

Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage

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# The Woman Who Lost Her Soul

AND OTHER STORIES

**Jovita González**

Edited, with an Introduction, by Sergio Reyna

Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage



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González, Jovita, 1904-1983.

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*To Dr. Nicolás Kanellos  
with admiration for the invaluable guidance and  
precious time he devoted to the execution of this project*

*And*

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## Introduction

My sister Tula and I did everything together. We went horseback riding to the pastures with my grandfather, took long walks with father, and visited the homes of the cowboys and the ranch hands. We enjoyed the last the most. There were Tío Patricio, the mystic; Chon, who was so ugly, poor fellow, he reminded us of a toad; Old Remigio who wielded the *metate* with the dexterity of peasant women and made wonderful *tortillas*. Tía Chita whose stories about ghosts and witches made our hair stand on end, Pedro, the hunter and traveler, who had been as far as Sugar Land and had seen black people with black wool for hair, one-eyed Manuelito, the ballad singer, Tío Camilo; all furnished ranch lore in our young lives.

—Jovita González, in *Dew on the Thorn*

It is indisputable that as a whole the works of Jovita González represent a valuable artifact of the history and culture of south Texas at the beginning of the twentieth century and are an indispensable element in the recovery of the literary legacy of Mexican Americans. Jovita González is considered by some critics today as a pioneer of Mexican-American literature because she achieved success as an educator, writer, and folklorist, despite the adversities that she faced as a Hispanic woman within a society and an epoch in which intellectual matters were almost exclusively dominated by Anglo American men.

The novels, short stories, and literary essays of Jovita González are based on her experience as a native of south Texas. The many stories and legends that she preserved through her literary work were influenced by her childhood experiences and became an important part of her personal history. They also represent the history and culture of an almost forgotten minority population in the United States. Most of the stories gathered in this collection were published by González in well-known Texas magazines, such as *Southwest Review* and *Texas Folk-Lore Society Publications*, from the 1920s to the 1940s. They encompass diverse themes that can be classified as: Tales of Human Characters; Animal Tales; Religious Tales; Tales of Mexican Ancestors; Tales of Ghosts, Demons and Buried Treasures; and Tales of Popular Customs. She based her classification on the practice of the leading folklorists of her time, such as Juan B. Rael, Aurelio Espinosa, Aurora Lucero White-Lea, and J. Frank Dobie. Although this classification is not rigid, exhaustive, or definitive, it does serve us today in grouping and studying her works.

### The Life of Jovita González<sup>1</sup>

Jovita González was born in 1904 in Roma, a small town in south Texas on the Mexican border. She was the daughter of Jacobo González Rodríguez, a descendant of a family of educators and craftsmen, and of Severina Guerra Barrera, who came from a family of colonists who participated in the settling of Nuevo Santander, a province of New Spain. Her great grandfather, who lived 125 years, received a large grant from the king of Spain and became one of the most prominent landowners in the Nuevo Santander.

At a time when higher education was often beyond the reach of minority groups, Jovita González obtained her Bachelor's degree along with a teaching certificate in History and Spanish from Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio, Texas. After

teaching at Saint Mary's Hall in San Antonio, she went on to continue her education at the University of Texas at Austin and obtained her Master of Arts in 1930. Her Master's thesis, entitled *Social Life in Cameron, Starr, and Zapata Counties*, is a well-documented study of the culture of the inhabitants of those counties of predominant Mexican population.

During her studies at the University of Texas in 1925, Jovita González met J. Frank Dobie, a well-known pioneer in the study of folklore. With Dobie's help, González began researching Mexican folklore in Texas and became an outstanding member of the Texas Folk-Lore Society. She served both as vice-president and as president of the society whose members included teachers as well as professionals in the study of folklore. The Texas Folk-Lore Society became an important catalyst in the preservation of Texas folklore in the early twentieth century. Jovita González also served as vice-president and president of LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens), which represented one of the first attempts by Mexican Americans to establish their own ideology in order to safeguard their rights as American citizens. González was also an active member of the Panamerican Club of Corpus Christi, which sponsored cultural and social events.

As a result of her thesis, *Social Life in Cameron, Starr, and Zapata Counties*, and through the recommendation of Dobie, González was awarded a Rockefeller Foundation Grant in 1934. This grant allowed her to take a leave of absence for a year from her teaching position at Saint Mary's Hall in San Antonio, Texas, and to dedicate herself to full-time research on the culture of south Texas. The result of this year-long research project was the writing of two novels never published in her lifetime: *Caballero: A Historical Novel*, a literary accomplishment highlighting the customs and traditions of south Texas, and *Dew on the Thorn*, a novel with

a folkloric base composed of a series of short stories that were also published in various magazines and literary journals.

In 1935 Jovita González married Edmundo Mireles, who was also a teacher. In 1939 they moved from Del Rio, Texas to Corpus Christi, where they became respected educators in the Corpus Christi School District. After her marriage, González limited her folklore writing and focused most of her time and effort on teaching Spanish and on being a wife (Kreneck 77). In collaboration with her husband, Jovita produced textbooks for learning the Spanish language. She continued to teach Spanish and Texas history until her retirement from W. B. Ray High School in Corpus Christi, Texas in 1966. The Spanish textbooks she wrote were used for many years in support of bilingual education in the southwestern United States. Jovita González and her husband died in 1983 and 1987, respectively, without children or close relatives to claim the inheritance of a literary legacy that included the novels that were published posthumously and the tales in this collection.

### **The Folklore and the Literary Work of Jovita González**

In the twentieth century two schools of thought developed regarding the scholarly treatment of folk narrative: preservation of the oral tradition in its original form, or transformation of the oral tradition by means of refinement and literary polish. Both tendencies, not surprisingly, originated a series of discussions and theoretical justifications for their methods in recovering folk narratives for preservation and analysis.

One of the folklorists who supported the first tendency was Jakob Grimm, who considered a popular story as a sacred relic of times passed, and as part of a precious treasure whose care is the responsibility of men across the ages (Cortazar 29). To maintain the original integrity of the work, a loyal reproduction does not change any of the oral text represented in oral tradition. The

followers of this purist school criticized the liberty of the folklorists who embellished the oral tradition. This purist approach is, in fact, the one that dominates the study of folklore today. Among the folklorists in the United States who strived in the early twentieth century to maintain the oral tradition in its original form were Aurelio M. Espinosa and Juan B. Rael.<sup>2</sup> These folklorists preserved material from the oral tradition of the Hispanics of the southwestern United States, presenting the oral tradition with all the slang, dialects, and the nuances of oral speech of the various social groups.

