

LEOPOLDO ALIAS (CLARÍN)

as a monument of Spanish fiction, comparable with those left to posterity by Cervantes and Pérez Galdós, and deserving a place with the outstanding prose fiction of nineteenth-century Europe.

Leopoldo Alas (Clarín)

(1852-1901)

EXCEPT FOR brief sojourns in Madrid, where he was known as a scathing critic of literature and of the socio-political set-up of Spain, Alas spent his rather uneventful life in Oviedo, where he taught law and political economy at the University of Oviedo, his Alma Mater. Under the pseudonym "Clarín," which means bugle, he blasted to the four corners of Spain his dissatisfaction with all kinds of obscurantisms, superstitions, fanaticisms and puerile nationalism, so well illustrated in his story "El sustituto." Without any doubt Clarín became the most considerable and the most terrifying critic of Spain at the end of the century. But at the same time he cultivated the short story, and his work in that genre ranks, with that of Alarcón and Pardo Bazán (the great trinity), among the loftiest and most significant of nineteenth-century Spain. He wrote in addition two memorable novels: the two-volume *La Regenta* (1884) and *Su único hijo* (1891). *La Regenta* is a tale of adultery, with certain psychological and stylistic affinities with *Madame Bovary*, depicting, in its panoramic sweep, provincial Spanish life. For its psychological penetration into human conflicts, its consummate style and vividly colorful descriptions, it may be regarded

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por Leopoldo Alas (Clarín)

MORDIÉNDOSE LAS UÑAS DE LA MANO IZQUIERDA, VICIO EN
ÉL MUY VIEJO E INDIGNO DE QUIEN ASEGURABA AL PÚBLICO QUE
TENÍA UN PLECTRO,¹ Y ACABABA DE ESCRIBIR EN UNA HOJA DE BIAN-
QUISIMO PAPEL:

Quiero cantar, por reprimir el llanto,
tu gloria, oh patria, al verte en la agonía . . . ?

digo, que mordiéndose las uñas, Eleuterio Miranda, el mejor poeta del partido judicial en que radicaba su musa, meditaba malhumorado y a punto de romper, no la lira, que no la tenía, valga la verdad, sino la pluma de ave con que estaba escribiendo una oda o elegía (según saliera), de encargo.

Era el caso que estaba la patria en un grandísimo apuro, o a lo menos así se lo habían hecho creer a los del pueblo ² de Miranda; y lo más escogido del lugar, con el alcalde a la cabeza, habían venido a suplicar a Eleuterio que, para solemnizar una fiesta patriótica, cuyo producto líquido se aplicaría a los gastos de la guerra, ⁴ les escribiese unos versos bastante largos, todo lo retumbantes que le fuera posible, ⁵ y en los cuales se hablara de Otumba, ⁶ de Pavía ⁶ . . . y otros generales ilustres, ⁷ como había dicho el síndico.

Aunque Eleuterio no fuese un Tirteo ⁶ ni un Pindaro, ⁶ que no lo era, tampoco era manco en achaques de malicia y

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by Leopoldo Alas (Clarín)

BITING THE FINGERNAILS OF HIS LEFT HAND, AN OLD HABIT OF
HIS AND QUITE UNBECOMING IN ONE WHO ASSURED THE PUBLIC
HE WAS A POET, HE HAD JUST FINISHED WRITING ON AN EXTREMELY
WHITE SHEET OF PAPER:

Thy glory I would sing, oh fatherland,
To repress my tears, seeing thee expire.

As I was saying, while biting his fingernails, Eleuterio Miranda, the best poet in the judicial district in which his muse was located, was meditating ill-humoredly, and on the verge of breaking, not his lyre—for, to tell the truth, he did not own one—but his quill, with which he was composing, to order, an ode or elegy, depending on how it turned out.

Actually, the fatherland was in dire distress, or at least, this is what the residents of Miranda's home town had been led to believe, and the most select people in town, with the mayor at the head, had come to beg Eleuterio—in order to solemnize a patriotic celebration, the net proceeds of which would be used to help defray the costs of the war—to write some rather long verses, as high-sounding as he could make them, about Otumba, Pavía, and other illustrious generals, to quote the syndic's own words.

