

# **The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico Study Guide**

**The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico  
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# Contents

<a href="#">The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 1 The Pachuco and Other Extremes.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 2 Mexican Masks.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">The Day of the Dead.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 4 The Sons of La Malinche.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 5 The Conquest of Colonialism.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 6 From Independence to the Revolution.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 7.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 8.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 9.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>

# Plot Summary

Nations experience transformation in the same way that individuals mature. We all tend to perceive ourselves as unique until we begin to question our existence and come to the realization that one faces the world alone. Nations search for their identity and their existence in relation to other nations.

The Mexican character is unique. It is best examined in the United States because it fostered certain symbolic expressions that can be best identified when compared with other groups and nationalities. There are no group or nationality like Mexicans who are neither Indians, nor Black people nor Americans. Through their rebellious nature they display their apparent disinclination to adapt. They exhibit a sense of restlessness, tendency to exaggerate, ridicule, and form gangs. They seek solitude when they become detached from their roots. They are drawn towards self-destruction, persecution, and redemption. In this way they can be more noticeable.

In Mexico they hide behind formalism, closed forms, modesty, and values. They see women through in their own way to realize their own desires. Hence women are best suited when passive because mobility can make them dangerous. In the conquest of love they escape under the disguise of the mask they create that forges a certain pose. Through nihilism they deny their existence but also the existence of those who oppress them.

Fiestas are a way to escape, but it is also the only time when Mexicans open up, engaging in joy and violence. They are to attract life and health but chaos pervades, uniting through formlessness when everything seems to merge. Fiestas allow for the rejection of impediments and individualities. Fiestas can celebrate death viewed according to Aztec beliefs as a transition in a cyclical stages of life. Mexicans celebrate death that, like life, has no meaning for them.

Mexicans are connected with their past. They work in a different way as they want to be engaged in each element of production. They are shaped by the colonial period in a society divided into those who inflict suffering and those who suffer. Personal strength that is part of personalities and wealth is still influential. Violations from the colonial period are still present in seeing foreign influences as dangerous, as it occurred with Dona Malinche who was seduced and abandoned by Cortes. Both Spanish and Indian traditions are denied. Breaking up with Indian and Spanish identity leads to nihilism. In this way, both the oppressed and the oppressor cease to exist.

Ancient beliefs and customs that have been retained are part of the Aztec civilization that integrated other cultures in the same way that Greeks absorbed cultures during the Hellenic period. Older cultures became liberated with the arrival of the Spanish conquerors when they forged alliances with them. It led to the division of the Aztec society and their surrender. The quick conquest brought cultural gains but also the quest for power and feudalism. The colonial period, despite its horrors, allowed for



participation of all. It had to end as it stifled commerce, personal expression, and adventure.

To progress, Mexico had to free itself from Spanish ties. The revolution that was to achieve this lacked meaning and ideas. Mexico separated from Spain without its own transformation while retaining some old static societies. Agrarian revolution was achieved, and slavery became abolished. Some progress was achieved under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, but not as the result of industrialism. The Revolution failed to be fully realized as some conservatism remained along with the lack of vision. It allowed, however, for the national recognition.

Philosophers and intellectuals tried to examine the Revolution. They failed to use analysis and judgement despite their broader significance in Mexico as compared to Europe or the United States. They examined the true Mexican nature, the Diaz regime, and formulated what makes a good writing. Overall, the Revolution allowed for self-discovery realizing that Mexico despite its isolation needs to participate in the universal history.

Despite the Revolutionary achievements some parts of society continue to suffer poverty. There is insufficient economic progress, and corruption. Neither socialism nor capitalism provided all answers to Mexican problems; Mexico needs to resolve them on its own without the inhibitions of pretense.

Solitude and love face similar challenges in modern society that opposes love through morals, laws, classes, or races. Both men and women face inhibitions in their choices through social constraints. Solitude is considered to be a punishment, but ancient societies regarded it as purification and preparation for the next stage of life. The labyrinth symbolizes solitary journey in search of answers to restore health and meaning. Our search for meaning can be obscured by rationality that can create horrors. Reason can inhibit our vision.



# Chapter I The Pachuco and Other Extremes

## Chapter I The Pachuco and Other Extremes Summary and Analysis

Nations experience transformation in the same way that individuals mature. We all tend to perceive ourselves as unique until we begin to question our existence and come to the realization that one faces the world alone. Nations search for their identity and their existence in relation to other nations.

Mexican character evolves along with changes that occur in Mexico since the Spanish conquest that marks its origin, colonization, and liberation. Just as individuals develop their own sense of self, nations become aware of their distinctive character when they mature. Mexicans realize their uniqueness that has been shaped by their specific historical circumstances. This self-discovery provokes questions about their relationship with other countries, along with their own position among other nations. Their character is apparent in their unique art. At the same time, it becomes obvious that this uniqueness makes them isolated. All individuals attain a certain stage in their development when they realize that they face the world alone, as they are responsible for making their own decisions.

Mexico originates through the Spanish conquest of the indigenous Indian population. Following the conquest the Spanish invaders often mixed with the Indian population, creating a race of Mestizos. There are still many diverse nationalities in Mexico living at different historical levels. Only Mexicans remain active among these nationalities, who although they adopted both Spanish and Aztec cultural elements, deny these roots.

Their specific uniqueness is even more apparent in the United States because their behavior and style cannot be compared to any other groups while they also develop certain symbolic aspects of their presence there. They are known to exaggerate through their particular clothing style. This fashion has been sparked by their propensity to rebel. They ridicule and become persecuted as they oppose the outside world. Without their tradition they become isolated, solitary, and defy everything around them. Their rebellion allows them to become victims that become noticeable.

Mexicans create a certain atmosphere in the United States through their behavior. They seem to lose their spirit and become restless, making an impression of certain sleepiness. In this way they separate from other Mexicans. This particular group that neither conforms to Mexican nor American life is called Pachucos and rebels through forming gangs that also allow them to maintain their own characteristics. Their fashion differs from North American fashion. Mexicans seek art in fashion while North Americans seek comfort and aesthetic.



The longer Mexicans live in the United States the more they notice differences that exist between them and Americans. Especially certain deeper meanings become apparent, such as the meanings associated with names of flowers or animals. Different associations with certain meanings can make communication with non-Mexican people ambiguous. They realize that referring to certain lost meanings leads to sentimentalism that can only be avoided if they withdraw from contacts with other Mexicans. When they become solitary, however, their differences also become more apparent, along with a particular way they experience their solitude. Mexican solitude involves certain separation or suspension. They feel removed and forgotten, seeking refuge either in silence, pray or sleep. North Americans experience solitude differently as they created around them a more technical abstract world, seeking relational similarities that reflects them experiencing being lost.

