

ANDRES BELLO AND THE CHALLENGES OF SPANISH AMERICAN LIBERALISM

By James Dunkerley

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ABSTRACT. Andrés Bello (1781-1865) is generally reckoned to be the foremost intellectual amongst opponents of the Spanish empire in the Americas after the Napoleonic Wars. This paper provides a synoptic account of Bello's development as a scholar, politician and statesman from his early career as a servant of the crown in colonial Caracas, through his 19-year exile in London, to his prominent role in the institutional design and management of the young Chilean republic. The paper traces the historiographical treatment of Bello and the application of his cosmopolitan learning to the tasks of nineteenth-century state-building. It is suggested that his trajectory reflected a successful adaptation of liberal precepts to a conservative local social setting within a world order dominated by British promotion of free trade.

A serious historiographical regeneration certainly attended the series of bicentennial anniversaries that began in 2009 with those celebrating the juntas of La Paz and Quito. Ranging from Jeremy Adelman's strategic inter-continental history, which asks 'how colonists disidentified with empires and monarchies', to Guadalupe Soasti's biography of Carlos Montúfar that provides a cogent and even chilling case-study of precisely that experience, this advance in historiography has moved us beyond a rather empty dichotomy of talismanic historias patrias, on the one side, and the revisionist school of imperial implosion, on the other.¹ Moreover, as the reception of John Lynch's studies of Bolívar and San Martín has shown, biography has retrieved regional academic acceptance. It is now much easier to depict the process of independence and the early republican period of Spanish America with all due sensitivity to the subjective and emotional worlds as well as the economic structures and social systems that are more familiar features of the scholarly literature.²

It may seem paradoxical – even perverse – to suggest that a reassessment of Andrés Bello needs to be made part of that process. After all, he is such an established icon of the independence and early republican eras, and we have Iván Jaksic's outstanding intellectual biographical study that sets the documentary record as straight as one might hope for.³ Written very much in the style of its subject – diligently detailed and scrupulously discerning at every turn - Jaksic's study has properly dominated the field for over a dozen years.⁴

¹ Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic (Princeton, 2006), 9; G. Soasti, El Comisionado Regio Carlos Montúfar y Larrea, (Quito, 2009).

² John Lynch, Simón Bolívar. A Life (New Haven, 2006); San Martín: Argentine Soldier, American Hero (New Haven, 2009).

³ Andrés Bello. Scholarship and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Latin America (Cambridge, 2001).

⁴ See, most recently, The Hispanic World and American Intellectual Life, 1820-1880 (London, 2007).

Yet Bello's name still remains more widely recognized than his personality and his ideas are appreciated. Moreover, since those ideas have been lionized by 'official Latin America' for the better part of 200 years, it has often been hard to discern their complexities and links with his character and experience. He has long served as a classic target for positivist and progressive-left schools in search of a foundational reactionary figure to attack, despite the fact that his political conservatism was underpinned by personal liberalism and undying attachment to the rule of law. Bello's profile, then, has suffered from a laudatory and denunciatory pincer-movement. His formidable record as a philologist and accomplishment as a poet complicate the picture further, introducing jealous lines of disciplinary demarcation just when the understanding of Bello's trajectory as a historian, statesman and thinker depends vitally on the other, private or 'cultured' side of his life.⁵

When teased out a little, however, this is a figure on the margins of glory. He is Bolívar's tutor, but not his real mentor – that role belongs to Simón Rodríguez. In his London years he deciphers Bentham's appalling handwriting alongside James Mill, but debates with neither.⁶ He is said to have met Humboldt as a young man and Darwin in his middle age, and yet we have no contemporaneous and reliable record from them of these encounters.⁷ Bello is a lodger of Miranda in London, but his signature appears nowhere in the documents of the Venezuelan mission of 1810 seeking British support for self-government, just as he is not identified in the May 1810 declaration of the junta in Caracas that it had no less a right than the Regency in Cádiz to uphold the rights of King Ferdinand VII. Yet it was Bello, on his own account, who wrote all those words.

⁵ One signal multidisciplinary exception is Beatriz González Stepan and Juan Poblete (eds.), *Andrés Bello y los Estudios Latinoamericanos* (Pittsburgh, 2009).

⁶ Sergio Fernández Larrain (ed.), *Cartas a Bello en Londres, 1810-1829* (Caracas, 1968), 77; Barry L. Velleman, *Andrés Bello u sus libros*, (Caracas, 1995), 221-2.