Although Eleuterio may not have been a Tyrtæus or Pindar—for he was not—he did not lack shrewdness or

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de buen sentido, y bien comprendía cuán ridiculo resultaba, en el fondo, aquello de contribuir a salvar la patria, dado que en efecto zozobrarse, con endecasilabos y eptasilabos más o menos parecidos a los de Quintana.⁶

Si en otros tiempos, cuando él tenía dieciséis años y no había estado en Madrid ni era suscriptor del *Figaro* ⁷ de París, había sido, en efecto, poeta *épico*, y había *cantado* a la patria y los intereses morales y políticos, ahora ya era muy otro ⁸ y no creía en la epopeya ni demás clases del género *objetivo*; no creía más que en la poesía íntima . . . y en la prosa de la vida. Por ésta, por la prosa de los garbanzos,⁹ se decidía a pulsar la lira pindárica; porque tenía echado el ojo a la secretaría del Ayuntamiento, y le convenía estar bien con los regidores que le pedían que *cantase*. Considerando lo cual, volví a mordorse las uñas y a repasar lo de

Quiero cantar, por reprimir el llanto,
tu gloria, oh patria, al verte en la agonía . . .

Y otra vez se detuvo, no por dificultades técnicas, pues lo que le sobaban a él eran rimas; se detuvo porque de repente le asaltó una idea en forma de recuerdo, que no tardó en convertirse en agudo remordimiento. Ello era que más adelante, al final que ya tenía tramado, pensaba *exclaimar*, como remate de la oda, algo por el estilo:

Mas ¡ay! que temerario,
en vano quise levantar el vuelo,
por llegar al santuario
del patrio amor, en la región del cielo.
Mas, si no pudo tanto
mi débil voz, mi pobre fantasía,
corra mi sangre, como corre el llanto,
en holocausto de la patria mía.
¡Guerrero no más arguyo . . .
el plectro no me deis, dadme una espada:

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common sense, and realized full well how ridiculous, at bottom, was this business of contributing to the salvation of the fatherland (were it really foundering) with hendecasyllables and heptasyllables more or less resembling those of Quintana.

If years back, when he was sixteen and had not yet been to Madrid or been a subscriber to the Parisian *Figaro*, he had, in fact, been an *epic* poet, and *sung* about the fatherland and moral and political issues, now he was quite another person, and did not believe in the epic, or any other kind of *objective* poetry; he believed only in intimate poetry, and in the prose of daily existence. But, for the sake of this bread-and-butter prose, he had made up his mind to pluck the Pindaric lyre, because he had his eye on a clerkship in the town hall, and it was advisable for him to keep in the good graces of the aldermen who asked him to *sing*. In consideration whereof, he bit his nails anew and went over the business of:

Thy glory I would sing, oh fatherland,
To repress my tears, seeing thee expire.

And again he stopped, not because of technical difficulties—he had more than enough rimes—he stopped because all of a sudden he was struck by an idea in the form of a memory that in no time turned to keen remorse. It was that, further on, after the ending he already had in mind, he thought he would *exclaim*, as a closing passage to the ode, something along these lines:

But alas! how I, unwary,
Rashly flew in vain
To reach the sanctuary
Of patriotic love, which skyward shall remain.
But if my feeble voice, my scant imagination,
Such flights cannot sustain,
Then flow, my blood, as tears of consternation,
Flow on, in homage to my Spain!
'Tis war! I heed the sign!
Give me not my plectrum, give me a sword instead

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si mi vida te doy, no te doy nada,
patria, que no sea tuyo;
porque al darte mi sangre derramada,
el ser que te debí te restituyo.

Y cuando iba a quedarse muy satisfecho, a pesar del asonante, que algo le molestaba, sintió de repente, como un silbido dentro del cerebro, una voz que gritó: ¡Ramón!

Y tuvo Eleuterio que levantarse y empezar a pasearse por su despacho; y al pasar enfrente de un espejo notó que se había puesto muy colorado.

— ¡Maldito Ramón! Es decir . . . maldito, no, ¡pobre! Al revés, era un bendito.

Un bendito . . . y un valiente. Valiente . . . gallina. Pues *Gallina* le llamaban en el pueblo por su timidez; pero resultaba una gallina valiente; como lo son todas cuando tienen cría y defienden a sus polluelos.