Apart from economic differences between Mexicans and North Americans there are also differences that pertain to their national characteristics. North Americans behave in a more confident, self-assured and happy manner. They are critical yet more adjusted to the outside world. Mexicans tend to be more revolutionary, adopting approaches to correct or improve the manner in which something is done. The apparent economic differences between Mexicans and North Americans are insufficient to define their different characteristics. Unlike Mexicans, North Americans retain their cultural structures, changing only procedures while preserving the same ideals. They tend to use reality rather than know it. Mexicans perceive reality in a pessimistic way. Even Nietzsche's view that women have illusions while men have ideals fails to be realized in practice.

Mexicans are influenced by the Aztec cult of death, being drawn towards self-destruction. They retain certain aspects of Aztec philosophy, incorporating filth and purity as part of life but recognizing also other religious feelings. They contemplate horror and fantasize. They lie in a way that is inventive but are nihilistic in nature. North Americans are more optimistic, lying through replacing truth. They strive to understand and trust. Mexicans tend to contemplate while they are suspicious. North Americans are more active, expressing their vitality in action as well as self-assurance. Mexicans are more quiet but can express a more vigorous joy during fiestas. These behaviors may be driven by the North American inclination to perfect the world while Mexicans want to redeem it. Spanish attitudes lack complacency, allowing for hope and transcendence.

The North American system of beliefs adopts certain formulas that provide solutions but can be limiting and lacking spontaneity. Breaking rules is insufficient to achieve the flux of life. Both Mexicans and Americans fail to achieve harmony with the universe.



# Chapter 2 Mexican Masks

## Chapter 2 Mexican Masks Summary and Analysis

Mexican people view the world around them as dangerous. The hostility of their environment and their history teach them to protect themselves. They display suspicion and distrust, closing themselves through defense using words, silence, politeness, resignation, and irony. Such attitude is also apparent in the language full of metaphors, allusions, and phrases. They are afraid of exposing themselves. In their behavior they display certain gestures to create poses that hide what they really think. These masks serve them as defense while at the same time provide separation from their reality. For them life is a combat. Various aspects of their world have been imposed upon them, such as when invaders tried to instill their values and beliefs upon Indian people. Despite their defensive attitudes they tend to surrender through resignation. They struggle individually with views and beliefs imposed upon them and admire fortitude.

Mexicans try to create an orderly world. In this way they like certain forms and values even though some were enforced during colonization. Formalism is another way to preserve their differences as they can hide beneath certain dogmas, allowing them to remain subdued. They prefer closed forms, such as geometry in arts or sonnets in poetry. Order implies safety although it can also limit expression.

Mexicans view humans as mixtures of good and evil. They are inclined towards modesty, prudence, and certain reserve. Mexican plays reflect certain conflicts existing in society. Juan Ruiz de Alarcon shows reason deprived of passion or grace in his plays. Lope de Vega on the other hand deals with love, heroism and super human features while being disinterested in moral dilemmas.

Also the body needs to be guarded. Mexicans are not ashamed of their bodies but as it can expose an inner world it needs to be protected with modesty. In this way, fashion is more than just clothing. Mexican women are admired when prudent. Mexican men display vanity that is part of their Indian as well as Spanish heritage.

A woman is viewed as an instrument of realizing one's desires. She is perceived in a masculine way as being part of masculine will and hence she needs to be passive. When passive she can adopt values assigned by society while providing stability. Through secrecy and impassivity she can adhere to the general model. She needs to be hidden from temptation when kept at home. Therefore she is admired and expected to be passive and nice. When she is active she acquires function or a channel. Mexican culture glorifies mothers. Other cultures may idealize prostitutes and virgins.

Mexican men perceive women as open to instincts but prefer them to have no personal life so that when shaped by male vision they can fulfill masculine desires. Mexican women remain calm, only awakened by men. They represent continuity and stability to ensure order. They are to soften the relationship between men but are deprived of the



ability to express themselves as human beings. When predisposed to submission they are vulnerable. Through suffering they become invulnerable, impassive, and stoic. Active women are perceived in a negative way as they acquire the ability to inflict pain that corresponds to macho characteristics. "Mala mujer" (bad woman) is more aggressive and has the freedom to leave her partner. Through this mobility her soul changes, becoming as independent as a macho man. While Mexicans acknowledge certain duality of female nature, North Americans deny immoral parts of the psyche, which also limits spontaneity. Foreign women can be more active, attracting men. Mexican women need to be lured, displaying a mixture of hope and contempt.

Masculine homosexuality is tolerated when it involves certain violation of passivity. Love represents opening and transformation, where both parties surrender in a relationship that contains various dangers. To hide the dangers of the relationship, feelings are exaggerated. Mexicans view love as conquest, where they use feelings to possess women.

Lying is an exercise used as part of a game. When a new reality is created through improvisation a certain model or a new reality is created. Remaining hidden means remaining unchanged. It can be achieved under a mask or pretense. Such acting can deny the existence of others or can allow for remaining unnoticed. When one adopts an attitude that denies one's own existence when pretending not to be, it is also relevant to those who made them this way. In the end they all cease to exist and silence prevail.





# The Day of the Dead

## The Day of the Dead Summary and Analysis

For Mexicans, fiestas are more than celebrations. They become rituals, where various events, battles, or saints are celebrated. In fiesta de Grito the crowd is shouting for the entire one hour. Fiestas are to sharpen imagination, where various ceremonies or dances are used to energize. At the same time they are an opportunity to sell fruit and toys. Some fiestas celebrate trades or neighborhoods. Despite poverty, time and resources are spent on numerous fiestas that involve patron saints. These celebrations become the only luxuries that help people to forget about poverty. Unlike rich countries that do not find these celebrations necessary, Mexicans engage in fiestas as a way of life. During these fiestas men can open up, escape from their troubles, apathy, solitude, and silence. Both joy and violence are present during these celebrations, where men can resort to fighting. They are necessary as resources spent on them are to invite the return of good life.

Fiestas provide certain meaning to celebrations, where rules that are otherwise present disappear while chaos prevails. Anything can happen in a heightened atmosphere, where order or even a sense of one's self disappears. Different rules that govern these celebrations transform time and space as in a dream. Individuals become less important than the crowd. Such celebration can be compared to a revolt or an experiment, where everything merges in a state that is pre-social. Although chaotic such celebrations can foster social processes and life itself. Participants feel free to express themselves in any way they want, abandoning inhibitions, engaging in noise and even violence. For Mexicans it is a way of escapism that is achieved through joy and sorrow.