One of the followers of the opposite school of thought embraced by those who leaned toward the literary embellishment of the oral narratives was J. Frank Dobie, Jovita González's mentor. As Limón states (*Caballero* xix), Dobie's method was educated and literary but in an open-ended way. Friendship and group dynamics were evidenced in his folkloric material and were a vehicle for what J. Frank Dobie called *flavor* in the text. He attempted to enjoy the nuances of culture without analyzing or commenting on the social significance. Dobie firmly believed that folk narrative should serve as the basis for literary production, even for more elaborate narrative works, such as the novels to be written by educated literary authors. But one of the problems that is presented by this type of re-written narrative polished by the folklorist is that it is not possible to study in the text the exact nature of its effects with respect to voice, gesture, and narrative art (Thompson 449-450). To a certain extent, the text is contaminated by the author's pen. The study of the art of folklore cannot be based on texts selected at random, unless they have been presented in their original form. Unfortunately, according to Stith Thompson, many collectors of folk narratives have been more interested in presenting stories in a manner attractive to potential purchasers than in preserving texts for scientific study (450).

As a follower of J. Frank Dobie, Jovita González became a literary elaborator of folklore. Folklorists of the stature of Aurelio M. Espinosa exercised a strong influence on Jovita González with regard to her determination in dedicating herself to the preservation of the oral tradition of her people, but it was Dobie who armed her with a methodology and a literary mind set. Jovita González collected folk narratives from her daily contact with the common people since her childhood. She collected and/or remembered a vast number of detailed stories. She polished and enhanced the original narrations that circulated among the Mexican population of south Texas, according to her "own fancy and taste," as Stith Thompson (450) characterizes this procedure when he talks about such folklorists. The work of González resulted in the production of short stories or sketches based on legends and folk tales that, because of their form and content, were pleasing to readers who preferred a refined quality of literature.

### The Historic Framework of González's Literary Work

The work of Jovita González covers several important periods of colonial Texas history, including the period of Mexican domination, the period of the Texas Republic, and finally the period of U. S. statehood. González preserved important elements of the sociohistorical reality of Texas that permit the researcher to reconstruct interesting scenes of the history and folklore of the community. María Cotera, in her epilogue to the novel *Caballero*, considers that González's work represents an early and important intent to give a place to the Chicano voice during a period in which Chicanos were witnesses to the Anglo American construction of official Texas history (339-345).

In the novels of Jovita González, especially in her novel *Dew on the Thorn*, we can clearly appreciate the historic framework for her literary creativity. *Dew on the Thorn* documents details in

the lives of González's Hispanic-Mestizo ancestors who lived in the 1740s in what is now Texas. This was during the last large scale exploration by the Spaniards in the New World. The novel makes reference to the relative autonomy and tranquillity of life after the Spanish government was expelled as a result of the Mexican War of Independence of 1810 and prior to U.S. statehood. As the community developed, its first real crisis was, for González, the invasion by the United States.

In the novel *Caballero*, González details the political and social character of the times, placing life in south Texas within the context of change brought about by U.S. expansionism and its appropriation of Mexico's northern states. Limón points out that Texas aided the expansion of the United States by declaring itself an independent republic in 1836 after the defeat of Santa Anna at San Jacinto, an event documented in *Caballero* along with the recounting of the fall of the Alamo (*Caballero* xii-xii). Mexico refused to recognize the loss of Texas in 1836, especially the territory located between the Rio Grande and the Rio Nueces, now south Texas. The conflicts between Mexico and the United States culminated in war from 1846 to 1848. The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo obliged Mexico to surrender its territories, including the disputed parts of Texas, to the United States. Both culturally and from a perspective of power, the direct and immediate opposition to the Americans is fully and explicitly highlighted in *Caballero*.

In *Caballero*, a panorama is presented of the historic reality in which the protagonist lived in the 1840s. Limón detailed this panorama as a climate of political discontent, of discrimination, and of hostilities toward the Mexican American population (xii-xiv). *Caballero* was not published at the time that it was created because it was not accepted by the publishing houses, despite González's having recruited an Anglo American co-author to make it more palatable to prospective publishers. The manuscript

was later reported lost by E. E. Mireles and Jovita González, during an interview with Marta Cotera in the 1970s, because the Mireleses feared political repercussions which could threaten their teaching careers in Corpus Christi, Texas (*Caballero* xviii-xxii). In the 1970s the political climate was still volatile, reminiscent of the racial climate of the 1930s and 1940s in south Texas. The Mireleses refused to publish the manuscripts even when the Chicano Movement was at its height. The manuscripts were finally published two decades later through the efforts of researchers José E. Limón and María Cotera.

The other narratives and the academic essays published by Jovita González described the climate of discrimination experienced by Mexican Americans in Texas. This discrimination occurred within the cultural context characterized by customs and traditions that place man at the center of the world and woman as subservient and submissive to men, as well as in the national context of racial discrimination against Mexican Americans, who were forced to be subservient to Anglo Saxons.

Although Jovita González pointed out these differences and problems between Anglos and Mexicans, it is possible to say that her intent was not to emphasize the differences between them, but to preserve the customs and traditions that identified her people by honoring them through writing, for they would perish in oral form, given the transformations of social life occurring rapidly in the Southwest as Anglo dominance increased. But, above all, González wished to create threads of understanding between these two ideologically and culturally opposed groups that found themselves in the historic necessity of sharing the same geography.

It was extremely difficult for a woman to study, write, and publish literary works at this time. Jovita González's accomplishments and literary successes are even more admirable for a Hispanic woman because of the degree of patriarchy in the society in which she was raised. Tatum marvels that at a time when



the Mexican Americans had limited opportunities to become educated, González obtained her teaching certificate (225). Limón was surprised by the daring attitude of a young woman exposing her work in a society where writing and lecturing were almost exclusively done by men: "What is she thinking, this young Texas-Mexican woman in a roomful of largely male Anglos in 1930?" (*Dancing* 68).

In summary, it can be affirmed that the historic framework adopted by González for her literary works is characterized by the political and social conflicts between the conquered and the conquerors. At the root of this daily battle played out in Texas was the social climate, which was permeated with violence and the violation of the most basic norms of social convention. Both groups exhibited attitudes of racial and cultural prejudice toward everything foreign. At the internal level, within the Hispanic culture of the southwestern United States, González knowingly depicted in her novels, essays, folk tales, and legends, the patriarchal system in which women were seen as having an insignificant role in the political and social development of the community. The situation of racial conflict, discrimination, and the undervaluing of women, which prevailed in the period described in her writings (middle of the nineteenth century), continued to exist, although to a lesser extent, during the years when Jovita González published the majority of her works: the 1930s and 1940s.

