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Closing History's Door: Nationality, Identity, and the Wars of Independence in Nineteenth-Century Latin American Historical Novels

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CLOSING HISTORY'S DOOR: NATIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LATIN AMERICAN HISTORICAL NOVELS

NINETEENTH-CENTURY Latin American historical novelists were frequently faced with conceptual and narrative problems rooted in their attempts to transfer the European model of the historical novel and its generic rules to a Latin American context. Latin American authors had to contend with the marked differences between the ideological presuppositions of the European historical novel and nineteenth-century Latin American concepts of the relationships among identity, nationality, and history. The European paradigm was established by Walter Scott's historical novels, which received an enthusiastic reception in Europe and the Americas. As Georg Lukács explains, European authors of the "classic" historical novel – the type perfected by Scott – envisioned their history as an unbroken continuum and wrote historical novels whose purpose was to reflect the clear connections between past and present.¹ *Ivanhoe* and the *Waverley* novels, Scott's best known works, were translated into Spanish and published in Mexico and Lima as early as the 1820s.² Nineteenth-century Latin American novelists acknowledged their debt to Scott as the founder of the modern genre of the historical novel; indeed, the prologues to their works frequently voiced the opinion that Scott's *Waverley* novels formed the ideal to which their own novels aspired and modestly noted their inability to vie with the "master" of the genre.

While European historical novelists saw history as a seamless continuum stretching from past to present, Latin American writers believed that the Wars of Independence had created a break with the past that in turn was the necessary condition for their historical existence.³ They established their own identity as Latin Americans on the basis of the forcible expulsion of the Spanish from the continent and a concomitant rejection of the Spanish colonial past. In this way, the ideological project of the genre of the historical novel – the desire to reveal the connections between past and present – came into conflict with its Latin American context, in which the past was violently severed from the present. This conceptual disjuncture made it difficult to sustain the gov-

¹ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: U Nebraska P, 1983). See especially "The Classical Form of the Historical Novel," pp. 19-88.

² Amado Alonso, *Ensayo sobre la novela histórica* (Buenos Aires: Coni, 1942) 61-3.

³ Benedict Anderson, in describing this phenomenon, refers variously to "a profound feeling that a radical break with the past was occurring," "this profound sense of newness," and "a profound rupture with the existing world." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; New York: Verso, 1991) 193.

erning generic conventions of the historical novel in Latin America. Because the founding moment of Latin American history was seen to originate in a discontinuity and a disruption, Latin American historical novelists had to construct a version of history that took into account the violent separation between past and present without succumbing to it. Their dilemma sprang from the fact that they had to have recourse to history precisely because concepts such as "nation" and "identity" could only be grounded on the foundation provided by the past; but they had denied that past in order to bring about their own existence. In their novels, they both returned to and rejected history as the condition of their own existence as citizens of independent nations. The problematic status of history and historiography resulted in historical novels that called into question the relationship between history and narrative and that cast doubt on the possibility of a seamless integration of the two.

Historical novels about the Spanish American Wars of Independence were particularly fraught with such questions about the status of history, narrative, and the past. These novels returned to the moment of the break with the Spanish colonial past – the break with history that was necessary for establishing Latin American identity but that signified a violent interruption in history, narrative, and plot. Writers who chose to write about the period in which Latin America fought for independence were especially concerned with constructing viable narratives that justified the Wars of Independence on the basis of the inadequacy of Spanish colonial rule and also espoused fresh ideologies and politics to replace the exhausted Spanish empire. Hence, in novels such as Alberto Blest Gana's *Durante la Reconquista* (1897), we see an uneasy attempt to construct an elaborate metaphor linking family to nation; this same metaphor functions more successfully in *La loca de la guardia* (1895), a late novel by the Argentine historian Vicente Fidel López. In Uruguay, Eduardo Acevedo Díaz wrote a tetralogy detailing the independence of his country and the rise of the gaucho caudillo José Artigas in an effort to find an autochthonous model of government. Because Spanish colonial history no longer served them as a suitable paradigm for the foundation of the new nations, these writers had to look elsewhere for models of how to construct and sustain functional democratic societies.

