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Mexican Nationalism in Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's Clemencia

Josue Efrain Pontaza
Bard College, jp4432@bard.edu

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Mexican Nationalism in Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's Clemencia

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
Efrain Pontaza

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To my family, for the constant support. Without you I would not be where I am today.

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Introduction

The concept of nationhood was a social construct taking form in Europe near the end of the eighteenth century, against the dynastic and religious realms that had failed to give its commoners a tangible and coherent sense of identity. Before the French Revolution, an *imagined community* (a term coined by Benedict Anderson) was composed of familial and religious elements. One of the first forms of community identity was that of the “extended family group,” or a cluster of individuals that “were engaged, within the circumstances enforced by differences of skill, stature and status, in the common business of survival and reproduction” (Thompson 145). Families were one of the first forces in creating a communal environment. Individuals of the same kinship often shared a similar religion, custom, language, and belief. All of these elements were fruitful in creating some form of stability and centrality within these small social and civic groups.

However, as Anderson’s book *Imagined Communities* argues, the emergence of what is today considered a nation was a gradual and slow-forming process that originated in the Americas. Unlike in Europe, this concept of nationhood derived from the independent movements that took place across Latin America in the early nineteenth century. Once having obtained their freedom, these new emerging empires were left in a precarious situation. The lack of political experience of the ruling classes, as well as heterogeneous populations were an intrinsic characteristic of post-colonial territories. These elements helped ignite political and social divisions that would lead to continuous civil wars. A need for solidarity was quickly summoned by many intellectuals in the nineteenth century—one of the most prominent being

Jose Martí, a Cuban revolutionary who fervently fought for the Independence of Cuba and helped establish some of the cultural and social features that gave the Latin American region its distinctiveness—in order to bring forth prosperity and uplift the region from its unstable beginnings.

When considering the making of the national project it is important to consider the power of the *print language* as a major catalyst that enabled its realization and fulfillment. Anderson writes about the fundamental aspect of the printing press in engendering a national idea when he considers that “the convergence of capitalism and print technology . . . created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation” (46). Unlike previous centuries, written texts in the nineteenth century were published with the aim of reaching a larger public. Both Latin and Greek had served as the official written languages during the European Middle Ages. This came to be viewed as an obstacle by future generations, given that only a very small percentage of the population in Europe could read and speak Latin (most of whom belonged to the aristocratic class). The appearance of the printing press in the fifteenth century, made it feasible to assemble related vernaculars and reproduce *print languages*, which according to Anderson “laid the bases for national consciousness” (44). The replacement of Latin enabled a larger readership that became aware of the thousands of people that were gathered under the same language family group. People became unified and solidarity became achievable through texts alone. The convergence of capitalism and print technology produced narratives with a new outlook. These novels created a newly defined imagined community that would rely heavily on the concept of nationhood.

In Latin America, the concept of nationhood emerged as a result of the Independent wars in the early nineteenth century. These series of battles resulted in the creation of independent nations that had previously been under the control of European world powers. In the particular case of Mexico, the country was under Spanish rule following the fall of the Aztec empire (1521) and remained under Spanish control until its independence in 1821. This event marked the genesis of a political detachment from Spain and embarked the newly conceived country into a road of self-governance. However, gaining autonomy for Mexico would prove to be more difficult than expected.

My purpose in this project is to analyze the social and cultural discourse produced when the presence of a foreign power threatens the identity and welfare of a nation—in this case, Mexico. I will analyze Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's historical novel *Clemencia* (1869) as an epitome of this literary genre, and as what Doris Sommer often refers to as a *foundational fiction*. That is, a text that combines the use of heterosexual love and politics to produce national allegories. However, one must be careful not to amalgamate these “national romances” into a single paradigm, given that “the projects they advocate are so varied, ranging from racism to abolitionism” (Sommer 20). For this reason I will adopt Sommer's notion of *national regeneration* (21). By this I mean of a renaissance of a state that did not have a solid grasp of its past, present, nor future, yet was able to forge and imagine one through the use of the novel. This rebirth is best exemplified through the protagonists' syncretic features that unite both historic and contemporary elements, establishing a subaltern subject that defies the conceptions of modernity and goodness in the nineteenth century.

My first chapter, titled “Mexican Liberalism” will consist of two different sections; the first part will give a brief biographical account of the author, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano. I will touch on the most elemental parts of his life, beginning with his journey as a writer and continuing with his involvement in Mexico’s political sphere. Altamirano’s adherence to the nineteenth century Mexican liberal party influenced his approach to and view of literature. His narrative is consequently imbued with a political message that aims to teach his readers liberal ideals, rather than create a story for pure entertainment. Altamirano conceived the novel as an ideal medium in the making of a modern society, capable of overhauling Mexico’s flawed political system. It was through the novel’s didactic character that he believed the masses would adopt a liberal consciousness and propel the country towards a promising future.

The second part of Chapter One will focus on the historical context from which the novel emerges. This section will outline the political turmoil in nineteenth-century Mexico and its influence in the literature that was being produced. The arrival of the French army on Mexican soil (1862) was a pivotal event that created a polarized atmosphere. Since the setting of *Clemencia* takes place during this bellicose event, it is important to give the reader a brief historical account before analyzing the novel. Likewise, great emphasis will be placed on the definition of *Mexican liberalism*, for it is a term essential to the novel’s message, whose meaning evolves with the passage of time.

In Chapter Two, titled “The 19th century Mexican Novel,” I will explore some of the characteristics that define the novel of mid-nineteenth century Mexico, using Eligio Ancona’s *Los mártires del Anáhuac* (1870), and Luis G. Inclan’s *Astucia* (1865), to underline some of these features. Similar to *Clemencia*, both of these texts participate in

the construction of a nation by incorporating historical and cultural elements. Even though Altamirano was not the originator of these ideas, he greatly expanded upon them by establishing a set of writing guidelines, giving advice on the style, structure, and the characterization of the literary subject. Altamirano wanted Mexican novelists to remain original and not to imitate European literary conventions. Following this, I will briefly look at romanticism as a literary movement in Latin America. Contrary to its European counterpart, Romanticism in Latin America forged a direct relationship with history, aiming to construct a national vision.

My third chapter, National Allegories, will focus on analyzing *Clemencia*. I will begin by examining the role of the protagonist within the novel's plot. Since this project revolves around the concept of nation building, stress will be placed on racial, political and cultural elements that are incorporated in the novel. These nation-building allegories are best represented through the characters' physical appearance and ideological views. Given the concern with race in *Clemencia*, a comparison of racial stereotypes will be made between the mestizo and the European individual. Even though the latter tends to be historically favored, I will use René Girard's theory on sacrifice and violence to demonstrate how Altamirano is able to reverse entrenched stereotypes and portray the mestizo as a constructive and liberating figure.

The last chapter is a translation of a small segment of the novel. I have translated four chapters that I feel encapsulate the novel's essence and will give the reader a feel for Altamirano's writing style and literary motifs. Even though *Clemencia* has been translated to the English language before, translated versions of this novel are no longer in print. By translating a portion of the novel I hope to render the text available to a larger audience.

Part of this project involves overcoming the obstacle of language as a barrier, often limiting the type of literature accessible to the reader. Similar to Altamirano's conception of literature, my aim in this project is meant to be practical; I aspire to inform English speakers on a topic that remains unfamiliar to most, yet whose importance in human history remains relevant today.

Chapter I:

Mexican Liberalism

Considered the founding father of modern Mexican literature, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano was born in Tixtla, Guerrero— a small town located in the south of Mexico— on November 13, 1834. A prolific writer, he wrote numerous novels, articles, and essays that affirmed the national values of his country. Altamirano believed the novel to be a didactic medium that could reach and cultivate the masses. He was confident of the novel's potential to propagate ideas and transform the lives of common citizens. In the literary field, the novel has long been a common medium where writers established their ideologies and portrayed the society they longed for. In his own words, Altamirano considered the novel as a “reading matter for the people” and judged its importance not in comparison with other literary genres, but for “the influence it has had and will have on the education of the masses” (Qtd. in Nacci 27).

Altamirano's passion for Mexican customs, myths, and panoramic sceneries would serve as elements that would be incorporated into his literary work, and would define his artistic interests. Besides being a novelist, he was also a poet, critic, journalist, historian, translator, and politician and would come to set the foundations for free and obligatory education in Mexico.

Born in a humble home, he was the son of Francisco Altamirano and Gertrudis Basilio, both of whom were indigenous. The family had adopted their last name from Juan Altamirano, a Spaniard who had baptized Ignacio's father into the Catholic religion. It wasn't until Altamirano was fifteen years of age that he began to learn to speak Spanish. It was also around this time that he began to learn to read and write. Altamirano had spent

most of his childhood helping his parents with household tasks. Due to the poor public education system in Mexico, as well as his indigenous background, the young boy's access to education looked bleak. However, in 1849, an unprecedented opportunity arrived. Thanks to certain norms that were dictated by the state of Mexico, Altamirano was awarded a scholarship to study at the Literary Institute of Toluca, one of the most prestigious academic institutions in Mexico at the time. His thirst for knowledge as well as his innate talent for learning quickly had opened the doors of education for him. As an educated indigenous, Altamirano had broken the racial barriers of the time, a crucial step in his life that would propel him into the academic and political domains of his country.

It was during his student years at the Institute that Altamirano grew intellectually and adopted a liberal stance in politics. Ignacio Ramírez, a professor at the Institute and Altamirano's benefactor, would have a major influence on the writer. Ramírez came to be known as one of the most prominent intellectuals of the period, and defendants of the native cultures of his country. His influence on Altamirano would be fundamental in the future novels of the author, where respect and admiration for the indigenous peoples would be a recurrent theme.

In the Literary Institute of Toluca, Altamirano learned Latin, which enabled him to study the literary classics. His gift for languages allowed him to also become proficient in English, French, and German. As a result of his outstanding language acquisition, he read texts that were originally written in these languages. It was through the art of translation that Altamirano became more familiarized with the European intellectuals of his day. During his student years, he worked as a librarian. Getting this job early in his youth would prove essential in his intellectual development. Keen for knowledge, he became a

voracious reader, reading varying genres, from French philosophers like Rousseau to English playwrights like William Shakespeare. Most important, was his fascination for the *Encyclopaedistes*—such as Denis Diderot and Voltaire—as well as for the liberal jurist treatises, texts that promoted rationality, secular thought, and progression.

However, in 1852, he was expelled from the Institute of Toluca due to his subversive comments in the school's editorial, *Los Papachos*. Nevertheless, the writer's educational journey continued, and in 1855 he was granted a scholarship from the renowned Colegio de San Juan de Letrán in Mexico City, where he studied law. It was within this academic institution that Altamirano was introduced to the political turmoil that was taking place in his country between the two major political parties of the time, the conservatives and the liberals. The liberal ideas promoted by his compatriots resonated with his previous readings of the *Encyclopaedistes*. Consequently, he adopted a liberal and progressive view of the political situation.

When analyzing Altamirano's literary work, it is fundamental to understand his political stance and ideologies, as the majority of his written texts articulate a nationalist discourse from a liberal and modern perspective. To define a Mexican liberal in the mid-nineteenth century we must take into consideration the evolution of this political philosophy, from its genesis, taking place shortly after Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, to its culmination with the French intervention (1862-67).

The story of liberalism begins with the fall of Mexico's first emperor, Agustín Iturbide, in 1823. With his downfall, Mexicans opted for the creation of a Republic, using as their archetype the political structure of the United States. There were no defined political parties at the time, yet there were two distinct political tendencies. Those who

supported the Empire of Iturbide were known as *Iturbidistas*. These individuals came from military families of pure Spanish blood and supported an authoritarian regime that maintained many of the colonial aspects intact. In contrast, the federalists—who were the minority—dreamed of a liberal government and administration. They wanted to forge a new nation by adopting political reforms that promoted juridical rights, representative governments, and a control in power. The Federalists relied on the American constitution as guidance for creating principles and laws. These political tendencies would go on to become the conservative and liberal parties, respectively. The ideological quarrel between these two parties would persist and worsen well into the century.

The creation of the first Mexican constitution came in 1824, and broached on the qualities of a federalist nation. Mexico had adopted a republican government, where the supreme power was divided between the legislative, judicial, and the executive branches. Even though the constitution seemed to promote progressive ideals, it lacked the authority to enact equal rights and give a sense of liberty to its citizens. This premature type of liberalism is conceived by its faith in the “magic of the constitution” to bring stability and order to the country (Hale 60). Its short duration would be replaced by the “Seven Laws” in 1835. These laws, promoted by Antonio López de Santa Anna, would alter the organization of the newborn Republic and revert it once again to its more conservative outlook.

The first thirty years that followed Mexico’s independence were marked by a pessimistic and disillusioned attitude. Continuous civil wars, the invasion of foreigners, economic crisis, political upheaval and the continuous quarrels between the Church and the State took a toll on Mexican liberals. Jose Maria Luis Mora, a prominent liberal figure

at the time, would later write, “Nothing has been achieved. Our efforts have been useless, merit has been forgotten, virtue dejected, and incompetence has been placed on high grounds, whereas the clamor of the people has been ignored and reduced to misery and oppression” (Wasserman 52). All hope seemed to be lost. The country seemed to be condemned to perpetual anarchy, corruption, and disorder.

