
Luis Llorens Torres and the Impossible Return: Identity, Conflict and Hope in the National Poem of Puerto Rico

EUGENIO M. ROTHE

Abstract: The psychodynamic exploration of the content of literary works and of the personal lives of their authors oftentimes reveals how they can be mutually reflective of the other. Such is the case of the poem, "Valle de Collores" (*The Valley of Collares*), considered by many to be the national poem of Puerto Rico and of the author Luis Llorens Torres (1876-1944), regarded as the "Poet Laureate of Puerto Rico." The timelessness and wide appeal of certain literary works has been attributed, among other reasons, to the fact that they address universal inner conflicts that affect all human beings. The poem "Valle de Collores" is the narrative of a country boy who leaves home to face the larger world and, as he reaches adulthood, he looks back and expresses his impossible longing to return to the rural home of his childhood. It is a description of

the universal struggles of human development and of separation-individuation, loss and mourning and a longing to return, and a wish to merge with the early parental objects of childhood.

The poem also parallels the history of the Puerto Rican people, in their transition from a rural society under Spanish rule to an industrialized society as an American Commonwealth. This difficult transition resulted in a massive immigration of Puerto Ricans to the United States that continues to this day. The poem also represents the longing of many Puerto Rican immigrants to return to their island home, and to a simpler time of more fundamental values. The land that is left behind and longed for becomes a metaphor for the early maternal imago.

Brief History of Puerto Rico

The island of "Boriquen"-later transformed into "Borinquen"-(*Taino*: "Land of the Brave Lord") was first identified by Europeans on November 19, 1493, during Christopher Columbus' second voyage and christened "The island of San Juan Bautista." Due to an error by a cartographer, the name of the island's capital, Puerto Rico (*Rich Port*), was mistakenly inverted in the early Caribbean maps with the name of the island as a whole, resulting in the island being named "Puerto Rico" and its capital city "San Juan."

As a Spanish possession, Puerto Rico developed into a self-sufficient, albeit modest, agricultural society of diversified crops. In contrast with other Spanish colonies

in Latin America, where feudal rule predominated and a two-class society without a middle class became the norm, Puerto Rico differed in that its economy was based on "mini-fundios," or privately owned small farms averaging between one and three acres. Since pre-Columbian times, the island was densely populated, and by the end of the 19th century, Puerto Rico was the most cultivated of all the islands in the Caribbean.

As a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898, Puerto Rico became an American colonial territory. Initially, the American government was confused in deciding the ultimate fate of the island. This confusion ended with the Olmstead Act of 1910, which opened the doors of the island to the powerful American industry. The multinational American sugar companies soon began buying land from the Puerto Rican farmers, establishing large sugar monopolies and effectively ending the diversified crop economy that had existed on the island until then. Independent farmers, who had previously farmed their own land, soon became landless and employed by the large sugar monopolies, which became collectively known as "King Sugar."

Eugenio M. Rothe, MD, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, University of Miami School of Medicine.

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The Jones Act of 1917 declared all Puerto Ricans American citizens and established that the island would be ruled by an American governor based in Washington, DC, appointed by the U.S. president.

The industrialization of the island that resulted from the Olmstead Act, the seasonal nature of the sugar industry, and the right given to Puerto Ricans to freely enter and work legally in the U.S. brought on by the Jones Act had dramatic effects that changed the core of Puerto Rican life. These changes opened the doors to the massive back-and-forth Puerto Rican migrations to the United States that continue to this day.

Puerto Rico was hit especially hard by the collapse of the world market of 1929 and by the Great Depression. The economy of the island had become totally dependent on the price of sugar, which had plummeted to an all-time low. Poverty and despair abounded for the next decade and a half, and by 1940 more than 80% of the people of the island were landless. Puerto Rico's luck began to change in 1941 when, as result of World War II, the strategic geographical location of the island was deemed of vital importance to U.S. military and political interests in the region. The U.S. government began investing generously in the island, which was subsequently equipped with large American military installations. In 1952, the island's political status was redefined as "The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico", ruled by a locally elected governor and senate. Puerto Ricans, however, were and still are unable to vote in U.S. national elections. The new political status was followed by Operation Bootstrap, a plan for economic recovery based on further industrialization of the island that offered tax exemptions to American industries in order to create more jobs on the island. The massive industrialization of the island and the virtual neglect of the agricultural industry contributed to further increase the migratory transit between the island and the United States (Morales Carrion, 1993).

