

Liberalism, Nationalism and Transnationalism in the Works and Life of Vicente Fidel López (1815-1903)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the contribution made to the consolidation of the Argentine national project, both as a writer and a high-ranking politician, by Vicente Fidel López (1815-1903), a member of the so-called Generation of '37. By focusing on some of his less well-known writings, it situates López as a socially inclusive conservative and at the same time as a patrician economic nationalist. Unlike most of the historiography on López, which has focused almost exclusively on his career as a historian, the purpose of the article is to distill the leading ideas of López on political identity out of some of his less well-known works in the fields of linguistics, literature (historical novels), journalism and political essays. It also relates these ideas to his brief performance as national finance minister (1890-1892).

Key words: Argentina, Intellectuals, Politicians, Vicente Fidel López, Nation-building, Political Identity, 19th Century.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo explora las contribuciones realizadas por Vicente Fidel López (1815-1903), un miembro de la así llamada Generación del '37, en la consolidación del proyecto nacional argentino, como escritor y como político de alto rango. Centrándose en algunos de sus escritos menos conocidos, el artículo sitúa a López como un conservador socialmente inclusivo y a la vez, como un patricio defensor del nacionalismo económico. A diferencia de la mayor parte de la historiografía sobre López, que se ha centrado casi exclusivamente en su carrera como historiador, el propósito de este artículo es extraer las ideas principales de López sobre la identidad política de algunas de sus obras menos conocidas en los campos de la lingüística, la literatura (novelas históricas), el periodismo y el ensayo político. También establece una relación entre dichas ideas y su breve actuación como Ministro de Hacienda (1890-1892).

Palabras clave: Argentina, intelectuales, políticos, Vicente Fidel López, construcción nacional, identidad política, siglo XIX.

SUMARIO: 1. Introduction. 2. Oeuvre and genre. 3. Society, language and history. 4. Practical politics. 5. López in office. 6. Conclusion. 7. Bibliographical references.

1. INTRODUCTION

In exile for much of his life, Vicente Fidel López had for many years no other way of practicing politics besides writing¹. Best known for his histories, he also published novels, treatises on economics and linguistics, and journalistic essays on topics ranging from culture to civil engineering. Though López has never attracted the same level of attention as his more illustrious contemporaries, his histories have been closely studied². The purpose of this essay is therefore to complement recent historiographic scholarship by distilling the leading ideas of López on political identity out of some of the less well-known works. An attempt is also made to relate these ideas to the policies he pursued during his brief period as national finance minister (August 1890 to June 1892). The views he developed about Romanticism, history, and language mark López as one of the most interesting Argentine thinkers of his day: a socially inclusive conservative with a continental vision of political identity yet, at the same time, a patrician economic nationalist, cursed with a strange knack of being simultaneously ahead of his time and behind the times, never quite in tune with the age.

The group of young men who opposed the regime of Juan Manuel de Rosas and returned after his defeat in 1852 to play prominent roles in the government and modernization of Argentina came to be known collectively by the year of their graduation – the Generation of '37. José Luis Romero, in his classic history of Argentine political thought, listed Vicente Fidel López fourth among its members, after Esteban Echeverría, Juan Bautista Alberdi, and Juan María Gutiérrez. In what was to remain the standard text for a generation, Romero went on to consider in greatest detail Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo*, Echeverría's *Dogma socialista*, and Alberdi's *Bases y punto de partida para la República Argentina*³. David Rock, a more recent general historian of Argentina, suggests that by the 1840s the three most prominent figures of the Generation of '37 were Echeverría, Sarmiento, and Alberdi. Romero lists only one of the numerous published works of López in his select bibliography. Rock lists only works by Alberdi and Echeverría⁴. In his monumental history of Spanish-American thought, David Brading covers only Sarmiento and Alberdi⁵. Nicolás Schumway, centrally concerned with the development of Argentine identity, nevertheless follows the pattern, devoting far more attention to Alberdi and Echeverría than to López⁶. Acknowledged in specialist works, López has been a minor player in more general studies.

Two reasons for this relative obscurity suggest themselves. In the first place, López did not pursue a career –as did Sarmiento or Bartolomé Mitre– so eminent as to

¹ Though its purpose is very different, this paper shares an appreciable amount of material with my chapter, "Finance, Ambition and Romanticism" in BROWN, 2009.

² Notable studies of the historical works and the polemical exchanges between López and Bartolomé Mitre include BOTANA, 1991; LETTIERI, 1995, and MADERO, 2005.

³ ROMERO, 1962.

⁴ ROCK, 1986.

⁵ BRADING, 1991.

⁶ SCHUMWAY, 1991. López is, of course, considered in more specialist works and, like other major figures in Argentine politics, attracted a substantial devotional literature. Examples of the latter include IBARGUREN, 1915, and ASOCIACIÓN NACIONAL DE PROFESORADO, 1916.

have assured him a readership for that reason alone. Secondly, with the exception of the *History of the Revolution*, these publications are less directly concerned with the mundane politics of his era than were those of his more celebrated contemporaries. López proceeded elliptically, employing a number of genres to advance his political programme, including the historical novel. Underlying this approach was a conviction—even a method—which might anachronistically be called social constructivist or, in Richard Rorty's sense of the term, utopian⁷. Sometimes to speak of things as they might be brings them closer to reality. López took the view that language itself was more important than any overtly political propositions that might be expressed in it. The general evocation of the past was weightier than any particular detail of historical interpretation. Together, language and history transmitted culture from generation to generation, while admitting progress through reliance on individual agency for their reproduction. Indeed López maintained that

peoples who lack a clear knowledge and understanding of their national traditions are like men cast away from hearth and family, who waste their lives in obscure and pathetic adventures, tied to no one by respect, love, or gratitude. Generation follows generation, given over to the convulsions and delirium of individualism⁸.

