

Convergent Realities: Magical Visions of Social Truths and Humanity's Flaws in Miguel Méndez's *The Dream of Santa María de las Piedras*

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When celebrated author Miguel Méndez passed away in June 2013, he left behind a legacy of socially committed fiction that will continue to inspire new generations of readers to engage in the preservation of the cultural histories of the Borderlands and the fight for justice for marginalized peoples living along the U.S.-Mexico border. The publication of his classic novel *Peregrinos de Aztlán* (1974), later published as *Pilgrims of Aztlán* (1992), cemented his presence as a prominent Chicano literary figure; however, his second novel, *El sueño de Santa María de las Piedras* (1986), published as *The Dream of Santa María de las Piedras* (1989) shortly thereafter, has received little critical attention. With the author's recent passing, though, the text's underlying celebration of oral history as the primary means to counteract oblivion through inscribing culturally specific experiences acquires additional weight. Yet, the themes and narrative techniques of this later text deviate from those typical of canonical Chicano nationalist works with their emphasis on hybrid identity and cultural conflict. Creating instead an innovative historical yet magico-real novel, and thereby establishing a hemispheric connection with the tradition of magical realism within Latin American literature, Méndez presents a vision of the evolution of humanity throughout history from the perspective of five aging narrators/storytellers from the fictional town of Santa María de las Piedras. Their exaggerated and episodic recollections, alongside the juxtaposed tale of one man's mystical quest for happiness and understanding, indicate a concern for the past as it converges with the present and future, through the addition of fantastic and magical elements to the depicted social reality. The unique generation of the magical, emerging from social reality, is presented in such a manner so as to compel the reader not to question the veracity of the fantastic, but instead to heighten his awareness of the troubling shortcomings of society and man throughout the years. In this respect, Méndez directs the reader's attention to the debasement of humanity, a universal issue that extends beyond the Chicano experience.

Incorporating various elements typically associated with Latin American magical realism, Méndez's novel pushes against the boundaries of the nationalist Chicano literary and cultural context, while engaging in a decolonizing discourse common to contemporary fiction that has

emerged in the Americas. In these magic realist texts, Stephen Slemon explains, “the dispossessed, the silenced, and the marginalized of our own dominating systems can again find voice and enter into the dialogic continuity of community and place” (422). “From this perspective,” adds Wendy B. Faris, “to adopt magical realism, with its irreducible elements that question [the] dominant discourse, constitutes a kind of liberating poetics” (“Question” 103), not just in terms of thematic content, but also in the narrative mode that undermines the authority of models of European realism. For, as Slemon proposes,

In the language of narration in a magical realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the “other,” a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences. (409)

In creating this disjunction, magical real texts destabilize distinct notions of dominant literary theories regarding genre. Moreover, beyond problematizing realism in its traditional sense, magical realist texts recuperate silenced voices, thereby engaging in decolonizing poetics even when not articulating specific ideas related to decolonization or the legacy of colonial history (Faris “Question” 103).

Perhaps the most effective means to convey the degree to which fact and fiction, magic and reality are intertwined could only be accomplished through a technique familiar to each reader—storytelling. In his discussion of Gabriel García Márquez’s works and transculturation, for example, Ángel Rama suggests the joining of the historical and the fantastic via oral and popular narrative structures (44-45). Méndez similarly captures the oral tradition in written text, thereby allowing the reader to come to know, understand, and identify with the history of a certain people, yet simultaneously be wary of unrealistic embellishment. Replicating the speech and mannerisms of a typical storyteller, Méndez employs casual and colloquial language, and at times utilizes lofty and sublime language when one of the five narrators/storytellers reflects on philosophical ideas, only to be met with perplexity and derision on behalf of his fellow storytellers. The author spares the reader the difficult task of interpreting obscure language because unraveling the events depicted throughout nearly thirty fragments with no names nor numbers provides sufficient challenge.

Initially presented with the title *The Dream of Santa María de las Piedras*, along with a “clarification,” the reader is to comprehend from the start that the town of Santa María de las

Piedras is “in reality only a dream” (Méndez 1), and accordingly the memories of the town’s history must be oneiric. Unmistakably connecting the novel to the canon of Latin American magical realism, the town’s name alone brings to mind Santa Mónica de los Venados, the fictionalized town in Alejo Carpentier’s *The Lost Steps*, a novel that exemplifies *lo real maravilloso*. Moreover, the description of the town’s isolation invokes the depiction of García Márquez’s Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or Juan Rulfo’s Comala in *Pedro Páramo*. As in these novels, Méndez’s work blurs time and space in the narration of the town’s past and present, just as the initial narrator’s clarification warns.

