Pilgrims in Aztlan Study Guide

Pilgrims in Aztlan by Miguel Mendez

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Introduction

Miguel Méndez, in his novel *Pilgrims in Aztlán,* tells many different stories. Heralded as a "landmark in Chicano literature" by critic Roland Walter in the *Americas Review,* the stories in this novel are hard to read. The difficulties are based on many factors; one of the most prominent is Méndez's creative use of time□there is no straightforward linear progression. Another challenge is keeping track of the long list of characters. A third factor is the subject matter. There is no easy way of reading about the lives of oppressed and constantly hungry people. Underneath all this, there is also another factor. Juan D. Bruce-Novoa, in his article "Miguel Méndez: Voices of Silence," states that

> Méndez never trusts the lazy reader who would take advantage of the novel to amuse himself without committing anything in return. Méndez is not interested in entertaining [the reader] but moving [the reader] emotionally to compassion and intellectually and socially to action. In another respect, as in all rituals, complexity and even confusion are codes hiding and protecting the secrets of a culture from the outsider.

Another way that Méndez protects the secrets of his culture is to write only in Spanish. In addition, his complex writing style makes translating his books very difficult. His writing style is based on the oral tradition of storytelling. Méndez is very concerned about the loss of the oral tradition, especially in the lives of the Mexican people who, like him, have immigrated to the United States. Bruce-Novoa explains that the oral tradition has been used to pass down stories from one generation to the other. It is through this tradition that children learn from their elders. But in the United States, the children of these immigrants are growing up speaking English, encouraged by the educational system to abandon their traditional language. This creates a huge gap between the generations when the children speak English and their grandparents speak only Spanish. "The oral tradition is in danger of disappearing into the silent past," says Bruce-Novoa, "and the Chicano, cut off from this door to his heritage, could lose his cultural identity, his place in the present, and thus, disappear in the future as well." It is for these reasons that Méndez continues to write in a style that reflects his culture and the oral traditions of his people. His stories speak out for the growing silences in his traditions. Bruce-Novoa concludes that Méndez's writing "is the voice of silence crying for justice in the desert."

Author Biography

There are so many remarkable things about Miguel Méndez that he himself has, at times, looked into the mirror and wondered who he was. He was born on June 15, 1930, in Bisbee, Arizona, a town that sits on the border between the United States and Mexico. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to El Claro, Mexico, where his father found work in a government-owned farming community. It was from his father that Méndez would learn the significance of the storyteller. His father's stories were conveyed to him in the traditional oral style. From his mother, who spoke both Spanish and English, Méndez would receive his love of language and reading.

Méndez attended school only through the sixth grade. This fact might have restricted someone with less determination, but Méndez used this circumstance to inspire himself to conquer the use of language. Throughout his years of working as a hired hand picking fruit and vegetables in the desert lands along the American-Mexican border, Méndez wrote prodigiously. He completed his first novel when he was only eighteen years old. During his years of farm work, he was to meet many of the characters that would people his future novels.

The borderland between the United States and Mexico has been the setting not only of Méndez's novels but also of his life. In 1946, he settled in Tucson, Arizona, where he became a bricklayer, a profession that he would practice for the next twenty-four years. He continued writing during this time. With the advent of the popularity of Chicano literature in the 1960s, he published his first short story after fifteen years of writing.

Méndez writes his stories in Spanish, his language of choice, and only a few of his works have been translated into English. Méndez prefers writing in Spanish as it better reflects his cultural roots. His profound fascination with language and imagery and his sophisticated writing style make it difficult to translate his works into English.

Until 1970, Méndez continued working in the construction field. He then began teaching Spanish, Hispanic literature, and creative writing at Prima Community College. Méndez also began teaching at the University of Arizona in Tucson. It was during this new transition in his life that Méndez reworked *Peregrinos de Aztlán* (the title translates as *Pilgrims in Aztlán*) and eventually had the novel published.

Méndez's autobiography *Entre Letras Ladrillos* (the title translates both as *Among Letters and Bricks* and *From Labor to Letters*) was published in 1996.

Plot Summary

If there is a plot associated with *Pilgrims in Aztlán,* it existed, at one time, only in the author's head as careful foresight in planning a complicated scheme. In the book itself, there is only story. More definitively, there is a collage of stories. That is not to say, however, that there is no action.

The novel begins with an introduction to Loreto Maldonado, a former revolutionary, who is now eighty years old and a Tijuana car washer. Loreto is also a very proud Yaqui Indian whose main goal in each remaining day of his life is to maintain his dignity and to find some way of making enough money to keep himself from starving.

The reader will meet all the various characters who people this novel through Loreto as he mingles in the dust and noise of the busy Tijuana streets, bumping into people whose stories he unfolds. If there is a protagonist, Loreto is it.

Within the first few paragraphs, the author lets the reader know that this story is not going to be an easy one to read. He uses words and phrases such as bad luck, anger, aching, dirt, furious, poisonous, and brutalizing. He also foreshadows the types of characters that Loreto is about to introduce by stating that the foul-smelling city in which the story is about to be told "bore the curses of so many frustrated individuals: veterans of the dirty wars, whoring and the unemployed rumbling with chronic hunger."

Don Mario Davalos de Cocuch is the first character that Loreto runs into. Don Mario and his wife are on their way to church. Sundays are the time when they walk among the poor, offering alms before they pray for more money. When they offer Loreto some money, he refuses it. Loreto is not a beggar; he works for his money. Don Mario, on the other hand, was more likely to make his wife work, especially back in her youth when she did not have to hide her age under heavy applications of makeup. Don Mario, whom Loreto describes as a "bastard prince," made his fortune by bedding his wife to politically prominent officials. He is also the owner of a brothel.

Next, Loreto meets a woman who goes by the name of Malquerida. She is one of Don Mario's prostitutes, bought by him after she was, in essence, kidnapped from her country home as a young girl and brought to the city under the pretence of being given a legitimate job and, perhaps, finding a benevolent husband. "Her harsh character was nothing other than a deep bitterness that occupied the place of her large congenital tenderness."

The story then shifts back to Loreto who, the reader is told, has not eaten for three days. Out of this bitter hunger comes rage. As he walks to the corner where he usually stops cars in the midst of Tijuana traffic, asking the owners if he can wash their vehicles, Loreto sees a group of very young boys. In the group is Chalito, an ambitious child whose mission is to save his family from poverty. Loreto yells at the children, trying to scare them away. But the children hold their ground. They, too, are hungry. In a short

few days following this encounter, Loreto learns that Chalito has died. After hearing the sad news, Loreto has trouble forgiving himself for being so harsh with Chalito.

Loreto next tells the story of Tony Baby, an American who has inherited his grandmother's wealth. He comes to Tijuana to spend the money, buying the favors of prostitutes. Later, when Loreto expands on the story of Tony's grandmother, the reader learns the cruelties of her former business practices. Tony's grandmother thought of herself as a good Christian who gave undocumented Mexican workers jobs. If it had not been for her, she rationalized, these people would be living out in the desert without water and food. In this way, she justifies paying them four dollars a day to cover their ten hours of labor. Eventually, when angered by the workers' decision to organize and ask for more livable wages, she turns them all in to the immigration officials.

The next few scenes personify Tijuana as a whore who postures itself in front of the American tourists, enticing them to leave their money in exchange for a few hours of being treated as emperors. Then Méndez moves in for a more intimate scene inside one of Tijuana's bars where dialogue, without attribution to specific characters, is read. After a brief interlude that announces the death of the little boy Chalito, the dialogue at the bar continues, and the reader meets Chuquito, the champion cotton picker whose reputation is the only remaining marker that he was once good. Chuquito is a broken man who, at the age of forty-five, has lost his agility and straight spine and spends most of his time swallowing liquor.

Loreto, in the meantime, eases in and out of dreams in which he remembers his friend and former military leader, Colonel Rosario Chayo Cuamea. Colonel Cuamea was a brave and forthright Yaqui Indian who lead his people during the Mexican Revolution. The Revolution gave Loreto a sense of self-respect, and he goes back in his memories to those times to recapture it. Colonel Cuamea will become a lasting character to whom Loreto will return throughout the story.

Little Jesus of Bethlehem is another character who appears mostly inside Loreto's memories. He was a childhood friend of Loreto who, because of his name and determination to speak the truth, became known as a healer. Little Jesus, also known as Chuyito, is another character who will appear at the end of the story in more detail.

The story, at this point, takes on a more general view of its characters, describing the plight of unnamed "pilgrims" as they cross the desert in search of work in the United States. Méndez also portrays the hardships of the lives of several prostitutes, before zooming in on two specific men in the desert. Lorenzo and Vate are poets who are struggling in the lethal heat of the sun in an attempt to save their families, back home, from starving. The author fills the reader's mind with images, putting faces on the seemingly unlimited throngs of immigrants by giving vivid details of these two young men. Lorenzo will not make it to the border, and Vate will have to bury him.

By the end of part two, Méndez will reintroduce all the characters he has created. They will wind in and out of the story, coming and going like dreams. In part two, he will expand on some of their stories, introducing minor characters to emphasize the

contrasts between the rich and fully fed and the poor and destitute. Part two will stop with a young man, Frankie Perez, who stumbles into Loreto's arms. Only later will the reader realize that Frankie dies as a soldier in Vietnam.

Part three fills in the background information on Colonel Cuamea, details about his youth, his family, and his rise to power in the Mexican Revolution. Méndez finishes this section on Cuamea with the observation: "Being Indians meant being forgotten, being censored, being scorned, receiving the iniquitous sentence of the worst kind of poverty and insulting disdain for their dark skins." Immediately after this sentiment, Méndez writes about Loreto's death.

Méndez then returns briefly to Colonel Cuamea's death, and closes with the announcement of Frankie Perez's death in a letter sent to his parents. Frankie's father goes crazy with the news, but this gives Méndez a chance to lift the father up off the ground as a bird so that he can encompass the entire landscape of his people. The last page of the novel is the voice of Méndez, thinly veiled as two different voices of a narrator. In the first voice, Méndez says, "We are descended to the bottom of the sea, where the stars descend to their nests, to ask if the heavens know where we are headed or where we come from." In the second voice, he says, "Break the silence of the centuries with the agony of our screams."

Part 1 pp. 1 - 42

Part 1 pp. 1 - 42 Summary

Pilgrims in Aztlbn is Miguel Myndez's exploration of the world of Chicanos, split between the United States and Mexico. Written in 1968, this work explores the social, political, and human aspects of the lives of Chicanos from many backgrounds, from farm workers, laborers, and prostitutes to the newly wealthy and powerful. The book follows interwoven tales of many Chicanos, switching from scene to scene, back and forth in time and place, sometimes not naming the characters, until slowly it builds a full picture of Chicano life in the 1960s.

Loreto, an old Yaqui Indian man, sets out with a bucket of water to make his living on the streets, washing cars for whatever people will pay him. Rain is coming, perhaps cooling but perhaps overbearing, washing everything away. Life, for Loreto, is a painful struggle. He is poor, dirty, and broken, but he conducts himself with pride.

Loreto runs into a well-dressed, wealthy couple on their way to church. The woman tries to give Loreto money, but he declines to take charity. The man is enraged at Loreto for this. The man made his money as a corrupt politician, and he used his wife's sexual favors to gain position. His wife is a former prostitute, while he is a former soldier who has lost control of his bowels because of the horse he rode in war. Both are now regular church-goers and spend their days preening their appearance.

On another day, Loreto runs into Malguerida, meaning the unloved, who offers him money to go to the drugstore, but his look of pride makes her pull back. She is aggressive and harsh, and so she has no friends although she is beautiful. Her bad temper is because of her lot in life as a whore.

At that time, the Yaqui has had no food for three days. Several little kids have taken one of Loreto's spots, and people give them money just because they are poor children, even though they don't do a good job washing cars. Loreto, desperate with hunger, finally yells at the kids to leave. He is so hungry that he washes a man named Tony Baby's car without asking him first, getting the man to give him twenty-five cents.

Tony Baby is a white man - a gringo - who haunts the nightclubs. He owns a string of restaurants that his grandmother grew, relying on underpaid illegal immigrant labor, who she would sometimes turn over to the authorities to avoid paying at all. Tony Baby married a woman who is frigid and only loves her cat, so he comforts himself in the nightclubs across the border.

The city entices people to all their human weaknesses: drinking, marijuana, drugs of all sorts, and of course, prostitution. The city will comfort you with all this, but only if you have the money to pay.

The scene is a bar. Men drink and talk about their plans. They make lewd jokes about the "big worm" in the tequila. The bartender is the lackey, giving the men whatever they want, but complaining to himself in his thoughts. The men discuss why people come out to drink, to find themselves and escape reality. One man, a sociologist, theorizes that drinkers love themselves and hate themselves at the same time.

The story switches back to the kids who took Loreto's spot for washing cars. Chalito, the thinnest of the kids, believes that by washing cars he could pull his family out of poverty. He gets soaked with water doing the job, and then he walks home in the wind. His illness starts with a cough and progresses until he is deathly ill. Because he is poor, no doctor or hospital will attend to him. His father, Lencho Garcia y del Valle, cannot find him help. They give him cinnamon tea and aspirin, and rub his chest with Vicks. They bury him in a blue coffin with white wings on it.

Back at the bar, a man greets his friend Chuquito, mentioning that he was a champion at picking in the fields in the U.S. Chuquito, though, is too old for hard labor now. He spends his time drinking. His wife left and his kids are picking watermelon and lettuce. Chuquito talks about his feelings of shame, saying that in the U.S., "You're nothing but a greaser, a spick, and then you come over here and you're nothing but a pocho" (p. 20). Still, the American military can take you off to fight their wars. The bartender cuts Chuquito off when Chuquito loses his temper and screams and swears at him.

The story switches back to Loreto. He is old and strange, and all he has left is his dignity. He barely gets by on money from washing cars or watching them while their owners drink and carouse. There are other crazy people in the city, trying to make their way on nothing. Kite is a fat and dirty man with huge and swollen feet. He is afraid of barbers and his beard is unruly and filthy. He ties dozens of tails to his clothes, and he walks the streets when the wind blows, pursued by children who pull off his tails as they fly in the wind. Ruperta the madwoman digs through garbage cans for food and wears a bride's veil. She carries herself with the elegance of a ballerina. The city is full of beggars and pimps.

The scene changes to a different time and place in Loreto's life. A general is talking to an officer. Their enemy has captured the only waterhole nearby. The general sends fifty men to break up the enemy, though he knows he's sending them to their death. Only four men survive: Tadeo Rosas, Loudmouth Beto, Loreto Maldonado the Yaqui, and Chayo Cuamea, also a Yaqui, who is the only one to survive without a scratch. Chayo Cuamea thinks of a woman, his love.