⁷ Alexander von Humboldt makes no mention of Bello in his *Personal Narrative* when relating his stay in Caracas, and particularly the ascent of the Silla de Avila on 2 January 1800, although it seems that Bello accompanied him and Bonpland on the climb until exhausted, returning to the city with carriers sent back to fetch food. Over 50 years later, Humboldt recalled advising the Bello family to moderate his dedication to study in order to preserve his health. M.L. Amunátegui, *Vida de don Andrés Bello* (Santiago, 1962), 18. For Darwin, see G. Whittemberg, K. Jaffé, C. Hirschbein and D. Yudelivich, 'Charles Darwin, Robert Fitzroy and Simón Rodríguez met in Concepción, Chile after the Earthquake of February 20 1835', *Interciencia* 28:9 (2003).

He was counselor to the Chilean dictator Portales, but always behind the scenes, appearing only a handful of times in the three volumes of Portales's correspondence and being sharply shut-down when he had the very occasional temerity to voice criticism in public. For over twenty years Bello directed the ministry of foreign relations of Chile but little of the diplomatic correspondence he drafted went out under his signature and he consistently resisted meeting foreign diplomats in person. Likewise, he was an adviser on the Constitution of 1833 and wrote the country's Civil Code of 1855, the most influential and enduring in regional history. For decades he drafted the presidential messages. Everyone who mattered knew it, but these were anonymous enterprises, services rendered to the state by an assiduous and retiring public servant who refused payment beyond his stipulated salary.⁸ Bello, one might say, was the ghost-writer of the emergent republican state of Chile.⁹

As already indicated, one key reason for Bello's most uncertain place in popular consciousness derives from what Iván Jaksic calls his 'crystallization', which impedes us from getting to the mind behind the name. Bello himself favoured monuments, which he saw, drawing on the Roman tradition, as guarantors of historical memory, and far from un-republican in quality. In the days of limited mechanical reproduction, he spent a whole newspaper article describing for the people of Santiago a stature of Bolívar in Bogotá that he himself had not seen. But it is not for nothing that his great-grandson Jorge Edwards Bello wrote of a 'Bisabuleo de piedra', a great-grandfather of stone, for statues and busts abound.

⁸ According to Guillermo Feliú Cruz, 'Personality disappears in this very broad concept of what service to the country meant. And it is precisely in this that we can explain the scarcity within Chilean literature of memoirs, autobiographies, and intimate revelations to newspapers.' Obras Completas de Andrés Bello (hereafter OC), XII, (Caracas, 1981), ccxxxiii.

⁹ I owe this phrase to Antonio Cussen, Bello and Bolívar. Poetry and Politics in the Spanish American Revolution, (Cambridge, 1992), 70. The best synthetic appraisal of Bello's contribution to the creation of a stable republic in Chile is Jaime Concha, 'Bello y su Gestión Superestructural en Chile', Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana, 43/44, (1996).

It is, then, something of a mystery that there is not one mention of Bello in David Brading's otherwise magisterial study The First America, which carries as its subtitle The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State¹⁰, with its chronological terminus placed at 1867, two years after the death of Bello – a man who earnestly served the monarchy through to 1810, who must stand as the quintessence of creole patriotism, and who was a leading architect of the subcontinent's remarkable liberal state? One might ask the same question of Adelman, who name-checks Bello just once, for accompanying Bolívar to London in 1810, in Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic. That fine study has the great merit of breaking precisely with the parochialism of the nation-state paradigm but it passes over one of the very, very few individuals of the age who was capable of doing that himself in real-time.¹¹

Luis Castro Leiva, the late Venezuelan political philosopher, devoted considerable energy to his brilliant deconstructions of the myth of Bolívar and what has now become a Chávez-fuelled Bolivarianismo, but in doing so Castro entirely ignored the constitutional critique of caudillismo offered by Bello, who equally dismissed the Liberator's 1826 charter for Bolivia.¹² From the Chilean perspective, Patricio Silva understandably mentions Bello in his recent study In the Name of Reason. Technocrats and Politics in Chile, which provides a compelling survey of the technical specialists and intellectuals who have provided different scientific rationalities for state management. With his concentration on the 20th Century, Silva's story understandably focuses on groups such as the 'Chicago Boys' behind Sergio de Castro's conduct of the economy for Pinochet and the post-structuralists at CIEPLAN who played a similar role for liberal democratic governments.¹³

¹⁰ The First America. The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1867 (Cambridge, 1991).

¹¹ Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic (Princeton, 2006).

¹² Obras de Luis Castro Leiva, I, Para Pensar a Bolívar: II, Lenguajes Republicanos (Caracas, 2005-).

¹³ In the Name of Reason. Technocrats and Politics in Chile (University Park, 2008).

