial and candied sets, no artificial lights; the scene was nature, and the actors humble peasants, soldiers and men of the people. Sound technique was extremely original. Only voices, as in the chorus of Greek tragedy, without dialogues or redundant commentaries'. Its structure he described, perhaps with more warmth than clarity, as being 'like a symphony, in which different movements are unified in spirit and form through the expression of the same *idea* of a superior order . . . ; the cinematographic melodies have their own counterpoint, and everyone requires a

different harmonization. In this fashion there are as many rhythms, graphic compositions and photographs, and finally, montages, as there are parts in the film.'⁴ And Miss Marie Seton later added (in 1948): 'The film *Que Viva Mexico!* as Eisenstein planned and directed it, was the most gigantic project anyone ever attempted to realize in the film medium. The film was to tell the story of a civilization — that of Mexico — from its early days before the New World was discovered up to the time when Eisenstein was working in Mexico in 1931. When he spoke to me on various occasions in Moscow about the film, he talked of it as the "living history" of Mexico and the Mexican Indian people'.²

For a year Eisenstein and his colleagues worked on the shooting of this picture. Ivor Montagu has described him as 'a person of fantastic energy, periods of fantastic laziness alternating with tremendous activity. Plans, schemes, ideas, would chase themselves around in his mind at times while he did nothing. But when the undertaking was launched, he would rest no hour of the day or night.' A journalist, Morris Helprin, gives the following account of Eisenstein working in Mexico:

That day at Los Remedios, when we walked over the hills in search of a suitable location, served as an indication of Eisenstein's preciseness, his exciting (?exacting) demands that his subject be even in quality. All Mexico around us was 'beautiful enough to swoon in' . . . You could set your camera down at almost any spot and grind. And have a beautiful scenic.

But the Russian, followed hastily by Tisse, his cameraman: Aragon, a young Mexican intellectual who serves as guide, interpreter and go-between, a camera boy and myself, trailed by five peons who were the day's actors at a peso each, led a frantic chase to find THE spot. Following which were at least a dozen of THE spots. . . .

Toiling in the sun from early in the morning, through the noon that is characteristically Mexican with its burning

heat, until the landscape began to cool, we dragged Christ from the church to lie, pathetically unaware of Eisenstein, staring at the blue bowl that is Heaven, while a machine recorded its image on revolving celluloid. . . .

No food for us during the day's work, except a bottle of warm beer that was as quickly spat out at the flies.

No rest while Eisenstein sees light in the skies. After eleven months of it he is as active in his picture making as during the first days. What significance fatigue, when this will be the first film made on the American Continent worth preserving for its sociological import? What are the dangers of mountain, jungle or sea, when you coincidentally explore human nature?²⁵

After eleven months Eisenstein was 'as active in his picture making as during the first days'; but this was not matched by a similar endurance on the part of Upton Sinclair and his friends. The bright noon-day sun might be burning in Mexico, but in California the storm clouds were gathering. Precisely how the quarrel arose between Eisenstein and Sinclair is not clear from the available records. Either through respect of the persons involved, or through fear, or out of a desire to avoid fanning the flames of dissension, the witnesses were cautiously reticent, and the full tale has not so far been told.

One can only make the rift intelligible by conjecture and supposition. Eisenstein shot a prodigious amount of film, 170,000 feet according to the final estimate, (and this includes none of the *Soldadera* story, which, according to Sinclair, he was not able even to begin), despite the fact that his final picture could be no longer than perhaps 10,000 feet at the most. This in itself might not have mattered so much, because even in the most well-organized Hollywood studios, directors invariably shoot much more film than is finally shown. But in the studios, shooting is at least finished within the reasonable time of a month or two, and the director works to

a detailed script. Eisenstein went on month after month apparently without regard to time; and what progress he was making, or whether he was in fact arriving anywhere at all, it was presumably impossible for the hapless Sinclair to say, since all he had to guide him was a brief outline which resembled a prose poem more than a script. One may imagine him week by week, and month by month, studying the incomprehensible rushes of the material which Eisenstein was shooting and sending to him, perceiving neither shape nor end to it all, while all the time the expense sheets were multiplying and his fellow backers were growing more and more impatient. A further guess which one may make from the available evidence is that to try and assume some control over a situation which he felt to be hopelessly out of hand, Upton Sinclair sent a supervisor to check what Eisenstein was doing. Eisenstein seems to have resented this person intensely, and to have doggedly resorted to all kinds of subterfuges to outwit him. Whether these tactics were reported back to Sinclair in a distorted form I do not know, but misrepresentations seem unquestionably to have been made, and amid mutual recriminations, the rift between the two men split wide open, beyond hope of bridging.

Again it must be emphasized that all this is the merest guesswork based on scraps of report and comment.

Eisenstein himself made an oblique reference to the quarrel in an article entitled *The Difficult Bride*, dealing with the relationship of the writer to the cinema, published in *Film Art*, Spring, 1934. This reference, which follows, suggests that he not only understood the basic cause for the trouble, but was prepared to suggest a solution for it:

The movie is heavy artillery with train loads of ammunition. while our colleagues of the pen are light cavalry.

And though our chains be but of celluloid they do not break. We are factories — while the writers are free Vikings or Christopher Columbuses discovering our today. Paradox as it may seem, it is the fact that the most dynamic of all arts is the heaviest on the uptake. Except where it is but a wandering of three fellows — we went through Mexico — stopping where we listed, letting the subject and the people grow upon us out of the very flow of life, in Yucatan or on the shores of the Pacific, or the mountain tablelands of Central Mexico. . . . But such months cannot be made to fit in with the planned activities of the movie factories. The problem of the division of labour arises. And that is where we need the help of the writers.⁶

The result of this split with Upton Sinclair was that work on the film was stopped, and Eisenstein returned first to the United States and then to the Soviet Union, having long outstayed his leave of absence. There was some rumour that it was the threatened loss of his Soviet citizenship which compelled his return. According to Seymour Stern, 'in order to complete the saga of Mexico . . . Eisenstein threw discretion and taeties to the winds. He did a thing, which, from the point of view of the Russian Proletariat and the World Revolution, is almost unforgivable, but which, when considered as the outburst of a really impassioned intellectual and artist, is very understandable; he violated his contract with the Soviet Government. When he returned to the Soviet Union, long after the time he had agreed to return, he met with a cold reception.'⁴

Eisenstein, we are told, tried his utmost to gain possession and control of the film he had shot, both before and after his return to the Soviet Union, but without success. The contract he had signed gave Upton Sinclair and his associates full ownership in the material, and the latter accordingly cast about for some means of using it, or disposing of it, in order to recover their outlay, as was natural enough.