The public career of this neglected figure may be dealt with quite briefly. Born in Buenos Aires in 1815, the son of Vicente López y Planes, Vicente Fídel graduated from the University of Buenos Aires as doctor of law in 1837. Like his contemporaries, he was a close observer of events in France, greatly affected by the revolution of 1830, more aware of Michelet and other French authors, and of the *Revue de Paris*, than of contemporary work in Spanish⁹. These influences encouraged the Generation of 1837 to oppose the regime of Juan Manuel de Rosas, governor of Buenos Aires from 1829 to 1832, who had returned to office with dictatorial powers in 1835. Dissent was met with repression, and in 1840 López fled to Chile, where he ran a school with Juan Domingo Sarmiento, later a reforming Minister of Education and President of the Republic. It was during this period, when the two exiles taught together, that Sarmiento wrote his powerful and influential anti-Rosista polemic, *Civilization and Barbarism*¹⁰.

López returned to Argentina to fight alongside Justo José de Urquiza, Governor of the Province of Entre Ríos, in the 1852 campaign that finally ousted Rosas following the battle of Caseros. At this point he seemed set fair for a career in law and politics. His father, Vicente López y Planes, had served as interim president of the sadly misnamed United Provinces of the River Plate following the fall of Bernardino Rivadavia in 1827. Now he returned as provisional governor of the rich, powerful, and still autonomous province of Buenos Aires, while Vicente Fídel was appointed Minister of Education. Then things began to go wrong. In the *Acuerdo de San Nicolás*, adopted at a meeting of delegates from all the Argentine provinces after Caseros, it had been

⁷ RORTY, 1989.

⁸ LÓPEZ, 2001, p. 21.

⁹ On the early years, see LÓPEZ, 1929, especially pp. 38-39.

¹⁰ SARMIENTO, 2003.

agreed than a new national constitution should be prepared. There was to be a strong federal government. Inter-provincial restraints on trade were to be lifted. There was considerable support, too, for a proposal to detach the city of Buenos Aires from its province, constituting it as a separate federal district. Meanwhile, López y Planes had made powerful enemies by his moves to expropriate the estates of Rosas and some of his chief allies. Together with merchants and career politicians of the great port city who had developed vested interests in political fragmentation under Rosas, these powerful men now baulked at a programme to which the López family— father and son —were irrevocably committed. Led by Bartolomé Mitre and Valentín Alsina, and assisted by the forbearance of President Urquiza, the *porteños* seceded from the nascent confederation, postponing national unification for a further decade.

So it was that in September 1852, Vicente López y Planes was ousted from the governorship. His son fled to Montevideo, there to piece together a living as lawyer, professor of political economy and, in the 1860s, local director of the recently established London and River Plate Bank. In the meantime, Buenos Aires and the remaining confederated provinces remained in a state of hostility. But when differences were settled and Bartolomé Mitre took office as the first President of a united Argentine republic in 1862, López did not immediately return. It was not until 1871 that he once again settled in Argentina, now serving as deputy in the provincial chamber and as professor and *rector* of the University of Buenos Aires. From 1879 to 1883 he took charge of the *Banco de la Provincia de Buenos Aires*, the oldest and most respected of Argentine banks. National office was denied him until his 1890 appointment as Minister of Finance, at a moment of national crisis. Soon after leaving office in 1892, he retired from public life following the death of his son in a duel. He lived on into the new century, dying in August 1903.

2. OEUVRE AND GENRE

Exile and disruption meant that for long periods López had no way of contributing to public life besides writing. His output was considerable, and falls into at least three categories. There was a good deal of journalism, ranging from early polemical essays, published in Valparaíso in 1842, that advocated a distinctive understanding of Romanticism, to his contributions to the *Revista del Río de la Plata*, of which he was co-editor in the 1870s¹¹. To some of the thirty-four issues of this journal, López contributed sections of longer historical works, eventually to be published in volumes, but he also threw in shorter pieces on language and politics and on the public works programme of the Sarmiento administration¹².

Next come the two major histories, one of the Argentine revolution and the other of the Argentine republic from its origins to 1852. While it is for these works that López is now best remembered, other shorter historical works include the early *Ma-*

¹¹ LAMAS, 1871-1874. The earlier work, on Romanticism, may most readily be available in a later compilation: PINILLA, 1943.

¹² LAMAS, 1872, II, pp. 135-163.

nual de historia de Chile (1845) and the *Manual de la historia argentina*, in which López summarised his longer works for the student. Besides, the novels he wrote and those he merely projected should be regarded as an extension of his historical *oeuvre*¹³. López himself would have accepted this. In *La novia del hereje*, still in print, and the better known of the two published novels, he pays tribute to Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper and adopts a standard device of the Romantic historical novel, embedding his fictional narrative in a context of historical events and characters, complete with footnotes. The avowed intent of *La novia*, he declared, was “to make a past way of life live once more or, to put it another way, to galvanise dead societies”¹⁴.

Third, López tried his hand at a scientific treatise on what would today be called linguistics but was still known as philology in his day. Garcia suggests 1868 for the publication of this work and offers a Spanish title. A French text was published in Paris and Montevideo in 1871 and gives no indication of being a translation¹⁵. In *Les races aryennes*, López provided an account of Quechua, the principal indigenous language of the *altiplano*, in which he drew on the work of Friedrich Max Müller and others to suggest that this was an Aryan language, related to Sanskrit. This contention, in turn, was used to support the familiar claim that South America had been colonised by peoples already relatively civilized, migrating in the proto-historical past from their Central Asian homeland. This speculation allowed López to promote a pan-South American foundational myth in which miscegenation between Iberians of Visigothic descent and pre-Columbian Americans was presented as the re-unification of a single Aryan people sundered by history¹⁶.

