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***Nuestra América / Our America at the Crossroads:
Splendors of Prophecy, Misery of History, and Other
Mishaps of the Patriotic Utopia (Notes on the
Bicentennial Recourse of the Method and on Martí's
Blueprint for Macondo)***

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"Yo solo, contra todo."

(I alone, against everything.)

—José Martí, *in a fragment of letter intended for Porfirio Díaz, 1894*

"En español nada hay que se parezca a la salida de bramidos de Martí."
(In Spanish there is nothing similar to the stream of howling coming from
Martí.)

—Sarmiento, *in a letter to Paul Groussac, 1887*

If we concur that Latin American culture, as a particular way of experiencing, interpreting, and being in the world, privileges symbolic dramatic cultural patterns over European rational enlightened ones (Larraín 88), then José Martí's *Nuestra América* (1891) is an iconic specimen of this type of expression. It is an exquisite piece of literature, a cornerstone of Latin American intellectual history, and a blueprint for political action at the end of the nineteenth century and beyond. An anecdote may illustrate its impact: two Cuban émigré workers who have just listened to one of Martí's fiery speeches look at each other and one asks the other: "Dude (*chico*), have you understood anything?" "Dude, I haven't understood anything, but my hat has been jumping on my head."

Indeed, *Nuestra América* reads like a relentless barrage of symbols, metaphors, and striking, even grotesque, images, and its firepower is completed with obscure historical and cultural references, all clearly beyond the reach of the ordinary people who used to attend the émigré gatherings, and many of them likely to tax even Martí's more cultured contemporaries.

This filter of exquisite “cultural encyclopedia,” which will make famous the *modernista* generation of the 1890s, could not be more distant from our own impoverished postmodern cultural baggage of today, or minimal “culture” (written decidedly in lowercase letters and sometimes within ironic quotation marks), oriented in a different direction. And yet, in comparison with the now stale “sad princesses” of Rubén Darío, *Nuestra América* continues to impress and to rouse emotions. Is it because, in Latin America, the tradition of “poetic poetry” has survived more intact, on the wings of undying romanticism? Or because some of its messages have continued to resonate throughout twentieth-century continental politics, and still do, thanks to inertia, even in the current century? Or perhaps because it has also opened up the path of self-reflection and self-centeredness as a radical “Other” that so many leading Latin American intellectuals have paced up and down, puzzled and embittered by their and their countries’ missed encounters with Modernity, squaring circles and labyrinths, in their self-imposed *one hundred years of solitude*?

Yes, Martí was, and is, persuasive. But, with all due respect, what is “under the hat” in *Nuestra América*? What do we read when we read Martí?

The Text and Its Fixes

The first question actually is *whom* do we read? Until confronted with a critical edition of *Nuestra América*, the readers may not realize that the very text they have in their hands has passed through numerous filters. There are two, not readily available, original versions as published: first in *La Revista Ilustrada* (New York, 1 Jan. 1891), and second in *El Partido Liberal* (Mexico City, 30 Jan. 1891); we do not have Martí’s original manuscript. Both versions would seem to have been enriched by the author’s and also by the typographers’ usual haste. The first editor of Martí’s collected works, Gonzalo de Quesada y Aróstegui, has used the Mexican publication (the one in New York was discovered only much later) and has made some light corrections there; the editors of the latest and most widely available *Obras completas* (Havana, 1963) have followed Quesada and have made further emendations. Finally, Cintio Vitier has prepared a critical edition for the centennial, which, however, has not failed to introduce some of its own typographical mischief;¹ a second edition, from 2002, follows the text that appeared in *La Revista Ilustrada* and includes the facsimile of the first page (the notes are the same). I will use this edition for a few textual comments.

In the original versions, the comets “van por el aire dormido engullendo mundos” (go through the sleeping air, gobbling up worlds). *Obras completas* (1963) changes “dormido” into plural “dormidos” (*OC* 6:15)² and this is accepted by Vitier (“dormido[s]”); but the substitution produces an

unintentional ambiguity: the passage may then mean either “sleeping comets” or “sleeping worlds.” In one way or another, all interpretations are possible, and the ambiguity created by editors is bound to surface in translations. Similarly, without the facsimile we would be unable to decipher what has happened in the second paragraph: “si no quiere que le llamen el pueblo ladrón, devuélvale sus tierras al hermano” (if he [the brother] does not want to be called a thief nation, let him return lands to his brother). The trouble is that the grammatical antecedent of the phrase is plural (“those brothers who”). Vitier protests that the changes introduced in collected works—“si no quieren que les llame el pueblo ladrones, devuélvanle” (15) (if they do not want to be called thieves by people, let them return)—alter the meaning, and proposes “si no quiere[n] que le[s] llamen el pueblo ladrón, devuélvanle” (2002, 15; in 1993, 144, there seems to be an errata, “llame” instead of “llamen,” which leaves the phrase grammatically incorrect: if they do not want *that* he/somebody call them a thief nation). On the strength of images and exalted feelings, Martí switches here from the general plural of “those brothers who” to admonishing one of those brothers to return the lands to the brother he has them stolen from. Stumbling grammar underscores the change of focus. But it is an emotionally charged grammar in the service of the message. Editors who opt for regularizing Martí do so at their own and his text’s peril.

On the other hand, editors leave unaltered the phrase in the following paragraph: “que se avergüenzan, porque llevan delantal indio, de la madre que los crió” (who are ashamed, because they wear an Indian apron, of the mother who raised them), whereas all the translators, following Onís (139), put the apron on the mother. It would seem that the sense dictates that it is the mother who is wearing the apron (*porque lleva delantal indio*), while her sons are now parading in Europe dressed in alienating, if not treacherous, European clothes.

The very ending presents another interesting problem: the hymn-like closure invokes “la generación actual” (*OC* 6:23) (the present generation). Vitier comments that *La Revista Ilustrada* offers instead “la generación real” (the real generation), while in *El Partido Liberal* the adjective must have accidentally been dropped altogether, creating the impression of incompleteness; “actual” (present) appears for the first time in the original Quesada’s edition and must have been inserted by him (1993, 161; 2002, 29). Indeed, “la generación real” makes sense because it echoes a passage in the text where Martí celebrates the apparent fact (long since turned illusion) that, after so many errors and false starts, “le está naciendo a América, en estos tiempos reales, el hombre real” (*OC* 6:20) (in these real times, the real man is being born to America).

These may seem minor issues, and even if noted, they are all “gobbled up” by the quick relentless stream of symbols, metaphors, arcane references, rhetorical gestures, and antics, jumping back and forth in the unfolding

discourse. The complex yet sketchy semantic maze—held together by the symbolic-patriotic charge and overarching poetic structure—turns this text into a nightmare for translators.