The story moves across the border, to a cotton field in the States. It is Chuco's first day picking cotton. He is small, but agile and full of energy. He picks 500 pounds of cotton in a single day. He picks cotton in Marana, Arizona, and he is the champion in the field. He has been a champion picker of grapes, tomatoes, and eggplants, and now he is a champion of cotton picking and carries himself with pride. He goes to a whorehouse and gets into a fight with a girl's lover. Chuco's companion, the narrator, carries Chuco home, bruised and bleeding. They separate, Chuco to grape fields in California and the narrator to work construction in Phoenix.

Ten years later, the narrator runs into Chuco in Aztlan, in downtown Los Angeles. Chuco is squatting on the sidewalk, imitating a sign showing a sleeping Mexican. Passersby talk about how lazy Mexicans are, and how they only drink and sleep. Chuco says, of the sleeping Mexican in the sign, "The fellow was the harvest champion, you know. He's there because he's all tired out with no one to help him. . . " (p. 28). The police come and cart Chuco away.

Tony Baby becomes the focus of the story again. He has to work hard while his grandmother is alive. She sells chile dogs, and since they are such a success, she must hire workers. She hires wetbacks because they are the cheapest workers she can find. She pays them four dollars a day plus a dozen hot dogs. They work ten hours a day without stopping. She likes to think of herself as a charitable woman, giving work and money to these poor unfortunate Mexicans.

Tony's grandmother takes a dislike to one of her workers, Choro, from Imuris, Sonora, Mexico, because he knocks over a pot of beans and causes her to slip. Because the boss dislikes him, he begins to speak out about how she can only think of money. Meanwhile, Tony Baby works wheeling around hot dogs in a moveable refrigerator. He sexually harasses the cooks and expresses his feelings toward his grandmother by an obscene gesture.

Choro organizes a strike, and the old woman holds up the workers' salaries for a month before calling the authorities on them. By the time of her death, the old woman has a chain of food stands. Tony Baby becomes wealthy by inheriting her business, but he can't buy the love of his wife and ends up sating himself at whorehouses.

The old Yaqui sits in the street, snoring and dreaming of the past, while amused by the tourists passing by. He remembers his childhood friend, Little Jes's of Bethlehem, who performs miracles. He dreams of Little Jes's. Batepi Buitimea has thorns stuck in his foot that no one can remove, but Jes's merely touches him and the thorns fall out. Jes's is born in Bethlehem because his parents are in the mountains in Bacatete, escaping the dictator Diaz. They arrive in Bethlehem on the back of a burro, and Jes's is born almost immediately. He seems to speak Nahuatl and Mayan as well as Yaqui, and he speaks Spanish perfectly. He even seems to speak ancient tongues, and from a distance he seems to float. He is miraculous.

The story returns to Chuco, the champion picker. To be a champion, you have to break your back. Chuco has two competitors, another Mexican named Pelele and a black man. At the end of a day of competition, Chuco comes back feverish and wakes up raving. He picks 612 pounds of cotton in a day. Others look at him with admiration, while Pelele grumbles that he mixes stones with his cotton, despite the weight man's disagreement.

The story again changes, telling of Don and Dosa de Cocuch, the wealthy couple Loreto ran into before. This couple is rich, but they cannot be accepted into society. Don Mario de Cocuch is coarse and crude, and it is easy to see that he has spent his life around horses and picked up the attributes of a horse. Mrs. Cocuch is more elegant than her

husband, but like him, she shows her past. In her case, she has a bad habit of chewing gum, picked up in her days as a prostitute. They are outcast by society for their uncouth habits, no matter how much money they have. In turn, the Cocuches turn bitter against society. Both are miserable, longing for the past, but neither will admit it.

The scene switches to Chuco and the cotton fields, where men are talking. One talks about marrying a girl he knows. Another complains about the sweat. They discuss where they will move to next, perhaps picking lettuce. They say that the Chicano foremen are worse than the white bosses are. Construction is worse, one of them says. Another man says he works in the canneries in the winter, because he can't stand the cold. They argue about who will cook, and then decide that they should stop talking or "we won't earn a cent" (p. 38).

Loreto sees so many men in the city waiting to cross over the border. It is hunger that drives them, not the promise of money or wealth. Many die on the road to the border, but their hunger drives them on, desperately. "They are hungry, their children are hungry, their women are hungry, with a hunger of the ages, a rabid hunger. . . " (p. 39). The border patrol will arrest them, jail and mistreat them, but the employers who hire them are never touched. Loreto hears the stories of suffering, of impoverished men and women and children. They are all alike, repeated over and over until no one has any sympathy for them.

Part 1 pp. 1 - 42 Analysis

Miguel Myndez does not tell a straightforward, chronological tale in this book. Instead, he builds up a story of a people with layer upon layer of character and scene. The central character is Loreto, the old Yaqui Indian, who has seen so much suffering during his lifetime. Loreto is a kind of everyman, representing all oppressed Chicanos. Each story that is told, each story that surrounds him, is another facet of Chicano life, building a picture of the conditions of society in Mexico and in the United States.

The story starts off in Mexico, creating an image of Mexican life. The impoverished make their money washing cars on the street, picking crops in the U.S., or as prostitutes or bartenders, catering to the unhealthy needs of the people. Drugs and sex thrive because the people are miserable. There is no health care for those who are sick and dying. The wealthy are corrupt and vain. An important theme is that the wealthy live on the backs of the poor, as Tony Baby's grandmother built her business on immigrant laborers and as politicians and soldiers achieve power at the expense of the impoverished.

When the action moves to the cotton fields in the United States, the author is introducing a new section of life for Chicanos. Chuco, the main character in the cotton field episodes, is an important character in the story. He is a champion in the fields, picking cotton at an amazing rate for the pride and satisfaction of being the best. He beats all others at back-breaking labor, and the white owner of the field says, "A few more like this one and we wouldn't have to invent machines!" (p. 35). This comment

shows how the whites value the exhausting labor of the Chicanos, bringing in the theme of racism as well as the theme of the wealthy living on the backs of the poor. The field pickers are no better than machines, and if they could all kill themselves to pick hundreds of pounds of cotton in a day, no machines would be needed. For all of his pride and effort, Chuco is worn down and defeated, ending up another drunken "lazy" Mexican with nothing to his name.

The sign on the streets of Los Angeles that shows the image of the Mexican sleeping, legs curled up and sombrero on his head, is a reflection of the image Americans have of Mexicans, a Mexican stereotype. Chuco imitates this image of laziness and drunkenness on the street. He has become what Americans expect of him, but he has become this because of the economic and social system that has impoverished, oppressed, and broken him.

The story of Tony Baby's grandmother further highlights the racism of the employers of illegal immigrants. She fashions herself as a Christian woman who is doing good works by hiring these poor people and giving them a safe and comfortable place to work. However, all she is really doing is making a lot of money by hiring the cheapest labor possible. When she has her own workers deported to avoid paying them, she shows herself to be truly villainous and she also exposes the immigration system as evil, punishing only the impoverished and hungry and not the greedy employers. Her grandson, on the other hand, is merely an unthinking and selfish man, catering to his own whims with his grandmother's wealth (gained from the labor of the poor).

Another theme is wealth. Wealth, throughout the book, is shown to be a tool of social injustice, and one that creates only misery and never happiness. Tony Baby can't gain his wife's love through wealth, and he ends up drowning his misery in cathouses and the nightlife on the Mexican border. The Cocuches are wealthy, but they long for their ignoble pasts because they can never be accepted into wealthy society. Wealthy and vain, they think only of themselves and how they appear. They go to church, but they seek only the social perception of being charitable and good. The woman hides behind her makeup. There is no happiness here. Even for the wealthy, no good comes of money. For the poor, money is a destructive force in their lives.

The story of Jes's of Bethlehem contrasts with the stories of those who are wealthy and unhappy and also with the stories of those who are broken by the system. This character is based on the Jesus of the Christian Bible. His mother and father, escaping persecution by their country's ruler, ride into a town called Bethlehem on a donkey, and their son is born, named Jes's. He is miraculous, healing people and speaking in tongues. This Mexican Jes's highlights spirituality and humility as the qualities one should seek. He stands outside the struggles for food, money, and power that occupy the other characters of the book.

Readers have seen life in Mexico, and seen life in the fields of the United States. The end of this section introduces another aspect of Chicano life: the crossing of the border.

Part 1 pp. 42 - 85

Part 1 pp. 42 - 85 Summary

The story switches briefly to an officer talking to a soldier. They talk about Colonel Chayo Cuamea's mad rebellion against the government. Cuamea is proclaiming that the Indians in Mexico are enslaved and that the government is unjust. The soldiers declare that they will hang him.

Two men are walking across the desert to the border. Their shoes are full of holes and their feet are busted up. One says that he can't go any further and will die here, but the other begs him to think of his starving father, wife, and kids back home and continue on. The man tries to continue on, but he collapses.

The point of view changes to two people in a car, passing the two men from the previous scene on the road, one man holding his companion like a dead weight. One person asks if they should give the men a ride, and the other says it's too dangerous.

The story changes to a prostitute's recollection of her life. A woman and man, claiming to be mother and son, come to her home and make friends with her family. They offer to take her to the border and get her a job, but the man takes advantage of her and the woman sells her to a cathouse at the border. Now, the only life she has is as a prostitute.

Loreto sees the life of Mexicans and how the wealthy live at the expense of the poor. He sees the desperation of the impoverished.

A group of men is walking across the desert, obsessed with thirst. One of them, Lorenzo, sees the beauty of the desert landscape. At heart, he is a poet, and he celebrates the moon in the desert sky. When they can walk no more, they camp. Their bodies are burning hot, but they are overcome by the vastness of the sublime desert. One of the travelers, Pedrito Sotolin, prays. Another, Ramagacha, is an old man. He knows the lack of water outweighs the beauty of the desert. He is going to the U.S. to earn money for his two grandchildren.

A man has died of heatstroke, and the group holds a wake. They talk of heatstroke, and one man tells a story about picking cantaloupes. A fellow picker collapsed, and this same man is Ramagacha, whose name means Bent Branch.

Vate always remembers Lorenzo Linares. He is part of the group, with Pedrito Sotolin and Ramagacha. Lorenzo is naturally a happy and laughing man, but Vate is naturally sad. Both are poets. Lorenzo shouldn't have died, but the water runs out. The others survive their journey to San Luis Rio Colorado. Lorenzo, though, doesn't sleep. He is enthralled by the desert. He runs the entire night, speaking of the desert as a blank canvas, listening to the silence, seeing the moon. The entire desert becomes his grave.

When Vate reaches San Luis, he gets so drunk that he doesn't know when he got to Califa.

The story switches to a first-person tale of a man who buried his friend, Manuel, called Batepi, in the desert. This is the same man, earlier, who tried to get his friend to continue on as the car passed them. He first meets Manuel at Empalme where ten thousand people are waiting to get across the border. There are too many people, and only those with bribes will be able to cross, so the two head out into the desert on foot. The man says that the more Indian blood a Mexican peasant has, the more oppressed he is and the more he is a slave. A politician comes through the camp while the ten thousand men are waiting. At least, says the narrator, he does not make empty promises and only waves at the impoverished men. The narrator has left his girl to go make money in the United States, telling her to wait for two years before giving him up for dead. He makes a cross for Manuel out of bones. As he buries Manuel, he cries for "the misery that comes to man and also because I saw myself in his place."

Loreto doesn't know how long he has been in his shack. It is Monday or Saturday. He is sick with fever and old age. He pulls himself up and goes out to work. When he daydreams, he imagines that all the cars are dirty, because the car owners are waiting for his expert car-washing. His shoes have holes and his pants are stiff with dirt. Once, an ant crawled in them, and he couldn't bend the cloth to kill it. Women laughed as he danced on the street trying to shake the stinging ant out. His shirt is full of holes. He walks past the destitute prostitutes and when he finally arrives at his usual spot, he finds the cars all washed and clean, with no business for him.

Poor women and children make money selling lottery tickets. One old woman, Dosa Candelita, sells tickets, and she fights with the younger women, dressed in a miniskirt. Dosa Candelita cannot make enough money to live. She puts a ball under her dress on her back, so that people will come to look at her "hump" and buy tickets out of pity.

In a short segment, an unnamed narrator talks about how hard the trip through the desert is and how the rich in Mexico cause poverty.

Loreto finally makes two dollars from some foreign tourists. He buys a taco for fifteen cents. He drops a coin, and Malquerida picks it up and returns it. Loreto smiles at her and she looks as if she will cry. She's been drinking. The night before Valente, the Vaseline Man, has talked seductively to her, and just as she was beginning to believe him, she realized that he just wanted to become her pimp. She tore his face up with a broken bottle.

Loreto eats half a sandwich and dozes. He thinks of Jes's of Bethlehem, also called Belen, one of eight Yaqui towns. Jes's is a great healer who doesn't charge for healing the people. An old man wanted to follow him, but when Jes's told the old man that he must give all his possessions to the poor, the man thought he was crazy and left. The government becomes afraid of Jes's, and they tie him up against a saguaro with huge thorns. As he is dying he prays, "Forgive them, sweet God, for they know very well what they are doing."

Loreto feels terrible about chasing off the children who were usurping his spot for car washing. He dreams of them, and especially Chalito in his coffin. He dreams of himself giving them money and jewels. Outside these dreams, in the real world, the sound of drunken chatter fills the world. The drinkers accuse tourists of ruining their world with their money; others decry how the Mexicans kowtow to the tourists. They talk of women and extol their manhood. One man spent all the grocery money on liquor.

Loreto washes off the face of a man who has been beat up. The man says that Loreto should get his pension and stop washing cars. The man got beat up for calling another man a coconut - brown on the outside, but white on the inside. Loreto asks the man why he's so angry, and the man talks of being without words. In U.S. schools, if you didn't speak English, you would be put apart like morons. The man is too old to pick in the fields, even though he is only around forty. The law doesn't help the Chicano, and the politicians only make promises. This man turns out to be Chuco, the once-champion picker.

Vate takes to drinking. Over and over, he reads a letter from Lorenzo's wife, asking him to take care of his friend.

Loreto wakes up to the screeches of tires, and two taxi drivers swear at each other. A hippie is sitting next to Loreto. He tells the Yaqui that the young in America are being destroyed. Unborn children are being murdered under the law. Those that survive turn to drugs. The parents are hedonists, abandoning the children for orgies.

Sesora Davalos de Cocuch is appealed to by Chalito's mother for money for the burial. She gives the mother a check for the coffin. Her husband admonishes her, but he is not serious. By making money, he assures their success in this world. By giving to charity, his wife assures their success in the next.

The next section, from the point of view of Vate, retells the crossing of the desert. His poetic language describes the barren landscape with its deadly beauty.

Chalito's father, Lencho, speaks the language of political clichys. He does no work and has ten children, always keeping his wife Beatriz pregnant. His wife and daughters make and sell tortillas to support the family. One day the children are all so hungry that they eat the tortillas as they come off the stove. The dough runs out, but the children are still hungry. Her husband comes home drunk, shouting happily about the new government. The boys shine shoes for money, careful to turn their earnings over to their mother.