However, by the mid-nineteenth century, liberalism in Mexico evolved to become more radical in its approach. It relied less on the Constitution as a way to guarantee its progress and strongly critiqued the colonial apparatus that stymied the country from becoming a modern state. Constitutionalism by itself wasn’t enough to catapult the newborn nation into progress. The focus became centered on the egregious role the church and the military had played in Mexican society. Liberals were not only interested in establishing progressive laws, but also in implementing and executing these laws. An active government was thus needed in order to put into practice these reforms. It is with the *Reform Laws* in 1857 that liberalism goes from being a passive ideology to an active and mobilizing doctrine. These laws, passed down by the president Benito Juarez, had a detrimental effect on the power of the church and the military. Most of the church’s land and capital was taken away with the aim to place the money into better use. The privileges given to the clergy were seen as an obstacle to the economic development of the nation. It was during this political turmoil that anticlericalism became an inevitable outcome. The Mexican liberals wanted a dynamic government that brought radical changes to the detrimental socio-political condition, and thus the conflicts that emerged between the Church and State reached their culmination during these years.

Nonetheless, in order to better comprehend how and why liberalism flourished as a political ideology in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Mexico, one must take into account the role of the French Revolution, as well as the intellectuals that represented the progressive ideals of this social movement. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, France found itself in a similar situation as Mexico did shortly after its independence. The European country exemplified the struggle between order and disorder. Its fervent struggle in aspiring to emancipation from the oppressive monarchical regime was something to which the Mexicans could relate. The French Revolution became an epitome of the modern liberal principles that the modern Mexican wanted to adopt. The national motto of France, *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity* would resonate within the Mexican population. Almost all of the political literature that was translated and read by the educated few was coming from the French *philosophes*. The ideas and views of Montesquieu, Robespierre, Rousseau, and Benjamin Constant would synchronize with the expectations many of the Mexican liberals had at the time.

It is through French political rhetoric that modern liberalism in Mexico starts taking form. Taking a closer look at the ideas of some of these French philosophers can help one better comprehend the origin of many of the political decisions that were made and adopted by the liberal party. One of these most influential works is Benjamin Constant's *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Governments* in 1815. In this political text, Constant reasserts the basic liberal themes he believed to be fundamental in the creation of a progressive and equalitarian society. As a revolutionary, he advocated for the defense of the individual's liberty against an authoritarian regime. Constant criticized the placement of power in the body of citizens. From his point of view, popular sovereignty must play a crucial role in

how the country is governed; yet it shouldn't be the central point. Intermediate bodies that separate the state from the people are needed. Like Tocqueville, Constant corroborated the implementation of judicial institutions composed of citizens and proprietors. These institutions had "a stake in preventing attacks on individual security" (Hale 57).

The solution to the chaotic administrative situation seemed to be very clear: an implementation of free political institutions was fundamental. This meant that the church and the military—both primary bodies, regarded by Mexican liberals as the cause of the economic collapse and social degradation of the country— first needed to lose their authoritarian privilege. Just as in France, religion became a major issue of contention. The ecclesiastical doctrines were questioned for their veracity, and began to be seen as archaic institutions that indoctrinated the people with erroneous conceptions of the world. These subversive ideas were taken from works of the *Encyclopaedistes*. The *Persian Letters* by Montesquieu is a lucid example of this attack on eighteenth century French society, as Martin states in his book *French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century*: "The reader is imperceptibly led to the conclusion that the institutions he has revered, and the authorities he has obeyed, are perhaps unworthy of his reverence and obedience" (90). Montesquieu makes caustic remarks regarding the religious and authoritarian orders, and encourages the reader to seek individual freedom by being rational and objective.

Ironically enough, the people whom the Mexicans admired and ideas wanted to adopt became a menacing force that jeopardized the establishment of a democracy. In 1861, the Republic of Mexico was thrown into a financial crisis that disabled it from paying its international debts. Since the United States was preoccupied with its own Civil War, the creditor nations—France, England and Spain—saw it as an opportunity to intervene in

Mexico. France believed that it was only a matter of time before the United States annexed additional lands from its southern neighbor, as they had done earlier with Texas in 1848. Given their antagonistic relationship, France wanted to avoid American expansion at all costs. The three European world powers landed their troops in the port of Veracruz in 1861. Nonetheless, England and Spain were satisfied after they exacted payment, and returned to Europe that same year. Napoleon III, on the other hand, had more ambitious intentions. After formally becoming emperor of France (1852), he had wasted little time building the most powerful regime in Europe; an aspiring man, he saw himself as a “great warrior who would change the world unto his design” (McAllen 49).

In the case of Mexico, Napoleon attempted to fulfill his uncle’s dreams, which had become his own, that of spreading French dominance in the Western Hemisphere. However, there was more to the expansion of his empire. As Edgar Quinet mentions in his essay “L’Expédition du Mexique”, Napoleon’s hidden intentions were greedier than they appeared at first glance. Even though France justified the invasion as being philanthropic, Napoleon was interested in the country’s resources and exploitation of its people. In fact, Mexico was just the starting point, for the French emperor had plans of moving southward and taking control of the rest of Latin America. Similar to Quinet, Francisco Balboa, a Chilean essayist, criticized the Bonaparte regime for failing to stand up to the ideals of the French Enlightenment: liberty, equality and freedom (68). Formerly embodying these positive traits, France had become a despotic power that posed a threat to emerging democracies.

Once having arrived to Mexico, the French decided to maintain their troops in Veracruz with the intention of moving into the interior and occupying the seat of

government. From 1861 to 1866 France dispatched its forces and slowly pushed the Mexican president, Benito Juarez, and his liberal troops out of the capital. By 1863 the French dominated Mexico City and a large portion of Mexico's population centers.

Mexico's internal political division made the French invasion feasible. Mexican conservatives strongly supported the idea of a European monarch. They were convinced that only under a European led monarchy could Mexico emerge as a world power. Mexican liberals, on the other hand, were strongly against a foreign presence meddling in their political affairs. They viewed such an occurrence as detrimental to the formation of an organized republic.

Back in Europe, Napoleon desperately searched for a suitable figurehead who would be willing to take the throne. His appointment of Austrian archduke Maximilian von Habsburg and his wife, Princess Carlota of Belgium would serve in an attempt to maintain a good relationship with Austria. The couple reined in Mexico from 1864 to 1867; their brief rule is indicative of Napoleon's failure to fulfill his life-long dream. Contrary to the French Emperor's draconian policies, Maximilian's ruling philosophy was based on a more tolerant and inclusive approach. As McAllen mentions, Maximilian "embraced honesty, trustworthiness, and honor as his basic tenets" (22). For this reason, many historians, including novelist Fernando del Paso, portray the imperial couple as victims of Napoleon's avarice. They had well intended intentions, yet were destined for a tragic outcome from the very beginning. Maximilian was executed by a liberal firing squad in 1867 in Santiago de Querétaro, Mexico. As for Carlota, once it was clear that the French were losing control, she departed for Europe in order to seek assistance in Rome from Pope Pius IX. Having failed to help her husband, she remained in Europe, only to go mentally mad.

The French Intervention was more than just a military invasion. It was a time for reflection. A series of fundamental questions arose with the arrival of a foreign presence: What are we fighting for? Who is the enemy? and What can we learn from this experience? Mexico's writers would answer these questions. It was through literature that a country's consciousness would be recorded and spread to the rest of the community. Altamirano would attempt to do the same in Clemencia.

Chapter II:

The Nineteenth-century Mexican Novel

Considered a historical novel for its use of real events, *Clemencia* was written shortly after the French Intervention in Mexico (1862-67). The thirty-seven chapters that constitute the novel appeared in serial form in the Mexican periodical of *El Renacimiento* in the year 1869. The novel received positive reviews from writers and journalists alike, underscoring Altamirano's ability to describe and capture an authentic representation of Mexican character types and landscapes.

It is not surprising that *Clemencia* would be widely extolled by its readership considering the socio-political situation in the region at the time. Mexico's victory over the French enabled the Mexican liberal regime to spread its dominance across the country. Benito Juárez, Mexico's first indigenous president (1867-72) became an embodiment of the progressive ideals propagated by Mexican liberals. His land reforms redistributed property from the wealthy to the landless, aiming to shorten the social gap between the rich and poor. With the expulsion of the French army in 1867, a national pride and spirit was spread across the country; a willingness to portray and preserve the country's roots and history soon became the aim of many Mexican writers.

Nonetheless, the concept of national pride— as viewed in the Mexican novel of the post-empire— was not a newly constructed notion. Altamirano was greatly influenced by numerous Mexican novelists from the first half of the nineteenth century, who like him relied heavily on historical and cultural elements to narrate a story. Many of these writers had a similar aim: that of capturing an essence of Mexican-related themes by alluding to the country's landscapes, customs, and history. Among some of the most prominent writers

belonging to this group were Justo Sierra O'Reilly, Juan Díaz Covarrubias, Eligio Ancona and Luis G. Inclán.

In the particular case of Eligio Ancona, one of his novels that best exemplify a historical reminiscence is *Los mártires del Anáhuac* (1870). Using Bernal Díaz del Castillo's chronicles to remain loyal to historical episodes, *Anáhuac* recounts some of the tragic events that took place during the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire. The negative portrayal of Spanish officials throughout the narrative—depicting them as tyrants and avaricious individuals—serves to transmit Ancona's views of Spanish authority during the colonial period. There is thus a critical element that is omnipresent in many of Ancona's literary works, that of a disdain toward foreign European forces. Parallel to this contempt is the writer's allusion to and glorification of pre-colonial indigenous rituals and customs, aiming to revalorize the country's origins and autochthonous features.

Similar to Ancona, Altamirano would adopt an antagonistic stance towards the supremacy of imperialistic authorities, with the purpose of establishing a nationalistic discourse that was rooted in elements that were proper to Mexico. In *Clemencia*, the French are perceived as a threatening force that undermines the welfare of the Mexican society. The narrator alludes to the negative impact caused by the French army through a description of an atmospheric change undergone in the city of Guadalajara: "La noche estaba oscura, fría y nebulosa . . . corría un viento glacial" (Altamirano 83). The atmosphere of the city in the beginning of the novel is described as being jovial, dynamic and cheerful. However, with the arrival of the French, the environment in the city turns somber and melancholic.

There is an undeniable criticism of the presence of a foreign army in both *Clemencia* and *Anáhuac*. Even though these Mexican writers use different historical periods in which to situate their narratives, readers find an analogous purpose: both novelists demonstrate their contempt for the authoritative position held by European empires. The repercussions caused by the presence of a foreign authority are perceived from the author's viewpoint to be more detrimental than beneficial.

One can find in the literature of Ancona a second major theme that would later be expanded by Altamirano: that of history and its implications in the literary field. With the publication of *Anáhuac*, Ancona became one of the first novelists to write about the Spanish conquest of Mexico, underscoring the importance of history as an elemental component in the depiction of a nation. In the mid-nineteenth century, history was beginning to be seen as a key element that had the potential to distinguish the literature of the Americas from that of Europe; it helped outline characteristics that were intrinsic to a particular region, enabling a path in the creation of a novel that could be considered as being fundamentally "Mexican." Referring to the role of Latin America's history in the production of national texts, Ancona points out the following:

El campo es vasto y seductor para el historiador, para el poeta y para el novelista. Desgraciadamente la mayor parte de los escritores latinoamericanos, en vez de cultivar este campo casi virgen todavía, han ido, como Calderón y García de Quevedo, a buscar sus inspiraciones a la vieja Europa. (29)

Latin American intellectuals like Ancona believed that in order to bring forth prosperity and stability in an emerging nation it was essential not to imitate foreign models, as this

would only lead to a loss of a country's individuality. He held Latin American writers accountable for not yet cultivating and expanding their country's literary canon. Altamirano would come to adopt a similar view. However, he would go on to develop a national project by propagating his ideology of Mexican literature across the country.

An early example that demonstrates Altamirano's tackling of this difficult enterprise comes with his publication of *Las Revistas literarias* (1868), a book that stipulated his national project. In it, Altamirano criticizes writing conventions in nineteenth-century Mexico—denouncing the mediocre tendency of adhering to European models— and likewise encourages young Mexican writers in opting for a narrative that was not a copy or a fabrication of external influences, but rather a product that mirrored the culture from which it was conceived. In the introductory chapter, Altamirano expresses his intentions:

... la juventud de hoy, nacida en medio de la Guerra y aleccionada por lo que ha visto, no se propone sujetarse a un nuevo silencio. Tiene el propósito firme de trabajar constantemente hasta llevar a cabo la creación y el desarrollo de la literatura nacional, cualesquiera que sean las peripecias que sobrevengan. (7)

He was well aware of the interest and concern that had been aroused in Mexican writers following the fall of Maximilian's empire, and thus decided to take advantage of the propitious timing to become a moral and supporting guide for younger generations. Altamirano had a strong opinion of the Mexican printing press—often criticizing it for its customary use for printing foreign literature— and believed the social and political context of the time produced numerous obstacles for aspiring writers. However, with the departure

of the French in 1867, a patriotic sentiment reverberated across the country, ultimately altering the perception and mentality of what was considered “good literature”.

