

A pesar de todas las novedades y los juegos de colores no puede negarnos Estrada que es un admirador de nuestra fresca poesía popular y que más de una vez ha bebido en las aguas cristalinas de nuestro "Romancero." Así nos lo demuestra al escribir:

Ya no pasarás, amiga,  
cantando por estas lomas,  
ya no pasarás.  
El trébol de cuatro hojas  
acabado se te ha  
por siempre jamás.

Y estamos por decir que por estos rumbos encontrará el poeta su camino de Damasco. Su "Queja del perdido amor," de inspiración netamente castiza, es para nosotros lo mejor del libro y digna de figurar en selecta antología:

En el pozo se cayó una tarde.  
¡Ay de mí, quién la sacará!

Mi sortija, la mía,  
era mi compañera,  
a volver a encontrarla  
las cosas que yo diera,  
de volver a tenerla  
un momento siquiera,  
de llevarla en mi mano  
lo que yo la dijera;  
era toda de plata  
mi sortija primera,  
pero tanto valía  
como puede cualquiera.

¡Qué diera por alcanzarla  
para volverla a llevar!  
¡Tortuga que estás adentro,  
subelá.

En el pozo se cayó una tarde.  
¡Ay de mí, quién la sacará!

*Crucero*, a pesar de cierta irregularidad de formas, es un libro de fino artista. No hallamos en él las empalagosas lamentaciones románticas de algunos modernistas ni la facilidad mecánica de versificación de que hacen gala nuestros poetas americanos. Tampoco cae en los excesos de abultada originalidad a que nos

quieren acostumbrar los escritores de estos diez últimos años. Es un placer no encontrar en un libro de versos palabras como "tanque," "hélices," "avión"; "arcos voltaicos," "policromías," etc.

Hemos mencionado ya las diferentes fases de la obra de este escritor mexicano; nos queda por señalar su amplia y profunda cultura que le hace andar como en propia casa por las literaturas inglesa, norteamericana, francesa e italiana. Como crítico ocupa, al lado de Alfonso Reyes, el lugar más alto en las letras de su patria; como evocador de motivos coloniales es único (a menos que Julio Torri siga cultivando en silencio tan hermoso género) y como poeta busca su camino entre la serenidad profunda de González Martínez y el radicalismo estético de López Velarde y de Tablada.

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## JOSÉ EUSTASIO RIVERA

It was the last Saturday of November when José Eustasio Rivera called me up to let me know that copies of the fifth edition of his book *La Vorágine* had just come off the press. With the boyish enthusiasm so typical of him he told me that the first two copies were on their way to Colombia, carried by the aviator Méndez flying from New York to Bogotá. A week later Rivera was dead, and the ship bearing his body reached his homeland before his book, for Méndez's plane was damaged while landing at Panamá. Rivera's shockingly sudden death had all of that tragic element that he had seen connected with anything that had touched the jungles of the Amazon even marginally; and the dark, mysterious forces he had sensed so clearly lurking in those inscrutable shadows seem to have reached out to claim him just as he felt that the jungle always, sooner or later, claims those who have violated its solitude, usurped its privileges, defied its terrors.

José Eustasio Rivera was born in Neiva, Colombia thirty-eight or forty years ago.

Neiva is some hundred and fifty miles south of Bogotá as the crow flies, and it was in the capital that Rivera received his higher education and his legal training. Here too, he began to participate in the politics of his country, his abilities and charming personality soon bringing him the high honors of the leadership of his party and the presidency of the senate. He served too, as secretary to several Colombia embassies and was appointed