As should be expected from an oral history, the memories and reminiscences do not occur in chronological order. Five old men gather daily in the plaza, taking turns to retell colorful and often creatively embellished tales, presumably to a younger audience, although dialogue is not clearly marked. Knowledge of the narrator at a specific moment indirectly presents itself through critical interruptions by fellow conversationalists. The fragmented narration, alternating between a first- and third-person perspective, creates an almost cinematographic retrospection. The nostalgic reflection on eighty-four years of the town’s past interspersed with a telling of a seemingly current journey of one local seeking satisfaction in the present, and commentary on the narrators’ swiftly approaching deaths (of the future), demonstrates a transcendence of time, and provides the reader with a rather coherent conception of the evolution of the fictional desert town and its inhabitants: “Así en forma fragmentada abarque [la novela] una panorámica más extensa del mundo complejísimo que confrontamos” (Bruce-Novoa 101). An entirely inclusive look at the town could only be achieved, however, through dual narrative planes. To understand the nature of the town, the reader must contextualize its existence in terms of historically and socially-based situations alongside the mystical and existential journey of one man, depicting the nature of his universal struggles as one within mankind. Despite a grounding in historical and social reality, the author incorporates the magical and downright bizarre, such that the validity of even the contrived journey is not questioned by the reader.

The manipulation of sometimes far-fetched notions or occurrences alongside more traditional and expected elements of history is certainly apropos in the context of storytelling. The concept of exaggeration when explaining a past event is in no way foreign, and with the passing of time, the tendency to reconstruct or recreate history (though often unintentionally) clearly intensifies. The basis of this novel is the sharing of tales of the past with younger generations in an effort to preserve the history and experiences of the town that will otherwise vanish. One can only presume that Méndez alludes so frequently to the purpose and benefits of the oral tradition in a

dialectic attempt to encourage the revival of this element of folklore. Acknowledging a “preocupación por la posible desaparición de la tradición oral” (Bruce-Novoa 37), Méndez himself affirms that “el pasado está muriendo lenta y literalmente” (Bruce-Novoa 37), as the oral tradition is in danger of disappearing. Bruce-Novoa explains, “Méndez ve una ruptura de las comunicaciones comunitarias tradicionales: la herencia familiar, comunitaria, étnica y nacional, que otrora se preservaba oralmente, está desapareciendo en silencio” (94). This potential disappearance is particularly worrisome to the Chicano, whose identity is molded in part by his access to the past vis-à-vis the oral tradition, according to Bruce-Novoa: “The oral tradition is in danger of disappearing into the silent past, 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” (“Voices” 206). This aspect of folklore, therefore, is an integral component of a Chicano’s identity and evaluation of his position within society. Through folklore in general, Chicano writers can “reflect experiences and situations of a collective group they wish to recreate” (Lomelí 38). With this being said, one fully understands the gravity with which Méndez addresses the issue of preserving memories by preserving the oral tradition.

In this sense, the old men’s reconstruction of the town’s history is wholly justified. Alternating between different eras provides the reader with what Méndez describes as a feeling of “el fluir del tiempo al que estamos sujetos temporalmente . . . la natural carga de la nostalgia, franca alegría, y tristezas que nos sombrea por cosas trágicas que suelen ocurrir” (Tatum 13). In spite of the excessive, though expected, exaggeration of historical events, questioning the veracity of the seemingly tall tales remains at a minimum: “In these parts everything is true, no matter how much it seems to be a lie. . . . Time moves backward because it knows this is a town condemned to oblivion, living only on the memories of memories made into dreams” (Méndez 98). This presents the reader with a disclaimer of sorts to allay any potential suspicions with respect to a lack of truth. Aside from occasional comments about storyteller Güero’s habit of prevaricating, the reader is not encouraged by the text to wonder whether far-fetched events do indeed occur. Because the reader becomes accustomed to taking what is presented at face value, he is more surprised when the author reveals that the tale of Timoteo Noragua’s journey is not merely another reflection of the chatting elders, but the reading out loud of a manuscript. The intertextuality is explicit, particularly when the manuscript’s author engages in conversation with the storytellers, who ironically, find the manuscript’s contents unrealistic. Expanding on Abelardo’s notion of a historian’s story versus one

that is orally transmitted, Méndez takes advantage of the opportunity to applaud both forms of storytelling, but ultimately expounds the advantage of oral history.