Translating *Nuestra América*

In translation, textual problems are themselves compounded by cultural difference: what works to perfection in the symbolic dramatic culture may fizzle or sound ridiculous in the culture privileging rational analysis. One is reminded of Rosario Ferré's musings on the process of rendering her novel *Maldito amor* into English. She has realized that the cultural vision expressed there—"still rooted in preindustrial traditions and mores . . . in Thomistic, Aristotelian beliefs, which essay to reconcile Christian thought with the truths of the natural universe and of faith"—is not compatible with a world that has undergone the scientific and industrial revolution. In sum: "Translation has taught me that it is ultimately impossible to transcribe one cultural vision into another" (91), and her task has swiftly turned into an intense rewriting.

Juan de Onís's 1953 translation of *Nuestra América* has served as the reference for all later attempts: Randall (1977) keeps fairly close (the "team of translators" in Shnookal and Muñiz, 2007, makes minimal changes to her version), while Allen (2002) is more independent. None is excessively reliable. Onís is perhaps most literalist, and occasionally leaves things out. While it might be amusing to focus on the gaffes, what interest me here are instead the signs of struggle that point to inherent semantic difficulties in the original text.

Let's start with the long paragraph cursing "sietemesinos" (children born prematurely at seven months): "A los sietemesinos sólo les faltará el valor. Los que no tienen fe en su tierra son hombres de siete meses" (*OC* 6:16), which has been translated as: "Only the seven-month birthling will lack the courage. Those who do not have faith in their country are seven-month men" (Onís 139); "Only those born prematurely are lacking in courage. Those without faith in their country are seven-month weaklings" (Randall 85); "Only runts whose growth was stunted will lack the necessary valor, for those who have no faith in their land are like men born prematurely" (Allen 289). All these translations are awkward. In Martí, "sietemesino" is turned into a complex symbol and always an insult. They represent much of what is wrong with Latin America (other symbols will later be hurled to their side, such as "los letrados artificiales" [the artificial educated class], the "exotic Creoles," "pedants," "la juventud angélica" [the angelic youth], among others). Martí plays on the connotations of the *sietemesinos*' being frail and small, lacking strength, and therefore falling

short on faith and on climbing trees; and they only slide from there to being “unmanly” and effeminate (with all that this eloquent euphemism connotes in Hispanic culture), and *therefore* to being born traitors.

Martí is obsessed with “virility”; in him, “manliness” goes far beyond Nietzsche: for the Cuban, to be “unmanly” seems to bear the stamp of original sin.³ Poetry and politics continue to fuse with religion, as has become usual in secular Spanish American patriotic discourse. Anticipating Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, Martí turns the unmanly into insects (Allen translates “termites”) and would load all of them on ships to rid the sacred fatherland of all that treacherous vermin.⁴

His diatribe then turns against the expatriates and unexpectedly merges with a quite different semantic and cultural context: in 1881 Martí had sent diverse news items to the paper *La Opinión Nacional*, published in Caracas. Among them was a brief note on the new term, *gratin*, for the cream-of-the-crop, upper-class elegant and decadent youth in Paris (named after the exquisite dish cooked *au gratin*); according to him, in Spain these youngsters were called *sietemesinos* (*OC* 23, 79–81; see also Lamore 89–90).⁵ Now Martí has further ideas about what to do with them: “Si son parisienses o madrileños, vayan al Prado, de faroles, o vayan a Tortoni, de sorbetes” (*OC* 6:16). Translated in Onís as: “If they are Parisians or Madrilenians, let them stroll along the Prado under the lamplights, or take sherbet at Tortoni’s” (139, and similar in Randall 85); in Allen: “if they are Parisians or Madrileños then let them stroll to the Prado by lamplight or go to Tortoni’s for an ice” (289). For once, Shnookal’s team rallies to improve on Randall: “If they are Parisians or from Madrid, let them go to the Prado, to swan around, or to Tortoni’s, in high hats” (121). But wait a minute: instead of sarcasm and derision, are we supposed to let them go and enjoy themselves in Madrid’s grand park or in the famous Parisian café? I don’t think so. In Martí, the implicit idea is “to go *posing as*.” To go posing as lampposts and as straws, *and* be ridiculous!

“Sorbeta” is indeed a liquid or iced sherbet, but in Puerto Rico (and also in Uruguay) it means straw (in New York Martí worked closely with Puerto Ricans as part of his liberation project); Vitier doubts that Martí means “sherbet” here and opts for the meaning it has in Mexico, that of a type of hat. But “sorbeta” or “chistera” is not any typical Mexican hat (think *mariachis*). The reference is to the high hat, sign of elegant high society.

As new insults are piled up (sensitive post-culture wars reader, beware!), Martí cannot contain his emotion and shouts out in the middle of the sentence: “¡bribones!” (scoundrels! loafers!). His attention then turns to those who have come to the United States from “his” America. He does not understand why they have done so at a time when Latin America is steadily rising while North America is going down the drain before his eyes. He is especially angry at those Latin Americans who serve in the U.S. army: they are all traitors selling out their own endangered countries (here Randall and

the “team” turn the reference to Washington on its head). Martí apparently cannot fathom why all these people are coming to these “tierras podridas” (putrefied lands)—where he himself has been able to live in relative peace and even prepare his revolution, instead of being kicked out, as he had in Mexico, Guatemala, and Venezuela, not to mention colonial Cuba—and clamors prophetically for all Latin Americans to get out of United States. It is pathetic to see how far off mark he could be when overwhelmed by his militant patriotism, which borders on chauvinism and hysteria.

The final insult links all these expatriate traitors to the earlier version of *sietemesinos-gratins*, the *incroyables* who emerged under the Directory during the decline of the French Revolution: “¡Estos ‘increíbles’ del honor, que lo arrastran por el suelo extranjero . . . !” (OC 6:16). The translators miss the sense of the passage: “These *incroyables* of their honor, who trail it through alien lands” (Onís 140); “These ‘iconoclasts’ of honor who drag that honor over foreign soil” (Randall 85–86); “These unbelievers in honor who drag . . .” (thus the “team” improves Randall in Shnookal 122); “These *incroyables* who drag their honor across foreign soil” (Allen 289). Yet the ironic sense is not readily apparent in Spanish either, referring as it does to the contradiction and hypocrisy of those showing off their high concept of honor and yet dragging it through foreign soil (in Martí’s eyes). The reference to *incroyables* closes off the diatribe on the reprehensible inadequacies and treacherous behavior of the unmanly *sietemesinos*.

Since I am not interested here in the translations per se, but in what they elicit from the original text, I will limit myself to one more comment. In one passage, Martí refers to the flaws of foreign laws imported home, “leyes heredadas de cuatro siglos de práctica libre en los Estados Unidos, de diecinueve siglos de monarquía en Francia” (OC 6:16–17). The translators render this phrase a number of ways; “laws that derive from four centuries of operative liberty in the United States, and nineteen centuries of French monarchy” (Onís 141); “laws inherited from four centuries of freedom in . . .” (Randall 86); “laws inherited from four centuries of free practice in . . .” (Allen 290). Allen is perhaps the closest to the sense of the passage, implying the history of the “rule of law” (estado de derecho) in certain countries, be it under the republican or monarchic order. “Operative liberty” is awkward, and counting freedom from the colony and the dawn of the monarchic regime is absurd, but both are embedded in the poetic and not fully fleshed out writing of the original.

