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Didacticism and reconciliation: instructive discourse in the novels of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano

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DIDACTICISM AND RECONCILIATION: INSTRUCTIVE DISCOURSE IN THE NOVELS
OF IGNACIO MANUEL ALTAMIRANO

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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by

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Abstract

Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's *novelística* is of insurmountable importance for any study of the development of Nineteenth century Mexican literary culture and the Mexican liberal national narrative. Nevertheless, the ample criticism which treats Altamirano's novels has to date failed to grasp anything more than a tenuous unity latent in those works. This investigation provides a new framework for a unified interpretation of Altamirano's three most widely read and commented novels, Clemencia, La navidad en las montañas, and El Zarco. By way of an examination of historiographic-political narratives contemporaneous with the period informing the writing of those novels, in conjunction with an appeal to the understanding of the function of the novelistic form following the theory of M.M. Bakhtin and others, Altamirano's still controversial final novel will be shown to yield a new interpretation whose unitary function is dependent on all three of the novels examined herein. This unitary function will be shown to be constructed by way of the deployment of an innovatory instructive discourse which embraces all three of the novels examined and fundamentally determines their structure and content. As such, this investigation provides a new understanding of the works of this canonical author and propounds a more profound understanding of the interdependencies both literary and extraliterary that shape this part of the *maestro's* work and the innovatory instructive discourse upon which it is founded.

Chapter I: Towards an Understanding of Altamirano's Instructive Literary Discourse

Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (Tixtla, Guerrero, Mexico, 1834 – San Remo, Italy, 1893) is an author of inescapable importance for the understanding of the development of nineteenth-century Mexican literary culture and liberal nationalist discourse¹. His foundational influence on incipient Mexican literary culture was not overlooked by the critics of his day, and as Erica Segre notes, “Literary historiography in Mexico during the latter half of the Porfiriato virtually canonized Altamirano as ‘el maestro’, founder and president of epoch-making literary fraternities and cultural societies” (267). Recent criticism has continued to emphasize the importance of Altamirano’s work to understanding the nationalist project in Mexico, declaring that he was one of the most actively involved intellectuals in the construction of the nation and the Mexican citizen, and pointing towards the “discurso fundacional nacionalista” found in many of his literary works (Ruiz 23).

This “foundational literary discourse” is often discussed in the criticism treating Altamirano’s works, and there is a general agreement as to its nature: it is instructive, and as such always involves a thesis (Schmidt 115, Giron 162)². Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the theses implicit in his literary works were always of primary importance, a fact which sometimes resulted in the subordination of aesthetic and stylistic considerations to didactic ends (Schmidt 115, Sol 83, Brading 43)³. This discourse is recurrent in much of Altamirano’s literary work, and specifically his novels, which played a central role in the advancement of that

¹ Recognition of Altamirano’s importance has led Doris Sommer to refer to him as “a patriotic institution in Mexican literature”, and Edward N. Wright-Rios acknowledges him as “one of the key figures of nineteenth-century Mexican nation building”. Cf. Wright-Rios, “Indian Saints and Nation-States: Ignacio Manuel Altamirano’s Landscapes and Legends”, p. 47, and Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, p. 232.

² In the same passage Nicole Giron notes the insistent presence of a thesis in both Altamirano’s journalistic and “*propriadamente*” literary works: “En su labor periodística –considerable –en su labor propriadamente literaria, siempre fue escritor de tesis. Siempre sostuvo una posición, una idea, una propuesta cultural o política, porque para él nunca hubo una frontera muy clara entre estos dos campos”.

³ As Pablo García notes, the subordination of aesthetic concerns to ideological considerations provoked the following criticism of Altamirano by Mariano Azuela: “Asimismo, [Azuela] delata la parcialidad del autor, obligado por ‘ciertas ideas acerca del papel que la novela debe desempeñar en la educación del pueblo [...] a torcer y retorcer la verdad, a deformar los acontecimientos, las cosas, los personajes, encaminándolo todo con una idea fija’”. Cf. García, “*El Zarco* vs. *Los de abajo*: El ideal denunciado o todos somos plateados”, p. 105.

instructive discourse by serving as its vehicle⁴. As such, and perhaps due in part to the fact that *Clemencia* (1869), *La Navidad en las montañas* (1871) and *El Zarco* (1888) are among the most read novels in Mexican literature, Altamirano's novels have been subjected to repeated critical scrutiny⁵. Nevertheless, because those novels tend to be analyzed in isolation, critics have yet to properly synthesize and unify an understanding of the instructive discourse present throughout them⁶. As a result, both the portrayal of Altamirano as author and the critical estimation of his novelistic production have suffered from contradiction and lack of cohesiveness⁷.

This investigation examines the innovatory instructive discourse present in *Clemencia*, *La navidad en las montañas* and *El Zarco* and will demonstrate how that discourse functions didactically to reconcile a specific interpretation of Mexican cultural identity with a renovated notion of religious faith in order to create a model indicating how the nation could progress into modernity. The three stages of this instructive discourse advance alongside the literary trajectory of Altamirano's novels and are systematically and synchronically represented throughout *Clemencia*, *La navidad en las montañas*, and *El Zarco*. As noted, the structure of the instructive discourse examined herein is tripartite and consists of the following stages: 1) the instruction of readers as to the dangers of corrupting foreign influences, and the exemplification of the

⁴ Altamirano's particular preference for the novel has been sustained by almost every author to treat the topic. Cf. José Salvador Ruiz, "El laberinto de la aculturación: ciudadanía y nación mestiza en *El Zarco* de Ignacio Manuel Altamirano", p. 24; Christopher Conway, "Ignacio Altamirano and the contradictions of autobiographical indianism", p. 34; David Brading, "Liberal patriotism and the Mexican Reforma", p. 43; Eduardo Abud, "Práctica narrativa de Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (a propósito de *Clemencia*)", p. 59; Beatriz de Alba-Koch, "Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-century México", p.111; Pablo García, "*El Zarco* vs. *Los de abajo*: El ideal denunciado o todos somos plateados", p.92.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that although they do not avow the author's preference, both Brading and Wright-Rios concur that he was not a gifted novelist (Cf. Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma", p.44; Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States: Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's Landscapes and Legends", p. 54).

⁵ Manuel Sol affirms this estimation of the dissemination of Altamirano's novels: "Yo me atrevería a asegurar que *Clemencia*, *La navidad en las montañas* y *El Zarco* figuran entre las novelas más leídas de la literatura mexicana". Cf. Sol, "*La navidad en las montañas* o la utopía de la hermandad entre liberales y conservadores", p. 73.

⁶ The unity between the novels studied here has partially been examined, albeit for different reasons, by José Salvador Ruiz in "El laberinto de la aculturación: ciudadanía y nación mestiza en *El Zarco* de Ignacio Manuel Altamirano", and by Christopher Conway in "Lecturas: ventanas de la seducción en *El Zarco*".

⁷ Wright-Rios discusses the contradictory portrayal of Altamirano in relation to his essays from *Paisajes y leyendas*: "An issue for contemporary scholars is, what does this famous radical of Indian descent intend to convey in his rambling examination of the nation's popular culture, and what does he reveal about Mexico's social and political evolution in the late nineteenth century? The results have been mixed. Essays from *Paisajes y leyendas* have led to claims that they reveal the author as a pragmatist devoted to national reconciliation, a shameless booster of Porfirian progress and denigrator of established popular tradition, an early proponent of the misguided cultural analysis of Mexico according to euro-centric criteria, or a cowed radical recognizing the unbridgeable gulf between the liberal, progress-oriented, secular state he helped to build, and Mexico's deeply religious Catholic population". Wright-Rios, p. 50.

Mexican national cultural identity in Clemencia; 2) the clarification and redemarcation of religious faith and the reconciliation of Mexico's religious past and present in La navidad en las montañas; and 3) a critique of problems, and specifically that of "militarism", which had impeded Mexico's entrance into modernity and the symbolic reconciliation of the political realities of the nation's past and present in El Zarco⁸. The final objective of this instructive discourse is the merger of a specific articulation of Mexican national cultural identity with a renovated conception of religious faith necessary for the continued pursuit of national progress, followed by an exposition of the manner in which that progress might take place so that Mexico could successfully enter into modernity.

Altamirano was more than a mere author: his literary and theoretical writings provided an aesthetic and critical foundation for Mexican national literary culture and thusly laid the foundation for the expansion of that culture by subsequent authors, hence his title "maestro de los maestros" (Kress 327): as Wright-Rios confirms, "above all, his fiction was a conduit of literary technique and style" (Wright-Rios 54)⁹. Because of this Altamirano may be understood as a Foucaultian "initiator of discourse"¹⁰. It follows that Altamirano as author occupies a "transdiscursive position" (Foucault 131). This "transdiscursive position" places his production as an author within a context characterized by the convergence of historiographical, politico-ideological, and literary-critical currents of discourse, and specifically that of the liberal national narrative that prevailed in Mexico until the end of the Porfiriato (1884-1911) and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). *Ergo*, properly contextualizing Altamirano's novels as they pertain to

⁸ The term militarism is used here in a technical sense defined in section 6.2.

⁹ Christopher Conway mentions Altamirano's mentorship of Justo Sierra and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera. Cf. Christopher Conway, "Contradictions of Autobiographical Indianism", p. 36. Manuel Sol speaks of a "Generación Altamirano" consisting of "Justo Sierra, Luis González Obregón, Manuel M. Flores, Rafael de Zayas Enríquez, Ángel de Campo, José Primitivo Rivera, José María Bustillos, y algunos más...". Cf. Manuel Sol, "La navidad en las montañas o la utopía de la hermandad entre liberales y conservadores", p.83.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault defines the term "initiator of discourse" in the following passage from his seminal essay "What Is an Author?": "The distinctive contribution of these authors is that they produced not only their own work, but the possibility and rules of formation of other texts. In this sense, their role differs entirely from that of a novelist, for example, who is basically never more than the author of his own text... [they establish] the endless possibility of discourse". Cf. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?", p. 129-131.

those currents of discourse proves to be integral to any interpretation one might take of them. Understanding Altamirano's novels within the context of this transdiscursive position facilitates an understanding of his works as original and innovatory, and as such functions to separate this investigation from what Erica Segre describes as "The established tendency to regard him as a diligent, eclectic consolidator (rather than innovator) and the architect in cultural matters of an aesthetic status quo which complemented the monolithic and prescriptive Eurocentric liberalism of the Porfiriato (1876-1910)" (266).

In order to properly contextualize the novels examined, this investigation will recur as necessary to Evolution política del pueblo mexicano (1900), the liberal historiographical narrative of Justo Sierra, "the truly great Mexican scholar of the nineteenth century" who would also eventually be hailed as "maestro" by "practically all of the 'modernista' poets in Mexico" (Kress 326-328). Sierra's historiographical work serves to synthesize divergent currents of the Mexican liberal historical narrative at the end of the nineteenth century, and as such the utilization of his work here does not aspire to a historically exhaustive and politically unbiased perspective on the events conveyed. Rather, this investigation avails itself of the perspective of Altamirano's "primer discípulo" in order to better orient itself with respect to the instructive discourse initiated by Altamirano, a discourse in many ways similar, but not congruent, to that of Sierra.

The selection of Sierra's text as a primary source also serves to justify the limited selection of other historical/historiographical sources employed, which have been selected out of preference for their proximity to Altamirano's moment in history and their importance to the liberal political narrative rather than for their factual integrity and historical authoritativeness. Furthermore, following the historiographical narratives of a liberal ideologue like Sierra actually establishes greater synchronicity with the prevailing political thought of the day in Mexico since,

as Sommer notes, Mexico's political direction had departed from its basis in the "popular groundswell" which had driven the efforts of Padre Hidalgo and José María Morelos to opt for a more conservative approach which in turn gave way to the ascendance of the ideologues who would shape future political programs for the nation (Sommer 220). Again, Sierra and Altamirano are not identical in their opinions, but, as Brading notes, the relative homogeneity of the goals of the liberal ideologues of the nineteenth-century should guarantee a minimal amount of ideological distortion:

La mayoría de los liberales suscribía más o menos el mismo cuerpo de abstracciones; creían en la libertad y en la soberanía de la voluntad general, en la educación, la reforma, el progreso y el futuro [...] Las diferencias surgen no del desacuerdo acerca de los objetivos finales, sino acerca de los medio prácticos a utilizar y de su distribución en el tiempo. (Brading 101)

In order to explore Altamirano's instructive discourse, this investigation begins with the elaboration of the Mexican historical backdrop preceding the writing of Altamirano's first novel following Sierra and other sources familiar to the author himself (José María Luis Mora, México y sus revoluciones (1836); Lucas Alamán, Historia de Méjico (1849-1852)) in section 2.1.

Section 2.2 more specifically examines the problems associated with the social and practical education of the Mexican population and the impediments to advancement into modernity which pertained to the various classes of Mexican society as they were understood from the liberal perspective.

Section 3.1 discusses the state of Mexican literature during Altamirano's time, the problems it presented to the author, and begins the demonstration of how Altamirano planned to help the nation to advance through that very literature. Section 3.2 examines the specific features of the novel which made it the most apt for that task by examining Altamirano's preference for that form and how this coincides with M. M. Bakhtin's understanding of the functioning of the novel, thereby establishing the critical basis upon which this study proceeds.

Chapter 4 departs from that basis to analyze Clemencia, and shows how this novel functions as the first stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse. Clemencia will be shown to represent an attempt to extol the dangers of foreign influences to the still incipient Mexican cultural identity and to exemplify that same identity in the personage of Fernando Valle as contrasted with that of Enrique Flores¹¹.

Section 5.1 explores the historically problematic nature of religious faith in Mexico and expounds upon the factors impinging upon the author in his attempt to reconcile that faith with political liberalism in La navidad en las montañas. Section 5.2 shows how this reconciliation is accomplished by way of an analysis of that novel and details the nature of the faith Altamirano strives to emancipate from the monopoly of the Church. The discussion of religious reconciliation in this novel has been frequent in recent criticism, but the present investigation will differentiate itself from previous ones by emphasizing the utilitarian nature of this reconciliation and its importance with respect to Altamirano's greater instructive discourse in section 6.4¹².

Section 6.1 follows the liberal national narrative in an exploration of the socio-political landscape of Mexico after the war of Reform and the events that had brought the Mexican people to the point of desperation. Section 6.2 addresses the problems which had brought on that desperation, their historical origins, and their persistence. In section 6.3 it will be shown how the historical rupture provoked by "militarism" is counterbalanced by a structural rupture in Altamirano's last novel, and an analysis of El Zarco will reveal the mechanisms underlying a dual didactic function manifest therein. This function will be shown to be dependent on the very

¹¹ This interpretation runs contrary to two seemingly oppositional interpretations propagated in recent criticism which, on one hand, argue that in Clemencia the novel's namesake is meant to represent an advanced model of female subjectivity for imitation, or, on the other hand, argue that the female characters serve to represent the adherents of a mistaken "gusto femenino" which the author wished to derogate. Reasons for rejecting both of these interpretations will be given in chapter 4. Cf. Fridhelm Schmidt, "Amor y nación en las novelas de Ignacio Manuel Altamirano", and Jennifer Lin Weger, "Modernización y género en Clemencia, de Ignacio Altamirano".

¹² Differing interpretations of this religious reconciliation can be found in the following: Nicolás Shumway, "El curioso caso del cura en La navidad en las montañas"; Manuel Sol, "La navidad en las montañas o la utopía de la hermandad entre liberales y conservadores".

same religious faith that Altamirano had coopted in La navidad en las montañas. The interpretation of El Zarco advocated in this section is an original departure from criticism to date and will shed light both on Altamirano's least understood, seemingly most contradictory novel and the greater instructive discourse of which it forms the ultimate stage. Section 6.4 retraces the steps of this investigation, offers a final explanation of the unity given by Altamirano's instructive discourse to the novels addressed, and concludes with an affirmation of the innovatory nature of Altamirano's instructive discourse.

Chapter II: On Ideological Fractures and Mexican National Evolution

2.1 Background for the Evolution of a Nation

Just as Altamirano's works would come to contribute significantly to the formation of the nation's consciousness and literary culture, those works themselves would similarly be thematized by the political and social discourses of the historical epoch in which the author found himself embroiled. As such, an elaboration of the context informing Altamirano's instructive discourse is necessary, and will be realized with comparative reference to Justo Sierra's Evolución política del pueblo mexicano and other salient texts.

Upon his birth in 1834 in the tiny mountain *pueblo* of Tixtla, now located in the state of Guerrero, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano was cast into a Mexico which seemed to have lost its way on the long road to modernity. As would quickly have made itself manifest to him in his young life, the plight of the autochthonous people of Mexico, his plight, was a matter infinitely debatable in the abstract and yet monumentally daunting whenever more concrete intervention was attempted¹³. From Bartolomé de Las Casas' and Juan de Sepulveda's debates in the XVI century well into the mid-XIX century, little had changed substantially for the indigenous segments of society¹⁴. Their intimate dependence on protectionist policies emanating from ecclesiastical patrimony as the guarantor and cultural axis of their world, a normative paradigm harkening back to the very beginnings of the viceroyalty of *Nueva España*, continued to gravely obstruct their assimilation and the normalization of their status as citizens¹⁵. Relegated to the position of *menores de edad perpetuos* by both three centuries of tradition and the stark reality of

¹³ Alamán discusses the difficulties inherent in the social incorporation of the *indio*, and attributes many of these to the natural traits of the indigenous peoples. Cf. Alamán p.22-26. Mora argues to the contrary, but likewise bases his reasoning on the innate abilities of the indigenous people. Nevertheless, he is careful to note that the current state of the *indio* is the direct result of historical subjugation and abjection. Cf. Mora p.61-68.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Mora directly accuses Las Casas and his spiritual successor Quiroga of propagating the erroneous concept of the *indio* which had helped to maintain the paralysis of the indigenous people: "Esta uniformidad de testimonios en personas que nada podían ser que sus enemigos, han sido el fundamento de los privilegios acordados por las leyes para compensar la superioridad supuesta de los blancos, y ella es la prueba más decisiva del concepto que se tenía de los indígenas.

¹⁵ Sierra's words on the state of the *indio* echo Mora's thoughts: "el indio... seguía siendo el siervo de la Iglesia, del español y del criollo". Cf. Sierra p.104 and Mora p. 65-68

the unavailability of means by which to educate them, the indigenous spirit could not but languish in anticipation of a future which might offer more than the abysmal possibilities of social stasis¹⁶.

Mexico's indigenous population had certainly played a significant role in the evolution of the nation. The political indoctrination resultant from three centuries of alliances between the clergy and the *terratenientes* had insured that the indigenous laborers, often debt-peons, were frequently capable of being mobilized by particularly charismatic *hacendados*, and in this way numerous, diversely situated and fiercely independent regional militias had brought considerable levels of power and influence to bear on the national stage. But the participation of the indigenous population was not fueled by homogeneous motives. Their nationalism "was the product of desperation rather than deep understanding" (Brushwood 70-71). The *indígena* simply lacked the social education to understand the impact that their actions could have on the formation of the *patria*. *Caciquismo* prevailed in the absence of such a social education, and would continue to resonate problematically well into the Mexican Revolution and beyond. This reliance upon *caciquismo* was of particular importance as a destabilizing factor in the nineteenth century, and Altamirano would roundly criticize the consequences of this and other forms of "militarism" in El Zarco.

Having understood the lamentable historical circumstances of the *indígena*, it becomes clear why Altamirano's instructive discourse does not begin in Clemencia by addressing an indigenous audience or specifically indigenous problems, and this despite the author's origins. In contrast with the indigenous class, however, the *criollo* aristocracy's greatest political strengths

¹⁶ Albeit to different ends than those of Mora, Alamán also recognizes the problems generated by the attachment of "*privilegios de menores*" to the *indio* and claims that it produced "*igual odio y desconfianza*" in the rest of the population. Cf. Alamán p.23-25.

were their education and the newly-renovated extension of their social dominion¹⁷. Their ideologies, afforded to them primarily via imported texts and modalities, furnished them with the fundamental tools necessary for statecraft (Krauze 149; Mora 82-83; Altamirano, Obras históricas, 60; Brading, Los orígenes del nacionalismo mexicano, 106). Moreover, their political and economic superiority gave them the best chance of being heard over the cacophonous acclamations of diffuse political ambitions. By the second half of the nineteenth-century the fact of Independence had been recognized as inevitable by all but few. The possible shape of the nation's future, however, did not receive such universal approbation. It would be the *criollos* who took the first decisive steps towards a plan of nation-building, and in doing so, also initiated the ideological debate which in great part forms the context of Altamirano's instructive discourse.

Two dominant ideologies soon rose to prominence as they attempted to provide ideological frameworks for envisioning and preparing for the nation's future. José Maria Luis Mora, arguably the most brilliant thinker of Mexican liberalism, published México y sus revoluciones in 1836, and effectively laid the groundwork for Mexican liberal thought until Altamirano's time (Krauze 132-134, 146-149). In that work Mora outlines a political project embracing his vision of the Mexican future, and interweaves social, political, historical and scientific elements to produce what would serve -albeit with some important modifications- as the foundation of the national narrative propounded by Mexican liberals throughout the remainder of the XIX century. Mora's body of work emphasized the value of elements of the indigenous past as valid stepping stones towards the threshold of modernity (a position typified in his underlining of the heroic nature of *huey tlatoani* Cuauhtémoc), but also shifted to

¹⁷ The extension of the social domain of Mexico's *criollos* following Independence was the direct result of the new availability of prestigious and well-paying government posts which, it was complained, had frequently been reserved for the peninsular class until after Independence. Cf. Sierra p.76-80 for a discussion of the historical roots of this problem.

accentuate the importance of *criollo* patriotism during and since the war of Independence when confronted with the problem of the contemporary state of Mexican politics (Mora 74, 93; 78, 145). This approach functions in conjunction with Mora's theoretical convictions, which specifically advocate the still semi-embryonic governmental model of the United States (*ibid* 46, 84). An understanding of Mora's perspective on the problems of Mexican society is fundamental for a proper understanding of Altamirano's work, especially because recent criticism has frequently failed to distinguish Altamirano's political ideology from that of the porfirian liberal positivists of the late nineteenth-century¹⁸. The homogeneity of thought imposed between Altamirano and the young *científico* positivists seems to entail a failure to acknowledge that even as some of Altamirano's writing continued to sing the glories of porfirian progress, he was nevertheless increasingly distanced from the center of liberal power during the period between the late 1870's and 1880's (Wright-Rios 54)¹⁹. The fact is that by the year 1889 the old liberal guard had been almost totally displaced from the Diaz administration's inner-circle of political influence (Giron 173). Therefore, it is necessary to use Mora's "*puro*" liberal republicanism to measure the distance between Altamirano's own position as a "*puro*" liberal and that of his positivist contemporaries²⁰. This movement away from a position of decisive political influence can be detected in the air of desperation that informs Altamirano's final novel El Zarco, and might be seen as a partial explanation for why it is that he opts to

¹⁸ Giron beautifully describes this distinction: "Aquellos, preparados por la lógica del sistema de pensamiento en que se inscribían, a subordinar sus análisis a la ordenada congruencia de los esquemas evolucionistas no querían reconocer el padrinazgo intelectual de un Altamirano. El, formado en las grandes fuentes de la cultura clásica y en la frecuentación de los enciclopedistas rehusaba el espíritu de doctrina del sistema positivista y defendió las virtudes –para él inalienables –de la crítica como la más soberana expresión de la libertad de pensamiento. Para Altamirano las convicciones liberales eran un evangelio existencial, artículos de fe contruidos con el ejercicio de la razón crítica", p.174.

¹⁹ This supposed homogeneity of thought has lead recent critics to argue that Altamirano's work was in some way intended to legitimize an illustrated liberal minority. Cf. Ruíz p.29.

²⁰ Krauze notes that the term "*puro*" originates with Mora: "Unos seguían las pautas radicales de Gómez Farías, creían en la vigencia de sus reformas anticlericales de 1833 y mantenían correspondencia con el gran exiliado, el doctor Mora. Se llamaban 'puros'", p. 162. It should also be noted that Mora and Alamán both contributed significantly to the formation of governmental policy as cabinet members under distinct administrations. Cf. Krauze 146-162.

reconcile and emancipate faith in La navidad en las montañas in order to deploy it in the final phase of his instructive discourse rather than some other, more concrete stratagem²¹.