The Life of the Poet

Luis Llorens Torres was born in 1876, one of five children of a well-to-do family of Catalan descent that resided in Collores, municipality of Juana Diaz, an agricultural region in southern Puerto Rico. His father owned a coffee farm where Luis spent his childhood years. After completing secondary school, he was offered the opportunity to study in Spain, which was then the colonial ruler of the island. Llorens Torres enrolled in the law school of the University of Barcelona, where he also began to court the daughter of one of his professors. This led to tensions that forced Llorens Torres to transfer to the University of Granada, where he completed a law degree as well as a doctorate in

letters. He married a native of Granada, Carmen Rivero, and the couple returned to Puerto Rico in 1901.

Upon his return, Llorens Torres found that the status of Puerto Rico had changed and that the island had become an American colony.

Llorens Torres settled in Ponce, the second largest city, and the metropolitan area in closest proximity to his place of birth. He began an active law practice and a literary career. He founded the literary journal *Las Antillas (The Antilles)*, and initially embraced Latin American Modernism, a flamboyant and romantic literary style in vogue at the time. However, Llorens Torres' literary style soon transitioned into "Criollismo" (creolism) or "Costumbrismo" (the study of customs), a sort of Caribbean nationalism that idealized the country life and the people of the land, and placed the peasant, or "jibaro," as the representative of Puerto Rican national identity. Llorens Torres also became politically active as a member of the Federal Party, which advocated for the independence of Puerto Rico, and served in the House of Delegates as a representative of his party. He defended the islands' Hispanic identity and attacked the colonial role of the United States in several of his poems, especially in "El Patito Feo" (*The Ugly Duckling*; Quinones, 1996) and the play "El Grito de Lares" (*The Battle Cry at Lares*; Llorens Torres, 1967) in which he openly expressed his anti-American and anticolonialist political views. He died in 1944 at the age of 68. He is regarded as the poet laureate of Puerto Rico and the poem "Valle de Collores" has been embraced by many as the national poem of Puerto Rico (Quinones, 1996).

The Poem "Valle de Collores" In its Original Spanish Version and an English Translation

In the opening stanzas of the poem "Valle de Collores" (lines 1-10), Llorens Torres describes his experience as an adolescent boy leaving the parental home on his way to meet the larger world for the first time:

Cuando sali de Collores	1	When I left Collores	1
fue en una jaquita baya,		it was in a faded little donkey,	
por un sendero entre mayas		by a path between the fences	
arropas de cundiamores.		enveloped by flowered vines.	
Adios, malezas y flores	5	Goodbye, wilderness and flowers	5
de la barranca del rio,		of the ravine by the river,	
y mis noches del bohio,		and the nights of my thatched hut,	
y aquella apacible calma,		and that peaceful calm,	
y los viejos de mi alma,		and the old folks of my soul,	
y los hermanitos mios.	10	and my little siblings.	10

As he departs, the young boy is overcome by sorrow when he comes to the painful realization that he is leaving behind his parents and siblings and the world of his childhood (lines 5-14). He describes seeing his mother as she waves goodbye with her tear-soaked handkerchief, signaling that the world of his childhood, as he had known it, was coming to an end and would never be again (lines 15-19).

Que pena la que sentia,
cuando hacia atrás yo miraba,
y una casa se alejaba,
y esa casa era la mía.
La última vez que volvía
los ojos, vi el pañuelo
empapado con el zumo
del dolor. Mas allá, humo
esfumándose en el cielo.

*What grief, the one I felt
when I looked back,
and a house was being left in the distance,
and that house happened to be mine.
15 The very last time I turned 15
my eyes, I saw the white handkerchief
soaked in the juice
of pain. And further beyond, smoke
disappearing in the sky.*

This is followed by a melancholic, exquisitely detailed description of the beautiful surrounding nature that mirrors his sorrow (lines 20-29).

La campestre floración
era triste, opaca, mustia.
y todo, como una angustia
me apretaba el corazón.
La jaca, a su discreción,
iba a paso perezoso.
Zumbaba el viento, oloroso
a madreselvas y pinos,
y las ceibas del camino
parecían saucos llorosos.

*20 The rural flora 20
was sad, opaque, wilted
and everything, like anguish
gripped my heart.
The donkey, to his discretion,
25 moved at a lazy pace. 25
The wind blew, aromatic
of honeysuckle and pine,
and the banyans along the way
resembled weeping willows.*

No recuerdo como fue
(aquí la memoria pierdo).