At this point, the reader appreciates the reasoning behind the existence and perpetuation of the oral tradition, yet simultaneously wonders, along with the novel's characters, whether "historical accuracy" ought to be compromised to the extent that it is within oral storytelling. One cannot help but to recognize that oral storytellers may very well misrepresent "true history," that is, accurate depiction of historical and social reality. It seems only logical, then, that both the legendary or mythical and realistic history present themselves so that one may better understand history as a whole through the integration of oral and written history. Méndez successfully provides insight relevant to understanding the nature of a particular fictional town as being shaped over generations through his combination of the oral tradition, as it is captured in written form: "This interplay of oral tradition and written history . . . portrays the history, life and reality of the town as it was/is experienced, lived, believed, and sensed by its people" (Walter 100). Presented with both a realistic and embellished view of history, the reader may then evaluate the degree of truth in both, and arrive at his own conclusions regarding that history. Throughout *The Dream of Santa María de las Piedras*, Méndez does just that, retaining a certain degree of authenticity of historical events, from which evolve unexpected and fantastic elements of that history.

Accordingly, Méndez has created a novel that is not only exemplifies the historiographic metafiction that Linda Hutcheon describes, but also falls under the classification of magical real, much like García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*. Within this literary current, the rational and the supernatural (Chanady 21-22), real and unreal, become integrated through incorporation of the blurring of distinct times and spaces, fragmented narration, multiple perspectives, dreams, visions and hallucinations (Walter 93), as opposed to surrealism, in which reality is presented through a dreamlike haze, the portrayal of dreams must be "presented as objectively real" (Chanady 29) within magical realism. Although a reader would ordinarily identify certain elements as illogical, a paradigmatic magico-realist novel would compel the reader to "accept their integration within the fictitious world" (Chanady 22) of the text. More recently, Faris points to the narrative strategy of using voices from the beyond to chronicle contemporary realities and problems in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Pedro Páramo* as exemplifying Salman Rushdie's juxtaposition of the "impossibly old" with the "appallingly new" ("Question" 106-07). In these cases, the reader accepts that, "Fluid boundaries between the worlds of the living and the dead are traced only to be crossed" (Faris "Scheherazade's Children" 172). Similarly, Méndez

manipulates his novel to create among his readers a more natural acceptance of the fantastic or supernatural within quotidian reality. The author toys with this bipolar reality, as is manifest in a sometimes problematic integration of fact and fiction within the oral tradition, yet offers the reader some guidance in assessing the fictionality of various fragments.

While the reader may at times detect the active imagination and creative capacity of the author, “lo principal [del realismo mágico] no es la creación de seres o mundos imaginados, sino el descubrimiento de la misteriosa relación que existe entre el hombre y su circunstancia” (Leal 233). Méndez unravels this relation by transplanting it within the relation between a realistic and acceptable framework from which emerges the magical. The co-mingling of social realism and magical realism is initially presented with the description of the setting. Despite the author’s concession that the town of Santa María de las Piedras is nonexistent, it—being specifically localized neither historically nor geographically—embodies all towns similarly situated within the Sonoran desert. The inhospitable environment is described with a presentation of its harsh conditions. The common association of the immense, unrelenting heat of the desert with a mirage or hallucination enables the reader to surrender more comfortably to the acknowledgment of magical elements grounded in social or historical reality. As expected, the description of the desert town entails mention of the cacti, sand, sun, fire, wind and stones. The extension of the physical reality of the latter two is accomplished as the heat and wind, “a prophet preaching in the desert” (Méndez 188), are responsible for, and symbolic of, the confluence of time. To present this, Méndez juxtaposes his description of the wind that “whips, blinds and turns” just as “time also bumps, spirals, and crashes” (131). In this sense, the notion of a suspended time, characteristic of the town, is naturalized. Consequently, the reader is not startled that “time and space in Santa María de las Piedras are swallowed up by the breath of the desert” (Méndez 3).