Ramón no tenía polluelos; al contrario, el polluelo era él; pero la que se moría de frío y de hambre era su madre, una pobre vieja que no tenía ya ni luz bastante en los ojos para seguir trabajando y dándoles a sus hijos el pan de cada día.

La madre de Ramón, viuda, llevaba en arrendamiento cierta humilde heredad de que era propietario don Pedro Miranda, padre de Eleuterio. La infeliz no pagaba la renta. ¡Qué había de pagar si no tenía con qué! Años y años se le iban echando encima con una deuda, para ella enorme. Don Pedro se aguantaba; pero al fin, como los tiempos estaban malos para todos, la contribución baldaba a chicos y grandes; un día *se cargó de razón*,¹⁰ como él dijo, y se plantó, y aseguró que ni Cristo había pasado de la cruz ni él pasaba de allí; de otro modo, que María Pendones tenía que pagar las rentas atrasadas o . . . dejar la finca. "O las rentas o el desahucio." A esto lo llamaba *disyuntiva* don Pedro, y María *el acabóse*, el fin del mundo, la muerte suya y de sus hijos, que eran cuatro, Ramón el mayor.

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For if I give my life, nothing will be shed
Oh Spain! which is not thine.
For if I give thy body the crimson stream I bled
'Tis only to repay thee
For the life thou gav'st to mine!

And when he was about to feel quite satisfied, in spite of certain discordant rhymes which bothered him, suddenly he heard something that resembled a whistling in his brain, a voice crying "Ramón!"

And Eleuterio had to stand up and begin to pace about his study, noticing, as he passed before a mirror, that he was terribly flushed.

"Damn Ramón! No, I don't mean damn. No . . . poor Ramón! Just the opposite—he was a saint!"

A saint . . . and brave. A brave . . . hen. For everyone in town called him "The Hen," because of his timidity. But he was a brave hen; as they all are when they have a brood and are defending their chicks.

Ramón had no chicks. On the contrary, he was the chick; but the one dying of cold and hunger was his mother, a poor old woman who now did not have even enough eyesight left to go on working and give her children their daily bread.

Ramón's mother, a widow, had leased a meager plot of land from Don Pedro Miranda, Eleuterio's father. The poor soul did not pay the rent. How could she, if she had nothing to pay with? For years and years a debt kept piling up, that was, for her, enormous. Don Pedro was patient, but finally, as times were bad for everyone, and taxes were crippling big and little alike, one day he got *fed up* (those were his own words), put his foot down and said that on the cross Christ had reached His' limit, and that here he had reached his—in other words, that María Pendones should pay her back rent, or . . . leave the farm. "Either pay the rent, or get evicted!" This was Don Pedro's *disjunctive*, as he called it, and this was the *end of everything* for María—the end of the world, and the death of her and her children, of whom there were

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Pero en esto le tocó la suerte a Eleuterio, el hijo único de don Pedro, el mimo de su padre y de toda la familia, porque era un estuche que hasta tenía la gracia de escribir en los periódicos de la corte, privilegio de que no disfrutaba ningún otro menor de edad en el pueblo. Como no mandaban entonces los del partido de Miranda, sino sus enemigos, ni en el Ayuntamiento ni en la Diputación provincial hubo manera de declarar a Eleuterio inútil para el servicio de las armas, pues lo de poeta lírico no era exención suficiente; y el único remedio era pagar un dineral para librar al chico. Pero los tiempos eran malos; dinero contante y sonante, Dios lo diera; mas ¡oh idea feliz!

"El chico de la Pendones, el mayor . . . ¡justo!" Y don Pedro cambió su *disyuntiva* y dijo: o el desahucio o pagarme las rentas atrasadas yendo Ramón a servir al rey en lugar de Eleuterio. Y dicho y hecho.¹¹ La vida de Pendones lloró, suplicó de rodillas; al llegar el momento terrible de la despedida prefería el desahucio, quedarse en la calle con sus cuatro hijos, pero con los cuatro a su lado, ni uno menos. Pero Ramón, *la gallina*, el enclenque sieteemesimo alternando entre las tercianas y el reumatismo, tuvo energía por la primera vez de su vida, y a escondidas de su madre, *se vendió*, liquidó con don Pedro, y el precio de su sacrificio sirvió para pagar las rentas atrasadas y la corriente. Y tan caro supo venderse, que aun pudo sacar algunas pesetas para dejarle a su madre el pan de algunos meses . . . Y a su novia, Pepa de Rosalia, un guardapelo que le costó un dineral, porque era nada menos que de plata sobredorada.