So, What Is Under the Hat in *Nuestra América*?

In *Nuestra América*, Martí has condensed his thoughts on “his” America in the modern world at a precise moment in history, after almost a century of

independent republics and at a time when the United States was ready to enter the world stage as a great power (Zimmermann) and tried to reassert, as a first step, its predominance over all of America.⁶ Cuba, then still Spanish colony but one that had developed close economic ties with the United States over the years, lay in the sights of the rising new power. For the United States, the Caribbean was the first perimeter of expansion in the Atlantic and also the first line of defense of their interests, since at that time a world power had to be a maritime power. And in order to exercise that power, advanced naval bases were highly desirable. One did not have to be a seer to see that. It was all over the place: in periodicals, in public debates, in diplomatic actions trumpeting Pan-Americanism, a fig leaf for North American hegemony.

Well aware of this situation, Martí worked urgently for the liberation and independence of Cuba as a way to stop the looming expansion of the United States in the Caribbean and South America. He thought that a free Cuba and a united Latin America would together form a bulwark contributing to world equilibrium and to a peaceful coexistence of nations. Yet he was also painfully aware that all was not well with that desired unity. The growing sense of urgency led him to feverish political activism. In Martí's life, periods of action alternate with periods of reflection; *Nuestra América* closes a decade of reflection—one lived out, furthermore, in the epicenter of the "future": New York, capital of the twentieth century. Immediately afterward will come yet another burst of action culminating in his accidental death at the beginning of the Cuban uprising against Spanish rule in 1895 and his posthumous glory as the apostle and martyr of Cuban independence.

Let's walk through *Nuestra América*. Martí begins in the style of fairy tales narrated to children (his experience from *Edad de Oro* comes to mind). He tells a parable—José Enrique Rodó will perfect this device in key moments of his *modernista* essays—about a villager happy with his little parochial life, yet unaware of the dangers out there in the larger world, be they menacing earthly giants or treacherous comets in the sky. The villager needs to wake up and prepare trenches of ideas. It would be a comic thing to dig trenches of ideas against the comets, so these are promptly forgotten. What those superhuman threatening giants, or the ideas to be used against them, might be is not yet suggested at this point. Certainly not the villager's ideas (similar to the future *subaltern*, he does not speak and needs to be interpreted by his intellectual mediator). Surprisingly, the conquistadors merit positive mention for their preparedness for any surprise from the indigenous people or wild animals.

The second paragraph develops the theme of the trenches of ideas. Martí begins writing a variation on the famous motto with which Domingo Faustino Sarmiento introduces *Facundo* (1845): "On ne tue point les idées," which the young Argentine had scribbled on the wall of his prison, and then

had himself translated for his book into the idiom of his stark times as “you can cut the throat of people, not of ideas.” Instead, the poet writes: “No hay proa que taje una nube de ideas” (*OC* 6:15) (No ship’s prow can cut through a cloud of ideas in the sky). His version is not only more poetic, but it would be absurd for any ship to try that. Fortunately, we know that metaphors should not be taken literally. Yet will the “cloud of ideas in the sky” not characterize perhaps inadvertently Martí’s own exposition?

The discourse then slips into biblical overtones: an energetic idea, unfurled before the world in time as a kind of mystical banner of Judgment Day, will halt the approaching fleet of battleships. Now the exhortation is directed to the different nations (“pueblos,” Allen translates as “hometowns,” 288): people should know each other as brothers and forgive mutual grievances, because they will soon fight together against their common enemy. Up to this moment, the threat, the enemy, or the nations involved have not yet been identified. The turning point comes when a “we” emerges in another eye-catching metaphor: “Ya no podemos ser el pueblo de hojas, que vive en el aire” (we can no longer be a nation of leaves, living [flying around] in the air), since the implied pronoun “we” links with the possessive “our” in the title (Our America): it is “us” who need to get prepared for battle. The trees themselves must jump from where they are and line up to stop the giant. Everybody must stand up and be counted. And “we” must march in unison as one solid mass, like the veins of silver rooted in the Andes. In a striking, magical action involving people, plants, and minerals of the region, descending from the treetops to the roots and the depths of the continent, “we” and “our” America must face the enemy as one. The outlandish parables, metaphors, and images coalesce at last in a political rallying cry.

In contrast to this promised “manly” action, the diatribe against the *sietemesinos*, the unmanly, the effeminate, and therefore traitors, follows. The discourse turns here into a kind of machine-gun fire of hyperbolic metaphors and insults; the individual bullets may not be aimed with precision, but they are lethal as they converge on the target.

One idea stands out and will be repeated over and over again, a prophecy in the guise of contrasting descriptions of the Americas: “nuestra América, que ha de salvarse con sus indios, y va de menos a más; . . . la América del Norte, que ahoga en sangre a sus indios, y va de más a menos” (*OC* 6:16) (our America, which will save herself together with her Indians, and grows from less to more; North America, which drowns her Indians in blood, and shrinks from more to less). Inexplicably, all translators interpret the phrase “salvarse con sus indios” as “to be saved by/through the Indians” (Onís 140; Randall 85; Allen 289), and embellish the text with one more contradiction.

The rhetorical question “¿Ni en qué patria . . . ?” (For in what fatherland) takes up the theme of pride in ever-ascendant Latin America, and

the paragraphs introduced with this phrase will develop some ideas on good government.

On Governing “Our America”

In the spirit of Montesquieu’s well-known treatise *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Martí asserts that laws cannot be imported with impunity. Striking, absurd metaphors are once more employed to underscore the futility of using foreign prescriptions for local tasks. Indeed, who would try to stop a wild horse by brandishing some of Alexander Hamilton’s decrees? Who would think to return, just by some Frenchman’s *fiat*, the pulse to “the clotted blood” of the Indian race? ⁷ Only when laws come from the realities and institutions of each country can a utopia of government under which every man “recognizes himself and exercises his rights” be achieved. “A government is no more than the equilibrium of the natural elements of a country” (*OC* 6:17). (Onís improves on this with “good government” and “true balance” [141].)

The good news apparently is, as Martí asserts earlier, that “never before have such advanced and consolidated nations been created from such disparate factors in less historical time” (Allen 289–90). The bad news is that Latin American nations are viewed as “unique” and endowed with “individual and violent composition.” Coming from “uniqueness,” the idea of Latin American exceptionalism based on *radical otherness* will emerge, with all kinds of intended and unintended consequences. Further, because they consider themselves “unique,” countries will likely defend their ingrained ways against other models, especially those coming from the modern world, and because they are “individual and violent,” they will likely resist “consolidation,” be it through centralist government, homogenizing nationhood, or even any semblance of organization. This stubborn negative facet will emerge later in the discourse, since even the most glorious prophecy cannot fail to stumble over some down-to-earth reality. But for now, it is Rousseau’s turn.