They began by offering the uncut film to the Russian organization Amkino in New York, 'for Eisenstein to finish, and for the Soviet film organizations to exploit on a cash basis. However, he (i.e. Sinclair) wanted some 90,000 dollars in cash and this was a sum which Amkino was altogether unable to afford'.⁴ (The contemporary evidence, incidentally, indicates that Soviet government agencies gave no assistance in the matter at all; and one has to remember that at this time the Soviet Government was still officially unrecognized by the United States.)

It was subsequently reported that the film was being offered for sale as travelogue material. Eisenstein's friends and supporters in the United States tried to intercede on his behalf and launched a campaign to raise 100,000 dollars to purchase the film for him, but without success. Eventually an arrangement was made with Mr Sol Lesser to edit the material into a feature film resembling as closely as possible the film Eisenstein himself had planned. The result could have been a surprise to no one.

The editor employed to cut the film was an experienced technician, but he was not another Eisenstein. He had been trained in a school where the creative emphasis lay primarily on scripting and shooting, and where editing was largely the intelligent assembly of what had already been created. He had no conception of Eisenstein's methods, in which shooting was mainly a collection of raw material, the notes of the director's observations, and in which the editing of this material, the conflict of shots to create new implications, and the relating of shots aesthetically according to their visual form, was the very essence of the creative process. And even if he had known all this, and had himself been another Eisenstein, he could have had no prophetic vision of a result towards which Eisenstein himself had

still been groping, and which in the nature of things would only emerge in full detail as he worked at the cutting bench. 'Go the way the material calls you' had been Eisenstein's maxim; 'the scenario changes on location and the location shots change in the montage'.⁷

Confronted, therefore, with 170,000 feet of film, still incomplete, on the one hand, and Eisenstein's prose-poem on the other, he did the best he could with it, according to his lights. He chose the clearest and most obviously dramatic of the four novels, the one Eisenstein had called *Magvey*, and edited it exclusively for development of the narrative and then added a prologue and epilogue, faintly resembling Eisenstein's originals in order to bring it to normal feature length. This film was distributed in America and Great Britain under the title *Thunder over Mexico*, and was advertised as being Eisenstein's masterpiece, and a correct interpretation of his ideas. Its promoters may have believed this, but from what has already been said it is clear that the claim could not be true and in making it they were deluding both themselves and the public.

From Eisenstein's supporters in America, who were already incensed at the treatment he had received, this action brought forth a tornado of protest and denunciation which found its echo in *avant-garde* film circles all over the world. The leaders of the protest were the editors of the magazine *Experimental Cinema*, and the following quotations are typical of the passionate manifestoes which they published, and which were republished elsewhere:

There is now being released on the world market a movie called *Thunder over Mexico*, which is what it is: a fragmentary and entirely conventional version of Eisenstein's original majestic conception. The story behind this commercialized version is without doubt the greatest tragedy in the history of films and one of the saddest in the history of art. It

represents the latest instance of a film director, in this case a genius of the first rank, forfeiting a masterpiece in a hopeless struggle against sordid commercial interests.

WE DECRY THIS ILLEGITIMATE VERSION OF *Que Viva Mexico!* AND DENOUNCE IT FOR WHAT IT IS — A MERE VULGARIZATION OF EISENSTEIN'S ORIGINAL CONCEPTION PUT FORTH IN HIS NAME IN ORDER TO CAPITALIZE ON HIS RENOWN AS A CREATIVE ARTIST. WE DENOUNCE THE CUTTING OF *Que Viva Mexico!* BY PROFESSIONAL HOLLYWOOD CUTTERS AS AN UNMITIGATED MOCKERY OF EISENSTEIN'S INTENTION. WE DENOUNCE *Thunder over Mexico* AS A CHEAP DEBASEMENT OF *Que Viva Mexico!* . . .

. . . LOVERS OF FILM ART! STUDENTS OF EISENSTEIN! FRIENDS OF MEXICO! SUPPORT THIS CAMPAIGN TO SAVE THE NEGATIVE OF *Que Viva Mexico!* DO NOT BE SATISFIED WITH ANY SUBSTITUTES FOR EISENSTEIN'S ORIGINAL VISION! MAKE THIS CAMPAIGN AN UNFORGETTABLE PRECEDENT THAT WILL ECHO THROUGHOUT FILM HISTORY, A WARNING TO ALL FUTURE ENEMIES OF THE CINEMA AS A FINE ART!¹⁸

Perceptive film critics also denounced it for what it was. John Grierson, for example, summed it up in characteristic manner thus:

It is a waste of time to consider what Eisenstein would have done with *Thunder over Mexico*, if he had been allowed to cut it. The fact is that he was not allowed, and alibis that the cutting was done 'in exact accord' with Eisenstein's script are merely silly. One might as well talk of writing a George Moore novel from George Moore's notes; for with Eisenstein, as with Moore, the style is nearly everything. . . .

. . . The clouds and the cactus will pass for great photography among the hicks, but they are, of course, easy meat for any one with a decent set of filters. The lovely moulding of form, the brilliance of near and intimate observation, which you get in *Moana* say, are a mile away and beyond. These are superficial qualities only. But, as I suggest, one never looked to Eisenstein for great photography or intimate observation, and one's only disappointment is that Hollywood has fallen for these clouds and things and let the

film go to the devil for the sake of its glycerined scenic effects. The types on the other hand are superb, for no one holds a candle to Eisenstein when it comes to picking a face. The acting, too, is much better than we have associated with Eisenstein in the past, though never as fine in its nuances of reactions as we get in Pudovkin.

But there you are and what of it? The significance that Eisenstein might have added to the tale is not there; and types, acting and glycerined clouds cannot turn a simple tale of village rape into the passion of a people. There were other things up Eisenstein's sleeve, or he is not the dialectician I have always taken him for.⁹

Although political considerations appear to have had no part in the origin of the controversy, they crept into the controversy itself as it was drawn out into the bitterness of public debate, with the implication that Upton Sinclair, in sponsoring the emasculated *Thunder over Mexico*, had betrayed his avowed Socialistic principles.

Sinclair himself replied vigorously to all the attacks made upon him. In a letter to the editor of *Close-Up*, for example, he made the following points in his defence:

1. That the statements made by his attackers were false, some of them deliberately so.
2. That Eisenstein's original proposition was to make a 'non-political' picture.
3. 'The so-called "mutilation" of the film was determined by one factor — the length of a feature picture which can be shown in an existing theatre. The entire material as outlined in Eisenstein's scenario would have taken six or seven hours to run.'
4. 'In making a selection the most "revolutionary" material was used, and the most "proletarian" . . . The story was cut in exact accord with the scenario . . .'
5. The material omitted (it is set out in detail) was simply 'everything that a tourist wandering through Mexico might find picturesque and interesting'. 'There is

nothing of the slightest degree "proletarian" in any of this material'.