### The Literary Works of Jovita González

The literary works of Jovita González have as their primary objective the historic preservation through the written word of the oral tradition in particular and Hispanic culture in general.

The object of study that is evident in each one of her works—whether they are novels, stories, legends or essays—is the description of the folklore of the Hispanic community. Among others, the themes that are addressed in her literary works include the cow-

boy, the peon, the patriarchal system of the family, and the static role of men and women within the hierarchy of Tejano culture.

The works of Jovita González represent a *native literature*, which reflects the economic, social, and political implications resulting from minority group membership in the United States. Her works are imprinted with the sense of history and tradition of the Hispanic population that has lived for many years in south Texas. As Velázquez-Treviño affirms, Jovita González exhibits a strong social conscience that takes into account the socioeconomic problems of her ethnic group (Jovita González 76-83). Through her folkloric narratives, González protests against the discrimination practiced by the Anglo-Saxon community against Mexicans during the colonization of Texas. In addition, Velázquez-Treviño emphasizes that the prose of Jovita González reveals the desire to reaffirm and vindicate the vision of her social group that was repressed and discriminated against during the colonization of the Southwest (83). It should be clarified that González, in her literary works, denounced the abuses and injustices of Anglo Americans towards Mexicans in Texas and also maintained the hope of influencing the culture of the United States through exposure to her literature. She wanted to create bridges of tolerance and mutual understanding between the two groups that would permit cohabitation founded on mutual respect.

Chase (123) and Garza-Falcón (74-75) maintain that Jovita González produced her essays and her picturesque folkloric narrations from the perspective of the upper class. Although González's ancestors were privileged in early nineteenth-century Tejano society, her own family was lower middle class. She had to work to support her family and to finance her studies at the university because her family could not afford to pay her expenses (*Dew on the Thorn* xxiii). The fact that González was able to write about popular culture of the Hispanic community can be explained by her more humble social standing and her associa-

tion with the working classes. And this led her to identify with the cowboy, the peon, the vagabond, and in general with the disinherited Mexican community in south Texas.

As a writer, Jovita González was a nativist, precisely because her work documents the priority of Mexican American culture in south Texas and its enduring legacy. It is precisely the written preservation of Mexican American oral lore that represented for her the protection and maintenance of her culture in the face of obliteration by the growing Anglo presence in Texas. It is by means of the enduring presence of art as an element in the continuity of the culture and sequential time that the work of Jovita González captures life's ephemeral images and rescues them from the imminent danger of obscurity, thereby making them available for our contemplation (Bruce-Novoa 95-96). According to Bruce-Novoa, in these images we encounter a permanent reflection of the essence of our being. This sacred act gives meaning to individual actions and thereby gives meaning to our world. Therefore, fortified with the recognition of our true significance and purpose, we can resist or face the chaos that threatens our existence. Literature becomes not just a propitious space from which to respond to chaos; even more importantly, it becomes an answer in itself (96-99). Thus, we can affirm that the literary works of Jovita González are an enduring response in the face of the imminent dissipation of the values, roots and cultural traditions of Mexican Americans.

While respected and admired during her career as a high school teacher and lecturer on Hispanic history and culture, Jovita González was particularly appreciated by a later generation of Chicano scholars for her pioneering literary efforts (Kreneck 77). Jovita González is considered by some academics, such as José Limón, Gloria Louise Vázquez-Treviño, Charles Tatum, Teresa Palomo Acosta, and Diana Rebolledo, among others, as one of the first Mexican American writers and folklorists. At a time

when it was rare for Mexican Americans to distinguish themselves in academia, González had won a place for herself among Texas intellectuals. González was also one of the first to identify and write about her people as natives of the Southwest. Her essays and research, thus, have great potential for the reconstruction of Mexican American cultural history.

As a literary stylist, González has caught the attention of a number of critics who have been reconstructing Mexican American literary history. The charm of her tales has captivated them for various obvious reasons. González's folkloric narratives are humorous, vivid, and colorful. They usually begin with a description of the character who will become the protagonist of the story (Chase 123), and the resulting anecdotes are always curious and intriguing. González's subtle humor and art of description bring these characters to life (Tatum 234). Her critical stance is represented in such narratives through irony and caricature, although this somewhat distances her from her creatures (*Cultural Ambivalence* 95).

González's folkloric tales are like snapshots of people that reveal their innermost thoughts and motivation. According to Tatum, González captured in her writing the essence of the people and scenery that were an important part of her childhood (226). She was particularly drawn to the world of the cowboy and portrays him as a special personage, born in Texas as the product of an interracial mix of the Amerindian and the Spanish conqueror (Chase 123). From his indigenous ancestors the cowboy inherited his love of nature and freedom, as well as his melancholy and fatalism. From his Spanish ancestors he inherited his love of music, his poetry, and religious devotion. Within his conception of life, the cowboy maintained a series of myths that found meaning in nature. Such myths and legends as "El Cenizo," "The Mocking Bird," "El Cardo Santo," "The Guadalupana Vine," "The Cicada," "The Cardinal," "The Woodpecker," "The Paisano," "The Dove,"

“Legends of Ghosts and Treasures,” “The Devil on the Border,” and “Without a Soul,” among many others, preserved and transmitted his values from one generation to the next.

It is important to point out that some of the narratives that Jovita González published in *Southwest Review*, *LULAC News*, and *Texas Folk-Lore Society Publications* were later incorporated in her novel *Dew on the Thorn*: “Tío Patricio,” “The First Cactus Blossom,” “The Gift of the Pitahaya,” “Legends of Ghosts and Treasures,” “Without a Soul,” and “The Mocking Bird.” According to the novel’s editor, José E. Limón, *Dew on the Thorn* can be interpreted as a unified literary combination of brief narratives that are inserted into the short novel, where the life of the community of Mexican descendants in south Texas is revealed (xv). Garza-Falcón asserts that most of the author’s presentations at the annual meetings of the Texas Folklore Society and her contributions to their publications were actually derived from this earlier manuscript of *Dew on the Thorn* (81-82). In this novel, a somewhat disguised plot line links a group of short folktales. These stories, told by various characters in the novel, are digressions that expand the narrative. González later used these stories as material for her various folklore presentations and publications.