One of the ways in which Altamirano directed novelists towards a conception of the ideal Mexican text was by providing them with subjects and themes to write about. Like Ancona, he believed that “Mexico’s history [was] an inexhaustible mine” (11). Furthermore, he viewed the novel as an ideal tool with which to recreate a nation, using the historical narrative as a means to attain this goal. He reminded his readers of the abundance of historical events, legends, and myths that the country offered. In the first pages of *Las revistas literarias* he enumerates in great detail the literary tools at the disposal of young writers:

Ahí está Cortés con sus atrevidos aventureros... ahí está esa larga serie de vireyes, ilustres los unos y beneficos, tiránicos los otros, pero notables los mas por los monumentos que dejaron... ahí están esos pueblecitos hermosísimos que se cuelgan como canastillos de flores en los flancos de las montañas y en las crestas de la sierra. (11)

According to Altamirano, Mexico was a country rich in history and architecture; a vast territory with a beautiful and diverse geographical terrain; a nation filled with vibrancy and dynamic heroes who desperately waited for the writer’s pen to recount and preserve all of these marvelous wonders that made the nation unique. Unfortunately, this history was appropriated by foreign writers like Alexander von Humboldt, who from Altamirano’s perspective had “altered Mexico’s history” (Heredia 113). In Altamirano’s view, the Mexican national novel would thus serve as a response to these foreign texts, and provide the population with a literature that would bring them closer to their roots.

Since the reading public in Mexico at the time had mainly read French novels in translation, Mexicans were more acquainted with the monarchs of France than with Aztec kings and deities. They remained ignorant of their viceroys and their heroes of Independence. In his biographical study of Altamirano, Chris N. Nacci underscores the admiration the reading Mexican public had for foreign literature: “They had developed a snobbish preference for everything French and looked down on what was Mexican or ignored it” (Nacci 40).

Altamirano thus pointed to the example of the South American poets who wrote verses extolling the landscapes of their native land, hoping they would help guide Mexican writers in the right direction. They sang about their rivers, their pampas, their mountains, and their women, distinguishing themselves for their originality and authenticity (Nacci 40). The Venezuelan poet and essayist Andrés Bello became an epitome of this movement, whom Altamirano often used as an example of a Latin American writer capable of capturing a national spirit in writing. One of his most renowned literary pieces, “Alocución a la Poesía,” is a poem that praises the Americas, admiring its fertility. A sense of pride and honor are deeply imbued in most of Bello’s poems. He expresses a jovial and ecstatic attitude in having been born in the New World, while at the same time urging the reader to divert his gaze from the European continent: “tiempo es que dejes ya la culta Europa” in order to focus his attention in his place of origin.

Regarding the structure and style of the modern novel, Altamirano emphasized the importance of writing a piece that was simple, elegant, and accessible to the majority of the population. In his view, the writer had to always keep his readership in mind. Since one of the primary aims of the Mexican novelist was to inculcate knowledge and wisdom in

the masses, it was critical for the content of the text to be easily transmissible to the public. In the beginning of *Las revistas literarias*, he outlines the importance of the novel's content and structure:

Dejemos el tecnicismo y la elevación hasta perderse en las nubes, para el escrito científico, para la historia filosófica, para los círculos superiores de la sociedad, y adoptemos para la leyenda romanesca la manera de decir elegante, pero sencilla, poética, deslumbradora, si se necesita; pero fácil de comprenderse por todos. (31)

Altamirano urges the novelist to use a simpler style, one that contained less phraseology and technicality, because even though he found it delightful, only very few readers would be able to absorb the material. He cautions about the excessive use of French expressions in a text written in Spanish, for fear that Spanish would become a dialect of a foreign language. For this reason, Altamirano not only advised writers in employing a narrative that was comprehensible to the reader, but also insisted that they remain loyal to Mexico's verbal expressions and word usage.

Altamirano's novel *Clemencia* is an excellent example of a text that abides by these guidelines. Following a lucid and elegant style, *Clemencia* does not diverge into complicated schemes but remains loyal to the relatively simple main plot of the story. The novel follows a clear chronological order, taking the reader by the hand and introducing him to the characters and historical context. One quickly realizes the simplicity and lucidity of the novel's arrangement by reading the titles of the opening chapters: "The Month of December in the Year 1863", "Major Enrique Flores," and "Guadalajara from Afar." The headings often serve to give the reader a concrete notion of the content, while the simplicity

of the language renders the narrative accessible to a wide range of readers. It is important to note, however, that even though Altamirano is considered to be one of Mexico's primary advocates of a literary revolution, many of his compatriots, including Inclán, had expressed similar views

Another novel that pertains to the transformative phase found in Mexican literature in the second half of the nineteenth century is *Astucia*. Written by Luis G. Inclán in 1865 (three years before the publication of *Clemencia*), this novel recounts the life and adventures of a middle-aged man by the same name—a leader of a smuggling group called *Los Hermanos de la Hoja*—and its five other members: Pepe el Diablo, Chepe Botas, Charro Acambareño, Tacho Reniego and el Tapatío. With the publication of this novel, Inclán produces a text that in many ways remains loyal to the “literary reconstruction” of the Mexican subject that was corroborated by Altamirano.

Astucia is an example of a novel that aimed to create an original text. One of its primary intentions is to give the reader a view of the daily rural Mexican life, a literary theme that up until that point had been scarcely addressed by other writers. Before Inclán, few Mexican novelists had paid attention to the poor stratum of society, ignoring a social class that according to historian Moramay López Alonso, constituted more than eighty percent of the Mexican population. One of the main reasons was due to the perception of lower classes as being unworthy literary subjects. Altamirano would follow a similar example years later with his novel titled *El Zarco* (1901). What distinguished both of these novels from what was being written in Europe is their focus and centrality around an indigenous subject. One of the main protagonists in *El Zarco* is a man named Nicolás (a man of indigenous descent). Similar to Inclán's fictional characters, Nicolás represents an

embodiment of society's lowest class. Like Inclán, Altamirano would center the story's plot on a figure that was alienated and discriminated against by Mexican society, often typified by someone with indigenous features. Both Mexican novelists would give these people a voice, yet at the same time they would turn them into a literary symbol. The mestizo or indigenous character would serve as a primary element in differentiating the literature produced in Latin America from that of Europe.

A couple of decades after the publication of *Astucia*, Federico Gamboa, a prominent Mexican writer and diplomat, would express his admiration for the novel, stressing its important role in the creation of a national text:

[Obra] de larguísimo título, con ser novela cansada y difusa, lo es menos que el *Periquillo*, y su nacionalidad mexicana mucho más acentuada que la del inolvidable pícaro. *Astucia* y *Los bandidos* no se inspiraron en Gilblases ni otros señores extranjeros; copian y reproducen lo nuestro sin tomar en cuenta modelos ni ejemplos, influjos o pautas; antes [bien], alardeando de un localismo agresivo y soberano, que ensancha hasta lo transcendental y realza hasta la hermosura sus cualidades y primores. (Qtd. in Franco 15)

Inclán would be recognized for faithfully capturing Mexico's popular culture through his description of regional customs and use of the local language. However, the language employed by Inclán was the most salient feature literary critics viewed as representing his *mexicanismo*. He aimed for a text that gave a faithful depiction of Mexico, as well as that of the personality of its characters. For this reason, there are numerous words in *Astucia* whose roots derive from indigenous languages, primarily Nahuatl. Rafael Olea Franco highlights this in his essay titled *En busca de una lengua nacional*: "En *Astucia* aparece

una buena cauda de voces de origen indígena... con esto llegamos a lo que parece ser un rasgo generalizado del habla mexicana, por lo menos desde el siglo XIX” (816).

Altamirano found the use of popular language in a written text questionable. Even though he strongly discouraged writers from using foreign expressions in their narratives, his national project consisted of creating a text whose language would be developed and enhanced. By this he referred to a writing that was poetic, elegant, and formal, as would be seen in *Clemencia*. Inclán was not the first author to have taken this approach. José Fernández de Lizardi did the same in what is considered as the first Mexican novel, *El periquillo sarniento* (The Itching Parrot, 1816). The language of the characters likewise reproduced a speech from the lowest strata of society. However, since the French authors of the stature of Eugene Sue and Victor Hugo had done the same, he would not censure writers who took a similar approach.

When analyzing the characteristics that define a nineteenth-century Mexican text, it is imperative to delineate the importance of romanticism as an artistic movement that is tied to the national project in Latin America. Many of the ideals propagated by the Enlightenment thinkers failed to persist long after the French Revolution. Romanticism thus emerged as a reaction to the progressive beliefs that were quickly replaced in France by a monarchical system (Vazquez 2). This cultural movement propagated similar ideas to those of many of the so-called *révolutionnaires* who fought for in the emblematic war of 1789: liberty, autonomy, and solidarity. Consequently, Latin American writers adopted a similar progressive rhetoric when compared to their European predecessors. Nonetheless, their aim was to create strong feelings and emotions within their readership in order to

establish a more dynamic and embracing rapport between the individual and a nation's past.

Even though romanticism (like most other western literary movements) emerged in Europe, its appearance in Latin America (around 1830) marginally changed the movement's aims and objectives. The Latin American writer was more concerned with creating a direct dialogue with the historical present, hoping to change the political and social situation of the country. Like Altamirano, many Latin American writers regarded the study of history as being a fundamental process in the creation of a nation-state, since hidden knowledge was perceived to lurk in a nation's past. Understanding the origin of a country's most detrimental mistakes was important in order to avoid falling back into a similar predicament. History came to be seen as a reliable field of study that had been improperly taught; it needed the use of the narrative to effectively reach the minds and hearts of individuals.

Romanticism thus came to change the role and function of history by giving it a more dynamic and active role in society. For centuries, history had been analyzed by historiographers in a very cold and apathetic manner (Vazquez 3). Romantic writers wanted to distance themselves from these previous doctrines and adopt a more inclusive and harmonious approach, one that would create a more personal relationship with the reader. Through the employment of the narrative, history was able to trespass this invisible frontier—one that distanced the reader from forging an intimate connection with the historical account—and enable the individual to experience, feel and imagine the world of the protagonist. The historical romance came to represent something completely different from previous writing of history. It became intertwined with the novel by operating and

evolving around a romantic affair. Historical events came to constitute the backbone of the romantic genre, acting as a tool that not only educated the public but also enticed them to act according to the welfare of the community. In her essay titled “La historiografía romántica en México,” Josefina Zoraida Vázquez explicates the role of the romantic genre in giving history a new outlook and objective:

. . . al revés de la Ilustración, el Romanticismo recomendó la Historia Nacional como la única digna de estudio, y dentro de ésta, la búsqueda del *espíritu del pueblo*, el verdadero autor de los acontecimientos históricos. Se acrecentó también el empeño por precisar mejor, en las distintas épocas, el paisaje histórico y las diferencias entre las diversas nacionalidades. (2)

Here, Vázquez claims that through a meticulous study of history, romanticism was able to capture a nation’s spirit. Nonetheless, it was up to the writer to look back and assemble the moral lessons that could be retrieved from a nation’s history (Vazquez 3). In order for this historical reminiscence to be fruitful and effective, the writer had to remain loyal to facts, geographical spaces, and dates. Jameson underscores the importance of history in the process of nation building: “Appeals to collective identity need to be evaluated from a historical perspective, rather than from the standpoint of dogmatic and placeless ‘ideology analysis’ ” (78). As claimed by Jameson, a “historical perspective” is essential when forging an understanding of a country’s culture and national character. A thorough examination of a country’s history is needed to create a conscious awareness of a people’s roots, culture and origins, elements required in order to forge an identity in a nation that lacked one.

Altamirano adopted the use of Mexican cultural elements, in particular that of history, to portray a national vision. Eligio Ancona and Luis G. Inclán were novelists that greatly influenced Altamirano's writing. Nonetheless, Altamirano took a more radical approach when it came to the national project. He became a teacher, instructing young writers on the literary techniques that the Mexican novel should embody. Similarly, he specified the importance of straying from European literary conventions and encouraged writers in incorporating elements that were proper to Mexico's culture. *Clemencia* would serve as an example of a novel in which to imitate, both in writing style and content.

Chapter III: National Allegories

“Synopsis”

Before analyzing *Clemencia*, I will give a brief summary of the novel, highlighting its most important elements, in hope that the reader will be better situated, and thus gain a better understanding of the themes and concepts that will be discussed throughout this essay.

The novel begins with a group of friends casually conversing in the home of a man whose name is unknown, yet who is referred to as “Doctor L.” The initial narrator describes him as being “a handsome young man of thirty years of age who served in the medical military body” (Altamirano 3). Mention of the “terrible weather” in the first few paragraphs of the novel is important, given that it forces the men to stay inside and pass the time recounting stories and drinking *ponche*. The story unfolds when the men take notice of a small frame containing a small letter with two quotes from E. T. A. Hoffmann. The men’s curiosity over the meaning of the passages leads the young doctor to narrate “a story of love and tragedy” (3). It is at this point in the novel that Doctor L. becomes the narrator of the story, recounting a personal account that marked his life.