6. In reply to the allegation that the epilogue had been edited with 'Fascist' implications, the selection had on the contrary included those elements 'which seemed least "Fascist" in tone'.¹⁰

It is clear that in this statement Upton Sinclair was primarily concerned to clear himself of the political accusations, which were the least relevant and justifiable. To the rights of Eisenstein as a creative artist, which were the fundamental point at issue, he seems to have been curiously but unmistakably blind.

None of this, of course, disturbed the exhibition of the film. Far from boycotting it, the audiences of specialist cinemas and film societies were most anxious to see it, not because they were deluded as to its nature, but because they were anxious to see even the ruins of something on which Eisenstein had worked. For one at least, and doubtless for many others, it was a sad experience to be stirred by the striking content and the beauty of so many individual shots, and to realize at the same moment what the cinema and the world had lost.

The film also received a certain measure of exhibition in ordinary cinemas, despite the fact that the absence of star names and of a conventional formula were against a wide popular success, and many good people must have watched it in various degrees of bewilderment and boredom without having any reason to doubt that it was 'directed by S. M. Eisenstein' as the credit title and advertisements proclaimed. There is, indeed, a malicious irony in the fact that none of the films which Eisenstein made, either before this or after, has received such a wide showing in Britain and the United States, as this film which, in the fullest sense, he did not make at all.

The subsequent history of the original film may be briefly told. Another film, an interest short called

Death Day, was later compiled from some of it, and there were rumours that Upton Sinclair had sold the rest to various studios for use as background material. However, when Miss Marie Seton went to the United States in 1939, she found the bulk of the material still intact. From March to September 1939 she did everything in her power to get the film back to Eisenstein, but without success. She then herself, together with Paul Burnford made from 16,000 feet of the film which she had purchased, another short called *Time in the Sun*.²

Finally (it would appear, in 1941) Upton Sinclair sold all that remained of Eisenstein's Mexican film 'for a very small sum to the equipment company, Bell and Howell. There the film library editor cut it into a series of educational shorts. Such was the end of what would probably have been Eisenstein's greatest film.'²

* * *

Eisenstein himself returned to the Soviet Union a deeply embittered man. Ivor Montague says that he was so broken that for many months he did not work in films at all, but confined himself to lecturing in the Film University. Marie Seton tells us:

When I first met Eisenstein in 1932, shortly after he had heard that Sol Lesser was to arrange for the film's editing in Hollywood, he did not wish to go on living. He contemplated suicide and was only prevented by the loyal friendship of his cameraman, Tisse, and Pera Attasheva, then his secretary. He said he never wished to work in films again.²

She adds elsewhere that for two years he could not bring himself to speak about the Mexican film, so great was his anguish.

In time this mood passed, and Eisenstein began work on a film called *Bezhin Meadow*. After he had been engaged on it for two years, the Soviet film authorities, who had insisted on various revisions to the film, finally

decided to stop it altogether. The misfortunes of this film naturally did not receive the same publicity in the Western world as those of *Que Viva Mexico!* but it is clear that Eisenstein's difficulties in this case arose from the fact that he was considered to be running counter to the Soviet Government's campaign against formalism in all the arts. In other words, he was accused of being so excessively preoccupied with form in his film as to have neglected its content, and so to have distorted its proper meaning. According to Ivor Montagu 'the film was viewed by all the film technicians in Moscow and Leningrad and other parts who came together for the purpose — directors, producers, cameramen, leading artists, scenarists — and a great conference was held, at which Eisenstein defended his views for seven days, until at last he realized or acknowledged that he was wrong.'¹¹

In 1938, he made the film *Alexander Nevsky*, and during the war he began work on a trilogy on the life of the Czar Ivan, the first part of which appeared in 1944 under the title *Ivan the Terrible*. Although part two was completed, it also became the subject of severe criticism in the Soviet Union, and was never shown. These two last films of Eisenstein's (and more particularly *Ivan the Terrible*) were a disappointment to Eisenstein's admirers. Nothing that he ever did was undistinguished, and both films were lavishly made and enriched with many beautifully arranged and photographed pictorial compositions, but they moved slowly and laboriously, and the dynamic vitality of his earlier work seemed (except for the battle on the ice in *Alexander Nevsky*) to have deserted him.

During the night of 10th February 1948, Eisenstein had a stroke while he was working in his library, and died suddenly. His colleagues found him next morning, still seated at his desk, with an unfinished thesis on

colour and three-dimensional film lying open before him.

* * *

The outline script, and the few lovely photographs published here, are all that are left of *Que Viva Mexico!* In a sense they bring us nearer to Eisenstein's original conception than any of the film itself because, unlike the film, they cannot pretend to be something which it is impossible for them to be.

Que Viva Mexico! and the storm of controversy it evoked, are dead. Nevertheless, it is well to look on the mournful monument of these remains, and to remind ourselves that the forces which smashed Eisenstein's film are as menacing and destructive today as they ever were. Herein lies one of the fundamental problems, if not indeed *the* fundamental problem, of our age; the problem of freedom of expression in a world which threatens more and more to make it impossible. No one directly suffers from this more than the artist, although indirectly, of course, his loss is a loss to us all. The artist, who at his greatest is nearly always an innovator and a rebel, and a law unto himself, can fulfil his function in society only by following his own inner voice; but the growing complexity of social organization, and of modern media of expression, are more and more restrictive to the exercise of this freedom. In this time, when every film-maker of integrity finds himself checked and frustrated by all kinds of commercial and political pressure, Eisenstein, who was greater than any other, and achieved more than any other, also suffered more than any other. His battle, in the wider sense, is still being fought all over the world, and still remains to be won.

Sources

1. *Close-Up* (London), Vol. X, No. 3. September 1933.
2. *Eisenstein 1898-1948*. A Memorial Programme published by the Society for Cultural Relations with the U.S.S.R., in conjunction with the British Film Academy and the National Film Library (London, 1948).
3. *The Film Sense*, by S. M. Eisenstein (London, Faber, 1934) p. 180.
4. *Cinema Quarterly* (London), Vol. 1, No. 2. Winter 1932.
5. *Experimental Cinema* (Hollywood, U.S.A.) No. 4. 1932.
6. *Film Art* (London), No. 3. Spring 1934.
7. *Eisenstein's Lectures in London* — a B.B.C. broadcast by Basil Wright and J. Isaacs on the Third Programme, 17th December 1949.
8. *Close-Up* (London), Vol. X, No. 2. June 1933.
9. *Grierson on Documentary*, edited by Forsyth Hardy (Collins, London, 1946), pp. 53-54.
10. *Close-Up* (London), Vol. X, No. 4. December 1933.
11. *Eisenstein* — a B.B.C. broadcast by Ivor Montagu on the Third Programme, 13th November 1948.

Que Viva Mexico!

The story of this film is unusual.

Four novels framed by prologue and epilogue, unified in conception and spirit, creating its entity.