One day, Lencho gets ten dollars from his sons to buy chicken for his son Buzz Saw's birthday, though the money was for notebooks and pencils for school. Lecho crosses into the United States through the border and buys ten pounds of chicken in a grocery store. On his way home, he stops to drink, and begins bragging about the chicken he has for his children. He opens the package and begins throwing chicken around. Then, he gets into a fight with a man who has taken a chicken neck. Lencho can barely

recover seven pounds of the now-dirty chicken before he is kicked out. He brings it home to his family, and they have a feast. Only Chalito, who is already sick, cannot eat.

After Chalito's death, Lencho is wracked with sorrow and swears never to drink again. Some say he never again touches a drop, and works at whatever jobs he can. Others say he drinks little afterwards because he spends time in jail, having changed to the opposition party.

A narrator, probably Vate, expounds poetically on the impossibility of creating in the desert, "writing pages in the wind so that my words would fly away" (p. 82), and speaks of seeking God. He speaks of the Indian people, hungry, tortured, and oppressed.

Two men meet. One has just come back from the U.S. He made $312, but it was stolen from him before he was deported. He's been deported four times and is crossing over again. The man says he's going to see if he can be an apostle, St. Peter.

The first part of the novel ends with an imagined conversation between Chalito and Loreto, where Loreto gives the boy pocketfuls of money.

Part 1 pp. 42 - 85 Analysis

The interweaving of tales continues. There are two stories in this section about crossing the border in the desert. One is the story of Lorenzo, the poet, who dies from becoming entranced with the desert. The story of Lorenzo brings up a strong theme in this work, that of the Chicano's loss of words. In American schools, Spanish is not allowed. Chicanos lose their language and their words. They also lose their words to poverty. In Mexico, where they must fight for survival, there can be no poetry. Lorenzo's death is symbolic of this loss. He cannot survive because he's a poet. Only by appreciating the deadly aspect of the desert can you survive. Because he sees its sublime beauty, he perishes.

This goes back to the author's preface, as well, when he apologizes for using the coarse language of the oppressed instead of the graceful language of poetry. The language of Chicanos is, in a way, losing its poetry because of oppression. The story of Chicanos can no longer be told beautifully, but only with rude and crude words.

The second story of Manuel, who also dies and is buried in the desert, is very nearly parallel to Lorenzo's death. The two almost identical stories each tell of a man crossing the desert to San Luis, who dies of thirst and exhaustion and is buried there. This brings home the fact that Lorenzo is not merely one man who dies. He is, like Loreto and like Chuco and like all the characters, an everyman representative of masses of men who cross the desert looking for work and money to support their families, but who find only death.

Prostitutes are also addressed in this section. The tale of the unnamed prostitute, another character representing a multitude of her peers, is one of slavery. She is lured away from her home and sold to a cathouse. This story will be revisited with another

story, nearly the same, from another prostitute, showing it clearly to be the everyman's story of many prostitutes throughout Mexico.

Women in *Pilgrims in Aztlbn* are very different and separate from men. They are in many ways completely outside of the men's world, and relationships are fueled by sex or merely cemented by children. The women are mothers, whores, or poor elderly women subsisting on begging - representing the three archetypes of women as the mother or saint, the whore, and the hag. The women in the book hold households together. The men either leave to drink and carouse or to work in the United States. They may send back money, or they may die.

Loreto thinks of Jes's again and tells of his last words, as he, like the Biblical Jesus, is killed by the government. "Forgive them, sweet God, for they know very well what they are doing," he says, a deviation from the Bible's, "Forgive them Lord, for they know not what they do." As what is good in the Chicano spirit is destroyed, the destroyers are culpable - they know what they are doing. Still, Jes's prays for forgiveness for them.

Finally, the story of Chalito and his father Lecho is filled out. Lecho follows politics and talks political talk. A would-be politician, the man is (as all politicians seems to be in the book) no good. He takes money from his family and drinks it away, providing no money and no help for his impoverished wife and children. He takes money that is needed for school to buy chicken - a luxury they cannot afford. It seems to surprise even him that he actually goes and buys the chicken. Even then, he almost loses it (and succeeds in losing three pounds and dirtying the rest) by going on a self-congratulatory drinking binge. Ultimately, he is concerned only with himself - bragging about himself and drinking.

Lecho's character is a microcosm of politicians, a representation of what a politician actually is and does. He speaks with elegant words, but they are meaningless. He is not concerned with the real poverty that is in front of him, in the shape of his wife and children. He does nothing to support them when they are hungry. He promises his constituents (his children) luxuries, but they must pay for them themselves (as with taxes). He takes their money, and when he acquires what he promised, he brags endlessly about it, promoting himself. In the process of his self-promotion, he half destroys what he set out to provide to the people. The family celebrates with a feast, but in the end, Chalito is not saved from death. The feast is just an illusion, a placatory fantasy. It does not stave off real hunger or real suffering. In this small story is reflected the story of all politicians and their empty promises.

The idea of God is connected to the idea of words in the poetic section, probably from Vate's point of view, when he states, "Now I know that He creates life and that I invent the language with which one speaks." It is almost as if, when language is destroyed by oppression, the oppressed are disconnected from God. The story of Jes's death confirms that the political powers work to take God away from the people. This story will be taken up again in Part Two of the book.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Two men talk about Jes's of Bethlehem, who is nearby and has just walked into a market. Jes's talks like a clown and a wise man. He is in the Good Samaritan Tavern. A man comes up to Jes's and tells him he wants to follow him. Jes's tells him he's a fool, and that he's Jes's because that's what they named him; he's from Bethlehem because that's the town where he was born. Jes's tells the man that he'd deny him the first time there was any trouble. He says that what he does is full of suffering and pain and that people have turned him into a miracle worker, convincing even him from the time that he was twelve years old. He parents made him a healer, and how could he turn his back on them?

Jes's left his hometown when he was twenty-two and wanted to change his name and marry. He tells about a sublime experience in the wilderness. Then, he came to the next town. They'd heard of him and had a banner up for him, and he screwed the mayor's wife and three daughters because he was so horny. The man is horrified at this story, feeling that this holy man is an imposter. Then, Jes's's face changes, and he seems a holy man. He says that the people have made him a holy man and redeemer. He has been tortured by the rich and powerful for asking for help and justice for the poor. He claims that the eighth deadly sin is politics. He has been in a hundred jails. He says his miracles are from providing hope of forgiveness, through suggestion as well as medicine he gives.

The police come, and Jes's is pointed out by a man for fifty cents. He is carried off as a rabble rouser, to be jailed and whipped. The man who was talking to him denies that he knows him, so that he too does not get jailed. When he sees how hard it is to be a redeemer, the man decides that he must be off across the border to be a picker again.

The story switches back to Loreto, still seated by the hippie. He dreams of his friend Colonel Chayo Cuamea. He dreams that the Indian soldiers are stone, and cannot be hurt. In his dream, Chayo cries, though Chayo never cried. Chayito - another Chayito, Chayo's son and Loreto's godson - is dead, hanged from a tree. Loreto remembers in his dream how Chayo raped death, stealing her virginity.

A car drives up beside Loreto and the hippie, and the man inside gets out, calling to the hippie, his son, to come home. In the car are a woman and a dog, groomed and wearing a jeweled watch. The hippie refuses them.

The man and woman are the Foxye family. They live in the U.S., near the border, and the man has become wealthy in real estate. The couple, when they were younger, scrimped and saved all their money, even denying themselves food. They accumulated wealth, and they thought of themselves as prudent instead of stingy. When their son Bobby was born, he took time and energy away from their business and he cost money.

Mr. Foxye had a vasectomy to avoid the trouble of more children. By the time Bobby was seven, the Foxyes were millionaires.

They wanted money because they wanted security, but when the Foxyes have their million, they are alone and friendless with only the business. Mr. Foxye gloats about his family that came to America on the Mayflower to bring Christianity to the Indians. He sees drinking, smoking, and fornication as the roots of evil. Meanwhile, Mrs. Foxye becomes more maternal, desperate for another child. Bobby goes off to boarding school. The dog, bought when Bobby was young, becomes his mother's pampered surrogate child, given more love than Bobby.

Bobby is away for years. His parents send him money and he writes but never visits. He says he is becoming a lawyer. Finally, the man says his son must come home to deal with a legal document, promising to raise his allowance. The man plans to turn his business over to his son and retire. When the son arrives, the parents are shocked. He is in ragged clothes, a hippie. He tells his family that he doesn't want anything to do with the business and that he hasn't been in school for two years. The boy accuses his forefathers of killing the Indians and stealing from them. He says his father built his money on the backs of the poor - blacks and Mexicans. He accuses them of loving the dog more than him. The family doctor realizes that Bobby is on drugs and he says that when parents seek advancement, they leave their children behind and the children turn to drugs. Before the Foxye family can get Bobby help, he has taken off.

The story moves back to Loreto, who sees Kite eating leftovers outside a restaurant. Loreto is disgusted. With pride, he rejects food offered by the restaurant owner. In apology for Kite, the woman tells Loreto that Kite was a great artist, an actor, who provided joy to everyone. He made much money and gave it all away as fast as he got it. Then, he went mad.

The scene switches to the bar, the Happy Day. The bartender asks a patron about Chuco, who hasn't been around for a while. Chuco is in jail for four years for stealing four bottles of wine from a liquor store, sentenced by Judge Rudolph H. Smith, a wealthy, successful, noble, and prejudiced man.

The day of Chuco's court case, Mr. Smith's house is cool, almost cold, with air conditioning despite the 120-degree heat outside. The judge and his family feast on bacon and eggs, hotcakes and juice for breakfast. The judge propounds that the summer heat is economical, the air conditioning more than paid for by the wealth of the many crops grown in the land and the blessed labor provided for the poor Chicanos who could not otherwise survive. He tells his family of a beautiful university student, daughter of a wealthy family, who tragically strangled her illegitimate baby and how he sentenced her to a mental institution to recover. As he leaves, he admonishes his wife to tell the Chicano gardener to do a good job because he is so easily replaced.

At Chuco's court case, he is defended by a court-appointed lawyer who speaks Spanish and acts as his interpreter. The judge looked at Chuco with instant hatred. Chuco swears at the judge and at his lawyer, and he says that the law, for judges, is like a

whore's underwear, to be taken on and off as they please. The lawyer, at the judge's insistence, translates Chuco's comments, and Chuco is hauled away, cursing.

The city is alive with tourists on a Saturday. Kite shouts, unheard, on a street corner. People drum up business for the cathouses. Two policemen come to one of the whorehouses to get La Malquerida, and they take her to identify her brother's body. She tells her story.

As a young girl, La Malquerida lives with her family. A woman and her supposed son come to town, Dosa Reginalda and Carlos. They tell her they can get her a job as a cashier at the border, and they take her away. On the way, Carlos tries to seduce her, and she fights him off. When they arrive, Dosa Reginalda sells her to a whorehouse. She fends off her first "customer," calling to the police below and crying, but she gets no help. Her second "customer," Tony Baby, rapes her, and her life of prostitution begins.

La Malquerida's brother comes to town, and finding out that Don Mario Miller de Cocuch owns the brothel, he kills the man. The police shoot him down, and the papers portray him as an immoral murderer killing a prominent, respectable citizen.

Kite crosses the street, streamers flying behind him. Cars crawl down the streets; sailors fill the bars and brothels. There are music, laughter, tequila, dirty words, nude dancers. Two old friends meet, appalled that they are in this dark world of sex and liquor. One asks the other to tell him a story from childhood, and the second, the narrator, tells a story of a stream that the children would play with as it rushed past their home. The narrator goes to see a woman, a prostitute, and she gives him the four dollars she's made. The narrator curses money, the force behind prostitution and drugs. He curses the streets. He is in love with the prostitute and torn apart by their life.

Loreto sees Kite, who babbles incoherently, bursts into tears, and then retreats into silence. Passersby decide that Kite is just a bum with no past.

Rain is falling. Dosa Candelita is standing on her corner. She has given up selling lottery tickets and is now selling other merchandise. A man comes up to her, confused and drunk, and asks about her flowers. She is selling herbs, though, not flowers. He tells her that his last friend is dead.

The man sneaks into the most expensive brothel, but everyone sees that his pants are ripped. He is kicked out. He has a vision or a dream of a child - himself as a child - who brings him a present of a box full of nails. Flies follow him all day, a sign of impending death, and he has a memory of a dead cow pulled out of the river when he was a child. Two brothers sit nearby, having lost their last cow. A child holding a dog's leash is standing by the cow, and the dog is eating the dead animal. The scene seems frozen, the first experience and understanding of death.

A lawyer questions an old woman and a little man about the body found in a nearby ravine. Neither knows the man's name. The woman had taken him in, but she had to throw him out because of his drunkenness. The old man noticed the vultures (compared

to politicians) over the ravine. In the ravine, he found the body of the unnamed man, who had killed himself. In his papers was found a poem, an elegy to Lorenzo Linares.

Frankie Pyrez comes out of a brothel, drunk, about to fall, and Loreto catches him. The boy is a Chicano from California, a young man who is filled with the questions of his family of migrant farm workers, the Vietnam war, prejudice, slavery, and school, where Spanish is disallowed.

As Loreto helps the drunken boy, the reader learns that the old man has a wooden leg, fashioned by his friend Chayo Cuamea when Loreto was wounded as a solider and his leg was amputated without anesthesia. Frankie flashes back to Vietnam and then to the grape fields where his father toiled, unable to provide for his family, who lived in a hovel without enough food.

Loreto gives the young boy water, watching over him, as he remembers his own life as a soldier and his friend Colonel Chayo Cuamea. Loreto's watch is like a wake over the boy, who will be killed nine months later in Vietnam, with no one there to watch over his body, and his parents anxiously praying for him at home. Frankie dreams of his Texas home, with adobe houses that erode in the rain. He remembers the farm owner, MacCane, as friendly, but his father works exhausting days and comes home to only tortillas and beans. Sometimes he beats them; sometimes he kisses them. When someone is ill, Frankie's father cries. They use herbs to cure the children, who sometimes die. The MacCanes are religious, protectors - or at least employers - of the Chicanos, who read the Bible at each meal. Even their cats and dogs are well fed. As Frankie dreams, Loreto thinks of his buddy Chayo Cumea, who took his three sons and went on a mission to topple the government.

Back in Frankie's memories, the reader learns that Frankie's father can make $25 a week by working every day for the MacCanes. His friend convinces him to come to Arizona to pick other fields, and the family moves. When Frankie becomes old enough, he is drafted into the Vietnam War, and he sees it as an escape until he gets a taste of what war means, fighting for the "valiant hawks" (p. 146) in their patriotic political positions who send young Chicanos to war in their place. Frankie imagines Superman, Batman, and the Great Cowboy coming through, heroically, in the field of battle. The cowboy is the ultimate American hero, who vanquished the Indians and the Mexicans.