Serving as a constant frustration to the political ambitions of Mora, Lucas Alamán, unquestionably the foremost conservative Mexican thinker of his epoch and a *criollo* as well, would sustain his side of the heated polemic that arose between them by way of arguments explicated in his Historia de Méjico (Krauze 152). Alamán's hostility in this work is palpable as he acerbically attacks the weaknesses of popular government and laments the loss of order and stability afforded by the colonial system to what he perceived as an uncontrollable lust for chaos and anarchy which periodically flared up in the *pueblo* (Alamán 165, 211, 234, 266-276). This is not to say that Alamán opposed himself to Independence *per se*: although Alamán rarely proffers a kind word with respect to the revolution or its *caudillos*, this treatment is conditioned by his deep-seated conviction that the very same Independence could have been achieved naturally without the bloodletting and disorder initiated by Hidalgo's uprising (Alamán 276, 325). A desire to restrain the passions of the masses and the blind lurching of the nation towards a bastardized and immature Independence motivates the entirety of Alamán's thought: stability, not idealism, is the order of the day (Alamán 371, 376-380). This motivation prompts him to formulate his political program as a return to the form of government which reigned under the colonial system (which he himself in turn seemed to unwittingly idealize) (Alamán 108-109). Though subsequent transformations of this platform were inevitable, Alamán's ideology nevertheless formed the groundwork for the Mexican conservative party (Brading, Los orígenes del nacionalismo mexicano 109; Krauze 146). For this reason, his thought is central to the principles guiding the conservative thought in Mexico with which Altamirano wrestles in La

²¹ This reconciliation and emancipation of faith is treated in chapter V of this investigation. Its subsequent deployment is treated in chapter VI.

navidad en las montañas in order to reconcile and emancipate faith²². Alamán's recognition of the fact of Independence, however, was not lost from view, and would insure that for some time this solution would be couched strictly in terms of organizational and administrative structural transformation: "Lo que a México conviene es volver al sistema español, ya que no a la dependencia de España, y no separarse de él sino en lo estrictamente necesario y lentamente" (*op. cit.* Sierra 136). Despite their differences, the Independence of the nation was at least initially non-negotiable for both thinkers.

Notwithstanding this point of convergence, the gulf between the goals and methodology of Mora on the one hand and Alamán on the other widened with the passage of time, eventually becoming so fundamentally ingrained in the Mexican psyche that they would in great part shape the underlying political configurations which surfaced time and time again throughout the conflicts of nineteenth-century Mexico. As such, these two ideological strains, their subsequent modifications and reiterations, and the division separating them, would continue to thematize the nationalist discourse up until and beyond Altamirano's time. From this division spring many of the factors that Altamirano must reconcile in order for his instructive discourse to succeed in its aims.

Ironically, the *criollos* who had so dutifully labored to give ideological direction to the nation, feeling that their moment of leadership had finally arrived in the era ushered in by Independence, would soon discover that this time had in fact already passed. A seemingly inexhaustible inundation of political calamities including (but certainly not limited to) numerous *golpes de Estado*, uncontrollable regional instability, the Annexation of Texas to the United States (1845), the First French Intervention (April 16, 1838 – March 9, 1839) and the bombardment of Veracruz by the French (November 27, 1838), Indian raids throughout the

²² In Los orígenes del nacionalismo mexicano Brading describes the centrality of religion to Mexican *conservadores* thusly: "La única piedra verdadera en la que decansaba la alianza de los conservadores era la Iglesia". Cf. Brading p. 113.

northern states and Yucatán and wide-spread brigandage left the nation in dire need of structural reinforcement and awash with indifference with respect to the possible modes of that reinforcement's realization.

When Antonio López de Santa Anna took the reins of the Bustamante administration in 1833, in a move anticipating the desperate tradeoff of liberties that would later characterize the politics of the Porfiriato, the *pueblo* sacrificed its idealism (already the commodity of a precious and dwindling few) in exchange for a respite from the turbulence which had been endemic since 1810. Santa Anna was allowed to establish himself as dictator, *temporarily* disabling the liberal *Constitución Federal de 1824* and utilizing his charisma and rapport with the masses as a war hero to maintain a white-washed façade of constitutional legitimacy. As his *Suprema Alteza* glutted his ego and desire for power the ideals that had been touted as the heart of the new nation became more emaciated by the day: In Altamirano's own words, "Para él las convicciones políticas no importaban nada. El poder a toda costa; tal fue el programa de su vida entera" (46-47). The ideological revolution and the reforms dreamt of by its harbingers would remain still-born, awaiting the day that another would again take up the mantel of liberalism and progress. But neither the ideological progress that had been made, nor the lessons learned from Santa Anna's abuse of power, would be forgotten by Altamirano as he sat down to reconcile Mexico's political past and present in El Zarco.

Invasion by the United States (1846-48) led to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the subsequent *decapitación* of the nation, a humiliation which came coupled with a substantial loss of international prestige and a healthy inoculation against the hypocrisy of the Monroe Doctrine in the light of the reality of what would continue to be perceived by many as "Yankee Imperialism" (Altamirano, Obras históricas, 43-4; Sierra 140). This served as the background to a political struggle which passed through a number of short-lived or interim

presidencies, many of them repeat popular elections of Santa Anna, to finally arrive at yet another exile of Santa Anna by Juan Álvarez, Ignacio Comonfort and the promoters of the *Plan de Ayutla*.

The Comonfort administration heralded the restoration of Constitutional government in Mexico. The *Constitución* promulgated in 1857 embodied the sort of Reform dreamt of by liberal politicians since José Maria Luis Mora put pen to paper. Comonfort's administration, however, was soon to be cut short by the capture of the capital by Conservative reactionary general Félix Zuloaga and his forces under the banner of the *Plan de Tacubaya*.

Zuloaga demanded the resignation of Comonfort and received it without firing a shot. It seems that Comonfort had simply come to terms with the impossibility of realizing the Reform longed for by the liberals (Krauze 226-228). In his place, however, arose the greatest bulwark of the XIX century Reform movement, "el alma de la nación": Benito Juárez (Sierra 248).

Vehement in his protest against the continuing Reformist attempts of Juárez, Zuloaga appointed himself president of a separate conservative-reactionary government. From this schism erupted the *Guerra de Reforma* (1858-60), and the passage of even more radical reforms such as the *Leyes de Reforma* (1859-1860) (*Ley Lerdo*, *Ley Juárez*, and *Ley Iglesias*) all but guaranteed that no peaceful compromise would ever be considered. This bloody and divisive civil war ended officially on January 1, 1861 with Juárez's reentry into Mexico City.

The Juárez administration, heir to a politics of post-conflict restoration and a dauntingly large foreign debt as a result of past bad management and accumulated war-time expenditures, fought frantically from 1861-1862 to re-attain socio-economic equilibrium while still striving to maintain the permanence of the reforms at the very heart of the liberal political program. This project would have to wait yet again, however, as it was in this very moment that the unbridled ambitions of Napoleon III were unleashed upon the unsuspecting nation in a move that likely

constituted a large part of the impetus behind Altamirano's repudiation of *modas extranjerizantes* in Clemencia.

The Second French Intervention (1862-1867) was welcomed by many conservatives and remaining reactionary generals. In an odd twist of fate, the "Emperor" Maximilian, a liberal thinker and reformer at heart, actually introduced many reforms at least as far-reaching as those desired by Juárez and his party. Much to their chagrin, it was soon made manifest to the conservatives that they had successfully aided and abetted an enemy who was both foreign and zealously opposed to their own ideological *desideratum*. With the execution of Maximilian in 1867 the French Intervention ended, and the nation breathed a sigh of relief. A half-century glut of carnage and reprisal seemed to have finally dominated the bellicosity of the reactionaries and the liberal's unwavering ideological zealotry. The nation was tired, desperate for solace, and the political landscape demanded express, pragmatically viable solutions. Nevertheless, slowly the nightmare of the first half of the XIX century gave way to renewed dreams of a future for a truly modern Mexican nation. It is here, with the liberal agenda finally enjoying a mostly unchallenged prerogative, that one may begin to appreciate the first stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse as presented in Clemencia. Additionally, it is the hope provided by this historical moment which makes possible the author's utopian reconciliation in La navidad en las montañas.

2.2 Altamirano's Instructive Discourse and Social Education: A Lesson in *Patria*

As Altamirano ascended to the upmost heights of Mexican society he attained various enviable positions and "el maestro" would learn many hard and valuable lessons in his life as "educador, político, militar y periodista" (Cortazar, 29). As a soldier he obsessively fought for the cause of liberalism and to safeguard the republican dream that Mora had put forth

immediately following Independence²³. As diplomatic envoy to France he was presented with the opportunity to defend and reinforce an image of Mexican national identity *confeccionado a propósito* for the international stage, and in that capacity he staunchly insisted on the recognition of the viability of the entity whose growth he had contributed so much to fostering²⁴. But it would be through literature that he would realize his greatest advancements in the awakening of the Mexican national consciousness. As Cortazar points out, the grounding of the “premisas instructivas” he sought to disseminate is an essentially literary discursive domain (33). Those advancements would be made in that domain through the dissemination of Altamirano’s instructive discourse, and would be instantiated primarily by way of his preferred ideological vehicle: the novel.

Two questions of undeniable legitimacy now raise their heads: 1) Why was literature chosen as the domain most apt for the dissemination of Altamirano’s instructive discourse?; 2) Furthermore, why was the novel seen as the most suitable vehicle for that discourse²⁵? The answer to both inquiries must be formulated with consideration given to what the liberal national narrative had long held to be the fundamental obstacle to national realization and social progress: lack of education²⁶.

Despite the relative novelty of some of the impediments obstructing the path to modernity arising in the years following Independence in 1821, the problem of the education of the *pueblo* in Mexico was hardly new. In fact, its impact with respect to the various social classes present in the nation had penetrated into the national consciousness sufficiently to obtain a great degree of fixity. In this way anticipated ineptitude due to historical differences, as

²³ Nacci describes the *pormenores* of Altamirano’s military career in *Ignacio Manuel Altamirano*. Cf. p.30-33.

²⁴ Giron’s article “Altamirano, diplomático” explores the suspicious motivations behind Altamirano’s diplomatic appointment. Cf. specifically p. 169-171.

²⁵ These two questions will be answered in sections 3.1 and 3.2.

²⁶ It should be noted that the usage of “education” here, though broad in scope, is primarily meant to refer to social education, understood more specifically as education meant to inform citizens as to their rights and history as such, and to delimit the manner in which they might incorporate themselves into society following the –here specifically liberal –national narrative”.

opposed to overt and expressly racial discrimination, served as the new justification for what amounted to administrative neglect of the development towards social and economic autonomy of some communities. Famed Mexican historian and disciple of Altamirano, Justo Sierra indicates the historical origins of this problem and the necessity of education for its resolution in his Evolución política del pueblo mexicano. As Sierra demonstrates, the severity which characterized the lack of a multi-dimensional educational program -and this only when the situation was not one of total scholastic abandonment- was most obviously exaggerated in the indigenous population:

En donde estaba, al pie del altar, allí quedó, y en nuestros días yace todavía en grandes grupos en el mismo estado, con las mismas costumbres y las mismas supersticiones; tiene que silbar mucho tiempo la locomotora en sus oídos para arrancarla del sueño, tiene la escuela que soplar la verdad en sus almas por dos o tres generaciones todavía para hacerla andar. (63)

It should be kept in mind that Sierra states the above in reference to the conditions of the indigenous population during the beginning of the colonial period in *Nueva España*. What might be surprising to the uninitiated in the history of Mexico will be the lack of a contrast which might have been anticipated between this and the situation of the same population as Sierra describes it following the change of momentum generated by the republican victory on *el cinco de mayo* some three and a half centuries later:

La fiebre de la defensa se iba apoderando del país entero; pero sólo la masa pasiva que constituía el fondo de nuestra nacionalidad (mestizos e indígenas), masa sin espontaneidad alguna, gracias a tres siglos y medio de minoría y dura tutela, se dejaba llevar al ejército y aglomerar en el cuartel; no faltaba en ella el deseo de combatir; pero ese deseo no era capaz de traducirse en iniciativa: era necesario el modo tradicional, la leva. (241)

As Sierra clearly indicates, the education of the indigineous masses continues to be of insurmountable importance. It is true that some particular members of the indigenous community had raised themselves to notoriety, perhaps most notably Altamirano himself. But

although the capacity of their race for achievement -albeit a point only infrequently acknowledged outside of abstraction -was no longer held to be nearly as contentious as the prevailing naturalist thought of the XVI century had frequently argued (*viz.* the argumentation of Juan de Sepúlveda), the population as a whole was far more valued as a potential political resource to be manipulated, that being a far cry from a mutually enriching culture capable of a legitimate and autonomous coexistence with the other segments of the populace.

These masses had been of inestimable importance ever since the uprising of Padre Hidalgo, but their utilization, and the most likely exaggerated, but still significant, tendency towards looting, pillaging, and occasional wanton slaughter, meant that their deployment always ran the risk of being a haphazard and volatile affair²⁷. As the escalation of the violence throughout 1810-11 illustrates, the danger of losing control of a unit and the ensuing descent into carnage, coupled with the debilitating effects of desertion and abandonment, were two problematic factors which could not be underestimated and were augmented as the size of a force increased. The memory of one such event in particular, the siege of the Alhóndiga de Granaditas in Guanajuato, would be forever engraved into the memory of one young Lucas Alamán, and his recollection of this event was likely decisive in his movement towards preference of social stability over progress, a preference which would shape the entirety of the conservative political program for years to come.

The perils of such catastrophes instilled a fear of revolutions in the populace as a whole. This danger seemed even more hauntingly imminent due to indigineous uprisings throughout the remainder of the century, and that same fear extended well beyond any present danger to tinge

²⁷ The violence latent in the deployment of the masses is perhaps best exemplified by Padre Hidalgo's siege of the Alhóndiga de Granaditas in Guanajuato on September 28, 1810. As noted above, Alamán was an eye-witness to the event. Cf. Alamán 412-432.

future indigenous relations with memories of perceived instability, incapacity and inferiority²⁸. These perceptions resulted in characterizations of the indigeneous masses such as the following from Alamán: “Tenían pues estas clases todos los vicios propios de la ignorancia y el abatimiento” (Historia de Méjico, 27). It was argued that this state of affairs signalled that there was simply no way to insure that their participation in political life would be productive since, as Alamán had long noted, “Careciendo de toda instrucción, estaban sujetos a grandes defectos y vicios, pues con ánimos despiertos y cuerpos vigorosos, eran susceptibles de todo lo malo y todo lo bueno” (*ibid* 26). With the incorrigibility of the *indio* having been argued for so long it is not surprising that Altamirano –who’s father’s mayorship in Tixtla was decisive in his being allowed to attend class with the “rational beings” (*viz.* not the indigenous children) –would strive to reconcile the past and present political instability which in Mexico had been central to the propagation of such a defective and prejudiced image of the *indígena* (Nacci 22).

It became obvious that in order to make a place for the indigeneous peoples in Mexican society they would have to be made to understand the nature of the patriotism which fueled their actions. They would have to become the willing bearers of the patriotic sentiment which sustained the revolution instead of the unwitting pawns of a handful of influential *caudillos*. The Independence they had fought for would have to be given to them on their own terms and out of respect for their own merits, realizing the dream of Hidalgo that they might finally be recognized as worthy of “*el camino de la libertad*”, but because of the “*derecho*” that they already possessed, not the “*tolerancia*” of their superiors (Sierra 108).

A lesson in *patria* was necessitated, and it would be Benito Juárez who Sierra would ultimately credit for augmenting the elements of education in order to “*transmutar al indígena y*

²⁸ Brading observes that this fear was also similarly present in Peru following Tupac Amaru’s indigenous uprisal, particularly amongst the *criollos*, and that in both cases it led many to embrace the conservative (then realist) cause: “...la salvaje calidad populista de la revuelta condujo a la atemorizada élite criolla a las fuerzas realistas, para repimir la amenaza a su prosperidad y status”. Cf. Brading p. 75

al mestizo inferior en valores sociales” (280). But, as Cortazar points out, even after the liberal educational program had come into full swing under the auspices of new education czar Gabino Barreda, its effectiveness was mostly confined to the city due to the limitations of economics and infrastructure, and for this reason many of the benefits intended for the *indígena* were never allowed to manifest:

En 1868 Gabino Barreda introduce oficialmente el positivismo en la educación media y superior. Se logra duplicar el número de alumnos en las escuelas oficiales de carácter laico y devotas de la ciencia y el progreso de la patria. Es ésta una medida progresista con base en la expansión educativa que se orienta y se imparte en la ciudad, pues la educación rural sólo llega a niveles elementales y de tipo técnico, no del conocimiento en general. Por ello, la política de desarrollo y de positiva transculturación del indio, con contadas excepciones, no pasaría de ser sólo un buen propósito. (Cortazar 18)

Notwithstanding the specific gravity of the situation of *lo indígena*, their lack of the social education necessary for them to achieve transculturation and entrance into modernity as per the liberal nation-building program was not an isolated phenomenon. Here again, as in the search for identity and belonging mentioned in the above, the *criollos* also suffered from a grievous lack of social education. This crucial shortcoming, however, did not stem from the unavailability of educational resources, but rather from the imperfections of the educational system already in place. Justo Sierra notes with tangible pride the success that the *criollos* had obtained with respect to intellectual and ideological advances in the epoch approaching Independence in spite of the constant meddling of the Church *via* the inquisition: “En la sesión solemne, se vió claramente cuánto habían adelantado las ideas nuevas, cuánto habían leído los mexicanos y cuán impotente había sido la Inquisición para impedir la transformación del alma de un pueblo” (103). The idea of the detrimental interference of the Church in education will be a recurrent theme throughout the present study and it will be addressed as the present analysis turns to La navidad

en las montañas (Ch. V), but its immediate importance revolves around its juxtaposition alongside the foreign influences that would shape education after Independence.

Just as the nature of colonial education had largely been determined either by the Church or by the influx of foreign ideological contraband, the preference for foreign modalities and ways of thinking would continue to be at the heart of the new educational system throughout the first 30 years of the XIX century²⁹. As Alamán understood it, the *criollos* of his era differentiated themselves from the lower class by no means other than their wealth (Alamán 16). And the peninsular Spanish, a class frequently criticized as unfairly having the upper hand in the social development of the nation during the colonial period, also enjoyed little educational superiority³⁰. As Alamán takes care to point out, although the influence of the Illustration in Mexico had been exhausted in this predominantly aristocratic class, its members could still hardly be classified as enlightened: the only real difference between the education of the *criollos* and the *españoles* seemed to be the pragmatic restrictions imposed on the education of the former by the reality of Mexican life and the necessities of survival (Alamán 17). Sierra comments on the the deep-rooted deficiencies of the colonial education as well:

La educación superior que daban a los mexicanos los profesores venidos de España o en la colonia nacidos, que eran los más, era eminentemente extracientífica; gravísimo mal, que no era remediable en aquella época y del que toda la Europa civilizada se resentía... Mas las ciencias, como entonces se decía, eran la teología, la filosofía, el derecho; la clase instruida se afiliaba en uno o en ambos regimientos: el de los clérigos, el de los abogados. (Sierra 89)

The aforementioned deficiencies not only failed to produce a class of educated citizens capable of contributing to the economic and industrial evolution of the nation; it also resulted in the popularization of foreign history and cultural modalities³¹. As Sierra incisively criticizes, the

²⁹ Altamirano's own curriculum is a good example of the foreign influences mentioned. Cf. Nacci p. 24-30.

³⁰ These accusations frequently revolved around the evocation of the image of the "Gachupín perdido", a figure characterized as "un resumen de todos los vicios que a veces precipitaban en los crímenes más atroces". Cf. Alamán p. 14.

³¹ It is of interest to note that the división between "*clerigos*" and "*abogados*" that Sierra mentions anticipates the circumstances of the Mexican population's division during the *Guerra de Reforma*.

result of this apathy toward the history of the nation and disbelief respecting the possibility of Mexican prestige on the international level led to the exaltation of all things foreign, and particularly all things French, over national interests: “los mexicanos instruidos conocían cien veces mejor la historia de Francia que la historia patria” (Sierra 233).

It was not simply that the emulation of traditions and embracement of thinkers from Europe and the United States of America was seen as being unfaithful to Mexican culture. As the history of Europe has demonstrated, most, if not all, aesthetic and political movements between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had their beginnings outside of the Iberian Peninsula. In the case of progressive social engineering and philosophizing in Mexico, this circumstance was tantamount to requiring that they search for the justification of their Independence in thinkers outside of Spain, and in this way the importation of ideologies and corresponding aesthetic evolutions came to be a well established tradition long before the borders of the Mexican nation were established (and subsequently repeatedly re-established) (Sierra 90). After all, the republican model of government was at that time best exemplified in the model present in the United States of America and which had directly served as a model for the liberal *Constitución de 1824* (Sierra 138). As Sierra affirms:

Ante las insensatas amenazas de España, y obedeciendo a la sugestión de las ideas federalistas, un considerable grupo de políticos mexicanos, seguro de que los americanos nunca tratarían de por la fuerza dilatar hasta nuestro territorio su movimiento de expansión (Zavala), se arrimaban a todo lo americano, y en las instituciones y las virtudes del gran pueblo sajón tenían sus irrealizables modelos. (140)

But much had changed between 1824 and 1867. Mexican reality had continued to demonstrate in unmistakable terms the difficulty of transposing the The United States’ model over the political reality of the Mexican nation, and the Constitution of the United states had come to be a work “más copiada que comprendida” (*ibid* 210). The triumph of the Republic

offered liberal thinkers a chance to reflect, and they could not help but feel betrayed by the manifold treacheries which had stained 40 years of international diplomacy with peripeteia of the most unfortunate and paralyzing sort. With respect to Mexico's "energetic and vigorous" neighbor to the North, at least two recognized invasions and the failure of the Monroe Doctrine to offer any guarantee against foreign aggression to the nation during the French Intervention left the liberals reeling as their ideal came crashing down around their heads, eliciting from Altamirano the lamentation of Mexico's constant struggle against external forces, "¡Siempre sorprendidos por el extranjero y en su propio país!" (Altamirano Obras históricas 38). This failure of anticipated assistance from the North, combined with perceived diplomatic insults (specifically the Seward and Campbell letters) led Altamirano to decry the presumptuousness of any power other than Mexico trying to take credit for the success of Independence and the republican triumph: "que nosotros hemos luchado y triunfado gracias a los Estados Unidos, es preciso que sepa el mundo, que tal aseveración es una vil calumnia" (*ibid* 284).

And just as one must recognize the ideological patronage received from the United States, it is also necessary to note how indebted Mexico had become culturally and literarily to France since Independence. In the same way that the Mexican novel was to be understood as reflecting the "alma de la nación", it was necessary to recognize that its relatively late appearance was preceded by foreign novels which had directly contributed to its ability to perform this reflective operation (Brushwood 70-72, 81). As Sierra recounts, "mientras el alma nueva se formaba, su difusa y profusa literatura no podía ser sino un reflejo de la luz, bastante velada ya que brillaba en ultramar" (90). Nevertheless, the bombardment of Veracruz and two "interventions" had ensured that the French would be granted little to no recognition as potential models of any sort after 1867. "El puñal de Napoleón en la garganta" that Alamán had felt had

been brandished too long, and the national ire would not allow its pride to be offended again (Alamán 175).