to serve on a number of commissions of importance. Three of these were of special significance in his life. One was the congressional investigation that made a survey of the petroleum resources of his country. His public-spiritedness was manifest in the report presented signed by him as chairman, in which he courageously attacked the exploitation and corruption that had grown up in connection with the development of this form of his country's wealth. Such a stand automatically made him *persona non grata* in the eyes of many politicians and foreign investors, yet at the same time added to his prestige so that he emerged as a political factor of even greater consideration. The second mission was the one that took him to the jungles and eventually gave him his reputation as a writer. It was the boundary commission composed of Swiss engineers appointed by Colombia and Venezuela to make a survey of and decide upon the definite boundary between those two countries. Rivera, always moved by an irresistible urge toward adventure, went as the lawyer representing his country, knowing full well what hardships penetration into jungle depths probably never before seen by white men would involve, knowing, too, the dangers the horrors of the jungle held for him. On his safe return from this long and wearying journey—which killed or sent back to civilization less hardy members of the party—he received the thanks of the nation for the able and conscientious way in which he had defended the interests of Colombia. The third and the last of his important missions took him to Havana early in 1928 to attend the International Congress on Immigration and Emigration, and it was from there that he decided to come to New York to supervise the publication of the fifth edition of his book and its translation into English.

Rivera first attracted attention as an able lawyer and statesman by vocation and a poet by avocation. The book that gave him a reputation as a writer of verse was his "*Tierra de Promisión*," a collection of sonnets. They show great technical ability and a fine command of decidedly melodic language, yet there is nothing in them that even slightly presages the vigor and stark reality that were to appear in the vivid pages of *La Vorágine*.

It was while plunging deeper and deeper into the Amazonian jungles on this boundary commission that Rivera conceived *La Vorágine*. It is possible that the first part of the book, dealing entirely with life on his beloved, stretching llanos, had come to his mind earlier. But when his sensitive soul saw or heard of the horrors that tortured the rubber workers, saw the mighty vastness of titanic forests, suffered the tribulations with which the jealous jungle lashes those who affront it, the desire to portray this inhuman vortex grew and grew. And *La Vorágine* was the result.

Much of it was written then and there. "Written" I say—but how! After a day's march barefooted through leech-infested swamps, stung to desperation by mosquitoes and insects, soaked by tropical downpours, tired and hungry, with only a handful of manioc to eat, he and his companions would sit around the evening smudge-fire, and Rivera would say, "Listen to what I have 'written' today." And then he would proceed to recite the "pages" he had composed, "pages" that, for lack of paper, he had to preserve in his mind. It was not until some time after the completion of his mission, as he rested and recuperated in a little country retreat, that *La Vorágine* took written form.

*La Vorágine* stands as his crowning achievement, and as an outstanding Latin-American book of recent times. It will endure as one of the definite contributions to the new Spanish-American literature. It is futile to theorize as to how Rivera might have made it an even greater book. Being his first, and so largely autobiographical, it has been easy for the author to put himself too much into its pages, and this lack of detachment and calm poise is not in keeping with modern taste. (Although if one looks at it as the psychological study of an unusual personality—Cova—quite a different impression can be formed.) This defect is emphasized by his own peculiar temperament, by the personality he has given Cova, the narrator whose memoirs the book is supposed to be, and by the lyrical nature of a large number of self-revealing or self-analytical passages, aspects also looked on with disfavor by modern standards, although with constantly changing tastes no one can dare set up absolute esthetic criteria and pronounce such passages "bad." Yet it is probably these factors that make me personally consider the concluding pages of the book as the greatest. Here is one great majestic sweep from climax to dénouement. Tense dramatic pages succeed one another with vertiginous speed. The action is crisp, vivid, horribly real. Into them, a whole volume has been compressed. They play on the reader's emotions stirringly, intensely. And as sudden is the fall of the last curtain, with the tragic and final words, *En nombre de Dios!* The vortex had swallowed its victims. The jungle had triumphed as it always does.

Rivera has descriptions of great beauty. His poet's soul was sensitive to every whisper, every shade, every nuance of a zephyr-swept plain at evening, or the mysterious voices of the jungles at night. His vocabulary is rich, unusually rich, and he was fastidious to an extreme in his structure and style. Comparison of each new edition with the former reveals change upon change, made to avoid the repetition of a word, a slight ambiguity, something that did not express the exact shade of meaning, or a

chance cacophony. In sheer beauty of description, *La Vorágine* invites comparison with Hudson's "Green Mansions" and Tomlinson's "The Sea and the Jungle," although such comparison dealing with two diametrically different tongues is not just, particularly in view of the disparity between English and Spanish usage and tradition. But the picture Rivera has painted of the jungles is a complete antithesis of Hudson's. Hudson saw the paradise Chateaubriand and Bernardin de St. Pierre sought to portray. Rivera has given us a monster, sullen, vicious, treacherous, awful with an awful beauty, always seeking to smite the impudent and puny invader, stretching out its evil grasp even to those who had long fled from it (as it seemed to do in the case of Rivera, whose resistance to illness undoubtedly had been lowered by the harrassing experiences on the Amazon). Rivera hated the jungle because it cut off the limitless sweep of the great plains, because it closed sun and moon from man, because its air was not the fresh morning air of the plains but noxious vapors and miasmas.