Journalistic essays, scholarly histories, school and university text-books, novels, and a scientific treatise: López tried them all, but with a constant purpose, which was the forging of a sense of national identity calculated to stabilise and extend Argentine national society. Socially conservative and communitarian, he developed ideas about society, language and history that drew deeply from the wells of European Romanticism and French pre-Marxist socialism, and the next section of this paper is substantially devoted to a sketch of these views, deriving from the early essays on Romanticism and Classicism, the novels, and the philological treatise.

3. SOCIETY, LANGUAGE AND HISTORY

López was convinced that literature, language, the church, and political action were all socially conditioned. A work of literature was not some “capricious outburst of in-

¹³ LÓPEZ, 1896 and 2001. The earliest date given in most sources for *La loca* is 1854, though whether of composition or of publication, and if the latter in what form, is unclear. *La novia* is said to have first been serialized in Chile before 1852, and was then re-published, once again in serial form, in *El Plata Científico y Literario*, 1854-55. LÓPEZ, 2001, p. 9.

¹⁴ LÓPEZ, 2001, p. 21.

¹⁵ LÓPEZ, 1871.

¹⁶ López was just plain wrong on dates. He identified the campaigns of Alexander the Great (BCE 333) as the cause of divisive migrations; yet population of the Americas from Asia had begun several thousand years earlier.

dividual genius”¹⁷. On the contrary, he held that “all writing worth remembering is a mirror which, at one and the same time, reflects the forms of an individual, a country, and a century”¹⁸. Historically, too, each literary creation was “a logical and necessary expression [*faz*] of the perpetual unfolding of thought”¹⁹.

In this way, classical theatre, derived from French eighteenth-century models through metropolitan Spain, “appeared among us together with the revolution”²⁰. This was no accident. With its emphasis on strong individual passion, French classical theatre appeared to López to be a preparation for revolution: fomenting destruction, not organization²¹. By contrast, Romanticism emerged from the reaction of French society against the excesses of revolution, a reaction which had centred upon the attempt to rehabilitate family and church as much as monarchy, and which found its leading cultural expression in a cult of the Middle Ages²². It appeared to López that Romanticism was able to flourish in Argentina, in the 1830s, under what might be thought very different conditions, because it had a foundation in reaction against the excesses of the attempt by Bernardino de Rivadavia, during the previous decade, to impose a rigid Benthamite form of government, owing much to the Bourbon administrations of the late eighteenth century, upon a society quite unsuited to it. Indeed, Rivadavia had spent some years in Europe trying to find someone of royal blood willing to accept the viceregal throne of the Rio de la Plata under the restrictions of a liberal constitution: a citizen king for the *porteños*.

The remainder of the analogy is not spelt out, though López can hardly have been blind to it. In Europe, Romanticism began as a reactionary force. Then young minds seized upon it to authenticate the new nationalisms of Greece, Italy, and the rest, in which it became for a time inextricably bound up with more progressive forms of liberal nationalism. For every Scott there was a Byron; for every Chateaubriand, a Mazzini. So, in Argentina, the reactionary phase was represented by the dictatorial rule of Rosas with its attempt at legitimation through a cult of the gaucho and traditional rural life. Sarmiento, in all probability, must serve as the Mazzini of Argentina.

In Europe, López detected solid achievement at the point of equipoise between these two politically opposed Romanticisms. This was evident in the revival of scholarly study of Dante, Calderón, and Shakespeare, and of medieval history. Audaciously, López seems to have seen himself in a similar intermediate role in Argentina. He suggested that changed social circumstances meant that Romanticism was a spent force after 1830 and that a new literature was coming into being, based neither on Antiquity (Classicism) nor on the Middle Ages (Romanticism), but on contemporary society. This was a literature preoccupied with the present and the future rather than the past, and with humanity rather than with individual nations. If *this* was the order of the day, then it must surely be seen as the yardstick by which López intended his own work to be judged. For he was quite explicit in his view that aesthetic value lay

¹⁷ PINILLA, 1943, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 21.

in being in tune with one's own age, and not in approximation to some universal goal. To say that Virgil was to be preferred to Statius "because he wrote better verses," he insisted, "is puerile nonsense; it reveals a failure to understand that this superiority depended upon deeper, more social causes. ... Virgil triumphed because he was more progressive"²³.

This attachment to the importance of the social base of literature is pressed home with greatest force in a desperately contrived passage early in *La novia del hereje*. A *balancín* stands waiting outside the Lima home of Maria, *la novia* herself, ready to carry the family away from its domestic security on the long and perilous journey to Spain²⁴. The word means, roughly, a beam or shaft. But in sixteenth-century Lima, López assures his reader, it was the name given, by association, to a kind of carriage without wheels, suspended from a beam. As society supports a literature (*literatura*) so the beam supports a litter (*littera*). The litter, shaped much like the body of a wheeled coach, tapering from top to bottom when viewed from the front, and with two eye-like apertures near its top, is compared to the face of a bearded man – reminiscent of King Philip of Spain. It is compared to a Dominican habit (black top; white and gold beneath). It is compared to the confessional, since it has wooden grilles rather than glass panes in those two apertures. Within, it is lined with pictures of famous historical and religious scenes: the Cid, an *auto da fé*, the archangel Michael weighing souls. Thus, the family is embraced by its monarch and the church. They confess through real grilles to a figurative Dominican, appropriately contemplating the Archangel's figurative weighing of souls while themselves literally hanging from a beam, supported by their social inferiors. The beam itself resembles society because it supports monarch, church and family, while the whole contraption is "una expresión de la sociedad, y como quien dice una literatura".