*30 I don't remember how it went 30
(here I lose my memory).*

Blos (1966) has observed that the most formidable task of adolescence is that of "psychic restructuring," and that this can be accomplished only through the process of successful disengagement from the internalized infantile objects. Anna Freud (1958) and Wolfenstein (1992) have likened adolescence to the process of mourning, in which there is a gradual decathexis from the first love objects accompanied by sad, painful feelings and the realization of the irrevocability of the loss of the childhood past. Anna Freud (1958) and Shaw (1981) have observed that the adolescent process involves a renunciation, during which bits and pieces of past loved relationships are remembered, hypercathexed and reexperienced with the awareness that they can never be again. Every acquisition of independent functioning is associated with a sense of object loss.

(1)The original Spanish version of the poem refers to a specific type of "flowered vine," a tropical plant known as "Cundiamor." The Spanish name of this vine can be translated into English as "abounding love," lending a much deeper meaning to the metaphor, which is unfortunately lost in the translation, which is my own.

Greenacre (1957, 1958) has brought attention to the greater sensory responsiveness of artists and their propensity to substitute the idealized image of the lost parent with an abstraction or metaphor, which she has termed "the collective alternate." In this way, the artist develops a "cosmic relationship," which is all encompassing and serves as a displacement for the infantile and idealized preoedipal parent. An example of this cosmic relationship with the collective alternate is the relationship with nature, so prominently depicted in the poem "Valle de Collores." The poet accomplishes a fusion and symbiosis with nature, which is described as experiencing anthropomorphic emotions. The collective alternate takes the place of the preoedipal parent in order to distance and protect the author from the feelings of loss (lines 20-29). The natural surroundings, so exquisitely described by Llorens Torres in the poem, stand as a metaphor for the loved objects of the poet's early childhood. In the poem, the defensive attempt of displacement on to nature fails to contain his emotions and the poet finds himself so overwhelmed with sorrow, that it causes him to dissociate, as he explains to us: "No recuerdo como fue (aquí la memoria pierdo)" (I don't remember how it went, [here I lose my memory])" (lines 30-31).

After the poet has described the sorrow of his departure, he then introduces us to a new stage in his life (lines 32-33). He is able to successfully mourn his losses and is ready to cathect his psychic energies onto new objects of attachment (lines 34-39). He leaves behind his adolescence and enters the next developmental stage of young adulthood. The poet is excited about his new found experiences and newly acquired independence and tells us:

Mas en mi oro de recuerdos,
recuerdo que al fin llegue;
la urbe, el teatro, el café
la plaza, el parque, la acera...
Y en una novia hechicera,
halle el ramaje encendido
donde colgue el primer nido
de mi primera quimera.

*Yet in the gold of my memories,
I remember that I finally arrived;
the city, the theatre, the cafe,
the square, the park, the sidewalk...
And in a bewitching girlfriend,
I found a burning branch,
where I hung the first nest
of my first chimera.*

Mahler, Pine, and Bergman (1975) have described the practicing subphase of separation-individuation as the phase of development when the child falls in love with the world, slowly moving away from the mother, until the completion of separation-individuation by the attainment of object constancy, which occurs at approximately 3'12 to 4 years of age. Bios (1966, 1967) explains that the adolescent process constitutes a second individuation, which, if it is successfully completed, culminates with the attainment of: (a) the consolidation of a sense of identity, (b) the accomplishment of mastery over drives, (c) the

development of a heterosexual object choice outside of the family unit, and (d) the development of a realistic view of the world. The poet describes his progression towards these goals and tells us: "Y en una novia hechicera, halle el ramaje encendido (*In a bewitching girlfriend, I found a burning branch*) (lines 36-37), possibly a reference to the first girlfriend in Barcelona, a relationship that ended bitterly because of disapproval on the part of the girl's father, or possibly the second girlfriend, who ultimately became his wife.

At the age of 25 Llorens Torres returns to Puerto Rico to begin his professional life. Upon arrival, he is deeply hurt by the new political reality he encounters. The world of his childhood (rural Puerto Rico) has been usurped by American colonization, the family coffee farm is being threatened by the sugar monopolies, his Hispanic identity is being threatened by American (Anglo-Saxon) colonialism, and the dream of Puerto Rican independence has been squelched. Llorens Torres enters the Puerto Rican political arena, but he becomes deeply disappointed by politics when he witnesses how inevitably the political destiny of Puerto Rico falls deeper under American colonialist control. His colleagues in the political arena negotiate for a settlement with the United States, renounce independence, and attack his uncompromising pro-independence stance (lines 40-44).