The story takes place in Mexico, but more precisely in the city of Guadalajara, located in the state of Jalisco. The narrator begins the novel by describing the unstable political situation of the country, situating the reader in a precise historical period: that of the French Intervention in 1863. The first few chapters also contain a detailed description of the beautiful city of Guadalajara, alluding to its baroque architecture, panoramic views and scenery:

In the center of this valley, traversed by the great river and by the gigantic mountain range, lies Guadalajara. The view that it delivers is magnificent to the one that sees it, coming from the west and having crossed the last hills that border the bank of Santiago through the Tololotlan pass. (15)

In this passage, the narrator extols the beauty of the Mexican city, praising its natural resources—such as its rivers, mountains, and terrain—in order to draw a detailed image of this edenic city in the reader’s mind. Moreover, he goes on to talk about the people who reside there, and who, like the landscape, adopt a welcoming and charming presence.

. . . when a Mexican visitor has recently arrived to Guadalajara he is quickly surrounded by twenty welcoming people who invite him to their home, raise a toast for him in the utmost hospitality, and seek a long-term friendship. (18)

Both these passages help the reader become familiarized with the setting and the time period in which the story evolves. Nonetheless, as this essay will study in greater detail, the descriptions of Guadalajara have as a primary aim to instill in the reader a love for Mexico’s national elements.

The story has four main characters whose dynamic and intertwined relationships will add tension to the already belligerent atmosphere produced within the context of war. Isabel, Fernando Valle’s cousin, is one of the main protagonists. She is described by the narrator as being “beautiful as an angel” (25). Her large blue eyes and light skin are constitutive of her beauty and elegance. Although her role in the novel is not significant in comparison to the rest of the characters, her presence in the narrative serves to expose some

of the social misbehaviors of aristocratic women in nineteenth-century Mexico. Through her comportment and demeanor, Isabel becomes an embodiment of an upper-class woman during the time of the French Intervention: her love and passion for foreign music, literature, and art are an indirect indication of her failure to demonstrate a sincere loyalty to and pride in her country's culture and roots.

Clemencia, friend of Isabel, is a young woman who is portrayed as a character devoid of virtues and morals. Her coquettishness and boldness are signs of her lascivious behavior, defying all conceptions of aristocratic women living in Mexico in the nineteenth century. She uses her beauty as well as her charming personality to make Fernando Valle fall in love with her; however, her actions are insincere, and Valle quickly falls victim to her mischievous goals. Like Isabel, she becomes enamored by Enrique's looks and charms, an encounter that forms an antagonistic relationship between the two female friends. Coming from a wealthy family, she lives an opulent lifestyle, living with her father in a large household and always having access to life's newest commodities. Skilled in playing the piano, Clemencia is portrayed as an intelligent and emotional character that is profoundly controlled by her feelings. Nonetheless, she goes through an illuminating experience that makes her become aware of her cruel behavior towards Valle, ultimately finding repentance and consolation in her belief in God.

Enrique Flores, a man of twenty-five years of age, is the third main protagonist of the story. A major of the Republican army, he is known for his charm and elegant demeanor. The narrator describes him as "a young man belonging to a well-established family; elegant, a good-looking lad of distinguished manners . . . absolutely charming... one of those men whose eyes seem to exert over the person they look upon an irresistible

and pleasant feeling” (8). He is well liked by everyone he meets, and is known for his skills in seducing women. However, Flores’ appearance conceals the young man’s true intentions. Similar to Isabel and Clemencia, his physiognomy is representative of his European heritage: “He had big blue eyes, and a large and blond mustache; he was Herculean and well formed, and had the reputation of being valiant” (7). His European features are constitutive of the positive traits that are associated with his character. Nonetheless, despite the narrator’s extolment of Flores, we come to see him for his true colors: he is an opportunist, a traitor, and an anti-liberal. Flores betrays his military troops by clandestinely adhering to the French forces, and even goes as far as to blame Valle for being the culprit.

Flores is important to the novel’s development; however, the narrative evolves primarily around Fernando Valle, who similar to Flores is a major of the Republican army. Valle is portrayed as an eccentric and particular man with an individual and distinct personality. Having started as a novice in the Republican army, he is ultimately promoted to major due to his merits on the battlefield— in particular after his performance in the battle of Puebla. He is an intelligent and ethical man who relies heavily on a moral foundation when making decisions. Nonetheless, his personality and demeanor are characteristics that ostracize him from the rest of society. Unlike the characters mentioned thus far, Valle’s physiognomy does not represent solely European features, but rather a mixture of indigenous and Spanish traits: “Valle was a young man of twenty-five years, just like Flores, but with a rickety and weak body; dark-skinned, yet unlike the lovely swarthy complexion of the Spaniards” (9) He is described as being unattractive and his timid and rigid moral values are seen as flaws that hinder him from becoming socially

accepted. Ultimately rejected by his family because of his political stance, Valle remains bold and loyal to his liberal principles, demonstrating his fervent devotion to the Juarez regime.

“Mestizaje in the construction of Mexican identity”

It is undoubted that the novel's involvement and role in the creation of a nation-state was pivotal to the national project's fruition. An ideal image of the future nation was made possible through the use of allegory. In his book titled *Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism* (1986), Frederic Jameson proclaims that “All third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as . . . national allegories” (69). It is through the use of allegory as a literary device that a cohesive relationship between love and politics is formed. As Doris Sommer points out in her discussion of what constitutes a foundational fiction, there is always an intrinsic relationship between romantic love and the political sphere (41). Both of these elements depend upon each other to construct a national vision that is exemplified through the heroes and idyllic lovers of the narrative.

In *Clemencia*, the character Fernando Valle comes to symbolize the ideal Mexican citizen through his political affiliations, his ethnic background and his moral values. This essay will begin by looking at Valle's political stance as indicative of the nationalist message that was deeply engrained in many of the nineteenth century Latin American romantic narratives. As stated in the previous paragraph, the political dimension was an essential element that helped constitute an idea of nationhood in Latin America. This was often portrayed through a character's unconditional love for and loyalty to the nation. From the beginning of the text, the narrator makes reference to Valle's fervent loyalty to the liberalist regime, by stating his military duties and achievements as a contributing factor in his patriotism:

. . . more than once in the campaign of Puebla, he had given proof of a temerarious courage, of a bravery that seemed inspired by an ardent desire to quickly ascend to a higher social status . . . In the army he was an upstart, because he had appeared as a private in the year of 1862, later ascending by his effort to the rank of sergeant in the Cumbres de Acultzingo, then to sub-lieutenant (he served back then in an infantry corps), to lieutenant after the Battle of Cinco de Mayo, and ultimately, to captain. (9)

Valle is portrayed as a courageous and gallant soldier who begins his military duty in 1862 (same year the French military declares war on Mexico with the aim of establishing an empire). The numerous battles in which Valle participates involve a resistance against a foreign European influence that has started to permeate the country. However, the novel suggests that it is through individuals like Valle that Mexico is able maintain and uphold its autonomy and in return preserve its idiosyncratic customs.

In fighting arduously for his country's sovereignty, Fernando Valle not only proves to be a loyal liberal, but also aspires to improve his social status. He exemplifies someone who is keenly interested in both the welfare of his nation and his own. However, both are interconnected, and he must first sustain the former if he wants to personally succeed. Altamirano here alludes to the progressive and modernizing benefits that can be gained if one adheres to a liberal ideology. The narrator mentions Valle's "ardent desire to quickly ascend to a higher social status." Even though he starts as a novice in the military, he is quickly able to climb into the prestigious role of a captain. Valle comes to symbolize what José Gomariz refers to as the "emancipation of the subaltern individual", by ascending "from the nation's margins into a position of cultural and political power" (113). Through

the adoption of liberal principles and ideals, Altamirano, like many of his contemporaries, exemplifies in a particular character a conception of the “ideal citizen,” as someone who shields and defends the nation from the ominous grasp of an imperialistic power. In the case of *Clemencia*, Valle is a representation of this singularity, giving the narrative a patriotic dimension.

The aim of Altamirano is not only to entertain his readership through a captivating and romantic story, as to instruct and entice them to adopt similar political views. Even though *Clemencia* revolves around a romantic affair, the foundational novel aims to propagate the author’s political ideologies and theories through the portrayal of its characters. We thus encounter a text that juxtaposes the political with the fictitious. Yet, as Sommers would argue, the political sphere serves more than a constitutive part of the text; it plays a central role within the romantic affair. Both of these units are thus inseparable, “creating a dialectic between love and state” (46).

Fernando Valle’s political opinions are in direct relation with the Mexican liberal project, since it is through his thoughts that the political message is overtly expressed. In one of the last chapters of *Clemencia*, titled “Fatality,” Valle is on the brink of death when he expresses his overwhelming disappointment of dying as an accused traitor, rather than on the battlefield: “Yo soñaba con la gloria; yo anhelaba derramar todavía más mi pobre sangre en los altares de la patria; yo me hacía la ilusión de sucumbir con la muerte de los valientes, a la sombra de mi bandera republicana” (123). This passage is a lucid example that demonstrates the didactic aspect of the novel; it aspires to disseminate political and social ideas in order to educate readers in emerging modern ideologies. Even though Valle’s emotional monologue serves to give the reader an insight into the character’s most

intimate thoughts, the chapter is heavily imbued with national rhetoric. Valle asserts his love, loyalty and compassion for Mexico, wishing to have died fighting for his country's welfare. The reader feels pity for him, given that he finds himself locked up in a cell ready to be unfairly executed. Altamirano attempts to instill in his readers a political stance that mirrors that of Valle's, prioritizing the country's integrity over one's own personal interests.

As viewed in the previous paragraphs, *Clemencia* exemplifies a didactic novel that outlines what the new nation requires of its citizens. Nonetheless, knowing who these citizens are is just as crucial when understanding the Mexican national project. The concept of *mestizaje* is a second major component that played a central role in the Liberal agenda (Sánchez-Clark 3). When it came to defining the Mexican race, Altamirano often underscored the importance of miscegenation in helping to delineate this social endeavor. Amanda Petersen's essay "¿Sacrificar al héroe para fundar nacionalismo?," discusses Altamirano's view of *mestizaje* as a favorable feature that had the potential to conceive an "imagined community":

Mestizaje for Altamirano comes to be perceived as something constructive rather than unfavorable. His imaginative community is not suspicious of the mixture of races, but rather tends to favor the mestizo protagonist and subvert the romantic principles in order to value the dark-skinned individual and despise the white one (9)

Due to Mexico's population, which is primarily a mixture of Spanish and indigenous, most Mexican liberal writers, including Altamirano, regarded *mestizaje* as a fundamental component of their political ideology. They believed it had the potential to unify the

country by reducing the cultural and linguistic diversity to a singular mixed-race identity. Sommers gives a similar argument when differentiating the way miscegenation was perceived in Europe and in Latin America, arguing that while in Europe it was “the road to racial perdition” in Latin America “it was the way of redemption, a way of annihilating difference and constructing a fraternal dream of national identity” (39). From Altamirano’s perspective, the mestizo was an embodiment of the Mexican citizen, since he emphasized an assimilation and appropriation of both indigenous and Spanish culture.

Fernando Valle is thus an archetype of the idealized mestizo in *Clemencia*. While the description of his race is enigmatic, his physical appearance fits well with what Gomariz refers to as the “subaltern individual” (119). This term connotes a sense of inferiority that is tied to the ethnicity and economic status of the character. The narrator’s cryptic description of Valle’s physical appearance leaves the reader dubious regarding his racial background: “[Valle is] dark-skinned, yet unlike the lovely swarthy complexion of the Spaniards, or that dark-skinned tone of the mestizos” (9). In this passage, the narrator establishes a distance that separates Valle from the typical mestizo and Spanish phenotype. However, his unknown race alludes to the complexity that comes with defining an individual’s race when miscegenation is involved. The ambiguity derived from Fernando’s racial composition is thus in accord with the *racial impurity* that the word mestizaje often connotes (Gomariz 119).

It is important to bear in mind racial prejudice in nineteenth century Mexico and abroad when analyzing the role of mestizaje in *Clemencia*. Understanding how the *mestizo* was perceived during this period can help the reader comprehend Fernando Valle’s depiction as a perceived outcast. Even though mestizos gained political power after

Mexico's Independence (1821), racial biases, many of which remain prevalent today, were omnipresent. Racism became an entrenched aspect of Mexican society during the Spanish colonization of the Americas: light skin became equated with a higher intellect and social standing, whereas dark skin was regarded as an inferior trait. Due to this form of thinking, Spanish men served as authoritative figures. *Criollos* (Mexican-born individuals of pure Spanish descent) would replace the Spanish after Independence, preserving this racial hierarchy.