¡Para qué quería Pepa el pelo de Ramón, un triste mechón pálido, de hebras delgadísimas, de un rubio de ceniza, que estaban vociferando la miseria fisiológica del sieteemesino de la Pendones? Ahí verán ustedes. Misterios del amor. Y no le quería Pepa por el interés. No se sabe por qué le quería. Acaso por fiel, por constante, por sincero, por humilde, por bueno. Ello era que, con escándalo de los

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four, Ramón being the eldest.

But just then Eleuterio's draft number came up. He was Don Pedro's only son, adored by his father and the whole family because he was a clever fellow who even had the gift of writing for the city papers, a privilege enjoyed by no other minor in town. Since Miranda's party was not in power at the time, but rather his enemies, there was no way the town council or the provincial legislature could declare Eleuterio unfit for military service; for being a lyric poet was not sufficient cause for exemption. The only solution was to pay a large sum of money to free the boy. But as times were bad, and as far as ready cash was concerned, only a miracle could produce it, Don Pedro had a felicitous idea.

"Widow Pendones' boy, the oldest one—right!" And he changed his *disjunctive* to "either get evicted or pay the rent by letting Ramón take Eleuterio's place in serving the king." And no sooner said than done. Widow Pendones wept and begged on her knees, and at the terrible moment of farewell preferred eviction, and to be out in the street with her four children, but with the four of them at her side, not one less. But Ramón, *The Hen*, the sickly seven-months' child who suffered alternately from ague and rheumatism, had energy for the first time in his life, and without his mother's knowledge *sold himself*. He settled accounts with Don Pedro, and used the price of his sacrifice to pay both the back and current rents. In fact, he was able to sell himself so dear, that he even had a few pesetas left for his mother to buy bread for several months, and enough to buy a locket for his sweetheart, Pepa de Rosalia, a locket that cost him a fortune because it was made of nothing less than gold-plated silver.

What did Pepa want with Ramón's hair, a pitiful, pallid lock of very thin, ash-blond hair that shouted to high heaven of the physiological poverty of the Widow Pendones' seven-months' child? Who knows? Such are the mysteries of love. And Pepa could scarcely have loved him for personal gain. No one could say why she loved him. Perhaps because he was faithful, loyal, sincere, and meek

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buenos mozos del pueblo, la gallarda Pepa de Rosalia y Ramón *la gallina* eran novios. Pero tuvieron que separarse. Él se fué al servicio; a ella le quedó el guardapelo, y de tarde en tarde fué recibiendo cartas de puño y letra de algún cabo, porque Ramón no sabía escribir; se valía de amanuense, pocas veces gratuito, y firmaba con una cruz.

Este era el Ramón que se la atravesó entre ceja y ceja ¹⁸ al mejor lírico de su pueblo al fraguar el final de su elegía u oda a la patria. Y el remordimiento, en forma de sarcasmo, le sugirió esta idea: "No te apures, hombre; así como D. Quijote ⁹ concluía las estrofas de cierta poesía a Dulcinea, ⁹ añadiendo el pie quebrado *del Toboso*, ⁹ per crúpulos de veracidad, así tú puedes poner una nota a tus ofrecimientos líricos de *sangre derramada*, diciendo, verbigracia:

Patria, la sangre que ofrezco quiero,
en lugar de los cantos de mi lira,
no tiene mio más, si bien se mira,
que el haberme costado mi dinero.