Dawn comes, as Loreto continues his watch over Frankie. He remembers again Chayo Cuamea, one of the brave Yaqui warriors who continued the fight for the Yaqui Nation, finally joining the rebels to fight their common enemy, with the promise that the Yaqui nation would have respect under the new government. Cumea was in love with lady Death, and she could not escape his embrace. In the jungles of Vietnam, Frankie first sobbed, then panicked, and became lost in meditation at the horror of the war and constant death. He came to recognize the universal suffering of man and of his people, the Chicano.

Part 2 Analysis

The stories of the characters intertwine and develop during this section. Jes's of Bethlehem is revisited, and the parallels between him and Christ continues. Like the apostle Peter, the man who comes to Jes's as an apostle denies him, as has been predicted. Like Jesus, Jes's is betrayed for silver coins (in this case 50 cents instead of 30 pieces of silver), and his betrayer reveals his identity with an act of affection (a hug instead of a kiss). Though Jes's says that he is a fraud and confesses to cuckolding the mayor of a town in coarse language, he also radiates a kind of holiness. He asks for mercy and justice for the poor. In this society, though, he is repeatedly punished and tortured for his work. The story of Jes's reveals how difficult it is to try to change the lives of the poor and the social and economic structure of the time. He is the one who works for justice; it is easier to be destroyed as a picker in the fields.

At this stage in the novel, the book begins to explore the lives of wealthy Americans as they relate to the poor in Mexico. The next story is that of Bobby Foxye and his parents. Again, the theme of wealth emerges, and the reader sees how unhappy wealth makes both the rich and the poor. The Foxyes are alone and isolated, wrapped up in their business. They don't enjoy their lives. They cannot love their son because they are so caught up in pursuing wealth. When they achieve their dream, they can't enjoy it, and they lose their son completely. He sees them as hypocrites. They, the wealthy, live on the back-breaking labor of the poor, and they have no conception of it.

The story of Kite, the now-mad artist, parallels the story of Lorenzo the poet. It is Kite's sensitivity, his ability to see into the hearts of man that both makes him a great artist and drives him mad in this world where there is so much suffering. The poor, like the restaurant owner, are the ones who give to and care for the needy, like Kite. To the wealthy, he is nothing.

Another wealthy American is profiled in the next story, that of Chuco's fate in being thrown in jail. Like most of the wealthy, Judge Smith considers himself to be a righteous Christian. He has mercy on the beautiful white girl whose crime is murdering a baby, and he praises himself for his justice and sweet mercy. The depiction of the judge's house - its air conditioning, its luxuriousness, the everyday meal that would be unheard of in impoverished Mexico - is dripping with a sense of injustice. The judge seems to see himself as a god and live like a god, but he is not a god of justice although that is supposedly his business.

Judge Smith seems to judge Chuco by the color of his skin before Chuco even opens his mouth, and it is the judge's deadly look that sets Chuco off swearing. That his lawyer translates Chuco's foul comments is another injustice. Chuco's defender causes him to be hauled off and ultimately jailed for four years.

The story of La Malquerida again addresses the theme of the law and justice - or rather injustice. This time, the injustice is in Mexico, but the players are the same, the poorversus the wealthy. The wealthy will always win, the book seems to say. La Malquerida is kidnapped, sold, and raped - paralleling the earlier prostitute's story,

making this every prostitute's story. Her brother's revenge is couched in terms of immorality, violence, and evil because the man that he kills has standing and wealth.

The story of the unnamed drunken man who kills himself is that of Vate, Lorenzo's friend who cannot get Lorenzo's death out of his mind. When he tells the old woman that his last friend has died, this is a clue to his identity. Throughout this section, as he moves toward death, the poet is unnamed. He has lost not only words and language, but he has lost himself and as Candelita points out, he has lost his illusions. Vate's identity is solidified in his poem to Lorenzo, as he calls out to the lost poet, the lost language, the lost glory of the Indians. "Cursed desert! You have drunk the language and the breath of my people of yore. . . Shrouds in the cottonfields, calvaries of lettuce. Vines covered with bunches of tears!" (p. 138). The death of Lorenzo is not just a death of a person or people; it is also the death of culture, destroyed by oppression.

The last section of Part Two contrasts the stories of two warriors. Chuyo Cuamea, comrade of Loreto, is one of the Yaqui warriors. Their people had fought for independence against the Spanish, and continued to fight until they joined the Mexican Revolution. They were promised recognition, but the ultimate fate of the Yaqui is shown in Loreto, who carries himself with pride but who is downtrodden and beaten. Readers already know that Cuamea will lead an impossible fight to bring down the government along with his sons. He is in love with Lady Death, and he is said to be the only man who has bedded her. His seeking out of death shows how ingrained battle is in the Yaqui soldier.

Frankie's experience in the Vietnam War stands in stark contrast to the Yaqui's battle. Frankie does not fight for his people's honor and land; instead, he fights for corrupt politicians who live in safety while they send him to battle. He is fighting for a people and a country who vilify him and his people. The image of the American cowboy brings into focus the image of the Chicano as the "other": a savage beast to be defeated and fought back by the glorious white American.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Chuyo Cuamea is walking toward San Josy de Guaymas. His feet are hardened from traversing tough lands. He is looking for revenge, and he finds himself in the Mexican Revolution with Elpidio, his assistant. Cuamea was a wild Yaqui warrior who became a colonel because of his fury and rage. After Cuamea is made colonel, his friend Elpidio is shot dead by a machine gun. Cuamea sees Death, the Skinny Lady, on one side. Men have different ways of dealing with the trauma of battle, and Cuamea's is that he sees Death. He becomes obsessed with her and tries to embrace her, but she flees from him.

The revolution troops capture 300 prisoners, Indian men like Cuamea who just happened to choose the wrong side of the battle. They are all executed, and Cuamea sees his beloved lady Death gathering their souls. At the end of the war, men divide up money and power. Colonel Chayo is let go without honors or money, only memories.

Chayo Cuamea marries a skinny woman, tall and thin like death, and he has four children. Chayito, the oldest, is just like his father. He raises his children like warriors, and he leads an ill-fated battle against the government. War has changed, and the warriors now have technology. Cuamea's troops are quickly disposed of. His son Chayito is the first of his boys to fall, and he is hanged. The other two sons die in battle.

Loreto outlives Frankie by two years. They discover him dead because of the smell, in the little house he constructed in an impoverished neighborhood. His house is eight by eight by five feet tall and constructed of garbage: Tecate beer bottles, a Poco Cola poster, Nabisco cracker boxes, Fedo dog food cans, and Enca shortening cans. Amid advertisements for steak and crackers and other foods, Loreto dies of hunger. They haul away his carefully constructed house like garbage, along with Loreto's body. The men find a box, and fight over its contents. When they open it, they find that Loreto was a soldier.

After Cuamea's revolution is squashed, his foes let him live. He comes back to his last son, but the boy is mentally lacking and unable to become a soldier. He finds her an Indian woman. The Indians around him are defeated and disillusioned. Cuamea still dreams of taking his grandsons to battle against the government, but instead his Skinny Lady comes to him as he lays out by the lagoon in his favorite spot. Slyly, Cuamea feigns death so that the lady will let down her guard and come to collect his soul. Instead, he attacks her, achieving at his last breath an intense orgasm.

Frankie Pyrez's parents learn of their son's death. They had hoped that the army would send their son to college after the war. His father Pbnfilo is distraught and drinks tequilla "like a thirsty sandpit" (p. 173). He begins to become a huge black bird. Pbnfilo flies throughout the lands of the Chicano people, and he sees the humiliation and enslavement of the people. He flies up to the sun until he is burning up, and he yells at

the sun, who shines happily on the white man as he sunbathes but beats down as a torture on the laboring Chicano, for justice for his people. The sun spits at Pbnfilo, and the father thinks that this must be how his Frankie was killed.

Pbnfilo remains unconscious as his family waits for him to awake, but when he comes to he is incoherent. Men come with unneeded straightjackets to take him away, and the bosses say he went crazy because he was such a drunk (not because of his daily toil in the field, his poverty, and the death of his son).

Two friends meet at a bus station. One is going to visit his home town in Mexico. They talk about their days working in the fields, picking cantaloupes, and their dreams that failed. They talk about their long-haired Chicano sons, who they don't understand. One parent tells the other: "My son already made it clear to me: 'Papa, we're going to live here until we die, and this is where our children are going to live. Since they've filled our shoes with tacks, they might as well beat the shit out of us for what is just; otherwise, we'll always have their boot on our neck'" (p. 177).

Part 3 Analysis

The third part of the novel brings the deaths of two main characters who both represent the old Indian people and the old Indian ways that are dying. Cuamea's story is finally told. He is a man of war, and he never gives up war. He wants his sons to fight after him, and his son's sons, so that the battle for the Indian pride will never be given up. His hopes are dashed as he is far outnumbered and his eldest son is hanged. His soul longs to be joined with Death, but he will not be taken by her. Instead, he will take Death, control it, conquer it with his manhood. In the end, though, for all of his will and his strength and his pride, the arms of death take Cuamea as surely as he takes the Skinny Lady.

Loreto dies broken and forgotten in a house he made for himself off the rejected garbage of society. The garbage is filled with images of food and marketed to people who can afford to treat their dogs like children. It is ironic that, surrounded by marketing images of steak to make your mouth water, Loreto dies of hunger. In the commercial society of Mexico, the poor are forgotten. The people who come to cart away his body like garbage find it hard to believe the old man was a soldier.

Frankie Pyrez, the new era of Chicano soldier, also dies. The fathers are lost; the sons are lost. Frankie's father goes mad, and in his vision he is much like Icharus. He grows wings to escape the horror that his people is forced into, and he flies up into the sky to freedom. He flies too close to the sun and is shot down. No Chicano can fly so high to seek justice without being felled.

However, amid all of this death and tragedy, with the Chicanos beaten down, the book ends on a note of promise. The new breed of Chicanos, the long-haired boys that their parents don't understand, are fighting for rights and justice in the United States, their new home. They do not dream of going back to Mexico. Instead, they dream of making

a life for themselves in this new and unfriendly land. They have been downtrodden so far that they might as well fight for just treatment. What more can the system do to punish them? The book ends on a call to action, to "break the silence of the centuries with the agony of our screams" (p. 178).

Characters

Chalito

Representative of all poverty-stricken street children, Chalito is a feisty little boy who thinks that he can make more money than anyone else can. He loves the sound of coins in his pockets and goes out early each day to work the streets. In his bid to free his family from poverty, he stays out too long one day, works too hard, gets drenched in the water that he uses to wash cars, and comes down with a serious chest cold. His family is unable to pay for medicine, let alone a visit to the doctor's office, and Chalito eventually dies.

Chalito's family is representative of most poor families living in Tijuana. His mother has given birth every year for ten years to nine children (including two sets of twins). His father is boastful and talks in "pretentious and ready-made sentences like politicians." The family survives due to the work of the mother, who sells tortillas; the older children, who shine shoes; and the younger ones, who wash cars. Lencho, Chalito's father, takes the money from the children and often gets drunk while his children go without food. They "were so hungry you could look right through to their souls."

When Chalito dies, his father goes crazy with grief, swearing never to touch alcohol again and to make sure that none of his children ever goes without food again. Rumor has it, says the narrator, that Lencho eventually breaks his promises and ends up in jail.

Chuco

See Chuquito

Chuquito

"If the work in the farm fields had been classified as an Olympic sport, how many gold medals ol' Chuco would have won!" Chuquito, called Chuco, is a champion picker. His reputation for picking over five hundred pounds of cotton in one day is legendary. Chuco is skinny and on the small side and moves "around with an agility so prodigious that it made you think of a dancer or boxer or some feline."

Chuco began working in the fields when he was twelve years old. By the time he reaches his thirty-fifth year, he is a broken man. The long days of backbreaking work have crippled him. When an old friend bumps into him in Los Angeles, Chuco is described as being "wrinkled like a raisin" at the age of forty-five. The friend finds Chuco squatting on the sidewalk with a big hat pulled down around his nose. He resembles a neon sign of a Mexican man in the same posture, leaning against a cactus, advertising one of Tony Baby's hot dog stands. Chuco tells his friend:

> You know what, pal? You see that pal there, leaning against the cactus? These people, pal, say that he's lazy, that he doesn't work, you know, but that guy's there, really, because he's all beat and all sad. The fellow was the harvest champion, you know. He's there because he's all tired out with no one to help him . . . [he's] just like a shovel or worn out pick that's not worth a damn anymore.

Other business people passing on the sidewalk are bothered by Chuco, calling him lazy, then sending for the police who take Chuco to jail.

Chuyito

Chuyito is a medicine man and a Yaqui Indian like Loreto. He is also a childhood friend of Loreto. He lived most of his life in the mountains, hiding from the federal troops who sought to slaughter all Yaqui Indians. He is called Little Jesus of Bethlehem because rumor has it that he has performed miraculous healings. It is often reported that he can speak in several languages, and when he is seen walking, from a distance he looks like he is floating.

When a man finds Chuyito in a bar, he goes over to his table and, calling him Little Jesus, tells Chuyito that he wants to follow him. Chuyito responds: "You want to follow me because you think this mission is a gringo movie in glorious Technicolor. But it isn't. Saving people is like dying over and over again."

Chuyito claims that he was, in some ways, cursed by having been baptized with the name of Jesus. He says that most of the people he healed had made themselves sick through all their greed and lying. All he did to cure them was to tell them to follow a path of truth.

But not all people wanted to follow him, government officials wanted to see him dead. They persecuted him because he went through towns and cities yelling "that the workers must be paid what is just." At one point when the police had caught him, they beat him and threatened to hang him "but a storm with lightning came up suddenly," Chuyito says, and "the cowards thought that I had supernatural powers, and [the police] let me go." In the end, Chuyito is turned over to the police by a Judas-like character who is paid "fifty cents" to point Chuyito out to them.

Colonel Rosario Chayo Cuamea

Colonel Cuamea comes to life in Loreto Maldonado's dreams. Chayo, a Yaqui Indian like Loreto, is remembered not only as a great leader of the Yaqui people during the Mexican Revolution but also as the "man who deflowered death."

The narrator eases Colonel Cuamea into the story in quick glimpses through Loreto's dreams and memories. Some of his memories, Loreto admits, may be corrupted by stories he's seen on television. But toward the end of the novel, a fuller scene of Cuamea is presented, a story that is entangled in a more modern story of a young, Mexican veteran of another war, in Vietnam.

Cuamea represents a sort of Pancho Villa-type heroic character, one who fights against the fourhundred- year history of Indian suppression by white settlers (who steal Yaqui Nation land). In his youth, Cuamea makes a commitment to dedicate his life to fighting for his people. "With his whole life as a guerrilla fighter, tanned to the core by the rigors of the bloodiest of battles, fighting in the Revolution came naturally to Rosario Cuamea."