The Bolivian author Nataniel Aguirre's 1885 novel *Juan de la Rosa: Memorias del último soldado de la Independencia* forcefully foregrounds the joint paradox and necessity of writing historical novels in nineteenth-century Latin America. As did such novelists as Blest Gana, López, and Acevedo Díaz, Aguirre proposed to create a viable paradigm of nationalism for Latin Americans and, more specifically, for his Bolivian readers. But at the same time that his novel advances a model for the construction of national identity, Aguirre problematizes that model by calling into question received notions about historiography, the basis of nationalism, and the relationships between history and fiction, nation and narration. Both the narrative structure and the content of *Juan de la Rosa* vividly dramatize the problems besetting the production of historical novels in nineteenth-century Latin America. The novel itself becomes a site where historiography is destabilized, as the eponymous protagonist, who serves as both narrator and historian, struggles to incorporate contestatory voices and histories into his autobiography. By drawing attention to the man-

ner in which the novel is produced, Aguirre indicates that historical narrative itself can never be fixed or stable; instead, it is continually under construction. Within the novel, the hero's adventures take him on an exploration of personal and political history and lead him to discover the significance of such historical narratives to his own life and to his nation. As a witness to the Bolivian War of Independence, the protagonist occupies the privileged position of being able to watch national history in the making at the same time that he attempts – and fails – to discover the truth about his family background. Aguirre uses the convergence of the two plots about the progress of the war on the one hand and the personal maturation of the protagonist on the other to argue that national and individual identity depend equally on historical understanding. Simultaneously, however, the fact that the novel concludes with Juan's inability to access his past completely indicates that true and total historical knowledge is impossible.

Juan de la Rosa first appeared as a serial in the newspaper *El Heraldo* of Cochabamba in 1885, shortly after the War of the Pacific among Peru, Chile, and Bolivia. The war, a dispute over the Antofagasta desert and its profitable mines, had been a complete disaster for Bolivia. Aguirre experienced this national catastrophe firsthand since he held the rank of colonel in the army and led a regiment of ill-prepared, inadequately-armed Bolivians into battle. After Bolivia's humiliating defeat, he held several government posts and finally retired to Cochabamba, where he wrote *Juan de la Rosa*. In the face of what he saw as the military and moral decay of his nation, Aguirre produced a novel that strove to connect family history to political experience in order to establish the personal investment of Bolivian patriots in their country. As the subtitle indicates, *Juan de la Rosa* purports to be the autobiography of the last surviving soldier of the Bolivian War of Independence. However, the events of the novel take place in 1810 and 1811, during which time this "soldier" is still a young boy. The narrative begins immediately before the armed insurrection against Spanish rule erupts. When Juan's mother Rosa dies, he is taken in by Teresa de Altamira, an upper-class royalist widow. Juan travels to the mountains, where he witnesses the crushing defeat of the rebel forces at the battle of Amiraya, and then returns to Cochabamba and Teresa's house. Towards the end of the novel, his protector Fray Justo dies and bequeaths his papers to Juan, who discovers in them his true paternity. Juan searches for his natural father but arrives just as the man draws his last breath. This deathbed scene concludes the novel.

From the outset, the novel foregrounds the process of historiography and its own conditions of production, drawing attention to the ways in which the text is composed of other, pre-existing narratives and documents. A prologue to the novel dated November 14, 1884, explains the genesis of the text. According to Juan, he decided to write his memoirs after his wife Mercedes informed him that he was the last surviving soldier from the wars of independence. He learned this when she berated him for a bout of drunken behavior, shrieking the epithets: "¡Espantoso vestigio! ¡Última carroña de los tiempos de la Independencia!" (xvii). In this way the narrative is tinged with irony from the very beginning, as the elderly soldier's retelling transforms his wife's scolding into a call to nostalgic reminiscence. Mercedes makes further editorial in-

trusions into the text. Not only does she ask Juan to insert a quote from another text into his history, but a footnote from the editor explains that Mercedes has pasted into Juan's manuscript a note to the reader contesting his version of her critical behavior, thus physically altering his history in order to make her own story legible.