Martí turns back to the happy fiction of the “natural man,” taken from the romantic repository of symbols, contrasting “the imported book,” “the artificial educated class,”⁸ and “the exotic Creole” on the one hand with “the natural man” and “the autochthonous *mestizo*” on the other; in one striking phrase, “The autochthonous *mestizo* has vanquished the exotic Creole” (*OC* 6:17). This may indeed be the case for Mexico at that time (Krauze), and we will see that the Mexican model looms large in *Nuestra América*. Allen spells out, perhaps excessively, some paradoxes hiding in this statement: “The native *mestizo* has triumphed over the alien, pure-blooded *criollo*” (290). The Creole, born in the country and living there perhaps for centuries,

is apparently not “native.” The “pure-blood” is meant as contrast to the implied mixed blood of the *mestizo*, but the reference to “pureza de sangre” could lead us astray. The *mestizo*, who was not there before the arrival of the Spanish, is nevertheless considered native. Probably since it was usually the mother who was Indian, and woman and Nature are closely aligned in the romantic paradigm.

If the *mestizo* is to be interpreted metaphorically, what remains of the Creole? Let us note in passing that the Indian has been left in limbo here (and, together with the black and the peasant, has even been positioned outside the realm of “us,” [OC 6:20]). His “silence” and “clotted blood” metaphors echo the nineteenth-century racial theories that described the Indian race as “sick,” if not “degenerate” (some of Martí’s earlier writing is quite graphic on this account). Only romanticism saves the *mestizo* from the same predicament. Instead, the full blow falls upon the hapless Creole.

Martí must have been occasionally aware that he himself was an accidental Creole. His solution was a metaphoric self-adoption. In 1878, in his first letter of presentation to General Máximo Gómez, he writes, “Rafael Mendive was my father” (OC 20:263). Yet his beloved teacher Rafael María de Mendive (1821–1886) was also only an enlightened nationalist Creole. Self-adoption will be Martí’s preferred stratagem: in 1884 he will feel circulating in his veins “la sangre enardecida” (the fired-up blood) of the Orinoco Indian tribes (OC 8:336), and in July 1894, hopeful for what he thinks will be a strategic meeting with Porfirio Díaz, he addresses Mexico, declaring himself “one of your sons who has not been born of you” (OC 19:22, here erroneously dated to 1875), and promises, in gripping metaphors, to seek vengeance if that country is not “worthy of your continental duty.” Porfirio Díaz had no intention of getting involved in the *mêlée* over Cuba, but he must have been impressed, and promised Martí about ten thousand dollars of his own money as a contribution to his enterprise (Herrera Franyutti 321, 329; Rojas 267–69, 347–48).

After the string of romantically charged dichotomies, there comes the famous reversal and displacement of Sarmiento’s “civilization and barbarism” opposition: “No hay batalla entre la civilización y la barbarie, sino entre la falsa erudición y la Naturaleza” (I follow Vitier 1993, 146; OC 6:17 and Vitier 2002, 17 put “naturaleza”) (There is no battle going between civilization and barbarism, but between false erudition and Nature). Not only does this statement show that Sarmiento’s call for modernization under the guise of “civilization” has been forgotten, but Enlightenment values are simply supplanted here by romantic ones, as if romanticism were less imported to America from Europe, and as if Enlightenment were less important to America.⁹ However, the mutual exchange of values within the opposites is striking and foreshadows the “romantic turn” coming into full force in twentieth-century Latin America, closing its doors on the tasks of

modernization and opening the road to Macondo and its literary delights (see my cited publications).

The romantic distance that Martí takes here to separate himself from Sarmiento leads to an apparent paradox. The prophet of the New Latin America, when examined closely, defends an “Americanism” that is uncomfortably close to what was instituted officially as such in Argentina during the dictatorship of Juan Manuel Rosas, Sarmiento’s *bête noire* in *Facundo*: the local *gaucho*’s traditional customs and ragged clothing, and was enforced by the *mazorca* vigilantes. An urban Argentine walking around in European clothes or shaved the wrong way was suspect and literally risked his neck. (“Foreign heretics” were tolerated, but were rightfully hated for that by the people.) Esteban Echeverría wrote about the reign of terror of this type of Americanism in his unforgettable short story “El matadero” (The Slaughterhouse, 1840). Rosas’s Americanism has been imitated and emulated by all subsequent Latin American dictatorships, left and right.

The prophet’s optimistic visions cannot fail to stumble against uncomfortable realities. Natural man is good by nature, says Martí, but the “uneducated masses”—who appear as if from nowhere—are lazy and reticent in intellectual matters, and just want to be governed well. If not, they will rebel. The former descends from the romantic paradigm, the latter come from positivist research on the irrationalities of mass behavior. But in their rebellion they act interchangeably. A typical liberal conundrum comes to the surface: the individual is idealized, the mass is suspect. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, liberals and democracy emerge as uneasy partners, and increasingly so in times of ever-denser mass society (José Enrique Rodó will capture this tension in *Ariel*, 1900). In a short text from 1892 that closely echoes *Nuestra América*, Martí agrees that “democracy and republic are not equivalent terms” (Ripoll 212). Among the many myths accumulated around his figure, could the Martí-democrat be one of them? Could the invoked democracy (“the stirring and prudent democracy” in the 1895 *Manifiesto de Montecristi*, a call to war, *OC* 4:93) be just a tactical ploy? His “democracy” seems rather *populist* in nature. In Latin America, populism and democracy have not been easy bedfellows.

Knowledge of one’s own country emerges as a precondition for good government. Martí supposes that knowledge of the local reality—desirable indeed—will somehow by itself lead to that goal. However, history does not readily support these expectations. In his time, a good example of one such “scientific government” in power was that of the Mexican strongman Porfirio Díaz, with whom Martí eventually reconciled and was connected through his dear friend and elder “brother” Manuel Mercado (1838–1909), one of the highest officials of the ruling clique. Under Don Porfirio, positivist philosophy was exalted nearly to a state religion and so obscured, like a fig leaf, his authoritarian republicanism. In an earlier speech called “Madre América” (Mother America), considered to be Martí’s trial run for

Nuestra América, Latin America advances “con Bolívar de un brazo y Herbert Spencer de otro” (OC 6:139) (arm-in-arm with Bolívar on one side and with Herbert Spencer on the other). A pretty powerful allegory.

Martí himself does not fail to notice that many dictators have climbed to power in Latin America precisely because they have recognized the importance of the natural elements in play in their countries, while their republican adversaries have not. As a matter of fact, if Don Porfirio had not been reclassified in time as a friend, and hopefully more, he would, at least for us today, be a good case in point for the former.¹⁰ Yet the solution for Martí is more of the same: knowledge. Only scientific knowledge will help the republics get rid of tyrannies in the future, he thinks. And based on that knowledge, the new republics must create everything anew.