Racial bias would play an important role when legitimizing France's intervention in Mexico. Leading up to Maximilian's arrival in the port of Veracruz, Mexican conservatives and foreign intellectuals viewed Mexico's biracial population as the source to the country's political and social turmoil. From a European perspective, the mestizo was intellectually inferior when compared to someone of European origin. Following this reasoning, many believed Mexico needed the aid of a European empire to pull the country out of its unstable beginnings. This racially charged perception originated and flourished during the colonial empire in New Spain. As Francisco-Flores Cuautle mentions in his thesis, "Desarrollo y crisis de la nación y la literatura del siglo XIX en México," the mestizo was a historical subject whose role in society was unfavorable and counterproductive to the country's social development:

El papel de los mestizos en la sociedad Mexicana fue desde muy temprano un factor de inestabilidad; desde los albores de la conquista española se multiplicaron, resultando inquietantes para el poder político. Esos primeros mestizos de padre español y de madre india no tenían hogar ni lugar definido en la sociedad de su tiempo. (126)

After Mexico's independence, the word *mestizaje* retained its negative connotation. However, Altamirano, similar to other Mexican liberal writers, aimed to reverse the meaning of the word by giving it a positive usage. For Altamirano, *mestizaje* had the potential to unify and converge its citizens into a single cultural group, where race was not a contentious factor.

Keeping in mind the sociopolitical discourse in nineteenth-century Mexico, the reader sees Fernando Valle's marginalization as being linked to his ethnic and political profile. Valle's subaltern position is thus engendered from his mixed-race identity and his strong ties to the liberal regime. Race and politics play an important role in *Clemencia*, embedding the narrative with a political message that goes beyond mere romance and provide the reader with an awareness of racial prejudice in nineteenth-century Mexico (Nacci 60). Through the representation of Fernando Valle, Altamirano destabilizes the generalized conception of *mestizaje*— widely regarded as detrimental to the country's social development— and represents the *mestizo* as a national hero whose death symbolizes an attempt to subvert the violence that corrodes Mexico's future. Contrary to many literary critics who claim Valle's death is counterintuitive to Altamirano's national project, I will corroborate Amanda Petersen's thesis, arguing that his death is not unfruitful when it is examined through the theory of René Girard. A major focus will be placed on Fernando Valle's ostracized status and the characteristics that make up his inferior position. Valle's negative traits are associated with the "typical" Mexican citizen: *mestizo*, liberal and reserved. His persona is indirectly connected to Gerard's theory of a sacrificial victim, where "the individual's characteristics are seen as a threat" (10). It is ultimately through sacrifice that his community perceives these traits as qualities rather than flaws.

In Girard's book *Violence and the Sacred*, the French philosopher argues that substitution is foundational in all sacrifices. This substitution is not an individual one, but one that impacts a whole community (8). According to Girard, there are two different types of violence. The first one is beneficial to a society's welfare and has a ritual character, while the second type is unrestrained and is seen as harmful to a community's wellbeing. In *Clemencia*, the arrival of the French in Mexico can be seen as an act that produces unconstructive violence, causing disruption in the once peaceful and charming city of Guadalajara. The relationship between the main characters is likewise affected by this bellicose event as it establishes what Girard refers to as the *monstrous double*. This term signifies a loss of identity that can be perceived with Fernando Valle and Enrique Flores, when it is known one of them has betrayed the liberal regime by clandestinely supporting the French army. The roles of hero and traitor—theme employed by Altamirano to differentiate between a “good” and “bad citizen”—become ambiguous, even interchangeable. This uncertainty reflects “the critical state in which Mexico finds itself”—a divided nation that can no longer distinguish its allies from its enemies; its citizens endorse the French intervention while its liberal soldiers (like Enrique) betray their country. Altamirano thus portrays a “violated nation” whose redemption can only be brought through a sacrificial death (Petersen 17).

Since violence cannot be diminished but only subverted (according to Girardian theory), a sacrifice is needed to restore stability to a community. Looking at Fernando Valle as a sacrificial victim can change the way one views the outcome in *Clemencia*. Girard describes such an individual as someone who does not socially integrate with the community where he resides, but who nonetheless shares similar features. This sacrificial

victim “must be somebody that can be distinguished from society” (8). From the very beginning of the novel, the reader becomes aware of Fernando Valle’s apathetic appearance and seemingly unpleasant personality. Unlike the rest of the characters who are described as being charming and robust, the adjectives the narrator chooses to depict Valle devalue his character. Doctor L . . . portrays him as having “a rickety and weak body,” with “a pale and sickly color that reveals a chronic illness” (9). His frail demeanor places a distance between him and the rest of the characters whose vigorous physical appearance are a direct contrast with his physiognomy. These physical descriptions are typically assigned to the indigenous subject, who is often regarded as weak and more susceptible to diseases (Gomariz 118). Valle’s sickly image differentiates him from the rest of his community, while at the same time keeping intact racial stereotypes that are applicable to Mexico’s indigenous heritage.

As opposed to the rest of the characters who display European features, Valle’s mestizaje is a presumed factor of his ugliness and inferiority. In *Clemencia*, the dark-skinned individual is depicted as being less alluring when compared to someone with a lighter skin tone. This element is perceived through the characters’ conception of ideal beauty. Both Isabel and Clemencia become enamored by Enrique Flore’s looks, admiring his virility, his “big blue eyes . . . and blonde hair” (8). On the contrary, both female characters regard Valle with a pitiful attitude. His feeble demeanor disturbs them and they remain indifferent in regards to his mixed racial features. Race is thus equated with aesthetics. Being mestizo places Valle at a disadvantage, influencing the way other characters negatively perceive him. Fernando Valle’s racial syncretism is thus in accord with his ostracized placement in the novel.

Another factor that illustrates Valle as a marginalized individual is his hostile personality. From the beginning of the text the narrator attempts to make the reader dislike Valle by describing him as a cold, timid and hostile individual: “Taciturn, deeply immersed in reflection . . . submissive . . . distracted . . . reserved and cold . . . this young man had a repugnant appearance and appeared unpleasant to everyone” (10). Through the use of adjectives, Altamirano subtly incorporates psychological stereotypes that are typically associated with an indigenous subject. In doing so, he places Valle in an inferior position. Gomariz refers to this characterization as the “melancholic indigenous”, stating that indigenous peoples are inherently somber and pessimistic (Gomariz 118). These stereotypes derive from the viewpoint of the European colonist who tended to denigrate the indigenous man by depicting him as an unwilling contributor of society. A similar example can be seen in Altamirano’s later novel *El Zarco* (1901), where the indigenous character Nicolás is described as being melancholic and reserved (118). The racial designations Valle embodies indicate the alienation, social rejection and silencing often experienced by the subaltern subject described by Girard.

Apart from being criticized for his ethnicity, Valle’s political affiliation is an elemental part of his subaltern status. In order for the protagonist to be considered a sacrificial victim, everything about him must be viewed as despicable, including his ideologies (Girard 12). Valle’s sole presence provokes animosity from the people that surround him. His father (a religious conservative) throws him out of his home due to their opposing political beliefs, viewing his son’s liberalism as a threat to his household. From a very young age, he is treated with contempt by other family members who come to perceive him as a potential enemy: “. . . el hogar paterno me negó desde niño sus goces, a

causa de mis ideas y no de mi conducta” (120). Having failed to forge a relationship with his family, he joins the military as an alternative to integrate with society. Paradoxically, there he undergoes a similar experience. Valle’s fervent morality and political devotedness become an encumbrance in his social life: “. . . his aversion towards the vices that the military youth was inclined, gave him an air of priggishness that inevitably attracted enmity from people” (10). By placing Valle as a social victim of the liberal brigade, Altamirano criticizes the members of the military order who no longer respect and stand up for the party’s ideals. If one follows Girard’s theory, Valle is “unsuccessful in any social environment”; nonetheless, his failure is partly derived from abstaining to indulge in the “vices” that are corrupting the nation (12). Unlike the rest of his comrades, he maintains a loyal devotion to the ideals and ethics of the modern Republic, becoming an archetype of a Mexican liberal soldier.

Fernando Valle’s alienated position makes him be perceived as a threat to the wellbeing of his community. His depiction in the beginning of the novel sustains the uncertainty aforementioned between hero and traitor. According to Girardian theory, unconstructive violence can cause a substitution of roles between characters. The good character is thus perceived as evil, while the malevolent individual is viewed by the rest of the community as noble, making “everything alternate” (149). Even though Valle is a fervent adherent of the liberal party, everyone in the liberal brigade despises him. In Doctor L’s words:

It is evident that this young man was hiding a sinister project, inspired by a colossal ambition, and who knows . . . he wanted to be promoted and

pretended to serve the Republic as a way to reach his goal. He wasn't a patriot, but a careerist, an evil person undercover. (10)

The inversion of roles engenders a nebulous distinction between the characters' intentions, allowing both Valle and Flores to take on a dual personality, with a distinction between the inner and the outer self. Valle is thus viewed by his troops as an "evil person undercover". This description can be applied to Flores; nonetheless, the narrator uses it to describe Valle, a devoted patriot with well-established morals. Appearances in *Clemencia* are thus untrustworthy. Contrary to Fernando, Enrique Flores' absolute charm and physical beauty are factors that enable his social acceptance. There is thus a contrast established between a person's inner morals and outer appearance; beauty is equated with goodness and ugliness with evil. However, this contrast is subverted with Fernando Valle's sacrifice, turning corporal beauty into a subordinate of moral values.

Valle's sacrificial death can be seen as an attempt to restore order in his community, making him a symbol of consolidation. As Girard mentions, the victim "serves to protect the entire community from violence" (8), turning Valle into a national hero who sacrifices himself for the nation's welfare. His death can thus be interpreted as the foundation of a social order that highlights national principles.

“An ominous presence”

In *Clemencia*, the foreigner constitutes the antithesis of the “ideal citizen”. From a liberal perspective a foreign influence was perceived as a hindering factor that prevented a country from gaining autonomy and acquiring social and economic progress. In nineteenth-century Mexico, France’s intervention was one of the most salient and contentious events that engendered an array of hostility between both political parties, polarizing the country. Enrique Flores is an embodiment of this foreign negative influence. His presence generates disruption within Mexican society, for as Gomariz mentions, he “behaves like a character from a French novel, oblivious to Mexican customs, sexuality, identity and the nation’s interests” (123). His greed, promiscuity and deceiving character are elements that are associated with the foreigner and go against the ideals of an emerging Republic.

In his *Revistas Literarias de Mexico*, Altamirano encourages young writers to stray away from European literary conventions. In particular, he focuses on the French novel, whose content he views as “inadaptable” to Mexican customs and way of living (13). He criticizes a number of French writers, including Gustave Flaubert, whose novels; such as *Madame Bovary*, he sees as devoid of a moral message. Promiscuity is a recurrent theme in Flaubert’s narratives; a theme that Altamirano comes to associate with French values.

In *Clemencia*, Flores is a representation of a Mexican who has been “frenchified”. For this reason, his immorality is seen as originating from the French influence that has permeated the country. He is known by his troops for being a womanizer, always being successful in winning over a woman’s heart. Doctor L . . . describes him as a man who “presented a danger for women.” His exotic look, “blue eyes” and “blond moustache,” are features that dazzle the opposite gender (7). Yet, appearances in *Clemencia* are misleading,

and since Flores lacks moral ethics, he uses his physical beauty to fulfill his own desires, not caring if his actions cause others harm. This is most evident in his treatment of women, viewing them as sexual objects that fulfill his sexual appetite. His negative influence ultimately inspires other soldiers to follow the same “vices” (10). Contrary to Flores, Valle demonstrates a moral integrity that remains loyal to liberal ideals. This points to another of Altamirano’s objectives; the novel should not only help in the intellectual advancement of a society but should likewise inculcate moral standards.

Nonetheless, Flores’ lust for women can also be regarded as having a political meaning if we view the feminine figure as an allegory of the nation. This goes in accord with what Sommers describes as “an erotics of politics”, where sexuality and political power are intertwined (6). Flores’ attempt to seduce and deflower Clemencia corresponds to Petersen’s description of Mexico as a “violated nation” (17). Political treason is thus equated with sexual rhetoric. Flores’ depraved view of women is indicative of the lack of respect he has for Mexico, willing to betray it and put its welfare at risk. Similar to the French, who want to tame, control and penetrate Mexico’s interior, Flores aspires to do the same with Clemencia.

Translation

The last segment of this project is an English translation of *Clemencia*. I have translated four chapters, titled “The month of December in the year 1863”, “Major Enrique Flores”, “Major Fernando Valle”, and “Guadalajara from afar.” I decided to translate these specific chapters for different reasons; the first being that most of the passages I use in my argument come directly from these sections. Overall, they demonstrate some of the characteristics that make *Clemencia* the first modern Mexican novel. They lucidly introduce the reader to the content of the story, situating him within a historical context, and providing him with a detailed description of each main character. These first few chapters encapsulate Altamirano’s simple and elegant writing style which aims to make reading an easy and enjoyable experience for the reader. In doing this, the political message embedded in the narrative is guaranteed to be transmitted to and absorbed by the reading public.

The process behind translation is one that is both enjoyable and frustrating at times. When translating *Clemencia*, I faced a series of difficulties that are common among translators: that of maintaining the overall meaning of a passage without altering the cadence and fluidity in the original language. I tried to preserve Altamirano’s writing style, whose elongated sentences and pompous descriptions might seem awkward if translated word for word. Another obstacle I came across was that of translating a nineteenth century text. Even though Spanish is my native language, I stumbled upon numerous words and expressions of which meaning I had a difficult time deducting. The use of a thesaurus as well as individual research was needed in order to remain loyal to the message that the author is trying to get across.