And lastly and most important, he hated the jungle because it made a brute of every man that dared to venture within its leaf-topped aisles of death and disease.

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I regret that lack of space forbids a more detailed consideration of *La Vorágine*. I know that should I turn to the book I would be launched on a series of endless quotations, for its three hundred odd pages contain too much that one would want to quote, both because of material or style. I fear I have been led into adverse rather than favorable criticism of the parts I have referred to. This seems inevitable when dealing with a great book. *La Vorágine* needs no exaltation. It stands unaided on its own merits. Nor does Rivera himself need eulogizing threnody to sing his virtues, except for the fact that he cannot be known as his book can be known. He was a man of prevailing magnanimity, generous and thoughtful with his friends as few men are. Oppression and injustice galled him to the quick, and scars on his leg showed where he had suffered bullet wounds as in Casanare he sought to right the wrongs he had witnessed. Now he rests once more where evening zephyrs rustle the palm-leaves, perhaps on the gentle knoll he spoke of in *La Vorágine* as a place of peace where he would want to end his days, beside a glaucous pool where cattle at evening would come to drink, where a nodding palm would sing the songs he was always listening to. "Those immense spaces injured me," he wrote of the plains, "yet notwithstanding this I wanted to embrace them. . . . I

know that in my dying moments the images I most clearly bear within me will blur in glassy eyes; but I know, too, that in the eternal atmosphere through which my spirit must ascend I'll find the half-tones of those tender twilights, which with brush-strokes of opal and rose already have painted for me on friendly skies the path the soul follows on its way to the supreme constellations." Sensitive spirit—dreamer of dreams—he sleeps now on his "llanuras inolvidables."

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### LA VIDA LITERARIA EN CHILE

La novela más importante del año ha sido *El chileno en Madrid*, de Joaquín Edwards Bello. Esta novela, que a mi se me antoja autobiográfica, es una verdadera loa al Madrid popular que los artistas de América tienen muy cerca de su corazón y celebran desde lejos en poemas a la manera de los de Emilio Carrere y en páginas en prosa que parecen desgajadas de los libros de Pío Baroja. Edwards Bello ha vivido muchos años en España, ha cultivado la amistad de sus mejores hombres y ha frecuentado las mansiones aristocráticas, las universidades, los teatros, los circos, las iglesias, los museos, los bares, los barrios bajos de Madrid, y por este motivo su última novela parece ser la obra de un madrileño . . . que hubiera vivido muchos años en América. Demuestra el autor de este libro un excesivo entusiasmo por la vida fácil de la "golfería," por toda la majeza racial que los españoles modernos tratan de ocultar y desdeñan, pero que existe, y tiene su encanto peculiar, como todo lo que es auténtico, primitivo, espontáneo en la feria de la vida.

Edwards Bello como narrador nos ofrece particularidades de un profundo interés, pues, sin ser un buen artista, logra interesarnos con sus cuadros realistas y con la inquietud de su estilo, incorrecto, destartalado, irregular y hasta grosero a veces, pero lleno de vida y de pasión; estilo que está más allá de la gramática y de las tiranías estéticas. De cultura cosmopolita, perenne viajero en busca de impresiones nuevas, Edwards Bello es el escritor chileno que más intensamente contribuye a nuestro hispanoamericanismo literario. *El chileno en Madrid* nos recuerda *La busca* de Baroja y, aunque parezca extraño, encuentra su único parangón en América en el *Facundo* de Sarmiento.

El ensayo de Ortega y Gasset *La deshumanización del arte* ha encontrado serios comentaristas en la América española. En México Jaime Torres Bodet ha puesto bien orientados reparos a