The theme of creation rather than continued imitation will return with greater force later in *Nuestra América*. Here, it is worth noting that the dictators were no less creators in their own right. The aforementioned savvy Argentine, Rosas, who was initially ushered to power as the “Restorer of the Laws” and who, like Don Porfirio, was ascetic and not personally corrupt, actually invented the modern Latin American populist dictatorship, from the networks of support and control to the distinctive attire and signs of allegiance worn by the enthusiastic populace under his watchful eye, producing a great “reality show” in which the whole country participated, legitimized by the complicit *letrados* and by the naïve foreign (fellow) travelers who fell for it.

On What Is “Ours”

Since the Latin American reality is not readily accessible through foreign books (“Neither the European book nor the Yankee book could provide the key to the Spanish American enigma,” [OC 6:20]), American universities are faced with special tasks. Martí appears to follow here in the steps of Andrés Bello (putting his ideas to work in Chile) and of Ralph Waldo Emerson (in his “The American Scholar,” 1837); but then the slippage begins. Apparently, for Martí it is more important to teach the history of the Incas and of the Aztecs in detail, and not the history of ancient Greece. “Our Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours. We need her more” (OC 6:18). The question, put in this way, then, actually is *what is “ours”*? Foreshadowing some radical “postcolonial” theories of today, Latin America’s historical road would be “rerouted.” The link to Western culture would be cut and imaginary metaphorical “roots” would be reimplanted instead. Further, due to only a scant knowledge of ancient Amerindian cultures at that time, imagination would have its feast, as can be seen in

Martí himself and later in José Vasconcelos or in José Carlos Mariátegui, for that matter (see my “Argiropolis”).

The point here is not so much the importance or not of the study of indigenous cultures per se, but rather the diagnosis of the historical formation of Latin American societies that is hiding behind this formula. Similar to the spurious postcolonial “de-Occidentalization” of Latin America (Mignolo), Martí would also try to somehow erase history and return the continent to the point of rupture created by the discovery and the conquest. The *topos* of “restitution,” real or imagined, runs through this pipe dream. As a result, Europe or Modernity would be just a *mask* barely covering up some concealed “profound” inner self, needed for the myth of regeneration taken up by the later “romantic turn.”

Martí then argues that, while concentrating on “us,” the world should not be completely forgotten. This might be understood as a halfhearted recognition of the need for modernization: modern ideas need to be let in, but they must be grafted carefully on “the trunk” of our republics (*OC* 6:18). And he cuts off any further debate on the issue: anyone who holds another opinion is called a “vanquished pedant” and instructed to shut up in view of the pride in “our suffering American republics.” As if pride in what Latin America has become, even if fully true, would preclude the need for discussion of the crossroads she was confronting regarding her future, not to mention the undisputed looming danger from the North. The allegedly glorious recent past would become a stumbling block on the road forward. The same would go for the massive “trunk” image, since it imposes an essentialist interpretation on “us.” In Martí’s imagination, the “trunk” is there to “stop,” even if it has to fly, as he has earlier magically commanded the trees to line up in the path of the enemy giant. Pride returns as a leitmotiv to frame this segment of *Nuestra América* dedicated to the far-from-satisfactory reflections on government.

As Martí cuts short the debate, all die-hard problems are relegated to the troubled past and a prophetic vision takes care of the glorious future. The unsettled present is thus successfully avoided. At the Pan-American Conference (as Santí shows in detail), the champion of Latin American unity felt thoroughly abandoned (if not betrayed by the delegates, since nobody bothered to raise the Cuban question, which was so close to his heart). At a toast, as the Latin American participants celebrated *their* unity, from which he felt excluded, a half-noble, half-hypocritical gesture of pity towards his person by the others attempted to compensate for his abjection. Thus, for a brief moment, the illusion of Latin American unity flared up. Martí, although deeply hurt inside and walking with his head down (*OC* 6:106), responded with a patriotic continental prophecy: he needed to reassure himself in *Nuestra América* that everything was continuing on the right track. Yet his feelings of exclusion from the “noble rapture” of Latin American unity may have translated into the undiplomatic hateful rapture of

exclusion of those who would not line up for his manly pursuits. Since his bet on Argentina failed, the illusions about Mexico had to stay alive. But illusions are only that: illusions. In the end, he merely precipitated what he thought he would prevent. Shrewd Don Porfirio suspected this all along.

And still more nagging questions about Martí's vision continue to emerge. While the thesis about "the equilibrium of the natural elements of a country" sounds great to any patriotic ears, even despite its use by the early *caudillos*, wouldn't some such form of government only petrify existing conditions? And doesn't the drive for the imaginary "restitution" look backward rather than forward? (This step back will be echoed in the already mentioned "romantic turn," to the *pampa* countryside in Argentina in the 1930s and "to the Mother" in the dazzling mythopoeia of Octavio Paz in *El laberinto de la soledad*, 1950.) The paradox of the later *caudillos* up to the present has been that they seized power with the avowed goal to *modernize* or to *democratize* their countries (never modernize *and*, or democratize *and*), yet because they were clueless about what Modernity actually is, between the failure to modernize or to democratize separately and their personalistic and patronal styles of government, they would all slide back to the well-trodden ways and, instead of modernity or democracy, their countries would be laid waste.

While Martí's rhetoric about the "world," the "trunk," and "grafting" may sound impressive, what might that "trunk" to be grafted onto actually be? The answer is left to imagination. And the metaphor makes it clear that the new must come in small doses, and that "we" can pick and choose what to accept and what not to, and always only what is convenient to "us." Has the storm of History hurling us into the future (Benjamin 257–58) ever offered anybody such an easy option? Can we opt out even if we "opt out"? Only a villager would believe that. Or perhaps a prophet blinded by his own vision.

Should not knowledge rather look forward and be a tool—agent—for change? Martí, surprisingly, seems to be clueless: on the one hand, he has farsightedly diagnosed many cultural epiphenomena of modern times (in the prologue to Pérez Bonalde's poem on Niagara, from 1882); yet, although he is fascinated by some aspects, he viscerally rejects the material modernity he is forced to live "in the monster." Further, as will become typical for Latin America, Modernity is identified with "modern ideas"; in his case, with scientific positivism. The only advantage to such a concept is that it puts the intellectual at the center of engendering Modernity. Yet the intellectual has only managed to modernize *literature*, and that only barely.

On the one hand, Martí speaks admiringly of the new, modern Latin America rising before his eyes—while the United States is terminally floundering;¹¹ on the other hand, he thinks that Latin America's past failure to get ahead is due to excesses of imitation. Importation of foreign books is not introducing "civilization" but only "false erudition." Actually, the

imitation of the “developed” world would itself only create parody, would put on a ridiculous mask of false modernity, and he piles a merciless series of outlandish metaphors on the pretentious Latin Americans of the past (*OC* 6:20): “What a vision we were” (Allen 293). On balance, it appears that Martí is more concerned about the loss of identity (the conservative agenda) than about the urgency of modernization (the liberal agenda).