Such contestatory moments are emblematic of the novel's desire to assemble a plethora of voices and texts within the confines of Juan's autobiography. Rather than merely being Juan's monologue, the text of *Juan de la Rosa* functions as an amalgam of history and historiography. The narrator is able to treat his memoirs in this way because of his experiences in the wars of independence. Far from being a soldier who actively participated in winning his country's freedom, Juan was a mere child. His function vis-à-vis history is to observe it, and, seventy years later, to write it down in his memoirs. In a characteristic phrase, he says, "fui espectador [...] de una curiosísima escena" (24), adding a little later, "todo esto, de que ahora doy testimonio, lo vi yo mejor que nadie" (32). His text collects not only these eyewitness accounts but also includes speeches he has heard and letters and proclamations sent by rebel leaders and royalists alike. Moreover, Juan hears historical narratives and political harangues from different characters and indicates at several points that he has access to archival sources and accounts written by other historians, whose versions he alternately confirms and denies.

The novel's relationship to and construction of history is made even more complex by the fact that Aguirre presents the text as an autobiography, which means that two levels of narration – the time of writing and the time of the events described – are continually in play. Many of the events described in the narrative are told from the perspective of the child Juan, purposefully excluding explanations that stem from the privileged knowledge held by his older self. For example, the story of his true parentage remains concealed from the young Juan and the reader until the moment when the boy reads Fray Justo's papers. At other moments, however, Aguirre allows the adult narrator to intervene and clarify the meaning of events Juan did not fully understand at the moment he experienced them. In this way, the description of the September 14 uprising is recounted from the child's point of view as he runs through the streets shouting with the mob. But the older Juan inserts explanatory footnotes and relates this scene to the political discourse his younger self soon hears from Fray Justo. The adult narrator frequently adds editorial comments and opinions granted to him by his mature experience and, more importantly, by the benefit of hindsight. In these ways, Aguirre shows that the process of constructing a history involves mediating among conflicting accounts, incorporating and subsuming contestatory versions into one narrative, and shifting among multiple perspectives and temporal locations. Aguirre not only describes the ways in which history is written, but enacts them; his novel insistent-ly points to its own mode of production, calling attention to the instability and inherent incompleteness of historical texts.⁴

⁴ Alba María Paz Soldán has also noted the organization of the narrative as an autobiography, but argues that the adult narrator's voice dominates and controls the novel so as to create a univocal version of history, rather than allowing for the existence of multiple histories.

On a formal level, then, *Juan de la Rosa* demonstrates the problematics of historiography in nineteenth-century Latin America. But the plot of the novel also brings to the forefront questions of history, narrative, and identity. Juan uncovers his own family history at the same time that he witnesses the beginnings of Bolivian national history. Indeed, as Fray Justo tells him, his family history is political history: Juan is the great-grandson of Alejo Catalayud, a mestizo who in 1730 participated in an uprising against the Spanish. Significantly, Juan hears this tale after participating in the September 14 demonstrations against the royalists, a confusing experience about which he says to Fray Justo, "no sé bien todavía lo que hemos hecho todos, ni de cómo ha sucedido esto desde el amanecer" (36). The story of Catalayud is meant to educate Juan about the causes of the current struggle for independence, about his family's role in that fight, and about his own duty to the Bolivian cause. Fray Justo makes explicit the connections between the earlier protests against Spanish rule and the current armed revolution, and in that way establishes the relationship between Juan's family history and the creation of Bolivian nationalism and identity.