The author personifies death by giving it the name Skinny Lady and states that Cuamea is in love with her. In the scene of his death, Cuamea is portrayed as raping the Skinny Lady.

Don Mario Davalos de Cocuch

Don Mario Davalos de Cocuch has "the dapper appearance of a bastard prince." He is a poor boy who makes good by "combining the activities of politicians and thieves." He works his way up the ladder by "bedding his wife with prominent men in order to win promotions." During the Revolutionary War, he fights with the Federal Army against Pancho Villa. In the war, he is given a horse to ride that has a sharp spine. Don Mario leaves the war a wounded man not from battle but from having ridden the horse. He comes away with an "injury of his sphincter." Because of this, he must wear diapers for he has lost control of his bowels. Don Mario represents the greed and corruption of the men who made their fortunes after the war. He owns a brothel, and in the end, he is stabbed to death by the brother of a young woman whom he had bought as a prostitute.

Bobby Foxye

On the sidewalk sitting next to him one day, Loreto sees a young, raggedy man with long hair dressed in hippie fashion. This young man is Bobby Foxye. Over the course of the novel, the reader hears Bobby's story that is filled with details of a child raised by parents whose main goal in life was to make money. Bobby represents the restless American youths of the early 1970s who were, for the most part, both spoiled by the capitalistic society in which they were raised and disgusted by it. In attempts to rebel against the ways of their parents, these youths took on the role of feigned poverty.

Bobby's family is very rich, and he was not neglected financially. He was sent to boarding schools that "could not offer the warmth of the home," but Bobby preferred these schools because at home all his parents did was talk about money. "They swam furiously in an enormous sea of numbers," the narrator states.

Eventually, Bobby is sent to law school because his father wants to retire and then have Bobby take over the management of his business. For two years, Bobby stays away

from his family, accepting their money but not attending any classes. One day, he comes home, wearing dirty and smelly clothes. He tells his parents that he does not want to be a lawyer. All he wants is "to live, love and not bother anyone." His father is furious with him and slaps him across the face saying: "You've been stealing my trust, exploiting me through deceit." Bobby's response to his father is: "Haven't you gotten rich by deceiving the whole world?"

La Malquerida

La Malquerida (whose real name is Rosenda Perez Sotolin) is a pretty, young woman who was tricked into becoming a prostitute. Méndez uses this character to put a face on the several somewhat faceless prostitutes that he mentions. La Malquerida is the only prostitute who is given any type of history. Her story includes having been lured to Tijuana on the pretense of finding a legitimate job, but once there, she is locked in a hotel room and sold to Tony Baby, who rapes her. Méndez also uses La Malquerida to emphasize that there is justice only for those who have money.

Lorenzo Linares

In the desert, Lorenzo, one of two poets in this story, loses his life. He is walking across the desert to find work on the other side of the border in the United States. He has, like most of the immigrants, a family that is depending on him to find work so that they might eat. On his way across, Lorenzo dies of thirst.

Everyone else in the group who is crossing the desert with Lorenzo makes it to the border. Only Lorenzo must be buried in a shallow grave in the sand. Vate, Lorenzo's buddy, believes that Lorenzo became so enraptured with the beauty of the desert landscape and the brilliance of the desert moon that he forgot that "he was conditioned to the time of his flesh and bones and became a part of the picture he was contemplating." Lorenzo fails to rest one night in the middle of his journey. He stays up all night, running over the sand dunes, captured by the deep desert silence. Vate says that Lorenzo "believed he was at the bottom of an enchanted sea."

The author uses Lorenzo to express his concept of the pilgrim. The narrator tells the reader that people like Lorenzo "come from the south, in the opposite direction from their forebears, in a pilgrimage without priests or prophets, dragging along a history without any merit for the one telling it, ordinary and repetitive in its tragedy."

Vate continues across the desert after Lorenzo's death. Toward the end of the novel, Vate, who never got over Lorenzo's death, writes an elegy, or funeral poem, to Lorenzo. Then Vate commits suicide.

Little Jesus of Bethlehem

See Chuyito

Loreto Maldonado

The narrator of *Pilgrims in Aztlán* describes Loreto Maldonado, in the beginning of the story, as a man who "lived with his soul turned like a telescope toward the living things of the past." Loreto is 80 years old and has more of a past than a future. But that is not the only reason that Loreto has turned his soul to things of the past. In Tijuana, Mexico, a border town where the poor and the destitute live in hunger and squalor amidst a steady flow of tourist money from the north, life is painful. For Loreto to focus on the present takes tremendous energy, not because he is old, tired, and hungry, but because the cruelties that one person is capable of afflicting on another sucks away all of Loreto's energy. Loreto is a proud, old man. He is also disciplined. His valor and dignity fill his soul even when his stomach is three days empty.

It is through Loreto that Méndez weaves his story. As Loreto walks the streets of his city, looking for cars to wash so that he might make fifty cents with which to buy food for the day, he bumps into the various characters of this story. When he is tired and sits down on the sidewalk to rest, his dreams take on visions from his past. Through these visions, the stories of the lives of warriors, healers, prostitutes, drunken fathers, Vietnam veterans, corrupt politicians, malnourished children, and unnamed emigrants on their way to the promised land of greenback dollars are all told. The stories are all filled with misery and wanting. Loreto collects these tales like a storyteller who retrieves the details of people's lives to save them "from oblivion by remembering them," as Salvador Rodriguez del Pino says in *Reference Guide to American Literature.* Loreto represents the oral tradition, a key element in Méndez's plea to protect and thus save the Mexican culture.

In reflections of his dreams and his daily visions, there are many times when Loreto feels that only purpose in his people's being alive is "to bear witness to how everybody else was fortunate." The poor and desolate are the mirror through which the fortunate ones refuse to see their own human likeness. Loreto's struggle, like the struggle of all the poor and hungry characters in this story, is "to reach a satisfying consciousness of self-worth, of his identity as a human being," says Oscar U. Somoza in his article "The Mexican Element in the Fiction of Miguel Méndez."

Sometimes Loreto's dreams are so vivid that upon waking, he barely remembers himself. At one point, as he stares into a store window, he jumps back when he focuses on his reflection. All he sees is an old, ugly man with a face that "revealed the wounds that his people had suffered. . . . he was the complete antithesis of feigned dignity." When Loreto's stomach churned with hunger, he "cocked his ears with intense curiosity, thinking that he was hearing his guts speaking in imploring voices that begged for food with a piteous tone." This embarrasses Loreto, and he becomes very upset with himself "because he had violated his own code of honor." But he goes on living, "dreaming that he's on an unknown planet and confined to oblivion like a foreigner without a country, ashamed of taking up someone else's space." However displaced he might feel, Loreto refuses to concede his "honor which was in direct conflict with his chronic hunger."

Loreto is a Yaqui Indian who fought in the Mexican Revolution with Pancho Villa. He represents the ancient history of Mexico, the aboriginal people of the land who are caught between two harsh worlds: the one where they have been relegated to the non-fertile lands of the arid mountains; the other where they live in the ghettos of the cities. Their choices are few: either die of hunger staying put in their hostile territories or take a chance of dying of thirst as they cross the desert in search of migrant work in the farmlands of the United States. It is through Loreto that the reader sees and hears the stories of his people as they make these choices. The consequences of their choices are played out in the streets, the bars, and, sometimes, right in Loreto's lap as when he cries, while holding a Vietnam soldier.

In the end, Loreto dies. His body is found in a decrepit shack that was made out of empty cans and beer bottles, old advertisements for food, and a large box showing a child eating bread. "The front part of Loreto's house and more than half the door . . . were covered with a . . . picture of a steak that was so real that you could almost smell the aroma." If dignity were the only element holding together Loreto's final years, it becomes totally dismantled in his death. His body is wrapped in a rotten tarp and tossed into the back of an old garbage truck.

Frankie Perez

The author has Frankie Perez stumble down the sidewalks of Tijuana toward Loreto and then collapse in Loreto's arms. Later, the reader discovers that Perez dies in the Vietnam War. Perez represents the Mexican male youths who move with their families to the United States in search of a better life. They work in the fields with their parents and attend school as often as possible. The cost of their education, however, is often the loss of their language and culture. Then, in the era of this novel, when they reach the age of eighteen, they are drafted in droves and shipped to Asia where they play out their short lives as pawns in a war without victory or dignity.

When Frankie is drafted, he is proud to serve his newly adopted country. "He had a sacred duty to defend his country. His beloved country, so just and generous with all its sons." But when Frankie finds himself in the middle of the Vietnam jungle, and after he has witnessed so many atrocities of war, he fears that even the animals must know through their instincts "that the earth was inhabited by a being that was all cruelty and viciousness." In the telling of the story, Loreto intertwines Frankie's war with Colonel Cuamea's revolution. Both men were war heroes and brave soldiers. But the great difference between them was that Cuamea fought a war for his own native people on his own native land, while Perez fought in Asia for an adopted country that exploited him.

The novel ends with Frankie's family receiving the news that their son has been killed in Vietnam. His father looses his grasp on reality:

The bosses said that he had gone crazy because he
was a real drunk. In part that was true . . . but he also

went mad from working like an animal . . . for seeing
his family . . . sunken in the cruelest of poverties
. . . and because of the death of his Frankie.

Tony Baby

Tony Baby is described as a "libidinous gringo" who hates to work. Tony is from the northern side of the border, or the United States, and he says, work "is for burros, oxen and fools." His grandmother, "a hairy chested woman," gains her fortune by selling hot dogs with chili sauce on top, calling them chili dogs to attract the Mexican- American population that lives in southern California.

Tony hates his grandmother, who makes him haul hot dogs around in a cart and work inside a huge refrigerator, stacking boxes of food. But Tony isn't the only one who hates her. When the men who work for Tony's grandmother try to organize to demand better wages, she calls in the immigration officials and has two hundred of the men arrested and sent back to Mexico.

The grandmother eventually dies, and Tony inherits her money. He then marries a woman who doesn't love him. Once his wife has gained a secure grasp on Tony's wealth, she refuses to go to bed with him. That's when Tony becomes a "dedicated frequenter of the border whorehouses, lost in the illusion that he was a rapist who couldn't be caught."

Rosenda Perez Sotolin

See La Malquerida

Vate

Vate is a poet and friend of Lorenzo Linares. While walking across the desert in an attempt to reach the United States to find work, Vate witnesses his friend's death and never gets over it. He feels responsible for Lorenzo, having promised Lorenzo's wife that he would watch over his friend to make sure that Lorenzo would return to his family safely. After Lorenzo's death, Vate's "mind became a falling star dragging along a tail of orphan words." The only thing he can think about is how he could not save his friend. In an attempt to make sure that people do not forget his friend, Vate writes an elegy, or long funeral poem, about Lorenzo. Then Vate commits suicide.

Themes

Pilgrimage

The pilgrimage to Aztlán is a dominant theme in Méndez's novel. To understand the pilgrimage, the concept of Aztlán itself must be grasped. As a myth, Aztlán has symbolized "the existence of a paradisiacal region where injustice, evil, sickness, old age, poverty, and misery do not exist," says Luis Leal writing in the *Denver Quarterly.* In the essay "Myth, Identity and Struggle in Three Chicano Novels," the writer and poet Alurista states that Aztlán represents "a myth of origin" and has "at least three traditions in distinct historical periods. First there is the ancient "Pre-Mexica" version that "dates back to the arrival of the first settlers" of Mexico. This version states that Aztlán was an island now lost in the Atlantic Ocean "where an advanced civilization" once lived. The second version, dating back to the time before the Spanish invasion of Mexico, holds that Aztlán was located somewhere around the present-day southwestern region of the United States.

The third version, says Alurista, is "the Chicano version" that was drafted by the "delegates to the first national Chicano youth conference held in Denver, Colorado," in 1969. "Here, again . . . Aztlán is used as a metaphor which unifies . . . [but] . . . is referred to as being more than a geographical location." This third interpretation adds more significance to the original meaning of the symbol. "Aztlán is no longer just an origin, a source, a motherland, a testimony to an ancient heritage and tradition. Aztlán has become a mission and a state of mind, a way of facing contemporary reality and social conditions . . . [it] speaks of reclaiming that which once belonged to its original inhabitants."

For Méndez, says Alurista, Aztlán is a land that is in the hands of capitalists from both north and south of the Mexican-American border. Aztlán no longer represents a utopian land, but rather it is a "place of toil and misery for those who have recently returned. And, for those who have been in the territory for generations, it is a place where their labor is exploited and their dignity stripped away." If these people in Méndez's novel are on a pilgrimage, Alurista concludes, at best it is a pilgrimage toward a national ideal "to be sought and fought for by a new generation yet to come."

In the novel, an anonymous voice (although it bears resemblance to the voice of one of the poets, either Lorenzo or Vate) calls out from the depths of the desert:

I was overtaken by imagination, and I saw in my pilgrimage
many Indian peoples reduced by the torture
of hunger and the humiliation of plunder, traveling
backwards along the ancient roads in search of their
remote origin . . . I was hurt by the despair of feeling
that utopia is ever a burning coal in consciousnesses

tortured by the denial of sublime aspirations,
and I fell to my knees begging for mercy.

War

Two wars are mentioned in detail in *Pilgrims in Aztlán:* the Mexican Revolution and the Vietnam War. In reference to the Mexican Revolution, "Méndez does not chronicle events about the conflict," says Oscar U. Somoza in his article "The Mexican Element in the Fiction of Miguel Méndez," instead he approaches it "and confront[s] it in a direct manner, letting [the characters] develop within the conflict but always with the freedom to return to the present moment when it is supposed that the Revolution has 'triumphed' and 'borne its fruits.'" The Revolution was not a success for the Yaqui people. Méndez's characters, says Somoza, like Colonel Cuamea and Loreto Maldonado, "are among that group of Mexicans who fought so their families could progress, yet even though their side won the battles, they came out of it with nothing."

In the novel, this outcome often puzzled Loreto who found himself going over "his experiences again and again, as if searching for the deficiency that by some misfortune might have turned things about, converting what could have been sublime into something awry, absurd." On the other hand, it is his experiences in the Revolution that stand out as some of his most vivid memories. By reflecting on these memories, it seems that Loreto is able to endure the terrible, undignified circumstances in which he finds himself as he struggles through each day. "This situation," Somoza states, "turns out to have been the reality for many of the surviving revolutionaries. If they were noble or idealistic they fell by the wayside like Loreto Maldonado. If not, they got ahead and became types such as . . . Davalos de Cocuch [a character who makes his money off of prostitution]."

The Mexican Revolution was a noble fight. The Yaqui people fought for a noble cause. But for what cause did the young men in the Vietnam War fight, especially the young men who were descendents of the Yaqui Indians? Méndez brings in the Vietnam War through the character of Frankie Perez. Frankie represents all the young men who were drafted by the thousands and sent to Asia to fight in a war that had no victory, no noble cause. The tone of voice used by the narrator as Frankie's experiences are told is coated in sarcastic irony. Here is a young man who is sent to the front lines to fight for a country whose long history includes the subjugation, if not attempted annihilation, of his own ancestral population. With an acerbic tongue in cheek, the narrator makes a list of American heroes for Frankie to turn to for inspiration. Instead of Villa and Zapata, Frankie has Superman, Batman, and, finally, the "Great Cowboy" to use as guides to bolster his courage when facing his Asian enemy.