From the physical reality of the stones, the author leaps to an unexpected yet accepted portrayal of the stones through anthropomorphism. Although the reader may be slightly perplexed upon reading of the stones’ frustrations stemming from a lack of appreciation, the desert conditions may be responsible for the narrators’ toying with reality, as intense heat toys with the atmosphere to cause reverberations or visible wavering of air: “Resentful of being ignored, they cry and moisten the atmosphere. Eternal stones, stepped and spit on by animals, never caressed, at the mercy of the winds and the time that weighs on them” (Méndez 136). The reader, once beyond the initial surprise of the topic at hand, recognizes that he has probably not concerned himself at all with this matter. Yet, the author writes of a magical anthropomorphism or personification of the stones that

apparently emerges from a physical reality of stones. Perhaps a result of heat-induced delirium, the narrator addresses a typically ignored issue.

Prompted to further reflect on the nature of stones, the reader recalls past comparisons of the stones with inhabitants of Santa María de las Piedras. Each of a different shape or size, “people here are like stones. They withstand heat without fleeing, giving the impression that they never budge” (Méndez 118). Based on the colorful retelling of the town’s sundry characters and situations, one would suppose that the individuals within the town are not immobile, but do experience life (albeit restricted to the desert town) until, perhaps as a result of age, “the stones have stolen our souls and . . . we wear their faces” (Méndez 137). The durability of stones represents “the antithesis to biological things subject to the laws of change, decay and death, as well as . . . disintegration” (Cirlot 313). Thus the recurring symbolic appearance of the stones within the text appropriately captures the narrators’ attempts to defy the deterioration and death of themselves as well as the town’s history through the oral tradition. As the narrators approach death, they may, removed from fond memories, adopt a stolid countenance. The stones retain the souls of individuals to ensure that their memory will live on indefinitely.

The reader subconsciously knows that Santa María de las Piedras is a dream, and thus the notion that its people create a particular impression of stagnation is appropriate. Grounding the development of sometimes outlandish characters of the past in a dream or hallucination ironically eliminates the “unreality” of such bizarre figures and experiences, because these dreams seem to originate from a believable, realistic framework. The characters are eccentric and animated, particularly in the case of the Noragua family, which is afflicted by madness. The Noraguas are not alone in this: “People in Santa María de las Piedras move and act like senile actors who must perforce invent their own characters daily. This is why they act crazy” (Méndez 122). Not only are characters generated from oneiric reality, they are also removed further from the common conception of reality by creating a role for themselves, through which they can represent (although not necessarily realistically) reality. However, the reader is not swept up in this confusion, but instead mentally justifies any potentially far-fetched occurrences with the initial explanation of the characters’ insanity. In order to understand the situations as experienced by the characters better, the reader enthusiastically accepts, for example, the possession of a successful chicken and egg farm to identify better with the characters and get a sense of the fictional town’s history.

As with characters, particular historically-related events are described in terms of the effects that the incidents had in shaping the identity of the isolated town. Incorporation of authentic tidbits

of history bolsters the depiction of social reality. Méndez begins with a notable event, then adds elements of the magical dimension to this, ultimately yielding a unique commentary on the afflictions of humanity that is all the more powerful because the juxtaposed magical elements highlight the sometimes horrific truth within social reality. The storytellers recount momentous events within the town's history, ranging from the arrival of the Spaniards and the subsequent colonization of the Indian population to the Gold Rush, the Mexican Revolution, and even the opening of its first brothel. Especially within his accounts of the 1830s Gold Rush and the Mexican Revolution, Méndez blends the historically accurate, historically fictional, and the fantastic with a resulting denouncement of mankind's evils.

Despite the comical anecdote explaining the discovery of gold by one member of the Noragua family, the reader must recognize the symbolic weight of the discovered gold smeared in the discoverer's feces, foreshadowing mankind's self-induced ruin. The explicit flaws of humanity—exploitation, greed, decadence, and ignorance (Walter 108-09)—surface within the context of the Gold Rush. One can only begin to justify the behavior typical of this time as perhaps being the only natural means of and reaction to the possibility of escaping the miserable poverty. More representative of the author's (not so) subtle combination of the historically or socially real and the magical is his treatment of the Mexican Revolution. Within the realm of war, death and destruction, Méndez writes of the 1915 arrival of two opposing generals. The author approaches and nonchalantly incorporates the magical when those who rise up against the invaders of the town are children armed with slingshots, "ghosts of the children of the Holy Crusades" (Méndez 150), no less, who are accompanied by the miraculous Holy Child of Atocha. Méndez later manipulates the factual history by combining a magical element of utter disorientation and regression to a childhood mentality in describing a potentially deadly encounter by the two generals. As Faris notes, in magical real texts, "Individuals merge or identities are questioned in other ways, and mysterious events require us to question who or what has caused them" ("Question" 111). The reader may suppose that the intense desert conditions provide a realistic point of departure toward the magical realm.