Different in content.

Different in location.

Different in landscape, people, customs.

Opposite in rhythm and form, they create a vast and multi-coloured Film-Symphony about Mexico.

Six Mexican folk-songs accompany these novels, which themselves are but songs, legends, tales from different parts of Mexico brought together in one unified cinematic work.

Prologue

Time in the prologue is eternity.

It might be today.

It might as well be twenty years ago.

Might be a thousand.

For the dwellers of Yucatan, land of ruins and huge pyramids, have still conserved, in feature and forms, the character of their ancestors, the great race of the ancient Mayas.

Stones —

Gods —

Men —

Act in the prologue.

In time remote . . .

In the land of Yucatan, among heathen temples, holy cities and majestic pyramids. In the realms of death, where the past still prevails over the present, there the starting-point of our film is laid.

As a symbol of recalling the past, as a farewell rite to the ancient Maya civilization, a weird funeral ceremony is held.

In this ceremony, idols of the heathen temples, masks of the gods, phantoms of the past, take part.

In the corresponding grouping of the stone images, the masks, the bas-reliefs and the living people, the immobile act of the funeral is displayed.

The people bear resemblance to the stone images, for those images represent the faces of their ancestors.

The people seem turned to stone over the grave of the deceased in the same poses, the same expressions of face, as those portrayed on the ancient stone carvings.

A variety of groups that seem turned to stone, and of monuments of antiquity — the component parts of the symbolic funerals — appear in a shifting procession on the screen.

And only the quaint rhythm of the drums of the Yucatan music, and the high-pitched maya song, accompany this immobile procession.

Thus ends the prologue — overture to the cinematographic symphony, the meaning of which shall be revealed in the contents of the four following stories and of the Finale at the end of these.

First Novel: Sandunga

Tropical Tehuantepec.

The Isthmus between Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

Near the borders of Guatemala.

Time is unknown in Tehuantepec.

Time runs slowly under the dreamy weaving of palms and costumes, and customs do not change for years and years.

Persons:

1. Concepción, an Indian girl
2. Abundio, her novio (future husband)
3. His Mother



‘Time in the prologue is eternity.’



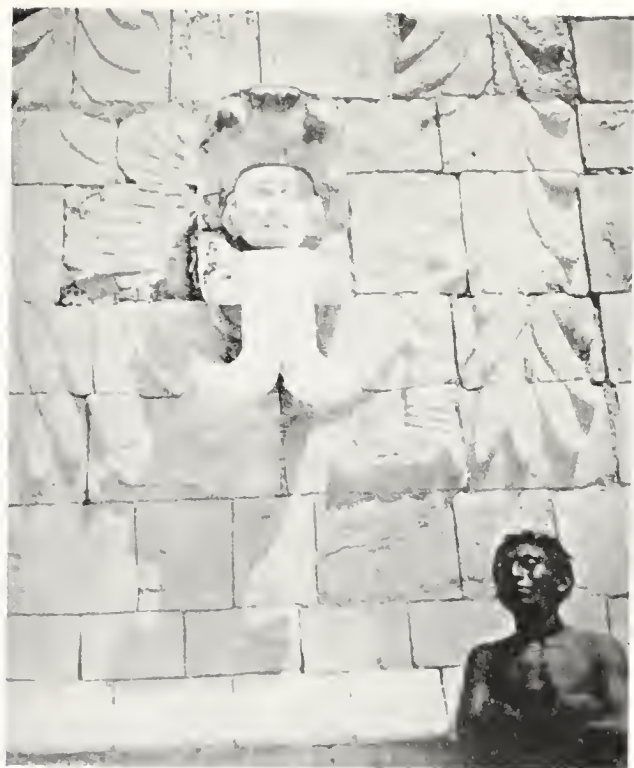
‘... ruins ...’



'... masks
of the gods ...'



'The dwellers of Yucatan have still conserved, in
feature and forms, the character of their ancestors.'



‘The people bear resemblance to the stone images.’



Faces of stone and faces of flesh.

4. Tehuanas (Tehuantepec girls)
5. Population of Tehuantepec in festivals, ceremonies and a popular wedding

Sandunga

The rising sun sends its irresistible call to life.

Its all-pervading rays penetrate into the darkest centre of the tropical forest, and, with the sun and the sound of the gentle morning breeze of the ocean, the denizens of the Mexican tropical land awaken.

Flocks of screaming parrots flutter noisily among the palm branches, waking up the monkeys, who close their ears in anger and run down to the river.

On their course these startle the solemn pelicans off the shore sands, and then they plunge, grumbling loudly, into the waves to fish floating bananas and cocoanuts.

From the deep of the river, crabs, turtles, and sluggish alligators crawl up to the shore to bask their century-old bodies in the sun.

Indian maids are bathing in the river; they lie on the sandy, shallow bottom of the river and sing a song.

Slow as an old-time waltz, sensual as a Danzon, and happy as their own dreams — an Oaxaca song — the *Sandunga*.

Another group of girls in tanned little boats glide slowly by in the bright surface of the river, indulging in the luxury of idleness and the warm kisses of the sunbeams.

A cascade of jet black shining hair drying in the sun denotes a third group of girls seated by the trunks of the nearby palm-trees.

Proud and majestic, like a fairy queen in her natural maiden beauty, is among them a girl by the name of Concepción.

Under the caress of the waves of her hair she lets herself float into dream-land. A wreath of flowers crowns her brow. While listening to the song of her friends she closes her eyes, and in her imagination gold takes the place of flowers.

A necklace of golden coins, adorned with rough pearls strung on threads of golden chains, is glimmering on her breast.

A golden necklace — this is the object of all her dreams; this is the dream of all the Tehuanas — the Tehuantepec girls.

From tender childhood a girl begins to work, saving painstakingly every nickel, every penny, in order that at the age of sixteen or eighteen she may have the golden necklace.

The necklace — that is a fortune, it is an estate. The necklace is the future dowry.

And the bigger, the more expensive it is, the happier future, marital life.

That is why the dreams of Concepción are so passionate; that is why the visions floating before her mind's eye are so colourful.

Handsome youths alternate with the necklace dreams.

Youthful beauty blossoms on the screen. . . .

The dreamy song of the girls wafts over the dreamy voluptuous tropics. . . .

Oh, . . . we have let ourselves drift so deeply into dreams, that we have not even noticed how the girls got to work, when they went over to the market place, exhibited their wares: oranges, bananas, pineapples, flowers, pots, fish, and other merchandise for sale. The Tehuantepec market-place is an interesting sight. If you will look in this corner you may think yourself in India.

On turning to the other side you will find it like



The Mayan Indians — a funeral ceremony.



'All the girls are wearing the fairy regional costumes...'

Bagdad because of the big earthenware pots surrounding its youthful vendor.