Mexicans are influenced by Aztec beliefs that life and death are part of a never ending cycle. Death is only the end of a cycle, where life has as little meaning as death. Both life and death are not personal. Aztecs believed in one inseparable whole, where everything merges, including the spirits of those who die. Despite this unity, people are assigned to a certain time and place, color and destiny. When space and time disconnect various spaces and time may emerge.

Aztecs believed in destiny just as we follow morality and freedom. They viewed gods as having freedom to choose, sin, and betray. Aztecs believed their gods betrayed them when they were conquered. For Christians, individuals can achieve salvation through sacrifice that is redemption. Christian religion encourages individualism and redemption, where salvation can be achieved through absolution. Sins can be erased through sacrifice. Death is a transition. For Aztecs death is regeneration, where forces are renewed during death.

According to Paz, the modern world denies the existence of death; it is absent in morality, advertising, or customs even though death is part of everything we do. Societies create hygiene, contraceptives, and drugs while they also build concentration



campes, atomic bombs, and police states. Mexicans are indifferent towards death, recognizing it in jokes and celebrations such as the Day of the Dead. Death is seen at the same time as an event that destroys and absorbs without a giver or a receiver. Death is questioned through thoughts that give it various meanings.

North American and European attitudes seem to preserve and protect lives but allow for crime that is plotted and conducted with ingenuity unknown to Mexicans. In such a world crime and crime prevention becomes efficient. Denying death leads to contempt for life as well as its denial.

For Mexicans killing has a different dimension that contains a human element. Other criminals and statesmen kill to abolish. In large cities, criminals treat killing as more of an experiment. There is no human aspect, relationship or liberating aspect in their crime. In Mexico death becomes part of poetry and drama. In Western societies individuals fear death, distancing ourselves from both death and life in the end. Both death and life need to complement each other. Mexicans express their attitude towards life in their poetry as nostalgia for death. For them life is only an invention but death is real. They engage in solitude that allows them to withdraw from life between fiestas. Unlike separation that ignites, solitude as withdrawal has purifying effects.



# Chapter 4 The Sons of La Malinche

## Chapter 4 The Sons of La Malinche Summary and Analysis

Mexicans are courteous, suspicious, and distant in a similar way that the Chinese, the Hindus, and the Arabs are. They are part of their past, representing both conquerors and conquered. They are insecure and loyal. Their hidden aspects attract and repel at the same time. Peasants fascinate because they represent ancient elements of society. Old wisdom also contains other hidden values. Women represent knowledge and mystery as they are responsible for life.

In Western societies workers lose their individuality, becoming part of the work process when becoming wage earners. Their work becomes the same as that of other men, representing functions rather than jobs. Mass production assembles units fabricated without being aware of what is created. In the same way, technicians lose knowledge of what they create. Functions become ends, where progress becomes aimless, advancing from nowhere to nowhere.

Propaganda operates in a similar way to the way mass production does where various units are assembled, disseminating incomplete truths that are then combined to make political theories. In the same way terrorism involves groups that are persecuted until everyone is affected. When groups separate from society they acquire a life of their own until they disappear.

The Mexican worker enjoys each element of work but he can also be transformed into a mass production tool. Mexicans have little understanding of themselves. They recognize their values through history and expressions, using words to express cruelty or sadism. They are weakened by suspicion, irony, and disguise. They open and become intimate only during fiestas. Their character has been shaped during the colonial period. In consequence, they wear masks to guard against traitors in a similar way that slaves, servants, and other submerged races do.

During independence the abuse of the rich people reinforced the misery of the common people that remained. Mexicans struggle with their past that is within them. They fear themselves and being themselves. Their society is divided into those who inflict suffering and those who suffer. Those who are weak follow those who are unscrupulous and strong, admiring strength, wealth and influence rather than ideas and accomplishments.

Mexicans separate themselves from foreigners calling themselves "hijos de la Chingada" where chingada symbolizes a woman that conceives when being raped rather than through love. Father in Mexican society represents power, superiority, and admiration. Masculine role is to be insensitive, powerful, and to humiliate while they suffer solitude the moment they cease being protected by their mothers.



The macho character is to confuse, destroy, using jokes and revenge. Conquistadors are still present in politicians and other rich people. At the same time, through the devotion to Christ, Mexicans celebrate the sacrifice and murder perpetrated by Cortes. They worship the Virgin of Guadalupe, who also became an Indian Virgin and shields the weak.

Corruption and violation is present in other symbols of conquest, such as La Malinche. Dona Malinche became the mistress of Cortes. She was seduced and then abandoned by him. La Malinche represents betrayal when dealing with outside world. Consequently those who are corrupted by foreign influences are called "malinchistas."

Mexico represents conflict, where both Spanish and Indian traditions are condemned. Mexicans only want to be themselves, becoming abstraction with no past and nihilistic tendencies. Breaking with tradition also leads to breaking with oneself. As Criollos, Indians, and mestizos become non-existent, they are only men.



# Chapter 5 The Conquest of Colonialism

## Chapter 5 The Conquest of Colonialism Summary and Analysis

Mexican people preserve their ancient pre-Cortesian beliefs while adopting, at the same time, Western customs. Archeological discoveries show that the Aztecs were the last culture to settle in the valley of Mexico, building a universal empire from other older societies. They were complete civilizations. The Spaniards were to create New Spain in what is today Central America and the southern parts of Mexico. Their only achievement was preventing the dispersal of the population.

Aztecs found and absorbed a large number of cities with complex and autonomous nations and cultures in the same way that Greeks absorbed other cultures during the Hellenic period. Traditions mixed and eventually integrated despite conflicts between them. At a certain period of time Aztec society started to dominate other cultures. It was an agricultural society that used maize and rituals such as a ritual calendar, ball-games, human sacrifices, and myths. At first these elements came from the South but then became adopted by the Aztec Empire that was both military and theocratic. Pre-Cortesian cities worshiped an agrarian deity Tlaloc, warriors such as Tzcatlipoca, Huitzilopochtli and Mixcoatl. New cultures dominated older who became liberated with the arrival of the Spaniards. Older cultures forged alliances with newcomers and created a split in society. This weakness of the Aztec Empire led to the surrender of Moctezuma who at first offered the Spaniards gifts. In the final struggle he committed suicide. His surrender was interpreted as the betrayal of gods. Moctezuma perceived the arrival of the Spaniards as the end of one cosmic period marked by the departure of gods. The conquest of Mexico was possible through the surrender of the Aztecs who lost their heart seeing their society divided in a way that corresponded to the duality of their gods.