Alone, relates the narrator, mounted on his spirited
horse, with a pistol in each hand, he [the "Great Cowboy"]
had vanquished and eliminated thousands of
Indians, liberating territories and caravans of religious
men and women predestined by God our Lord

to colonize these lands, as fertile as they were vast.
What is more, he had punished all of the evil Mexicans,
killing them like rabbits or humiliating them
just by looking at them askance.

The Vietnam War, the narrator concludes gave these young Mexican-American men "a great privilege! They had the distinction of dying, in a higher percentage, sacrificing themselves thus for their noble country."

Displacement

The results of the Mexican Revolution created a huge disparity between the corrupt politicians and businesspeople and the lower economical class. Opportunities for a major portion of the population were few, and poverty forced them "to leave their places of origin," says Somoza, "and set themselves up elsewhere." They leave their rural homes behind to search for work in the cities. Unfortunately, there are few jobs to be found in their own country. And thus begins the great emigration from their homeland.

Méndez depicts this emigration in small pieces, sharing brief moments throughout the novel with the great flood of humanity in its trek north across the desert in search of food.

The only hope, says Somoza, that remains for these
individuals, men as well as women, is to form part
of a group that crosses the border toward a country
that is not their own and that treats them as slaves . . .
the few that manage to establish themselves in the
United States find themselves . . . disoriented as . . .
they discover no entry into a socio-economic ambience
that rejects them and denies them the opportunities
that belong to the Anglo-American group.

The character Vate, after burying his friend Lorenzo in the desert, says:

I know that in the storybooks, the poor young man
goes out to seek adventures, and he comes back rich
and marries the daughter of the king. But now I also
know that to be a Chicano or a wetback is to be a
slave and to live scorned. It's been a century since
left my village, and someday I'll return to cry for my
dead.

Style

Form

The form of *Pilgrims in Aztlán* might be considered new and inventive when compared to traditional concepts of written literature. However, when compared to oral tradition, an age-old process of handing down cultural stories from one generation to the next, the form of Méndez's novel is commonplace, as old as language itself. The first requirement in transposing oral tradition to the printed word is to create an orator or storyteller. In this novel, that role goes to Loreto Maldonado. Although it is not always clear where and how Loreto gets these stories, he is "the center for the loose voices of the novel," says Juan D. Bruce-Novoa in *Contemporary Chicano Fiction.* While the voices of the rich and powerful are written in public records such as newspapers and history books, the voices of the poor go unrecorded, says Bruce- Novoa. Their stories, if not passed down through oral tradition, are permanently lost. That is why Méndez tries to capture the form of oral storytelling in writing this book, a collection of stories about the poor.

In the telling of these seemingly random stories, the form becomes somewhat fractured. Chronological time exists but only as a jigsaw puzzle exists when broken in pieces. Jumps from the past to the present, from one story to the next, from poetic metaphor to vulgar slang challenge the reader to take an active part in the story. Who is talking now? Whose story is this? What is this new setting? Why is this voice so different? What time is it? Where is this story going? These questions buzz in the reader's head as the story progresses.

Bruce-Novoa states that this fracturing of form is also Méndez's way of reflecting the fracturing of the society of which he is writing. He says,

> . . . the fragmentation of the narrative reflects the confusion and disorganization of the people, whereas a chronological, orderly structure would reflect more the supposed order of society into which the Chicano is being pushed. The structural tensions of the novel reflect the structural tensions of the socio-cultural (and economic) struggle.

For the reader who is willing to face the challenge, Bruce-Novoa continues, Méndez has provided a surprise. If the reader has listened carefully, "the voice [at the end of the novel] reveals the purpose of the voyage. The reading has been an initiation rite in which the reader becomes [the pilgrim in Aztlán] worthy of the revelations to be made to him."

Figurative Language

The use of metaphor and personification begin on the first page of this novel and continues through the last pages. As if the story did not provide enough color in all the various voices, characters, time lines, and themes, Méndez splashes figurative language on each page as colorful as tropical flowers. His images take the ordinary, flat, black and white, printed pages and paint three dimensional murals that pull the reader into his imaginary landscapes.

On the first page alone, Méndez has a string of metaphors that begin with "the bucket was foaming like an angry camel," and end with a description of Loreto's difficulty in walking as that which is "experienced by ants after someone's sadistic footstep has stepped on them." On the second page, Méndez has Loreto's heart leaping around "like a rock-and-roll toad;" his brain is bubbling; his soul is a telescope; and he was "navigating like a falling star." Loreto's whole life, Méndez writes "meant struggling with death, as if the fluidity of his temporal condition were a black colt, the wildest of the wild, determined to whip him off his slippery back against the outcroppings of rocks."

Death, in Méndez's hands, is personified as the "Skinny Lady." In the desert, the landscape takes on human form as he talks about the "throat of the canyons," and the moon as a "tangible bride into whose ear he could speak beautiful things and who would cling tenderly to his arms."

The long lines of pilgrims crossing the desert become "a ladder of questions without answers, voices born of the bowels of the earth." The United States is a "Mecca for the hungry;" and the starving Mexican people are described as "skeletal women with tits like dry wells," children who look like "skin and bone pinatas," and their dogs are "so skinny they look like stringed instruments."

Two extended metaphors occur in part three of the novel. The first involves Colonel Cuamea and the Skinny Lady of Death. As Loreto tells the story, Colonel Cuamea was in love with Death and determined to "deflower" her. She taunts him through most of his adult life, but as an old man, he sees her and "without thinking" takes off his clothes, lies down, and prepares to meet her.

For her part, Death is torn between meeting him and turning away, postponing the inevitable. But she cannot resist. She approaches and sits astride him and is surprised to "feel a sharp object like a dagger tear at her insides." Angered, she digs into Cuamea and "yank[s] out the roots from which life hangs. Then she leaves his body lying there "rotting like an animal. Protruding eyes like large tomatoes adorned the carrion banquet."

The second extended metaphor involves Panfilo Perez, a man who has lost a son in the Vietnam War. Perez goes crazy at the news of his son's death and in his madness, he imagines himself "an enormous bird with black wings." In this form, Panfilo's eyes fill with a downpour that "was so thick that it was as if his soul had turned into a sea." He then flies so high that he can see "the teeth in the man in the moon." He also discovers

that the stars "are pinatas . . . [and] . . . not phosphorescent billiard balls." The earth, through Panfilo's eyes, has rivers that look "just like varicose veins," and forests sit "thick on the cheeks of the ravines." When Panfilo flies up to talk to the sun, "he felt his beak warp as though it were made of molasses," then his claws become "soft like the hands of a newborn baby and his eyes as brilliant and fiery as two white-hot coals."

Historical Context

The late 1960s saw a rise in Mexican-American political activity as well as a substantial increase in the publication of Mexican-American literary works. While for other ethnic groups, these were years of protests against the Vietnam War and marches for women's liberation and civil rights, for Mexican- Americans it was a time of searching for and reclaiming an identity. During this same period in California, Colorado, and Texas, thousands of Mexican-American students were boycotting their schools, refusing to accept the Americanized versions of history, especially in terms of the historical supposition that Columbus had discovered America. They also demanded the creation of Chicano studies programs. It was a time of protests against working conditions in the agricultural fields and the disproportionate numbers of Mexican- American men fighting in Vietnam. Also during this time, David Sanchez helped organize the Brown Berets, a group that promoted Mexican pride.

One of the Mexican-American mottos of this era came from former professional boxer and poet Rodolfo Gonzales' "I am Joaquin," an epic poem chronicling four hundred years of Mexican history. The phrase that turned into a motto was "I will never be absorbed." It incited a move against enculturation. It was also at this time that the first Chicano Youth Liberation Conference was held. At the conference, The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán was drafted and legitimized by the delegates. It was in this plan that Aztlán, the mythical utopian symbol of Mexico, was used as a unifying metaphor for Mexican-Americans. It was also at this conference that a renewed interest in Aztlán changed the symbol to include not only a geographical location but also a state of mind. One of the final statements in the Spiritual Plan declares, "We are Aztlán." With this statement, the poet Alurista says in his article "Myth, Identity and Struggle in Three Chicano Novels," "Aztlán has become a mission and a state of mind, a way of facing contemporary reality and social conditions."

During the 1970s, there was a flourishing of Mexican-American literature. Some of the more popular literature included Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo,* Rudolfo Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán* and *Bless Me, Ultima,* Ernesto Galarz's *Barrio Boy,* and Jose Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho.* In this same time frame, Mexican- American studies programs were inaugurated in American colleges and universities.

On the other side of the border during this same period, student protests were on the rise. Mexico was in the grasp of a very strong governmental force that made several unpopular political arrests, suppressed several labor strikes, and annulled several controversial local elections. It was the time of the Mexico City-sponsored Summer Olympic Games, and the leaders of the country wanted to make sure that the international spotlight did not expose any signs of political or economic instability. Despite the crackdown on protests, the students' voices grew louder, and, in August of 1968, students convened in the largest antigovernment demonstration ever held. The police arrested the leaders of the protest and announced a ban on any further protests. This did not, however, stop the student activity. In October, another student protest was organized. Although the crowd was much smaller, the police did not waste any time.

They came in with helicopters and tanks, and by the end of the skirmish, it was estimated that four hundred students were dead.

The 1970s brought a new Mexican president to power. In an attempt to de-radicalize the young leftists and intellectuals, the new president gave them posts in the government. As a matter of fact, this president, Echeverria, became a champion of leftist causes in Latin America. He began a redistribution of power and wealth through massive public-spending programs and was responsible for heavy state investment in the promotion of consumption and social welfare for the middle and lower classes. Echeverria was also responsible for programs that redistributed land and increased the number of schools and health clinics in the rural areas. Unfortunately, the combination of government spending and Echeverria's poor relationship with the national business community lead to a 450 percent rise in Mexico's national debt and subsequent devaluation of the peso. A dramatic rise in the number of immigrants to the United States soon followed.

Critical Overview

Although only a few of Miguel Méndez's works have been translated into English, his writing impressed enough English-speaking, literary personages to win him a teaching position at a university. Not only that, it won him an honorary college degree. Although his writing is not well known to the general non-Hispanic population in the United States, the Hispanic community admires him as one of the finest, contemporary writers.

Méndez's novel *Pilgrims in Aztlán* was published around the same time that Mexican-American youths were beginning to organize a political movement whose basic premise was the resistance of enculturation. The students were refusing to give up their use of the Spanish language in school. They were rebelling against American history texts in which Christopher Columbus, for instance, was honored as the person who discovered America. Also at this time, the symbol of Aztlán, the mythical homeland of the Aztec people, was a rallying point for the students who were searching for a cultural identity. A reawakening need for symbols of their traditions found a home in this mythical symbol. This symbol seems to have arisen from some deep, collective passion and was found in the title of many literary works at the time. Méndez's book was one of the first. The symbol helped to unite the Hispanic community, and Méndez's book furthered the concept.

For these and other reasons, most critics view Méndez's book as a landmark in Hispanic literature. Oscar U. Somoza in "The Mexican Element in the Fiction of Miguel Méndez," says that with this novel Méndez "solidified his position as an outstanding representative of Chicano literary expression." Somoza adds that Méndez "emerges as a proponent of a deep moral approach toward socio-economic issues." Roland Walter, writing in the *Americas Review* calls Méndez's novel "a sociological document of high aesthetic standard."

Pilgrims in Aztlán, says Juan D. Bruce-Novoa in his "Miguel Méndez: Voices of Silence," is a story about the poor who have, without Méndez, no voice. He also admits that Méndez's book is hard to read. It is complicated by a fractured timeline and complex structure. It is a novel that "waits for someone capable of listening to and actualizing the voices." Despite its challenging style "the strong reader, the faithful, persistent reader will prove himself in the arduous reading by understanding Méndez's real message." That message waits for the reader at the end of the book, and like a rite of passage, says Bruce-Novoa, the reader must make his way through.

The book is a "wealth of oral tradition," continues Bruce-Novoa, and

> Méndez achieves the purpose of converting the oral tradition into fixed images: Méndez creates a synthesis of the voices of the poor and a written text that can compete in complexity and beauty with contemporary literature.

One of Méndez's deepest concerns is the loss of oral tradition in the Mexican-American culture. Because the younger generations are losing their language, the gap between their generation and the generation of their grandparents is widening. Since oral tradition is handed down from the older generation to the younger one, the oral stories of the older generation are being lost.

Although there is agreement that Méndez's text requires an active reader who is willing to record the names behind the voices and keep track of the histories behind the names, most critics also support Bruce-Novoa's statement that "what seduces us is not simply what is said [in Méndez's novel], but how it is said." Méndez's use of metaphor and his poetic appreciation of language makes the pilgrimage from the first page to the last well worth the effort.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Hart is a freelance writer and former director of the Mentors Writing Conference. In this essay, she looks at the protagonist, Loreto Maldonado, as metaphor for the oral tradition and its role in the Mexican-American culture as interpreted in Méndez's novel.

The word *pilgrim* has several different connotations. From the Latin root, *peregrinus,* the word means "foreigner." A more descriptive definition translates as "one who travels to a foreign or sacred place." When the word is extended to *pilgrimage,* it encompasses the journey itself; and at its most philosophical extension can refer to the actual journey through life on earth. Underlying all these various interpretations of the word is the sense of movement. Someone is moving somewhere for some consciously or unconsciously determined reason.

This movement, or pilgrimage, is a theme that runs through all the many stories in Méndez's *Pilgrims in Aztlán.* But because there are so many stories, so many voices, and so many journeys, the reading of the novel can be challenging. The fragmentation of time and form demands greater attention than an easy-reading novel. This fragmentation, says Juan Bruce-Novoa in his article "Miguel Méndez: Voices of Silence," is done on purpose. Méndez wants to challenge the reader to take an active part in the stories, but he also wants the chaos to reflect the confusion that his characters are experiencing. This confusion also confronts the lives of Mexican-Americans, today, who, in Méndez's point of view, are losing their sense of their culture. This loss is reflected in the loss of the oral tradition, the process by which the older generation passes down stories to their children. The power of the oral tradition is that it holds the culture together by making sense out of the chaos of all of life's stories.

In the novel *Pilgrims of Aztlán,* the character who represents the oral tradition is the storyteller Loreto Maldonado; he is the one who holds things together. Bruce-Novoa says that

> The oral histories, unacknowledged in society's official records vibrate in the head of the protagonist Loreto . . . Loreto is the center for the loose voices of the novel. Believing that the history of the poor is found in the oral tradition, Méndez needs a human center to contain it, to be its focus.