Altamirano's historical writings are relentless in their criticism of the jeopardy in which French interference had placed the development of the nation:

Nuestra susceptibilidad con este respecto debe herirse por más pequeño que sea el ataque, por más amiga que sea la mano que lo dé, porque para la independencia de México, tan dañosa es la influencia de esta clase que venga del otro lado del mar, como la que venga del otro lado del Bravo. (Altamirano, Obras Históricas 283)

As expressed in the above, liberal sentiment with respect to the two foreign powers who had promised so much assistance ideologically and culturally to Mexico during and after Independence had shifted to a discourse characterized by distrust, betrayal and abandonment:

...los que sabemos, en fin, cuánto y con que esfuerzos heroicos ha luchado el partido republicano de México, abandonado de todo el mundo, podemos decir, alta la frente, y por honra de nuestra patria: que hemos triunfado merced a nuestro esfuerzo, que la victoria sobre la intervención europea ha sido obtenida por los hijos de México solamente, que no contaron ni con tropas, ni con armas, ni con dinero de nuestros vecinos. (ibid 286)

As if to underline the historical roots of this abandonment, Altamirano's writings point toward its analogues in the uprisings of 1810 and the beginning of the Reform through the *Plan de Ayutla* in 1854, stating that "aquella revolución comenzó, como la del año 1810 en la misma comarca, sin contar con más que el valor de los hombres y el apoyo de los pueblos" (ibid 53). But it is here where the social education of the populace becomes of central importance. It was undeniable that foreign models had penetrated and subsequently helped to conform the standard Mexican social education, but now this influence was seen as resulting in a miseducation which failed to instill the patriotic sentiment necessary for the liberal plan. Altamirano had already noted this grievous lack of patriotism in the educated upper class during the campaign against invasion by the United States. It was then that "se pusieron de manifiesto... la indiferencia y falta

de patriotismo de las otras clases llamadas privilegiadas, de lo que constituía la aristocracia... que no supo hacer el sacrificio de sus intereses en aras de la patria” (*ibid* 43). As this wealthy class ascended the Mexican social hierarchy, eventually attaining positions of great political significance, the perils of this miseducation extended from the domain of dissident ideological preference to endanger the entirety of the liberal project for the nation: “Observóse desde entonces que los diputados más considerados por sus antecedentes universitarios fueron precisamente los que combatieron con más ardor las libertades humanas y políticas, lo que demuestra de un modo claro el atraso en que se encontraban los estudios científicos en aquella época” (*ibid* 59).

As demonstrated by the previous overview of the various classes in need of social education in Mexico, this aristocratic class, because of their access to educational facilities –and thusly the far greater likelihood of them being literate –, their economic stability and their immediate potential to make lasting changes in the ideological landscape of the country –a potential only matched by their ability to likewise imperil the nation –, would be the first target of the tutelage which Altamirano sought to promote³². The new social education emitted by his instructive discourse would be patterned in a way similar to that of the new lay education favored by Sierra and the reformists; the primary subject was *patria*, and the goal the “creación de un pueblo mexicano consciente de su derecho” (Sierra 153). In this way, the link between Altamirano’s instructive discourse, the social education it sought to instill, and the liberal project for the nation shines forth, only to be eclipsed by the brilliant promise tied to its success: “Un pueblo educado así, sabe lo que es la patria” (Altamirano, Obras históricas 312).

³² Both Christopher Conway and Óscar Mata signal that Altamirano’s readers were far more likely to be *lectoras* than *lectores*. Cf. Conway, “Lecturas: ventanas de la seducción en *El Zarco*”, p. 95-97, and Mata p. 30-33.

Chapter III: Literature for Change: Ideological Adoption and Rearticulation

3.1 Freedom of Literature through Freedom in Literature

Ignacio M. Altamirano's *novelística* responds to the need for a new social education of the Mexican people already enunciated, and as previously indicated, Mexico's incipient literary culture would house the operations of the instructive discourse meant to convey that social education. Nevertheless, this investigation has yet to respond to the two questions mentioned in section 2.2: 1) Why was literature chosen as the domain most apt for the dissemination of Altamirano's instructive discourse?; furthermore, 2) why was the novel seen as the most suitable vehicle for that discourse? An analysis of the circumstances of the incipient literary culture of Mexico will be necessary for understanding why it is that Altamirano chose literature as the venue to host his instructive discourse and his vision for the nation.

In 1868 Altamirano initiated the first national literary program in Mexico, and apart from that moment "literatura nacional" became synonymous with the ideas surrounding the burgeoning Mexican nationalism of the period (Cortazar 36). As already intimated, it was clear to Altamirano that foreign influences were corrupting the education of the Mexican aristocracy, and, due to the spread of foreign customs and modalities through emulation by the lower classes, the resulting social disease would have to be culled from the Mexican consciousness through social education if the nation were to ever prosper and successfully enter into modernity as a unified whole. Foreign models obscured this transition because they promoted confusion in the *pueblo* by adorning the supposed aristocracy, a class lacking the cultural roots necessary to support its claim to that title and whose dominance was entirely based on its economic superiority, with glamorous flourishes foreign to the Mexican reality outside of its imported literature.

The aristocracy's emulative zeal also served to impede the sort of collective "simultaneous imagining" whose centrality in the "re-presenting" of the "imagined community" that is the nation has been argued by Benedict Anderson, likewise driving deeper the perceived wedge between Mexico's classes and further impairing integration of the various segments of the population that had no place in the foreign imaginings being idolized (Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, p. 25-27). Directly owing to this undeserved adulation, in as much as the nation managed to collectively conjure a glimpse of what Mexico might become, it did so following models which were foreign, not Mexican. The image produced could not help but transmute the pueblo with its sentiments into caricatures of themselves, and the resultant discrepancies between idealization and reality could not but frustrate liberal nationalist sentiment as it struggled to realize what Ernest Gellner has called the "nationalist principle"³³.

In as much as the sentiment aroused by the violation of Gellner's nationalist principle is in some way constituted by the "daily emotions aroused by the same natural objects", the representational displacement of Mexican reality by foreign reality debilitates "the impact of the same world on the sensibility [that] engenders a common soul" (Brushwood 57). As Mexico measured itself against the nations it sought to equal in power and prestige, its lingering gaze facilitated the adoption of conventions and modalities which, although perhaps of great utility in their places of origin, often ended up seducing the aristocracy into conceiving of themselves in terms which were foreign to the reality of their nation. According to the ideals of the liberal nation-building project then underway, this false self-image made grievous omission of the struggle and sacrifice which had enveloped the nation's metamorphosis and the siren song of

³³ In Nations and Nationalism Gellner defines the nationalist principle as follows: "Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent... Nationalist *sentiment* is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of that principle, or the feeling aroused by its fulfillment", p. 1.

foreign decadence and ostentation exacerbated the nation's disorientation towards its own future (Brading, Los orígenes..., p. 139).

Admittedly, and as noted in chapter II, foreign literature, and specifically that of the French, had historically gained a critical foothold in the minds of Mexican authors and had left a significant impression on the *vogue* of the aristocracy. But if, as Altamirano seems to be suggesting, the French romantic models were no longer viable in the national literary project, this had certainly not always been the case. In Roger Picard's detailed socio-historical critique of French Romanticism, he charts the trajectory of this literary movement within France from its beginnings between 1815 and 1820 to its ultimate downturn from 1848 to 1852. As one readily discovers, the Romantic movement was erected around a matrix of thought with which Mexican liberals could readily sympathize (El romanticismo social 15). Picard notes that, as Stendhal defined it, Romanticism was "el arte de dar a los pueblos las obras literarias que, en el estado actual de sus costumbres, y de sus creencias, son susceptibles de proporcionarles el mayor placer posible" (*ibid* 13). This enunciation belies the problematic nature of the utilization of foreign models in Mexican literature: the aesthetic models present in French literature had been developed in direct correlation to French society, French customs, French desires and French sentiments. It should then fail to surprise that the aristocracy's fondness for this literature should entail a fondness for the French society which permeated its works and lent substance to its reality.

But following Altamirano's instructive discourse, these distractions diverted Mexicans' attention away from authentic reflection upon their reality and blinded them to their ability to define themselves in terms of the phenomenon imminent in that reality. The result of this distraction is at the heart of the amorous deception seen in Clemencia. All the more interestingly, his rejection of foreign models actually places Altamirano in line with the sort of

thinking already attributable to French Romantic authors, for, as Victor Hugo declares: “El romanticismo... no es en el fondo, y ésta es su verdadera definición, más que el liberalismo en la literatura... La libertad en el arte, la libertad en la sociedad; ése es el doble fin a que deben tender por igual todos los espíritus consecuentes y lógicos (*ibid* 14). The above indicates that Altamirano shared a similar vision of the mission and potential of literature with the Romantic literary project of the great French authors, but the geographical, political, and cultural disparities between his position and that of the French Romantics necessitated that he seek to emancipate Mexico from the methodologies which had resulted from foreign attempts to instill this freedom. Just as the guiding principles of the French Romanticism had in great part been conformed bearing in mind the particular circumstances of France, Mexico would likewise need to articulate its literary method in relation to its own reality. Altamirano’s novelistic adherence to the basic goals of Romanticism as *per* the French formulation necessarily entailed his rejection of the manner in which the French had attempted to realize those same goals. The direct result of this rejection is manifest in Altamirano’s occupancy of a transdiscursive position, and here specifically locates him in a space in tension between any pure notion of Romanticism or the Realist and *costumbrista* currents that would follow it (Navarro 35-36)

Nevertheless, this attempt to rethink the content of the Romantic program while still embracing the principles which initially determined its direction seemed rife with inherent contradictions. If nothing else, few could negate the aesthetic value of foreign Romantic works and the inspiration that an author might draw from them. Furthermore, although Altamirano might not have written in the French style, it nevertheless appeared to be necessary that he write within the confines of genres whose possible realizations, due to the comparatively late emergence of literary life in Mexico, had already in great part been demonstrated or anticipated by foreign authors. To adopt these formats would surely be to adopt the aesthetic criteria by

which previous foreign works had been historically judged. For reasons already indicated, in as much as a genre's structure had already been regulated and predetermined outside of the reality of the circumstances of Mexico, its utilization in light of undesirable foreign adulation became a self-defeating proposition. What was needed was a form which overturned the reader's preconceived notions, a form which did not characterize itself in terms of its relationship to the achievements of the past but rather in terms of its relationship to a shared, dynamic present, and which lent itself towards the transformation of that intimate present into a future³⁴. Altamirano found the form that he sought in that of the novel, and it is from then on that a new novelistic product begins to flourish in Mexico without the support of antiquated foreign models:

La novela histórica y social mexicana ya no será meramente una copia, estéticamente en forma y contenido, del modelo europeo... Así, la novela europea que se lee en México es una obra que se aprecia por sus costumbres y su pasado medieval, gracias al don artístico del escritor. Pero en la época de los años sesenta los novelistas mexicanos retomarán de la novela histórica europea la estructura y el aspecto imaginativo para adaptarlo al contexto mexicano y conformar un nuevo estilo –y un nuevo producto novelístico en la medida en que habrían de referir los propósitos motivados por su responsabilidad social–.
(Cortazar 25)

Cortazar continues to affirm that Altamirano's preference for the novel directly coincides with his understanding of the role it was capable of playing in his educational project: Altamirano chooses the novel because he thought that it in particular was the format most capable of serving as his vehicle for transmitting instruction to the masses, thereby making cultural independence a possibility (Cortazar 29). But without doubting the certainty of Altamirano's convictions, one is nevertheless inclined to wonder what it is about the nature of the novel that seems to warrant such great interest in its potential. What specific merits might the novel possess in order to justify its investiture with Altamirano's instructive discourse and vision of the nation's future?

The answer lies in an understanding of the novel following the thought of critic and theorist

³⁴ Mata notes that the realization of these goals was often coupled to the promise of the novel as a vehicle of education. This fact is evident in the didactic tone frequently found in nineteenth-century Mexican literature and perhaps most skillfully employed by Altamirano. Cf. Mata p.36.

Mikhail Mikhailson Bakhtin, to whose work one turns to make sense of how and why the novel came to be understood as the optimal medium for Altamirano's educational plan.

3.2 On the Nature of the Novel

M.M. Bakhtin addresses the ever elusive nature of the novel and delineates the means by which the novel evolved and its function in his collected essays, *The Dialogic Imagination*. From the very outset of his interrogation of the novel, Bakhtin declares that it does not function as do other literary genres, for while all genres preceding the novel have become standardized and therefore concretely established normatively, the novel enjoys a flexibility no longer possible within the framework of traditional "generic skeletons" (Bakhtin 3). The flexibility of the novel immerses and exerts itself as the author attempts to impose unity on a form which is capable of taking from all forms, and it is in this acquisition and the subsequent assimilation of elements from other forms that the novel begins to parody all other literary forms (*ibid* 5). This particular feature of the novel is critical for Altamirano's instructive discourse because it makes clear how that discourse functions to incorporate literary techniques and ideologies of origin foreign to Mexican reality while avoiding the foreign emulation that Altamirano's work repudiates.

As the novel advances, its flexibility places the dogmatically rigid aesthetics of canonic literary genres more and more obviously in ridicule, relegating them to the past as victims of stylization (Bakhtin 6). Bakhtin explains that novels "become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the 'novelistic' layers of literary language" (*ibid* 7). The accumulation of these layers allows for the novelized reality to be increasingly permeated by the extraliterary reality of the present, and in this way the novel introduces into the literary world it evokes "a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)" (*ibid*). In the case

of Altamirano's instructive discourse, the unique relationship with the present that the novel is capable of manifesting allows its development to move synchronously with that of a greater awakening of Mexico's consciousness and, as will be seen in El Zarco, makes possible the reconciliation of a literarily evoked national past with the extraliterary present that permeates the novel (Brushwood 81).

On Bakhtin's understanding, the novel's connection to the present is attributable to its youth and status as "the only developing genre". The constant evolution of the novel also affords it the ability to reflect "more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding" (*ibid*). These peculiar characteristics solely possessed by the novel lead Bakhtin to underscore the following:

Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process. The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is, after all, the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it. (*ibid* 7)

From the above it is clear that it is the peculiar nature of the novel that allows it to function as the optimal vehicle for the emission of Altamirano's instructive discourse, but there is something more that demands attention: whereas the standards erected and maintained by French Romanticism once loomed on the literary horizon as a constant threat to cultural independence and the budding fecundity of the "*literatura nacional*", the novelistic deployment of Altamirano's instructive discourse ushers in a new era, and with it a new discursive position standing in defiance of foreign emulation and housed within Clemencia, Mexico's first modern novel and a point of summation for Altamirano's literary and didactic thought (Mata 67, Brushwood 100-101). The novel's being as such mandates that it be original because of the connection it establishes with the polyglossic, unclassifiable and underdetermined present of *Der Velt*; Bakhtin argues the point thusly:

The novel, after all, has no canon of its own. It is, by its very nature, not canonic. It is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review. Such, indeed, is the only possibility open to a genre that structures itself in a zone of direct contact with developing reality. Therefore, the novelization of other genres does not imply their subjection to an alien generic canon; on the contrary, novelization implies their liberation from all that serves as a brake on their unique development, from all that would change them along with the novel into some sort of stylization of forms that have outlived themselves. (39)

As one affirms in accordance with Bakhtin that the novelistic form is characterized by the flux generated by its continuing development, it should also be remembered that this developmental process revolves around the incorporation of extraliterary elements. Such incorporation allows the literary reality of the novel to establish itself in uncommonly intimate relation with the present, resulting in the production of a distinctly efficacious means of social critique. Altamirano manipulates this process of incorporation to his advantage, and in Clemencia he utilizes the novel's special characteristics to attain a degree of proximity to the reality of the Mexican people that facilitates the educational purpose that guides his work. Altamirano then capitalizes on this proximity to construct his characters as recognizable models which will be deftly compared and contrasted in the light of the prevailing liberal ideology he advocated. What is more, the intimacy which characterizes the reader's relationship to the images that Altamirano presents through the novel compels the reader to draw closer to the work, maximally exposing them to Altamirano's instructive discourse, by generating an "impulse to continue" and "impulse to end" both of which "are characteristic only for the novel and are possible only in a zone where there is proximity and contact; in a zone of distanced images they are impossible" (Bakhtin 32). The ultimate goal in this, the initial stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse, will be the exploitation of unifying and decentralizing tendencies surrounding the literary images evoked in order to orchestrate the separation of foreign influence from meditations on the future of Mexico and the formulation of Mexican cultural identity.

Chapter IV: *Clemencia*, or Bad Education and Foreign Adulation

The forces of unification and decentralization that inform the discursive context of Clemencia are placed into play within the period spanning from the end of 1863 to the beginning months of 1864. As he concluded Clemencia in 1869, Altamirano's position and that of the nation were markedly different then they had been a mere five years before. The republican triumph over the allied armies of the conservative reactionaries and the French invaders was understood to have signaled the transformation of Mexico into a nation, and all the unrest and divisiveness that had proceeded this transformation was seen as culminating in Mexico's acquisition of "un alma, la unidad nacional" (Sierra 267). The hope implicit in Sierra's assertion, however, is a far cry from the predominant tone of the country during the worst of the Invasion in the winter of 1863 to 1864, a moment in which French and reactionary aggression had been "rápida y mortal para el gobierno legítimo" (Sierra 247). And who better to illustrate the difference between those two periods than Altamirano, the "tribuno del sur" and "más elocuente vocero" of the new reformist generation, who had been witness to the war from his position within the republican army (Sierra 232)?

In order to accomplish this task, Altamirano launched his instructive discourse with Clemencia to educate the aristocracy as to how they might find their way towards social reconciliation under the banner of a unified, although incipient, Mexican cultural identity. In isolating and critiquing the "foreign" elements –those seen as extraneous to the narrative echoing the liberal perspective- which had come into play in the formation of Mexican cultural identity, Altamirano would reductively craft an exemplary model of the essence of that identity³⁵. The

³⁵ Erica Segre describes the cultural identity advocated by Altamirano in his works as "an austere Mexicanized classicism" opposed to "baroque hybridity". Cf. p. 270.

resultant cultural identity modeled in Clemencia functions didactically to instill the social education propounded by Altamirano's instructive discourse³⁶.

Altamirano's instructive discourse begins its work in Clemencia by fleshing out this context, but rather than appealing directly to his own experiences he chooses to transmit them through his avatar El doctor L. One immediately notes that Altamirano does not deign it necessary to fully incarnate this character, a fact demonstrated from the very beginning by his refusal to give him any name beyond the modicum of information "L". The explanation for this becomes clear as the doctor's role is considered. Altamirano, apparently somewhat reluctant to interfere directly in his novel, intends to utilize the doctor to generate the stage upon which the novel will take place and depends on this character's personal testimony with respect to the events recounted to guarantee the veridical nature of the story: in the author's own words in a *nota* following the story's closure he concedes that the story told by Doctor L "Es un artificio literario, como otro cualquiera, pues necesitaba yo que el doctor narrara, como testigo de los hechos, y no creí que debía tener en cuenta el tamaño de la narración" (129). The importance of the Doctor and his story is so great to Altamirano that he willingly incurs into what he admits is one defect, albeit the smallest, of his "pobre novelita" in order to guarantee this device's success (*ibid*).

Notwithstanding the technical problems implicit in Altamirano's employment of Doctor L, he could hardly have created a character more compatible with his own perspective. One notes from the very beginning of the description of Doctor L that he "es un guapo joven de treinta años y soltero", that being the same age and marital status as Altamirano in the year 1864. The doctor is then characterized as a "literato instruido y amable", both likewise fitting descriptions of Altamirano, and we cannot help but recognize allusions to the disillusionment and passionate

³⁶ Beatriz de Alba-Koch argues that, rather than repudiating all things foreign, Altamirano favors "the adaptation of elements of European culture that he found congenial". Cf. p. 110-111.

sentiment of the author himself in the ideological disposition he attributes to his character: Doctor L is “algo desencantado de la vida, pero lleno de sentimiento y de nobles y elevadas ideas” (3-4). In fact, it seems as if the author himself had self-consciously noted the extent to which he coincided with his narrative mouthpiece and somewhat hurriedly turned from his praise, indicating that any further reflection there would be of little effect for his reader’s understanding of the story (4)³⁷. Two citations are then introduced from Hoffman, a device meant to generate the “impulse to continue” in both the reader and the characters listening to the doctor’s story in the text (*ibid*)³⁸. The curiosity piqued by the anguish evident in these citations is attested to by the listener’s exclamations, and as the doctor draws them near so that his story might commence the reader too is pulled into the near past of December 1863 (4-5).

As Doctor L begins his story the reader is immediately greeted with a fraternal tone and the explicit assumption that the reader is familiar with the history of that year so deeply engraved in the liberal memory (“como ustedes recordarán...”) (5). Nevertheless, it makes sense to think that, given the fact that the author does not omit this history based on the reader’s supposed possession of this knowledge, this tone is best interpreted as being normatively prescriptive rather than descriptive of the reader’s actual knowledge. Upon Altamirano’s model of a good Mexican, the reader should already know what the author goes on to tell, but as described in the previous chapter, there are manifold reasons why Altamirano might have assumed that they would not. In fact, to suppose otherwise would seem to controvert the necessity from whence Altamirano’s instructive discourse emanates. But the historical lesson which constitutes the entirety of the second chapter is also made use of to further the narrative, for it functions to incorporate Doctor L into the historical tapestry by explaining how it was that Doctor L came to find himself in Guadalajara (6). Additionally, the Doctor’s description of his ailments and the

³⁷ Abud offers a reading of Dr. L’s perspective that directly parallels that of Altamirano’s sketched here. Cf. Abud p. 63.

³⁸ Schmidt points out that the inclusion of quotations from Hoffman also alludes to the amorous intrigue to come in the novel. Cf. p. 103.

personal reasons prompting his movement allow Altamirano to detach Doctor L from his own personage, facilitating the immersion of the reader in the primary narrative strand of the novel (that being the story told and not the circumstances of its telling). Having fixed the temporal parameters of the classroom, Altamirano's lesson can now begin, and after assuring the reader once more of the truth of the forthcoming account he moves directly to the description of the characters he will construct to serve his didactic purposes and the surroundings they will inhabit.

Chapters three and four of Clemencia provides preliminary descriptions of *Comandante* Enrique Flores and *Comandante* Fernando Valle. It is fitting that Altamirano should depart from a description of Flores rather than Valle, for, as will be handily demonstrated by the end of the novel, it is the first impression that Enrique is capable of leaving that makes the trauma of the story possible. Furthermore, Enrique does initially seem to be superior to Fernando in all categories. The more ostensible traits demonstrated by the two simply could not be more different. As his flowery surname suggests, Flores is "gallardo" and his eyes exercise a "dominio irresistible y grato" over whomever he fixes his gaze upon. His physiognomy is "tan varonil como bella", and his "grandes ojos azules" and "grandes bigotes rubios" combine with his "hercúleo" and "bien formado" physique to render him a "seductor" par excellence (7-8). Valle's physical traits, however, run quite to the contrary of those of Flores. Whereas Flores' description easily places him within the mold of *criollo*, Valle's morbid visage does not allow for ready categorization. The two share the same age, but Valle's body is described as rachitic, his skin is "moreno" with a hue seemingly indicating "una enfermedad crónica o costumbres desordenadas" (9). His eyes are "pardo" and "regular", his hair black and withered, and his hands thin and tremulous. Whereas Flores' aspect endears him to all whom he encounters, Valle's smile "daba a su semblante un aire de altivez desdeñosa que ofendía, que hacía mal" (9).

As is to be expected, the vast physical discrepancies between the two young officers exerts a profound effect upon the nature of their reception in society, and this effect is further exaggerated by their differing dispositions and manners of comportment. Flores carries himself with “*maneras distinguidas*” and is privy to “*increíble fortuna en los asunto de amor*” because he does not hesitate to appeal to his “*relevantes prendas*” whenever the opportunity presents itself (7). Valle, on the other hand, is “*taciturno*”, “*metódico*”, “*frío*”, and “*reservado*”, all factors which, as will be revealed in time, have lead to him never knowing love (9, 31)³⁹. Even their respective forms of dress betray the profound differences between the two, for while Flores “*era elegante por instinto*”, Valle is “*siempre vestido con su uniforme cuidadosamente aseado, pero sin lujo*” (8, 12). The result is that Flores is adored by his fellow soldiers and officers for his generosity and affability, and the prestige he consequently enjoys causes his companions to comment on the inevitability of his “*próximo y honroso ascenso*” (7). Meanwhile, Valle is disliked by all of his brothers-in-arms, who read in his “*pruebas de un valor temerario*” incontrovertible indications of “*un proyecto siniestro*” (10). In summary, while Valle is perceived as being “*un pobre diablo, bien seco, bien fastidioso, bien repulsivo*”, Flores is “*absolutamente simpático*” (7, 12)⁴⁰.