The Aztecs religion was solar. Their god was the sun, the source of life. The Aztec accepted death as their gods and allies abandoned them. This surrender had a horrific impact on other Indians powerless to stop the white people and prevent them from bringing misery.

The conquest was both a private and national undertaking. Individual and monarchy interests clashed when personal greed for gold unfolded. During the invasion, tendencies existing in Spain, such as quest for power, feudalism, the Church and absolute monarchy were also present. Conquistadors were adventurers rather than invaders, bringing medieval institutions. The Spanish tradition is free of cast system and open to universality with French and Italian influences containing the elements of liberty clashing with passive features.

The artificial New Spain was for a short period more successful than the conquests of other nations. Complexity, perfection, and speed was achieved with certain coherent



inflexibility driven by a single will. Catholic religion was spread at the time when it started losing its significance in Europe. New beliefs failed to be understood while Catholicism's lack of creativity became only an addition to other deeply rooted indigenous beliefs that were preserved.

When Baroque reached its heights in Spain, Sor Juana was a Mexican writer who attempted to reconcile tendencies and ideas. She was a nun interested in knowledge, ancient mythology, and philosophy. She was not critical of knowledge and intellectual pursuits as were other Spanish writers. The intellectual life in Mexico was stifled after the 1692 uprising.

The colonial period inflicted crimes but did not negate the place of its indigenous people. It was open to participation in a cultural order while being closed to personal expression and adventure. It ended with few changes. A new era began, forging ties with European rationalism.



# Chapter 6 From Independence to the Revolution

## Chapter 6 From Independence to the Revolution Summary and Analysis

The Bourbon dynasty improved business operations through reforms and New Spain became a real colony but only an empty body. Eventually, ties with Spain were severed, and independence achieved. The modern Hispanic thinking has the Spanish and Spanish American influence characterized by independence and search for destiny. Traditional Spanish thought examines its own meaning and reality while North American thought is the future to be realized. Such dualism is especially sharp in South America, where opposition to Spanish tradition was prevalent. South American independence was driven through other movements, such as the French Revolution, but was more in tune with common people and hence was more realistic. San Martin freed half the continent while Bolivar the other half, creating states and confederations. The Spanish Empire disintegrated.

Spanish American independence lacked ideas that would express it because the groups that created it belonged to the native aristocracy who were hindered by protectionist policies that restricted development. Spanish bureaucracy was unable to change social colonial structures. Unlike North America, where the transformation of the entire nation took place, in Mexico only a break up with Spain occurred. Due to lack of new social forces, modern society could not be created. The fragments of old static societies remained. National South American traits were formed later creating only vague differences in the nine republics. Modern societies never fully emerged. In Mexico, independent struggle was to fight the abuses of the Spanish bureaucracy and native land holders. Hidalgo abolished slavery. Morelos achieved breaking up with the great estates. It was also an agrarian revolution. The defeated great landowners seized power themselves and broke ties with Spain.

The liberals tried to create a bourgeoisie, creating legislation based on the US model. While this struggle continued, the US invaded Mexico and took half of its territory. In 1857, Mexico adopted a liberal constitutional charter. After dictator Santa Ana was overthrown during the popular revolution, Napoleon III installed Maximilian who was executed by Benito Juarez. The revolution broke ties with the past, along with the Church and colonialism, but promoted return to native beliefs and atheism. The liberal ideals remained empty, lacked social basis and meaning, and accentuating feudalism.

During the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, who believed in progress and science as part of positivism, a civilized class among the Mexican aristocracy emerged. This class was formed through acquiring Church properties rather than industrialism. Positivism in a country with no industry could not thrive. Consequently the Diaz regime was expelled. The Reform movement was completed through breaking links with the past. At the end



of the nineteenth century, another period of discord occurred when Mexican nature failed to be expressed. At the same time Mexico had difficult relationships with other countries. Its dialogue with the US was marked either by force or business while being full of useless dogmas when trying to establish relationships with other South American countries. Mexico tried to imitate France, which disregarded it, remaining ultimately alone. Breaking up with the colonial past meant rejecting religious dogmas while accepting science and reason.

The Revolution demanded truth and honesty from the government. It preceded the Russian revolution and hence it had nothing in common with it. It lacked ideology, theories, and experience that would justify the fight.

There were limited external influences on the Mexican Revolution that are apparent in various political movements, such as conceding to English capital or protection given to the President of Nicaragua.

Dias ended communal ownership of the land that was part of the Laws of the Indies, where land was assigned to a community. Emiliano Zapata wanted to reform legislation, eliminate feudalism, change agrarian policies and distribute the land.

Revolutions are to repair certain violations by the oppressor. According to Marx, revolution tries to free man from the old regime so that he can realize himself. Zapata created a movement that was to integrate past and present, which clashed with the Villista movement. In the end the Carrancistas restored Caesarism or the personality cult. The Constitution of 1917 was proclaimed, along with the adoption of a modified liberal program that forged the division of powers and federalism. Due to lack of meaning, the progress has been erratic. The ruling class had to collaborate with foreign powers and classes such as bankers who now have the ability to take over the government. Mexicans become isolated rejecting external help or ideas, moving in an unknown direction. Through the Revolutionary fiesta they can recognize themselves as Mexicans.





# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Mexican culture is complex, searching for its identity through the discovery of its meaning. Vasconcelos, a Mexican philosopher who founded modern Mexican education, understood action and participation, arguing for education to be secular and traditional. He opposed liberal and positivist movements. He proposed socialistic education creating conflict between old and new structures. As Spaniards permitted various types of ownership, communal ownership remained, provoking other dilemmas over its legitimacy. Contemporary writing endeavored to tackle indigenous themes, colonial issues, and the Revolution. The connection with the Spanish heritage became obvious when returning to tradition while newness and futurity were embraced through a certain free spirit.

When the Revolution was over, intellectuals undertook to improve law and education, but failed in their analysis and judgement. Intellectuals in Mexico have a more political role than intellectuals in Europe or the United States where they act outside their governments. The intelligentsia provided effective assistance but failed to realize certain ideals because of government corruption. Some intelligentsia embraced Marxism while others engaged in discovering true Mexican characteristics.