¡Oh, cruel sarcasmo! ¡Sí, terrible vergüenza! *¡Cantar a la patria mientras el pobre gallina se estaba batiendo como el primero, allá abajo, en tierra de moros, en lugar del señorito!* ¹⁸

Rasgó la oda, o elegía, que era lo más decente que podía hacer en servicio de la patria. Cuando vinieron el alcalde, el síndico y varios regidores a recoger los versos, pusieron el grito en el cielo al ver que Eleuterio los había dejado en blanco. Hubo alusiones embobadas a lo de la secretaría; y tanto pudo el miedo a perder la esperanza del destino, que el chico de Miranda tuvo que obligarse a *substituir* (terrible vocablo para él) los versos que faltaban con un discurso improvisado de los que él sabía *pronunciar* tan ricamente como cualquiera. Le llevaron al teatro, donde se celebraba la fiesta patriótica, y habló en efecto; hizo una paráfrasis en prosa, pero en prosa mejor que los versos rotos

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and kind. However that may be, the fact remains that to the great astonishment of all the handsome young men in town, lovely Pepa de Rosalia and Ramón *The Hen* were sweethearts. But now they had to separate. He went into the service, and she had her locket, and, from time to time, letters in the handwriting of some corporal or other, as Ramón did not know how to write, and resorted to a scribe, whose services were seldom free, and signed with a cross.

This was the Ramón who went through the mind of the greatest lyric poet in town as he forged the finale of his elegy or ode to the fatherland. And remorse, in the form of sarcasm, suggested the following idea to him: Do not worry, for just as Don Quixote in his scrupulous concern for truth ended the strophes of a certain poem devoted to Dulcinea with the short line "Del Toboso," so you can add a note to your lyric offerings about the "crimson stream I bled," saying, for example:

Spain, the blood I'd offer thee
In lieu of songs from my lyre
Of me has naught, if you inquire,
But having cost me money!

Oh cruel sarcasm! Oh horrid shame! To *sing* to the fatherland while the poor *Hen*, instead of the *señorito*, was fighting like the best of them overseas in the land of the Moors.

And so he tore up his ode or elegy—the most decent thing he could do for the fatherland. When the mayor, the syndic, and several aldermen came to pick up the verses, they shouted to high heaven when they saw that Eleuterio had left them in the lurch. There were so many veiled allusions to the matter of the clerkship, and the fear of losing hope of employment was such that the young Miranda boy was forced to *substitute* (a terrible word for him) for the missing verses, an improvised speech, something he could *deliver* as splendidly as anyone. They brought him to the theater, where the patriotic celebration was being held, and he actually spoke: he gave a paraphrase in prose, but

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de la elegía u oda. Entusiasmó al público; se llegó a entusiasmar él mismo. En el patético epílogo se le volvió a presentar la figura pálida de Ramón . . . mientras ofrecía, entre vivas y aplausos de la muchedumbre, *sellario* todo con su sangre, si la patria la necesitaba, y se juraba a sí propio, echar a correr aquella misma noche camino de África, para batirse al lado de Ramón.

* * *

Y lo hizo como lo pensó. Pero al llegar a Málaga para embarcar, supo que entre los heridos que habían llegado de África e dos días antes estaba un pobre soldado de su pueblo. Tuvo un presentimiento; corrió al hospital, donde vió al pobre Ramón Pendones próximo a la agonía.

Estaba herido, pero levemente. No era eso lo que le mataba, sino lo de siempre: la fiebre. Con la mala vida de campaña, las tercianas se le habían convertido en no sabía qué fuego y qué nieve que le habían consumido hasta dejarle hecho ceniza. Había sido durante un mes largo un *héroe de hospital*. ¡Lo que había sufrido! ¡Lo mal que había comido, bebido, dormido! ¡Cuánto dolor en torno; qué tristeza fría, qué frío intenso, qué angustia, qué *morriña!* Y ¿cómo había sido lo de la herida? Pues nada; que una noche, estando de guardia, en un rayo de luna . . . ¡zas! un morito le había visto, al parecer, y, lo dicho ¡zas! . . . había hecho blanco. Pero en blanco. Pero el frío, la fatiga, los sustos, la tristeza, ¡aquello sí! . . .

Murió Ramón Pendones en brazos del *señorito*, muy agradecido y recomendándole a su madre y a su novia.