Before continuing with this analysis, it is absolutely critical that one recognizes the literary devices that Altamirano cunningly employs in the aforementioned descriptions. It should be noted that the author only utilizes direct description of Flores and Valle when presenting their physical characteristics. The remainder of the information provided arrives before the reader by way of hearsay and speculation. Altamirano is careful to specify that Flores “*tenía fama de*

³⁹ It has been argued that the romantic difficulties resultant from Valle’s appearance reflect the prejudices that Altamirano himself suffered due to his “*italicized ethnicity*”. Cf. Segre p. 271.

⁴⁰ This investigation argues that Altamirano portrays European characteristics as being beautiful in order to later decry the social miseducation that leads one to accept that error. Abud argues differently, and states that the narrator’s perspective is such that these characteristics are seen as beautiful specifically because they are European. The difference between these two accounts is that the present investigation takes care to separate what the narrator actually confirms following his own aesthetic judgements and what he mentions but indicates is grounded in the popular social perspective or hearsay. Cf. Abud p. 62.

valiente” (8). At this moment, the substance of this claim is unimportant; what matters is the perception it stems from. Altamirano is playing up the illusion that Flores generates in his hangers-on so that when that same illusion is shattered and reality dawns upon them the impact will be that much more dramatic. In the case of Flores, the rest of the work is done for him: because the impressions that garner Flores such great repute amongst his adorers and comrades all stem explicitly or implicitly from his physical traits and refined demeanor, nothing more is necessary to make these claims appear sufficiently substantive.

It is in Valle’s case that the author will be forced to employ the brunt of his rhetorical repertoire: to conceal his merits sufficiently for the story’s *dénouement* to be successful Altamirano must appeal time and time again to the perceptions that stem from the repugnance which Valle inspires in others. In this way the quantity of claims against Valle function to temporarily mask the ephemeral logic that grounds them. Nevertheless, Altamirano also cautiously inserts a portentous conversation at the very end of his description of the morass of enmity surrounding Valle:

–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. (11)

The allusion above will soon come to fruition as the dastardly deeds of Flores expose his true nature, but the key point which must be reiterated is that from the outset Altamirano is coloring both Flores and Valle with ink drawn from the well of Mexican society’s *qué dirán*. As indicated earlier in this study, the supposedly aristocratic class in Mexico exerted great influence on the remainder of society, and this *qué dirán* was perhaps the most powerful manifestation of that influence. Therefore the faulty perception of either character is precisely that, an error of society’s perception originating from the perceptions of that class and the subsequent emulation

of that perception by others. Said error is the target of the instructive discourse in Clemencia, and it is for this reason that Altamirano purposively designs the context in which both men will meet their destiny to underscore the root of the distortion in society's discernment.

The state of Jalisco, and more specifically Guadalajara, serve as the background of the story being told, and the reasons for its selection are made clear by the manner in which Altamirano approaches its description. The representation of Guadalajara is made patent in two different stages, firstly that of "Guadalajara de lejos", then "Guadalajara de cerca". The contents of these complementary descriptive perspectives resonate throughout the novel and will be echoed in the formation of the oppositions arising between Fernando Valle and Enrique Flores.

In "Guadalajara de lejos", the city's reputation precedes more concrete description: Altamirano declares that Guadalajara "a justo título puede llamarse la reina de Occidente", for although other cities might surpass it in terms of population and mineral resources, the author insists that the city is unrivaled in "belleza", "situación topográfica", and importance as the "centro agrícola de los Estados Occidentales" (14). Not content to merely describe the people of Guadalajara directly in this moment of distanced observation, the narrator speaks of their reputation as if it were common knowledge: the reader is assured that there is a consensus with respect to the praise being given because the narrator himself "había oído nombrar [a Guadalajara] a menudo como la tierra de los hombres valientes y las mujeres hermosas" (14).

The contrast which the author is driving towards and the connection being made between Guadalajara and Fernando Valle become apparent in short: like Valle, Guadalajara "encierra en su seno todas esas bellezas", but is surrounded by a "llanura estéril y solitaria". Because of its surroundings, during "los tiempos calurosos" Guadalajara appears "triste y severo", while in the rainy season "El cielo parece siempre entoldado de nubes sombrías y tempestuosas" (15-16). The narrator goes on to note that these inclement conditions have influenced not only the city,

but also its people: “en sus amores, en sus odios y en sus venganzas se observa siempre la fuerza irresistible de los elementos desencadenados” (16). In order to avoid the sort of mischaracterization that this somewhat violent presentation of the city might provoke, the narrator also takes care to balance his account by alluding to the natural harmony which one encounters there, a phenomenon illustrated by the plentiful and harmonious presence of “los arboles de diversas zonas” which coexist in “admirable consorcio” (16). In doing so the image of Guadalajara becomes more evenly textured, a favor which neither society, nor Clemencia as a member of that society, will concede to Fernando Valle.

One should also note here the presence of a parallel between Valle’s reception and the sort of reception which might have welcomed Altamirano, whose physical characteristics unmistakably marked him as indigenous, into the high society of Mexico City⁴¹. But the most important lines contained therein once again remind the reader that *las apariencias engañan*: “Pero, volviendo al camino de Guadalajara, observaré que no se advierte al aproximarse a ella ese movimiento, esa animación que anuncian la proximidad de una ciudad populosa... El silencio rodea por todas partes a la más alegre y bulliciosa de las ciudades de Occidente” (16). Like Valle’s “*cuerpo raquítrico*”, Guadalajara’s spirit of activity is obscured by its misleading appearances. Nevertheless, the education in *patria* emitted by Altamirano’s instructional discourse continues to figure centrally here as well, as the justification he puts forth for his descriptive zeal illustrates: “Perdonen ustedes mi afición a describir, y no la juzguen tan censurable mientras que ella sirve para dar a conocer las bellezas de la patria, tan ignoradas todavía” (16).

As Altamirano draws the reader closer and closer to Guadalajara the true secrets of the city’s enchantment and beauty begin to reveal themselves. It is the human kindness, best

⁴¹ Christopher Conway describes the challenges that racism presented Altamirano in Mexico City. Cf. Conway, “Contradictions of Autobiographical Indianism”, p. 37-39.

signified in the warmth of family –and it should be noted that according to Altamirano’s instructive discourse all of the nation comprises this family- that makes Guadalajara so attractive: “Desde que se penetra en sus primeras calles hay algo que simpatiza profundamente... algo semejante a la sonrisa de una familia hospitalaria; se diría que una mujer amable y buena le abre a uno los brazos y le estrecha contra su corazón” (17). This profound feeling of welcome runs quite contrary to what the narrator attributes to other cities in the Republic, in which he recalls with distaste “algo que me repelía, se me ha oprimido el corazón como al penetrar en una ciudad enemiga o en una cárcel” (17). These other unnamed cities act as the antithesis of idyllic Guadalajara, and it is of great interest to note the similarities between the tenor of the social environment which Valle has been seen to occupy and that recounted by the narrator here: “cada cara me ha mirado con ceño, y la población entera se me ha figurado que me hacía una mueca de odio y de insulto” (17).

But here again, the comparisons which seem most obvious (those literally pertaining to the cities mentioned) are surpassed in significance by a definitive enunciation which serves as the crux of the novel and this initial stage of the instructive discourse deployed by Altamirano. What truly separates Guadalajara from the other cities in Mexico is a property that its women possess: “una cualidad que no es común, que va siendo más rara de día en día, que va a desaparecer del mundo si Dios no lo remedia... lo que se llama hoy el corazón” (19)⁴². The “corazón” the author speaks of “consiste en saber amar bien y cumplidamente, con ternura, con lealtad, sin miras bastardas, sino en virtud de un sentimiento tan exaltado como puro” (19). However this purity of sentiment, the author warns, is being threatened by the lures of the “becerro de oro” of foreign influence disguised as the path to “civilización” (19). But as the fruitless sacrificio of Clemencia’s father’s wealth to redeem Flores and later Valle will show,

⁴² From Altamirano’s advocacy of the female “*corazón*” and the representation of Valle it can be determined that the foreign “*gusto*” that the author repudiates is not intrinsically feminine. Schmidt argues to the contrary. Cf. Schmidt p. 109.

wealth and adherence to a flawed and *extranjerizante* aristocratic mentality will neither bring the civilization desired by this class, nor is it capable of solving the sorts of problems that stem from treading that erroneous path. And this is made even more problematic because it is that same sort of sentiment, that same *corazón*, which leads one to love the *patria*, so that as it becomes corrupted the energies which were once directed towards patriotic action are squandered on foreign emulation (cf. Schmidt 113-114). The problem of the misdirection of sentiment gives rise to the other two primary characters, Isabel and Clemencia, whose social education has rendered them paragons of misperception⁴³.

Whereas the comparisons mentioned concretize the difference between Valle and Flores, it is the similarities between Clemencia and Isabel which are important here. Both have received a foreign education, a fact attested to in the way in which they both grapple with their emotions: they are both prodigious piano players and it is by way of the French, German and Italian masters that they translate “sus pensamientos desordenados” (39, 41, 44). This predilection towards the foreign is also belied by Clemencia’s usage of the word “soirée” *en lieu* of *fiesta* or *reunión*, and by Clemencia’s insistence that there be a Christmas tree –a tradition which Altamirano notes is “un precioso capricho no introducido todavía en México” –at “la última navidad” (47, 75)⁴⁴. The danger of filtering sentiments through foreign ideologies and models runs parallel to the dangers Altamirano was forced to confront in his election of literature as his preferred educational vehicle: straying outside of the Mexican reality in order to find means to understand that same reality was almost necessarily counter-productive, if not outright harmful. Altamirano strives to prove as much with Clemencia.

⁴³ Jennifer Lin Weger has argued an interpretation of Clemencia contrary to the one taken here. According to her argumentation, Clemencia is meant to function as a progressive model of female subjectivity. Cf. p. 132-133. Schmidt, to the contrary, has written that the emancipation of women was one of the few elements of French Romanticism that Altamirano did not endorse. Cf. Schmidt p. 110.

⁴⁴ de Alba-Koch interprets the presence of the Christmas tree in the scene discussed as an endorsement of the inclusion of select foreign elements in the new Mexican cultural identity. The present investigation opposes this interpretation on the basis of the content of Altamirano’s instructive discourse and the centrality of that discourse in Clemencia. Cf. Alba-Koch 110.

But there is another common thread which binds Isabel and Clemencia together: they rival each other in physical attractiveness, but also with regard to inner beauty. As Altamirano hinted in the interlude to Guadalajara, they are both “dotadas del sentimiento más exquisito... Eran mujeres de corazón” (26). The issue then is not the lack of sentiment, but rather a lack of discernment to properly direct that sentiment. The problem is that “Flores era hermoso” (26), and his beauty is parsed in the terms that the women have been taught to appreciate by the social education they have received. This is why Altamirano takes care to characterize Flores as “el tipo completo del león parisiense en su más elegante expresión” (8). And as both women have concluded that “la forma” is certainly “la revelación clara del alma, el sello que Dios ha puesto para que sea distinguida la belleza moral”, they are left utterly defenseless against Flores’ deceptions (26).

Although it remains unbeknownst to both Isabel and Clemencia for some time, Flores’ façade of *caballerosidad* is shattered for the reader by his flippant dismissal of love and sentimentality. Flores desires neither romance nor happiness for he sees both of these as impossible poetic dreams. The only road by which he might strive to satiate his desires is that of ambition: “Feliz absolutamente, no; necesitaba yo muchas, muchísimas cosas para ser feliz. Mi ambición es insaciable, mis sentidos exigentes hasta lo imposible” (31). This unanticipated divulcation on the part of Flores is met with incredulous astonishment by Valle:

-¿Sus sentidos? ¿Pero usted no tiene corazón?
-Querido, ¿cree usted en el corazón?... Arránqueselo usted a la primera oportunidad, Fernando... el corazón es como el diablo, sólo existe en las leyendas. (31-32)

This is the most significant difference between Flores and the rest of the primary characters: Flores rejection of sentiment means that in his case the issue at stake is not one of direction and discernment, but rather the wholesale repudiation of the very sentiment which gives way to true

love, which allows for the reconciliation of the Mexican family following their historical division, and of greatest import, which sustains the genuine patriotism necessary for fueling the advancement of the Mexican nation into modernity⁴⁵. The vacuous result of Flores' attitude permits the gestation of an ostensibly impressive but ethereal patriotism, the likes of which derogates collective enhancement and a progressive mentality in favor of individual advancement and ascendance:

-De modo que el patriotismo entra muy poco en los propósitos de usted.
-El patriotismo tiene sus móviles de diferente especie; para unos es cuestión de temperamento, para otros es la simple gloria, ese otro platonismo de los tontos. Para mí es la ambición. Yo quiero subir. (33-34)

The true nature of the problematic perceptions of the novel's women, and Clemencia in particular, now raises its ugly head. It is emphasized that patriotism and the willingness to sacrifice oneself as a martyr "en aras de la patria" are understood by Clemencia to be the specific criteria to be fulfilled by the man she will give her heart to: "Se me figura un proscrito, perseguido por todo el mundo, un mártir, un hombre que subiera al cadalso por su fe y por su causa, abandonado de todos, hasta del cielo... este sería el hombre a quien yo amase..." (69).

Clemencia then goes on to assert that this peculiar amorous ideal is not derived from romantic novelistic indulgences. To the contrary, it is produced by her singular "deseos" and "ideas", that is, her authentic sentiments, her *corazón* (69). It is this very same sentiment that leads her to reject any suitor who possesses nothing more than "el atractivo vulgar de una hermosura de Adonis" (69). This assertion proves a point repeatedly emphasized by Altamirano's instructive discourse: it is the judgment that Clemencia lacks, a judgment obscured by faulty education, that leads to her failure to perceive that Flores, the man she so fervently desires, is precisely what she finds repugnant. Her sentiments, although authentic and admirable,

⁴⁵ The parallels between this romantic sentiment and that aroused by Gellner's "nationalist principle" should be kept in mind as this investigation proceeds. Cf. Gellner p.1-10.

simply cannot distinguish the proper object to act upon. The greatest peril she faces, as will be demonstrated by the revelation of Flores' treachery, is that she might act, because her lack of discernment will force her to act wrongly with the best of intentions.

This, then, is the lesson that Altamirano has been striving to instill through his presentation of Flores and the social responses to this character, a lesson which he has been pointing towards since the very beginning of the novel: "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" (9). As the novel progresses towards its conclusion, the reason behind this focus on the characterization of Flores becomes abundantly clear. Flores attempts to exercise his diabolical persuasion over Isabel in order to rob her of her virginal innocence before his unit is dispatched away from Guadalajara, and the ever-virtuous heroine is rescued only by her moral fortitude (71-73). It is at this moment that Isabel realizes that her love stems from deception since "el objeto que lo inspira es indigno de él" (72). Nevertheless, despite her newfound understanding of Flores' character, she finds herself incapable of suppressing the sentiment which attracts her towards him (72-73). The only solution that remains to her is to suffer in silence and hope that one day the pain may be overcome: "amo a Enrique cada momento más, y despreciando su conducta no me es posible despreciarle a él... ignoro si es una locura, pero lo que siento es extraordinario. ¡Y se irá de Guadalajara, y me parece que voy a morir!" (73). Clemencia agrees with Isabel and affirms her rejection of Flores as the virtuous decision, ostensibly identifying Flores as a scoundrel in the process: "–Has hecho bien, Isabel mía, has sido digno de ti. Una joven como tú, virtuosa y altiva, debe sacrificar primero su vida que consentir en recibir tamaña ofensa. Ese hombre no es un caballero... es un libertino gastado en los galanteos y los placeres" (73). But her insistence on the inevitability of these sentiments and their uncontrollable nature

believes that Clemencia herself refuses to claim responsibility for directing her sentiments towards that selfsame scoundrel and will continue to err just as Isabel had: “No dependió de ti dejar de amarle, eso no depende nunca de nuestro corazón” (73). Thusly, Clemencia fails to apprehend the lesson otherwise readily divined from Isabel’s experiences and continues in her pursuit of Enrique Flores. After all, the values disseminated by the supposed aristocracy of the time had made it quite clear that in such situations a woman was to guard her silence if she wished to preserve her honor, and in as much as this was accomplished there could be no culpability assigned to Flores (Conway, “Lecturas:...”, p. 94). This means that Isabel’s silence functions to socially absolve both her and Flores, leaving Clemencia with one less obstacle in her path and no reason to hesitate in her pursuit of a man who had not directly offended her. The requirements needed to satiate the *qué dirán* had already been presented in Isabel’s self-abnegation. Valle, in turn, continues “entregado ciegamente a su amor por Clemencia, y no había para él medio entre ser amado de ella o morir” (77)⁴⁶. His devotion is repaid by Clemencia’s perfidious manipulation, and a duel resulting between he and Flores is only prevented by their both being sent to different positions so that their companies can prepare in anticipation of the French forces (77-78, 80-82).

The two *comandantes* will soon meet again, but this time under very different circumstances, for it is soon discovered that Flores has been providing the French forces with classified information about the republican’s positions and strategies. It is Valle who is first accused, and although it does not stem from any overt malice on his part, it is his testimony that leads to the inquiry which condemns Flores (96-104). One can perhaps glimpse the autor’s underlying motivations here as he asserts that Valle feels no guilt for bringing Flores’ treachery to light, nor should he: “Su conciencia no le acusaba, es verdad, de haber hecho mal en presentar

⁴⁶ Valle’s deception seems to be sufficient evidence to allow us to determine that social miseducation has a variable level of impact and is not exclusively applicable to females.

las pruebas de la traición de Flores... ni era tampoco para un oficial republicano motivo de pesar el que se castigase ejemplarmente la traición a la Patria en aquellos momentos de lucha y de prueba” (104). Valle is selected to be Flores’ custodian in Zapotlán until his execution (101,104). Despite prolific and damning evidence Clemencia and Isabel both refuse to believe that the accusations against Flores could possibly be true, and it is at that moment that the differences between the character of Isabel and Clemencia become overwhelmingly evident (108). While Isabel resigns herself to prayer and disbelief, Clemencia immediately begins to take action at any cost to insure that her “wrongfully” accused lover will be liberated: “De modo que Enrique contaba con la protección de esos dos ángeles. Sólo que Isabel se contentaba con llorar y rezar, y Clemencia trabajaba con energía” (108). Furthermore, the strength of her sentiment, despite the overwhelming indications to the contrary, refuses to allow her to believe that she might have been deceived: “¡Su amante traidor! Eso hubiera querido decir que él la había engañado vilmente” (108).

Allowing herself to continue to be blinded by the sway her miseducation holds over her perceptions, Clemencia once again exercises the bottomless energies of her *corazón* in vain⁴⁷. Even Flores’ protests of cowardice before his imminent death, one which he knows he has rightly merited, fail to awaken Clemencia to the *león* and his ruse. The effect is rather the opposite, as she distorts his pleas to make him conform to the mold of *mártir* and, becoming even more fervent in her misled passion and adoration, blames Valle for Flores’ condemnation and swears vengeance against him:

-No olvides mi súplica. Necesito un veneno, yo no quiero salir a la expectación pública y morir en un cadalso afrentoso. Esta idea me hace perder la cabeza... Por nuestro amor, no lo olvides...

⁴⁷ Giuseppe Bellini argues that Clemencia’s actions are the result of a superficiality and negligence particular to women of the Mexican aristocracy rather than the result of social miseducation as argued here. Cf. p. 41.

...mártir, le amo más, mi amor es casa de su muerte pero me quedo en la tierra unos cuantos días para vengarle. Le pareceré a usted una loca; pero ya me conocerá usted mejor. (110)

Valle suffers greatly in the wake of these words, for his heart still belongs to Clemencia and his disdain for Flores pales in comparison to his love for her. This love will drive him to knowingly sacrifice his life in exchange for that of Flores and thusly the happiness of Clemencia: "...hay una mujer que moriría si lo fusilasen a usted. Quiero que viva y que sea feliz; ella lo ama y a su amor deberá usted su salvación" (113). It is of significance to note from whence this compassion stems, for it is no simple embrace of recklessness and blind romantic zeal at the expense of Valle's duty to his country and his people⁴⁸.

Altamirano has taken great care up to this point in the novel to insure that all conversations that give rise to the topic progressively reaffirm the authentic character of Valle's patriotism and expose the Flores' falsity. By the end of the novel there remains no question as to Valle's goodness or Flores' perfidy in the eyes of the reader. Flores' fall from grace culminates in the author's estimation of his face before death and we see that the valor which was presumptuously attributed to him is as immaterial as his feigned chivalry:

Aquel joven y brillante calavera había sido soldado más bien por vanidad que por organización, y aunque no se contaba de él ningún rasgo de valor, si no había avergonzado el ejército en algunas batallas a que había asistido, era porque siempre había procurado, con maña, esquivar los peligros más serios, sin por eso dar lugar a que se creyese que los huía... no era de esos hombres que sonríen al ver acercarse la muerte. Gastado por los placeres de una vida sibarítica, no tenía en compensación esa fuerza de acero que no se destruye jamás en el espíritu de los valientes". (111)

Nevertheless, Clemencia's self-deception and bad education have driven her to the height of delusion, and she refuses to see in her beloved Flores the traitor to Mexico that he has been accused of being. Her incapacity to do so is magnified even more by the nature of her

⁴⁸ Abud insightfully notes that the day of Valle's execution directly coincides with the defeat of the liberal forces by the French in Guadalajara. Cf. Abud p. 63.

sentiments, for as well demonstrated in the above, her patriotism and her passion stem from the very same fount, a fact which her father notes in their flight from Guadalajara:

-De veras que admiro tu patriotismo, hija mía; no te juzgaba capaz de tamaña exaltación.

-Papá –replicó la niña- a usted debo todas mis ideas y el odio que tengo a los enemigos de México.

-Algo se mezcla el amor en tu patriotismo, según presumo; pero no lo tengo a mal... (85).

The intersection of love and patriotism and the contradictions implicit in their opposition make the revelation of the truth of the Flores' betrayal impossible until, upon his escape thanks to Valle, he himself flippantly confesses:

-¿Luego usted traicionaba? –preguntó Clemencia interrumpiéndole con violencia.

-Traicionar no es la palabra, vida mía; en política estos cambios no son nuevos, y el rencor de los partidos los bautiza con nombres espantosos. Pero el tiempo vuela y es preciso salvarme. (115)

Clemencia then comprehends once and for all the first lesson that Altamirano's instructive discourse has been painstakingly reiterating throughout the novel, and she will no longer allow her devotion to be directed by an education which has summarily failed her:

-¿Es que le amas todavía? –le preguntó tímidamente Isabel.

-Es que le desprecio con toda mi alma. Aquí no hay más que un hombre de corazón, y es el que va a morir... (116).

Finally, after Flores' true nature has been revealed to all, the central message of the initial stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse may be unveiled. After all, knowing why Clemencia and Isabel have both been beguiled by Flores is only half of the lesson. After discovering that this hollow model of *mexicanidad* -one only supported by the caprices of society and unthinking foreign adulation- is not functional as an object of aspiration for the future of Mexican society, one is still left asking what model it is that should become the new focus of emulation.

As should be readily understood, it will be the figure of Fernando Valle who will step in to fill this vacuum. As such he represents the exemplary Mexican liberal hero of the past in

Altamirano's innovatory instructive discourse and the nexus concentrating all of the traits necessary for the proper formulation of the new Mexican cultural identity. This representation of Mexican cultural identity coincided directly with what had long been advocated by the liberal political program, and at its heart was the *criollo* patriotism that had defined the independence movement and guided the nation until the rise of Benito Juárez. The traits expounded therein were the atomic building blocks which would be assembled into Altamirano's *buen mexicano*.