By not only listening to Loreto's stories but by also studying Loreto's pilgrimage (his movement through this novel), the reader is given a tool to help understand all the other stories. If Loreto were real and sitting in front of the reader, his tone of voice and facial expression, his past history with the reader, as well as his creativity in altering the insinuation of the story as it relates to the present time would all give more food with which to fuel the reader's imagination. It would fill in the gaps between all the stories. Because it is impossible to provide this set of circumstances, the reader must work to understand Loreto by studying the clues that Méndez provides in describing Loreto's

actions, his motives, his thoughts, and his pilgrimage. The reader needs to ask: What drives Loreto? What is he looking for? Where is he going? Where has he been?

One of the first interesting facts the reader learns about Loreto is that, although he represents the oral tradition as the storyteller, he is, for the most part, silent. The histories of the poor may vibrate in his head, but "the complicated need to arrange his memories in a chronological order was now of no use to him. He lived with his soul turned like a telescope toward the living things of the past." This does not prevent him from seeing and hearing the stories of the present unfold in front of him, but they act only as catalysts to stir his memories. Another fact that the reader learns about Loreto in the opening pages of the novel is that he has, despite his current appearance and economic status, a "code of honor." Keeping this in mind, the reader can see through his eyes as Loreto reflects on the moral disposition of all the forthcoming characters. Knowing that Loreto is a noble man also helps to better understand his journey.

As Loreto walks down the streets of Tijuana each morning, what is he looking for? The casual reader might suggest that the old Yaqui Indian is looking for money with which to buy food. But is that all that his life is worth? Is Loreto only looking for survival? Loreto is a proud man with a proud past, but sometimes, in his present state, he does not recognize his own image.

> How many times had he seen his reflection in the panes of glass of those buildings, where so many things are for sale, without recognizing himself, until after a few seconds it would strike him that that blackened and wrinkled face was his own?

Loreto is a man who is suffering from a lack of self image. He knows his past very well, but his present is unrecognizable. With this information, the reader might assume that Méndez is reflecting on his fears that his people, because they are losing their oral tradition, are also losing their identity, losing their sense of culture and place. Méndez strengthens this assumption in another description of Loreto as a man who "goes on living, or better, dreaming that he's on an unknown planet and confined to oblivion like a foreigner without a country."

Loreto is also a little mischievous. "He was amused by the parade of gringos buying souvenirs," Méndez writes. But then, a few paragraphs later when Méndez turns the point of view from the old man to the tourists, Loreto is fast asleep, snoring and sounding like "a serenade of pigs in heat calling for their females." Whether Loreto is feigning sleep, as well as his loud snoring, remains unknown. But the scene, at first, does invoke a sense of comedy. On another, more serious level, however, this is a foreshadowing of a scene yet to come. Point of view is very significant to Méndez, as is misinterpretation. The other scene in the story between a group of "gringos" that is walking past a Mexican man, Chuco, who is lying on the sidewalk, ends up with Chuco being thrown in jail. Although he is not sleeping, but rather contemplating a picture of a Mexican man sleeping, the white people, nevertheless, call him lazy. "All they think of is booze and sleep!" In fact, Chuco has worked all his life in the fields. He was known as

the champion of all pickers because he worked so fast and so hard. His prone figure, like the prone figure of the Mexican man in the sign, is easily misinterpreted by people who have stereotypical identities of the Mexican man.

In the course of the novel, Loreto has direct confrontations with three young men. One is a young child, Chalito, whom Loreto tries to chase off his street corner where the child is washing cars. The child's precise age is unknown, but it can be deduced that his age is less than nine years. This child will haunt Loreto in future scenes. Chalito will die, not from anything that Loreto did, but for something he could not do. In a later dream, Loreto sees Chalito and puts his hands into his bulging pockets and pulls out handfuls of money that he gives to the child. Chalito is transformed, and Loreto recognizes himself as that child. It is through children that Loreto shows his strongest emotions. "They looked on him with the fresh eyes of children which are like fresh, unused film." Children are the future of the culture, "the dawn of another generation." This is Méndez talking as he worries about the loss of tradition for the future generations.

The next young man that Loreto encounters on the sidewalk is a white man from the United States. This young man is a college dropout. He is the product of a marriage blessed with money ("wealth based on the suffering of others") but bothered by having produced a child. The hippie represents the antithesis of the young boy Chalito's story. The hippie has chosen filth and is feigning poverty. However, Méndez may well be using the hippie as a warning. Mexican-American youths may be losing their culture, but what, if any, culture do the Anglo-Americans have? The irony goes further when Méndez has the hippie "speak with the lucidity of a Spanish university professor." Méndez contends that one of the main reasons for the disappearance of oral tradition in his culture is that the young children no longer speak their grandparent's language.

The third man that Loreto meets on the sidewalks is Frankie Perez. When Loreto first sees him, he makes the mistake, as Méndez says most all of us do, of prejudging him. "Loreto saw him coming out of a brothel . . . and knew he was going to fall. Later, his soul would become afflicted with the blackest anguish when he learned the enormous tragedy of the little drunk." Furthermore, Loreto thinks that Frankie is a young child, "he looked fifteen at the most." In truth, Frankie turns out to be a Vietnam veteran home on leave.

When Frankie stumbles and falls into Loreto's arms, it is the first scene in the book where the reader actually sees Loreto touching someone. Loreto holds him up and that's when he notices "that [Frankie] was dark, with a big nose and the features of a Yaqui. The old man trembled, shaken by a burst of tenderness." In this scene, it appears that Frankie dies while Loreto holds him. The truth is that Frankie dies in Vietnam, but Loreto senses Frankie's death coming, and the narrator confirms it. "The draw of life . . . it was fate that old Loreto Maldonado hold a symbolic wake over the body of Frankie, because nine months later, when he fell in Vietnam, no one accompanied his lifeless body." Loreto, in some sense, is holding on to his own progeny, a descendent of his ancient culture□and his child is dying. What's more, he is dying because he went to fight in a foreign war, defending a country that does not honor him. In his stupor, Frankie relives his short life in bits and pieces of dialogue. "He, his

family, the war, prejudice, slavery, school. Spanish is not to be spoken! Hunger. Spanish, no! The grapes, the cantaloupes, cucumbers, cotton. Without medications! I told you. Don't speak Spanish. Dark people are worthless. Get to working hard, hard, hard. Listen. Speak English. The war, the war, ah, ah, the war . . . . "

While Loreto holds Frankie, Méndez plays a sort of duet with the memories of war between the two men. Loreto has his Mexican Revolution, the war that cost him his leg, the war in which he fought with his buddy Colonel Cuamea. Frankie has Vietnam. Back and forth like gunfire, Méndez mixes up the two wars, sometimes in the same paragraph. The Mexican Revolution, in name, was a victory for the Yaqui Indians as they were able to get rid of a despotic dictator and technically win back their lands. But where did the Revolution get Loreto? How did he end up living in the back streets of Tijuana? Was he any better off than Frankie? The only hint that Méndez offers as the difference between the two men is that at least Loreto fought on and for his own land.

> There has never existed a race that fought with such determination and courage for its land as the Yaquis did. Ready to die for their soil . . . Neither women nor old people were excluded from the struggle to death for the land that the white men grabbed from them like pulling their nails out.

"The Yaqui Loreto survived the unfortunate Frankie by two years," the narrator tells the reader. His body was discovered in the "little house that he had constructed in the neighborhood alongside the dried-up river." The river has been damned, obviously watering someone's lush fields. Garbage men find Loreto's body. They wrap it up and toss it into the back of their truck. Irony reigns again when the narrator describes Loreto's shack. It is constructed out of empty cans and bottles of food and drink. It is papered with posters of people eating and drinking. The only piece of furniture is a small chest inside of which is a picture. It is a picture of Loreto with Colonel Cuamea. There is also a document, one that states that Loreto, during the Mexican Revolution, had been a general.

Bruce-Novoa states that Loreto's "role as the custodian of oral history is underscored by the fact that only Loreto knows and remembers the semimythical deeds of Colonel Cuamea." But after his death "Loreto will not be included in the official accounts of the Revolution . . . like all members of the poor class, Loreto disappears, and with him all those oral histories he would have passed on to a younger generation if the oral tradition still functioned as it should." Loreto's death symbolizes the death of the oral tradition.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *Pilgrims in Aztlán,* in *Novels for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Rodriguez del Pino reviews Méndez's contributions to Chicano literature.

The craft of writing is a demanding skill. Not many are able to achieve it. Most of us spend all of our young years□from elementary school through college□learning it, and yet some of us graduate almost illiterate. If this is true, for learning the craft of writing, how much more difficult is it to be a good writer of literature? Until very recently, the writer or novelist needed good training in literature, money to support himself or herself, and time to write. Writing was an endeavor of the upper classes or of individuals willing to give up everything for the love of art. It certainly was not for the working classes, for the poor, or for the uneducated. Very few with these drawbacks ever succeeded. In 1971, Edward Simmens wrote: "At any rate, neither the upper-class Mexican-American nor the lower-class laborer has produced literature: the former is not inclined; the latter is not equipped." Yet, there are always exceptions. Miguel Méndez, a Mexican American bricklayer with a sixth-grade education, has produced some of the most polished Chicano literature written in Spanish and has received an honorary doctor's degree from the University of Arizona where he holds a position as professor of Latin American and Chicano literatures.

In my book *La novela chicana escrita en espanol: cinco autores comprometidos* (*The Chicano Novel Written in Spanish: Five Committed Authors*), I define Méndez's commitment as a commitment to the people, to the Chicano people, to be exact. His commitment, in the sense of being engagé, is a commitment he made to the nascent Chicano literary movement in order to rescue its oral history and to create the necessary images to document Chicano history, culture, and presence through the vehicle of the Chicano's ancestral language. Some of the other committed writers included in the book have abandoned their commitment of writing in Spanish. Only Méndez has continued to do so, and I am sure that Tomás Rivera would have also continued to do so had he lived. But the reason Méndez continues to write in Spanish is that he has not been able to master the English language well enough to use it as a literary medium. Some readers are glad, I suppose, because □whether for this reason or another□Méndez continues to preserve Spanish as an important factor in Chicano literature. And this is one of the important characteristics that distinguish Chicano literature as such, even though it still creates problems for English and Spanish departments in universities and for students as well. This literature demands that the reader be bilingual, as the corpus of Chicano literature cannot be divided into Spanish and English; each of the two languages is part of the same vital experience, and most of the time, they are intertwined in the same text. The bilingual factor sets Chicano literature apart as unique among national literatures.

Méndez's commitment stems from personal conviction and a cultural legacy that carries within itself the necessary and important need to preserve itself through oral history transmitted through the ritual of storytelling. Méndez has enhanced this ritual with the art of writing. Yet, while transmitting this cultural and historical legacy through literature,

Méndez has not forgotten that contemporary Chicano culture is a symbiosis and amalgamation of three cultural heritages: indigenous, Hispanic, and Anglo American.

Ever since his two seminal stories, "Tata Casehua" and "Workshop for Images: Come in," appeared in *El Espejo* in 1969, Miguel Méndez has continued to keep his commitment to rescue the voices of silence and to create images that reflect and interpret the elusive reality and history of the Chicanos. In "Tata Casehua," Méndez sets forth his obsession to rescue the forgotten history and legacy of the people born under the sign of omega. These are the descendants of the conquered peoples of America, who, according to Méndez, were doomed to extermination and oblivion by the arrival of the Europeans on the American continent. One must listen, he said, to the dispersed voices and histories of these peoples, carried by the wind that forever writes forgotten symbols on the ever-shifting sand dunes of the Sonora Desert□voices, he assures us, that whisper to the chosen ones the mystery of the ancient symbols that must be rescued from their silence. And Méndez is one of those initiated, as Bruce-Novoa explains in his article "La voz del silencio: Miguel Méndez."

In his other story, "Workshop for Images: Come In," Méndez tells us how reality is represented by the many broken pieces of a mirror that reflect a different perspective of the same reality and how people cling to the image of a certain reflection as the only true representation of reality. In order to grasp the essence of reality, he tells us, we must accept and realize that each broken piece is but part of the whole, and that the myriad reflections must be put together so we can comprehend and actually see the total image of reality. That is why, he tells us through examples in the story, each generation reacts and rebels against the perspective of reality held by the generation in power. This also works for the group that holds power in any society. The power group's view of reality is the basis for its interpretation of history, its rationale for oppressing other groups, and its obligation of imposing its own values and behavior. One of the examples Méndez uses to illustrate this concept in "Workshop for Images" is the older generation in power ordering the younger generation to fight and die and suffer the ravages of war in a conflict conceived by and based on the reality of the power group.

Méndez continues to use this personal concept of reality in his works and to present its many variations in order to capture the whole. *Peregrinos de Aztlán* is a case in point. The fragmented stories, anecdotes, and lives he presents in the text poignantly reflect the whole spectrum of the border reality that Méndez wants to portray. He would not have achieved this objective so thoroughly had he taken a more conventional and traditional approach with a single protagonist within a one-dimensional view of reality. Méndez, a voracious reader of world literature, could have used techniques and styles encountered in his readings, such as the fragmentation used in Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* or Fuentes's *La región más transparente,* which in a sense he did. But he takes this approach a little further by presenting a physical and psychological reality fragmented even in its components, a reality that is contradictory, perverse, and arbitrary. One example of contradiction in the text is the description of the millions of tourists who visit Tijuana every year and of Rudolph H. Smith, the judge, who seem to be attracted to and cherish the Mexican culture and decorate their houses with Mexican designs and themes but, at the same time, cannot tolerate the presence of a dark

Mexican in their home. This is a very contradictory but acceptable view of reality when practiced by those in power.

Méndez is also adept and sensitive when rescuing the indigenous and folk stories that appear in many of his works as well as in the transculturation process of introducing stories from the *Calilia et Dimna* into the Chicano world view. The stories or fables from the *Calila et Dimna* can be traced to India and Persia; they were written and preserved by the Arabs and translated into medieval Spanish in 1251 by order of the Castilian king Alfonso X, El Sabio. Méndez takes these stories inherited from the Hispanic legacy and turns them into Chicano literature through the process of bilingualism, Chicano psychology, and relocation to the border region of Arizona. Another Chicano writer who has drawn from Spanish literature is Rolando Hinojosa. Two of his sources for his Klail City Death Trip Series have been *Claros varones de Castilla* and *Generaciones y semblanzas,* Spanish masterpieces from the medieval period.