Después, en pos de ideales. *Later, in the pursuit of my ideals. 40*
Entonces, me hirió la envidia. *Then, I was wounded by envy.*
Y la calumnia y la insidia *And the slander and the insidiousness*
y el odio de los mortales. *and the hatred of mortals.*

In addition to his law practice, Llorens Torres also turns his attention to his literary work, becoming a distinguished poet, journalist, and playwright. He finds his literary voice in the style known as "costumbrismo" (*the study of customs*) or "criollismo" (*creol-ness or native-ness*) which exalts Puerto Rico's rural culture and rural past. He deals with the hurt and disappointment (narcissistic injuries) by returning to the good, early, internalized parental objects, represented metaphorically by nature (the collective alternate), with which he establishes a cosmic relationship, which is also present in most of his other poems. After encountering the triumphs, disappointments, and complexities of adult life (lines 44, 50-55), his memory takes him back to the initial point of departure, when he separated permanently from the all good maternal object (lines 45-49):

Y urdiendo sueños triunfales, *and in sifting through triumphant dreams,*
ví otra vez el blanco vuelo *again I saw the white flight 45*
de aquel maternal pañuelo *of that maternal handkerchief*

empapado con el zumo *soaked in the juice*
del dolor. Lo demás es humo *of pain. The rest is smoke*
esfumándose en el cielo *disappearing in the sky*

Llorens Torres never completely accepts the loss of the rural life of Puerto Rico, which was so intimately connected to the world of his childhood. Instead, he develops a nostalgic relationship with the past.

Werman (1977) describes nostalgia as "a desire to return to something far away and long ago" (p. 388). He explains that nostalgia represents "an intense desire for the pre-genital mother." In the nostalgic relationship with the lost object, (a) the person avoids the work of mourning, (b) avoids internalizing the lost object, and (c) repetitively seeks, in fantasy, for a union that never takes place. In this manner, the lost object is never given up. Outwardly, the person appears to mourn the loss of the object, but what appears to be a renunciation of the object is in actuality the formation of a substitute or surrogate. The lost object is kept alive in fantasy. This way the person is able to maintain a sense of separateness from the object, which leads to an indefinite and indefinable quest. The person can only enjoy the quest, but not the possession of the object, and if another object should appear that too closely resembles the lost object, the latter one is then demythologized and rejected.

Nostalgia is experienced ambivalently, as a bittersweet joy, tinged with sadness. The sadness, at some level, acknowledges that the past is irretrievable. The nostalgic relationship can sometimes interfere with the reinvestment of cathexis onto new objects. Nostalgia is a substitute for mourning that effectively impedes the acceptance of the loss of an object. The poem ends with the wish for an impossible return (lines 56-59):

Ay, la gloria es sueño vano. *Oh, glory is but a vain dream. 50*
Y el placer, tan solo viento. *And pleasure all but wind.*
Y la riqueza, tormento. *And richness, torment.*
Y el poder hosco gusano. *And power, a coarse worm.*
Ay, si estuviera en mis manos *Oh, if it was in my hands*
borrar mis triunfos mayores, *55 to erase my major triumphs, 55*
y a mi bohío en Collores *and to my thatched hut in Collores*
volver en la jaca baya *return in that faded donkey*
por el sendero entre mayas *by the path between the fences*
arropas de cundiamores *enveloped by flowered vines.*

Greenacre (1957, 1958) and Shaw (1981) have brought attention to how artists frequently seek a narcissistic union with their artistic product, by which the artist reexperiences a sense of completeness that was once experienced in union with the primal object, when transience and decay were absent, and when the relationship to the early object was experienced in a realm of time-lessness and continuing harmony.

The Vissitudes of Puerto Rican National Identity

Bird (1982) has called attention to the "cultural dichotomy" experienced by the people of Puerto Rico. It is a country that has to adapt to having two different languages, two different flags, two different national anthems, two different governmental structures, and two different national identities. He explains that Puerto Ricans constantly face a crisis of identity that is commonly encountered among colonial people. Bird cautions that explaining conflicts of national identity can become a complicated undertaking because it leads to an overlap of sociopolitical, economic, and psychodynamic paradigms. However, he places importance on the understanding of societal development by using certain principles of psychic development. He theorizes that the difficulty of Puerto Ricans in consolidating a clear sense of national identity can be understood by using Erikson's (1950) epigenetic model, which describes the challenge of adolescence as the dilemma of accomplishing "identity vs. role diffusion."