I hope that this translation can give the reader a feel for the novel, and at the same time introduce him to a type of literature that might be unfamiliar. It is by being exposed to a different type of writing that we can grow as readers.

EL MES DE DICIEMBRE DE 1863

Estábamos a fines del año de 1863, año desgraciado en que, como ustedes recordarán, ocupó el ejército francés a México y se fue extendiendo poco a poco, ensanchando el círculo de su dominación. Comenzó en los Estados centrales de la República, que ocupó también sin quemar un solo cartucho, porque nuestra táctica consistía solo en retirarnos para tomar posiciones en los Estados lejanos y preparar en ellos la defensa. Nuestros generales no pensaban en otra cosa, y quizá tenían razón. Estábamos en nuestros días nefastos, la desgracia nos perseguía, y cada batalla que hubiéramos presentado en semejante época, habría sido para nosotros un nuevo desastre.

Así pues, nos retirábamos, y las legiones francesas, acompañadas de sus aliados mexicanos, avanzaban sobre poblaciones inermes que muchas veces se veían, obligados por el terror, a recibirlos con arcos triunfales, y puede decirse que nuestros enemigos marchaban guiados por las columnas de polvo de nuestro ejército que se replegaba delante de ellos.

De esta manera las tres divisiones del ejército francomexicano, mandadas por Douay, Berthier y Mejía, salidas en los meses de octubre y noviembre de México en diferentes direcciones, a fin de envolver al ejército nacional y apoderarse de las mejores plazas del Interior, ocuparon sucesivamente Toluca, Querétaro, Morelia, Guadalajara y San Luis Potosí.

Como el general Comonfort había sido asesinado en Chamacuero por los Troncosos, precisamente cuando venía a ponerse a la cabeza del ejército nacional, su segundo, el general Uruga, quedó con el mando en jefe de nuestras tropas.

THE MONTH OF DECEMBER IN 1863

We were near the end of the year 1863, miserable year, in which, as you will all recall, the French military occupied Mexico, and extended its power progressively, widening the scope of its domination. It began in the central states of the Republic, which were also occupied without the need of any ammunition, because our tactic only consisted in retreating to distant states in order to prepare a defensive position there. Our generals did not think of anything else, and perhaps they were right. We were living grim days, misfortune pursued us, and in such a time, every battle we might have fought would have been a new disaster for us.

Thus, we retreated, and the French legions, accompanied by their Mexican allies, advanced over unarmed populations that many times found themselves—forced by fear—to welcome them with triumphal arches. And it can even be said that our enemies marched ahead, guided by the columns of dust left behind by our army who withdrew right in front of them.

In this way, the three divisions from the Francomexican army, led by Douay, Berthier and Mejía—having departed from the capital in different directions during the months of October and November, with the aim of surrounding the national army and taking control of the best plazas of the interior—occupied successively Toluca, Queretaro, Morelia, Guadalajara and San Luis Potosi.

Since General Comonfort had been assassinated in Chamacuero by the Troncosos, precisely when he had become the head of the national army, his second in command, General Uruga, became Commander-in-Chief of our troops.

Uraga determinó evacuar las plazas que ocupaba, seguramente con el designio de caer después sobre cualquier de ellas que hubiese tomado el enemigo, y salió de Querétaro con el grueso del ejército, ordenando al general Berriozábal, gobernador de Michoacán, que desocupase Morelia y se retirase a Uruapan para reunírsele después.

Los franceses entonces se apoderaron de Querétaro y Morelia. El grueso de nuestro ejército, con Uraga a la cabeza, se dirigió a la Piedad, en el Estado de Michoacán. Pocos días después Doblado evacuó Guanajuato y se dirigió a Lagos y a Zacatecas. El gobierno nacional también se retiró de San Luis Potosí, que ocupó Mejía, y se dirigió a Saltillo después del desastre que sufrió la división de Negrete al intentar el asalto de aquella plaza.

Así, pues, en pocos días, en dos meses escasos, el invasor se había extendido en el corazón del país, sin encontrar resistencia. Faltábale ocupar Zacatecas y Guadalajara. Esto se hizo un poco más tarde, y todo el círculo que se había conquistado quedó libre cuando Uraga, después de haber sido rechazado de la plaza de Morelia defendida por Márquez, se vio obligado a dirigirse al sur de Jalisco, donde aun pensó fortificarse en las Barrancas y resistir. Cuando Uraga tomó esta dirección, el general Arteaga evacuó también Guadalajara con las tropas que allí tenía y se retiró a Sayula, incorporándose después a Uraga. Bazaine, general en jefe del ejército francés, ocupó la capital de Jalisco.

Uraga resolved to evacuate the town centers he occupied surely with the intent of coming back to any one of them that might possibly be taken by the enemy. He left Queretaro with the bulk of the army, ordering general Berriozábal, governor of Michoacán to leave Morelia and head towards Uruapan and later join him there.

And so, the French took over Querétaro and Morelia. The bulk of our army with Uraga in command moved towards the city of Piedad, in the state of Michoacán. A few days later Doblado left Guanajuato and set off to Lagos and Zacatecas. The national government likewise withdrew from San Luis Potosí— which was later occupied by Mejía—and headed for Saltillo after the disaster suffered by the division of Negrete in an attempt to assault that town.

In this way then, in a few days, scarcely two months, the invader had penetrated to the heart of the country without finding any resistance. They only needed to occupy Zacatecas and Guadalajara. This was accomplished a bit later, and all of the area that had once been conquered was left free when Uraga who had been driven from the Plaza of Morelia defended by Márquez, was forced to move towards the south of Jalisco, where he still planned to fortify and set up resistance in the Barrancas. When Uraga took this direction, general Arteaga likewise evacuated Guadalajara with the troops he had installed there, and left for Sayula, later joining Uraga. Bazaine, commander-in-chief of the French army, occupied the capital of Jalisco.

Debo volver ahora un poco atrás, a los días en que nuestro ejército se dirigía a la Piedad en el mes de noviembre, para decir a ustedes que yo, bastante enfermo y sin colocación en el Cuerpo Médico militar, conseguí licencia del cuartel general para dirigirme a Guadalajara, y aproveché la salida de un pequeño cuerpo de caballería que el general envió a Arteaga, para incorporarme a él. Este cuerpo escoltaba un convoy de vestuario y armamento que se juzgó conveniente mandar a Guadalajara, donde el general Arteaga podía utilizarle.

Marchamos, pues, los soldados de ese cuerpo y yo, grandemente contrariados por no poder asistir a las funciones de armas que evidentemente iban a verificarse dentro de muy pocos días.

I must go back in time, to the days in which our army was marching towards the city of Piedad in the month of November, to tell you that although I was fairly sick and without a posting in the medical military body, received permission from the Army Headquarters to go to Guadalajara, and took advantage of the departure of a small cavalry group, sent to Arteaga by the general to join them. This group was escorting a convoy of uniforms and weaponry that someone judged convenient to send to Guadalajara, and where General Arteaga could make use of it.

We marched then, the soldiers from the group and I, greatly upset at not being able to attend to the operation of weapons that would evidently be confirmed within a few days.

EL COMANDANTE ENRIQUE FLORES

Debo cesar aquí en el fastidioso relato histórico que me he visto obligado a hacer, primero por esa inclinación que tenemos los que hemos servido en el ejército, a hablar de movimientos, maniobras y campañas, y además para establecer los hechos, fijar los lugares y marcar la época precisa de los acontecimientos.

Ahora comienzo mi novela, que por cierto no va a ser una novela militar, quiero decir, un libro de guerra con episodios de combates, sino una historia de sentimiento, historia íntima, ni yo puedo hacer otra cosa, pues carezco de imaginación para urdir tramas y para preparar golpes teatrales. Lo que voy a referir es verdadero; si no fuera así no lo conservaría tan fresco, por desgracia, en el libro fiel de mi memoria.

El coronel del cuerpo de que acabo de hablar era el guapísimo oficial: llamémosle X. . . Los nombres no hacen al caso y prefiero cambiarlos, porque tendría que nombrar a personas que viven aún, lo cual sería, por lo menos, mortificante para mí.

Mandaba uno de los escuadrones otro oficial, el comandante Enrique Flores, joven perteneciente a una familia de magnífica posición, gallardo, buen mozo, de maneras distinguidas, y que a las prendas de que acabo de hablar agregaba una no menos valiosa, y era la de ser absolutamente simpático. Era de esos hombres cuyos ojos parecen ejercer desde luego en la persona en quien se fijan un dominio irresistible y grato.

MAJOR ENRIQUE FLORES

I must stop here the fastidious historical narrative that I have found myself obligated to recount, first due to that tendency of those of us who have served in the military, to talk about movements, maneuvers and campaigns, and even to establish facts, determine the places, and mark the precise epoch of the events.

I now start my novel, which by the way will not be a military novel—by which I mean a book of war with episodes recounting battles— but rather a story of emotion, an intimate story: I cannot do anything else, for I lack the imagination to concoct plots and come up with plot twists. What I am going to relate is true; if it were not the case I would not have it so freshly preserved, by misfortune, in the loyal book of my memory.

The general of the army corps of which I have just spoken was a handsome official: lets call him X . . . Names are irrelevant and I prefer to change them, because I would have to name people that are still alive, which would be for me, at the very least, mortifying.

One of the squadrons was under the command of another official, major Enrique Flores, a young man belonging to a well-established family; elegant, a good-looking lad with distinguished manners, and to the qualities I have just spoken of he added one no less valuable, that of being absolutely charming. He was one of those men whose eyes seem to exert over the person they look upon an irresistible and pleasant feeling.

Tal vez por esto el comandante Flores era idolatrado por sus soldados, muy querido de sus compañeros y el favorito de su jefe, porque el coronel no tenía otra voluntad que la de Enrique. De modo que era el árbitro en su cuerpo, y los generales a cuyas órdenes había militado, conociendo la influencia que ejercía sobre su jefe y su prestigio entre la tropa, no perdían ocasión de halagarle, de colmarle de atenciones y de hacerle entrever un próximo y honroso ascenso.

Como era la época en que se franqueaban los escalones de los más altos empleos más fácilmente que nunca, susurrábase que el coronel sería ascendido a general, y que entonces Flores quedaría con el mando de su cuerpo, quizá con el carácter que aquél tenía.

Además, y esto es de suponerse, Flores era peligroso para las mujeres, era irresistible, y mil relatos de aventuras galantes y que revelaban su increíble fortuna en asuntos de amor, circulaban de boca en boca en el ejército.

Flores, por otra parte, no perdía oportunidad de hacer uso de sus relevantes prendas; y aunque el ejército, en aquel tiempo, no hacía más que marchas en opuestas direcciones y cruzar rápidamente por las ciudades, el comandante, sin descuidar sus deberes, encontraba momentos a propósito para galantear a las más hermosas jóvenes de los lugares que tocaba, no siendo nada difícil para él concluir una conquista en breves días y, a veces, en horas.

Perhaps it was for this reason that Major Flores was idolized by his soldiers, well loved by his mates, and his lieutenant's favorite, because the coronel did not have any other desire than pleasing Enrique. He was thus the mediator in his military corps and the generals under whose orders he had served—knowing the influence he exerted over his superior and his prestige in the troop—did not miss any opportunity to flatter him, to shower him with attention and to offer him a glimpse of a near and honorable promotion.

Since it was a time when one could easily climb the social ladder and ascend to the best employments than ever before, there was a rumor that the coronel would be promoted to general, and that Flores would thus remain in control of his battalion, given the character he possessed.

Furthermore, and this is only to be assumed, Flores presented a danger for women. He was irresistible, and thousands of gallant tales revealing his incredible fortune in the matters of love circulated from mouth to mouth in the army.

On the other hand, Flores never seized the opportunity to make use of his respectable uniform, and even though at the time the army did not do anything but march in opposite directions and quickly marched through cities, the major, without neglecting his duties, found time in which to woo the most beautiful young women wherever he found himself. It was not difficult for him to win over a woman's heart in a matter of days, sometimes even hours.

El hecho es que no salía de una ciudad un poco importante, sin llevar consigo dulces y gratos recuerdos de ella, ni dejaban de verter lágrimas por él los ojos más hermosos de la población.

Ya se sabía; tan luego como se tocaba la botasilla para prepararse a salir, tan luego como se oían los toques de marcha, mientras que los demás pasábamos indiferentes por los pueblos y las ciudades y sólo nos ocupábamos en hacer nuestras maletas y comprar provisiones, Enrique, después de dar las órdenes necesarias a sus capitanes, siempre tenía que escribir un pequeño billete de despedida, siempre se apartaba un momento de la columna para galopar en uno de sus soberbios caballos en dirección de la casa de sus amadas de un día, para estrecharles la mano y recibir, en cambio de tiernas miradas, un pañuelo húmedo de lagrimas, un rizo de cabellos, un retrato o una sortija.

¡Qué dicha de hombre!