Y el *señorito*, más poeta, más *creador* de lo que él mismo pensaba, pero poeta épico, *objetivo*, salió de Málaga, pasó el charco ¹⁴ y se fué derecho al capitán de Ramón, un bravo de buen corazón y fantasía, y le dijo:

—Vengo de Málaga; allí ha muerto en el hospital Ramón Pendones, soldado de esta compañía. He pasado el

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in a prose superior to the broken lines of the elegy or ode. He enraptured his audience, and even enraptured himself. In the course of his pathetic epilogue he evoked once more the pale figure of Ramón, while he offered amid the cheering, applauding crowd, to *seal* everything with his blood, if the fatherland needed it, and swore to himself to run away that very night to Africa and fight side by side with Ramón.

* * *

And he did just as he planned. But on reaching Málaga, where he was to board the boat, he learned that among the wounded brought over from Africa two days before, there was a poor soldier from his home town. He had a premonition and rushed to the hospital, where he found the poor Ramón Pendones, close to death.

He was wounded, but only slightly. It was not that which was killing him, but the same thing as always, the fever. With the wretched life he had led during the campaign, the fever had turned him into a kind of fire and ice, consuming him until he had become a cinder. For a whole month he had been a *hospital hero*. How he had suffered! How poorly he had eaten, drunk and slept! How much pain surrounded him, what cold sorrow, what intense cold, what anguish, what melancholy! And how did he get his wound? It was nothing. One night, while he was on guard duty, standing in a ray of moonlight . . . bang! Some little Moor had seen him, it would seem, and, as I have said, bang! . . . scored a hit. But not in a vital spot . . . Yet the cold, the fatigue, the dread and the melancholy—that was different.

Ramón Pendones died in the arms of the *señorito*, very gratefully commending his mother and girl friend to him.

And the *señorito*, more of a poet, more of a *creator* than he himself suspected—but an epic, *objective* poet—left Málaga, crossed the sea, and went directly to Ramón's captain, a courageous fellow endowed with imagination and a kind heart, and told him:

"I've just come from Málaga, where a soldier from this company, one Ramón Pendones, died in the hospital. I have

mar para ocupar el puesto del difunto. Hágase usted cuenta que Pendones ha sanado y que yo soy Pendones. El era mi *sustituto*, ocupaba mi puesto en las filas y yo quiero ocupar el suyo. Que la madre y la novia de mi pobre sustituto no sepan *todavía* que ha muerto; que no sepan jamás que ha muerto en un hospital, de tristeza y de febre

El capitán comprendió a Miranda.

—Corriente—le dijo—por ahora usted será Pendones; pero después, en acabándose la guerra . . . ya ve usted

—Oh, eso queda de mi cuenta ¹⁸—replicó Eleuterio.

Y desde aquel día Pendones, dado de alta, respondió siempre otra vez a la lista. Los compañeros que notaron el cambio celebraron la idea del *señorito*, y el secreto del sustituto fué el secreto de la compañía.

Antes de morir, Ramón había dicho a Eleuterio cómo se comunicaba con su madre y su novia. El mismo cabo que solía escribirle las cartas, escribía ahora las de Miranda, que también las firmaba con una cruz; pues no quería escribir él por si reconocían la letra en el pueblo.

—Pero todo eso—preguntaba el cabo amanuense—¿para qué les sirve a la madre y a la novia si al fin han de saber ?

—Deja, deja—respondía Eleuterio ensimismado.—Siempre es un respiro Después Dios dirá.

La idea de Eleuterio era muy sencilla, y el modo de ponerla en práctica lo fué mucho más. Quería pagar a Ramón la vida que había dado en *su lugar*; quería ser sustituto del sustituto y dejar a los seres queridos de Ramón una buena herencia de fama, de gloria y algo de provecho.

Y, en efecto, estuvo acechando la ocasión de portarse como un héroe, pero como un héroe de verdad. Murió matando una porción de moros, salvando una bandera, suspendiendo una retirada y convirtiéndola, con su glorioso ejemplo, en una victoria esplendorosa.

crossed the sea to take the place of the dead man. Make believe Pendones has recovered, and that I am Pendones. He was my *substitute*, and took my place in the ranks; now I want to take his. Don't let his mother or his girl friend know that he's dead *yet*; don't ever let them know he died in the hospital of melancholy and fever!"

The captain understood Miranda.