But Silva starts this story precisely with Bello's prize pupil and leading critic Lastarria, not least because of Lastarria's explicit embracing of Positivism and the language of science as a critique of a Chile, where he claimed there still prevailed in social life the theological and metaphysical ideas of the Middle Ages. Bello is thereby morphed into the antediluvian regime, precisely where Lastarria sought to consign him, but less for what he did in terms of state-building and management than for his insistence upon an empirical and documentary core to history-writing. Lastarria was never reconciled to Bello's embracing of science but refusal of scientism, which he disliked for its rhetorical hubris, even as he read Darwin closely, and even came to appreciate the merits of the railway.¹⁴

Bello's 'ghostliness' is a general pattern, but it is still subject to signal interruption. The 'Cláusula Bello' marked his personal commitment to Spanish American community by ensuring that Chile always offered commercial treaty terms to other regional states that improved upon Most Favoured Nation status. His decade-long campaign in the columns of El Araucano for peace and reconciliation with Spain was unsigned but known to all, bearing uncontroversial fruit in 1844.¹⁵ And, of course, on 17 September 1843, this severe and decidedly reticent man stepped forward to deliver the inaugural address of the University of Chile, of which he was the founding rector, before the president of the republic, members of congress, leaders of the armed forces, the Church and the diplomatic corps as well as the faculty. He was 61 years old and at the peak of his intellectual powers, deferred to even by the radical liberals who sought to tarnish him as the intellectual author of dictatorship but whose critiques reveal him to be the architect of a far more consequential conservative hegemony.

¹⁴ Nearly 100 of the 2,000 books of Bello's library at his death were devoted to medicine and science. Velleman, Bello y sus libros, 65-70.

¹⁵ OC, X, 543-562.

On that day, Bello spoke out firmly in his own name, and his lecture was a critical moment in the intellectual life of the 19th-century American world. It is fully comparable with Newman's The Idea of a University, which postdated it by a dozen years, and it is still salient today for its anti-positivist treatment of the relationship of reason and logic, on the one hand, and morality and faith, on the other.

In the Philosophy of Understanding Bello upholds the tenets of what today would be dubbed 'intelligent design': 'We believe...that the whole search for the reason for first principles and the logical bases of the confidence we place in them, is nothing but plunging into a sphere which is beyond the reach of human faculties.'¹⁶ And at the same time, drawing directly on the Scottish Enlightenment, he calmly notes that, 'The primary elements of reason, axioms, truths that have a complete certainty and which are found within the reach of all, are the peculiar objects of common sense, a denomination to which some give a more extensive meaning than others and which has been much abused in modern times...'¹⁷

Always mindful of the needs of present public policy, he drove his empirical explorations deep into the past, back through the Siete Partidas, the voluminous legal instruments of Alfonso X, beyond the medieval epic Poema de Mio Cid, through to Virgil and Homer, whose verses he learnt as a child and recited on his deathbed, to the Roman Law that he prized as the basis for modern jurisprudence, and to the Latin which he so loved but which he energetically rejected as a model for Spanish syntax.

An empirical pragmatist, Andrés Bello clearly knew that he was party to a changing world in which history and culture needed to attend to the claims of the future. If his research was meticulous, it

¹⁶ Filosofía del Entendimiento, in *OC, III*, (Caracas, 1981).

¹⁷ Ibid. English translation here is from O. Carlos Stoetzer, 'The Political Ideas of Andrés Bello', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 23:4, (1983), 399.

was self-consciously at the service of design for future generations. And it is as much a mark of his inner tenacity as of his faith that he consistently pursued those tasks even though nine of his 15 children predeceased him.

The portrait before you, by Raymond Monvoisin, is of Andrés Bello in the dress of the Founding Rector of the Universidad de Chile and with all the gravitas of a senior figure in an oligarchic society, but upon closer inspection you might appreciate that it is also of a grieving father, who has lost his 7-year old daughter Dolores a few weeks earlier. That event prompted one of Bello's finer poems, 'La Oración por Todos' (A Prayer for All), where, having recognized the reality of death and asked Lola, as the family called her, to pray for them and humanity as a whole, he anticipates joining her before too long:

'I will also – the day is not far off –

Inhabit the house of darkness

And I will ask for a pure soul

To give me consolation for my long suffering.'¹⁸

A Secondary Figure

In case you think I am set fair to do nothing but write this man up, let me reiterate straight away that he has been treated as a figure of secondary order for some very understandable reasons, not just at the caprice of posterity. First, Bello was a scribe, not a warrior, at a time of war in a heroic age. Whilst his student Bolívar led successive armies in a 12-year continental 'war to the death', he was bottled up in north London, for half of his time here scraping a living through translation, tutoring,

¹⁸ This translation is from Jaksic, Andrés Bello, 193.

and even assisting his tailor in order to pay off the family clothes bill.¹⁹ His own trade was pen and ink, his posture sedentary, and although his gait was rapid, there is no evidence he ever rode a horse in adulthood. That didn't look too good in the age of Byron and Bolívar.

Secondly, Bello was certainly a conservative and legalist state-builder, not a proclaimer of popular programmes. He stood for many admirable things, but 'order' – that most mercurial constituent of Liberalism, and nowhere more so than in Spanish America - is in ordinary times a vote-winner only with a minority.²⁰ His insistence that 'freedom' was not synonymous with 'licence' pleased neither those who disdained every form of change nor those who sought it any cost, and today it still resonates of Pinochetista prescription.