As well as overtly connecting Juan's personal history to his patriotic duty through narratives of colonial and proto-national history, Fray Justo serves as the source of all of Juan's knowledge about his family, relaying information to him about his maternal and paternal legacies alike. Fray Justo tells Juan stories about his mother's family, the mestizo Catalayuds, and, in the documents Juan finds after the priest's death, bequeaths to him the story of his father's family, the white Altamiras. Fray Justo's diary reveals to Juan the story of three Creole siblings, Carlos, Enrique, and Teresa. According to the notebook, Carlos fell in love with a mestiza, Rosa, made her pregnant, and went mad after their separation. Enrique had by this time entered the priesthood and taken the name of Fray Justo. The mysterious connections between the impoverished Rosa, the beneficent Justo (Enrique), and the wealthy Teresa are thus explained through a process of historical recovery. This historical recovery depends once again on Juan's ability to manipulate different historical modalities, for while his paternal history is encoded in a written text, his maternal history is narrated orally. Juan himself becomes a repository of different historiographical methods and then encodes the various history-telling traditions in his own text, another example of the way in which the novel makes explicit its own modes of production. Furthermore, the documents Fray Justo leaves to Juan contain not only his personal diaries and the story of Juan's parentage, but also political papers, including works by Rousseau and Montesquieu and a translation of the United States Constitution. In this archive personal and political history are explicitly connected yet again. The mingling of different kinds of historical documents reflects the way in which, earlier in the novel, Fray Justo helped Juan understand the links among his heritage as the great-grandson of Alejo Catalayud, the embryonic stirrings of Bolivian nationalism implicit in that story, and the struggle for independence to which Juan is a witness. Fray Justo provides the means by which Juan comes to discover his own past and his own identity and shows him that that process is tied inextricably to the creation of modern Bolivia.

All of these aspects of the novel make it clear that throughout *Juan de la Rosa*, Aguirre is preoccupied with the ways in which historical texts are pro-

duced and with the connections between personal and national histories. By constructing a narrative in which Juan's personal quest to discover his heritage leads him to witness a series of political events, Aguirre establishes that the process by which the orphan Juan lays claim to his own identity is bound up with the birth of the Bolivian nation. But the fact that Juan's task in the novel is to research his pre-existing family history shows that for Aguirre, notwithstanding the dramatic break in the system which the Wars of Independence symbolize, the historical slate is not wiped clean and the break with the past is not total. This is true for Aguirre because, as Fray Justo takes pains to point out to Juan, the struggle for independence has its roots in the distant colonial past. Juan finds that he is part of a tradition of Bolivian nationalism and that in order to understand the current events surrounding him he must be fully cognizant of his own past. Aguirre uses Juan's coming-of-age story to point towards a heroic vision of the past as a didactic example for his readers and to promulgate the idea that Bolivians are personally invested in their country's identity. His argument is that the possibility of integrating individuals into the nation as citizens is predicated upon their ability to recognize the necessary links between their personal narratives and family history on the one hand and national identity and history on the other.

Aguirre's desire to create a novel that would inspire patriotism in his readers may have been prompted by the threat that Bolivia's defeat in the War of the Pacific posed to Bolivian democracy and national identity. He wrote *Juan de la Rosa* immediately after the War of the Pacific, which, as we have seen, was an unmitigated disaster for his country. Bolivia was ill-prepared to enter into a war since the national treasury had been drained by the depredations of the dictator Mariano Melgarejo and by a series of civil wars. The army was poorly equipped and untrained and its commandants lacked knowledge of military strategy. The Bolivians had no experience in desert fighting and no way of establishing supply lines and communications between La Paz and the Atacama desert, where the war was fought. After overwhelming Chilean victories in several naval battles, the final blow came in the battle of the Alto de la Alianza, in which the Bolivian force lost almost half its men in less than twelve hours.⁵ In the aftermath of defeat, Bolivia was forced to cede all the disputed territories to Chile, thereby losing its maritime access as well as the coveted mining areas. The ensuing bitterness felt by Bolivians may be gauged by the fact that they refused to sign the treaty concluding the war and continued to contest the disposition of land and natural resources in Chile's favor until 1929.

In short, the War of the Pacific cost Bolivia not only thousands of lives and all of its coastal territory, but was a crushing defeat attributable chiefly to the blunders of both political and military leaders, a fact that Aguirre's political and military responsibilities allowed him to observe clearly. As well as fighting in the war, after its dispiriting conclusion Aguirre became the Minister of War under President Narciso Campero and was charged with the task of reorganizing the demoralized troops. He also began to write the *Historia de la Guerra del*

⁵ Robert Barton, *A Short History of the Republic of Bolivia* (Bolivia: Editorial "Los Amigos del Libro," 1968) 203-8.