It is not that he does not dream of free Cuba as a rich paradise: because his country is situated at the crossroads of world trade, he muses aloud in the *Manifiesto de Montecristi*, once she is freed from Spanish incompetence and corruption, “respectful nations will shower riches” on her (*OC* 4:101). A cavalier attitude toward the workings of the material world is quite striking in Latin American thinkers of the time: in *Ariel*, Rodó’s plan is to engage the North American Caliban-*gringos* for the chores (which they will gladly do for Latin Americans since the latter are spiritually so superior); Vasconcelos (in his *Raza cósmica*, 1925) does not even touch on the problem and jumps right into the mysteries of eugenic aesthetics; and for José Carlos Mariátegui (*Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana*, 1928), as for his Marxist followers, all imaginable social problems will be solved by the socialist revolution working like a magic wand. Today we know better, and the continent has paid, and is still paying, a heavy price for the arresting follies of these lofty *pensadores* (“deep thinkers”), the “specialists in generalities,” as later the older, sober, and embittered Vasconcelos would sarcastically call his peers, including his former self.

The uniqueness of the Latin American “enigma” poses the question of her exceptionalism and radical otherness. If no knowledge of the world serves, if nothing “fits,” if everything must be invented anew from scratch, and not much has been created from the inside yet, in what position does it leave Martí to charter the future course for the continent? In this tough predicament, what legitimizes his voice? Martí speaks on the strength of his convictions; he makes us believe that he and only he knows, and that he and only he has the right answers for the questions posed by the enigma. And anybody who would question the prophet is a “pedant” vanquished in advance who had better shut up. Anybody who may disagree is caricatured and pulverized. Not a good way to allow for a dialogue.

The intellectual *caudillo* reflects the *caudillos* from the real world. There, “I am the law and I own everything in the land.” In him, “I am the truth.” The prophet as *caudillo* and the *caudillo* as prophet are not accountable to anybody but themselves and their dreams. In 1884 Martí wrote, somewhat theatrically, to General Gómez: “A nation is not founded, General, in the same way that one commands military camp” (*OC* 1:177); now he might look at himself in the mirror.

Some Further Revelations

The poet is seeking some anchor for his unifying vision of America (the “trunk,” what is “ours”). The Indian does not qualify, since his image was marred by the nineteenth century’s racial theories. The Creole is also dismissed, turned into an “exotic” entity in America. The paradox of the Creole was formulated already by Simón Bolívar: “European in America, and American in Europe.” In Martí’s version of the story, the “exotic Creole” pays for all the broken china in Latin American history. In his search for the “trunk,” Martí opts for the mythical middle ground between extremes and pulls out of the hat the *mestizo*, to play the hidden card of “nuestra América mestiza” (OC 6:19) (our *mestizo* America). This is a powerful metaphor and a bold revaluation of the *mestizo*, whom nineteenth-century positivist racial “science” considered the lowest of the low because he, “logically,” combined the worst of both races. Martí’s new, romantic image of *mestizo* will be picked up by Vasconcelos and will find its apotheosis in his dream of the “cosmic race.” But the symbol of the *mestizo*, in both cases, would only paste over the complex racial, social, and cultural realities of Latin America. The metaphor was raised to a status symbol in the Cuban Revolution, and at one time there was no Latin American intellectual who would not call himself *mestizo*, of course, in that lofty and metaphorical sense of the word only.

In “Madre América,” a speech just a couple of months earlier, the *mestizo* does not appear at all, and the Creole ranges the whole gamut, from the white *criollo* to the *mestizo*. Martí even ventures prophetically into the past: “The first *criollo* born to a Spaniard, the son of Malinche, was a born rebel” (OC 6:137). Originally, “*criollo*” referred to any member of a nonnative race born in America, and was used for both whites and blacks; later, the meaning was reduced to whites only. It is interesting to see how the mythology of the *mestizo*, assumed in *Nuestra América*, reshuffles the values: the *mestizo* as a new positive entity now occupies the place of the *criollo* and leaves the latter hanging in the air.

A comparison between the two texts is quite interesting. Two shifts are clearly apparent: the attitude toward the United States and the U.S. experience is significantly more benign in “Madre América,” and one notes a rush to romanticism in *Nuestra América*. Perhaps what was still hope when Martí was addressing the delegates of the Pan-American Conference in December 1889, and what turned into ashes soon after as his advancing of the “Cuban cause” failed, needed some compensation, a refuge in a dream, in a fortifying vision? In another “noble rapture” of Latin American unity? Actually, has this been anything else, ever?

The second half of *Nuestra América* turns into a set of variations on and a development of motifs introduced in the first part. In the following

segment, Martí steps back to recall the struggle for Independence and paints, in synecdochic strokes that are as interesting for what is left out as for what is included, a large canvas of uprisings emerging all over the continent. Father Hidalgo and the Virgin of Guadalupe head the celebratory historical procession (*OC* 6:18). What strikes one in this is the contrast to the earlier metaphorical mention of the state vs. church conflict: “pelea del libro con el cirial” (*OC* 6:16) (struggle of the book with the candlestick). Earlier, it would appear from the text that the whole of Spanish America has emerged in the midst of that fundamental struggle. The “cirial” and its religious connotations make for another tough spot for translations and even for some native speakers: Ramos, for example, interprets “cirial,” which is also a plant in Mexico, as a “metaphor for tree” and therefore as part of the opposition “false erudition vs. Nature” (235). Here, again, as in Vallejo, Rulfo, and many others, regional variation in Spanish takes its toll.

Actually, the conflict between the Church and the radical secular liberals in power came to a head in Colombia (Bushnell and Macaulay 209–20) and became vicious at different times in Mexico. One of those periods was the presidency of Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada (1872–1876, deposed by Porfirio Díaz), who unleashed a savage war on religious Mexico (which was repeated with even greater intensity under the presidency of General Calles in the 1920s).¹² Martí lived in Mexico for two key years, from February 1875 to December 1876, when he fled precisely because of his blind unconditional support for Lerdo’s group of radical Jacobins. It was the country in civil war, the mismanagement and excesses of the government, that ushered in Porfirio Díaz as a peacemaker. (Unfortunately, like so many others, he overstayed his welcome.)

Martí never stopped admiring these criminally fanatic Mexican Jacobins, his friends. Actually, when one reads his earliest writings and notes, one realizes that he was a pretty radical Jacobin himself, and never stopped being one at heart. The search for the “real” Martí may bring up real surprises. It was the politics of the envisioned uprising that forced him to seek consensus in order to bring together the widest spectrum of the Cuban exile community and to create the illusion of unified Latin American support for his project.

Yet there is a hint of a change toward the religious problem, motivated by the positive recognition of the religious element in Independence: “el alma de la tierra desatada a la voz del salvador” (*OC* 6:19) (the soul of the country unleashed by the voice of the Savior). Don Porfirio’s example may have also contributed. Martí plays on words, contrasting “los redentores bibliógenos” (the redeemers soaked up in books), his example of false erudition that does not understand the countries, and the “salvador” (the Savior) as a metonymy of the religious impulse and as “the soul of the country to be governed with and not against it or without it” (yet note the programmatic small initial letter in “salvador”). The syntax is twisted, and

Onís has remarkably botched this passage (144; Randal and the “team” follow suit).