Puerto Ricans are faced with three possible political formulas:

1. The currently existing one, of a semiautonomous Commonwealth status. This option brings with it the ambiguity and confusion of national identity.
2. Statehood, by which Puerto Rico would become the 51st state of the United States. This option, although favored by many, would bring about the loss of the Hispanic identity, heritage, and Spanish language. It would also bring about other losses associated with the current Puerto Rican identity, such as the loss of athletic representation in the Olympic Games and other international events, as well as higher taxes and the loss of certain tax exemptions.
3. Independence from the United States. This option, although a sentimental favorite of many Puerto Ricans, is seen by the majority as potentially catastrophic from a financial standpoint, and is consistently favored by less than 5% of the population in national elections (Morales Carrion, 1993).

Faced with the difficulties of defining a clear sense of national identity, the construction of a national Puerto Rican archetype becomes necessary in order to clarify the Puerto Rican identity. This option involves a recovery of the island's historical past. The construction of a Puerto Rican identity and national archetype, the Puerto Rican man of the land or "jíbaro," exalted by the "Criollista" literary movement, of which the poem "Valle de Collores"

is a clear example, offers the option of a national identity rooted in an idealized rural past that is also seen as more simple and conflict free. This national identity construct succeeds because it is based on a veritable and culturally syntonic his-torical tradition that can be passed down, from one generation to the next, incorporating these images into a collective ego ideal. It can also coexist,

without conflict, with any of the three political formulas available to Puerto Ricans. The creation of a nostalgic relationship with the past helps keep this past alive in an idealized form. The person can then embark, time and again, in search of the idealized past, creating a narcissistic union or cosmic relationship with the collective alternate that leads to a sense of completeness that was once experienced with the primal object.

This construct of a national Puerto Rican archetype or national ego ideal becomes particularly relevant among Puerto Ricans who have immigrated or who are "shuttle immigrants," moving back and forth between the island and the United States (Carrasquillo & Sanchez-Korrol, 1996). The poem "Valle de Collores" recounts the story of migrating from a small rural community to a large urban area, an experience that is deeply rooted in the Puerto Rican experience of the 20th century, and that resonates with the island's collective unconscious OUS.

The term *emotional refueling* was used by Mahler et al. (1975) to designate the toddler's frequent return to the mother from forays in an ever-expanding outer world, during the process of separation-individuation. Grinberg and Grinberg (1989) and Akhtar (1999) have called attention to the process of emotional refueling that immigrants undergo after they have spent time away from the native country. Immigrants may feel that their sense of national identity is under siege, which results from the loosening of ties with the country of origin and the incorporation of new identity fragments belonging to the host culture. These authors describe the immigrants' need to provide external reinforcements to their intrapsychic connection to the motherland. This may come in the form of international phone calls to relatives or trips back to the island, or it may also take place in the forms of rituals, such as celebrating national holidays among compatriots, listening to the native music, and eating the foods of the motherland, leading to a process of ethno-psychic rejuvenation.

The poem "Valle de Collores" is widely taught in schools across the island and is sometimes read to Puerto Rican children by members of the older generations, or the parents and grandparents encourage the children to memorize it and recite it, thus reminding them of their Puerto Rican identity and roots. Rituals such as this one lead to the affirmation of a national identity as well as to the

transmission of cultural values and traditions from one generation to another (Hughes, 1993).

Conclusions

Bettelheim (1977) has called attention to the timelessness and universality of certain myths, fairy tales, and other literary works, such as poems. He attributes these qualities to the fact that they address "the ever new, age old problems that affect humanity". They also address complex, ambivalent feelings connected to early parental figures and inner conflicts that affect particular moments of our lives, and hold the promise of a solution to these conflicts.

This paper represents an attempt to use applied psychoanalytic theory and psychodynamic concepts in order to understand some of the conflicts and feelings contained in the poem "Valle de Collores," which can be understood at three levels: First, it is an attempt to understand how the conflicts and feelings expressed in the poem reflect similar conflicts that were relevant in the life of the author Luis Llorens Torres. Second, it is an attempt to understand how the conflicts and feelings contained in the poem and experienced by the author resonate with certain experiences relevant to Puerto Rican national identity, history, and the Puerto Rican experience of the 20th century. Finally, it is an attempt to explain the timelessness and universality of "Valle de Collores" by understanding it as a narrative of the conflicts and vicissitudes inherent in the psychosocial development of all human beings.

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