By this emphasis (which is the author's), by the way in which he so signally breaks with his explicit commitment to a simple American prose style, and from the fact that no image half so elaborate appears elsewhere in the novel, his reader can remain in no doubt about the didactic intention of the young López. Language and society are analogous and inextricable. Not only literature but language itself is socially determined. Languages are not "real entities with an independent life". Rather, they are "intimately linked with the fortunes of mankind, following in their development the same course as that of human societies"²⁵. López took the view that linguistic uniformity was, by and large, a measure of political development. In an area of many primitive tribes, each would have its own language, and each of these would be in constant flux. But an empire would adopt or enforce linguistic uniformity and, even after it dissolved into anarchy, would leave traces of its culture in the language bequeathed to the successor states.

This line of argument was essential if López was to recapture the lost history of the Inca through the Quechua language spoken by their rustic successors, as he attempted to do in *Les Races Aryennes*. The problem, as he saw it, was that all written

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 52. The comparison is between two Latin poets: Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro, 70-19 CE) and the less celebrated Publius Papinius Statius (45-96 CE).

²⁴ LÓPEZ, 2001, p. 43.

²⁵ LÓPEZ, 1871, pp. 9-10.

history of South America prior to the Spanish conquest was hopelessly corrupt. The Incas, a recent and revolutionary dynasty, had begun the destruction of history by heaping the achievements of past centuries on to the founders of their own dynasty. Only philology and archaeology could unmask these founding falsehoods. But the philological enterprise was far from straightforward. All that remained of the language of the Incas was a peasant dialect, the Quechua of his day, together with a few corrupt transcriptions of literary works made by the Jesuits. So the language had to be reconstructed.

One has to separate the primitive and unaltered body of the language from all impure accretions and then, this work of recovery once completed, work on the purified language, dissecting it as has been done with Semitic and Aryan languages²⁶.

López clearly empathised with Quechua and the civilization it represented. In trying to relate it to Sanskrit he was trying also to reveal an authentic linguistic and cultural basis for a broad South American political identity, going beyond any of the emergent nationalisms of the hemisphere. He had attempted much the same in *La novia* through his positive emphasis on miscegenation and by the active roles he allocated to members of the dispossessed Inca elites. He applauded the way in which Quechua had persisted in everyday use in spite of the conquest and looked for a long future for it, and the chief reason for this enthusiasm was that López believed Quechua to be a form of evidence superior to any historical claims or traditions that might be expressed in it. It was, moreover, especially well adapted to this task because of the way in which it developed new words, not by modification of their roots or by inflexion, but by the simple addition of prefixes and suffixed. While European languages resembled buildings constructed from the ruined masonry of earlier structures, Quechua preserved its roots intact and was therefore, López suggested, “a mirror which faithfully reflected all the objects placed before it without any loss of transparency and clarity”²⁷.

The language, even in the mouth of the most ignorant and coarse of peasants, would be for us a more faithful and complete historian than many a famous writer; under interrogation, words will recount the past to whoever knows how to make them talk; they will reveal the customs, the religion, the spirit of the race ... and its origins²⁸.

For López, as will shortly become clear, this last point was the essential element in an argument vindicating miscegenation as the basis for an authentic Argentine nation of Aryan descent.

Many of the same ideas of cultural and social relativity that pervaded his opinions about literature also characterised the view López took of the Church. Socially con-

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 17. The original text reads: “[Il faut] dégager de toute alluvion impure le fond primitive et inalteré de la langue ... puis, ce travail de restitution terminé, agir sur cet idiome ainsi épuré, en dissequer le corps comme on a fait pour les langues semitiques et ariennes ...”.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

servative liberal that he was, López distinguished firmly between the good Church and the bad, represented respectively in *La novia* by the archbishop of Lima and Father Andrés, Franciscan chief of the Inquisition. López notes with approval how, in general, religion in sixteenth-century Lima had adapted to “the exigencies of a new and petulant society” by its exuberant public festivities. But the “bad Church” was equally reflective of society. In *La novia* this reflection is allegorical rather than strictly causal. Andrés is revealed as both victim of and traitor to history. First he is caught up in a revolt of colonists and Incas against Spain, during which he fathers a child by an Inca princess. Later he betrays family and revolution to become the chief agent of reaction. He, the churchman, is made to sway the balance of fortune away from the ideal of a “grande imperio mixto” based on miscegenation, towards an insupportable Euro-American tension still unresolved in the Argentina of López’s own day.

Finally, political action was constrained by society. State tyranny, López maintained, was always based upon patriarchal despotism within the family. Such virtues as there were in colonial Lima derived from stern parental authority; conversely, in so far as this order rested upon fear, free will was suffocated, opening the door to vice and demoralisation.

Again and again, López lays stress on the inter-relatedness of literature, language, and institutions, and the embeddedness of all three in contemporary social structure. As historian, however, he is concerned not simply with structural manifestations of these relations, but also with their reproduction and development over time. Equally, although he generally suggests that society is fundamental, constraining culture and politics, he denies this in practice throughout his own life and work. Throughout, there is a clear intention to mould the historical development of contemporary society by providing it, through the novels, the philology, and the histories, with fresh myths: myths to legitimate or normalise just that “imperio mixto” whose original loss forms the background to *La novia*.

Society conditions culture and politics, but society itself evolves through history, and individuals act in history to modify society. His own work suggests that López believed that he himself, at least, by his understanding of this process of social construction, could transcend it and achieve what he set out to do. Equally, use of Andrés in *La novia* as the figure who unknowingly, and from base motives, tips the balance of historical development, suggests that beneath the doctrine of social conditioning (what the Generation of '37, following Henri de Saint Simon, called socialism) there was an unregenerate individualism²⁹. The sinful or passionate individual could knock history off course; the critical intellectual, prefiguring Karl Mannheim, could set it right again by manipulation of historical narrative.

