

FUNDACIÓN
**CORRIPIO
ALONSO**

SPEECH BY ALEJANDRO VEGA RIEGO

Ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I would like to welcome you to Villaviciosa, and especially the Corripio-Alonso family and everyone who has wished—and been able—to join them on this occasion. I would also like to extend a special welcome to those who have travelled here from further afield, including His Excellency the Ambassador, who represents the Dominican Republic in Spain at the highest level, as well as all the institutions and members of civil society represented here today.

On a day like today, as we officially present this new project of the Corripio-Alonso family—a project which is now a reality, born from the wishes of its founders and from their commitment to this land, which is also their land—I would like to speak about the values they represent and the values that lie at their roots.

And I would like to do so through some of the symbols of their family history: apple orchards, oak trees and palm trees. These symbols reflect the story of many of our emigrants—Asturians who left their homeland in search of a future abroad. They are beautifully represented in the titles of two autobiographical works by Alfonso Camín, one of the Asturian writers who wrote most memorably about Asturias and its connection with the Americas. Camín, an Asturian poet and indiano, lived between 1890 and 1982, dividing his life between Asturias, Cuba and Mexico. Two of his autobiographical works were entitled *Among Apple Trees: Childhood Along Hard Roads* (1952) and *Among Palm Trees: Lives of Emigration* (1958).

And when we look at this family's story, the symbolism becomes particularly meaningful. In La Pumarada—a place whose very name evokes an apple orchard—in Valbuena, in Cabranes, Don Manuel Corripio García was born in 1908. Not far from there was Niao, the homeland of his wife, Doña Sara Estrada Corripio. Under the oak tree of La Rionda, in Arroes, Villaviciosa, Don José Luis Corripio Estrada—Pepín—was born on 12 March 1934. And very close to the thousand-year-old oak of Coya, in Villabaxu, Piloña, Doña Ana María Alonso García was born, daughter of Don Alfonso Alonso Huerta and Lucía García Corripio.

We know that the Latin roots associated with the oak—*quercus* and *robur*—also evoke the strength and toughness of its wood. Indeed, *robur* came to mean strength and vigour. In Asturian language, we say that someone is as strong as an oak.



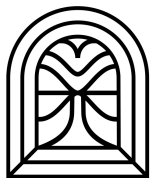
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And in that respect, dear family, I think the people of Coya have won this particular contest... I have no figures for the oak tree of La Rionda in Arroes, but I am afraid it would be difficult to compete with the great oak of Coya: twelve metres tall, with a trunk measuring 4.8 metres in circumference, and believed to be around one thousand years old.

And then, of course, there are the palm trees. The palm trees over there, on that wonderful island once known as Hispaniola and now home to the Dominican Republic—a country that welcomed and captivated this family, as well as many other Asturians. And the palm trees here, too—the ones planted beside the family homes, as so many indianos did after returning from the Americas.

The story of this family is the story of good timber that bears good fruit: fruit made possible by the strength and nobility of their roots, but also by the dedication and hard work required by our apple orchards if they are to grow, blossom and bear fruit.

Today, I cannot resist quoting Alfonso Camín's poem *Return to the Homeland*, written in Mexico in 1948.

*When I return to the old homestead, I think of what I was and what I have become...
I walk once more through the proud hills, the immense cliffs,
the rocky ground from which the powerful spring bursts forth.
The thick smoke from the family hearth.
The bumblebee among the chestnut trees.
The corn hanging from the granary in the fields.
The circle of young women dancing and gathering at the fountain,
the brother oak clinging to the earth,
asking me, relentlessly:
if I am the oak, battling against the wind,
how could I live with my roots elsewhere?*

How can anything flourish without its land?

Don Ramón, first. Then Don Manuel, in those early days at Colmado Lavandero, alongside other emigrants from Cabranes. Doña Sara. Later, Don Pepín and Doña Ana María. And now their sons



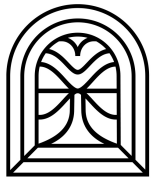
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and daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They are the answer to the question with which the poem ends. Yes, it is indeed possible to flourish away from one's native land—when one succeeds in putting down new roots. And that is precisely what they have done in the Dominican Republic: putting down such deep roots that they have come to love that country as dearly as the land where they were born.

The French philosopher and activist Simone Weil expressed this beautifully in her book *The Need for Roots*, published in 1943: To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul. A person is rooted through real, active and natural participation in the life of a community that keeps alive certain treasures of the past while nurturing hopes for the future. Human beings need multiple roots. We receive our moral, intellectual and spiritual life through the communities and environments to which we naturally belong.

And this brings us to values—the essential nourishment for every kind of growth. Not, in this case, the growth of trees, but the growth of people. We are talking about belief, hard work, effort, honesty and kindness.

The hard work that has defined the humble beginnings of so many emigrants is clearly reflected in the fruits of the Corripio-Alonso family's remarkable journey.

They have created wealth and employment, while never forgetting the commitment that has traditionally characterised our indianos: a commitment to the society and the land from which they came. A commitment expressed through education, culture, churches, cemeteries, local celebrations and the provision of water to villages—as well as through investment and business. And, in the case of the Corripio-Alonso family, that commitment has also extended to the country that welcomed them, as demonstrated by the important work carried out through the Corripio Foundation in the Dominican Republic.

Today, we are witnessing the birth of a new fruit of the apple orchard, the oak trees and the palm trees. A new fruit of the hard work and generosity that have always characterised this family. And so, I can only reiterate my gratitude for this gesture and for everything you have created, and wish Don Pepín and Ana María health and many more years surrounded by their loved ones—and alongside all of us, here and there, in their two homelands: Spain and the Dominican Republic.



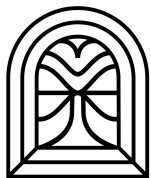
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Thank you very much.



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