Religious theme reappears as one of the oppositions when Martí contrasts yesterday’s hatred and today’s love, after the countries have got tired of the “useless hatred” that was tearing them apart: book versus lance, reason versus candlestick, cities versus countryside (*OC* 6:20). Now the poet senses that “love is tried out almost without realizing it.” What a miracle it would be! While “love” is surely an exaggeration, some “accommodation” has been taking place in most Latin American countries: Argentina got organized, albeit imperfectly, and conciliation was the outward face of the Mexican *porfiriato*, among others. Don Porfirio let the harsh anticlerical laws stand, but refrained to enforce the most odious of them, letting everybody know that the peace depended entirely on his good will; also he shrewdly opened his arms to and won over former enemies; he used his *friendship* as “exchange of benefits for loyalty” (Krauze *Mexico*, 316). Martí’s friends in Mexico were pleased and he himself benefited at last through his well-paid contributions to the pro-government *El Partido Liberal*. Some episodes show the length of Martí’s *angst* that he may have crossed the line (the reported gossip about the aging *caudillo* dominated by his young wife, [Herrera Franyutti 287–90]). He never lost faith that he would win over Don Porfirio as an ally for the coming war.

Yet the example of the Mexican strongman shows how limited and precarious the alleged attempt at love was. In *Nuestra América*, we read in the love segment: “if the republic does not open her arms to everybody and does not advance with everybody, the republic dies” (*OC* 6:21). In Tampa in November 1891, Martí gives his famous speech, summarized as “Con todos y para el bien de todos” (*OC* 4:267–79) (With everybody and for the benefit of everybody). After the fit of anger in which he classifies half of America’s citizens as effeminate and traitors and turns them into insects to be put on boats and sent away, his populist rhetoric of love and of assuaging “everybody for everybody’s sake” is not especially reassuring. The visceral outburst of spite and intolerance undercuts his otherwise humanistic message. Language is a double-edged sword, as Sor Juana already discovered: relentless exaggeration drives home the message, but it also may distort it.

In the last segment of his quick journey through the America’s past, present, and future, Martí returns in closing to the threat from the North. He even attempts a certain gesture of conciliation between countries and races. The gesture is not directed to the United States alone, because the racial problem (in the wake of the bloody rebellion of the black slaves in Haiti in 1804, in which the whites were bludgeoned to death) also loomed large in Cuba. Martí felt that he had to exorcise the threat in order for his compatriots to stop worrying about what might come after independence. He thought that

just his words would do the trick and that the complex issue would go away. (It did not, but I am not writing a history of Cuba here.)

Martí also puts the intellectual squarely in the service of the cause: “To think is to serve” (OC 6:22). Not only is the intellectual’s autonomy taken away, but his status as a *critical* mind is seriously diminished. While admitting that “criticism is health” (OC 6:21), Martí undermines it immediately by saying that it needs to be done “with one heart and one mind” (Onís 148). Perhaps within one heart, everything; outside of one mind, nothing? Criticism becomes a toothless circular exercise within a determined monologic discourse which then is not only *monologue* but also *one single logos*. The age of the Revolutions from the 1960s on will take up with a vengeance Martí’s demands of the intellectual, turning him into an expendable and always complicit *apparatchik*. As Don Porfirio used to let his interlocutors know, “deserve my *friendship*, or else.”

Conclusions, or New Questions?

Nuestra América is a marvel of symbolic dramatic action working through the incessant flow of high-powered images unfurled before the reader or listener as a kind of mystical banner at Judgment Day. It is a solemn rallying call, a sermon, a hymn, a prophecy, rather than any type of analysis for which it has been many times mistaken. Its rhetorical vehicle uses a stream of shocking metaphors, hyperboles, exhortations, and even insults in order to elicit shame and a patriotic response. As such, it is destined for fast reading and listening that tend to enhance its impact on the imagination, and from there on the volition of the reader-listener (to get ready to enlist for any kind of patriotic tasks on the order of the day).

While its segments endow its macrostructure with a certain sense of organization and progression, within it, the thematic motifs move freely, coming and going, jumping back and forth, in series of alternating contrasts, in centrifugal and centripetal variations, and the discourse continually and abruptly switches emotional and genre registers. In this type of intense textual flow, even the most flagrant contradictions do not hinder the force of persuasion and purpose. As a composition thought as *performance*, Martí’s *Nuestra América* is rather a poem in prose, “a collection of slogans that turn around a small number of poetic symbols-leitmotifs that, together, organize the piece into a kind of contrapuntal ‘musical’ structure” (Volek “Argiropolis” 60). One just has to let oneself go with the flow of images.

However, both as a work of art and even more as a possible blueprint for action, Martí’s *manifesto* and *profession of faith* demands careful scrutiny. It is surprising that the very text of such a piece as *Nuestra América* has remained unsettled, and for those who do not read primarily in Spanish, the

translations—struggling with the rich rhetoric, symbolic layers, and arcane allusions, all communicated through twisted syntax and some hurried writing—create an additional layer of misunderstandings. Slow reading helps to flesh out its intellectual import, but the analysis needs to go beyond that.

Even as a work of art, *Nuestra América* cannot be read intrinsically only. It is part of a historical situation and of a real and imagined historical romantic struggle, involving the entire American continent and all of humanity. It is also part of the strategic needs and of the pragmatic calculus such a struggle presupposes. Published in Mexico and written with Mexico in mind as a desired future key ally, it also becomes willy-nilly a celebration of the *paz y progreso porfirianos* (Porfirian Peace and Progress), a period that was seen quite differently from the post-revolutionary Mexican side. Defending the American “trunk,” its “Americanism” gets uncomfortably close to the one typified by the prototype for all modern Latin American dictators, Juan Manuel Rosas and his cutthroats. Proclaiming Latin American exceptionalism and radical otherness, the normal flow of critical dialogue and exchange with the world is reduced to pre-screened “grafts,” opening the road to self-delusion and solitude. This and the touted miracle of turning bananas into wine—a feat that would be envied even by José Arcadio Buendía—as well as the concoction of diverse new rationalities invented for mankind (those utopian “dreams of reason”), have only managed to re-create Latin America as Macondo, so celebrated in literature and so sweet-exotic for export, and yet so bitter for those who have to live its everyday reality. Yet once we stop and think, the paradoxes continue, waiting for new readings and for new questions.

Postscript: Martí as a Challenge to/for Liberal Education

Any attempt at reading a complex literary and cultural text will have to call to action a host of most diverse humanistic disciplines. José Martí’s *Nuestra América* is just such a text, one that transcends simple thematic considerations reintroduced into circulation by the now fading vogue of “cultural studies,” one that transcends the ossified patriotic toasts raised to it. Martí was a voracious reader, well steeped in the style of *fin-de-siècle* highbrow intellectuals; but he used language purposefully, strikingly differently in a variety of literary and discursive genres, and his sense of civic duty and revolutionary engagement guided him away from the pitfalls of lofty ivory towers to which many of his *modernista* contemporaries would fall prey. It was in his best chronicles and essays where he unleashed his masterful dominion of language and the exquisite “cultural encyclopedia” he accumulated throughout his lifetime.