Pacífico, parts of which were published in the newspaper *El Heraldo* in 1882, but he never completed this work.⁶ Finally, he served as the Minister of Government and Foreign Affairs. When Campero's term ended in 1884, Aguirre left the government and returned to Cochabamba to lead his province's newly-formed Liberal Party, to teach law at the university there, and to write *Juan de la Rosa*.⁷

Confronted with what he perceived to be the military and moral decay of his nation, Aguirre produced a novel in which personal history was linked to political experience in such a way as to establish the personal investment of Bolivian citizens in their nation. The protagonist of *Juan de la Rosa* comes to claim his identity as the descendant of the Catalayuds and Altamiras simultaneously with his participation in the creation of the Bolivian nation. His comprehension of the political events unfolding around him depends upon his ability to connect his personal experience and family history with the development of Bolivian nationalism. Aguirre's text is meant to propose a model by which contemporary Bolivians could envision themselves as participants in the national project at a moment when that enterprise seemed on the verge of failure. Prompted not only by the military defeat of the War of the Pacific but by the blow to national pride that the loss of so much territory meant for Bolivia, Aguirre attempted to create a novel that would serve both as a reminder of Bolivia's past glories and as a vehicle through which readers could be encouraged to interpret their personal experience as relevant to the process of rebuilding their nation. The message of *Juan de la Rosa* is that the nation is brought into being when individuals conceive of their personal and family histories as integral parts of the national project. When they do this, these individuals begin to think of themselves as citizens – that is, as participants in a national enterprise whose scope and importance transcends their individual experiences. Through *Juan de la Rosa*, Aguirre proposed a way for his readers to see that their personal histories necessarily involved them in the project of Bolivian nationalism at a moment when the demoralizing defeat suffered in the War of the Pacific seemed to have struck Bolivia a mortal blow.

Despite Aguirre's efforts to advocate the imperative need for contemporary Bolivians to revive and understand fully their personal and national history, however, the recuperation of the colonial past in *Juan de la Rosa* is always incomplete. Although Juan discovers his family history and comes to claim his paternal legacy, he does so at the precise moment when his father dies. Juan achieves full knowledge of his familial legacy only when he is orphaned; his attempt to claim his paternal inheritance is frustrated by his father's death. Something is always being withheld from Juan, whether it is his mother's stubborn refusal to narrate the story of Alejo Catalayud's martyrdom at the hands of the Spanish, Fray Justo's unwillingness to acknowledge the blood tie between himself and Juan until after his own death, or Carlos de Altamira's recognition of Juan as his natural son. Aguirre thus points towards Juan's in-

⁶ Charles W. Arnade, "Nataniel Aguirre y *Juan de la Rosa*," *Bolivian Studies* 1.1 (1991): 41.

⁷ Details about Aguirre's life may be found in the introduction to the third edition of *Juan de la Rosa*.

ability to obtain complete access to his family history at the same time that he argues that knowledge of one's personal background is indispensable to participation in the creation of national identity. He apparently wants to tie together personal and national history and does so by sending his protagonist on a quest to discover his true background, but he thwarts Juan's efforts to know his family by making him an orphan at the precise moment when he should be able to lay claim to his identity as his father's son. Aguirre tries to argue for the possibility of establishing links between the colonial past and the independent present by showing how those links are literally embodied in the figure of his protagonist, but by making parts of Juan's history inaccessible to him he undermines his own efforts to recuperate the colonial past for use in the present.

Moreover, Aguirre's novelistic project of historical recuperation is undermined from the outset by the ironic inscription of the codes of memoir writing with which the novel begins. In the prologue, Juan writes, "puedo ya pedir a la juventud de mi querido país que recoja alguna enseñanza provechosa de la historia de mi propia vida" (xviii), showing that he wants his memoirs to serve as an uplifting example to his readers. But the expression of this authorial desire is preceded by Juan's description of the scene in which his wife Mercedes sarcastically calls him an "espantoso vestigio" and mocks his assumed status as the last surviving soldier of the Wars of Independence. Juan begins his story not with an image of himself as a courageous soldier, but as a henpecked husband who incurs his wife's wrath when "un añejo vino de mis cepas se me subió a la cabeza, y quise abrazar a Merceditas, mi adorada mitad" (xvii), an amorous desire that prompts her shrill reprimands. While Juan tries to explain the origins of his text as his desire to construct a heroic vision of Bolivia at the time of independence as a moral example for his contemporary readers, his autobiography is first and foremost inspired by Mercedes's shrewish scolding.