One of the key individuals promoting the oral tradition of the Mexican American community is without doubt the *storyteller*. González describes the *storyteller* within his or her natural setting as the central figure surrounded by an audience that has gathered precisely to enjoy the stories. Thus, narratives such as “Tío Patricio,” “The Bullet-Swallower,” “Ambrosio the Indian,” “Pedro the Hunter,” and “The Mail Carrier,” in and of themselves, celebrate and preserve the *storyteller* as an historian and transmitter of values for the community. In “Shelling the Corn by Moonlight,” for example, González commemorates the typical custom of the early Hispanic settlers of meeting together at night

by the light of the campfire and the moon to tell ghost stories and tales of buried treasure:

It was on a night like this that the ranch folk gathered at the Big House to shell corn. All came: Tío Julianito, the pastor, with his brood of black half-starved children ever eager for food; Alejo the fiddler; Juanito the idiot, called the Innocent, because the Lord was keeping his mind in Heaven; Pedro the hunter, who had seen the world and spoke English; the *vaqueros*; and, on rare occasions, Tío Esteban, the mail carrier. Even the women came, for on such occasions supper was served.

A big canvas was spread outside, in front of the kitchen. In the center of this canvas ears of corn were piled in pyramids for the shellers, who sat about in a circle and with their bare hands shelled the grains off the cobs.

It was then, under the moonlit sky, that we heard stories of witches, buried treasures, and ghosts. (*Among My People* 100)

In addition to emphasizing the personality of the cowboy, the peon, and the preacher, Jovita González points out the strong presence of the landowner within the patriarchal system full of myths and superstitions; he, in particular, is threatened by the new political and social order imposed by the Anglo Americans. In “Don Tomás” and “Don José María,” the author tells of two rich landowners who, typically, control not only their own families but also the lives of their peons and other employees. The power that these landowners maintain over the population of the region is not only seen as exercised directly over their workers and families, but also in the creation and imposition of their laws and their fight against the imminent overthrow of the patriarchal system.

In her tales of the animal kingdom, such as “The Paisano,” “The Mocking Bird,” “The Cicada,” and “The Woodpecker,” González illustrates the values worthy of transmission from one generation to the next: honesty, humility, and fidelity, among others. Velázquez-Treviño has written an interesting analysis of how González’s stories detail the lives of wild animals, mirroring in the animal kingdom the limited women in a patriarchy, where the men are the center of daily life (*Cultural Ambivalence* 101-102). They receive the attention of all who surround them, while women are submissive and must sacrifice their well-being for the men around whom their world revolves.

González’s preservation of the folklore of her people would not be complete without the preservation of the supernatural, a theme that is vital in Mexican American oral tradition. Legends about ghosts, demons, and buried treasure that were passed down from the Spaniards, are represented in “The Devil on the Border,” “Legends of Ghosts and Treasures,” “Nana Chita,” and “Without a Soul.”

Jovita González also sought to preserve the memory of her Mexican ancestors. In “The Gift of the Pitahaya,” she presents a “prince from the faraway land of the Aztecs (75). He was tall and straight and walked the village streets in pride and disdain. His look was bold and defiant like the eagle’s. The feather mantle he wore rivaled in beauty the flowers of the prairie. Heavy bracelets of gold and precious stones circled his arms.” Through this story, González demonstrates the pride, veneration, and nostalgia for the indigenous roots of Mexican culture. “Ambrosio the Indian” and “The First Cactus Blossom” are stories that also deal with characters and themes related to Amerindian ancestry. In these stories, González shares with her readers an overflowing pride for her Aztec race, the bronze race, the race of true heroes that have contributed to the country of “her people,” such important

figures as Moctezuma, Cuauhtémoc, Benito Juárez, The Pípila, José María Morelos, and others.

“Shades of the Tenth Muses”<sup>3</sup> was never published by Jovita González. In this story, González exhibits great pride in her Mexican ancestry. Evidently, this is the only non-folkloric story she wrote. Here, she describes the natural beauty and splendor of Mexico, and gives evidence of her Amerindian ancestry when she writes that “a Virgin of Guadalupe reminds [her] daily that [she is] a descendant of a proud stoic race” (80). González describes Mexican social classes of the seventeenth century and expresses her enormous admiration for the Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, because of the intense intellectual virtues that made her stand out as one of the most important female writers of seventeenth century in the Spanish speaking world. While demonstrating clear admiration for the *Tenth Muse*, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Jovita González also deals with the role of women and the defense of their rights in the patriarchal society of seventeenth-century Mexico.

The political resistance of the Mexican American to oppression is one of the last themes that González developed toward the end of her writing career. In the penultimate story that she published, “The Bullet-Swallower,” she writes of a smuggler who defies the laws imposed by the Anglos and enforced by the Texas Rangers. This rogue-hero, related to the heroes of border ballads, survives an armed confrontation with the Texas Rangers after being shot in the mouth and scarred for life, to which he owes his nickname *Bullet-Swallower*. Limón suggests that in “The Bullet Swallower” Jovita González reveals “more of her narratively unrepressed critical political unconscious” (*Dancing* 71-74). Her criticism of the North American invasion of Texas and of the subsequent imposition of rules and laws on the Hispanic community is manifested in such attitudes of obvious resistance on the part of the Mexican American community. These attitudes of resist-

ance were evidenced by the Mexicans through the defiance of the laws imposed by the new government, specifically those regarding smuggling and gambling. This attitude of explicit resistance, in an attempt to wage a fierce although disadvantaged fight against the Texas Rangers, is illustrated in the following passage from "The Bullet Swallower":

The men I associated with were neither sissies nor saints. . . . We were bringing several cartloads of smuggled goods to be delivered at once and in safety to the owner. Oh, no, the freight was not ours but we would have fought for it with our life's blood. . . . The pack mules, loaded with packages wrapped in tanned hides, we led by the bridle. We hid the mules in a clump of tules and were just beginning to dress when the Rangers fell upon us. Of course we did not have a stitch of clothes on; did you think we swam fully dressed? Had we but had our guns in readiness, there might have been a different story to tell. We would have fought like wild-cats to keep the smuggled goods from falling into their hands. It was not ethical among smugglers to lose the property of a Mexican to Americans, and as to falling ourselves into their hands, we preferred death a thousand of times. It's not disgrace and dishonor to die like a man, but it is to die like a rat. . . . I ran to where the pack mules were to get my gun. Like a fool that I was I kept yelling at the top of my voice, 'You so, so, and so gringo cowards, why don't you attack men like men? Why do you wait until they are undressed and unarmed?' I must have said some very insulting things, for one of them shot at me right in the mouth. The bullet knocked all of my front teeth out, grazed my tongue and went right through the back of my neck. Didn't kill me,

though. It takes more than bullets to kill Antonio Traga-Balas . . . (108-09)

Thus, toward the end of her creative writing career, Jovita González achieves the explicit expression of this typically Mexican American attitude of resistance. In the "Bullet-Swallower," Jovita González ultimately achieves the vision, clarity, and political as well as social focus that are defined and refined throughout her work and that came to dominate Chicano writing in the 1960s and 1970s.