In still another place it looks like the South Seas. However, there are also spots that look like nothing else on earth, for four-eyed fishes are sold only in Tehuantepec.

As soon as a girl sells some trifle, as soon as she receives the few cents in payment, she immediately begins to think of the necklace, begins to count the gold coins she still has to earn.

Thus, coin by coin, the necklace is built, enhanced, but, alas, it is still short one — the bigger, central coin.

So thought Concepción, she needed only one, just one more coin to win the right to happiness!

Business, however, is slow in the quiet, lazy tropical market.

Concepción goes on dreaming about this last coin, while the song, the song that stands for happiness with Tehuantepec girls, continues to float in the air.

But at last the bananas are sold, those bananas that were to bring in the money for completion of the necklace. And as the customer pays Concepción, she says: 'May your necklace bring you luck!'

The happy Concepción tightly grips the long wished-for coin in her hand.

The Ball

The most beautiful that the tropical forest can yield, flowers, banana-trees, palm-leaves, fruits, adorn the walls of the dance hall.

The most elegantly dressed of the Tehuana girls are seen there. The dance hall is the only place where a youth and a girl may meet, where they can confide to each other the secret of the heart!

In the brilliance of her best dress and the high pitch of her feelings she casts aside the silk veil of her shawl to draw the eyes of all youths and maidens and keep them spellbound upon the splendour of her beauty and her new golden necklace.

After the dance, when Concepción withdraws with her beloved to a retired corner, Abundio proposes to her. And now:

The Proposal

Behold Concepción trembling, pensive, frightened. And here the author speaks!

— Why Concepción, isn't this what you came for? Is it not what you expected? Is it not what you longed for? In reply to the voice of the author Concepción smiles, nods her head in assent. But!

The Bridegroom's Mother is a practical woman!

She sends her women to the bride's house to take stock of the dowry and make sure that all is right.

That there are enough petticoats in the trousseau. That the gold coins in the necklace are plentiful.

Experienced old women, nearly centenarians who had taken hand in the marriages of three generations come to Concepción's home. They examine all her outfit, feel the velvet, smell the silk, count the gold coins in the necklace and subject them to the tooth-test to make sure of the purity of the gold.

Stirred to the depths of her soul Concepción laughs with joy and happiness. The venerable women then pronounce judgment:

All is perfectly right! So, traditional rites begin.

Concepción's friends bring her presents: A cow dressed up in a masquerade costume; goats with bow ties around their necks; they are carrying on their shoulders many hens, turkeys, little pigs and other gifts



'Youthful beauty blossoms on the screen ...'

and in a quaint procession are advancing toward the bride's home.

In compliance with a tradition centuries old they bring her pure bee's-wax candles fantastically decorated.

Middle-aged women are busy in the elaborated preparation of typical and delicious dishes for the indispensable, peculiar banquet.

Entire Tehuantepec is stirred up by this event.

All the girls are wearing their fairy regional costumes and wait for the newly-wedded near the church.

Under the sound of the wedding bells the procession carrying palm branches goes to the house of the young couple.

And when left by themselves, Concepción coyly allows her husband to take off her pride — the golden necklace.

Grandma runs out on the balcony and loudly announces to the expectant Tehuantepecans that Concepción — the girl, has become Concepción the woman.

Sky rockets soar up high; fireworks crack, all the young girl friends of Concepción turn their fairy head-gear inside out, like a flock of bih-birds all spreading out their wings, and they dance and sing!

The Sandunga

The Sandunga that always sings in the air whenever happiness comes — either in dreams or in reality.

While throughout the tropical forest under the peaceful fragrance of the palm-trees life pursues its habitual daily course.

The old apes rock their offspring to sleep.

Parrots teach their young to scream.

Pelicans bring fish for their little ones in their pouches.

Time passes, new flowers bloom. Concepción the woman is now a happy mother.

Thus the story of Concepción comes to an end, with
the portraying of happy, contented parents and a
laughing boy.

With the sun setting beyond the Ocean.

With the peaceful lyric-song of dreaming beautiful
girls.

Ends the romance of tropical Tehuantepec.



'Big earthenware pots surround the youthful vendor.'



The dawn hymn
of the peons.

Second Novel: Maguey

The action of this story develops through the endless fields of maguey in the 'Llanos de Apam' and the ancient Hacienda de Tetlapayac, State of Hidalgo. 'Llanos de Apam' are the foremost 'pulque'-producing section of Mexico.

Time of the action, beginning of this Century under the social conditions of Porfirio Diaz' dictatorship.

Persons:

1. Sebastian, peon indio
2. Maria, his bride
3. Joaquin, her father
4. Ana, her mother
5. The Hacendado
6. Sara, his daughter
7. Don Julio, her cousin
8. Don Nicolas, the administrator
9. Melesio, his mozo
10. Senor Balderas, a guest
11. Felix
12. Luciano — peons, friends of Sebastian
13. Valerio
14. Charros, mozos, guests and peons

The Maguey

Aggressiveness, virility, arrogance and austerity characterize this novel.

As the North Pole differs from the Equator, so unlike to dreamy Tehuantepec are the famous 'Llanos de Apam'.

So different their people, customs, ways and mode of living.

At the foot of the high volcanoes, at an altitude of

ten thousand feet, on this desert land grows the big cactus plant — the Maguey.

With their mouths they suck the juice of this cactus plant to make the Indian drink known as 'Pulque'.

White, like milk — a gift of the gods, according to legend and belief, this strongest intoxicant drowns sorrows, inflames passions and makes pistols fly out of their holsters.

Feudal estates, former monasteries of the Spanish conquerors, stand like unapproachable fortresses amidst the vast seas of cactus groves.

Long before dawn, long before the snowy peaks of the volcanoes are lit up by the first rays of the sun, over the high walls of the massive farmhouse come the sad, slow tunes of a song.

El Alabado the peons call this song.

They sing it every morning before they get to work.

It is a hymn in which they pray to the Holy Virgin to help them on the newly dawning day. When the high snowy peaks of the mountains begin to glitter under the rising sun the gates of the fortress-like farm-house are opened and, ending their song, the peons tightly wrapped in their serapes and holding their big sombreros in their hands, pour out into the cactus fields to suck in the juice of the maguey with long, especially fitted calabashes.

On the screen you shall see the astonishingly original process of pulque production — which originated hundreds of years ago and has not changed up to the epoch of this story.

Later, when the fog has cleared away, when the sun has warmed the earth, the servants of the landlord's household get up and begin preparations for the evening, for on this day the annual feast of the Hacienda is to be celebrated.

The 'charros' put on their best costumes in honour of



'... the sad, slow
tunes of a song.'



In the country
of the Magueys.



Sebastian awaits
Maria.

the guests and they exhibit boastfully their remarkable horses.