Oblivious to their bellicose intentions, the generals mutually request information about the town before including their troops in holding hands and playing childhood games. The extreme effects of the ambience on the troops' behavior oddly serves more to reinforce the severity and power of the desert than to cause the reader to question the truthfulness of the situation. One may also interpret this extreme disregard for the generals' ideals as a metaphor for the abandonment of or removal from the true objectives within the Revolution as a result of corruption and greed. In

recounting events over time that are plagued by humanity's afflictions, the storytellers (or more appropriately Méndez) repeat appearances of tragic flaws of man—greed for material wealth, corruption, exploitation, and ignorance among others. Bearing this in mind, the notion that “man is the only animal who falls in the same hole twice” (Méndez 88) points with more strength toward the tragedy found within an accurate depiction of reality. The degree of tragedy only intensifies when history repeats itself because man does not learn from his mistakes. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the tragic flaws of humanity (throughout time) with elements of the magical realm provides a stark contrast between the serious nature of the socially real and often lighter chimerical elements, and consequently emphasizes the immediate attention that seeking a remedy for humanity's evils demands.

Again, issues of social reality surface and are emphasized via incorporation of the magical within a different context. Acting as a link between the first narrative plane, involving the elicitation of memories, and the second plane, centering on an individual's journey to the United States, Timoteo Noragua is the agent by which the reader discovers the urgency with which social evils ought to be denounced and ultimately eliminated. Once again, the reader's awareness of social realism is heightened by Méndez's exaggeration of social problems accomplished with incorporation of the magical real. As in other episodes, Timoteo's contrived journey is grounded in reality, as the initial explanation of the hereditary madness within the Noragua family operates as a realistic framework upon which magical elements are added. With this family background, along with a more personal description of Timoteo as a “wayward pilgrim lost in a world of dreams” (Méndez 24), the reader accepts the introverted yet intelligent man's journey as authentic. Motivated by an embellished representation of the United States and a desire for more comfortable living conditions, Timoteo leaves his family in search of happiness across the border. Along the way, the reader is presented with his explicitly misguided notions, or better said fantasies, of the life that lies ahead. His reasons for leaving his town are legitimate and realistic; one may argue that the dreams and hallucinations he experiences are not. However, given his introspective nature and tendency to dream, the dreams and visions are also accepted as legitimate. To what extent, though, do these dreams subsume his experiences? Perhaps, even his journey altogether is but a dream. Elements within the narration of the journey, even if magical, actually support the veracity of Timoteo's pilgrimage.

As Timoteo approaches Los Angeles, “the capital of Aztlán” (Méndez 58), his entrance to and experiences within Cosmicland appear a bit far-fetched. In preparation for his interaction with

bizarre creatures and different times, he is warned: “Pilgrim, your past has been left behind and you now abandon the present in order to tread the future. Take delight in the world of tomorrow with the spirit of a child” (Méndez 59). The connection between the ground covered by Timoteo’s journey and the expression of impending transcendence of time may seem to exceed the limits of reality until, that is, the reader recognizes the reality of this in an excursion to Disneyland. Because the reader can relate to Timoteo’s Cosmicland, the magic and fantasy is naturalized, allowing for the coexistence of the magical and real without raising any serious doubts about the likelihood of strange occurrences.

Seeking to know the identity of the creator of the many marvelous wonders with which he has come into contact in Cosmicland and beyond, Timoteo initiates a quest to find Huachusey. Not realizing the name is simply the confused reply of those he questions, he is driven to find this “earthly god.” Startled that Huachusey is similarly responsible for great destruction, Timoteo struggles to understand Huachusey’s duality. He vacillates with regards to whether he truly wants to encounter this omnipotent being, primarily due to an inner voice that discourages him. “Dream on . . . dream the dream of the simple at heart” (Méndez 94), this inner voice that has experienced bygone eras warns, for it recognizes the disillusionment that will result from Timoteo’s encounter. Perhaps his subconscious, the voice provokes Timoteo to reflect upon his identity, which in no way merits an encounter with divinity. In this respect, Méndez incorporates a very real issue of trying to find the Chicano identity within the magical context of Timoteo’s mystical journey.