While Ramos formed the image of a Mexican as inaccessible, isolated, and hiding behind a mask, Jorge Cuesta thought Mexico had no past, denying the colonial tradition and choosing the universal values of French rationalism. Mexican poetry, as well as art, is Romantic or national as it is ruled by universal concepts. They reflect Mexican desire for self-knowledge. Cosío Villegas examined the Díaz regime and Mexican situation in his book "American Extremes." José Gaos inspired with his philosophy while Alfonso Reyes provided lessons in clarity and thinking through his use of language and expression. According to Reyes, a writer should use words skillfully, clarifying and purifying them. Words should be used as tools of thinking rather than cover. Writing involves faith and is subject to moral and historical criticism. Literary style is a way of thinking, where a writer fosters communication in a world in which the direct means of communication are broken down. The Mexican writer has an obligation to express Mexican nature, recreating language as Mexican while remaining Spanish. Reyes examined Mexican character as involving extremes and instability as well as Mexican attitude towards language. Spanish forms imposed onto the diverse creations of previous societies unified, as did Catholic religion, allowing for the participation of all members of society.

Catholicism offered escape for Indians, while liberalism produced utopia and abstraction. The Revolution led to self-discovery and assimilation of tradition. Mexican philosophy lacks solutions to conflicts perpetrated by hidden meanings in the Mexican character. It has been mostly adopted from Europe. Mexican history had little influence on the rest of the world. Mexicans as individuals seek their own solutions in America,

where the European spirit can realize itself. Mexican reality is unique. It needs to be examined as existing in isolation but becoming universal. The Revolution failed to resolve all the issues facing Mexico.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

The Mexican revolution was the first revolution of the twentieth century but failed to create order in a just and free society. It was to transform Mexico into a modern society, accomplishing what took a hundred years of proletarian struggle in Europe and the United States. While Western countries became modernized in a natural way, Mexico achieved the end of feudalism through the redistribution of lands, irrigation, and agrarian projects.

Despite these achievements, the rural population continues to suffer poverty. Insufficient economic progress, overpopulation, underemployment, and insufficient resources contribute to other difficulties in Mexico. New institutions and new bourgeoisie emerged, strengthening the middle class that began to replace revolutionaries and industrialists. As corrupt leaders are overthrown, the conflict between nationalism and imperialism continues while national capitalism emerges. Partial state direction and economic intervention allows Mexico to be the fastest in progress among other Latin American countries despite lacking lucrative industries. Mexico still lacks industries and infrastructure, relying mostly on tourism. It produces raw materials and depends on the fluctuations of the world markets and the influence of the Northern American capital.

Lack of capital precludes financing development. Low prices of natural resources are subject to economic laws, contributing to the inability to foster higher incomes. The US economic advisors propose private investment, but it can foster economic dependence and political interference. Capitalism can also inhibit economic development. The only solution is public capital investment. Mexican policy severs the relationships with other Latin American countries. Joining other Latin American, Asian or African countries with similar problems would benefit Mexico that attempts to use its own devices to overcome its problems despite difficulties, being concerned that rich countries prefer to deal with space exploration than issues affecting the Earth.

Both capitalism and socialism failed to deliver on their ideals. The Soviet Union, the only US rival, produced totalitarian socialism that deprives people of freedom. Capitalism failed to redistribute resources after achieving abundance, as rich classes refuse to give away their gains.

Socialist theories failed in practice. The adopted processes that fostered the rise of fascism resembled an orchestrated overthrow of governments rather than revolution. Hungarian and Spanish revolutions were suppressed. World tendencies involve the rising of workers who oppose imperialism to create better conditions for themselves. The movements in Indonesia, Venezuela, Egypt, Cuba, Ghana and Latin America reflect this trend. Most of the present leaders, such as Cardenas, Tito or Nasser foster personality cult through messianic formulas combined with democracy and revolution. In Mexico the lack of ideology prevented the rise of terrorism and exercise of power. Lack

of analysis of European revolutions preclude from understanding it as a world-wide phenomena. Trotsky thought that socialism would spread or would need to be revised otherwise.

Mexico has similar problems as in the past despite ending feudalism. It is unable to link liberty and order. Mexicans need to resolve their issues themselves as ideas adopted from Europe or the United States fail to deliver appropriate solutions. They can only achieve that if they face reality without the disguise of their masks.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

All human beings experience solitude throughout their lives when dealing with separation, loss, and abandonment. Solitude involves escapism and insight into the condition that everyone tries to avoid. Just as love involves longing, solitude is regarded as suffering. There is punishment as well as promise of its end inherent in such condition. Both solitude and love are to provide more life. Escaping the solitude of birth and death is challenging as circumstances continually compel us towards it at the same time. In the same way, we are pulled away from love through our social existence, time, reason, and habits.

Society opposes love through morals, classes, laws, and races. As women are treated as instruments or in the way prescribed to them, love tends to be not natural. The Christian concept of sin and social disapproval made love impossible because of the inability to choose freely between individuals who are part of destiny and discovery. When free choice in love is prevented it results in the violation of social norms and laws. Love liberates because it allows for freedom and transformation. Women who bear masculine images imposed upon them have to free themselves from these images to be themselves.

Men also have inhibitions when choosing love. They experience desires and frustrations through social, moral and hygienic prohibitions. To choose their partners, men are forced to adhere to popular concepts choosing their partners from the same race, culture, or class. They fear to confess that they do not love the women they marry. Often they are married to women who are not their own selves. Society fails to acknowledge that love is the necessary part of conceiving children. Instead it identifies love with marriage. It also fails to recognize that marriage is not an ideal realization of love but a social form that is different from love. Marriage reproduces the same society but love is naturally antisocial. Love breaks up a marriage if it succeeds, transforming it into a separate world that is made by two individuals who reject time, social lies, and work.

Society punishes love. It makes love confusing, forbidden, absurd, and abnormal. Hence love is often exposed through scandal, crime, or a poem and often persecuted. Prostitution is perceived as either blessing or necessary evil. A prostitute is regarded as a caricature or a victim of love. Such social restrictions compel towards divorce. With choice restriction, divorce becomes imminent. If choice was free in love, divorce, prostitution, and adultery would disappear. While modern eroticism condemns love, crime is encouraged.

Society is unable to justify appetites, denying instincts, and creating division through the concept of good and evil. It enforces various views through social norms while suppressing its shortcomings. Society denies solitude, contradictions, and exceptions. It expects all to adhere to expectations placed upon individuals.



Love can lead to a deeper examination of oneself in the same way that different environments allow for realization through solitude or re-creation. We all face solitude through departures and separations. These states also allow for overcoming of these conditions. Solitude is eventually broken through reunion.