Meantime, in the maguey field, where the peon Sebastian is working, a meeting takes place. Maria's parents bring their daughter to hand her over to her *fiancé*.

According to tradition, Sebastian will have to take his bride to the owner of the Hacienda as homage.

But the 'charros' who are guarding the landlord's house won't let Sebastian in, so he has to remain in the front yard.

On the terrace the landlord, in the company of a group of his nearest friends, are having drinks — and their spirits are rising.

The 'hacendado' receives Maria; he is a good-natured old man; he fumbles in his vest pocket for a few pesos as a gift to the bride.

But at this moment an old-fashioned carriage drawn by six mules comes speeding along.

The old man's daughter, Sara, has arrived.

She has brought her cousin with her and has broken in upon the group on the veranda in a storm of laughter and gaiety.

She flies into her father's arms. And all their friends drink a toast to her health.

Maria is forgotten.

Sebastian gets restless, while waiting in the front yard.

His sweetheart is slow in coming back to him and the explosive laughter on the veranda sounds suspicious.

The forgotten, frightened, inexperienced Maria is awaiting her luck.

Bad luck appears in the shape of a coarse, drunken guest with a big moustache.

Availing himself of the fact that the company is too absorbed with drinking and merry-making, he seizes

Maria from behind a door and drags her into a remote room.

One of the servants, a close friend of Sebastian, witnesses this scene and runs with all his might to the yard with his startling news.

The Indian blood of Sebastian dictates his further course of action.

He rushes up the veranda knocking the guards off their feet, he breaks in like a storm among the merry guests. . . .

He demands Maria, his bride.

A fight starts at once, but is brought just as quickly to an end, for slim are the chances of Sebastian alone against all the assemblage.

Sebastian is sent rolling down the stairs for his insolence and effrontery.

A door opens and the intoxicated villain appears before the excited group.

Distraught, weeping, Maria slips by stealthily behind his back.

The tenseness of the situation is aggravated. But the 'hacendado' is a good-natured old man. He does not want to mortify his guests, he does not want to spoil the feast.

To distract the people he issues orders to start the music, the fireworks and the games.

Maria is put under lock till next morning, pending the hearing of the case.

In the rattle of the music, the excitement of the games and intoxication of hilarity, the sad incident is forgotten.

The brighter the fireworks blaze, the more violent wrath rages within Sebastian's heart.

Vengeance germinates in his mind.

Vengeance begets conspiracy.

Three of his comrades pledge themselves to help him get revenge.



'... a meeting takes place.'



‘ . . . Sebastian will have to take his bride to the owner of the Hacienda as homage.’



‘Maria is forgotten’



One woman.



'Sebastian finds his tragic end . . .'

In an auspicious moment they direct the blazing sky-rockets into hay-stacks.

The flames spread like wild fire.

While the assemblage is panic-stricken, Sebastian and his associates provide themselves with arms and cartridges out of the landlord's supplies and make an attempt to release Maria from confinement.

But the guards fire back and the conspirators are forced to flee.

Under cover of night the fugitives evade persecution.

Morning overtakes them in a forest on the slope of a mountain.

Wending their way towards the mountain pass across the ridges, they plod laboriously through the thickest of the fairy-woods. The charros, however, on their fine horses, accompanied by the indomitable Sara and her cousin, make the pass first and intercept the fugitives.

Cross-firing breaks out in the tangle of the nopal-wood.

Sara, fascinated by the shooting, incessantly makes attempts to rush forward and her cousin has to keep her back at a distance from the whizzing bullets by sheer force.

Sara kills one of the peons and pays with her life for her daring.

A bullet finds its way to her heart through the watch she is so fond of. The mechanism of the broken watch trembles under the shots and slowly stops its movement.

Sara's cousin puts her body across his saddle and carries her away from the field of battle.

The shooting breaks out anew with increased violence.

The fugitives are retreating into the maguey fields.

In the stronghold of a huge cactus, three of them seek refuge.

The hissing bullets pierce the succulent leaves of the

aguey plant and the juice, like tears, trickles down its trunk.

The cartridges are exhausted.

The peons make an attempt to flee.

The agile charros fling their lassos around the fugitives and hold them captives.

All torn, tottering Sebastian and two of his surviving friends are brought in upon the scene of Sara's funeral.

Eye for an eye . . . they pay with their lives for their daring.

Among the magueys, where Sebastian had worked and loved, he finds his tragic end. . . .

Beyond the great snow-white summits of the volcanoes the sun is sinking. The day is dying.

The large gates of the estate are closing.

Maria is set at liberty and goes looking for the body of Sebastian amidst the maguey plants.

Her appearance startles the buzzards and they fly away.

While over the high walls of the estate float the sounds of wailing.

A mournful, drawn-out wailing — the Indian farewell to the setting sun.

Maria finds the remains of her beloved, of him who was to become her husband, who had raised his arm in her defence . . . she sobs convulsively over his dead body.

Beyond the tall walls of the Hacienda the peons are singing their vesper song just as plaintive, as mournful, as their morning Alabado.



'Maria is set at liberty . . . '



' . . . and goes looking for the body of Sebastian amidst
the maguey plants.'



‘Maria finds the remains of her beloved . . .’



‘. . . she sobs convulsively over his dead body.’



Mexican peons watching from a hilltop the passing funeral.



Mexican women mourning over the coffin of the dead boy.

Third Novel: The Fiesta

Time of the action — same as Maguey — that is — prior to the Revolution of 1910.

Action includes scenery of all the most beautiful spots of Spanish colonial style and influence in Art, buildings and people in Mexico.

(Mexico City, Xochimilco, Merida, Taxco, Puebla, Cholula, etc.)

The atmosphere of this part is of pure Spanish character.

Persons:

1. Baronita, picador and first lover
2. The Matador (played by champion matador David Liceaga)
3. Senora Calderón, one of the queens at the bull-fight
4. Senor Calderón, her husband
5. Hundreds of ritual dancers, 'danzantes' in front of the Basilica de Guadalupe
6. Crowds of pilgrims and penitents
Crowds enjoying the bull-fight and the floating gardens of the Mexican Venice — Xochimilco

The Fiesta

Weirdness, Romance and Glamour constitute the make-up of the third novel.

Like the Spanish colonial *barroco* works the stone into fanciful lace-work on the wire-ribbon of columns and church-altars. Thus the complex designs, the elaborate composition of this episode.

All the beauty that the Spaniards have brought with them into Mexican life appears in this part of the picture.

Spanish Architecture, costumes, bull-fights, romantic love, southern jealousy, treachery, facility at drawing the gun, manifest themselves in this story.

In old pre-revolutionary Mexico the annual holiday in worship of the holy Virgin of Guadalupe is taking place.

Hence the abundance of merry-go-rounds, shows, flowers, the multitudes of people. Pilgrims from all parts of the country are coming to the feast.