No: y debo confesar a ustedes que Flores era seductor; su fisionomía era tan varonil como bella; tenía grandes ojos azules, grandes bigotes rubios, era hercúleo, bien formado, y tenía fama de valiente. Tocaba el piano con habilidad y buen gusto, era elegante por instinto, todo lo que él se ponía le caía maravillosamente, de modo que era el dandy por excelencia del ejército.

Gastador, garboso, alegre, burlón, altivo y aun algo vanidoso, tenía justamente todas las cualidades y todos los defectos que aman las mujeres y que son eficaces para cautivarlas.

The fact was that he never left a city that was somewhat important without taking away sweets and pleasant memories from the women he met, nor did the most beautiful eyes found in the town cease to shed tears for him.

We always knew that as soon as the bell was rung to prepare for departure, as soon as the sounds of marching were heard, while the rest of us passed indifferently through towns and cities, and only buried ourselves in packing our luggage and in buying supplies, Enrique, once he had given the necessary orders to his captains, always had to write a short farewell letter. He always strayed from the military troops and galloped off on his own in the direction of some ephemeral lover's house, to kiss her hand, and receive in return for amorous glances, a handkerchief drenched with tears, a lock of hair, a portrait or a ring.

What a happy man!

Now! And I must confess to you all that Flores was a seducer, his appearance was as masculine as it was beautiful. He had big blue eyes, and a large and blond mustache; he was Herculean and well built, and he had the reputation of being valiant. He played the piano with skill and good taste, he was naturally elegant, and everything he wore on suited him magnificently, so that he was par excellence the dandy of the army.

An excessive spender, glamorous, cheerful, a teaser, arrogant and a bit conceited, he had all the qualities as well as shortcomings that women love, and that are effective in captivating them.

Por eso las muchachas más guapas de Querétaro, primero, y después de Guadalajara, se morían por bailar con él, gustaban de apoyarse en su brazo y saboreaban con delicia su conversación chispeante de gracia, salpicada de agudeza ingeniosas y, sobre todo, galante.

Enrique era el tipo completo de león parisiense en su más elegante expresión, y se desprendía de él, si me es permitida esta figura, ese delicado perfume de distinción que caracteriza a las gentes de buen tono.

Todavía más. Flores era jugador y, por una excepción de la conocida regla, ganaba mucho. No parecía sino que un genio tutelar velaba por este joven y le abría siempre risueño las puertas del santuario del amor, del placer y de la fortuna. Era seguro que cuando nosotros estábamos en quiebra, Flores tenía en su bolsillo algunos centenares de onzas de oro y ricas joyas que valían un tesoro en aquellos tiempos.

Flores no esquivaba jamás la ocasión de prestar un servicio, y sus amigos le adoraban por su generosidad.

Me he detenido en la descripción del carácter del primero de mis personajes, porque tengo en ello mi idea: deseo que ustedes le conozcan perfectamente y comprendan de antemano la razón de varios sucesos que tengo que narrar.

Tal era el comandante Enrique Flores.

For these reasons, the most beautiful women of Querétaro, first, and then those of Guadalajara, were dying to dance with him. They took great pleasure from resting on his arm and savored with delight his graceful, ingenious and above all charming conversation.

Enrique was a Parisian lion in its most elegant expression, and from him wafted— if I may use this image to describe him—that delicate and distinct aroma that characterizes people of good taste.

Furthermore, Flores was a gambler, and as an exception that deviated from the known rule, he won a lot. It seemed that a tutelary spirit watched over this young man, and with a beaming countenance always opened the doors to the sanctuary of love, of pleasure, and of fortune. It was certain that whenever we were bankrupt, Flores had in his pocket some hundreds of ounces of gold and precious jewels that were worth a treasure in those times.

Flores never missed the chance to lend a favor, and his friends adored him for his generosity.

I have taken my time in describing the personality of my first character, because in it lies my intention: I want you to know him perfectly and understand beforehand the reason for various events that I am about to relate.

Such was Major Enrique Flores.

EL COMANDANTE FERNANDO VALLE

Había también en el mismo cuerpo, y mandando el segundo escuadrón, un joven comandante que se llamaba Fernando Valle. Era justamente lo contrario de Flores, el reverso del simpático y amable carácter que acabo de pintar a largas pinceladas.

Valle era un muchacho de veinticinco años como Flores, pero de cuerpo raquítico y endeble; moreno, pero tampoco de ese moreno agradable de los españoles, ni de ese moreno oscuro de los mestizos, sino de ese color pálido y enfermizo que revela o una enfermedad crónica o costumbres desordenadas.

Tenía los ojos pardos y regulares, nariz un poco aguileña, bigote pequeño y negro, cabellos lacios, oscuros y cortos, manos flacas y trémulas. Su boca regular tenía a veces un pliegue que daba a su semblante un aire de altivez desdeñosa que ofendía, que hacia mal.

Taciturno, siempre sumido en profundas cavilaciones, distraído, metódico, sumiso con sus superiores, aunque traicionaba su aparente humildad el pliegue altanero de sus labios, severo y riguroso con sus inferiores, económico, laborioso, reservado, frío, este joven tenía aspecto repugnante y, en efecto, era antipático para todo el mundo.

Sus jefes le soportaban, y se veían obligados a tenerle consideración porque mas de una vez en la campaña de Puebla, primera que había hecho en su vida, había dado pruebas de un valor temerario, de un arrojo que parecía inspirado por un ardiente deseo de elevarse pronto o de acabar, sucumbiendo, con algún dolor secreto que torturaba su corazón.

MAJOR FERNANDO VALLE

In the same military corps, and in charge of the second squadron, was a young major by the name of Fernando Valle. He was the exact opposite of Flores, the other side of the coin to the likeable and generous character that I have just portrayed with sweeping brushstrokes.

Valle was a young man of twenty-five years, just like Flores, but with a rickety and weak body; dark-skinned, yet unlike the lovely swarthy complexion of the Spaniards, or that dark-skinned tone of the mestizos, but rather a pale and sickly color that reveals a chronic illness or unhealthy habits.

He had brown and ordinary eyes, his nose was a bit aquiline, his moustache was small and black, his hair was straight, dark and short, and his hands were thin and trembling. His ordinary mouth sometimes had a small crease that gave his countenance a haughty and disdainful aspect that offended, and displeased.

Taciturn, always deeply immersed in reflection, distracted, methodical, submissive with his superiors, even though his humble aspect tended to betray the arrogant fold of his lips, strict and rigorous with his inferiors, economical, hard-working, reserved, and cold, this young man had a repugnant appearance and appeared unpleasant to everyone.

His superiors tolerated him, and saw it as their duty to treat him with respect because more than once in the Puebla campaign—the first one he carried out in his life—he had given proof of a daring courage, of a bravery that seemed inspired by an ardent desire to quickly ascend to a higher social status or to rid himself of some painful secret that tortured his heart.

Hubiérase dicho que, desafiando a la muerte, había querido humillar a sus jefes que combatían con la prudencia del valor reposado y experto.

En el ejército era un advenedizo, porque había aparecido como soldado raso en las filas el año de 1862, ascendido luego a cabo por su aplicación, después a sargento en la Cumbres de Acultzingo, a subteniente (servía entonces en un cuerpo de infantería), luego a teniente después del 5 de Mayo y, por último, a capitán.

Como tal había tomado parte en la defensa de la plaza de Puebla en 1863, sirviendo entonces en el batallón mixto de Querétaro, a las órdenes del valiente y malogrado Herrera y Cairo.

No cayó prisionero, sino que pudo evadirse de la ciudad y se presentó al gobierno en México, que le ascendió a comandante y le destino a servir en el cuerpo de caballería en que se hallaba actualmente.

Aplicado con asiduidad a esta para el nueva arma, había aprovechado tanto su tiempo, que se le citaba como el oficial más inteligente y más capaz, por lo cual y por su carácter frío y reservado, sus compañeros le profesaban un odio reconcentrado y mortal.

—Evidentemente, este muchacho escondía un proyecto siniestro, estaba inspirado por una ambición colosal, y quien sabe. . . el quería subir, y aparentaba servir a la República como un medio de llegar a su objeto. No era, pues, un patriota, sino un ambicioso, un malvado encubierto.

Esto se decían los oficiales en voz alta, esto se decía el coronel, esto se decía el mismo Flores, y mas de una vez Valle tuvo que sufrir los sangrientos sarcasmos de todos, y los devoró en silencio y palideciendo de rabia.

One would have said that, in defying death, he wanted to humiliate his leaders, who fought with the prudence of a skilled and unhurried bravery.

In the army he was an upstart, because he had appeared as a private in the year of 1862, later ascending through his effort to the rank of sergeant in the Cumbres de Acultzingo, then to sub-lieutenant (he served back then in an infantry corps), to lieutenant after the Battle of Cinco de Mayo, and ultimately, to captain.

As such, he had taken part in defending the plaza of Puebla in 1863, serving back then in the mixed battalion of Querétaro, under the orders of the valiant and deceased Herrera y Cairo.

He was not taken prisoner, but rather was able to flee from the city and present himself to the government in the capital, who promoted him to major and placed him in the cavalry corps in which he now found himself.

Having assiduously applied himself in his new role, he had taken so much advantage of his time, that he was mentioned as being the most intelligent and capable officer, for which, due to his cold and reserved character, his fellow soldiers professed for him a devoted and deadly hate.

It is evident that this young man was hiding a sinister project, inspired by a colossal ambition, and who knows . . . he wanted to be promoted and pretended to serve the Republic as a way to reach his goal. He wasn't a patriot, but a careerist, an evil person undercover.

These things were said out loud by the officers, these things the coronel said, Flores did likewise, and more than once, Valle was the butt of hurtful jokes; he received them in silence, turning pale with fury.

—Él no es cobarde, él sufre nuestros insultos y evita toda pendencia; luego abriga una mira particular a cuya realización sacrifica hasta su amor propio.

Esto añadían en coro los oficiales.

Además, Valle ni pedía un servicio a nadie ni lo hacía. Guardaba su poco dinero, gastábale con parsimonia y evitaba toda ocasión de comprometerse a pagar en un convite la comida y el vino de sus compañeros, por lo cual regularmente comía aparte o en diferente fonda, siempre solitario y siempre económico.

Esta sobriedad calculada, su falta de buen humor, su aversión a los vicios a que es inclinada la juventud militar, le daba un aire de gazmoñería que no podía menos de atraerle la enemistad de las gentes.

Así cuando algún oficial, porque todos los demás se amaban fraternalmente, estaba enfermo o metido en algún apuro, todo el mundo volaba a su socorro, se le prodigaban los ciudadanos más solícitos, se velaba a la cabecera de su cama, se le facilitaba dinero, se le asistía, en fin, como en familia.

Pero cuando Valle, que tenía, a pesar de su aparente raquitismo, una salud robusta, solía estar achacoso, o herido, como acababa de sucederle a consecuencia de una escaramuza, nadie le hacía el menor caso; se le trataba como a un perro, y el orgulloso comandante tenía que preparar su hilas con una sola mano y que tomar sus tisanas y beber agua en su jarro con infinitos trabajos, porque rehusaba hasta los servicios de un viejo soldado que le servía, quien, por otra parte, le quería poco.

“He isn’t a coward, he takes our insults and avoids any quarrel; he then cherishes a particular motive whose attainment he will sacrifice his own love.”

This the officers added in chorus.

Besides, Valle didn’t ask for any favors nor did he ever do others any. He saved his small amount of money, spent it wisely and avoided any situation in which he must might find himself obliged to pay for the meal and wine of his mates, which is why he usually ate alone or in a different tavern, always lonely and always spending little.

This calculated sobriety, his lack of humor, his aversion towards the vices to which military youth are inclined, gave him an air of priggishness that inevitably attracted enmity from others.

Thus, because all of them shared a fraternal love for each other, when an officer was sick or found himself in a difficult situation, everyone ran to help him. The most obliging fellows were at his disposal; they would stay up at his bedside, offer him money, in other words, he was helped as one would be in a family.

Yet when Valle, who enjoyed—in spite of his rickety appearance—a robust health, was sick or injured—as had happened to him as the consequence of a skirmish— nobody paid the least attention to him. He was treated like a dog, and the haughty major had to prepare his bandage with a single hand, take his herbal tea and drink water from his jug with tremendous effort, because he refused even the services from an old soldier that served him, who, it has to be said, liked him very little.

Francamente, hasta nosotros los médicos, hombres de caridad y que no consultamos nuestras simpatías para ser útiles a los que sufren, hasta nosotros, digo, repugnábamos acercarnos a él, porque sentíamos una invencible antipatía viendo a ese pequeño oficial con su mirada ceñuda, su color pálido e impuro y su boca despreciativa.

—La tisana que me recetó usted, doctor, no me ha hecho provecho alguno —me dijo un día en Querétaro cuando estaba atacado de fiebre a consecuencia de la herida.

Dígame estas palabras con tal desdén, con tal acento, que en un arranque de cólera le repliqué:

—Pues si no le hace a usted provecho, arrójela.

Él me miró fijamente con sus ojos hundidos, y temblando por la calentura, se levantó, tomó su jarro de agua fría, bebió hasta hartarse y se volvió del lado de la pared.

Indignado yo de tamaña insolencia, salí refunfuñando.