In his search for the creator of social reality, Timoteo understands that he must return to his people. In doing so, he returns to the land of the stones, which themselves represent a “harmonious reconciliation with self” (Cirlot 313). Along the way, he attends a magico-real funeral procession honoring none other than Huachusey. Timoteo is guided by a woman “covered with spiderweb” to the procession, a mosaic of time and race that includes “majestic kings of bygone ages . . . noble knights . . . modern automobiles of powerful politicians” (Méndez 191). At last, he confronts the creator of good and evil within social and historical reality--modern conveniences and corruption, greed and materialism. He opens the casket and is taken aback by his own reflection staring back at him. Méndez incorporates the fantastic in such a way that the “magical elements enlarge the socio-realistic ones” (Walter 131). Through his visions, dreams and hallucinations, Timoteo is compelled to learn about his identity, and in doing so, understand elements of social reality. In this sense, his and all of our responsibility for creation of a world in which materialism and exploitation run

rampant is emphasized, and the reader is more attuned to the necessity of condemning or preventing such evils of humanity, unfortunately elements of social reality.

Broaching issues that are far-reaching within society, Méndez effectively transcends the false barriers that may restrict the canon of Chicano literature. Does this, in turn, mean that his work should not be considered Chicano? As Luis Leal astutely questions, “Why should the Chicano experience be limited to the campesino struggle, the description of life in the barrio, or the social confrontation with the majority culture? Why can it not go beyond to include the universal nature of man?” (Lomelí 34). Méndez does precisely that within his text, addressing universal issues through the characters and experiences of one mythical yet realistic Mexican Sonoran Desert town. A town in which “facts could well be what flickers in the mirror and reality what gives off reflections” (Méndez 1) and perhaps “nothing more than the reflection of the desert towns turned by the sun into mirrors irradiating soaring flames and humanity that converge here” (Méndez 3). The notion of mirrors points to the manner in which Santa María de las Piedras and its characters, by conveying images, merely present reflections of that which occurs across humanity. The negative depiction of mankind with its social ailments within certain reconstructed memories, and the all the more horrifying realization by Timoteo that we are each responsible for the destruction of our world, are applicable to men of any descent. The perpetuated social injustice, which may be institutional, is presented along with more personal universal issues.

Each individual will inevitably face death, and with his manipulation of time and space, the author accentuates this. Gathered amongst fellow storytellers, one narrator refers to the ascension of Timoteo, implying that his death has already occurred. However, it is not until the final fragment (three fragments and twenty pages later) that his departure from the earth is obscurely described. Rather than presenting the reader with the traditional view of ascent (from the earth toward the direction in which one may spiritually rise), Méndez instead describes Timoteo’s view as he is removed farther and farther from “an enormous ball enveloped in blue color, its edges white with extensive patches of yellows, greens, ochres, and silver . . . until at last it was lost from view” (194). Consequently, the reader senses that Timoteo will live on despite his death while the world that he knew plummets toward oblivion. As the four final storytellers cope with the loss of the liveliest of their group, their preoccupation with death increases. Perhaps because they too anticipate an ascension and removal from the earth, they are concerned about the earth’s plunge into oblivion. To counteract this, they have sought to maintain the oral tradition throughout the novel, so that their reconstructed memories of Santa María de las Piedras will live on as the result of a rebirth of sorts.

In this novel, as in others, “it is not always realism that we are dealing with but rather indirect and imaginative way of recreating life” (34), as Francisco Lomelí remarks. Through the multiple narrators’ attempts to reconstruct and recreate the history of the town and the lives of its people, highly imaginative and magical elements are added. Thus, the product of the remembrances and novel in general are not entirely representative of reality *per se*. Yet, the mythical and uncommon accentuate those social and historical elements that do remain. Upon reading the text, the reader understands how these varied aspects of reality operate to sustain one another. Méndez’s *The Dream of Santa María de las Piedras* is a prime example of a “novel as a receptacle of experience . . . [and] involvement in history and the creative realms of imagination” (Lomelí 34). As such, its universality not only provides additional force behind the chisel that chips away at the canon of the traditional Chicano novel, and warrants the author’s recognition beyond the confines of Chicana/o literary scholarship, but also situates the novel squarely within a hemispheric conceptualization of magical realism as a postcolonial literary mode.

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