Children break solitude with their birth. They begin their interaction with the outside world that ends when they die. They acquire language to resolve their solitude when dealing with their realities. When we achieve self-awareness during adolescence, we realize that we face the world alone. Adolescence involves extreme self-consciousness that can be transcended by self-forgetfulness and self-surrender. Hence solitude is associated with romances, sacrifices, and heroism. Solitude leads to opening, action, love, and vision. It can be present even when one is surrounded by people. Solitude represents the continuing search for communion even when we enter the world of facts when becoming adults.

Solitude should not be present in our adulthood as it tends to be today. It represents entering another world when breaking up with the old world. It was experienced in this way by

Buddha, St. Paul, Mahomet, and Machiavelli. Withdrawal and return occurred in the history of all people. Archaic societies viewed solitude as danger or illness. To be solitary was to be exiled or punished. Departure was equal to death.

Groups are forced to face dispersions through wars, conquests, or changes. They experience new situations when they leave their former circumstances. Individuals cannot always be part of a group that has rituals or cults. To belong to a group requires effort. Groups, however, offer a promise of a new society, such as experienced by Greeks who formed an Orphic society after dispersion. The Orphic society was to organize and link those who became separated. During such separation, as the meaning of Orphic implies, they became empty.

Solitude unveils a longing for a place of belonging that according to ancient beliefs is the center of the world. It can be a paradise or a mythical place of origin. The labyrinth has solitary and purifying aspects that can restore health or freedom when undergoing such experience. Ancient beliefs claim that men were expelled from the center of the universe where time was one with both future and presence contained in unity. The chronometric time that we have to adhere to fails to correspond to the flow of reality. Mythological time involves the existence of other times.

Fiestas destroy chronometric time just as the Aztecs assigned space to time while reinstating presence. The imposed time that is relative can be broken down through participation and allow for entering the real mythical time. Our perceptions are obscured by our rationality that can experience. Rationality may obscure our vision that can lead to horrific experiences. Reason may be responsible for experiencing nightmares, and perhaps we need to realize our visions, as what all men ultimately long for is the realization of freedom.



# Characters

## Emiliano Zapata

Emiliano Zapata was the leader of the Revolution who became a hero. He formulated a program that contained a few ideas that allowed for breaking the hindering ties. The Plan of Ayala contained Articles such as those that called for the distribution of the land, demanded change in policy that dealt with agrarian properties, leading to the building of modern Mexico. He envisaged the end of feudalism, where legislation should be construed according to the existing Mexican realities.

His Plan of Ayala envisaged that the land restitution had to be legally binding. The recipients of lands are to receive also titles to these lands. All peasants and villages that had no titles were to benefit from extending the traditional system.

His movement was to repair Mexican history along with its meaning as a nation. It differed considerably from the liberal program. According to Zapata, Mexico was not a future that was to be realized but more a return to its origins. The only basis of Mexican institutions was returning to the roots. In this way the Revolution was different from other revolutions.

Zapatistas made *calpulli*—a communal ownership of land—the base of economic and social structure. In this way they saved an important part of the colonial tradition. They asserted that the valid political construction need to be based on ancient part of existence such as the indigenous past.

His traditional views showed that he was aware of Mexican history. In his isolation from other contemporary journalists or theorists allowed for a position of strength, where he was able to understand certain simple truths. The truth of the Revolution was to free the Mexican reality from the constraints of liberalism as well as the abusive powers of conservatives and neoconservatives.

The Zapatista proposed returning to the ancient and hence permanent tradition. In this way it denied the Reform but it called for the return to the roots that other liberals wanted to separate themselves from. His ideas were to integrate present and past to make it a living thing. The intellectuals of that time were unable to understand the full meaning of the revolutionary movement.

His movement as well as a similar Villista movement were part of an organic plan that was experienced but not thought out.

## Porfirio Diaz

Porfirio Diaz was a dictator who believed in progress, science and free enterprise. He shared the same ideals as the European bourgeoisie. His regime was to be the



successor of liberalism and followed the ideas of the 1857 Constitution. Some thought that Diaz would direct the country towards transformation from feudalism. In the end his regime only followed colonial feudalism, where land ownership was in a few hands allowing for the growth of land owners. It inhibited progress, laws, and science reinforcing the past. It had to lead to rebellion.

Diaz's dictatorship needed to adopt positivist ideas. In this way liberal thought dominated along with other inspiring ideas. In the era of peace a philosophy or order needed to be adopted that was derived from Comte, Spencer, and Darwin. The equality of men was substituted with the struggle for existence along with the survival of the fittest. Such positivism followed European bourgeois in a more natural manner. Diaz and his regime adopted positivist philosophy in a way that did not allow for critical stance, forging certain dependence. The relationship with ideas was hindered while ideas were never fully embraced. In this way it produced flaws. Although the regime had little in common with these ideas it tried to adopt them, despite differences between European and Mexican land owners. In Mexico there was no heavy industry or free intellectual activity. The Diaz dictatorship managed to finalize what the Reform movement intended to do. The positivist movement allowed for breaking with the past but it exposed liberalism as empty. Diaz had to adjust positivist ideas with considerable changes that ultimately misconstrued them. In the end, due to these misconceptions, the Diaz regime was expelled. The Diaz regime included mostly elderly men who wanted to hold on to their power. His government used the mask of liberalism to implement power rather than rule in a constructive way.

Diaz allowed for the development of the Revolution. He followed the plan of Lerdo de Tejada and other conservatives to allow the influence of European capitalism rather than that of the United States. This led to US resentment. He also offered protection to the Nicaraguan President while refusing to allow the US fleet to remain in Magdalena Bay.

Strikes and the peasant uprising that occurred during the Diaz dictatorship led to the lessening of his popularity. His regime was criticized by Antonio Caso and Jose Vasconcelos. The philosophy of the Diaz regime was in the end destroyed by Caso, although he offered no new reforms.

## **Justo Sierra**

Justo Sierra wrote a meditation on Mexican history. He understood the limitations of rigid Catholicism and impositions of the official philosophy. He thought of Mexico as an independent reality that advances through time towards the future. Mexican history, though, was full of meaning and direction. He conceived the philosophy of history as a certain direction among the lack of ideas. He was also the founder of the National University. Without the past, this institution was to be freed from the colonial era. He was critical of liberal and positivist ideas while also rejecting religious dogmas. The only hope for mankind was science and reason. Sierra regarded them as tools that should be utilized by nations. He denied truth as a given fact contrary to the metaphysical





rationalism. According to Sierra, truth was part of various elements in every science that needed to be reconstructed. He thought philosophy should be included in teaching. What he intended was accomplished by other intellectuals, such as Antonio Caso, Jose Vasconcelos, Alfonso Reyes and Pedro Henriquez Urena, who discredited positivism in their criticism.