As Tey Diana Rebolledo points out in her studies of Chicano literary tradition, as more and more texts are saved from anonymity, we gain a better understanding of the impact of women on the political and social structure of the country throughout history (26-27). González is certainly one of our forebears whose literary works should be studied in depth.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>More information about the biography of Jovita González can be found in *E. E. Mireles and Jovita González de Mireles Papers, Special Collection & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library*. Also, more biographical information can be found in Jovita González, *Dew on the Thorn*, ed. José E. Limón (Houston: Arte Público, 1997): ix-xiii.

<sup>2</sup>See Aurelio M. Espinosa, *Cuentos populares españoles* (New York: AMS, 1967) and Juan B. Rael, *Cuentos españoles de Colorado y Nuevo Méjico* (New York: Arno, 1977).

<sup>3</sup>This story was recently located by María Cotera in the enormous collection of manuscripts catalogued with the title *E. E. Mireles and Jovita González de Mireles Papers, Special Collection & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library*. At the time of the publication of this anthology of short stories written by Jovita González, "Shades of the Tenth Muses" still had not been published. At this writing, María Cotera has been working on this story and is about to publish a literary analysis.

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## The Woman Who Lost Her Soul

## **Animal Tales**



## The Mocking Bird

There was a time when all the creatures of Nature talked a common language. This language was Spanish. *El zenzontle*, the mocking bird, had the sweetest voice of all. The other birds stopped their flight to listen to him; the Indian lover ceased his words of love; even the talkative *arroyo* hushed. He foretold the spring, and when the days grew short and his song was no longer heard, the north winds came. Although he was not a foolish bird, *el zenzontle* was getting conceited.

"I am great, indeed," he said to his mate. "All Nature obeys me. When I sing, the blossoms hid in the trees come forth; the prairie flowers put on their gayest garments at my call and the birds begin to mate; even man, the all wise, heeds my voice and dances with joy, for the happy season draws near."

"Hush, you are foolish and conceited like all men," replied his wife. "They listen and wait for the voice of God, and when He calls, even you sing."

He did not answer his wife, for you must remember he was not so foolish after all, but in his heart he knew that he was right.

That night after kissing his wife goodnight, he said to her. "Tomorrow I will give a concert to the flowers, and you shall see them sway and dance when they hear me."

"*Con el favor de Dios*," she replied. ("If God wills it.")

Jovita González, "Folk-Lore of the Texan-Mexican Vaquero," *Texas and Southwestern Lore*, ed. J. Frank Dobie (Austin: Folk-Lore Society, 1927) 10-11. This story was republished in "Stories of My People," *Texas Folk and Folklore*, eds. Mody C. Boatright, William H. Hudson and Allen Maxwell (Dallas: Southern Methodist U P, 1954) 20-22.

"Whether God wills it or not I shall sing," he replied angrily. "Have I not told you that the flowers obey me and not God?"

Early next morning *el zenzontle* could be seen perched on the highest limb of a huisache. He cleared his throat, coughed, and opened his bill to sing, but no sound came. For down with the force of a cyclone swooped a hawk and grabbed with his steel-like claws the slender body of the singer.

"*Con el favor de Dios, con el favor de Dios*," he cried in distress, while he thought of his wise little wife. As he was being carried up in the air, he realized his foolishness and repented of it, and said, "O God, it is you who make the flowers bloom and the birds sing, not I." As he thought thus, he felt himself slipping and falling, falling, falling. He fell on a ploughed field, and what a fall it was. A white dove who had her nest nearby picked him up and comforted him.

"My wings," he mourned, looking at them, "how tattered and torn they look! Whatever shall I tell my wife?"

The dove took pity on him, and plucking three of her white feathers, mended his wings.

As a reminder of his foolish pride, the mockingbird to this day has the white feathers of the dove. And it is said by those who know that he never begins to sing without saying, "*con el favor de Dios*."

## The Woodpecker

<i>Pájaro, pájaro carpintero,</i>	Woodpecker, woodpecker,
<i>Pájaro trabajador</i>	You hard working bird,
<i>Yo no te pido dinero</i>	I am not asking for money;
<i>Sólo te pido perdón</i>	I merely beg your forgiveness.

Such is the rhyme which all Mexican ranch children repeat whenever they see a woodpecker. And if you ask them the meaning of it, this is the story you will hear.

In a very poor house, so poor that it had no roof, lived a man named Juan with his family. He earned his living making wooden spoons out of the slender Texas ebony tree. But as he did not like to work; and as the process of making spoons was long and tedious, his children often went hungry. One day when his wife had scolded more than usual he took his ax with a moan and a groan and went to the nearby *potrero* (pasture). Very soon he came across what he had been looking for, a straight smooth ebony. Cursing the fate that had not been content with making him a poor man but had made him lazy also, he swung his ax and began to cut. A woodpecker came out of his hole and what was Juan's surprise when the bird spoke:

"Dear friend, do not cut down my house. My little ones can not fly yet."

"I am sorry, *Carpintero*, but mine are starving and unless I make spoons out of this very tree they will die from hunger."

"Please, sir, if you leave my home you will never have to work again."

At this Juan's face brightened like the April sun after a shower.

"Really, *Carpintero*?"

"Really, my friend." And going into his hole, *Señor Carpintero* came back holding a little purse in his beak.

"Here," the bird said, "this is a magic purse. and if you ever need money hold it in your hand and say: 'Do your duty, little purse.'"

Juan was very doubtful as to the merit of the woodpecker's gift; so on his way home, just to make sure, he took it out and said the magic words. Immediately it filled with gold coins. He sang and danced with joy. Never in his life, not even in the days of his courtship, had he moved with such quickness.

That same day he went to the city. Fearing to lose his magic purse, he gave it to the landlady at an inn to keep for him.

"My dear lady, be very careful with it. You see how dirty it looks, don't you? Don't be deceived by looks, *Señora*. It is the most wonderful purse you ever saw. I leave it in your care, but whatever you do, you must not say to it: 'Do your duty, little purse.'"