If the initiative of an individual acting *in* history was constrained by his personal past, the imagination of an individual acting *upon* history was constrained by the supreme obligation of factual accuracy. For López was obsessed with factual accuracy and saw himself above all, as historian. An accomplished scholar of the colonial period, he frequently interrupts narrative and adopts a didactic pose to instruct the

²⁹ TAYLOR, 1975.

reader in the details of family life, the gay bars of Lima, or some other topic in social history. Typical is the account offered, in *La loca de la guardia*, of the Saturday evening market in Santiago, where the poor went to buy shoes in order to be able to attend mass the next morning, before pawning them until the next weekend. There are footnotes from time to time in *La novia*, providing support from Hakluyt, Southey, and others for this or that incident in the story. The historical novelist must on no account distort the known facts. Were he to do so, he could no longer be regarded as a serious historian, and López as novelist is nothing if not serious, modestly conceding his inferiority to Scott and Cooper whilst, in the same breath, claiming kinship. The novelist must not distort, but he may –indeed– he cannot but invent.

This evocation was problematic. Plainly Classicism had conceived of itself as evoking the past. But it had, in the eyes of López, done no more than copy the *forms* of Greece and Rome, reinterpreting them in terms of its own individualist and undemocratic contemporary vision. “The form of a literature is always visible and seems easy to copy. But how is one to copy the foundation, the internal life that beats within it?”³⁰ The answer was that evocation was to be achieved by sympathetic invention within the context of the documented past. This invention might take two forms: context and actors. The only records that remain are of public events; ordinary life disappears without trace.

It is like the human face, which is destroyed by death. But the truth is that alongside *historical* life there was life; just so, every man who is remembered had a face. The skilful novelist can use imagination to reproduce what is lost, freely creating everyday life (*la vida familiar*); and, by subjecting himself strictly to historical life in combining the one with the other, he can reproduce the complete truth³¹.

Accordingly, *La novia* abounds in scenes of low life and pays particular attention to the sub-cultures of conquered indigenous people and male homosexuals. And what is attempted in *La novia* is every bit as serious as the equally heroic attempt to recreate Inca society through analysis of the Quechua language in *Les Races Aryennes*.

So much for context: there remain the actors. López, so often reflexive and aware of his method, displaying the trick he intends to perform with no fear that this will give the game away, is uncharacteristically silent on this subject. But what he does is consistent with his general view of history. The main characters are emblematic less of national characteristics than of the typical objective constraints or predicaments created by national histories. The excesses of Francis Drake’s treatment of the Spanish are explained away by the supposed exile of his family as political refugees under Mary, an experience that echoes the author’s own exile. Andrés, head of the Inquisition, and Mercedes the Inca princess, were lovers some twenty years before the action of the novel. They have now reacted: he to an extreme and repressive Catholicism; she to serve in Drake’s subversive intelligence network. Together they model the lost possibility of miscegenation and its decay into mutual dependence (she blackmails him) and destructive conflict between Spanish and indigenous populations.

³⁰ PINILLA, 1943, p. 29.

³¹ LÓPEZ, 2001, p. 27.

Juana, the child Andrés fathered by Mercedes' sister, marries Drake, indicating the progressive role of the British as a cosmopolitan and liberal force – a characterisation from which López would later draw back. Minor characters, too, such as Lentini and Don Felipe, are constructed in such a way that their behaviour is intelligible only in the light of their experiences as youths. For only the young are able to act in a relatively unconstrained way, as do hero and heroine in a marriage that affronts religious and national loyalties.

History figures prominently, therefore, not only in the explicitly historical works, but also in critical essays, the novels, and the philological treatise. This is because López sees history as the central feature differentiating Romanticism from Classicism. Romanticism had directed contemporary intellectuals to a study of origins, he affirmed. Society and language could no longer be regarded as fixed ahistorical structures.

Romanticism has destroyed the fatuous despotism of grammar and rhetoric; these rules aspired to infallibility and immovable firmness, and consequently denied the perfectible nature of human intelligence³².

Such rules either denied the possibility of improvement, which the liberal in López thought irrational, or else assumed perfection, which seemed absurd to his conservative *alter ego*.

The political purpose of all this stress on origins is clear enough. López admired the function he believed French Classicism to have performed under the *ancien régime* as critique of a static system. Its subsequent failure lay in inability to legitimize a truly novel social order. To achieve this in post-colonial South America was precisely his own mission, and provides the context of all his writings. For lack of such legitimation, his native Argentina was adrift. Sketching what he would have hoped to achieve by a further historical novel (one he never wrote), López referred explicitly to the Argentine nation, “stunned by the excesses and calamities of incessant war,” and to the need to recall it to “the healthy path of its nationality, its only possible development”³³.

Hence the attempt, through so many genres, to build a strong myth of reconciliation between *criollo* and aboriginal populations, consistent, in its sub-continental scope, with dreams of a greater Argentina and the recovery of lost territories of the Bourbon viceroyalty in the North³⁴. Elevation of the indigenous peoples of the *altiplano* to the status of foundational Aryans, a straight borrowing from Cooper which dates back to an early point in López's career, serves the purpose of ennobling the historical division between First Nations and *criollos* and, hence, the wished for reconciliation³⁵. Nothing less than a providential healing of the struggles that defined

³² PINILLA, 1943, p. 23.

³³ LÓPEZ, 2001, p. 25

³⁴ On the loss of Paraguay and Bolivia see ROCK, 1986, pp. 80-92.

³⁵ COOPER, 1992, p. 34. The link between López and Cooper is stronger than this mere detail might suggest. There are features of Cooper's career with which López may have empathised. Also, Cooper deals, in *The Last of the Mohicans*, with the theme of miscegenation, which lies at the heart of *La novia*. Cora Munro is part Afro-

Europe and separated it from its broader original culture was now to be achieved in the modern world of South America.

Fugitives from the hosts of Alexander, [the Americans to be] came to the land of their exile condemned to be devoured by Pizarro and Cortés, heirs to the task begun by that destroyer of the Ancient World³⁶.