Thirdly, Bello belonged to everyone and yet to nobody. In nothing was his identity so fragile than in response to history's insistence that identity be place-based. Born in 1781 a subject of the King of Spain, he descended from Canary Islanders. A colonial servant in the Captaincy General of Venezuela, his first political initiative upon the collapse of the Spanish monarchy is to uphold the rights of Caracas within an international royalist confederation. At no stage did he live as a citizen in the Republic of Venezuela, which country he left in 1810 and to which he never returned.

With the rapid defeat of the cause of self-government, for which he travelled with Bolívar to London to promote, Bello entered - in law and to some appreciable degree also in psychological condition – into the status of exile. He spent almost twenty years in London, married an Irish Londoner, raised three children, lost his wife (at the age of 26) and his youngest boy here; remarried, again to a woman of Irish descent, with three further children born as Londoners. Yet Bello, who for 15 years worked his British Museum reader's ticket for every waking minute it was worth, never

¹⁹ John Lynch (ed.), Andrés Bello. The London Years (London, 1982).

²⁰ Ana María Stiven, La Seducción de un Orden. Las elites y la construcción de Chile en las polémicas culturales y políticas del siglo XIX. (Santiago, 2000).

felt himself a Londoner or British or even European, despite his profound respect for Spanish history and culture. He closely studied and profoundly admired British politics, law and civic culture, but only to seek out suitable applications for the Americas, where he ardently wanted his children to grow up. During the 1820s Bello often described himself as 'Colombian', and he did so with palpable pride, but by the end of the decade Gran Colombia, which then included Venezuela and Ecuador as well as present-day Colombia, had come to an end. This time, the nation left the man.

After apparently settling the issue with his move to Chile in 1829 [he was naturalized in 1832], Bello wrote, '...here I am, a Chilean citizen by law, a father of Chileans, and employed by the Chilean government for more than ten years...and yet in the opinion of most Chileans, just as alien as the day I arrived.'²¹ This was not self-serving. The oppositional Liberals readily drew attention to Bello's foreignness, the old federalist José Miguel Infante in defiantly xenophobic terms, and even Bello's student José Victorino Lastarria was not above giving the issue an airing with menace.

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In a way it is surprising that more scandal was not attached to an act for which we do have hard documentary evidence – Bello's supplication of June 1813 to the Spanish regency to be included in an amnesty, deploying what might now be thought a thoroughly craven apology.²² Such a move can certainly be explained by developments in Spain, where the defeat of the French and the promulgation of a charter of liberalism unprecedented in world history provided probably all of what Bello sought in terms of constitutional monarchy, to which he cleaved until at least 1821.

²¹ To Felipe Pardo, 26 July 1839, OC, XXVI, 55.

²² 'The supplicant took no part whatsoever in the movements and plotting that preceded the Revolution – no intelligence with those planning the First Junta, no slippage, not even of the slightest nature, whilst a legitimate Government stood in Caracas'. OC, XXV, 55-7.

But Bello refused a fate of mute marginality. The application for amnesty rejected by the Spanish liberal authorities – Ferdinand VII was still imprisoned in France - his own exile status was confirmed. Now he becomes a regular reader in the warmth of the British Museum, legwork on the origins of the Poema de Mio Cid being undertaken in these severely lean years, Bello's discovery of lost stanzas and his deconstruction of the complexities of the work's metre constituting what he and his family considered his greatest scholarship. The letters of his son Carlos, one of only two to visit Europe, frequently described the Spain of the 1840s in terms of the *Cid*, and it must have been a particularly bitter blow for Bello to learn - at the age of 82 and from an aside in a letter from Lastarria of all people - that the Spanish Royal Academy had declined on completely non-academic grounds to publish his edition of the epic.²³

I think that Antonio Cussen is right to see Bello's identification of the missing scene of the Jura de Santa Gadea - when the Cid obliges King Alfonso to swear himself innocent of the death of King Sancho - as emblematic of an accountability deep in the Spanish monarchical tradition, perhaps comparable to that celebrated by Burke in Britain and definitely in need of promotion in 1823, when Ferdinand VII was restored by French troops to absolute power and the constitution of 1812 swept away.²⁴ Whatever the case, the question of monarchism continued to cause Bello trouble into the 1820s, and nothing stirred things up so much as a letter of November 1821 he wrote on this subject to Fray Servando Mier, that erratic radical priest and recidivist jail-breaker. Mier, who was then in Philadelphia, never received the letter, which unaccountably fell into the hands of the republican ministry in Bogotá for which Bello now worked as a diplomat and which was less than thrilled to

²³ Archivo Epistolar de Don Miguel Luis Amunátegui, 155-6.