Through this model of authentic Mexican character Altamirano's instructive discourse strives to impress the errors implicit in the *sacrificio inútil* of Clemencia's family fortune and Valle's life into the consciousness of the nation so that similar improvidences might be avoided in the future. Though Altamirano would differ with many of his mentors and herald the *mestizo* as the class to bear the bulk of the the national effort towards modernization, this would be impossible until the *criollos* had finally resolved their disputes over origins and come to terms with themselves and their new position in the cultural landscape⁴⁹. This reconciliation of origins necessitated an understanding of the sacrifices they had made for Mexico and those that had been made for the *criollos* themselves, all of which had come to determine the future of their class and the future of their nation. As the aristocracy came to see what they were, what Mexico *was* and *had been*, they ought to better comprehend their roles in assisting those who would determine what Mexico *would become*. In the same way, they could derive some contentment from knowing that their role in Mexican historical continuity was assured.

A totalizing review of the *buen mexicano*, the new Mexican cultural identity and historical stepping stone from which the nation would depart on its journey into modernity, is now in order. Like Valle, who broke military law for the law of the heart in his release of Flores, but nevertheless overcame heartbreak to face the enemies of the patria, the *buen mexicano* is

⁴⁹ Cf. Ruiz, p. 29.

passionate and its patriotism is rooted in the passion of the sentiments which motivate nationalism, not in the abstract theorization underlying Independence and its political and philosophical underpinnings. Like Valle and Clemencia, the *buen mexicano* is faithful, disciplined, virtuous and active. Like the citizens of Guadalajara, the *buen mexicano* is hospitable and welcoming. It comes from a past of abandonment, as in the case of Fernando and his family, but from this divisiveness should not stem isolation, but rather the embrace of a much larger, grander family: the nation, all Mexicans, are now family as they embrace the unitary identity of *mexicano*. This point lies at the center of Altamirano's reconciliatory instructive discourse, for even if all had not been *buen mexicanos*, all were invited to share Mexico's future as such. Finally, despite outward appearances and social prejudices in his contra, the *buen mexicano* is worthy of love, devotion, and most importantly recognition for all of the greatness that his love of country and his fellow *mexicanos* inspires within him. To this end he need no longer appeal to foreign influences and models which would dilute his identity before it might reach the international stage: the *buen mexicano* merits recognition both domestically and internationally, not for what he is in comparison to others or might be, but for having been and continuing to be *mexicano sin más*.

The disclosure of the nature of the Mexican cultural identity *via* the model of the *buen mexicano* embodied in Fernando Valle represents the completion of the initial stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse and as such provides the prototype for the model Altamirano will incarnate as Nicolás *el humilde herrero* in El Zarco. But before that final phase of his instructive discourse can be made manifest another intermediate stage will be necessary. The intermediate stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse is realized through La navidad en las montañas and entails the reconciliation and emancipation of the faith necessary for the deployment of Altamirano's completed model of the *buen mexicano* in El Zarco.

Chapter V: Reconciliation, Renovation and Rebirth

5.1 Blind Faith Forlorn, Patriotic Faith Reborn

Altamirano's instructive discourse advances to its intermediate stage in 1871 with the publication of La navidad en las montañas. That discourse functions here in a way similar to that found in Clemencia, but its utilization in La navidad en las montañas reflects important methodological differences which take into account the still incipient ideal of Mexican cultural identity modeled in the first stage of that discourse⁵⁰. With this being the case, the instructive discourse operative here functions in a context where the propounded model for Mexican cultural identity is taken to be already present, and La navidad en las montañas relies on an understanding of the possibility of universal adherence to that identity to present this novel as an appeal in universal terms. This strategy coincides with an interesting philosophical tendency present in the works of the Mexican Romantics, and represents an attempt on the part of Altamirano to address his instructive discourse towards a universal man by way of the anxieties of particular individuals (Cf. Brushwood 18). Because of the presence of this new model for unitary national cultural identity, Altamirano's instructive discourse here departs from the critique of *lo extranjero* which primarily thematized Clemencia, and now fixes its corrective ambitions on an element central both to that identity and a multitude of problems which had historically impeded the development of Mexico: the objective here will be the reconciliation and reformation of religious faith (Sol 76)⁵¹.

⁵⁰ The advance of Altamirano's instructive discourse coincides with what Nicolás Shumway has argued is a decisive moment in the intellectual development of the author. Cf. Shumway, p. 185.

⁵¹ Recent criticism seems to be unanimous in its affirmation of the presence of the element of faith in La navidad en las montañas. Nevertheless, the significance of the presence of that faith has been argued in diverse ways. Wright-Rios argues that Altamirano "advocates a Christian spirituality liberated from the baroque bad taste and semi-idolatrous veneration of the saints. For Altamirano, Christianity is nothing less than a sanctified liberalism that unites the book's characters in worship, civic morality, and progress". Wright-Rios later asserts that an examination of Altamirano's essays reveals his advocacy of a return to a simpler, indigenous Catholicism. Cf. p. 56, 61. Shumway argues to the contrary, stating that this novel, and specifically the presence of a priest in the novel, "de ningún modo indica... un retorno al Catolicismo de Altamirano". Instead, Shumway argues that it is the utilitarian value of religious faith for social progress that Altamirano means to propound here. Cf. Shumway p. 188-189. This investigation differentiates itself from previous ones by acknowledging that same utilitarian character of religious faith, but differing as to the means by which its emancipation and reconciliation function, and with respect to how that faith, once renovated, is

From the liberal perspective shared by Altamirano, the issues entailed by the abundant religious faith characteristic of the Mexican populace had often worked against the *pueblo*'s interests in the past, specifically because religious adherents had a history of malleability which the Church frequently exploited to its advantage (Sol 79). In like manner, it should not be forgotten that Altamirano's instructive discourse is in part informed by his own formation under the firebrand *jacobino* Ignacio "el nigromante" Ramírez, who wasted few opportunities to rail against the evils of ecclesiastic influence in the public forum (Shumway 190)⁵². Like that of education, the problem of religion had already put down deep roots before the beginnings of the colony, and the situation had been compounded as the Church came to take the position of "la suprema colaboradora en el gobierno" during the viceroyalty of *Nueva España* (Sierra 75). The Church's strength would only increase with time until it came to acquire "un inmenso poder propio" with great autonomy from the Spanish monarchy, eventually giving rise to what Sierra called "un problema de doble aspecto":

...el político, porque si la riqueza es el poder, no hay duda que el poder lo tenía la Iglesia, y que el Estado... le estaba subalternando, esto era indeclinable; y el económico: no existía riqueza circulante, sino escasísima, en torno de la enorme masa amortizada en manos de la Iglesia; pues sin riqueza circulante el crecimiento social es raquítico y malsano. (82-83)

The Church was the largest landholder in Mexico until the passage of the new *Leyes de Reforma* and the domain in which it might exercise its influence was fundamentally dependent upon the incomes resultant from their possessions. Alamán, who himself showed no violent opposition to the Church, noted that in the first half of the nineteenth-century "La totalidad de las propiedades del clero tanto secular como regular... no bajaba ciertamente de la mitad del valor total de los bienes raíces del país" (67). The *Ley Lerdo* was specifically designed to remove these interests

subsequently employed in *El Zarco* as a means to allow the nation to envision a future beyond Mexico's then abysmal political present (Cf. chapter VI).

⁵² For more on the relationship between Altamirano's thought on religion and those of Ramírez see the following: Krauze, p.191-192. Nacci, p.36-37. Brading, *Los orígenes...*, p.139-140.

from the *manos muertas* of the Church. But, as Mora notes, their lands were not the only sources of ecclesiastical income, for even though “las cofradías eran dueñas de casi todas las tierras de los indios” since the inception of *Nueva España*, the Mexican populace was still required to pay absorbent *diezmos* which were utilized for the “gastos improductivos” of religious ceremonies which in turn only allowed the population to be more readily manipulated and afforded them no tangible improvements (189-191). It may be these unproductive expenditures that cause Altamirano to revile the pagan veneration of saints noted by Wright-Rios⁵³. Furthermore, Mora decries the “votos perpetuos” which the church used to bind the Mexican youth into their service and which were irrevocable, asserting that in this way the Church robbed the nation of the citizens who ought to have been most productive and whose marked lack of representation coincided directly with the nation’s economic paralysis (233-237). It is of interest that although Altamirano does not speak out directly against that practice in La navidad en las montañas, its function parallels the practice of military impressment suffered by Pablo and mentioned toward the end of the novel (161-162)⁵⁴.

One of the harshest criticisms the liberals launched at the Church was directed at the inefficacy of their educational system. Even though the Church’s contribution through education to the burgeoning nation seems *prima facie* to have been integral in its formation, the fact of the superficiality and inadequacy of the ecclesiastical curriculum was sufficient to provoke surprisingly harsh criticism even from Lucas Alamán: “... cuanto en tiempos posteriores ha podido aventajarse en superficie, se ha perdido en profundidad: especialmente el clero, y en esto todavía más el regular que el secular, ha tenido desde aquel tiempo un atraso notable” (19-20). Nevertheless, if the clergy suffered in its ability to provide an education capable of sustaining

⁵³ Cf. footnote 51 above.

⁵⁴ Pablo is the male protagonist of the novel’s romantic subplot.

national advancement, it met with no such shortcomings in its endeavors to socially indoctrinate the *pueblo*.

Whereas the dilemma of social miseducation presented by foreign influences and treated in Clemencia was primarily manifested in the wealthy tiers of the supposed Mexican aristocracy, and only subsequently spread to the remainder of the *pueblo*, the influence of ecclesiastical prescriptions and proscriptions pervaded all of society. The machinery supporting the Church's ideological impositions dated back to the missionaries who had accompanied the first conquistadors, and as society had expanded and interests and means diversified the resultant stratification left few sources of unity beyond that of the Catholic religion untouched. It is intrinsically contradictory, but not at all strange then, that the liberal, republican ideals embodied in the *Constitución de Apatzingán* (1814) include amongst them the acclamation of Catholicism's preeminence in the nation: "La Constitución de Apatzingán se distingue de la de 1812 por su carácter netamente republicano y por una importancia mayor dada al predominio del catolicismo" (Sierra 114). But what had begun as the affirmation of the disposition of a majority rapidly transformed into the rejection of a principle which, as Mora insists, is inevitable in the process of establishing true progress and liberty:

Todo se sacrifica a evitar lo que al fin ha de suceder, sin que haya medio ninguno de impedirlo, porque está en la naturaleza de las cosas y en el curso natural de los adelantos humanos, a saber: la tolerancia religiosa. Ningún pueblo ha establecido la libertad civil sin que venga a parar en la religión, y todos los que han empezado por el reconocimiento de esta no han podido menos de llegar a aquella. (143)

Religious tolerance was not only completely necessary for the advancement of the nation, it was also critical because it would create a rupture in the Church's defenses and allow for criticism of the methods that the Church had employed to maintain its power. The creation of a space for criticism of the Church was essential to the liberals; from their perspective the mantle of ecclesiastical immunity shielded the source of many of Mexico's problems and the *clase*

privilegiada that perpetuated them: “Estas son las clase privilegiadas de la República, y nos hemos detenido en pintarlas y caracterizarlas para que se haga sensible que la mayor parte de los males del país tienen su origen en ellas, y no se corregirán sino con su total abolición” (Mora 120). Moreover, for as long as the clerical mitre had held sway over the populace, a position which it had enjoyed ever since the arrival of the Inquisition in *Nueva España*, the virtues it purported to teach had been slowly transmuted into mockeries of themselves, serving only to obscure the goodness and potential of the Mexican citizens who followed them in order to maintain their subjugates in a state of perpetual dependence. Mora argues thusly:

En el estado actual de las cosas es todavía difícil formar una idea exacta del carácter mexicano que por estarse formando aún no es posible fijarlo:... el corazón del mexicano es recto, franco y abierto. Las ideas de virtud que se le habían dado eran las más a propósito para extraviar su moralidad: hacer compatibles los goces del vicio con los honores de virtud, formar un crimen de los actos más necesarios del entendimiento, y echar por tierra todos los deberes y consideraciones sociales que fundan la mutua confianza entre los individuos de una misma familia y sus deberes recíprocos, he aquí los errores que fomentó y sostuvo en la educación de la juventud mexicana la Inquisición, que en México, como en todas las partes del mundo en que ha existido, ha dado el tono moral. (Mora 78)

The caustic tone that Mora adopts in his criticism of the Church functions in accordance with the aforementioned historical horizon of difficulties linked to the same, difficulties which, like those associated with social education in *Clemencia*, were most aggravated in the indigenous population.

Mora underlines that the *atraso* that population suffers is rooted in the nature of the treatment of the autochthonous peoples by the Church since the birth of the viceroyalty: “Todo su empeño consistía en que fuesen cristianos, sin cuidarse primero de hacerlos hombres, con lo cual se consiguió que no fuesen ni lo uno ni lo otro” (75). By the mid-nineteenth-century little had changed, but some individuals had managed to free themselves from the Church’s paradigmatic bondage and now wished to alleviate the populations which had been so ill-served

by supposed ecclesiastical patrimony. They faced a monolithic enemy, for in the years following Independence “Lo que se establecía en México, en donde la mayoría de las poblaciones se componía de indígenas incultos, o de propietarios mestizos, era en realidad una monarquía disimulada, bajo la influencia de ejército, del clero y de los ricos” (Altamirano, Obras históricas 37). With the final realization of the Reform now within their reach, it had fallen to Mora and Ocampo’s successors to strike the final blow against the clerical institution (Brading, Los orígenes..., 140-142). Altamirano figures foremost among their ranks and deploys his instructive discourse in La navidad en las monañas as a *coup de grâce* against the Church’s monopoly over faith.

Such a project was on dangerous footing from the very outset. As Mora had warned, the Church’s monopoly over social norms and society’s understanding of itself was sustained by structures whose primary function was to maintain the institution of the Church in power:

El clero pues, debilitará siempre la acción del gobierno en todas sus providencias, ya sean adversas, ya indiferentes a sus intereses, por solo el hecho de ser el único creador y regulador de los deberes sociales, y porque no hay una conciencia política, que como la religiosa, funde la necesidad de cumplirlos. (Mora 459-60)

The direct impact of the Church’s stranglehold on faith and morality was most dangerously manifested in the *pueblo’s* failure to distinguish between *el delito civil* and *el pecado religioso* (Mora 458). This ambivalence led to the creation of a zone of maximum hostility towards any progress which did not explicitly entail the further empowerment of the clergy, for in Mexico “para ser tenido por irreligioso, basta no ser secretario ciego de las opiniones... de los frailes y de la curia romana” (Mora 64). This hostility had been fomented by the Church itself, and had played a tremendous role both in the demonization of Padre Hidalgo and the initial failures of the movement towards Independence:

...los pronunciados por la independencia se hallaron envueltos, no sólo en las dificultades políticas de la empresa, muy grandes por sí mismas, sino también en las religiosas,

suscitadas maliciosamente contra su causa, teniendo que defender a la vez la justicia de la independencia, y vindicarlo de la nota de herejía contra un pueblo ignorante y supersticioso. (Mora 66-67)

The intent to establish freedom of religion threatened the lynchpin sustaining the mechanisms of ecclesiastical dominance because “la negación de la libertad de conciencia era la razón misma de su autoridad”.

Nevertheless, it must be underscored that in as much as part of the *pueblo* had been manipulated into opposition of Independence by the Church, the very same faith that made such manipulation possible had also been integral in the uprising of the nation against foreign domination:

...los curas y frailes eran los principales agentes de la revolución; y las masas, compuestas en su totalidad de gentes supersticiosas, eran los medios de acción, se procuró dar una especie de carácter religioso a lo que debía tenerlo político, y se supuso que los españoles, contaminados por el contacto necesario en que se hallaban con los franceses, eran ‘herejes’ y trataban de establecer el ‘tolerantismo’. (Mora 17)

Notwithstanding all of the opportunities that religious faith had provided for manipulation of the populace, it had also served to cement the convictions of the patriots lauded by the liberal narrative to which Mora and Altamirano subscribed:

Una de las cualidades que caracterizaban a los héroes de la Independencia, era una profunda fe religiosa que sólo era superada por la inmensa fe que tenía en la justicia de su causa. Casi, casi confundían una con otra. Para ellos la Independencia era derecho divino, y tenían razón dadas las ideas de aquellos tiempos. (Altamirano, Obras históricas 138)

The problem, then, was not one of religious faith *per se*. The liberal program could find both grounding and a tremendously effective tool for mass mobilization and union in this faith.

Morelos is quoted as saying that “Dios no ha dicho nunca que es padre únicamente de los gachupines; también nosotros somos sus hijos” (Altamirano, Obras históricas 140). With the end of the *Guerra de Reforma*, the time had come to reemploy this faith to reconcile the liberals with the conservatives who had always been allies of the Church. It was essential that the qualifiers

“liberal” and “religious” were no longer viewed as being in contradiction with one another. This necessity was reflected in Altamirano’s emphatic portrayal of Morelos, who “había abrazado la causa de la Independencia nacional, y sin embargo, mantenía pura su fe religiosa” (Altamirano Obras históricas 140). The faith reflected in Mexico’s Catholicism would have to be made to coincide with the progress of the nation in the same way that faith in *la patria* had motivated the revolution of Independence (Altamirano 139). The religion of Abraham and Christ would have to be cast as synonymous with “la religión del patriotismo y de la libertad” (*ibid* 152). Sierra recalls that the liberal press had already begun to advocate such a move: “La prensa liberal desataba en acérbas críticas contra el clero, no atacando a la religion, sino al contrario, confrontando crudamente la conducta del clero con las máximas del Evangelio” (152). This definitive change in the Mexican understanding of faith would require its emancipation from the institution of the Church in Mexico, and the successful attainment of this emancipation is achieved by way of Altamirano’s instructive discourse in La navidad en las montañas.

5.2 A New Hope: The Reconciliation of the Mexican Family

From the very beginning of La navidad en las montañas, Altamirano’s instructive discourse acts to immerse the reader in an idyllic world by conjuring up the nostalgia of an experience dear to the heart of every Mexican, the night before the festivities of Christmas:

“La noche se acercaba tranquila y hermosa: era el 24 de diciembre, es decir, que pronto la noche de Navidad cubriría nuestro hemisferio con su sombra sagrada y animaría a los pueblos cristianos con sus alegrías íntimas. ¿Quién que ha nacido cristiano y que ha oído renovar cada año, en su infancia, la poética leyenda del nacimiento de Jesús, no siente en semejante noche avivarse los más tiernos recuerdos de los primeros días de la vida? (123)

This nostalgia-laden moment provides the perfect context for Altamirano’s instructive discourse to evoke memories of the celebration present in the hearts of all the *pueblos cristianos*, that is to say, all of Mexico, and to thusly fix a universally viable underpinning to the reconciliation of the Mexican family, all of which shares this memory from their *infancia*. From the basis of this

common ground Altamirano's instructive discourse shifts to traverse the problematic nature of the institutional influence of the Church from the liberal perspective, and it is to a new understanding of that basis that it returns when the reunion of all Mexicans in the faith of *patria* has been accomplished at the close of La navidad en las montañas.

As mentioned, the universality of the common ground provided by memories of *la navidad* prompts an unusual change in Altamirano's instructive discourse, and it departs from the narrative puppetry underlying the selection of Doctor L in Clemencia, opting now to carry out its work through a first-person perspective made manifest through a nameless liberal captain. Perhaps there is an autobiographical element behind the adoption of this narrative perspective, but as the story being told relies on its applicability to every Mexican, the possible coincidence of the author's perspective and that of his characters avoids fracturing the narrative image as it would have in Clemencia⁵⁵. It is worth mentioning, however, that attempts to theoretically incorporate the significance of this autobiographical element have led critics to wildly diverse conclusions⁵⁶.

As alluded to by Altamirano's introduction, and as necessitated by the universal applicability that his instructive discourse presupposes in this intermediate stage of its development, the narrator also treasures childhood memories of Christmas. But the memories upon which he fondly reflects contrast painfully with the reality of his situation, and his mind is soon called back to contemplation of a scene more embittered for the sweetness of the remembrance preceding it: "Ay, había repasado en mi mente aquellos hermosos cuadros de la infancia y de la juventud; pero ésta se alejaba de mí a pasos rápidos, y el tiempo que pasó al

⁵⁵ The nostalgia permeated memories of Tixtla present in Altamirano's "La semana santa en mi pueblo" are perhaps even more closely reflective of the contradictory position towards religion that Altamirano struggled to maintain in his private life. Christopher Conway argues as much: cf. "Contradictions of Autobiographical Indianism", p. 45.

⁵⁶ One is the argument by Conway cited above. In contrary fashion, Wright-Rios has denied the existence of the *indígena* in the novel: "Yet, curiously absent from *La navidad en las montañas* imaginary village are Mexico's Indians. The author simply describes the inhabitants as rustic agriculturalists". The text begs to differ: Cf. Wright-Rios 61; Altamirano, *La navidad en las montañas*, p. 154-155.

darle su poético adiós hacía más amarga mi situación actual” (125). The captain, like Altamirano -who had also shared the rank of *capitán* during his service- had fought alongside the liberal forces during “la orgía clerical, la saturnal de sangre” of the *Guerra de Reforma*, and even beyond the battlefield he continues to be haunted by the memories of the treachery and bloodshed which had, following the liberal perspective, been the prevailing theme of the Church’s role in the civil war:

Me hallaba perdido entonces en medio de aquel océano de montañas solitarias y salvajes; era yo un proscrito, una víctima de las pasiones políticas, e iba tal vez en pos de la muerte que los partidarios en la guerra civil tan fácilmente decretan contra sus enemigos. (125)

His only hope now lies in the brief respite he expects to encounter amongst the small mountain populations whose geographical isolation has served to mostly preserve them from being embroiled in the constant political turmoil of more populated regions⁵⁷:

Se me había dicho que terminaría mi jornada en un pueblecillo de montañeses hospitalarios y pobres que vivían del producto de la agricultura, y que disfrutaban de un bienestar relativo merced a su alejamiento de los grandes centros populosos, y a la bondad de sus costumbres patriarcales. (126)

As the unnamed captain approaches the pueblo where he hopes to rest, Altamirano’s instructive discourse purposefully alludes to the religious theme at the heart of this novel by evoking an image directly parallel to that of Joseph and Mary’s approach to Bethlehem through the words of the servant González: “necesitábamos de todos sus auxilios, porque venimos cansados y no hemos encontrado en todo el día un triste rancho donde comer y descansar”(126). But the similarities between that night in Palestine and this in the Mexican mountains end here, for the captain will not be turned away. Nevertheless, his interest and aversion are both piqued when he comes to find out that the lodging his servant has arranged for is to be provided by a priest, and a Spanish one at that: “-¡Español! –me dije yo- eso sí me alarma; yo no he conocido

⁵⁷ Erica Segre notes the unique value that the mountains held for Altamirano in “Memory and Renascence in Altamirano”: “The mountain heights sacred to the pre-conquest Nahuas, still venerated as Catholic shrines after Christianisation, in Altamirano’s metaphorical geography offer spiritual resistance to the crude materialism and ‘extranjerismo’ of urban modernity”. Cf. p. 274.

clérigos españoles más que jesuitas o carlistas, y todos malos” (127). It is obvious that the captain’s estimation of the situation is being informed by his prior experience with the clergy and the violence of the *Guerra de Reforma*, but he takes the first step towards reconciliation out of necessity and decides to guard his tongue in exchange for a good night’s sleep.