It is needless to say that as soon as he was gone the woman did what she was told not to do.

Naturally, when Juan came back both the woman and the purse were gone.

So to Juan's misfortune he had to take his ax the next day and go to the pasture in search of an ebony tree. Hoping that his friend the woodpecker would come out, he started cutting on the tree.

"What?" said the woodpecker. "You here again? What did you do with the purse I gave you?"

Jovita González, "Tales and Songs of the Texas-Mexicans," *Man, Bird and Beast*, ed. J. Frank Dobie (Austin: Folk-Lore Society, 1932) 93-95.

And Juan had to tell his story. When he had finished, the woodpecker said:

“Your head is as hard as the bark of the ebony tree you are cutting. No one but you would have done that. I shall teach you a lesson that you will never forget. Here, take this whip and when you get home say, ‘Whip do your duty.’”

Of course, Juan expected something wonderful, but when he uttered the words his gift was transformed into an *alicantre* (whip snake) and oh, how well it did its duty. It beat Juan out of the house, then into the house, and out again, and the faster he ran the faster the snake whipped. He climbed a mesquite tree and the snake followed.

“Only when you ask the woodpecker’s pardon will I cease to whip you,” said the snake.

And down to the pasture ran the poor man, the snake close at his heels. Finally they came to the ebony tree, where, falling on his knees, Juan gasped the words:

<i>Pájaro, pájaro carpintero</i>	Woodpecker, woodpecker,
<i>Pájaro trabajador</i>	You hard working bird,
<i>Yo no te pido dinero</i>	I do not ask you for money.
<i>Lo que te pido es perdón</i>	I merely ask your forgiveness.

“Very well,” said the woodpecker, who had come to see what the excitement was all about. “But I am not satisfied with that. You and your children’s children must ask pardon of my descendants of the trouble you have caused us.”

So to this day Juan’s descendants have always repeated the rhyme whenever they see a woodpecker.

## The Paisano

Everyone knows that when the world was young all the creatures of nature spoke a common language and understood each other. Social classes and distinctions also prevailed among them. The eagle was the proud king of the air and all flying things, and the mocking bird had the vain glory of being the lord of the singers. In this manner all the different families with a King at their head formed a world of their own; and quarrels, jealousies and disputes were never lacking among the feathered people.

There was a bird, who, although of plebeian origin, was a distant relation of the pheasants. This made him vain, arrogant and haughty. Every evening he went walking, his crest waving in the air and his tail switching from left to right with the pride of the peacock. He did not deign to speak to the humble sparrows and the modest dove who always mourned her misfortunes. But he was only too glad to greet the nobles and the lords of high position whenever the occasion presented itself. Forgetting his humble birth, he addressed them as cousins and *paisanos*.

“Good morning, *Paisano Zenzontle*,<sup>†</sup> how is your Lordship?” Or “how are you, *Paisano*?” addressing the noble Sir Cardinal.

Jovita González, “Tales and Songs of the Texas-Mexicans,” *Man, Bird and Beast*, ed. J. Frank Dobie (Austin: Folk-Lore Society, 1932) 92-93. This story was republished in “Stories of My People,” *Texas Folk and Folklore*, eds. Mody C. Boatright, William H. Hudson and Allen Maxwell (Dallas: Southern Methodist U P, 1954) 19-20.

<sup>†</sup>Mocking bird.

His lack of common sense and his excessive vanity blinded him in such a way that he never did notice the disdain and coldness with which he was tolerated. One day while the eagle was discussing important matters of state with the nobles of the kingdom—the cardinals, the scissortails and the hawks—the foolish cousin of the pheasant family came into the chamber without announcing himself. He did not see the consternation on the face of the nobles, who were shocked at his daring, but, bowing and smiling, said to the monarch:

“How fares your Majesty and my *paisanos*, the nobles here assembled?”

The eagle, furious at seeing the familiarity with which a plebeian treated him, cried out in a voice like the tempest of a July night:

“Out of my presence, creature of low birth! I banish you forever from my kingdom. From now on you forfeit the noble name of *Faisán*. You will forget to fly and will feed on the most unclean things of the earth, snakes, tarantulas and poisonous insects.”

The poor bird, blinded with shame and mortification, tried to fly from the court room but could not; his wings had lost their strength. To his greater dishonor, he was forced to run out of the room like a common beast. Since that time he has been the outcast—a pariah—of the birds. He runs here and there among the chaparral and cactus in his endeavor to hide his shame and disgrace. When the heat of the desert plains is unbearable, something like a sob is heard. It is his voice harsh and melancholy mourning the loss of his caste.

Not only the birds mock him, but man, to remind him of his pride and vanity, calls him *paisano*.

## The Cicada

**L**a *Cigarra*<sup>†</sup> was a gay person, in fact too gay to suit his wife. In spring when the *huisache* was in bloom he became intoxicated with the balmy perfumed air and the joy of living. It was then that, forgetting his duties of a faithful husband, he made love to the butterflies, which, like flying flowers, tempted him with their beauty, and to the hummingbirds, the tenors of the fields.

His wife was jealous and when her erring husband returned home in the evening, satisfied with himself and life, you should have heard her garrulous voice rise above the stillness of night. But he said nothing and merely sat heavy eyed with love and too happy to hear. As summer came on and the July heat made his life unbearable, his romantic adventurous habits were transformed into a languorous lassitude. Perched on the bark of a mesquite, he complained in his shrill voice of the cruelty of the sun. It was then that his wife, forgiving his past offenses, bathed his feverish forehead with the morning dew. The butterflies seeing him so domesticated flew to more venturesome lovers and the hummingbirds forgot him in disgust.

Jovita González, “Tales and Songs of the Texas-Mexicans,” *Man, Bird and Beast*, ed. J. Frank Dobie (Austin: Folk-Lore Society, 1932) 95-96. This story was republished in “Stories of My People,” *Texas Folk and Folklore*, eds. Mody C. Boatright, William H. Hudson and Allen Maxwell (Dallas: Southern Methodist U P, 1954) 22-23.

<sup>†</sup>The locust, or cicada.

All was peaceful again until spring, when passions were stirred in his heart, and his roving disposition returned. At last his wife went to the eagle, the monarch of all flying beings, and presented her plea. After due deliberation the king replied:

“Only one thing can check his roaming ways and that is to make him ugly in the sight of the ladies. From now on his eyes will be popped and round, and his colored wings an ashy gray. If this does not stop him nothing else will.”