## Vasconcelos

Vasconcelos was a philosopher who was anti-intellectual. He supported intuitions, regarding emotions as the only devices that can understand material aspects. Through knowledge, reality could be perceived in its entirety. Vasconcelos construed a philosophy of the Iberoamerican race. In this way he represented an important facet in Spanish-American thought. His influence extended during his employment as Secretary of Public Education. He is regarded to be the founder of Mexican education. He followed the work of Justo Sierra, trying to instill principles that were part of Mexican tradition.

## Hernan Cortes

Hernan Cortes found a large number of cities, all part of a vast civilization, upon his arrival. He forged alliances with Aztec rivals and offered Moctezuma gifts. His accomplishments represent a certain synthesis that was followed by independence.

Cortes invaded the Aztecs, forming an empire on the remnants of indigenous culture, creating a new organism. The state was open to participation and built to endure. It established relationship with all elements as well as with the whole. Catholicism was the core of this society that also allowed for equal participation. Cortes fought in the name of his king.

## Jose Gorostiza

Jose is a Mexican poet who regards life as death without end, where one continually falls into nothingness. His poem called Muerte sin Fin expresses the examination of our existence. In a dialogue between the water and the glass he delivers a dialogue between man and the world that is also a dialogue between thought and form, where water eventually corrodes the form. He considers appearances as prison. Trees, stones and emotions are only metaphors but what is inside shapes it, providing it with form. For him the mind is also only a reflection of death. All strives towards death and hence life is also just a metaphor and invention; although death, even though it seems real, is also deceiving. In this poem, consciousness is examining itself in water that tries to imitate life being death without end.



## **Xavier Villaurrutia**

Villaurrutia regards life as "nostalgia for death," p. 62. He uses the title for his book—*Nostalgia de la Muerte*—meaning nostalgia for death. For him, death is origin. Such origin, according to ancient beliefs, is a bone and not a womb. He strives to unveil a certain meaning in death that explains temporal life. In this way he wants to arrive at the true meaning of life.

## **Molina Enriquez**

Molina Enriquez was the precursor of the Revolution. He understood the agrarian problem that Mexico faced although his ideas were disproved by other revolutionaries.

## **Antonio Caso**

Antonio Caso examine positivist philosophy, disagreeing with its official thesis. He used Boutroux's philosophy as well as Bergson's ideas. He favored intellectualism over pragmatism along with Plato, Spinoza, Hegel. He regarded himself as an idealist as far as knowledge was concerned.



# Objects/Places

## Pachuco

Pachucos are young people of Mexican origin who represent a lack of spirit, form gangs and have specific language and behavior.

## Los Angeles

A city that is inhabited by more than a million people of Mexican origin.

## Paris

Both Paris and New York experience the absence of people as remarkable, as individuals gather usually in small groups but not as a living community.

## Chingaste

Chingaste means residue in a glass in Guatemala

## Mexico

Europeans view Mexico as on the margin of universal history, where everything that is distant is strange. Mexican peasants, as peasants in other countries, represent the ancient elements of society.

## Chinuirito

In Cuba, chinquirito is a shot of alcohol.

## Chingana

In Chile, Peru and Ecuador Chingana means tavern.

## Cuauhtemoc

Cuauhtemoc means in Aztec "falling eagle." He was the Mexican chieftan.

## **Mesoamerica**

Mesoamerica included the central and southern parts of today's Mexico as well as some part of Central America. It was described as the historical area that had the following elements of all cultures: maize based agriculture, a ritual calendar, a ritual ball game, human sacrifices as well as solar and vegetation myths.

## **The Valley of Mexico**

The Valley of Mexico was where Aztecs resided; they were the last to enter this area.



# Themes

## Search for identity

Paz analyzes solitude as the search of a modern man to fill the emptiness that surrounds him. It is the search for identity that is all the more difficult for Mexicans because they close themselves off through distancing. Mexicans are both conquered and conquerors and must guard themselves against another conquest. This protection bestows solitude. Their identity is also conditioned by their environment. The natural world of Mexico that was also part of their ancient people reminds of the past, still lingering there as part of the lost world. The history of Mexico remains influential.

When Mexicans search for their identity they become powerless. The conquest that led to submission created the reality that represents taking over another man. When victims and their conquerors unite, a certain state of limbo pervades, where solitude is withdrawal. Paz describes Mexican solitude as suspension between heaven and earth. The abstract heaven corresponds to an unidentified sense of identity that pervades. Mexican solitude is influenced by history, natural forces, and the lost world. It differs from North American solitude that operates within its own world of machines and moral precepts. North Americans face the reality created by themselves. In Mexico this reality has a life of its own regardless of men.

Although Paz also concludes that man is alone everywhere, he refers to the solitude of existence, where man faces the world on its own, recognizing his own self as part of maturity, where this identity is shaped through the relationship with the world. This relationship with the world is paramount in the way one is defined. The difference in the way Mexican women see themselves is partly attributed to the way Mexican men see them. As Mexicans tend to hide behind their masks, it renders their women less expressive. They are either submissive or aggressive but treated more as tools to fulfill male desires rather than human beings of their own volition. When being more active and thus seen as aggressive, women pose a threat to men because they can leave. This manner of identification stems from the way men identify themselves, where pretense or mask implies withdrawal, hence lack of identity.

## Violence

Violence is one of the issues that pervades the book. The beginning of Mexico marks conquest that violated the existing civilizations. It ended with Moctezuma's suicide. Conquest was shared by all missionaries and bureaucrats who engaged in personal battles. The extermination of Indians was only partial as Indians were needed for work on haciendas. Even though their beliefs were also violated, Indians persisted in maintaining their own religious backgrounds.



Violence remains symbolic of the conquest that marked horrors committed also against women. Some allowed themselves to be seduced by Spaniards, such as Dona Malinche who became the mistress of Cortes but was soon abandoned by him when she was not needed. Cortes and La Malinche are Chingada or those who open themselves to the outside world and become corrupted by it remain present in the imagination of Mexicans. These figures are not merely historical figures as they represent unresolved conflict. The independence movement assured breaking traditions and with oneself.

Mexicans rebel and contemplate horror that is present in jokes, churches and celebrations. They exhibit self-destructive tendencies that can be part of masochism but they are also connected with religious emotion. Violence occurs not through instincts but their individual expression.