If Nicolas Schumway is correct in his claim that one source of Argentine failure in the twentieth century was an ideological legacy that was “in some sense a mythology of exclusion rather than a unifying national ideal, a recipe for divisiveness rather than ... pluralism,” then López represents the path not taken, an appropriately nostalgic destiny for a self-confessed Romantic: a Janus figure uneasily oscillating between Rivadavian recuperation of Bourbon order, incipient populism, and –in his own time– the thoroughgoing and remorseless liberalism of Mitre and the social conservatism of Rosas or Urquiza³⁷.

4. PRACTICAL POLITICS

López identified a middle way. Society moulded individuals who nevertheless retained sufficient agency to achieve progress. For this to happen, a balance had to be struck between revolution and order. In economic and political terms, this middle way took the form of federalism with a strong central government willing and able to curtail the excesses of provincial administrations and strike a balance between market forces and the requirements of national development. In power, López set aside musings about language and history, but brought to the task of government the same spirit of progressive moderation that he had displayed in earlier life. Anticipating Giuseppe di Lampedusa, he appeared to recognize that, if things were to stay the same, everything would have to change. To create the conditions for sustained national progress, provincial finances would have to be brought back under control, the balance between modernization and state solvency restored, and the vigour of foreign capital securely harnessed to national development objectives. How would this ideologue situate himself in practical politics following the final creation of the Argentine Republic in 1862 and resolution of the dual role of Buenos Aires in 1880? What part would he play in the constitutional and financial crisis of 1890?

The election of Julio Roca to the presidency of the republic in 1880 has often been seen as the beginning of almost four decades of scarcely interrupted economic prosperity and political dominance by the landed oligarchy through the *Partido Autonomista Nacional* (PAN). This understates the precariousness of economics and

Caribbean (p. 187). There is an interesting foreshadowing of the kind of racial reconciliation sought by López (though in this instance of Afro-Caribbean and indigenous Americans) in the doomed relationship between Cora and Uncas (p. 406). What dies with this last of the Mohicans is not just his line, but the possibility of racial harmony and integration in the independent republic that lay just around the corner.

³⁶ LÓPEZ, 2001, p. 30.

³⁷ SCHUMWAY, 1991, p. X.

politics alike during the 1880s. Roca's political fortunes depended crucially on his declared policy of modernization and stabilization in a country that had, ever since independence, been sorely divided by internal conflict and *caudillismo*. By 1883 European capital markets were already saturated with Argentine bonds. This meant that the extensive range of public works and private initiatives to which Roca looked to modernize the country and deliver a second PAN term was being sustained largely by insider trading as the bankers strove to maintain public confidence.

This situation must be blamed almost entirely upon Roca himself, who had broken with the gentlemanly tradition whereby each country issued its external bonds largely through a single European firm: Brazil with Rothschilds and Argentina with Barings³⁸. By the start of 1884, desperate to raise more money, Roca repented of his promiscuity and assured Barings that he would once again confine his dealings to their firm. This offered them and their French competitors time to unload the un-sold bonds they still held from loans issued over the past three years. But within weeks Roca changed track and began negotiations with a French-led syndicate for a further external loan, appearing to believe that the willingness of marginal finance houses to lend to his country was unambiguous evidence of its ability to repay.

By the year's end the position was desperate, aggravated by ham-fisted timing of the announcement of changes in import tariffs. Calculated to slow down imports and secure a trade surplus to offset the steadily rising burden of debt service, these changes had had precisely the opposite effect. Given five months' notice of the higher duties, importers not unnaturally rushed to fill the city's warehouses at the cheaper rates, putting pressure on the exchanges and bringing the government perilously close to default.

From the point of view of Roca and the PAN, the direct financial consequences to be expected from this sad display of ineptitude were of less immediate concern than their anticipated effect on the forthcoming presidential election. Constitutionally barred from serving a second term immediately, Roca was anxious to ensure continuity of PAN political control. Dardo Rocha, who had been rewarded with the governorship of Buenos Aires for his support of Roca in 1880, harboured presidential ambitions. When Roca withheld support for his candidacy in favour of his own brother-in-law, Miguel Juárez Celman, Rocha left the PAN, and though he ultimately failed to secure the nomination of the opposition *Partidos Unidos* in December 1885 he appeared a plausible candidate up to that moment³⁹. For a time, therefore, continuation of the party's programme of modernization appeared to depend crucially on averting a financial crisis capable of uniting and strengthening opposition in the run-up to the election⁴⁰.

³⁸ Those concerned to exculpate Roca might plead that rising prosperity in Continental Europe and the United States was providing a supply of capital, which made fiercer competition between the established merchant banks and new firms unavoidable. This is true, but Argentina could probably have borrowed just as much as it did in the 1880s, but at better rates, had it stuck to the old system as long as possible.

³⁹ ALONSO, 2000, p. 49.

⁴⁰ A closer observer of the shifting political alliances of the day than of the business of government, Paula Alonso underestimates the threat to Roca and the PAN at this point in an otherwise excellent study. "The two administrations of the 1880s experienced no serious challenge", she suggests. This is true only because Pellegrini saved the day. *Ibidem*, p. 46.

The hero of the hour was Carlos Pellegrini. Despatched to Europe to rescue the government, Pellegrini succeeded against all the odds in persuading the major British, French, and Belgian lenders to form a comprehensive syndicate and to preserve the interests of government and bondholders alike by issuing a further loan, of an unprecedented £8 million, making an immediate advance of £1.8 million to avert default. More than this, when nationalistic resistance to the harsh terms of the new loan led Congress to throw out the bill proposing it, in August 1884, –the spectre of Egypt loomed large!– it was Pellegrini who managed to persuade the bankers to step down, and the markets rallied.