²⁴ Cussen, Bello and Bolívar, 53-7.

learn of his view – soon to be dropped for ever - that monarchy was the only reasonable system of government for Spanish America.²⁵

The Liberals, of course, had only momentarily regained power in Spain, but at no stage did policy towards the Americas undergo major alteration. Indeed, these were the years of fiercest warfare. Moreover, Bolívar did not seem particularly dismayed by Bello's views. After all, he would himself soon write a quasi-monarchical constitution for Bolivia, and once out of power he confided in General O'Leary that the region would be better administered under the aegis of the Koran than anything resembling the US Constitution.²⁶

It is probable that Bolívar felt slighted by the faintness of the praise offered by Bello's 1822 epic poem on the struggle for independence Alocución a la Poesía, and Bello's claim that he lacked the literary skills to celebrate the magnitude of the Liberator's achievement does seem disingenuous. Yet more than that, or any memory of the early years, it appears to have been Bolívar's loss of office that complicated relations between the two men, the soldier because he became disorientated and careless of detail, the intellectual because he couldn't quite grasp that the hero now lacked unquestioned executive authority, and was unable to deliver on simple requests such as paying the London embassy.

Thus, it was over the tiresome sale of a Venezuelan mine on the London market that Bolívar miscalculated, irritably chastising Bello in May 1827 for what he deemed slackness. Perhaps more than any other event, this determined that Andrés Bello would never return to Venezuela, choosing instead the country which Bolívar, when he realized the mistake he had made, dubbed the 'land of

²⁵ OC, XXV, pp.114-8. It was probably Mier's name that attracted one of several agents sifting through the international mails in that period, but letters were generally vulnerable.

²⁶ Bolívar to O'Leary, 13.ix.1829, quoted in I.Jaksic and M.Leiras, 'Life without the King. Centralists, Federalists, and Constitutional Monarchists in the Making of the Spanish American Republics, 1808-1830', Working Paper no.255, Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame (1998), 13.

anarchy'.²⁷ In April 1829 he wrote from Quito to the Colombian ambassador in London, Fernández Madrid, urging him to persuade Bello that 'Colombia is the least bad of the countries of America', and that he would be given a good post there: 'I know the superior talents of this native of Caracas who is my contemporary; he was my teacher when we were of the same age; and I loved him with respect. His reticence has kept us apart to a certain extent, and because of that I want to be reconciled with him...'²⁸

It was, as Iván Jaksic says, too little, too late. Bello, his second wife Elizabeth and their five children had boarded the brig Grecian at Gravesend two months earlier, their voyage paid by the Liberal government in Santiago de Chile, which had long since matched Bolívar's job offer. At dawn on the day of their departure, Bello dashed off an affectionate note to Fernández, noting that London was 'in so many ways hateful to me, and in so many other ways the object of my love'.²⁹

On the second and final journey of his life Andrés Bello took with him the saddest of personal memories, a fount of practical experience in international diplomacy, and 400 books. Today it is easy to forget that this most domestic and cautious man, close to 50 years of age had not just opted against going 'home'. He had also chosen to spend the rest of his life in what was then a desperately unstable country, currently ruled under a constitution that had been devised by his friend José Joaquín Mora but that took federalism and the division of powers to lengths that Bello thought absurd and destructive.

²⁷ Bello to Gual, 6 Jan.1825, *Ibid.*, 142-3.

²⁸ Bolívar to Fernández Madrid, 27 April 1829, *Cartas del Libertador*, VII (Caracas, 1969), 127-8.

²⁹ OC, XXV, 408-9.

The Scribe Finds his Place

The country he reached on 25 June 1829 was, however, about to change decisively. Within ten months the Liberals were decisively defeated at the Battle of Lircay (17 April). Many of the problems that Bello had anticipated were now emphatically removed from the political realm, his intellectual peers finding frightened and often resentful refuge in the academic arena.

At Lircay the battle-cry of the Conservative troops led by Diego Portales was 'no dejar gringo vivo' ('Leave no Gringo alive'), few prisoners were spared, and a young London friend of Bello's, William Tupper, was subjected to an almost ritualistic and cruelly protracted death by sabre-blows on the field. One of Elizabeth Bello's early tasks in Santiago was to support Tupper's widow Isidora Zegers and her newborn son.³⁰ Bello himself now confronted the formidable prospect of dealing with Portales, the deeply feared victor, a coldly violent man who despised all foreigners but, as an international merchant, considered the English at least practical and reliable. And although he had been contracted by the despicable Liberals, in Bello Portales smelled the blood of an Englishman.