Upon arriving at the priest’s residence the captain finds himself before “una casa cural muy modesta” instead of the gluttonous decadence which he might have reasonably expected, and as his surprise turns to pleasure he attempts to connect with the priest by alluding to a passage from *Don Quixote*, a book which Mexicans, after having 300 years to acquaint themselves with Spanish *gusto*, have learned that “siempre será caro a los españoles y a sus descendientes” (127). The seed of friendship between them bears fruit almost as soon as it is sown, and the priest, fully conscious of the preconceptions which the captain must retain with respect to his origin and post, declares that he will be more than happy to rectify any misgivings that the captain might have:

Contestóme que con mucho placer satisfaría mi curiosidad, pues no había nada en su vida que debiera ocultarse; y que, por el contrario, justamente para deshacer en mi ánimo la prevención desfavorable que pudiera haberme producido el saber que era español y cura, pues conocía bastantemente nuestras preocupaciones a ese respecto, muy justas algunas veces, se alegraba de poder referirme en los primeros instantes de nuestro conocimiento algo de su vida... (128)

With these words Altamirano’s instructive discourse signals to the reader that it is about to directly engage in its didactic function, for it is by way of the example of this *cura perfecto* that separating the good of religious faith from the historically manifold ills of the institution that had until then monopolized it becomes possible. The reconciliation which will be necessary between the masses of the faithful and liberal ideologues like Altamirano is first incarnated in the dialogue which obtains between the captain and the priest in this moment.

The first step will be for the priest to demonstrate that his grievances with the Church are very similar to those of the captain and those shared by many in the Mexican population at large. The priest recalls his excitement following his entrance into the Order of the Carmelites, and his subsequent disillusionment as he realized that his idealization of the work he had committed himself to ran quite to the contrary of what actually awaited him:

Conocí entonces... lo que verdaderamente valían las órdenes religiosas en México; comprendí, con dolor, que habían acabado los bellos tiempos en que el convento era el plantel de heroicos misioneros que, a riesgo de su vida, se lanzaban a regiones remotas a llevar con la palabra cristiana la luz de la civilización, y en que el fraile era, no el sacerdote ocioso que veía transcurrir alegremente sus días en las comodidades de una vida sedentaria y regalada, sino el apóstol laborioso que iba a la misión lejana a ceñirse la corona de las victorias evangélicas, reduciendo al cristianismo a los pueblos salvajes, o la del martirio, en cumplimiento de los preceptos de Jesús. (129)

The critique of the decadence and inactivity of the clergy in México made explicit in the above reflects the same position taken by liberal thinkers of the period, and in this way manages to show that the deplorable state of affairs in which the clergy finds itself is symptomatic of the corruption of the institution regulating the practice of the faith; we are to understand then that such a state of affairs is not in any way to be held to be a direct consequence of the core dogmas of Christianity (Brading, “Liberal Patriotism”, 41, 46)⁵⁸. It is to that effect that Altamirano’s instructive discourse illustrates the contrast between the priest’s understanding of his own mission as the fulfillment of the precepts established by Christ with the reality of the situation in Mexico. But it is of even greater import to note that although –due to health problems which preclude the possibility of him traveling – the priest is unable to fulfill his mission as he originally conceived it, that is, to “ser misionero y mártir de la civilización cristiana”, he nevertheless continues to pursue the best approximation of that mission in the small mountain town assigned to him (129). The way in which he carries out his duty in this town will be a

⁵⁸ This point is also sustained by Altamirano’s *elogios* of the Franciscan missionaries of the colonial period. Cf. Brading, “Liberal Patriotism...”, p. 45-46.

response to many of the social evils the Church has been accused of up to this point, and will also allow for the creation of a model which the faithful might follow as a means of reconciling the mandates stemming from their understanding of Christianity with the progress necessary for the advancement of the nation according to the liberal program. The effectiveness of this model for assisting that progress is made unquestionably evident in the spiritual, material and educational advancements which the priest brings to the pueblo⁵⁹.

We find that upon his arrival the priest realized that here too he could be the missionary he had always longed to be: "...en estas montañas también soy misionero, pues sus habitantes vivían, antes de que yo viniese, en un estado muy semejante a la idolatría y a la barbarie" (129). In order to spur on the advancement of his new flock, the priest recurs to the foundation of the same sort of institutions that the liberal plan had been advocating and the dissemination of social and practical education in a way synchronous with that plan:

Yo les he dado nuevas ideas, que se han puesto en práctica con gran provecho, y el pueblo va saliendo poco a poco de su antigua postración. Las costumbres, ya de suyo inocentes, se han mejorado: hemos fundado escuelas, que no había, para niños y para adultos; se ha introducido el cultivo de algunas artes mecánicas, y puedo asegurar a usted, que sin la guerra que ha asolado a toda la comarca, y que aún la amenaza por algún tiempo, si el cielo se apiada de nosotros, mi humilde pueblecito llegará a disfrutar de un bienestar que antes se creía imposible. (130)

Furthermore, despite the numerous benefits that the priest has brought to the town, he does not bask in the glory of his achievements or expect compensation, for he understands the advancements that he has promoted as being mandated by the duties of his post, and even argues that the recompenses and *diezmos* generally extracted from the populace in similar situations ought to be regarded as detestable and exploitative:

-¿De manera, señor cura –le pregunté- que usted no recibe dinero por bautizos, casamientos, misas y entierros?

⁵⁹ Alba-Koch interprets these advancements as being tantamount to the recommendation of the adoption of European customs on the part of Alltamirano. Cf. p. 110-111.

-No, señor; no recibo nada, como va usted a saberlo de boca de los mismos habitantes. Yo tengo mis ideas, que ciertamente no son las generales, pero que practico religiosamente. Yo tengo para mí que hay algo de simonía en estas exigencias pecuniarias, y si conozco que un sacerdote que se consagra a la cura de almas debe vivir de algo, considero también que puede vivir sin exigir nada... (130)

Here the reasoning behind his convictions is essential, for they do not stem from a political ideology, but rather from the tenets of his religious faith and his emulation of Christ: “Así creo que lo quiso Jesucristo, y así vivió él” (130). The nature of the priest has now been fully illuminated for the reader, and Altamirano goes on to confirm that the words the priest has proffered are no mere musings meant to feign humility, as shown in the priest’s final utterance: “-Pero, señor capitán... yo no merezco... yo creo que cumplo... Esto es muy natural; yo no soy nada... ¡qué he de ser yo!” (131). This priest’s objectives are shown to be completely compatible with the aims of the liberal political plan, for the objects of his veneration are “¡Jesucristo! ¡Dios! ¡El pueblo!” (131).

The captain, upon hearing the words of the priest, is overwhelmed as he realizes that this priest is precisely what he has always longed to encounter but what had seemed impossible, for his past experience in the *Reforma* had caused him to equate the entirety of the Christian religion as practiced in Mexico with the greatest enemies of the nation’s progress, the *alto clero*: “Señor, le diré a usted francamente y con mi rudeza militar y republicana: yo he detestado desde mi juventud a los frailes y a los clérigos; les he hecho la Guerra; la estoy haciendo a favor de la Reforma, porque he creído que eran una peste” (131). Nevertheless, in the face of such great and selfless virtue the captain now realizes that he has been wrong, for as he admits, he has always respected Christian virtue. It is just that he had never encountered a true manifestation of that virtue, and had thusly concluded that the very possibility of its existence was counterfactual within the Mexican context:

Oh, señor, yo soy lo que el clero llama un hereje, un impío, un *sansculotte*; pero yo aquí digo a usted, en presencia de Dios, que respeto las verdaderas virtudes cristianas, como jamás las ha respetado fanático o sayón reaccionario alguno. Así, venero la religión de Jesucristo como usted la practica, es decir, como El la enseñó, y no como la practican en todas partes. (131)

Here again, the gravity of this statement is beyond estimation for Altamirano's instructive discourse, for it is shown here that the captain is not discovering Christian virtue through the priest for the first time. Rather, as he himself states, he is simply astonished to recognize his own formulation of Christian virtue, one which coincides with his liberal "republican" perspective, represented in a man who is allied officially with the Church.

As his own words reveal, the captain has always held these tenets to be true and has lived by them for some time, but the political manipulation stemming from the Church had impeded his ability to reconcile his own beliefs with those of that body. In a manner quite similar to that portrayed in Clemencia, the captain's failure to recognize Christianity as compatible with his liberalism also stems from an erroneous perception, but this time the onus falls to the Church for refusing to acknowledge the virtues preached within Mexican liberal political doctrine as the same as those espoused in the Church's dogma. The character of the priest becomes the embodiment of this compatibility and the living proof of its possibility. To be fair, the author seems to understand that such a model seems to be a far cry from the priests actually existent in Mexico, a point which the captain himself underscores in his own inner monologue: "si alguien hubiese venido a contarme que existía en un rincón de la República, a la sazón agitada por las pasiones del clero, un sacerdote como el que yo me había encontrado, francamente, lo habría creído con suma dificultad" (132-133). In the face of this understandable disbelief, Altamirano's instructive discourse insures the believability of his model by closing the novel with the assertion that this story is in fact true and that such a priest does in fact exist, because this story is not one of his own invention, but rather a simple recounting of a story he had been told by a

reliable witness: “Todo esto me fue referido la noche de Navidad de 1871 por un personaje, hoy muy conocido en México, y que durante la guerra de Reforma sirvió en las filas liberales; yo no he hecho más que trasladar al papel sus palabras” (167).

The revelation of the captain, however, should not be taken in isolation, for it is not the only thing that he learns from his encounter with the priest. In meeting with him he is also struck by another epiphany, namely that all of the events which had provoked such great nostalgia at the beginning of the novel are merely epiphenomenon dependent upon the Christian virtue made most clearly manifest during *la navidad*:

¿Qué valen las fiestas de mi niñez, sólo gratas por la alegría tradicional y por la presencia de la familia? ¿Qué valen los profanos regocijos de la gran ciudad que no dejan en el espíritu sino una pasajera impresión de placer? ¿Qué vale todo eso en comparación de la inmensa dicha de encontrar la virtud cristiana, la buena, la santa, la modesta, la práctica, la fecunda en beneficios?... amo al cristianismo cuando lo encuentro tan puro como en los primeros y hermosos días del Evangelio. (131)

This virtue is what truly matters, what had cemented so many of the cultural traditions treasured in Mexico and what could give unity to the national family as the nation progressed into the future. But notwithstanding all of the progress for which the priest has been responsible, he cannot be the sole solution. Altamirano’s instructive discourse attests to this fact by citing the progress the priest has made by introducing the cultivation of wheat, and almost simultaneously signaling that although this indeed signifies substantial progress, the disarray in which the nation finds itself limits the extent of that progress:

-Seguramente; yo creo, como todo el que tiene buen sentido, que la buena y sana alimentación es ya un elemento de progreso...

Pero, ¿qué quiere usted? Los trigos que comienzan a cultivarse en nuestro pequeño valle necesitan un mercado próximo para progresar, pues hasta ahora la cosecha que se ha levantado, sólo ha servido para el alimento de los vecinos. (134)

The notions of faith and virtue that Altamirano’s instructive discourse retakes from the ecclesiastical institution will not solve all of Mexico’s problems, and to promote it as such would

be to falsify its true, substantial value as a moral standard and a unifier. The consequences of such a portrayal would have been all too conducive to further manipulation of the faithful masses, albeit potentially by the liberals instead of the conservatives and the clergy. But this does not devalue the people's faith, rather it enshrines it in its rightful position, and this is more than sufficiently productive for the liberals' aims. The priest highlights the productive uses of religion for the progress of the nation in no uncertain terms:

-La religión, señor capitán, la religión me ha servido de mucho para hacer todo esto. Sin mi carácter religioso quizá no habría yo sido ni escuchado ni comprendido. Verdad es que yo no he propuesto todas esas reformas en nombre de Dios fingiéndome inspirado por él; mi dignidad se opone a esta superchería; pero evidentemente mi carácter de sacerdote y de cura daba una autoridad a mis palabras, que los montañeses no habrían encontrado en la boca de una persona de otra clase. (136)

Religious faith and virtue can be of paramount value to the liberal purpose, as long as Christ's vicars comport themselves as brothers of their followers and not their masters:

Sólo que yo comprendo así mi cristiana misión: debo procurar el bien de mis semejantes por todos los medios honrados; *a ese fin debo invocar la religión de Jesús como causa, para tener la civilización y la virtud como resultado preciso*; el Evangelio no sólo es la Buena Nueva desde el sentido de la conciencia religiosa y moral, sino también desde el punto de vista del bienestar social. La bella y santa idea de la fraternidad humana en todas sus aplicaciones, debe encontrar en el misionero evangélico su más entusiasta propagandista; y así es como este apóstol logrará llevar a los altares de un Dios de paz a un pueblo dócil, regenerado por el trabajo y por la virtud; al campo y al taller, a un pueblo inspirado por la idea religiosa que le ha impuesto, como una ley santa, la ley del trabajo y de la hermandad. (136-137) (Emphasis added)

With the end of the priest's dissertation Altamirano's instructive discourse finally discloses its purpose in this intermediate stage. The result is the proclamation of the hybridization of the religion of *patria* and the Christian religion, and the concretization of the relationship between Christianity and democratic civilization: “–Demócrata o discípulo del gran Maestro Jesús ¿no es acaso la misma cosa...?” (137). The priest is now “hermano” as much as he is “padre”, and by the “ley de hermandad” his mission is to help his brethren rather than parasitically feeding off of them (137). With the adoption of this model of virtuous priesthood Mexico might finally bid

adieu to the days in which the populace had been “un rebaño dominado por el subdelegado y el cura”, chained by “el temor de la horca” and subjugated by “el terror del infierno” (Altamirano, Obras históricas 137).

As La navidad en las montañas draws to a close, Altamirano’s instructive discourse begins to suppress the apologetic overtones which have thematized the novel up until this point. The novel engages in a much lighter romantic subplot which does not fail to provide some social insight and commentary, but none of it is nearly as forceful as that meant to redeem the figure of the priest and establish the compatibility between Christianity and liberalism. It has now been handily demonstrated that religious faith and Christian virtue in and of themselves are not to blame for the *Guerra de Reforma* and for the paralysis of the progress of the nation. The real *culpable* is held to be the Church, the institution whose extraordinarily powerful members had manipulated that faith in order to promote and insure their own interests at the expense of those of the people. As liberalism in that moment had at its core the necessity of the establishment of “libertad de conciencia” and religious tolerance, a fact reflected in the importance of the *Reforma* and the sacrifices made to maintain it, it is implicitly made understood that this too should be accepted under the new synchronization of the political and religious spheres in Mexico. In fact, religion in all of its utility could have a substantial role in this, for as Altamirano points out, even despite the passage of the *Leyes de Reforma* and the decrees of religious freedom therein, “creer que las teorías se desarrollarán solas en un pueblo que tiene costumbres inveteradas, es no conocer el espíritu humano y no comprender la historia” (146).

Religion’s emphasis should now be on virtue, faith and their intrinsic value for the movement towards progress: the Mexican people are now to be “animated by virtue” on the path towards modernity (Brading, “Liberal Patriotism”, 29). In as much as the faithful follow this formulation of religion they will be capable of elevating the populace by founding, “sobre los

principios religiosos libres, el edificio de la prosperidad pública” (146). Following this affirmation, Altamirano’s instructive discourse has successfully emancipated Christian faith and virtue from the devices of those in power in the institution of the Church through the contrast between their actions, those of the priest, and an exegesis of Christian morality. With the success of that emancipation, Christian faith and virtue are reformed into a tool capable of unifying the *pueblo*, both conservatives and liberals, within the liberal program for the advancement of the nation and its faithful. This reconciliation and emancipation of faith signals the completion of the intermediate stage of Altamirano’s instructive discourse. Nevertheless, it will not be until the completion of El Zarco that one sees how that instructive discourse will put this faith to good use by placing it in the hands of the now mature realization of the once incipient model of Mexican cultural identity brought forth in Clemencia.

Chapter VI: Historical Rupture, Textual Unity

6.1 A Nation Beleaguered

Altamirano is generally thought to have written El Zarco in the period between 1885 and 1888, but it was not published until 1901, almost 8 years after his death in 1893. Nevertheless, recent critical investigation has revealed that Altamirano had in fact begun the novel in 1874 (Sol 25, 29-30). Critical editor Manuel Sol suggests that the period of the novel's gestation was not indicative of Altamirano's inability to concretize the objectives to be realized through the work or the means of their realization, since he already had "un perfecto dominio del tema y de lo que proponía estética y socialmente" (*ibid* 29-30)⁶⁰. The present investigation suggests that the lapse between when the novel was finished (1878), and when the author claims he finished it in the text (1888) is more than coincidental, for it seems to correlate all too readily with the retardation of the advancement of the liberal political project by repeated intestinal disturbances in Mexico up until the early years of the Porfiriato. It seems that the lack of an element crucial to the final stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse in El Zarco, which as demonstrated had already been concretized by the author but whose realization was impaired due to extraliterary factors, also seems to coincide with this *atraso*. Ergo this investigation holds this delay to be an affirmation of the structure of the instructive discourse examined here as it is presented, and a confirmation of the necessity of the anteriority of the intermediate stage of that discourse in La navidad en las montañas. The conclusion derived from this premise is that the element provoking this delay was the absence of a manner in which Altamirano might empower his discourse in order to allow it to be realized despite the turbulence of Mexican political reality.

⁶⁰ The text of Manuel Sol's remarkable discovery follows: "Se ha afirmado –debido a que el mismo Altamirano había escrito, en la nota que sigue al título y en la que se encuentra al final del original autógrafo, que los primeros trece capítulos los había leído en las reuniones del Liceo Hidalgo, en 1866, y que había terminado en 1888-, que *El Zarco* se empezó a escribir en 1885 o 1886. *Esta suposición es completamente falsa* (énfasis mío)... Por otra parte, es muy claro que *El Zarco* la empezó a escribir en 1874... Que Altamirano tenía un perfecto dominio del tema y de lo que proponía estética y socialmente nos lo demuestra el hecho de que, cuando se propuso terminarla, lo hizo en poco más de un año... esto es, alrededor de un capítulo por mes, frente a los trece primeros capítulos en los cuales se había tardado aproximadamente doce años" (Cf. 29-30).

Following the sudden death of Benito Juárez in 1872, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, a man bent on insuring the permanency of the *Reforma* as his most radical liberal predecessors, had taken Office first as interim and later as constitutional president. The situation left by the vacancy of Juárez was most dire, for even granting the transcendental importance of the *Reforma* and the institution of the liberal republican governmental model, the internal deficiencies of the country were manifold and constantly threatened the public welfare. Juárez had been all too aware of these problems, and had riskily attempted to maintain the presidency even though his presence had suddenly come to be seen as imperiling the government rather than solidifying it (Brading, “Liberal Patriotism”, p.27). Even Altamirano, he who was once ranked foremost amongst the adherents to Juárez, found this attempt to be a grave misstep: “Éste pudo haberse retirado entonces del poder... Habría sido entonces verdaderamente el Washington de México” (Altamirano, Obras históricas 101). In fact, Juárez was subjected to direct criticism from both Altamirano and Ignacio Ramírez, although Ramírez’s criticism was decidedly more acerbic (Brading, “Liberal Patriotism”, p. 39)⁶¹. But this criticism aside, Altamirano’s estimation of the importance of the role of Juárez is clearly superlative: “Altamirano... presented himself as ‘a humble apostle of the cult of the patria’ and saluted Juárez as ‘the high priest of the republic... our immortal president... the second father of Mexican independence’” (Brading, “Liberal Patriotism...” 38). This must be kept in mind in order to avoid the pitfalls which have led the majority of criticism up to this point to see the inclusion of Juárez in El Zarco as an indictment of his administration rather than a reconciliation of his person. This investigation will demonstrate it to be the latter.

Juárez’s death sent a shockwave through the people, and created a rupture which brought all too fleeting hope to the exhausted liberals struggling to maintain some semblance of stability

⁶¹ Brading attributes the following to Ramírez: “‘Don Benito, you and all yours reduce politics to electoral intrigue, secret expenses, corruption of deputies and the shedding of blood’”. Cf. p. 39.

in order to justify the power they had fought so hard to attain against the constant subversion of intestinal conflicts: “Las armas cayéronse de las manos de los combatientes. Hubo luto en toda la nación. Pocas veces la muerte de un hombre ha apaciguado tan rápidamente los rencores levantados en su contra” (Altamirano, Obras históricas 112). Nevertheless, tremors of instability soon returned to be felt throughout the nation. These were the direct result of the economic toll of the Reform, one which had been unforeseeably exaggerated by the complete absence of any lasting stability since as far back as the brief presidency of Vicente Guerrero in 1829. The Lerdo government had inherited this weighty price, and the economic insolvency of the administration dispelled all hope that stability and progress might be possible: “Naturalmente, todo progreso era imposible entonces” (*ibid* 105).

Something would have to be done, for whereas once the liberals had seen themselves as the avatars of the sentiments of the pueblo, those very same sentiments had now collapsed to a singularity which clamored exclusively for peace, and the stability necessary for the establishment of this peace was one thing that the Lerdo government could not provide: “El deseo verdadero del país... era el de la paz... Todo se sacrificaba a la paz: la Constitución, las ambiciones políticas, todo, la paz sobre todo” (Sierra 288)⁶². Lerdo struggled desperately to return the nation to equilibrium, but as his term was completed it became apparent that what had been impossible at the outset of his governance remained impossible. Despite Lerdo’s re-election, his failure to deliver the peace that had become the one unifying desire of the people insured that the Revolution in Tuxtepec spear-headed by Porfirio Díaz would meet with little resistance: “Al amanecer el año de 1877, la revolución tuxtepecana era dueña del país” (Sierra 286).

⁶² Of the nation’s desperation manifest in El Zarco Melgarejo de Acosta and Lund state: “As much as finding its moral foundation, the nation seems to equally quake before its political reality”. Cf. p. 60.

Díaz, a war hero who had shared in the Republican triumph over the French, capitalized on his popularity to insure that he was chosen to fill the vacuum left by the *antirreelectionista* deposition of Lerdo de Tejada, and until 1880 the *Pax Porfiriana* made good on the promises previous liberal governments could only have dreamt of fulfilling: “Con excepción de estas intentonas de guerra civil, la república, durante el gobierno del general Díaz, es decir, desde 1877 hasta 30 de noviembre de 1880, ha permanecido en paz” (Altamirano, Obras históricas 124). During this time Díaz focused on improvements meant to extend the infrastructure of the country and facilitate modernizations across the board in hopes that the possibility of the generation of new revenues might provide incentives sufficient to insure the pacification of factious internal elements: “A esta conducta política, amplia y fecunda en buenos resultados, el general Díaz ha unido su actividad en la parte administrativa, poniendo las bases del gran movimiento industrial y progreso material que hoy se nota en la república mexicana” (*ibid* 124).

At the end of his term Díaz did not forget the ticket of *no-reelección* that had carried him into power, and he bided his time while consenting to be the puppeteer of figurehead president Manuel González until the moment came for him to establish his dictatorship in 1884 by *temporarily* suspending the Constitution and effectively establishing what Sierra referred to as “La reelección indefinida” (295). His successful manipulation of all parties in power through *clientelismo* and his pacification of the people through “pan o palo” public policy insured his control of the country until 1911 (Krauze 306-308). But this peace carried a price tag too great for some of the members of the liberal party to ignore. Though they could not deny the benefits of Díaz’s rule they nevertheless felt it necessary to assert the impossibility of an accurate assessment of the *Porfiriato* from their historical positions, and declared the necessity of retrospective analysis when such might become possible (Sierra 295; Altamirano, Obras históricas 126-127).

Díaz's liberalism was a reflection of the times and for this reason stands out as being markedly different from the ideology of its forbearers. With the influence of positivist philosophical thought in the style of August Comte, the new liberal mantra had come to be synonymous with "la divulgación de la doctrina de libertad, orden y progreso social de la nación" (Cortazar 105). But the peace brought about by the *Porfiriato* would make manifest only two of these three directives, because the peace imposed was political in nature and did not bring about the fundamental changes necessary in all strata of society. As such, the Porfirian peace was a fabrication dependent on the satisfaction of the foreign interests whose economic investment granted the funds it required in order to promote material and industrial advancement. The liberty of the people was sacrificed to guarantee the stability upon which those investments depended (Bethell 81-88). This situation prompted Justo Sierra, who would also ally himself with the positivist methodology and would utilize it to conceive of the nation as an organism in evolution, to restate the central importance of liberty to the progress of the nation in his conclusion to that work: "Y así queda definido el deber... Toda la evolución social mexicana habrá sido abortiva y frustránea si no llega a ese fin total: la libertad" (298). Social rebirth in the wake of the bloody tide of the *Reforma* would be necessary if the nation as a whole was to enter successfully into modernity, and liberty for all citizens would have to be at the heart of this resurrection. In its absence Mexico would remain the *nación de unos cuantos*.