And it did, for the butterflies laughed at his owl-like eyes and colorless wings. Chagrined and morose, he came home and for months refused to speak. His wife’s wishes had gone beyond her expectations; she wanted him at home, it is true, but expected him to keep her company as in the days of their courtship. Realizing that she could never be happy with this ugly creature who did nothing but complain, she went to the king again and this time asked him to make her like her husband. And with her change she became fretful like him. So to this day the shrill voices of the cicadas are heard in the heat of summer, the male complaining and shrill, the female shrill but contented.

## The Cardinal

Every one regards the cardinal for the brilliancy of his feathers and the sweetness of his voice. But once he was an insignificant, ashy gray, little person noticed by none until he met and spoke with the spirit of the plains. And this is the story, a Texas tale one—of those fantastic creations of the fertile *mestizo* mind.

The singing birds were to have a concert in celebration of the arrival of spring. The mocking birds, the thrushes, the doves, and even the magpies filled the air with their songs. With the blooming of the trees and flowers and the arrival of the butterflies, enthusiasm ran riot among the feathered creatures. Crazed with joy, they sang unceasingly. All were joyous except a little gray bird who, too sensitive at his inability to sing, stayed at home. He tried to sing but just a gruff, hoarse sound came from his throat. He tried again and again but with no success. And if birds can weep, he wept in despair.

“If I could sing just for once,” said the little bird, “how happy I could be.”

“Why do you want to sing?” asked a voice.

“Why? Why? So I can sing a love song to my mate like all other birds do, and praise the beauty of the world.”

Jovita González, “Tales and Songs of the Texas-Mexicans,” *Man, Bird and Beast*, ed. J. Frank Dobie (Austin: Folk-Lore Society, 1932) 96-98.

“A wonderful thought indeed! I might help you, little bird, if I could but see your mate.”

So the lady bird came.

“You are not very pretty, my dear,” said the voice. “And you can not sing either?”

The little lady bird shook her head sorrowfully.

“Would you really want your husband to sing?”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said the little gray wife, clasping her little claws pathetically. “We could be so happy.”

“I can give beauty and voice to only one of you. Which shall it be, you or your husband?”

“My husband, if you please,” said the little lady.

“Are you sure you will not regret it?” continued the voice.

“Yes, yes. You see he has to go out into the world, while I stay at home and care for my babies.”

“And you,” said the voice, speaking to the male, “accept the sacrifice of your wife?”

“She has chosen well,” replied he in a pompous voice.

“Very well, tomorrow at dawn things will be as you wish.”

And when the sun tinted the horizon with red both birds jumped from their bed in the tree top. The male was a brilliant red. They looked at each other, the female with a smile admiring the glory of her mate, the male with a frown noticing for the first time the ugliness of his wife. Then, raising his crested head, he sang. The voice was clear and triumphant, an epic in song. He soon forgot his wife’s sacrifice, grew overbearing and cruel, and scolded and pecked her because of her ugliness.

But the spirit of the Plains saw all and grew sorry for the little lady bird. He could not take away the gift he had so freely given to the male, and since he could give her just one gift he made her a wonderful singer. Whereas he husband’s song was one of triumph, hers became one of love and gratitude. Probably because of her

unselfishness, the grayness of her dress has changed to a rosy tint. So now, whenever the male begins to fuss and scold, she, knowing the vanity of his sex, tosses her little head and flies off laughing at the stupidity of husbands, who, like hers, are all woman made and yet are proud of what they think is their own achievement.

## The Mescal-Drinking Horse

The thick brush country of the Rio Grande saw his birth. His mother, a scrub mare, famous for her ability to smell and dodge the law, had saved Juan José, her smuggler master, from a prison fate. *El Viento*, she had been called, for she raced with the fleetness of the Gulf winds as they blow over the prairie, defying the thick mesquite thorns, and the screwlike spikes of the *granjeno* and the flexible but tough cactus needles. His father was a powerful stallion of Arabian blood that had wandered away from the stables of his rich master.

And so it was that *El Conejo* came into existence. An awkward creature since birth, he had been a contradiction of everything a horse should be. "He looks like a rabbit," his master had said, laughing uproariously, seeing the trembling creature with his mother's short, stubby hind legs and the powerful front legs of his Arabian father. So he was called *El Conejo* (the rabbit). He grew, a gentle, good-natured pony. Juan José's children made him their pet, spoiled him, and he in turn bore them from their home hidden in the thick chaparral to the *camino real*, where he and the children peeped with curiosity at the outside world.

One never-to-be-forgotten day, his placid life of easy-going contentment came to an abrupt end. Juan José, doubly drunk—

drunk both with success of his latest exploit and with a quart of *Pájaro Azul mescal*—opened a new and vicious world to him.

"Come here, Conejo," Juan José called to him, waving a newly opened bottle of *mescal*. "I don't like your looks," he laughed. "A horse like a rabbit is neither a horse nor a rabbit. I know you don't like your appearance, either. Come here to me; this will make you forget." And, saying this, he poured the quart of *mescal* into a tin wash basin.

Conejo approached the basin, and without even the faintest sniff, took a deep draught. He looked up, surprised at the fire that burned him, gave a snort and a kick, circled the pan gingerly, sniffed at the contents this time, and without hesitation quaffed the *mescal* to the last drop. He looked up. If ponies can smile, Conejo did so now, and foolishly too, rolled his eyes and wiggled his ears at the same time. Then, as if stung by a wasp, he bolted, kicked the air and ran away to the nearest brush. All day long he was heard running and snorting. At dusk he returned slowly, a sober horse, his colthood days behind him.

Next day, Juan José, seeing the sadness in his eyes, and knowing how it felt to have a *cruda* (hangover), offered him the bottle he always carried in his hip pocket.

"You need it, Conejo," he told the horse, "but just a little this time—two drinks—three drinks—and plenty of cold water." The horse, seeming to understand what his master was telling him, drank two swigs—three swigs—and then swallowed enough water to float his own body.

From that day on Conejo took his daily drink of *mescal*, and he was none the worse for it. In fact, it made him a horse of reputation. Other smugglers came to see him drink, and all admired him. "He should be called *El Pájaro Azul*," suggested one of the smugglers, noticing his fondness for that particular brand of *mescal*. And so *El Pájaro* he became now, little knowing that the

Jovita González, "The Mescal-Drinking Horse," *Mustang and Cow Horses*, ed. J. Frank Dobie, Mody C. Boatright, and Harry H. Ransom (Dallas: Southern Methodist U P, 1965) 396-402.

name so glibly given would become a by-word among the people of the borderland.