Violence is the result of repression. In the same way that propaganda spreads incomplete truths, repression may result in terrorism that uses similar devices. Groups become persecuted until terrorism becomes generalized.

## Love

Solitude involves pain in the same way that love does. Love reflects true life although it is fought by morals, laws, races, classes, along with lovers themselves. Man changes the woman he loves into an object of obtaining fulfillment. Love has to violate our laws to be realized. It is most often expressed in scandals because women have to break from their masculine conception of them. Women can only be themselves if they break away from these impositions and dare to love.

Men experience prohibitions that involve social and moral constraints. They are compelled to choose wives that are suitable that implies that they are not from a different race, culture or class. When society identifies love with marriage it denies it at the same time its core purpose—that of conceiving and raising children. The protection that is given to marriage would be reasonable if such marriage involved free choice. Marriages are conservative so that society can reproduce the same society. Love is antisocial as it violates these rules expressing truth and hence it is punished by society that treats it with condemnation.

In this way modern society seems to encourage crime but persecute love. In the same way that solitude is prohibited love is also something that has to be defended, as it is antisocial. Love allows for our realization in another. It is also a way of self-examination while it is tested against different environments and phases. Social life impedes erotic communion in the same way that it impedes solitude.



# Style

## Perspective

Octavio Paz, a winner of the Nobel Prize for *Labyrinth of Solitude*, wrote this book some 50 years ago due to the influences experienced during his childhood. When he was a child his father joined revolution. He and his mother had to go and stay with his grandfather. He had to leave the city and grow up in a village. He also changed where he stayed, living in Los Angeles for a short time.

Paz was critical of communism as well as American materialism. His point of view hence involves another, a third way of solving Mexican problems that needs to start with becoming aware of who they are.

His point of view blends perspectives that include European, American, and Aztec views of life. He treats Indian roots with legitimacy and admiration. His view is both personal and historical. Apart from clichés ingrained in Mexican people that show them as machos, there is also certain old wisdom that Mexicans have to recognize. The ancient history is still present there, despite its people having been conquered.

His rendering of Mexico shows that it is a mysterious and fascinating country with various appearances, but with intellectual insights. Its complexity means that some of its differences are hidden. Despite certain points being repeated, the book retains certain poetic flavor and wisdom.

His point of view also includes philosophical reflections that give it an interesting insights, where Mexico is immersed both in its past and future.

While dealing mostly with Mexican culture, he also criticizes certain aspects of American culture, thus presenting views on both.

## Tone

The way Paz handles the difficult search for Mexican identity is a skillful engagement of eloquence that is both captivating and poetic. In a tone that is almost majestic, he unveils with grace all truth and masks that invade Mexican persona. Symbols and metaphors present throughout render reading effortless as well as enlightening. He deals with all aspects of human existence with careful analysis, recognizing both myths, rituals, and what is rational.

His tone involves both original vision and intellectual discipline. His sharpness invites attention. His views are presented with sincerity that penetrates with grace. Sometimes he seems lost in the labyrinth of his thought but always delivers an interesting conclusion. He uses an engaging tone, while his simple truths invite reflection.

The tone that pervades is also a tone of discovery that probes and gives interpretations. His insights can be still relevant while some aspects describe the past. He manages to capture the relevant issues that Latin Americans face in his narration that, although written as prose, is also poetic.

## Structure

Labyrinth of Solitude is divided into nine chapters. The first chapter explores the beginning of one's own existence in a universal sense, exploring the beginning of a nation that can only be able to move forward when it is able to identify itself. Mexican identity is examined in contrasts with North American identity. Even in North American society, Mexicans carry their art and withdrawal.

Each chapter deals with various aspects of Mexican nature. Some belong to the past from which insights progress. Just as labyrinths represent journey, each chapter is a journey that examines a particular aspect of Mexican life. The second chapter deals with what is behind Mexican masks that is still influenced by conquests. Life for a Mexican is combat and defeat also has to be present. His search for identity reflects the way women are perceived and the role they represent in society.

In the third chapter fiestas that symbolize joy and life are examined along with death that is remains part of celebrations.

Labyrinth requires that both views outside and inside are adopted. Paz employs both universal themes and personal insights when examining issues from the outer world as well as the inner world, employing in this way more strength and insight. When returning from this labyrinth of thought, worldly concerns become unburdened.

The middle of the labyrinth is its center. In this center is chapter five that deals with colonialism and its conquest and independence. These issues constitute the core of the book's issues and resolution. He deals in this chapter with Aztecs and their influence on conquerors while analyzing their surrender—both certain resignation and understood as the next phase in a cyclical view of time. The conquest had to be resolved through revolution in chapter six that allowed Mexicans to recognize themselves when becoming independent.

Chapter eight examines various revolutions and their effect on nations. Even though the Mexican revolution was part of history it had little effect on other revolutions. The last chapter deals with universal aspects of society, including love and the way love resolves solitude and can be the way society is defined.

The journey through the labyrinth symbolizes spiritual growth through events and history while reminding one their place in relation to these events.





## Quotes

Man is alone everywhere. (p. 19)

Man, it seems to me, is not in history: he is history. (p. 25)

A study of the great myths concerning the origin of man and the meaning of our presence on earth reveals that every culture—in the sense of a complex of values created and shared in common—stems from the conviction that man the intruder has broken or violated the order of the universe, (p. 26).

Man collaborates actively in defending universal order, which is always being threatened by chaos. (p. 26)

If the solitude of the Mexican is like a stagnant pool, that of the North American is like a mirror. (p. 27)

In every man there is the possibility of his being—or, to be more exact, of his becoming once again—another man. (p. 28)

The Mexican is always remote, from the world and from other people. (p. 29)

The problem of love in our world reveals how the dialectic of solitude, in its deepest manifestation, is frustrated by society. (p. 202)

Self-awareness begins when we doubt the magical efficacy of our instruments. (p. 203)

Language, freed from intellectual meanings, ceases to be a collection of signs and again becomes a delicate and magnetic organism. (p. 203)

Solitude and sin are resolved in communion and fertility. (p. 212)

Modern man likes to pretend that his thinking is wide-awake. (p. 212)

## Topics for Discussion

What is the meaning behind the Mexican identity?

How are the Conquest and the Mexican identity reconciled?

Why was the Revolution important in Mexico?

What is the significance of Aztec and other ancient culture in the present Mexico?

What is the significance of solitude for an individual and society?

Why was Zapata important in the Mexican revolutionary movement?

Which philosophical concepts were the most influential in Mexico and why?