The scope of the benefits brought on during the *Porfiriato* would have to be called into question if the nation as a whole was to benefit from the tremendous gains which a rare few had reaped from their involvement in Díaz's *clientelismo*. The only method of doing so would be to examine the problems which had given way to Díaz's ascension in hopes of demonstrating how those same problematic circumstances continued to gestate below the surface of the apparent success of the Porfirian government. With El Zarco, Altamirano's instructive discourse makes

apparent the changes which would be necessary in the nation's government if the stability enjoyed was to be married to the progress of the Mexican people as a whole: "más allá de continuar con la propuesta de progreso y conciliación nacional, con *El Zarco* su intención sería mostrar que esto era imposible mientras no se llevaran a cabo ciertos ajustes administrativos y se destituyera lo corrupto del sistema político imperante" (Cortazar 106).

In order to hear Altamirano's message the people would first have to be made to listen, and the *Porfiriato* brought with it an era of mass media censorship which was in the main greatly successful at silencing voices of opposition. Furthermore, the complacent apathy brought on by peace guaranteed that any cries of protest that managed to pass through the government's filters unscathed would almost certainly fall on deaf ears (Bethell 81-88). The resultant difficulty in penetrating the conscience of the *pueblo* is the primary force with which Altamirano's instructive discourse has to reckon, and the structure of El Zarco functions to counteract this resistance. By deploying his instructive discourse through the novel, in which his meaning would have to be deciphered rather than being stated explicitly, Altamirano managed to avoid the immediate censorship and persecution that his communication through other outlets like that of the newspaper might have entailed and guaranteed that his message would be delivered to its intended target without a loss of structural integrity. As this investigation will demonstrate, the structure of the novelistic medium facilitates the understanding of the message emitted by his instructive discourse as it is encoded by incorporating an extra-historical, epic plane of reality similar to that upon which didactic biblical narratives take place. Again, that didactic structure is not coincidental, granted the role that religion has played in Altamirano's instructive discourse up to this point, the didactic ends of his instructive discourse, and particularly because of the role that the faith emancipated in the intermediate stage of that discourse plays in El Zarco. But first

the problems underlying the reality of the *Porfiriato* and that of the novelized period from 1861-1863 have to be addressed.

6.2 Pressing Problems Past and Present

Similar to the tack taken at the beginning of *La navidad en las montañas*, the third and final stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse begins in *El Zarco* with an examination of the bucolically welcoming aspect of the *paisaje* in which the novel takes place. The reader's gaze is brought before Yautepec, a *pueblo* "pintoresco" positioned along a "río apacible de linfas transparentes y serenas". The population of Yautepec is "buena, tranquila, laboriosa, amante de la paz, franca, sencilla y hospitalaria" (*El Zarco* 4)⁶³. Although Altamirano notes that Yautepec has risen as of late in its political importance and its inhabitants have been affected for this reason by the *Guerra de Reforma*, "sus inagotables recursos and su laborosidad" have nevertheless allowed them to reestablish themselves, and for this reason the natural wealth and plenty surrounding them is truly their greatest treasure (4). In accordance with the harmonious interdependence between man and nature so readily seen in Altamirano's presentation of Yautepec, one is led to confirm along with Cortazar that "Yautepec también representa el símbolo de la armonía que ha logrado el hombre mexicano a través de su historia con su propia naturaleza y con su medio ambiente... es la comunidad modelo de paz y de progreso social, y, si entendemos bien al autor, asimismo una representación alegórica de la soberanía de la nación" (110). But it is here that the central problem of the novel also enters into play, for despite all of the natural serenity of the town, it is not tranquility but rather terror which thematizes the existence of the people of Yautepec.

The events of *El Zarco* occur in the period between the years 1861 and 1863, a moment in which the republican government tenaciously struggled to return the nation to stability and

⁶³ Despite Altamirano's explicitly contrary characterization, Schmidt insists that the population is a "populacho sin civilización ni cultura". Cf. p. 114.

equilibrium. Much of the progress toward that end had been shattered by the Second French Intervention (1862-1867), but the nature of that struggle would have to be made clear to the nation so that it could more readily comprehend the efforts expended by the Juárez administration and appreciate the difficulties which had inevitably led to the frustration of its goals (Brushwood 8). This moment is critical to the liberal narrative for a number of reasons, not least among them because it is here that the increasing fatigue of the nation becomes most clear (Abud 58). This fatigue was at the root of the complacent apathy which the nation would have to overcome in the Porfirian era if Mexico was to continue its progress, but the difficulty of doing so had been profoundly exaggerated by the events between 1860 and 1870:

“La conciliación era imposible... el interés hablaba más alto que los sentimientos religiosos, explotados hasta en sus más recónditos raíces por el clero, y ante la perspectiva de las exacciones, de la contribución a la guerilla en la hacienda, el saqueo o el plagio y el préstamo forzoso en la ciudad, y el embargo y la prisión en todas partes, una exasperación profunda se adueñaba de cuantos pensaban y no estaban personalmente interesados en la contienda. (Sierra 219)

Without comprehending the nature of the national fatigue from which stemmed the singular desire of the *pueblo* for peace, it would be impossible to convince the nation to exchange the temporary stability afforded by the *Porfiriato* for the further pursuit of liberty and progress central to the liberal political program. To fail to temper his message to meet its readers might well guarantee that Altamirano’s instructive discourse be received in much the same way as that of the conservatives and their allies during the *Guerra de Reforma*: “Las clases privilegiadas, esto es, el clero, el ejército y los ricos, hacían de nuevo un esfuerzo desesperado para hacerse dueños del poder y entronizar sus principios siempre rechazados por el país” (Altamirano, Obras históricas 65). Altamirano’s instructive discourse returns to the root causes of the instability that had brought on the nation’s fatigue in order to show how said problems

might be resolved without the sacrifice of freedoms seemingly mandated by the Porfirian approach to restoring order.

This final stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse grapples with the destabilizing political problems which most imperiled the future of the nation. These problems can be understood categorically under the heading of "militarism", a term which will be used from here on out in the technical sense defined as follows: "militarism" is to be understood as a proclivity which may prevail in a society and whose presence obscures the possibilities of the realization of a specified goal by means other than those such that they require the imposition of violence. The term "proclivity" here should be understood as a historical tendency which makes itself manifest on both the individual and the social level, and which, due to its historical nature, grows with the passage of time until a cultural intervention successfully corrects or redirects this tendency.

Such a definition is not without precedent, for it draws heavily upon concepts first employed by socio-jurisprudential philosopher Giorgio Agamben in his consideration of political stability and the "state of exception":

Just as between language and world, so between the norm and its application there is no internal nexus that allows one to be derived immediately from the other.

In this sense, the state of exception is the opening of a space in which application and norm reveal their separation and a pure force-of law realizes... a norm whose application has been suspended. In this way, the impossible task of welding norm and reality together, and thereby constituting the normal sphere, is carried out in the form of the exception, that is to say, by presupposing their nexus. This means that in order to apply a norm it is ultimately necessary to suspend its application, to produce an exception. In every case, the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without *logos* claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference. (Agamben State of Exception 40)

The definition laid out here is parasitic on Agamben's notion of the "state of exception" and the raw violence which accompanies it, but its usage herein is more specific, for the present investigation limits itself to an examination of the appropriation of this raw violence by specific parties within the context of Mexico.

Furthermore, whereas Agamben's ideas have operative primacy within the domain of legality, jurisprudence and civil rights and aspire to universal applicability, the conception of "militarism" here is meant to operate solely within the Mexican historical context. As is to be expected, the results of the utilization of this theoretical tool in the domain of discourse concerned with a politically evolving organism – to borrow Sierra's terminology – should be, and in fact are, markedly different. The present investigation presupposes a particular context and accommodates its understanding of the "state of exception" accordingly by choosing to focus on the elements of instability which necessarily emanate from the instantiation of that phenomenon. This modified theoretical paradigm allows one to characterize the "state of exception" in its manifestation at the historical position explored as a rupture that constantly provokes instability, a phenomenon that Agamben explicates in terms of the state of *tumultus*, which produces *magno trepidatio* in a society (Agamben 42). As such, "militarism" occupies this rupture as one sort of category describing the possible means of realizing specified goals in the absence of the necessary order and stability for social progress, and thusly conforms the possible manifestations of "pure violence" present in the "state of exception".

A description of the origins of "militarism" and the *praxis* associated with the manner in which it shapes this pure violence is now essential, and is encountered for the purposes delineated in two different domains: the historical and the literary. Following this bipartite division, two separate but related interrogations are formulated: one historical, which asks after the parties who historically lent agency to the manifestations of "militarism" in nineteenth-century Mexico, and another literary, which asks after the manner in which these parties and the problem of "militarism" in general are represented by Altamirano's instructive discourse in El Zarco.

In response to the first interrogation, and following the liberal perspective contextualizing Altamirano's instructive discourse, one is first confronted with the parties most obviously culpable for the violence during and following the *Guerra de Reforma*, namely the clergy and their military allies. But although the clergy certainly had a great hand in promoting hostilities, the Institution as a whole cannot be said to have personally made manifest the sort of physical violence characteristic of the rupture produced by the "state of exception" in Mexico. This blame is then left to fall to the Church's military allies, and abuse of power by the military class was far from being a novelty in Mexico. Sierra writes that this class first came to be established under Viceroy Iturrigaray, and seems to elude to the treachery that would immerge from it in his concisely incisive description of its patron: "Era un Godoy" (102). As the military class grew, it frequently did so to the detriment of the nation. Many young men foreswore a more practical vocation, that is to say, specifically that which was necessary if the nation was to have the sort of workforce necessary for social and economic progress, in order to join the ranks of the *militares*.

As religious manipulation became more and more closely aligned with the methods and aims of the military class this situation became more perilous. In many cases the resultant confusion of loyalties degenerated into external opportunism and internal cronyism, a fact attested to by Sierra and readily demonstrated by Enrique Flores in *Clemencia*: "Servir al gobierno era su deber general, servir a sus jefes era su deber concreto" (Sierra 150). In this way, the Mexican military class' historical growth is paralleled by the fragmentation of the alliances maintaining its integrity, resulting in an increase of clashes between rival ambitions and more instances for "militarism" to come into play to decide these conflicts, as contemplation of "la manía de pronunciamientos" clearly illustrates (Altamirano *Obras históricas* 99). Porfirio Díaz would also manipulate this "militarism" to his advantage by appointing multiple regional

caudillos and playing them against each other, a practice which would directly lead to the disintegration of the *Porfiriato* between 1910 and 1920 (Bethell 83-94).

With the amassing of forces that had accompanied the *Guerra de Reforma* and the French Intervention, standing military forces had swelled to numbers previously unheard of. Many of these had been reactionary soldiers such as those described by Sierra:

...sin ideas políticas precisas, identificados todos en el odio desdeñoso de los gobiernos que se apoyaban en la guardia nacional, amantes de la guerra por la guerra, por hábito profesional, contando con los aplausos de la sociedad decente, de las familias ricas, en quienes el rencor a las ideas reformistas era religión, contando con las áreas del clero y seguros del éxito militar, se disponían a conquistar la República con la punta de la espada y a disputarse el poder; aquélla era una gigantesca aventura que acometían sin escrúpulo, con regocijado valor. (Sierra 214)

Of those who did not accept the amnesty issued by Benito Juárez after the triumph of the republican forces, many turned to banditry for subsistence, and this same problem occurred even outside of the military class, for it was the common man who had been raised in the *leva* and forced to fight. Furthermore, Altamirano was clearly aware of this fact (Melgarejo de Acosta, 54). Now, upon returning home after fighting for one party or the other, the awaiting economic devastation made brigandage the only viable option for survival for many. This was one of the greatest factors underlying the movement of the desire for peace to the forefront of the national consciousness:

El fracaso de Miramón en Veracruz y el desastre de Degollado en Tacubaya, hacían ver claro que aquella lucha, que desbarataba todos los elementos de trabajo en el país, lo desangraba sin cesar, y obligaba a las poblaciones rurales huir de los campos o a explotar sistemáticamente, hasta convertirlos en profesión, el bandolerismo y el guerrillerismo... e hicieron nacer en todas las conciencias en que un rescoldo de patriotismo quedaba, un anhelo infinito y doloroso de paz. (Sierra 219)

The presence of bandits in Mexico had been a historical fact long before the war for Independence, and one which had become increasingly more problematic with the passage of time. Alamán had made mention of it as early as 1805 (Alamán 51). But with the diminution of

other economic avenues the ranks of Mexican banditry had swollen at an unprecedented rate, and many acted without fear as the band of immunity issued by Juárez to the reactionaries could be manipulated to work in their favor:

...como todo esto sentenciaba a una especie de inanición a los partidos, y sólo permitía vivir a las innúmeras partidas de salteadores, capitaneadas por bandidos de que eran tipos Rojas y Carbajal con la bandera constitucionalista, y Cobos y Lozada con la bandera de la cruz... (Sierra 219)

Altamirano saw in these bandits a possible model for the illustration of social ills, namely that of the *charro*, a frequently robinhoodian figure prominent in the collective Mexican imagination.

This model could provide a literary image that would capitalize on the popularity of that figure to resonate with the hearts and minds of the nation and captivate their imaginations, thusly carving a trail for the didactic purposes of the final stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse.

Nevertheless, Altamirano makes many critical adjustments to the *charro* before deploying it as a model incarnated in the bandit el Zarco⁶⁴. Having now explored the historical interrogation with respect to "militarism", it is now necessary to examine the questions that constitute the aforementioned literary interrogation.

If the *charro* was to serve as Altamirano's model of social ills it would have to first suffer a rearticulation that would in great part remove it from the common conception of the *charro*, and Altamirano does this by making el Zarco the leader of the *plateados*, a historically notorious group of bandits. Paul J. Vanderwood notes that the instability of the period between 1857 and 1867 had accelerated the growth of the number of bandits roaming the countryside, and foremost among them were the *plateados* of Morelos who were feared for their brute force but respected as a manifestation of the Mexican national figure of the *charro* (Vanderwood 8). Nevertheless, the *plateados* differed from the *charro* because their brigandage was neither misunderstood nor

⁶⁴ Christopher Conway's interpretation of El Zarco conflicts with that taken here. He argues that El Zarco represents "una reflexión sobre la subjetividad femenina, y, por otra, una serie de condenas y prescripciones sociales y jurídicas". This investigation affirms the latter half of that claim. Cf. "Lecturas...", p. 101.

robinhoodian; their motivations were limited to the continued extension of their influence and affluence (*ibid* 9). The *plateados*' numbers exceeded a thousand men, and given their power no one was capable of resisting their abuses or safeguarding themselves against their cruel and vengeful reprisals (*ibid* 9-10). The nation's incapacity for resistance and the inability of the federal government to change these circumstances culminated in the unchallenged domination of the State of Morelos by the *plateados* and the near-total economic paralysis of that region by the end of 1861 (*ibid* 10-11). In this way the *plateados* can be understood as epitomizing the problem of militarism at the root of the nation's instability, and this is precisely the sort of representation of them that Altamirano's instructive discourse deploys in El Zarco⁶⁵.

As previously enunciated, it is terror that thematizes the existence of the inhabitants of Yautepec:

[...] hoy no se atrevían a traspasar los dinteles de su casa, y por el contrario, antes de que sonara en el campanario de la parroquia el toque de la oración, hacían sus provisiones de prisa y se encerraban en sus casas, como si hubiese epidemia, palpitando de terror a cada ruido que oían. (5)

The nocturnal assaults of the *plateados* are an imminent menace that constantly threatens the population with “los horrores consiguientes de matanza, de raptos, de incendio y de exterminio” (5). In a departure from the historical situation already explored, Altamirano also takes care to note that this violence does not arise from economic necessity but from the cruel nature of the *plateados*: “los bandidos de la tierra caliente son sobre todo crueles. Por horrenda e innecesaria que fuere una crueldad, la cometían por instinto, por brutalidad, por el deseo de aumentar el terror entre las gentes y divertirse con el” (5). It is their love of cruelty and purposeful opposition to stability that warps the potential tranquility of the *ambience* of Yautepec into “esos tiempos siempre medrosos” (5). As reflected by the historical reality of the situation, the

⁶⁵ Some critics have interpreted the symbolic value of the *plateados* differently. Ruiz, for example, identifies them with the “masas populares” and the “vulgo”. Cf. p. 26.

prosecution and elimination of these bandits was made impossible by the accomplices brought under their sway by fear and coercion: “[los plateados] contaban siempre con muchos cómplices y emisarios dentro de las poblaciones de las haciendas, y que las pobres autoridades, acobordadas por falta de elementos de defense, se veían obligadas [...] a entrar en transacciones con ellos, contentándose con ocultarse o con huir para salvar la vida” (5). This effectively gave the *plateados carte blanche* to pursue their own sinister ends and led to their further accumulation of power and influence: “envalentonados en esta situación, fiados en la dificultad que tenía el gobierno para perseguirlos, ocupado como estaba en combatir la guerra civil, se habían organizado en grandes partidos de cien, doscientos y hasta quinientos hombres” (6). The methods they used to maintain that power also expanded in like fashion to include “el plagio, es decir, el secuestro de personas, a quienes no soltaban sino mediante un fuerte rescate” (6).

These then are the *plateados* as Altamirano’s instructive discourse portrays them, and as such they serve as a manifestation of the destabilizing evils of “militarism” in Yauhtepec, and in accordance with the symbolic value of that *pueblo*, in the nation as a whole (Cortazar 110). Altamirano’s didactic description of the phenomenon of “militarism” gives way to the expression of the sentiment that “militarism” had generated in the populace, and this displacement is primarily conveyed through the exclamations of the population as they react to their own current state of vulnerability resultant from the *Guerra de Reforma* and the bandit scourge. Altamirano’s instructive discourse does not stop there, however, and it is through the medium of the leader of the *plateados* and the novel’s titular character that it confections the most important representation of the evils impeding the nation’s progress by aggregating problematic elements already explored in Altamirano’s previous novels to that of the “militarism” central to the literary world of El Zarco.

6.3 Bifurcation of Textual Reality and the Epic Engagement of Abstract Oppositions

“Militarism” in the sense defined is perpetuated by the presence of a rupture in society, namely that between the application of a norm and the norm itself. As indicated in the above, such a rupture had been present for some time in Mexico, precipitating the continued manifestation of “militarism” while simultaneously perpetuating its instantiation. This social rupture corresponds to another rupture present in the text of El Zarco, and this second rupture on the textual level produces different, though correspondingly similar results. Altamirano’s instructive discourse ingeniously exploits this rupture through the textual structuring of El Zarco. After all, Altamirano’s instructive discourse utilizes the novel as its avatar because of its specific properties as a literary form, amongst which one finds the possibility of the existence of such a rupture, as Bakhtin elaborates in his exposition of the fundamental characteristics of the novel: the novel is distinguished in part from other genres because it allows for “radical change” in the “temporal coordinates of the literary image” (Bakhtin 11). The conscious utilization of this potential for “radical change” results in the creation of a “new zone opened by the novel for the structuring of literary images, namely, the zone of maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all of its openendedness” (*ibid*). In El Zarco this textual rupture facilitates “the transposition of realities in order to provoke an awareness rooted in the past but possibilited by the present” (Brushwood 9).

Altamirano’s instructive discourse recurs to the historical past of 1861-1863 from its original position of deployment at the moment that the author declares the novel’s completion (1888), and this movement indicates its determination to take advantage of the possibility of temporally structuring the textual world of El Zarco afforded by the novelistic form. Furthermore, the span connecting the epoch of the writing of the novel, that of its intended audience, and that encapsulating the events novelized in El Zarco is sustained and unified by the

stages of Altamirano's instructive discourse which have up to this point sought to extract lessons from Mexico's past and to impart them to the readers contemporaneous with the author. Thusly, the transposition of historical periods in El Zarco results in the unitary structuring of the text and a resultant thematic cohesiveness connecting the lessons of the past and the difficulties of the present *via* an appeal to extraliterary historical elements. This peculiar thematic cohesion can be understood to be the product of the dialogized novelistic image resultant from the intervention of the didactic aims of Altamirano's instructive discourse in the text (Bakhtin 46). This textual strategy facilitates the ideological penetration necessary for the dissemination of Altamirano's message. But though this structural rupture serves to ostensibly unify the text despite the incorporation of past and present, and thusly lends it thematic cohesiveness, its impact on the internal textual reality of the novel functions quite to the contrary.

In as much as it effects the reality of the literary world of El Zarco, this structural rupture in the text also produces a bifurcation which crescendos until the end of the novel, at which point the various characters pertain to one of two symbolically separate planes which are ontologically distinct but unified by the author's narrative and the two stages of Altamirano's instructive discourse proceeding El Zarco⁶⁶. The first of the two planes produced by the bifurcation of textual reality is historical in nature and is existent as the primary ontological plane from the very beginning of the novel. It is on this plane that the majority of the characters comprising the *dramatis personae* of El Zarco are encountered.

The first characters deployed in this final stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse are "las dos amigas" Pilar and Manuela, and both their presentation and relationship is very similar to that of Clemencia and Isabel in the initial stage of that discourse (Clemencia). There is,

⁶⁶ The results of this bifurcation and the resultant conversion of the nature of the characters initially present in El Zarco, a fact which following this investigation results in the transposition of certain characters to a plane of epic literary representation, has been explained otherwise in the criticism of this novel and has led to accusations of maniquean character creation on the part of Altamirano. Nevertheless, many acknowledge that this situation is directly indicative of the predominance of Altamirano's didactic purpose in this novel. Cf. Ruiz, p. 27 and García, p. 94.

however, one critical difference which must not be neglected: whereas Clemencia and Isabel both had their respective vices in Clemencia, the two primary female characters in El Zarco are constructed so that one is obviously inferior to the other following the perspective of the liberal nation-building project orientating Altamirano's instructive discourse. Pilar is "morena; con ese tono suave y delicado de las criollas que se alejan del tipo español", and although a strategy similar to that utilized in the characterization of Fernando Valle in Clemencia is employed by initially stating that "su cuerpo [...] parecía enfermizo" and by noting her "melancolía", these devices will soon be dropped to reveal her true character (7). The decisive moment arrives when Nicolás, Pilar true love, is unjustly imprisoned by a passing band of *militares* who take his completely justifiable accusations of negligence as an insult and decide to imprison him (55-56). Pilar is overcome by this cruel twist of fate and her true character as the virtuous model of Mexican womanhood shines forth:

En otras circunstancias, ella, dulce, resignada por carácter, tímida y ruborosa, habría muerto antes que revelar el secreto que hacía al mismo tiempo la delicia y el tormento de su corazón. Pero en aquellos momentos, cuando la vida del joven estaba peligrando y lo suponía desamparado de todos y entre las garras de aquellos militares arbitrarios y feroces, la buena y virtuosa joven no tuvo en cuenta su edad ni su sexo; no reparó en que su educación retraída había producido el aislamiento en torno suyo; no temió para nada el qué dirán de las gentes de su pueblo; no pensó más que en la salvación de Nicolás, y por conseguirla salió de la casa de su madrina [...]. (58)

In this way Pilar comes to embody all of the virtue that Clemencia and Isabel had possessed, but does not suffer from the same faulty education and misleading perceptions which might turn her away from the love of the novel's true representation of Altamirano's *buen mexicano* as Clemencia had. Furthermore, her racial characteristics fit perfectly with Altamirano's social theory which emphasized that it was the *mestizo* who was most apt to carry out the initial push for the progress of the nation⁶⁷:

⁶⁷ The concept of *mestizaje* in Altamirano's work is intimately linked with the sort of transculturation first formulated by Fernando Ortiz. Cf. Solares-Larrave p. 60.