Martí's work—*Nuestra América* being one of its pinnacles—represents a challenge to the present-day reader. His texts demand knowledge that may elude, at some crucial points, even the best specialists in the field. Indeed, they are a difficult “feast” for the reader ill prepared for it by today's culture, which chases after the lowest common denominator and celebrates consumerism and “disposable everything” attitudes. Even the best liberal-education program could hardly prepare anybody for the specific case Martí represents—but that would actually not be its aim. A liberal-education program can only endeavor to develop a set of competencies that will empower the individual to tackle the open-ended challenges of the world. The rest is trial-and-error, a give-and-take process, a lifelong accumulation of experience and experimentation in which confrontation—dialogue—with other peoples' experience is crucial.

What competencies do we need to read *Nuestra América*? The work is particularly striking because it can be understood in so many complementary ways: on the emotional level, the hat is jumping on the head; on the poetic level, the readers may immerse themselves in the vortex of images and symbols or listen to the music of clashing rhetoric; on the intellectual level, it gets more complicated because we need to go cautiously step by step, but every new perspective introduced by reading, by shifting culture, or by unfolding history, threatens to upset our carefully constructed appletart. The reader struggles with the text, which is brilliant and yet surprisingly unfinished in many ways—indeed, untranslatable as a product of certain culture, yet illuminated, against its grain, by the trials and errors of its hapless translators. Then comes the language, with its striking range of registers and geographies. Martí plays with all possible textures of meaning, creating a moveable feast of symbols (notably the shifting symbolism of the book). And these textures give rise to a text that sums up a lifetime of personal quest, and a nation, and a continent north and south, in momentous historical transformations; yet also reflects a fleeting moment in history (the tense microcontext of the Pan-American conference, its moments of splendor and misery) and the alluring call of the poet's awaiting Fate. Within Latin American intellectual history, *Nuestra América* emerges as a product of its culture but is destined to shape that culture at a crucial point in history, turning it away from the need for modernization *and* democratization (and initiating what will become a long defensive “U-turn” toward cultural identity at the expense of modernization; see my “Argiropolis”). It emerges as a piece of literature fitting into the historical jigsaw puzzles of the Continent, literature that will become a personal and continental destiny.

Martí demands a lot from the reader. He himself is the product of the liberal education of his times and his moral wager is clearly on human freedom. On second thought, this ethical dimension underlying his quest may upset my own little appletart. While I have argued that his blueprint for the Latin American continent is confused and in part mistaken, especially as

seen from the consequences unfolding in the twentieth century, Martí's core idea of freedom and humanity continues to be our own unsettling and central vital problem, everywhere today, not only in "his" America. In the struggle for our humanity, liberal education is not *the* solution: it is an indispensable *aid*. In this sense, its mission goes far beyond the specific competencies it helps us acquire. Without it, we would go out into the modern world at our peril.

Notes

1. I quote from the Mexican re-edition from 1993. Where the text says: "hemos de andar en cuadro apretado, como la plata en las raíces de los Andes" (*OC* 6:15), instead of "plata" (silver), "planta" (plant) has slipped into the critical edition (Vitier 1993:145).
2. Unless otherwise specified, all further quotations from *Nuestra América* come from *OC* 6, as it is most widely accessible. Also, quotes that refer to the *Obras completas*, when in English and unless otherwise specified, are my translations and include the referent page number for the Spanish-language text as it appears in the *Obras completas*.
3. Martí's obsession with "virility" has even made some critics suspect him of homosexual *angst* (Molloy). The suspicion seems unfounded. He is distinctly "homosocial," which should not be thrown into the same basket.
4. Fidel will put the "unmanly" to forced labor in the infamous militarized prison camps (the UMAPs) and also follow Martí's lead in dealing with the "counterrevolutionary worms" (gusanos); only ungrateful History will in due time return the latter to the Island as admired, richly colored "mariposas" (butterflies).
5. Yet equating *gratin* and *sietemesino* does not look right. Both Espasa-Calpe and Sopena define the latter as "jovencito que presume de persona mayor" (a youngster who pretends to be adult).
6. The immediate historical context of *Nuestra América* (the Pan-American Conference in Washington, 1889–1890, and its aftermath) is analyzed in detail and with great insight in Santi; for its place in Martí's life and work, see Aínsa; Lagmanovich analyzes poetic devices and Ferman underlying thematic structure and its lay-out patterns.
7. Yet Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836) must have been dear to Martí precisely because he was one of the leading Jacobins.
8. *Letrado* is tough to translate, because it has broader meaning than "a lawyer"; according to Covarrubias, it is "he who practices letters." In colonial times, the *letrados* were part of the elite, a parasitic lay-educated class who participated in government and secular cultural life. These characteristics would continue for another one hundred years in postcolonial times, until, starting in about the 1920s, the *letrados* are slowly replaced by the *intelligentsia*, who come from a broader—mass—segment of society. [See Angel Rama's "La ciudad letrada" (1984, posthumous).] The translations offer "the artificial, lettered men" (Onís 141), "learned and artificial men" (Randall 87), and "artificial intelligentsia" (Allen 290).
9. Let's recall that, rightly or wrongly, for Octavio Paz the Enlightenment was the gateway to Modernity, and its absence in Latin America is and continues to be a fatal impediment for any future access to it (1987; 248, and *passim*, especially his

essays from the 1970s, written after his return to Mexico and collected in *El ogro filantrópico*, 1979).

10. Martí's strikingly positive, even reverent vision of Porfirio Díaz has only recently come to light (in Herrera Franyutti, 1996, and Rojas, 2001).
11. The United States in terminal decline will be an important *topos* of Latin American thought throughout the 20th century.
12. This war went far beyond stripping the Catholic Church of its power and privileges. It ended up taking aim at any Catholic religious expression as such; men, women, and children could be killed for any external manifestation of faith. The Calles episode (the "Cristeros War" between 1926 and 1929) was especially brutal, a Mexican holocaust in which more than two hundred thousand people perished. In both Lerdo's and Calles's times, the figure of the "desfanatizador" (religious defanaticizer) emerged: the widely accepted technique of "de-fanaticizing" somebody was cutting off his head, especially if he was an Indian (there are photos of the proud modernizers clutching the severed heads of "religious fanatics"). History—both official history and that written by left-wing intellectuals dazzled by the word "revolution" (although both episodes occurred in peace times)—has treated the topic gingerly and, when referring to it at all, has summarily attributed it to "peasants fanaticized by the priests." It has not occurred to these good people that ordinary Mexicans were defending their humanity and human rights, with guns only after nationwide civil disobedience (in the 1920s already inspired by Gandhi) failed to move the government. Mexico had to wait for a young Frenchman who, in the revolutionary 1960s, was turned around by his contact with the ordinary people who lived through that ordeal, and wrote the classic on the topic, *La Cristiada*, in which he analyzed the history and the diverse dimension of the religious conflict (Meyer).

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