Knowing all too well how close the country and their party had come to disaster in 1885, Juárez Celman, his Vice-President Carlos Pellegrini, and Finance Minister Wenceslao Pacheco were determined to reduce the vulnerability of the economy by repatriating part of the external debt, thereby reducing the salience of debt service in the balance of payments. They hoped to achieve this by obliging banks to hold a substantial part of their reserves in Argentine government bonds, at the same time encouraging the creation of new banks in the provinces and injecting liquidity into the growing economy. The financial crisis they had hoped to avert began at the end of 1889 as fresh lending from Europe dried up and prices for Argentine exports fell. This in turn broke the speculative boom in land, and brought down elaborate credit structures based on inflated values.

Things became considerably more serious as the year progressed. At a mass rally against Juárez Celman in April the *Unión Cívica* was established. This led directly to an armed revolt in July, which –though defeated– brought about the resignation of the president early the following month. This was the moment, in the early days of August, when Pellegrini, taking charge of the administration, called for Vicente Fidel López to serve as National Finance Minister. The situation could hardly have been worse. Not only was the economy in critical condition, so too was national politics. As Pellegrini brought those chiefly responsible for its military defeat into his cabinet, including Roca, the net effect of the July revolution seemed to its more explosive leaders to have been to confirm their opponents in power. In a letter that perfectly encapsulates his combination of liberal optimism and conservative caution, López wrote in strong terms to Leandro Alem, his co-conspirator of July, who was now fomenting opposition to Pellegrini's government.

I am informing you of the colossal task that I have over my shoulders and ask you to stop agitating the spirits, and to wait and be cautious... If you persist in following your passions, assume that the road had split in two; you take the one of the agitators and I will continue the one of order⁴¹.

November saw the effective failure of Barings in London. Panic was averted only by the speedy raising of a private guarantee fund. Early in 1891, as the two major official banks, vital to government finances, were about to go under, the national

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 73, quoting V. F. López to Alem. Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 8-IX-1890, Archivo V. F. López, Leg. 21-1-16, Doc. 4320.

government appealed to the private banks to subscribe to a new internal loan to be known, with no hint of irony, as the Popular Loan. A telegram from Buenos Aires to the head office of the most powerful of the private institutions, the London and River Plate Bank, reveals in crude terms the terms of the deal. It read: "If loan successful promise has been given by Argentine President of Republic to cancel deposit tax"⁴². Worse, the London bank was able to use the government's acute vulnerability at this moment to push through the acquisition of one of its leading Argentine rivals, the *Banco Carabassa*, in the teeth of government opposition.

Because political nationalism, by that name, did not appear in Argentina until 1930, and because the most significant nationalisations of British firms took place only in the late 1940s, under Juan Domingo Peron, it has generally been accepted that liberalism remained the dominant ideology in Argentina at least up to the world-wide economic crisis of 1930⁴³. In that year Argentina left the Gold Standard and, within months, suffered the first of what was to prove a succession of military coups, bringing an end to seven decades of almost consistently constitutional government. So too, the 1930s created the circumstances in which Raúl Prebisch would formulate the theoretical underpinnings of policies of import substitution, export cartels, and regional cooperation which would spread across the global South, through his role in the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and, later, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (established in 1964), remaining influential right up to the 1980s.

This view understates the extent to which the close alliance of Argentine and British economic liberals had already been coming under pressure in successive economic crises from as early as the mid-1870s, when voices in support of export-oriented protection of the textile industry were first raised. Pellegrini and López had already been prominent in this campaign, favouring a tariff that would foster industries adding value to products currently exported in an unprocessed state⁴⁴. Prior to 1930, the 1890 crisis was far and away the deepest the country had suffered and brought the most serious challenge to the Anglo-Argentine relationship; at its nadir, power fell into the hands of proven economic nationalists. Alonso, her eyes perhaps a little too firmly on her central topic, has been too ready to attribute less principled positions to other elements in the *Partidos Unidos* and the later *Unión Cívica* than to the direct progenitors of the budding Radical Party. Leandro Alem emerges as the most dedicated and consistent opponent of the PAN. Yet López and Pellegrini shared a history of consistent and moderate economic nationalism. López had joined Sarmiento and Mitre in voicing opposition to what they felt was an unacceptably centralised and unac-

⁴² RECORDS OF THE BANK OF LONDON AND SOUTH AMERICA, University College London, D75, 8 March 1891.

⁴³ While Rock is substantially correct in dismissing the claim of Alejandro Bunge that Alvear's 1923 tariff proposals marked the decisive move to economic nationalism, it is revealing that in doing so he refers back to the 1870s proposals of Pellegrini (and López and Varela). Like Alvear, the 1870s protectionists do not pass muster with Rock because they aimed to develop domestic manufacturing by adding value to exports rather than import substitution. This, together with Rock's insistence on nationalism as a phenomenon of the far Right, leads him to underestimate the consistency of a socially conservative strand of economic nationalism that can be heard as a faint yet distinct counter-melody throughout the PAN ascendancy and beyond. Rock, 1986.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 149 and 205.

countable tendency under Juárez Celman⁴⁵. López, along with Mitre, had attended the inaugural meeting of the Unión Cívica in 1889⁴⁶. Pellegrini, in the final days, had elected to back Roca, not Juárez Celman. In short, the Pellegrini–López partnership might have been expected, on past form, to pursue the PAN’s programme of national development but in a more competent manner than Roca and with more honesty and regard for national autonomy than Juárez Celman.

5. LÓPEZ IN OFFICE

The course of Argentine politics in 1890 was far from straightforward. During the days following the defeat of the July 1890 revolution Juárez Celman had cast around unsuccessfully for allies to strengthen his cabinet. Meanwhile Pellegrini had commenced negotiations with Roca and, within days, the two of them together asked Juárez Celman for his resignation. Assuming the presidency on 6 August, Pellegrini appointed Vicente Fídel López as Minister of Finance. Already seventy–five, López was to remain at the Ministry for the remainder of the six-year presidential term, and ought certainly to be counted as among the most successful finance ministers in Argentine history. By the time he left office, recovery was already well under way, helped by buoyant export demand. But in one important particular, López did not succeed. His attempt to curb the power of the private banks –briefly alluded to earlier– was defeated in spite of a vigorous and nationalistic campaign in which he anticipated later and more xenophobic publicists.