Altamirano [...] con este recuento inicial de la historia de *El Zarco* también apelaba a un precedente que había hecho público en 1866; el mismo que en su presente encontraba un nuevo auge; y que después en 1889 Justo Sierra evocaría como parte de la retórica oficialista. Esto es, que de los grupos raciales en México el mestizo era ‘el más apto, el agente de progreso’, y que el indio, para poder progresar, había tenido que transformarse en mestizo. (Cortazar 110)

Pilar embodies all of the qualities which Altamirano saw as integral to the progress of the nation, and as such she serves as an instructive model of Mexican womanhood to be emulated and adulated by El Zarco’s readers. It is only fitting then that she is to be married to Nicolás at the finale of the novel, thereby sealing the ideal union of the Mexican family both symbolically and didactically (118-119). The character of Nicolás also readily functions to achieve this model union, for as Cortazar signals, just as el Zarco “evade las virtudes republicanas”, “Nicolás las profesa como el credo de su existencia” (Cortazar 112).

Manuela, on the other hand embodies all of the characteristics which no longer fit within the Mexican identity as Altamirano had distilled it in Clemencia. Manuela is “blanca” and possesses “ojos oscuros pero vivaces”, but her corrupt nature begins to be revealed as the narrator notes that “tenía algo de soberbio y desdeñoso” and that she wears “una sonrisa más bien burlona que benévola” (6). Nonetheless, all of these physical characteristics only hint at the shortfalls of Manuela’s character, and her true nature will not be totally brought to light until her lover el Zarco arrives and it is revealed that she, like Clemencia and Isabel, has been deceived by illusions of gallantry and glamour in a manner strikingly similar to that employed by Enrique Flores in Clemencia. Not coincidentally, it is at that very same moment that the narrative reality of El Zarco bifurcates and assumes different trajectories as two separate ontological planes.

El Zarco first interacts with Manuela during a secret “entrevista”, and it is then that she divulges her desire to run away with El Zarco to the “guarida” of the *plateados* (22-28). Having fallen victim to her illusions of the grandeur and adventure of the life of banditry, she willfully

surrenders herself to the bandit and the two of them soon depart for the *plateados*' lair in Xochimancas. El Zarco as he has been described up to this point shares many characteristics found in Clemencia's treacherous antagonist Enrique Flores: like Flores, el Zarco is “alto, bien proporcionado, and de espaldas hercúleas”, “blanco y güero” and as his name indicates, he too has strikingly blue eyes (20)⁶⁸. But unlike in the case of Flores, el Zarco begins to be shaped as the antagonist of this novel almost as soon as he appears “caminando así a mujeriegas” (19). Nevertheless, all of the subtleties of Flores' *altanería* would be insufficient to mask the decadent ostentation of el Zarco, leader of the *plateados*, for when he first appears he is “cubierto literalmente de plata” (20). Altamirano's instructive discourse deploys this brusquely damning characterization of el Zarco purposively, for readers must not be lulled into thinking even for a moment that el Zarco could be anything but the enemy of virtue and progress. As shown, this effect is emphasized by that discourse's attribution of the same sort of characteristics which typified the problem of foreign influence decried in Clemencia to el Zarco and his lover Manuela. This initial characterization, however, is only the first step in a two-phase process which terminates in the transformation of el Zarco from a historical figure related to the *charro* of national legend to the totalizing incarnation of the social ills impeding Mexico's national progress.

As this process continues, it will do so on the second aforementioned plane of reality, one which is epic rather than historical in nature. Structurally, this division enters in as Altamirano's instructive discourse injects elements of the epic genre into the novel, and its doing so is central to the realization of its didactic aims seen here in evolution since Clemencia. On Bakhtin's understanding, the epic as a genre shares three constitutive features: “(1) a national epic past [...] serves as the subject for the epic”; “(2) national tradition (not personal experience or the free

⁶⁸ Conway has argued that el Zarco's presentation should be interpreted as a commentary on female subjectivity. Cf. “Lecturas...” p. 101.

thought that grows out of it) serves as the source for the epic”; (3) an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is, from the time in which the singer (the author and his audience) lives” (Bakhtin 13). Going forward this investigation shows how El Zarco incorporates these elements to define this second plane of epic reality and how this process relates to the overall function of Altamirano’s instructive discourse in this novel.

The second phase of el Zarco’s characterization occurs when he returns with Manuela to the *plateado*’s hideout in Xochimancas. The narrator then recounts her experiences “entre los bandidos”, and with the passage of time the reality of her repugnant situation becomes abundantly clear to the reader, although not entirely to Manuela, because of the blindness brought on by her “ensueño romántico-idealista”. Altamirano maneuvers the reader’s perspective so that one cannot help but come to the conclusion that el Zarco and his cohorts are “delictiva” and “antisocial” by their very nature; the author’s message is that “debían de ser exterminados como tales” (Cortazar 113). Not even the love of Manuela will earn el Zarco any sympathy, for the narrator readily confirms the reader suspicions that this love, like el Zarco himself, is already perverse beyond all redemption:

Porque el Zarco amaba también a Manuela, sólo que él la amaba de la única manera que podía amar un hombre encenagado en el crimen, un hombre a quien era extraña toda noción de bien, en cuya alma tenebrosa y pervertida sólo tenían cabida ya los goces de un sensualismo bestial y las infames emociones que pueden producir el robo y la matanza. (26-27)

By characterizing el Zarco thusly, Altamirano prepares the bandit to bear the symbolic weight of all social evil, and at the end of this transformation el Zarco will be relocated from the historical plane of the novel to the epic plane where he will remain as disorder incarnate, the amalgamation of the worst of the ills resultant from foreign adulation, lack of virtue and “militarism”, until he is finally confronted by an opponent who is capable of challenging him. It is significant that the process of relocation of el Zarco occurs in Xochimancas, specifically because the process of this

relocation is facilitated by Xochimancas' construction as a "space of disarticulation" defined only "by the total lack of reason, where chaos, passions, mistrust and greed govern" (Melgarejo Acosta 53). But the process of relocation is also of significant symbolic weight in and of itself, for in this process Altamirano's instructive discourse distances el Zarco from the textual realm of the historical plane populated by the people of Yautepec that readers have been in the process of identifying with since the beginning of the novel. This shift had already been initiated through the movement of the narrator to describe Xochimancas instead of Yautepec, but allowing it to be echoed by the symbolic structure of the novel in this way instantiates the third characteristic of the epic mentioned by Bakhtin, that of epic distance and removal from contemporaneous reality, and thusly represents an appeal to this form and its respective devices and capacities by Altamirano's instructive discourse (Bakhtin 13).

This transformation and relocation is also facilitated by a descriptive departure from the traditional form of the *charro*. In appealing to this figure Altamirano's instructive discourse instantiates Bakhtin's second fundamental characteristic of the epic, namely the utilization of national tradition for the source of the narrative. But whereas Bakhtin rightfully sees this sort of appeal as functioning to squelch free thought and entailing a derogation of the value of personal experience, the final stage of the instructive discourse in El Zarco departs from a purely epic, and therefore staid, narrative position by extensively relaborating the *charro* (Bakhtin 13). If there had initially been any question as to a possible congruency between el Zarco and the *charro*, the insistence on sufficiently demonizing this figure even beyond the limits of historical accuracy insure that this comparison can no longer be reasonably drawn: As Cortazar argues, "Cegado por su férreo apego a la legalidad y el cuidado del orden, Altamirano descuidó de considerar las condiciones sociales de este individuo, pues solamente se ocuparía de él, en cuanto a sus actos ilícitos, para señalarlo como obstáculo al progreso de la nación" (Cortazar 117).

It is the instructive discourse's treatment of el Zarco that makes this demonization possible despite its at least partially counterfactual historical nature, and the rupture with history that this image provokes is precisely what allows Altamirano to distance el Zarco from the rest of the characters in the novel, even Manuela, to place him on the epic battleground where he will be met by Martín Sánchez Chagollán. Furthermore, the trajectory of this process of characterization systematically reorients el Zarco with respect to his associations within the imagination of the reader, and is capable of doing so because of the abundant space provided by the coexistence of the two planes of reality in the novel. In accordance with its borrowing from the epic and as confirmed by reference to Bakhtin's aforementioned third characteristic, the structure of the novel is such that it is capable of facilitating this distancing, and as a direct consequence, the national figures which Altamirano's characters play upon are capable of contrasting with their historically accurate counterparts without unnecessarily obfuscating the narrative images presented.

Both Martín Sánchez and el Zarco pertain to the epic ontological plane of the narrative because their representations are reliant upon their having been distanced from the other characters which populate the novel. Bakhtin writes that "The formally constitutive feature of the epic as a genre is rather the transferral of a represented world into the past, and the degree to which this world participates in the past" (Bakhtin 13). The distance imposed by Altamirano's instructive discourse between el Zarco, Martín Sánchez, and the rest of the characters in the novel is again critical because it allows those two to be "located in the same time and on the same evaluative (hierarchical) plane, but the represented world of the heroes stands on an utterly different and inaccessible time-and-value plane, separated by epic distance" (*ibid* 14). Thusly, their clash can take place in true epic fashion and a totalizing solution may be provided to the problems of Mexican society embodied in el Zarco without attenuating the symbolic weight

attributed to the historical plane of the text and to Pilar and Nicolás. Pilar and Nicolás are to serve as the model of the union of the Mexican family and represent the class that will continue the progress of the nation, but as they are unable to defend themselves against el Zarco and the *plateados*, this epic distance shelters them from the consequences of their impotence, namely the diminution of their heroic status⁶⁹.

It should be insisted, however, that Nicolás and Pilar do have some part in el Zarco's demise, but it is not due to any active role that they play in his ultimate destruction. In their roles as members of the community of Yautepec, their voices join in with those of the rest of the population to express the exhaustion and deep yearning for peace symptomatic of the nation's fatigue⁷⁰. In this way their pleas can be understood as summoning forth Martín Sánchez by instantiating and underlining the necessity of the existence of such a figure in the narrative and in their reality⁷¹. Furthermore, as best exemplified in the case of Nicolás before the *comandante*, these appeals are grounded in their rights as citizens as made patent by the liberal national narrative up to this point (Ruiz 32). For even though the population of Yautepec has been left defenseless, this is not their fault, nor are they culpable for what amounts to the federal government's complete inability to bring down the *plateados*. This fact is made apparent in the dialogue which takes place between that population and the *militares* who arrive in Yautepec claiming that they have already disposed of the *plateados*, a falsehood belied by el Zarco's brief presence in Yautepec after this extermination was supposed to have occurred:

- Pues bien, y ustedes, ¿por qué no se defienden?, ¿por qué no se arman?
- Porque no tenemos con qué; todos estamos desarmados.
- Pero, ¿por qué?
- Le diré a usted: teníamos armas para la defensa de las poblaciones, es decir, armas que pertenecían a las autoridades y armas que habían comprado los vecinos para su

⁶⁹ Melgarejo de Acosta and Lund's understanding of the symbolic weight of Nicolás attests to the necessity of this separation. Cf. p. 56.

⁷⁰ This fatigue has sometimes been understood as being indicative of Altamirano's political frustrations before the ostensible failure of the realization of the reconciliation of liberal and conservative that he is held to propose in *La navidad en las montañas*. Cf. Sol p. 79.

⁷¹ In as much as Sánchez is summoned by the people, it could also be argued that what is truly clamoured for here is a sovereign (v. Juárez) and that Martín in fact represents that sovereign's message. Cf. Melgarejo de Acosta p. 56-57.

defensa personal. Hasta los más pobres tenían sus escopetas, sus pistolas, sus machetes. Pero pasó primero Márquez con los *reaccionarios* y quitó todas las armas y los caballos que pudo encontrar en la población. Algunas armas se escaparon, sin embargo, y algunos caballos también, pero pasó después el general González Ortega con las tropas liberales y mandó recoger todas esas armas y todos esos caballos que habían quedado, de manera que nos dejó con los brazos cruzados. Luego, los bandidos apenas saben que alguno tiene un caballo regular, cuando en el acto se meten a cogerlo. ¿Quién quiere usted que compre ya ni armas, ni caballos, sabiendo que los ha de perder de todos modos? Además, aun cuando nos queden machetes y cuchillos, ¿cree usted que nos vamos a poner con quienes traen buenos mosquetes y rifles? (52)

This defenselessness is at the root of the fatigue which the nation continues to experience up until the epoch of the writing of El Zarco and beyond, and is in great part responsible for the complacent apathy which allowed the temporary peace of the *Porfiriato* to continue to function. And as seen in the words of the *pueblo*'s inhabitants, this condition of defenselessness had been brought on by both the reactionaries and the liberal republican troops. This is why the presence of someone like Martín Sánchez is mandated by the sentiments of the *pueblo* so that they might be saved from their impotent paralysis, and as such it is also the final element to be dealt with by the instructive discourse that had begun in Clemencia and continued in La navidad en las montañas.

When Martín Sánchez is presented to the reader he is cast in the mold of an everyman, no less or more a *buen mexicano* than Nicolás and only differentiated by his exceptional zeal for honor:

Martín Sánchez Chagollán, personaje rigurosamente histórico, lo mismo que Salomé Plascencia, que el Zarco y que los bandidos a quienes hemos presentado en esta narración, era un particular, un campesino, sin antecedentes militares de ninguna especie [...] Era un hombre de bien a toda prueba, uno de esos fanáticos de la honradez, que prefieren morir a cometer una acción que pudiera manchar su nombre o hacerlos menos estimables para su familia o para sus amigos. (103)

But one must not fail to notice that this everyman quality will soon be superceded by Martín Sánchez's symbolic purpose in the novel, and rightfully so, for although Martín Sánchez first appears as such, his everyman status does not fit in comparison with the others bearing this

mantel in the novel. As noted in the above, Cortazar argues that Yautepec symbolically represents the sovereignty of the nation, and as such its inhabitants fulfill the role of the true everyman in El Zarco. But this population's existence is thematized by their state of defenselessness, a disposition which Martín Sánchez does not share. Thusly, it is only fitting that he transcend the historical level which those inhabitants populate as soon as possible to be placed on the epic level with the literary image of el Zarco, and Altamirano's instructive discourse makes his ascendance to that level possible through a device similar to that which initially signalled the rupture in the novel's narrative reality: "una entrevista".

In the twenty-fourth chapter of El Zarco, Martín Sánchez presents himself before President Benito Juárez, and he indignantly asserts the necessity of full powers being given to him so that he might exterminate the bandit plague: "–Lo primero que necesito, señor, es que me dé el gobierno facultades para colgar a todos los bandidos que yo coja, y prometo a usted, bajo mi palabra de honor, que no mataré sino a los que lo merecen" (113). The symbolic gravity of that moment is worthy of note, for it is then that Altamirano's instructive discourse symbolically reconciles Juárez's administration's inability to return the nation to equilibrium⁷². Although the measures that Juárez had actually put into action in the period between the *Guerra de Reforma* and the *Intervención Francesa* had been frustrated and fruitless, when he gives Martín Sánchez the powers he requires to bring the villains terrorizing the populace to justice he also transforms Martín Sánchez into something greater than himself and earns the credit for providing some sort of solution (Brading, "Liberal Patriotism...", 27).

Likewise, Altamirano's instructive discourse also allows Martín Sánchez to offer an explanation as to why the Juárez administration was forced into a position which rendered it incapable of reckoning with the domestic instability of the period: "Bueno, y hará usted un

⁷²Other critics have seen Juárez's presence in this novel as part of a critique of or commentary on extrajudicial justice and vigilanteism. Cf. Melgarejo de Acosta, p. 50, 60, and Conway, "Lecturas...", p. 98.

servicio patriótico, porque hoy es necesario que el gobierno no se distraiga para pensar sólo en la guerra extranjera y en salvar la independencia nacional” (114). In a manner which resonates with the liberal perspective, Martín Sánchez’s priorities are the same as those of the Juárez administration, and because of this he recognizes both the country’s impinging foreign concerns and the government’s inability to provide a uniform solution capable of solving all of Mexico’s internal and external ills in one fell swoop (112-113). Martín Sánchez is granted what he desires only on the condition that “debe usted obrar con justicia, la justicia ante todo” (114). These powers will allow Martín Sánchez to become an “exterminating angel”, and to function within the historical rupture between the application of norms and those norms in and of themselves without making him vulnerable to the accusations of militarism which would have been viable if he had remained on the historical plane:

Martín Sánchez blurs the boundary between the sovereign and his messenger, to the point where the law is neither deliberated nor applied, but rather *suspended*, reduced to an immediate question of decision and judgment, well outside the limits of any covenant or constitution. (Melgarejo de Acosta, Lund 50)

With the acceptance of Juárez’s condition, the transformation of Martín Sánchez is complete, and he is moved from the historical plane of the narrative to that of the epic in order to embody the singular directive to which he is bound: “la justicia”.

6.4 Didactic Unity: the Completion of Altamirano’s Instructive Discourse

El Zarco’s transformation into “el terror, el desorden, y todo lo opuesto a un hombre de progreso” has now been illustrated (Cortazar 112). In like fashion, it has also been observed how Martín Sánchez is transformed into an incarnation of justice. With these two now epic figures in play the genius behind the structure of El Zarco can now be fully appreciated. El Zarco’s text houses two parallel ontological planes of different temporal and generic extension. The historical plane houses the population of Yautepec, and foremost among them the *indio* iron

worker turned hero, Nicolás, and Pilar, the model of virtuous Mexican womanhood. The epic plane, by contrast, comes to house both el Zarco and Martín Sánchez posterior to their respective transformations into epic and symbolically charged figures. The bifurcation of textual reality indicated by the coexistence of these two planes allows the final stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse to emit two distinct but interrelated messages through El Zarco.

The narrative which obtains primacy on the historical plane of the novel is that of the “buen amor” which grows between Pilar and Nicolás and eventually leads to their union; as such it should be understood as the symbolic union of the agents Altamirano believed to be most capable of carrying Mexico into modernity. But the possibility of the success of that union is imperiled by the instability of the Mexican political reality, a situation which the liberals prior to Díaz had been unable to resolve and which had been only temporarily resolved by Díaz himself, and that at too great a price, for it entailed the sacrifice of liberty in exchange for order and stability. This is why the narrative must also take place on the epic level, for while there were no immediately viable solutions to the problems plaguing the Mexican political and social landscapes, these evils could still be beaten back in the abstract. It is for this reason that the intermediate stage of Altamirano's instructive discourse had emancipated religious faith from the monopoly of the institution of the Church in La navidad en las montañas. The articles of that faith, now free to be utilized by the liberals for their own ends, were steeped in the structure of biblical narratives of epic conflicts between good and evil in which the triumph of good was always celebrated. Altamirano's instructive discourse takes advantage of the population's predisposition towards the acceptance of such a narrative, and capitalizes on it by using the same sort of imagery employed by biblical narratives on the epic plane of El Zarco to show the conflict between good and evil and the ultimate triumph of justice in the victory of Martín Sánchez over the *plateados*. The result is the generation of hope centered around a vision of the

modern Mexico to come that transcends the impossibility of that vision as determined by the political realities of the day⁷³.

It should be mentioned that it is Nicolás who bests el Zarco in the battle that occurs in Xochimancas, a site which remains at an epic distance from Yautepec (106-111). Nevertheless, it is Martín Sánchez who finally brings El Zarco to his end by hanging him and his men, and it is of fundamental importance that this should be as it is (114-119). If Nicolás had completed the destruction of el Zarco by his own hand and without the sort of express authorization given only to Martín Sánchez and his black riders by Benito Juárez, he too might have been held culpable for engaging in “militarism” and thusly become a participant in the instability which Altamirano’s instructive discourse wishes to repudiate with El Zarco. For this reason, even his non-lethal triumph over el Zarco is made to await the transformation of Martín Sánchez so that it might occur under the auspices of his authority, and in doing so Nicolás is allowed to exist for a moment on the epic plane of the novel under the vicarious auspices of Juárez without being distanced from the historical plane.

By preserving this separation of action and only allowing Nicolás limited engagement on the epic plane of the narrative Altamirano’s instructive discourse insures that the message it emits is not unduly adulterated. Following Bakhtin, it is seen that Nicolás must remain on this historical plane, for after the transformation of Martín Sánchez and el Zarco into epic figures, these two now pertain to the “national epic past”: Nicolás is the nation’s future and thusly manifestations of “militarism”, a phenomenon undeniably present in Mexico’s past, must be separated from him by this symbolic distance so that neither he nor the reader will be drawn to them in the future (Bakhtin 13). This is a far cry from the contradictory endorsement of

⁷³ García has also noted the space created for hope in El Zarco. Cf. p. 105.

vigilanteism that other critics have read in this novel.⁷⁴ These manifestations must be shown as pertaining to the past, so that as the reader continues on and Pilar and Nicolás are joined together, “militarism” as a possibility remains quarantined in the past at an epic distance.

The message stemming from the epic plane is preserved in this manner and is made clear both to the inhabitants of the novel’s historical plane and to El Zarco’s readers: faith must be kept in the triumph of justice over evil, a faith which the Mexican people must make manifest through hard work, perseverance, and trust in the liberal principles of justice and progress (Brading, “Liberal Patriotism...”, 46). This first message is complemented by the lesson immersing from the historical plane, which details which class will assume this position (the *mestizo*) and will keep this faith in order to bear the nation into modernity. With this being the case, the juxtaposition of a wedding and a hanging at the end of the novel suddenly makes perfect sense⁷⁵. Rather than striking a grim note of hopelessness because of its violence, the hanging of the bandits at the end of the novel ought to reaffirm the faith of the Mexican people in the triumph of justice over evil even in the face of seemingly impossible odds. The result of this triumph is the restoration of stability that allows for the happy union of the novel’s protagonists to be consummated. By binding these two seemingly incompatible images together, the final stage of Altamirano’s instructive discourse successfully fashions a justification of the faith in *patria* that had been yielded by La navidad en las montañas (intermediate stage) and clearly delineates how those who are now in conformation with the Mexican cultural identity it began to isolate in Clemencia may live out this faith by putting that it into action for the progress of the nation and utilizing it to see beyond the political problems imperiling Mexico’s present to a future which, if impossible to realize at that moment, was not unimaginable. These two messages taken as a

⁷⁴ Cf. footnote 72.

⁷⁵ Many critics have overlooked the difficulties surrounding the hanging that concludes the novel, and have instead focused on the wedding which occurs immediately prior to el Zarco’s execution. Cf. García 104.

whole are meant to provide an impetus to the reader to cast off the façade of peace provided by the Porfiriato and to break with their complacency in order to make real progress the new *leit motif* of Mexican existence.

The conclusion of El Zarco marks the final stage of the tripartite instructive discourse which Altamirano had begun in Clemencia and carried forth through La navidad en las montañas. With Clemencia it had demarcated the Mexican identity by circumscribing elements foreign to Mexican reality, condemning the social miseducation that perpetuated the emulation of those elements, and providing a new model for Mexican cultural identity in Fernando Valle. In La navidad en las montañas a similar demarcation delineates the bounds of the domain of the people's religious faith by extracting the essence of that faith from the monopoly of the Church, reconciling the historically divided parties which shared it, and illustrating its utilitarian value within the liberal political program. El Zarco continues this trend by defining the path to the nation's future realization via the virtuous mestizo and distancing unacceptable means of that realization, namely militarism, by properly contextualizing them in the "absolute past" characteristic of the epic (Bakhtin 13). Altamirano's instructive discourse then closes with a graphic justification of faith in social justice, and as a consequence, faith in a future for Mexico. Understanding the role of this faith is crucial, as such an understanding allows one to see that Altamirano is not fleeing into idealism in order to escape the impracticability of his ideas in reality (García 106). Rather, his instructive discourse aims to provide a means for transcending that impracticability and the desperation it provokes. As such, Altamirano's final novel El Zarco provides finality and unity to his instructive discourse by binding together the diverse elements of its multifaceted message with Altamirano's own unique political thought, didactic purpose, and ultimate faith in Mexico's future overcoming of the fatigue and complacent apathy brought on by decades of turmoil to further pursue social progress and the successful entrance of the

nation into modernity. With this understanding of Altamirano's instructive discourse in hand, this investigation may now affirm that in addition to being novels of supreme importance in the study of Mexican literary culture, Altamirano's Clemencia, La navidad en las montañas, and El Zarco function interdependently to convey an innovatory and multi-faceted didactic message by way of an instructive discourse which unifies those novels.

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Vita

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