¡Qué me importa que te lleve el diablo!

Creí que se pondría peor y avisé a alguno de mis compañeros para que fuese a asistirle; él me manifestó que le sería desagradable, y no fue a verle.

Al día siguiente salimos de Querétaro.

—¡Una camilla para el comandante herido! —pidió en el patio del hospital el jefe del Cuerpo, sabiendo que nadie se había acordado de Valle.

Frankly, even we doctors, men of charity, who do not think twice before helping those that suffer, yes even we, I must say, were disgusted to get close to him, because we sensed an overwhelming antipathy, looking at that small officer with his frowning stare, his pale and impure color and his disdainful mouth.

“The tisane you prescribed to me hasn’t been helping me doctor” – he told me one day in Querétaro when he was feverish from the injury.

He said these words to me with such disdain, and with such emphasis, that in a burst of anger I replied, “Well if it isn’t helping you, throw it away.”

He stared at me with his sunken eyes, and shaking from the fever, he got up, took his jug of cold water, drank until he had had enough and turned his back to me, facing the wall.

Outraged from such insolence, I left grumbling.

“What do I care if the devil takes you!”

I thought he would get worst and notified one of my colleagues to assist him; he stated that it would be unpleasant, and didn’t go to see him.

On the next day we left Queretaro.

“A stretcher for the injured major!” asked the chief of the group, knowing that nobody had remembered Valle.

Pero los soldados estaban demasiado atareados con su equipo, nosotros ocupados en nuestros aprestos de viaje, los soldados de ambulancia se encogían de hombros, y el comandante quedó abandonado.

Íbamos acordándonos de él, ya en la columna de camino y en marcha, cuando le vimos a la cabeza de su escuadrón, sereno, callado, cejijunto y llevando el brazo envuelto y colgado del cuello.

—Realmente hay algo de misterioso en la fuerza de espíritu de este muchacho — nos dijimos

—¿Será un héroe futuro?

—¡Bah! tiene más aspecto de traidor que de héroe; él medita algo, no hay duda —se me contestó.

Y así continuamos hasta que él sanó sin necesidad de más asistencia de facultativo.

But the soldiers were too busy with their equipment, we the doctors were worried about our preparations for the trip, the ambulance soldiers shrugged their shoulders, and thus the major was left abandoned.

The memory of him slowly came back to us while we were marching on the path, when we saw him at the front of his squadron, serene, silent, frowning and with his arm wrapped and hanging from his neck.

“There is something truly mysterious in the strong spirit of this young man”, we told each other.

“Perhaps he’s a future hero”

“Bah! He looks more like a traitor than a hero; he’s got something on his mind, there is no doubt,” someone replied.

In this way we continued until he recovered without the necessity of any more medical assistance.

GUADALAJARA DE LEJOS

Hallábase Guadalajara en aquellos días llena de animación. A propósito, me parece conveniente hacer a ustedes la descripción de esta hermosa ciudad que tal vez no conozcan.

Guadalajara, que a justo título puede llamarse la reina de Occidente, es sin duda alguna la primera ciudad del interior, pues si bien León tiene una población más numerosa, y Guanajuato la tiene casi igual, la circunstancia de ser la primera de estas dos ciudades muy pobre y escasa de monumentos, y de estar la segunda situada en un terreno áspero y sinuoso, aunque rico en metales, hace que Guadalajara por su belleza, por su situación topográfica, por su antigua importancia en tiempo de los virreyes —la que no ha disminuido en tiempo de la República— sea considerada superior, no sólo a las ciudades que he mencionado, sino a todas las de la República.

La antigua capital de la Nueva Galicia, que contaba en el año de 1738 mas de ochenta mil habitantes, según afirma Mota Padilla, cronista de todos los pueblos de Occidente, ateniéndose a los padrones de su tiempo, parece conservar una población igual a la que tenía en el siglo pasado, aunque, según los datos estadísticos recientes, se afirma que disminuye.

Esto, y el hecho de ser el centro agrícola y comercial de los Estados Occidentales, así como el haber representado siempre un papel importantísimo en nuestras guerras civiles, dan a Guadalajara un interés que no puede menos de inspirar la curiosidad más grande a los viajeros mexicanos que la ven por primera vez.

GUADALAJARA FROM AFAR

Guadalajara was full of life back in those days. In fact, it seems convenient for me to give you a description of this beautiful city that you might not know.

Guadalajara— a city that can be properly referred to as the Queen of the Occident—is without a doubt the principal city of the interior. Even if Leon has a larger population, and Guanajuato's is almost as big; the fact that the former is very impoverished and lacking historical monuments, and the latter is situated in an arid and sinous landscape (even though it is rich in minerals), cause Guadalajara, due to its beauty and its topographical location, as well as to its former importance in the time of the viceroy (which has not diminished since the founding of the Republic) to be considered superior, not only in comparison to the cities I have just mentioned, but to all the cities in the Republic.

The former capital of Nueva Galicia, which had more than eighty thousand inhabitants in the year of 1738, according to Mota Padilla, a chronicler of all the towns and villages of Western Mexico who always abided to the census of his time, seems to have preserved a similar population to the one it had in the previous century. Still recent statistical data confirm that it is decreasing.

All of the aforementioned, and the fact that it is the agricultural and commercial center of the Western States, as well as always having represented an important role in our civil wars, give Guadalajara a particular value that can only inspire the greatest curiosity in Mexican travelers who see it for the first time.

Yo particularmente sentía un placer inmenso en ir acercándome instante por instante a la bella ciudad que había oído nombrar a menudo como la tierra de los hombres valientes y las mujeres hermosas, y esto me compensaba en parte de la contrariedad que sufría por verme alejado del círculo de los sucesos militares.

Guadalajara está separada del centro de la República por una faja de desierto que comienza en Lagos, y que con la única interrupción de Tepatitlán, pequeño oasis famosos por la belleza de las huríes que le habitan, concluye a las puertas de la gran ciudad; de modo que ésta se muestra, al viajero que la divisa a lo lejos, más orgullosa en su soledad, semejante a una mujer que, dotada de una hermosura regia, se separa del grupo que forman bellezas vulgares, para ostentarse con toda la majestad de sus soberbios encantos.

Por el lado de las poblaciones centrales de México, Guadalajara ésta defendida naturalmente, por el caudaloso río de Santiago que, nacido en la gran mesa de Anáhuac, y después de formar el lago de Chapala, va a desembocar en el mar Pacífico.

Por el occidente se alza gigantesca y grandiosa una cadena de montañas cuyos picos azules se destacan del fondo de un cielo sereno y radiante. Es la cadena de la Sierra Madre que atraviesa serpenteando el Estado de Jalisco, y cuyos ramales toman los nombres de Sierra de Mascota, Sierra de Alicia y más al norte, el de la Sierra de Nayarit, yendo después a formar las inmensas moles auríferas de Durango, hasta salir de la República para tomar en la América del Norte el nombre de Montañas Pedregosas (Rocky Mountains).

I in particular felt an immense pleasure in approaching the beautiful city which I had often heard referred to as the land of valiant men and beautiful women. Approaching this city compensated some of the disappointment I suffered from seeing myself separated from the circle of military activity.

Guadalajara was separated from the center of the Republic by a desolate strip of land that starts in Lagos, and apart from Tepatitlan, a small oasis known for the beauty of the houris that reside there, ends at the entrance to the great city. It is in this way that the city is perceived by the traveler, who sees it from afar, as being proud of its solitude, resembling a woman, who graced with a magnificent beauty, detaches herself from the group that forms the common allures in order to boast of the refinement of her splendid charms.

Looking East, toward the central states of Mexico, Guadalajara is naturally protected by the fast-flowing Santiago River— beginning in the basin of Anahuac— and after having formed the lake of Chapala, it flows into the Pacific Ocean.

Looking West, a gigantic and noble chain of mountains rise, showing their blue peaks that distinguish themselves from the radiant and serene background of the blue sky. It is the chain of the Sierra Madre that meandears through the state of Jalisco, and whose branches take the name of Sierra de Mascota, Sierra de Alicia, and farther north, that of Sierra de Nayarit, later forming the colossal gold-bearing mines of Durango, until they leave the republic, adopting the name of Rocky Mountains in North America.

En el centro de este valle, trazado por el gran río y por la gigantesca cordillera, se halla asentada Guadalajara. Magnífico es el aspecto que presenta al que le ve, llegando por el lado del occidente, y después de trasponer las últimas colinas que bordean la ribera del Santiago, por el paso de Tololotlan.

La vista no puede menos de quedar encantada al ver brotar de la llanura, como una visión mágica, a la bella capital de Jalisco, con sus soberbias y blancas torres y cúpulas, y sus elegantes edificios que brillan entre el fondo verde oscuro de sus dilatados jardines.

Todavía más que Puebla, Guadalajara parece una ciudad oriental, pues, rodeada como esta de una llanura estéril y solitaria, encierra en su seno todas esas bellezas que traen a la memoria la imagen de las antiguas ciudades del desierto, tantas veces descritas en las poéticas leyendas de la Biblia.

Efectivamente, la llanura que rodea a la ciudad da un aspecto extraño al paisaje, que no se observa al aproximarse a ninguna de las otras ciudades de la República.

En las mañanas del estío, o en los días del otoño y del invierno, como en los que llegue por primera vez a Guadalajara, aquel valle es triste y severo; el cielo se presenta radioso y uniforme, pero el sol abrasa y parece derramar sobre la tierra sedienta torrentes de fuego.

La brisa es tibia y seca; y el suelo, pedregoso o tapizado con una espesa alfombra de esa arena menuda y bermeja que los antiguos indios llamaron con el nombre genérico de Xalli, de donde se deriva Jalisco, se asemeja a la rambla de un inmenso lago disecado, o el cráter de un volcán extinguido hace millares de siglos.

In the center of this valley, traversed by the great river and by the gigantic mountain range, lies Guadalajara. The view that it delivers is magnificent to the one that sees it, coming from the west and having crossed the last hills that border the bank of Santiago through the Tololotlan pass.

The eyes can only be enthralled upon seeing the beautiful capital emerging from the plain, like a magical vision, with its magnificent white towers and domes, and its elegant buildings that shimmer against the pine-green background of its extensive gardens.

Even more than Puebla, Guadalajara looks like an oriental city, surrounded by a sterile and solitary plain. It encloses in its core all those beautiful charms that bring to mind an image of the ancient cities of the desert, many times described in the poetic tales of the bible.

In fact, the plain that surrounds the city gives the landscape a strange aspect that is not noticeable when approaching any of the other cities of the republic.

On summer mornings, or in the days of autumn and winter—such as the ones in which I arrived in Guadalajara for the first time— the valley is somber and stern; the sky appears radiant and uniform, yet the sun burns and seems to spill hungry streams of fire over the earth.

The breeze is warm and dry, and the ground, rocky or covered with a thick carpet from the thin and auburn sand that the ancient Indians referred to with the generic name of Xalli—from where Jalisco is derived— or the crater of a volcano that perished a thousands of years ago.

Conclusion

Altamirano's novel *Clemencia* serves as a literary medium that helps propagate the author's liberal political views and establish an ideal conception of the Mexican individual of the nineteenth century. Fernando Valle, a timid and awkwardly social character, embodies the qualities of the modern Mexican citizen, as someone who is patriotic, liberal, and remains stoic when facing death, knowing that his sacrifice will help bring his country closer to stability and modernity. However, in order for there to be a notion of who the "ideal Mexican" is, the presence of a foreign invader is needed as a foil to help reflect on the nation's unique features, and propel the writers of nineteenth century Mexico in the quest for self-identity.

Recalling Altamirano's liberal project, Latin American writers in the nineteenth century were encouraged to create a narrative that would elucidate a history that in the real political realm seemed nebulous and incomplete. As Sommer claims, the novel acted as a filler in a nation that was full of gaps by directing its "history towards a future ideal." Following Sommer's argument, literature had the capacity to "intervene in history and help construct it"; the romance novels did more than entertain readers, "they developed a narrative formula for resolving continuing conflicts" (8). Altamirano had this in mind when writing *Clemencia*; he believed the novel to be an efficient tool that would educate the masses on their history, customs and traditions. Gaining knowledge would enable them to climb up the social ladder.

Nonetheless, the journey of self-quest is one that has no defined answer. Nineteenth century Mexican writers, like Altamirano, attempted to answer one version of a question that has troubled humanity for centuries. Questions such as Who are we? What do we stand

for? Are perhaps as relevant in today's political setting as they were in Mexico one hundred and fifty years ago. Mexican contemporary writers, Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, are examples of authors that have tackled the question of Mexican identity from a more modern perspective. In Paz' *the Labyrinth of Solitude*, the quest for Mexican identity is the main theme that is broached in the collection of essays. Paz makes reference to the psychology of the Mexican individual, describing him in a very similar way Altamirano described Valle, as hermetic and in a constant struggle with his place in society. This psychological phase is attributed to the individual's mixed race, indigenous and Spanish. His double heritage throws him into a stage of confusion. Such diversity carries detrimental consequences, including racial prejudice and social inequality, phenomenon that remain ever-present today. It thus becomes difficult if not impossible to unite such diverse cultural elements under a single archetype.

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