These private banks, which claim to have done such services for the country, have not, to my knowledge, lent a single peso in our countryside or provinces –López complained in the Senate.– They share out their cash among those they call “good accounts,” and what they call good accounts are those who place large deposits in their hands... Let a middling trader, someone just starting, ... a farmer who needs to develop his business go asking for credit from any of these banks –the London and River Plate, the Carabassa, the Anglo-Argentine– and I am certain that they’ll be shown the door in a decidedly unceremonious manner⁴⁷.

López firmly believed that what was at issue in the struggle over banking law and taxation was nothing less than the recovery of Argentine economic and political independence. For a short time, in the early months of his tenure, it seemed that he

⁴⁵ ALONSO, 2000, p. 45.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 192.

⁴⁷ “Estos bancos particulares que pretendan haber hecho grandes servicios al país, no han descontado hasta ahora, que yo sepa, un solo peso en nuestras campañas ni a las provincias; ellos distribuyen su dinero entre lo que llaman *las buenas cuentas*, y llaman ellos buenas cuentas a las que ponen en sus manos grandes depósitos... Pero que vaya una comerciante mediocre, un principiante, un hombre de la campaña, un agricultor, que necesita fomentar su industria, que vaya a pedir un crédito a cualquiera de estos bancos, al de Londres, al de Carabassa, al Anglo-Argentino, etc. y estoy seguro que lo pondrían puertas afueras con marcada descortesía...”. CÁMARA DE SENADORES DE LA NACIÓN, Diario de sesiones, 17-I-1891, p. 83.

might succeed⁴⁸. The 1891 budget, brought to Congress late in 1890, proposed annual taxes of 0.2 per cent. on bank deposits and 7 per cent. on net profits, and subjected the private banks to an inspectorate of companies. Pleased that the more damaging provisions of the 1886 Banking Law had been defeated by events, the bankers were grudgingly content to accept and absorb the taxes, minimizing their effect by changes in accounting methods. At this point, however, the plight of the Banco de la Provincia de Buenos Aires and the Banco Nacional, the two leading official banks, deteriorated markedly⁴⁹.

Pellegrini's first suggestion, early in 1891, had been that the government should offer tax concessions to the private banks on condition that they took over from then Banco Nacional large quantities of treasury bonds, effectively becoming creditors of the government. By March the position was critical, and López called a meeting of private bank managers, asking for a loan of \$20 million gold pesos (£4 million), without which the official banks would fail. Persuaded that there was some prospect of success, the board of the Bank of London and the River Plate, agreed to put together a syndicate to raise the required sum on condition that the government exempted all banks subscribing to the loan from the deposit tax. The deal was struck, the loan launched, but too late. The two official banks suspended payments early in March and, within a few days, the London and River Plate Bank had acquired its rival, the Banco Carabassa. The deal had first been bruited in January, at which time López had made his opposition clear. Now the London Bank became, at a crucial moment, the most powerful financial institution in the country.

Together, Pellegrini and López had done what they could to sustain and redirect Juárez Celman's assault on foreign financial institutions, but events had been against them from the start. After Alvear took office in 1892, López was replaced by José Terry. Not wanting to take the initiative himself, Terry suggested to the banks that they petition Congress for relief from the tax on deposits. The petition succeeded, the tax was abandoned and, though proposals for its reintroduction surfaced now and then, the threat was never again serious in this period⁵⁰. The nationalist moment had passed, and the failure of Pellegrini and López in this sphere might perhaps be seen as support for their analysis of the extent of dependency and its dangers. Their failure should obscure neither their intent nor its consistency with their past political trajectories.

6. CONCLUSION

Public office seldom provides opportunities for grand schemes. Much of the time is spent fire-fighting. Out of office, and most of all in exile, politicians enjoy the luxury of more sustained and comprehensive consideration of values and aspirations. These

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

⁴⁹ JONES, 1973, pp. 241-266.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 250-260.

deliberations seldom come to fruition, but there is usually some continuity and integrity between the life of the political exile and his performance in office.

So it was with López. No opportunity ever came his way to reclaim the lost provinces of the Viceroyalty of the River Plate, still less to shape the integrated mestizo society of his dreams, but the same aspiration to social order and moderate nationalism that had given rise to his grand projects was evident in his more modest political practice as Minister of Finance. Coming to high office so late in life and at a moment of grave national crisis, López presided over a remarkably rapid recovery, owing much to buoyant prices for Argentine exports; but he failed in his attempt to tame foreign capital and establish sound fiscal support for the balanced style of national economic development with which he had long been identified. This failure, and the return to thoroughgoing economic liberalism after 1892, brought closer the inexorable failure of conservative elites to shape and channel the aspirations of the country's growing working class. It was a trick that would be pulled off with relative success in Britain, the USA, some of the self-governing countries of British settlement, and a handful of smaller north-west-European states, but not in Spain or Italy; still less in Germany. Why should Argentina have been any more fortunate? – By virtue of the structure of its economy, Argentina stood at the cusp, resembling Canada or Australia in its economic trajectory and demographic composition. Argentina almost succeeded. Lack of the social integration and economic autonomy that López consistently tried to foster through his writings and in office deserves a prominent place among the reasons for failure. Crucial political schisms, perhaps most of all those of 1852 and 1880, find López positioned in ways consistent both with his early writings and his later behaviour in office. A man of integrity, he was not alone among his generation in failing fully to appreciate the extent to which politics had been transformed by urban growth and global economic integration.

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