"All right," he said, "for the time being you'll be Pendones, but later on, when the war is over—we'll see."

"Oh, I'll take care of that," answered Eleuterio.

And from that day on Pendones, readmitted into the service, always answered the rollcall. His comrades, aware of the change, approved of the *señorito's* idea, and so the substitute's secret became the company secret.

Before his death Ramón had explained to Eleuterio how he corresponded with his mother and his girl friend. So the same corporal who used to write his letters now wrote Miranda's, who also signed them with a cross—for he did not wish to write them himself in case they might recognize his handwriting in his home town.

"But all this," asked the corporal who wrote the letters, "what good will it do the mother and the girl friend if eventually they'll have to learn the truth?"

"Never mind, never mind," Eleuterio replied, absorbed in his thoughts, "Surely it is a respite. . . . Later on. . . . God will tell."

Eleuterio's idea was very simple, and his way of carrying it out much more so. He wanted to repay Ramón for the life he had given in *his stead*; he wanted to be the substitute's substitute and to leave Ramón's loved ones a fine inheritance of fame and glory and something worthwhile.

And, as a matter of fact, he was looking for a chance to act like a hero, like a real hero. He died killing a lot of Moors, saving a flag, stopping a retreat and converting it, through his glorious example, into a magnificent victory.

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No en vano era, además de valiente, poeta, y más poeta épico de lo que él pensaba: sus recuerdos de la *Iliada* ⁶ y otros poemas épicos, llenaron su fantasía para inspirarle un *bel morir*.¹⁷ Hasta para ser héroe, artista, dramático, se necesita imaginación. Murió, no como hubiera muerto el pobre Ramón, sino con *distinción*, con elegancia. Su muerte fué sonada; no pudo ser un héroe anónimo. Aunque simple soldado, su hazaña y glorioso fin llamaron la atención y excitaron el entusiasmo de todo el ejército. El general en jefe le consagró un solemne elogio; se le ascendió después de muerto; su nombre figuró en letras grandes en todos los periódicos, diciendo: "Un héroe: Ramón Pendones"; y para su madre hubo el producto de una cruz *póstuma*, pensionada, que la ayudó, de por vida a pagar la renta a don Pedro Miranda, cuyo único hijo, por cierto, había muerto también, probablemente en la guerra, sin que se supiera cómo ni dónde.

Cuando el capitán, años después, en secreto siempre, refería a sus íntimos la historia, solían muchos decir:

"La abnegación de Eleuterio fué exagerada. No estaba obligado a tanto. Al fin, el otro era sustituto; pagado estaba y voluntariamente había hecho el trato."

Era verdad. Eleuterio fué exagerado. Pero no hay que olvidar que era poeta; y si la mayor parte de los señoritos que pagan soldado, un soldado que muera en la guerra, no hacen lo que Miranda, es porque poetas hay pocos, y la mayor parte de los señoritos son prosistas.

THE SUBSTITUTE

Not in vain was he, besides being brave, a poet, and more of an epic poet than he thought: his memories of the *Iliad* and other epic poems filled his imagination and inspired him to a *beautiful death*. Even to be a hero, artistically, dramatically one must have imagination. He died not as poor Ramón would have died, but with distinction, with elegance. His death was widely publicized; he could not be an anonymous hero. Although a simple soldier, his deed and glorious end attracted attention and aroused the enthusiasm of the whole army. The commanding general gave him a solemn eulogy; he was promoted after his death; and his name was printed in big letters in all the newspapers: A HERO, RAMÓN PENDONES. For his mother there were the proceeds of a posthumous decoration—a pension that helped her pay her rent for the rest of her life to Don Pedro Miranda, whose only son had also died, probably in the war, without anyone knowing where or how.

When, years later, the captain would tell this story to his intimate friends, always in strictest confidence, many of them would say:

"Eleuterio's self-sacrifice went too far. He was not obliged to do so much. After all, the other fellow was his substitute and had been paid for the job—he had closed the deal willingly."¹⁸

This was true. Eleuterio had gone too far. But one must not forget that he was a poet, and that most señoritos who pay for a substitute, a substitute who may die in the war, would never do what Miranda did because poets are scarce and most señoritos write prose.