José Victorino Lastarria, who bitterly resented Bello's decision to collaborate with 'the dictatorship', tellingly describes him at home one night in a fit of giggles, holding onto a pillar and fighting back the tears as the elderly and deadpan Simón Rodríguez recounted how some years earlier in La Paz he had been anxious to throw a banquet for Marshal Sucre and his entire staff after the Battle of Ayacucho. However, at the last minute he found he lacked sufficient crockery and so was obliged to buy some chamber pots from a store down the street in order to serve all the officers.³¹ Perhaps predictably, relations between Sucre and Rodríguez soured thereafter. Here, of course, we find the

³⁰ F. Encina, Resumen de la Historia de Chile, II, (Santiago, 1954), 827; L. Bocaz, Andrés Bello. Una Biografía Cultural, (Santa Fé de Bogotá, 2000), 207; T. Sutcliffe, Sixteen years in Chile and Peru: from 1822 to 1838 (London, 1841), 245-6.

³¹ Literary Memoirs (New York, 2000), 34-5.

pleasures of self-mockery among intellectuals, but there is also a deeper, nervier element, of which Rodríguez was acutely aware: 'The Independence of America is due to the use of Arms...and it is with them that it will have to be maintained; those who have not been able to take them up have worked under their protection or lived in their shadow...'³²

Chile adopted as its national motto 'Por la razón o la fuerza' in 1834, when Portales was not in ministerial office, but it was precisely Portales's preferred form of exercising power to occupy subordinate positions and threaten the use of force against those located in the commanding heights of reason if they exceeded their brief. Portales did not exclude the possibility of development and even of some future democracy, he simply believed, not unlike Bolívar, that it would be long delayed by 'el peso de la noche' ('the weight of the night') or that assemblage of historical backwardnesses to which, of course, he himself made such a singular contribution.³³ Bello did not stand outside this equation – after all, he had asked Portales to be the godfather of his daughter María Asunción six months earlier, and had received a box of cigars from the Governor when he couldn't attend the baptism. Much of Lastarria's critique must stand.

Yet, whatever the trauma of Lircay and the temporizing with Portales, Bello's political strategy for the new republican order was clear from his first months in Chile and consistently upheld until his death 35 years later: 'The form of government is not itself the primordial cause of the wealth of nations. Rather, it is the consonance between the institutions of the state and the character and morality of the populace. So long as a society is in conflict with the laws under which it subsists, and

³²En defensa del libertador del mediodía (Arequipa, 1830), 152, cited in L.Castro Leiva, 'El Historicismo Político Bolivariano', Revista de Estudios Políticos, 42 (1984), 100.

³³ 'The democracy that is so urged by the deluded is absurd for countries like the Americas, full of vice and where citizens are entirely bereft of virtue, which is necessary for the instituting of a true republic. Neither is monarchy an American ideal; we emerge from one terrible condition to enter into another, and what have we gained? Republicanism is the system we should adopt, but do you know how I understand it for these countries? A strong government, centralized, whose members are true models of virtue and patriotism...When the citizenry has been moralized, then let completely liberal government prevail...' Epistolario de Portales I, 176-8.

whilst these provoke disturbances as well as impeding the supreme power from suppressing them, there will always be instability.’³⁴

For Lastarria, the young ideologue, this was to borrow the authority of Montesquieu for a cause that Portales imposed as if it were a state of nature. But Bello was far from alone in his incrementalism. Domingo Fausto Sarmiento, a friend of Lastarria during his long exile in Chile, later president of Argentina, and arguably the only figure of 19th-century Spanish America to match Bello’s intellectual influence, took the same route. Sarmiento supported Lastarria’s repudiation of Spain but could not abide his corollary sympathy for indigenous America, which he found utterly barbarian, and when he returned to Chile in 1841 Sarmiento took only a week to accept the conservative regime’s offer of work because, ‘We...had to prove to America that it was not in the name of some utopia that we were suffering persecution, and that, given the imperfection of American governments, we were disposed to accept them as facts, with the firm intention, at least on my part, of injecting them with progressive ideals.’³⁵

Such a strategy of pragmatism in pursuit of modernity was, as you might expect, much easier to proclaim than to implement. The six volumes of Montesquieu possessed by Bello were themselves prohibited, as was Vattel’s Le droit des Gens, the primary inspiration for his own treatise on international law, the first book he published in Chile and the most influential throughout the continent. A comparable paradox lay in the fact that Bello’s only platform for denouncing censorship was El Araucano, the paper of the very government that refused to confront the Church

³⁴ El Araucano, 27 Nov. 1830, cited in Stuvén, La Seducción de un Orden, 51.