Dancers of ritual dances are getting their fantastic costumes and masks ready.

The bishops and archbishops are donning their gorgeous feature robes.

The girls who are destined to appear as queens of the bull-fights are putting on their expensive combs and mantillas in a tremor of vanity.

And finally the heroes of this tale, the famous matadors, are getting dressed for the performance on the veranda of a Spanish *patio*, amid the tinkling of guitars and the sound of militant songs of the ring.

The best of the matadors is enacted by David Liceaga, the most renowned matador of Mexico and 'champion' of the 'golden ear'.

In front of a pier-glass, swelling with the self-consciousness of their importance and grandeur, the matadors are putting on their gold and silk embroidered costumes.

More than the others, wriggles in front of the mirror (the most concerned about his personal appearance), the care-free picador, the lazy Don Juan Baronita.

He is mindful of every detail, for an encounter more hazardous than the bull-fight awaits him.

He has a date with another man's wife! Having dressed, the matadors drive to the chapel of the Holy Virgin, the patron of their dangerous art.

Having knelt before her altar, whispered to her his



The Festival of the
Virgin of Guadalupe.



'... open coquetry ...'

prayer, and begged her benediction, the best of the great matadors drives over to the quiet home of his mother to bid her —

Goodbye!

May be for the last time —

And on the plaza a multitude of some sixty thousand people, amid hand-clapping, shouts its impatience. The orchestra in gayful tunes begins to play the opening official march and the matadors make their appearance in the arena.

During the parade the picador Baronita appears in full splendour, mounted on his white horse, and throws a stealthy glance in the direction where the queens are seated.

The belles of the city in expensive lace under the refreshing breeze of fans, and open coquetry, are filling the 'Royal' box seats.

Baronita manages to locate the queen of his inflamed heart and give her his 'killing' glance.

And as in the traditional *Carmen* the eyes of the matadors meet the dark eyes of the beautiful queens and as a tradition dictates, this glance kindles the flame of valour in the matadors' eyes.

The sixty thousand attendants release an *Ah!* of wonder the moment the bull runs out into the ring. The very famous David Liceaga displays all the beauty and elegance of the art of the matador.

Full of grace and valour he dances his 'dance' on the margin of death and triumph.

He does not stir from his place even when the bull's horns come within a hair's breadth of his body; he does not tremble, but smiles serene, and to top it all he pets the sharp horns of the animal and this provokes an endless savage outburst of delight from the crowd.

But the bull, enraged by the teasing of Liceaga knocks down the horse of the infatuated Baronita.

And he is forced disgracefully to jump the enclosure under the roars of derisive laughter from the crowd.

Notwithstanding all this, his love remains true to him — she gives him the high sign of the feasibility of their rendezvous.

In the meantime, in the town square, fairs and market-places, a crowd of many thousands are contemplating the ritual ceremonial dances of Indians dressed up in gilded brocade, ostrich feathers and huge masks.

Under the peals of the ancient Spanish church bells, under the sound of music and the rolling of beating drums, the thunder of exploding sky rockets, the feast flourishes. Under the roar of the exalted crowd, at the other place, the killed bull is taken away from the grounds.

A maelstrom of hats and unabating ovations accompany the triumphant exit of the valiant matador.

Baronita has now met his 'queen'. Wrapped up in one cloak, the pair of lovers make their way through the narrow Spanish alleys to the landing of the boats adorned with flowers.

Their boat sails by the floating gardens along the dreamland canals of Xochimilco, the so-called Venice of Mexico.

In the shade of an awning under the sound of guitars and marimbas the pair of lovers will forget their troubles.

But trouble does not forget them.

The wife catches sight of her husband; the pair hide behind the curtain and a swift change of their course saves them from a tragic look.

The husband is furious, he is raving, because he can find no trace of his wife. A mad pursuit among the moving maze of flower-covered floating temples of love. . . .

The boat of the amorous pair passes under his very



The matador.



'Full of grace and valour the matador dances his "dance" on the margin of death and triumph.'

nose and disappears among hundreds of other festively adorned boats.

In a retired nook of a remote canal the 'Ship of Love' lands. Baronita conducts his forbidden love to the summit of a mountain, to a big stone crucifix, where they watch the sunset and exchange kisses.

In their moment of utmost bliss they are surprised by the husband. He draws his Spanish fancy-made pistol. He is ready to discharge it. And by pure miracle Baronita escapes the avenging hand. . . .

The final song of the great feast ends the day.

Happy, romantic, is the finale of the story about this ancient and beautiful Spanish holiday.

Fourth Novel: Soldadera

The background of this story is the tumultuous canvas of uninterrupted movements of armies, battles and military trains which followed the revolution of 1910 until peace and the new order of modern Mexico were established.

Deserts, woods, mountains and the Pacific Coast at Acapulco, and Cuautla, Morelos, are the landscapes of this story.

Persons:

1. Pancha, the woman who follows the soldier — the Soldadera
2. Juan, Pancha's soldier
3. The sentinel, Pancha's second soldier
4. Pancha's child
5. The Army in march and fight
6. Hundreds of soldaderas, wives of the soldiers, following the armies

Soldadera

Yells, shouts, general havoc seem to reign in the small Mexican village.

At first one gets bewildered, one cannot understand what is going on — women are catching hens, pigs, turkeys; women are hastily seizing tortillas and chile in the houses.

Women wrangling, fighting, shouting at each other. . . .

What is up?

These are soldiers' wives, 'soldaderas', forerunners of the army, who have invaded the village.

Those are the 'soldaderas' getting provisions to feed their weary husbands.

One of them is Pancha; a machine-gun ribbon hangs

across her shoulder, a big sack containing household utensils weighs heavily on her back. . . .

Having caught a chicken and voiced her snappish retort to the protests of its owner, she finds a convenient place for the day's quarters.

The soldaderas are breaking camp by the bridge on the bank of the river, they are getting their brimstones — *metates* — out of their sacks, are husking corn, kindling fires, and the clapping of their palms, patting tortillas into shape, seems to announce peace.

A little girl is crying and to console her, the mother, for lack of candy, gives her a cartridge.

The child sucks at the dum-dum bullet and rejoices over the glistening toy.

The weary army enters the village and the soldiers in ravenous anticipation inhale the smoke of the bonfires.

Clarions sound the call to 'rest'.

Artillery soldiers release the donkeys and mules from the dust-covered machine-gun carriages; the women are looking for their men.

Pancha finds her soldier, Juan.

She treats him to a roast chicken and hot tortillas.

Supper over, Juan rests his head in Pancha's lap and hums the tune the guitars are playing.

Adelita is the name of the song and this song is the *leitmotif* of the 'Soldadera'.

When overcome by exhaustion he falls asleep and his stentorian snoring joins in the general snoring chorus of sleeping soldiers.