Méndez also draws from Latin American literature, another source of the literary legacy of the Chicano. His use of magical realism in his latest novel, *The Dream of Santa María de las Piedras,* is an extension of the Latin American propensity to mix the fantastic and the real, which is the mixture of the magical, spiritual, and physical reality that truly represents the holistic interpretation of Latin American reality. This is the result of the *mestizaje* of the magical and spiritual world of the indigenous people of America and the pragmatic, but mystic, reality of Spain. The desert seems an appropriate location for a Chicano version of Latin American magical realism, as the constant mirages and images produced by the heat and reverberations of the local elements create a fantastic atmosphere where both realities, the physical and the psychological, converge in a dramatic display presenting different levels of perception. Hallucinations? Illusions? Reality? All of these and more. That is the nature of the desert and of the land of Aztlán: a mixture of magical realism and mythology. A study of Méndez's use of magical realism in *The Dream of Santa María* can be found in the eloquent article by Alfonso Rodríguez in the proceedings from the conference in Barcelona on Culturas Hispanas de los Estados Unidos de América.

Méndez, again, juxtaposes both realities, as if to pit one against the other, in his epic poem *Los criaderos humanos y Sahuaros* (*The human breeding grounds and Sahuaros*). Poetic language, it seems, was the only vehicle for dramatizing the profound pain and grief that invade like a cancer the lives and circumstances of the downtrodden, the unwanted, the pariahs. These, according to Méndez, are the indigenous Americans, the people of the desert, of Aztlán, people who are not only victimized by "the terrible mother," the desert, but also by their fellow human beings, the powerful, the elite, entrenched in the cities. The desert and the city become the entities that breed their oppressors. The desert and the city emerge as constant leitmotifs in Méndez's works just like the dual representation of reality from "Tata Casehua" to *The Dream of Santa María de las Piedras,* these two elements are constant in his work no matter what the themes are or what genre he uses.

Another characteristic of Méndez's style is the reappearance of protagonists in his works. These characters are prototypes found along the border: streetwise kids,

wetbacks, gossipy old men, prostitutes, and Indians, people Méndez knew and lived with during his youthful pilgrimage through the Southwest. To anybody who has lived in any of the border cities, Tijuana, Juárez, Nogales, or Brownsville, Méndez's characters seem like old friends. The Mexico-United States borderland is unlike any other region in the world. It is a twothousand- mile stretch of land where the first world confronts the third world, creating some kind of utopia (a good place or no place, depending on your interpretation of the term). It is the dumping ground of two countries where the people who live there must forever scheme and invent daring strategies for survival. A place where on one side people are constantly looking for ways to cross the borderline, while on the other they are constantly looking for more brutal ways to stop them. Yet, it is a place full of life and energy. A place where races and languages mix freely together, and whose economic strength relies upon the creativity of the people, with no holds barred. Anything goes, as long as you don't get caught. In spite of its dynamics, Mexico and the United States disassociate themselves from the borderland. They argue that it is a place completely created by a bad press in order to embarrass both governments and that the border represents neither Anglo American values nor the traditions of Mexican culture. Méndez does not describe this world any differently in his work. In fact, he adds that it is a place where greed, injustice, and discrimination pervade. Yet, despite the harshness of the situation and the hostility of the environment, it is the people struggling for survival in this place that make the border the last frontier in America. And Miguel Méndez continues to tell the world their story.

Source: Salvador Rodriguez del Pino, "Miguel Méndez: The Commitment Continues," in *Miguel Méndez in Aztlán: Two Decades of Literary Production,* edited by Gary D. Keller, Bilingual Review/Press, 1995, pp. 89-91.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, del Pino presents an overview of Peregrinos de Aztlán, *stating that Méndez "indicts the perverse political systems converging on the border by rescuing stories that were never officially told."*

Peregrinos de Aztlán, Miguel Méndez M.'s first novel, was a long awaited literary event in Chicano literature. Méndez M. had already achieved recognition through his short stories "Tata Casehua" and "Taller de imagenes: pase" (Shop of Images: Come In), which had been written in a very polished prose and innovative imagery in the Spanish language. *Peregrinos* came to verify the masterful use of language by a Chicano construction worker who had not finished high school and who, by reason of class, education, and resources, was considered incapable of writing literature. The novel did not disappoint anyone. Instead, it added new dimensions to the Spanish language by including apocryphus dialects such as Border Spanish, Chicano Spanish and "pachuco calo" (a hybrid street Barrio jargon) into a literary text. In other words, Méndez M. gave genuine expression to the different characters that inhabit the Mexican and Chicano world of "the Border."

The Border is a region where Méndez M. lived and experienced the injustice and oppression perpetrated by two political systems that converge and confront each other along one of the longest borders in the world: the U.S./Mexico border. The microcosm is Tijuana, a city on the California- Mexico border. Within this city one finds representatives of almost all suppressed classes as well as oppressors whose stories converge and confront each other by their need to be told. Méndez M. rescues these stories about ordinary people who are neither heroes, personalities, nor famous. These are stories about the downtrodden, the helpless, the poor, and the unwanted whose only crime seems to be their skin color and their Indian race.

Méndez M. employs a fragmented style of storytelling in order to include the many stories that the city harbors, and he anchors them in the feverish mind of Loreto, an old car washer, who retrieves them from oblivion by remembering them. The Anglo hippie, the white-slaver, the prostitute, the corrupt judge, the cynical bureaucrat, and the hapless undocumented worker are some of the characters that find voice through Méndez M., who lets them speak in their own language. Reading the text is a tour de force in linguistic expertise as the reader must be knowledgeable in various levels of Southwestern dialects in order to fully appreciate the richness of the text.

Méndez M. structures the novel in three parts: in the first part Loreto introduces the many characters to the reader as he meets these characters while walking the streets looking for cars to wash; the second part elaborates and details their stories and develops their personalities; and the third centers on Colonel Cuamea, an old Yaqui warrior, and Frankie Pérez, who dies in Vietnam. Revolution and war are the scenarios in the third part where the lives of Cuamea and Frankie are compared through a personal struggle of ideals.

The procession of deaths throughout the text, some of them tragic, others ironic, intensify the contrast of forgotten heroic stories with the uninspiring and useless lives of the people in power. Méndez M. creates here a novel of thesis where he indicts the perverse political systems converging on the border by rescuing stories that were never officially told or were too banal to be considered. One of these is the story of Pedro, the brother of Rosenda, who kills Mario Miller de Cocuch for selling his sister into prostitution. The local papers report the incident by presenting the vilest character in the novel as a "very distinguished citizen in city politics and business who is suddenly and without provocation assaulted and stabbed by an unknown evildoer who, without a word and driven by his criminal instinct, kills him and rapidly flees." The honor and dignity of the poor is constantly reviled by those in power who seem to be the only ones to command respect by reason of wealth or political power. The stories succeed one another as Loreto guides us through the streets of the city introducing us to characters who seem to be invisible and insensible to the feelings of the foreign tourist or the wealthy passerby. The lives and histories of these city outcasts are retrieved from history's garbage pile and brought to life to remind us that their lives are also important and serve as counterparts to the stories of heroes and great persons that official history chooses, through a perverse system of values, as worthy of remembrance. Méndez M. reminds us that most of these outcasts and unwanted people are heroes themselves as the struggle for survival in the border is a heroic act in itself.

It took almost twenty years for *Peregrinos* to be translated into English. It was no easy task for translator David Foster to plunge himself into a linguistic labyrinth of converging dialects and levels of meanings and to come forth with a substantially good translation. While there may be detractors and critics who will find fault with it, they all have to agree that it was a difficult project and that its greatest achievement so far is that it made available, for the first time, an example of Chicano literature that had been kept away from English-speaking readers.

Source: Salvador Rodriguez del Pino, "*Peregrinos de Aztlán:* Overview," in *Reference Guide to American Literature,* edited by Jim Kamp, St. James Press, 1994.

Topics for Further Study

The Mexican Revolution is said to have been won but without a real victory for the Yaqui Indians. Research the cause that lay behind the uprising of the Yaqui Indians. Then find out where and to whom the spoils of the victory went if not to the Yaquis.

The character of Colonel Rosario Cuamea is likened to the heroic figure of Pancho Villa. Research the biographical details of Villa's life and compare them to the story of Colonel Cuamea. How are they the same? How do they differ?

The main characters in *Pilgrims in Aztlán* are predominately male. Look at Méndez's portrayal of women. What roles do they play? What types of females does Méndez emphasize? Is he sympathetic to their plight? Do they fare any better than the men?

In an article written in the *Denver Quarterly,* Oscar U. Somoza states that Loreto Maldonado (the protagonist in *Pilgrims in Aztlán*) "must struggle within himself to reach a satisfying consciousness of self-worth." Study the passages in this book that detail Loreto's daily routines and experiences. How does Loreto, amidst his poverty and hunger, satisfy his need to find self-worth? How does he maintain a sense of dignity?

In 1992, the president of the United Sates signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico. This agreement was created to stimulate trade between the two countries. Through the years since that signing, there has been mounting criticism on both sides of the border concerning the loss of jobs and critical environmental pollution. Research current topics on this agreement. What are the major arguments in favor of NAFTA? What do the opponents argue? Discuss ways that these issues might be resolved.

The word *Aztlán* in the title of this novel refers to an ancient, utopian land of the Aztecs. Historians do not know if this land actually exists, but in the past few decades the concept of Aztlán has become a focus of some politically active groups. Some groups claim that Aztlán is territory that was ceded to the United States through the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty in 1848 and is located in the southwestern portion of the United States. Some groups are suggesting that this area be returned to Mexico. Others suggest that the border area in both the United States and Mexico be set aside as a separate country all its own. Develop arguments for or against any, or all, of these suggestions.

Compare and Contrast

1970: Hispanics make up 12 percent of California's population.

1990: Hispanics make up 30 percent of California's population, and 9 percent of the total population of the United States.

Today: It is estimated that there are six million undocumented workers in the United States.

1986: The U.S. government signs the Immigration Reform and Control Act that confers legal status to three million people who came to the United States before 1982. This law also imposes legal sanctions on employers who are found to have employed undocumented workers.

1994: Proposition 187, which denies state aid to illegal immigrants, is approved by voters. But, it is blocked by state and federal courts. Hispanic voter turnout rises seventeen percentage points in the following election.

1996: The number of Hispanic registered voters reaches 6.6 million.

Today: The AFL-CIO reverses its position on immigration and sponsors a rally in Los Angeles' Sports Arena where twenty thousand immigrants march, demanding unconditional amnesty.

1970: Sixty-one percent of all urban dwellings in Mexico have access to running water. Fiftynine percent have electricity. Forty-one percent have dirt flooring. Forty-one percent have indoor plumbing.

1990: Seventy-nine percent of all urban dwellings in Mexico have access to running water. Eighty-seven percent have electricity. Twenty percent have dirt flooring. Sixty-three percent have indoor plumbing.

1960: Seventy-six percent of Mexico's population live below the poverty level.

1980: Forty-five percent of Mexico's population live below the poverty level.

Mid-1980s: Poverty rate explodes as Mexico's economy tumbles.

1983: United States and Mexico sign the La Paz Agreement on Cooperation for the Protection and Improvement of the Environment in the Border area.

1991: Texas chooses a dumping site for radioactive waste: a small, poor, rural border county whose population is 70 percent Hispanic. Eleven more dumps are planned.

Today: Life-threatening pollution increases along the border and is said to be caused by American-owned factories on the Mexican side of the border.

What Do I Read Next?

Oscar Z. Acosta's *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* tells the story of a young Mexican- American man who becomes disillusioned with American culture and returns home to Juarez, Mexico. There he wastes away his life with prostitutes and alcohol until he is thrown into jail and told by a judge to go home and learn his father's language. The question for the protagonist to answer at this point is, Where is home?

Another classic book by Oscar Z. Acosta, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People,* continues with the character Brown Buffalo after he has led Mexican-Americans through the revolts in Los Angeles during the late 1960s. Tired from the struggles, he goes back to Mexico, where he stays with his brother. In Mexico, Brown Buffalo sees another side of revolution, and he learns that the revolt against oppression is more widespread than he thought.

Bless Me, Ultima, by Rudolfo A. Anaya, tells the story of a young boy who makes friends with a local healer who works magic among the people of the rural community where the boy and the healer live.

Heart of Aztlán, by Rudolfo A. Anaya, is a novel about a family that leaves their rural home in New Mexico to find work in the city of Albuquerque. This moves means that the family has to sell their land, leaving them feeling unrooted and without a clear identity. The change strains family relations that are finally resolved by a blind musician and a witch.

Raymond Barrio's *The Plum Plum Pickers* follows the life of a family of migrant workers and tells the harsh story of the oppressive working environment and the squalid living conditions in which they must live, as well as the greedy employer under whom they must work.

Miguel Méndez's *The Dream of Santa Maria de las Piedra* is a story seen through the eyes of a group of old men who gather each day to share their memories and to gossip about the lives of the people in their small, rural village in the Sonora Desert in Mexico.

Richard Vasquez's *Chicano* is another classic Chicano novel. Four generations of a Mexican- American family are portrayed. In one of the generations, a young girl, Maria Sandoval, falls in love with a young Anglo boy. The boy's head is filled with stereotypical versions of the young girl who must struggle to define her Mexican- American identity.

Jose Antonio Villarreal's novel *Pocho* is considered a vanguard in the renaissance of Chicano literature in the early 1960s. It tells the story of a Mexican family's migration to the United States and their problems dealing with assimilation, racism, and a denial of their culture.

Further Study

Bacon, David, *LA Weekly: News Feature: Immigrant Workers,* www.laweekly.com/ink/99/46/news-bacon.shtml (October 8-14, 1999).

Bacon's article is a news story about the plight of Mexican-American workers at an L.A. furniture store. When the workers tried to organize to ask for higher wages, the employer insisted on seeing their green cards in an attempt to squelch the unity of the group.

Bruce-Novoa, Juan D., "Mexico in Chicano Literature," in *Retrospace,* Arte Publico Press, 1990, pp. 52-62.

Bruce-Novoa, one of the leading literary critics of Chicano literature, writes a brief history of the various> ways that Mexico is presented in literature throughout Chicano renaissance. It provides the reader with references to some of the more influential writings of the times.

Illegal Alien Resident Population, www.ins.usdoj.gov/ graphics/aboutins/statistics/illegalalien/index.htm (July 23, 2000).

For more detailed information about the trends of illegal migration in the United States, this website, sponsored by the U.S. government agency Immigration and Naturalization Service, breaks down this population into various categories. The categories include the country of origin, the state of residence, and the total population.

Leal, Luis, "The Problem of Identifying Chicano Literature," in *Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature,* edited by Francisco Jimenez, Bilingual Press, 1979, pp. 2-6.

This article provides an interesting background and summary of the current literary theory in reference to Mexican-American literature. Leal tries to answer> the question, What makes a literary work Chicano Literature? Leal mentions Méndez's work as well as the writings of several other authors who were involved in the Chicano literary renaissance.

Profile of Illegal Border Crossers, http://gort.ucsd.edu/mw/ tj/profile.html (July 23, 2000).

This website offers an overview of would-be illegal border crossers as developed from research conducted by San Diego Dialogue in the San Ysidro Port of Entry in partnership with the University of California, San Diego. It is an interesting observation about the kinds of people who cross at a particular entry at the border between Mexico and California.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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