³⁵ Recollections of a Provincial Past (New York, 2005), 188; Norman Sacks, ‘Lastarria y Sarmiento: El Chileno y el Argentino Achilenado’, Cuadernos Americanos 2, 62, 1997.

and dismantle the mental world of the Inquisition.³⁶ As a corollary, Bello apparently never saw anything amiss in editing a paper of that title whilst persistently ignoring the condition of the contemporary indigenous people of Chile. There are just two references to indigenous figures – Atahualpa and Moctezuma - in Bello's epic poem La Agricultura en la Zona Tórrida. Equally, Catherine Davies has argued convincingly that there and in his other poetical works he effectively 'troped women out of history'.³⁷

There is something of this, too, in Bello's Civil Code of 1855, where the effort to promote modernity through Lockean contract chafed badly against the need for laws to chime with social mores. For just as Bello was opposed to idealist legislation, so also did he believe that 'laws that empower [citizens] to take part in public affairs are infinitely less important than those that secure one's person and property'.³⁸ But since his prescription for this was formal process rather than custom and practice, the instruments for dealing with legitimacy and inheritance effectively 'stripped everyday acts that were socially indicative of paternity of their legal significance'.³⁹ Out went scandalous gossip and dodgy legal reasoning, and up went the liberties of fathers as a leveling civic democracy was crushed by formalized bureaucracy.

Bello produced a more efficacious result for the vexed question of entail, or mayorazgos, since entailed estates had been at the heart of the liberal-conservative ideological conflict from independence, with the latter successfully beating off efforts to abolish entail, albeit at the considerable cost of impeding the development of markets in land and mortgages. Here Bello's

³⁶ El Araucano, 23 Nov. 1832, cited in Margaret Campbell, 'Education in Chile, 1810-1842', Journal of Inter-American Studies, 1:3, (1959), 366; Simon Collier, Chile: The Making of Republic 1830-1865 (Cambridge, 2003), 29.

³⁷Ruth Hill, 'Entre lo Transatlántico y lo Hemisférico: Los Proyectos Raciales de Andrés Bello', Revista Iberoamericana, LXXV, 2009, 730; Catherine Davies, 'Troped out of History: Women, Gender and Nation in the Poetry of Andrés Bello', Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, 84:1, 2007.

³⁸ 'Civil Code. Presentation of the Bill to Congress', Selected Writings of Andrés Bello I.Jaksic (ed.) (New York, 1997) (hereafter SW) 271.

³⁹ Nara Milanich, Children of Fate. Childhood, Class, and the State in Chile, 1850-1930, (Durham N.C., 2009), 58.

mercantilist pragmatism succeeded by converting such estates into rent-bearing assets and thereby assuring the owners that their inheritance remained valorized.⁴⁰

The picture, then, is distinctly mixed. It would not be until 1865, the year of Bello's death, that religious tolerance was introduced to Chile, and even then such was the opposition that this could not be by amendment of the Constitution but only through an interpretative law. There is perhaps a tragic echo of such engagement between tradition and modernity in the destruction of the Santiago Church of the Compañía de Jesús in December 1863, when the great majority of a congregation of 2,000, overwhelmingly women and children, expired in a conflagration caused not by the 7,000 candles but by a leaking gas canister used to illuminate a colossal image of the Virgin Mary. The elaborate crinolines worn by the doomed celebrants apparently accelerated the fire, which, in turn, provoked the establishment in the capital of a volunteer fire service - including Bello's 18-year old son Emilio - that would become a core element in 20th-century democratic culture.⁴¹

Ventriloquism (and Vehemence) in Foreign Policy

Like Rodríguez, Bello recognized the primacy of force, and in public he neither contradicted any government nor engaged in partisan politics, but privately he continued to argue cases, even with Portales. For Iván Jaksic, the only time that the Venezuelan intellectual seriously considered leaving Chile was in late 1836, when Portales was set upon destroying the new Peru-Bolivia Confederation

⁴⁰ Arnold J. Bauer, *Chilean Rural Society from the Spanish Conquest to 1930* (Cambridge, 1975), 20-21.

⁴¹ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *El incendio del templo de la Compañía de Jesús: fundación del Cuerpo de Bomberos de Santiago* (Santiago, 1971).

set up by Marshal Santa Cruz.⁴² Now serving as minister of war, Portales wrote to Admiral Blanco Encalada,

'I have argued a thousand times with don Andrés, against his opinions on the blockade etc., but he keeps on putting texts in front of me, and I have to shut up. Today I had him come back ...and he replied that there never has been an instance of a conditional blockade being ordered, and still less one declared by higher law of the nation, which would not be respected by neutrals.'

But then, predictably, Portales instructed his commander to open hostilities.⁴³ A month later the government reserved the right to remove any citizen to any point in the republic, and two months after that permanent courts martial were instituted, any returning exiles being subject to a mandatory death penalty to be executed within 24 hours with no right of appeal.⁴⁴ Even Pinochet stopped short of such public instruments.

Bello had held firm on the issue of hostilities because he neither shared Portales's 'realist' conviction about the need to remove the Confederation nor was he convinced that the facts – too labyrinthine to recount here – justified a causus belli.⁴⁵ Yet, it is notable that after Portales was killed in June 1837, Bello continues to support the conflict, which now had widespread popular approval. Henceforth, his settled policy – and it was tested more than a few times – was to ascertain whether parties or individuals were disturbing the affairs of their neighbours and whether crimes had been committed or were being planned.