Pancha washes his shirt — and cleans his gun.

At dawn, while the echo of the desert still reverberates with the soldiers' snoring, Pancha places five or six cartridges in Juan's gun and puts the gun by his side.

She packs her household belongings in her big sack and lifting it to her back she joins the crowd of women setting out on their endless pilgrimage.

Faint under their heavy loads, trying to calm the crying children, munching the tortillas left over from breakfast, the crowd of women runs along the dusty, deserted road.

Suddenly the loud voice of the author calls to Pancha:
— Say, 'Soldadera'. . . .

Pancha stops, turns her head toward the camera, first she just stares; then, pointing her finger to her breast, she inquires silently: 'Did he call her?' The Voice, again:

'Where art thou going, woman?'

She turns pensive, smiles enigmatically, shrugs her shoulders, as if ignorant of what to answer, parts her hands in the broad gesture women are apt to make when saying:

— 'Who knows?' (*Quien sabe . . . ?*)

She is borne onwards by the strong current of women and gets lost in the big moving mass of humanity and in the dust that veils everything from the human eye.

Machine-guns are roaring.

The clatter of cavalry is heard.

A battle is raging.

Juan is fighting like all the rest of the soldiers.

He discharges his gun.

Shouts . . . '*ora . . . arriba . . . Adelante*' . . .

Rushes into attack amidst bursting shells.

Under the cars of a freight train the 'soldadera' are praying for their fighting men.

They have suspended their 'Santos' — the holy images of their dearest devotion — from the car wheel and placed their little votive lamps on the springs of the car axle.

The machine-guns are silent.

The shooting abates.

The soldiers' shouts are no longer heard.

The soldaderas go to the head of the train, to the

engine, and hence they look in the direction of the ending battle.

The soldaderas rush up to meet them, scrutinize their faces.

Question . . . ! 'Have you seen mine?'

The excited Pancha is looking for Juan.

Here they bring him wounded.

Pancha runs up to him.

Uncovers his face . . .

No, that is not he . . .

The soldaderas bandage up wounds, treat them to the best of their knowledge. Apply tortillas to the wounds and fasten them with willow fibres.

Juan is safe and sound but worn out, and he must get into the car of his troop for the officers and engines are blowing the whistles for departure.

Having seen him board the train, Pancha gets on the engine platform.

The angry voice of the sentinel calls to her.

'What have you there under your shawl?'

And lifting her rebozo, Pancha answers quietly:

'Who knows, senor, it may be a girl or it may be a boy. . . .'

The troops start off noisily. In the packed cars the soldiers are singing *Adelita!* And on the roofs, the soldaderas with their kitchens and children are squatted like crows.

They have kindled bonfires on the iron roofs and the patting of palms making tortillas seems to compete with the rattling of the car wheels.

The military train vanishes into the dark of night.

At daybreak the soot-covered stoker leaps from car to car of the train in motion — jumps among the wandering women and children.

On one of the cars he drops flat on his belly and shouts through the open door. . . .

In answer to his call Juan, aided by his comrades, climbs up to the roof.

The rattling of the train drowns the words of the message the stoker has brought to Juan.

They run fast to the engine, frightening the sprawled women and on reaching their destination, they climb to the front platform.

Under the clothes hung out in the lanterns to dry, under soldiers' underwear waved by the wind, near the blazing bonfire, Pancha is sitting with her new-born baby.

And the same cross guard seated close by, near a machine-gun, asks Pancha:

'Is it a girl or a boy?'

Among the mountains in the clouds, puffing with effort on the steep stretches of the road, the military train is advancing.

Another battle . . . !

Again the racket of machine-guns . . .

Again the soldaderas are awaiting the returning wounded soldiers . . .

This time Juan does not come back.

And when the fight is over amidst its smoking ruins Pancha finds the body of her husband . . .

She gathers a pile of rocks, makes him a primitive tombstone, weaves him a cross of reeds . . .

She takes his gun, his cartridge belt, his baby, and follows the slowly advancing, tired army.

Her legs can hardly support her body, heavy under the burden of grief and weariness.

And then the same cross soldier walks up to her and takes the baby from her.

Pancha leans on the strong arm of her new husband in order not to fall and not to lag behind the army.

Adelita is the tune the tired bands are playing, falsely and out of rhythm.

The army has prepared for an attack, but the people from the city come up and explain.

The civil war is over.

Revolution has triumphed.

There is no need now of Mexicans fighting Mexicans.

The brass band discovers a new source of strength that enables it to play *Adelita* stoutly, solemnly and triumphantly.

Like peals of thunder roll the triumphant shouts above the heads of the soldiers.

The armies are fraternizing.

One might decipher on the banner — the last word of its device.

Towards Revolution.

Towards a New Life . . . says the voice of the author.

Towards a New Life! . . .

Epilogue

Time and location — modern Mexico.

Mexico of today on the ways of peace, prosperity and civilization.

Factories, railroads, harbours with enormous boats; Chapultepec, castle, parks, museums, schools, sports-grounds.

The people of today.

Leaders of the country.

Generals.

Engineers.

Aviators.

Builders of new Mexico.

and

Children — the future people of future Mexico.

The work of factories.

The hissing of aeroplane propellers.

The whistles of work-plants.

Modern . . . Civilized . . . Industrial Mexico appears on the screen.

Highways, dams, railways . . .

The bustle of a big city.

New machinery.

New houses.

New people.

Aviators.

Chauffeurs.

Engineers.

Officers.

Technicians.

Students.

Agriculture experts.

And the Nation's leaders, the President, generals, secretaries of State Departments. Life, activity, work of new, energetic people . . . but if you look closer, you will



‘Death comes along dancing.’



‘... many deaths ...’

behold in the land and in the cities the same faces —

Faces that bear close resemblance to those who held funeral of antiquity in Yucatan, those who danced in Tehuantepec; those who sang the Alabado behind the tall walls, those who danced in queer costumes around the temples, those who fought and died in the battles of revolution.

The same faces —

but different people.

A different country,

A new, civilized nation.

But, what is that?

After the bustle of factory machines.

After the parading of modern troops.

After the President's speeches and the generals' commands —

Death comes along dancing!

Not just one, but many deaths; many skulls, skeletons . . .

What is that?

That is the Carnival pageant.

The most original, traditional pageant, 'Calavera', death day.

This is a remarkable Mexican day, when Mexicans recall the past and show their contempt of death.

The film began with the realm of death.

With victory of life over death, over the influences of the past, the film ends.

Life brims from under the cardboard skeletons, life gushes forth, and death retreats, fades away.

A gay little Indian carefully removes his death-mask and smiles a contagious smile — he impersonates the new growing Mexico.



' . . . many skulls . . . '



The unity of death and life.

TRENT UNIVERSITY



0 1164 0433605 3