A new relationship developed between El Pájaro and Juan José, one of respect and mutual admiration. But there was something he missed, the close contact with man, which only comes to a horse when he is ridden by his master. The children were no longer allowed to ride him; Juan José still laughed at his queer shape and thought him unworthy of riding. Every day, after his customary drink, he ran off like a flash of lightning to the brush, where he remained—unmolested—until the effects of the *mescal* left him.

Time passed for master and horse in this manner, and then on the feast day of Santiago, the patron saint of horses, Juan José, feeling unusually gay after their daily drink, said to El Pájaro, “*Pájaro*, I am going to ride you; you are to be my horse.” And without more ado, he jumped on the unsuspecting horse. The struggle that followed was one of endurance—Pájaro trying to throw his master down, Juan José to hold on. At last, each recognizing the stubbornness and tenacity of the other, both stopped from sheer exhaustion.

The following day word came that a load of tobacco leaf and *mescal* was ready to be brought across the river. Calling his men together, Juan José planned the expedition for the first night after the last quarter of the moon, which would be four days hence.

El Pájaro was made ready for the expedition. He did not mind the saddle at all; and the bridle merely gave him a ticklish sensuous sensation in his mouth. Under cover of darkness Juan José and his men met at the river.

“*¡Vamos, Pájaro! Adentro,*” the rider whispered in his ear. Horse and rider plunged into the stream and swam to the other side. The hidden load of smuggled goods was found; the mules were packed, and the smugglers again plunged into the river.

Land was reached in safety. Juan José was whispering commands into his horse’s ear, but Pájaro was sniffing the air.

“*Ya, ya, Pájaro,*” whispered Juan José. “Keep quiet, steady.”

Unheeding his master’s words and caresses, Pájaro reared on his powerful, short hind legs and without warning fled to the chaparral. Hardly had he brought his master to the safety of the brush when the Rangers fell upon the smugglers, wounding some and taking the rest under their custody.

Because of this incident, Pájaro’s fame as a “Ranger sniffer” spread over the borderland. Fleet as a rabbit, with the intelligence of his Arabian father and the endurance of his plebeian mother, he was the envy of all the *rancheros*. Fabulous sums of money were offered for this *mescal*-drinking horse, but Juan José would not sell him. He was too valuable to the smuggler; with this aid, Juan José and his men became unconquerable.

However, with the development of the lower Rio Grande Valley, swift changes came to the border. Smuggling became unprofitable. No longer did it pay the smugglers to bring in fresh supplies of tobacco leaf. Bull Durham and brown paper was taking place of the corn shuck *cigarrillos*. No longer was it spectacular to swim the river under the very nose of the Texas Rangers. For these officers, seeing the demand for tobacco diminish, directed their activities to more active sources. And without the thrill of persecution smuggling lost all zest and glamour. Juan José, who always liked to occupy the center of the stage, did a dramatic thing then. Repenting his sinful life, he acquired religion and decided to lead the life of a saint. It was then that he sold El Pájaro, the wonder horse. A rich *ranchero*, Don Manuel de Guevara, became his new master. Juan José wept over his horse at parting, begging Don Manuel not to give him any more *mescal*.

“He is part of my very soul,” Juan José explained. “With my repentance came his too. He is as much of a Christian as I am.”



But with the new master and the new life, El Pájaro lost spirit. His eyes lost luster, he refused to eat, and when saddled merely stood still. His new master cursed and swore, saying he had been cheated in the bargain. Then like a flash a thought came into his mind. The horse needed *mescal*. And he was right. A quart of the fiery liquid restored the horse to his former manner. El Pájaro pitched and snorted as of old. He became so spirited that no one, except the *ranchero*, could ride him. A man in his early forties, Don Manuel was the typical *ranchero* of his time. A good *jinete*, he bragged that no horse could throw him and no rider could out-ride him. And to a certain extent the boast was true. Except when he was "in the grape," the polite border way of saying he was drunk, he could ride any horse. He used to boast that if Pegasus himself, the fabulous winged horse, were placed before him, he could ride him—wings and all. El Pájaro had met his match.

In those days, at the turn of the nineteenth century, there was no better known figure than Father José María. A native of France, he had come to the border country as a young man of twenty-five, forty years before. Because of his excellent horsemanship, he was lovingly known as the "Cowboy Priest." Now as an aging man of sixty-five, he still rode all over the lower border administering the sacraments and preaching the gospel. Loved and respected by all, his word was law among a people who had very little liking and less respect for American law.

One evening, just at sunset, Father José María, riding his white mule, arrived at Don Manuel's ranch. Hearing the cries of a woman, the hoarse swearing of a man, and the weeping of children, he entered the yard of the ranch house without announcing himself. The sight that met his eyes did not surprise him at all, for he knew Don Manuel only too well.

The *ranchero* was much "in grape" and so was El Pájaro. Don Manuel could hardly stand on his feet; yet he was trying to ride the snorting and pitching horse. His wife stood on the porch

wringing her hands and weeping. The children were adding to their wails and tears to hers, and the two peons standing against the house were paralyzed with fear. Don Manuel would surely be killed if he succeeded in getting on El Pájaro.

Father José María took in the scene at a glance. Dismounting from his mule, he came to where Manuel struggled with El Pájaro, "*Hola Padre*," the *ranchero* called out, "watch me ride this devil of a horse."

"Stop a moment, Manuelito," answered the priest. "I'll make a bet with you."

Manuel stopped, for if there was a thing he loved more than *mescal* and horses, it was to make and win an honest bet.

"A bet, *Padre*, did you say?"

"Yes, I bet I can ride El Pájaro."

"All right, *Padre*. I take your bet. If you ride this demon of a horse, he is yours. Agreed?" "Agreed," the priest answered.

With slow steps the priest approached the horse—caressed him gently, patting his mane and rubbing his nose. In less time than any one realized, Father José María was riding El Pájaro. The *mescal*-drinking horse and the *mescal*-drinking *ranchero* had been defeated.

From that time on El Pájaro was the priest's property. Years passed. The black-robed, white haired priest, learned in Latin, and the gentle, queer-shaped horse, *Stella Matutina* now, *alias El Conejo*, *alias El Pájaro*, traversed the borderland, bringing consolation to the sick and afflicted. Whenever the good priest talked to some impenitent sinner, he would often comment, "My horse, Morning Star, is a good example of what religion can do for a man. Imitate him. He has left his evil ways."