The idea that his text is meant to serve as a moral tale for the edification of his readers is further subverted by Juan's physical collapses whenever he attempts to draw moral lessons from his comparisons of the past with the present. Juan frequently expresses the idea that modern Bolivian society is in decay, having fallen from the heights it reached in the wars of independence. But this belief, as well as prompting his nostalgic reminiscences, also causes an uncontrollable rage that spurts out and literally marks his text. After he describes the soldiers fighting in the battle of Amiraya, he turns to

los soldadotes del día [...] que dispersan a balazos un congreso, fusilan sin piedad a los pueblos indefensos, entregan la medalla ensangrentada de Bolívar a un estúpido ambicioso, se ríen de las leyes, hacen taco de las constituciones, traicionan y se venden... ¡oh, no puedo! ... ¡Mercedes! ¡me estoy ahogando! ... (161)

At this point a line of ellipses cuts into the text. The narrative continues with Juan's explanation, "he tenido que interrumpir mi historia" (161). As he rails against the inadequacies of contemporary Bolivians, he is overcome by his rage and forced to break off his diatribe. Similarly, when he describes the Latin American revolutionaries facing Spanish troops, he tries to make explicit the differences between the heroes of yesteryear and the inferior modern soldiers,

exclaiming, "¡Figúrense mis lectores lo que serían [los revolucionarios]! ¡Díganme, sobre todo, si los hombres de hoy pueden compararse con los de aquel tiempo!" (270). Here too the writer falls victim to his own anger: "¡por Dios, no me digan nada! Porque se me sube la sangre a la cabeza y la pluma se me cae de la mano!" (270). Once again, his outburst is followed by a line of ellipses, marking Juan's loss of writerly authority precisely when he most needs to assert that authority so that he may reveal to his readers the lesson offered by the past. After such interruptions, the narrator is unable to continue the invidious comparisons between his contemporaries and the younger generation; instead, in order to avoid a repetition of his outraged collapse in-and-on-his text, he must return to his strictly historical narrative. Every time Juan attempts to make explicit the exemplary potential of history for younger Bolivians, he fails, literally dropping his pen and figuratively dropping his moralizing project. The text's efforts to present a clear moral through the use of historical examples are insistently undermined by the emotional outbursts of the narrator, which erase the very text he is trying to compose as lines of ellipses take the place of a concluding moral.

The problematic role of history and historiography in the novel are also evident in the ambiguous nature of the historical archives that Juan finds in his journey through history and through his story. There are two key moments in the novel when Juan discovers troves of books and papers. One, of course, occurs after Fray Justo's death when Juan opens the priest's missal and finds hidden within it political and personal papers mingled together. It is this discovery that reveals to Juan his true parentage and enables him to find his heretofore unknown father. But earlier in the novel there is another scene of discovery that also offers a commentary upon the possible functions of books, reading, and history in the formation of the nation. Soon after Juan arrives at Teresa de Altamira's house, he notices one of the maids leaving a room with some papers in her hand, which she then uses to light the kitchen fire. Juan ventures in to explore "aquella parte desconocida de la casa" (76) and discovers the personal library of Teresa's deceased husband. Among the first texts he unearths are histories of the discovery and conquest of the New World; "fui leyendo nombres que ni yo desconocía: Colón, Cortés, Pizarro, etc." (76). When he tries to scold the housekeeper for burning these books, she laughs at him and explains that Teresa and her children are uninterested in the library, saying,

¡Qué tonto eres! [...] ¿Piensas que la señora o los niños han de perder su tiempo como tú vas a perderlo? ¿No sabes que mi finado amo [...] nunca abrió ninguno de esos libros de su padre? ¿Ni qué quieres tú que haga con ellos un mayorazgo? (77)

The archive cherished by the mestizo hero is thus viewed by the white Creoles of the household and their haughty servants as, at best, kindling. It is significant that what Juan finds in the library – and remembers seventy years later in his memoirs – are histories of the New World. Not only is this archive, notable mostly for its histories of the colonial past, seen as useless by the maid and the Altamira family, but its complete lack of interest for the "mayorazgo," or first-born son and heir to the Altamira estates, fortune, and name, is emphasized.

Such histories do not serve the purposes of the Spanish colonizers and are instead destroyed little by little. At this point in the novel Juan still has not discovered his father's name and thus cannot lay claim to his own paternal legacy and become a "mayorazgo" in his own right – one who might be able to provide an answer to the maid's question and show what an heir could do with these books. Nonetheless, he tries to save the books from the maid's depredations and to recuperate the history of the New World for his own use. But he can only do so furtively, stealthily taking the books from the library and carrying them to his own small room; when he leaves Teresa's house at the end of the novel, he must also abandon the partially-salvaged archive. Although Juan recognizes the importance of the documentation of the past, he is unable to make these histories his own. He cannot appropriate the Spanish version of New World history comprised of chronicles by Cortés, Pizarro and other Spanish conquistadors. The only archive he manages to walk away with is Fray Justo's personal diary and a selection of political tracts. Colonial history may be crucial to our young hero and by extension to the emerging Bolivian nation, but it can never be fully incorporated into Juan's history or into Bolivian national history.

The narrative of *Juan de la Rosa* in these ways refuses the very meaning it tries to advance. The message seems to be that readers should understand the past in order to serve the present; but access to the past for the protagonist of the novel is always incomplete. Significantly, what Juan cannot reclaim is his status as his father's son, because his father is a symbol of Spanish colonial power. Similarly, Fray Justo, Juan's other father-figure, his uncle, and a member of a white royalist family, also dies before the novel is completed, neatly removing any last loose ends and leaving Bolivian nationalism for the "true" patriots, the Creoles and mestizos who have learned from European models and now transform them into a truly Bolivian democracy. Juan does have access to his mother's history, to the rebellious, nationalist mestizo history of the Catalayuds. But full knowledge of the past implies acceptance of the white, Spanish imperial history of the Altamiras, a possibility decisively rejected by the novel. Juan cannot return to his father, to paternal legacy, nor to Spain, just as Aguirre's readers cannot and must not return to the Spanish colonial period. Juan's father dies at the exact moment when Juan opens the door – to his family heritage, to his paternal legacy, and to the Spanish colonial past. But Carlos de Altamira's death symbolically closes the door again, leaving (Juan's) history incomplete. In this regard, it is important to note that while Juan tells us at the end of the novel that his story will continue, Aguirre would never write a sequel. In the novel, Aguirre tries to recuperate a sense of the past in order to instruct his readers in how to be proper Bolivian citizens. But if true patriotic knowledge depends upon the ability to understand history, Aguirre himself closes the door to full understanding of the past by denying his hero complete access to pre-Independence history. The only historical moment that can be fully recuperated is the moment in which the Bolivian nation is born, the moment described in exhaustive detail in *Juan de la Rosa*. Aguirre must refuse the possibility of a total return to Spanish colonial history because of the nineteenth-century belief that Independence marked the violent and thorough rejection of the Spanish past. Such a rejection, as we have seen, was a require-

ment for the establishment of national identities throughout Latin America in the nineteenth century. Bolivian national identity, in short, was founded upon the repudiation of the Spanish empire and its vision of New World history; hence, Juan cannot save the Altamiras' abandoned library of colonial chronicles, but must leave it behind to be used as fuel for the kitchen fire. Given that the narrative purposes of *Juan de la Rosa* are to tell the story of the successful revolution and to justify the violent overthrow of Spanish rule, Aguirre must also reject the possibility of a complete recuperation of Spanish colonial history at the same time as he attempts to point towards the importance of historical awareness for true patriotism and citizenship. Aguirre's anxiety about the ways in which national identity can and should be constituted results in conflicted narrative desires that mark his text with lapses and erasures, showing that the project of the historical novel in Latin America is always complicated by the break in history and the rejection of the colonial past.

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