⁴² Jaksic, Andrés Bello, 120.

⁴³ Portales to Blanco Encalada, 17 Oct. 1836, Portales pintado por si mismo (Santiago, 1941), 115-6.

⁴⁴ D. Barros Arana, Un decenio de la historia de Chile, 1841-1851 I, (Santiago, 1905), 77.

⁴⁵ According to Portales, 'Chile's position in relation to then Peru-Bolivia confederation is untenable. It cannot be tolerated neither by the people nor by the government, for it would be equivalent to suicide'. Epistolario, II, 452.

In 1844, the Confederation defeated and Santa Cruz now held prisoner in Chillán, Bello argued precisely on such grounds for detaining a former head of another state. Having been an exile himself, he was most mindful of their rights, but Santa Cruz, although a foreigner, was still subject to municipal law, even if the crimes, including murder, he planned or committed were in another jurisdiction.

‘When has International Law protected this class of criminals? Does it not, rather, group them as enemies of the human race which every nation can properly try and punish? Which moral code justifies clandestine conspiracy in which assassination is an instrument?

If a Chilean were to be confined and punished with corresponding severity for activities like those we have described... Chile would have no grounds upon which to protest.’⁴⁶

If that observation by Chile’s foremost scholar of jurisprudence had been to hand in London a decade ago, the defence of General Pinochet in the House of Lords would surely have been spoiled rather more rapidly than was the case.

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Chile has always had to ‘speak to power’ internationally, and for that it possessed a remarkable early tutor in Andrés Bello, who understood the difference between a message sent and one received, between mere expression and true communication. In his approach to international relations, Bello might be described as both a realist and an idealist. Louise Fawcett has recently made a compelling case for his contribution to international thought being a singular blend of ‘western’ and ‘non-western’ approaches.⁴⁷ In London he had learned from Irisarri that even the greatest asymmetry in

⁴⁶ *El Araucano*, 25 Oct. 1844, in OC, XI, *Derecho Internacional*, II, Caracas 1981, 271-2.

⁴⁷ Louise Fawcett, ‘Between West and non-West: Latin American Contributions to International Thought’, *The International History Review* 34:4 (2012).

power need not obviate just treatment of weak states, provided they conducted their affairs prudently.⁴⁸ And in Principios he goes straight to the point:

‘in issues between the weak and strong, the strong state is effectively judge and jury... That is the condition of the world and that is also the value of supposed international equality, which in each era can only correspond to the prevalent intellectual and moral culture. This is where we can progressively move towards the ideal...’⁴⁹

On one occasion, in a piece of diplomatic jiu-jitsu, Bello wrote to Henry Walpole, ‘The British government is strong enough to be unjust with impunity, but hitherto the benign effect of her serious and generous conduct has been palpable...’⁵⁰

We already know that Bello was something of a ventriloquist, and he certainly seemed to have a European-style balance-of-power approach to Spanish American relations. But if there is a sort of subalternity in substance as well as form, we should be mindful of the constraints: in 1836 the Chilean foreign ministry employed just four diplomats abroad – the *chargés* in Paris, Washington, Lima and Central America – on a budget of less than 20,000 pesos. Under such circumstances, it was vital to ‘get the record straight’, maintaining scrupulous records of past treaties – until Chile signed new ones, she effectively inherited international commitments from Spain – as well as keeping up to speed with legal and political developments across the globe. A compulsive collector of detailed accounts, and ever attentive to the issue of sequencing, Bello went so far in 1849 to have Congress publish an entire volume providing in minute detail the unraveling of the notorious ‘Seth Barton Case’, in which the US Ambassador of that name sought to create an international crisis over

⁴⁸ According to Irisarri, ‘it is not weakness but imprudence that has caused the poor outcome of relations between strong and weak states, because when the just cause of the weak is made plain, the strong cedes...’ Quoted in G.Feliú Cruz, Andrés Bello y la Redacción de los documentos oficiales, administrativos, internacionales y legislativos de Chile. Bello, Irisarri y Egaña en Londres (Caracas, 1957), 229-230.

⁴⁹ OC, XI, 31-2

⁵⁰ Ibid., xlv.

his marriage to a Chilean Catholic under the Protestant rite in the American legation. Barton's claims collapsed in the face of one triangulated fact after another.⁵¹

Sometimes, however, empirical precision was simply not enough. In the prolonged case of the *Jeune Nelly*, a French craft from which the Valparaiso authorities confiscated some cargo in 1833, Bello made little headway with Chargé Ragueneau de la Chainaye under Article 5 of the Treaty of 23 May 1769 between France and Spain, and was then stung by the unbridled insolence of a letter from Paris's Vice-Consul.⁵² He duly drafted for minister Tocornal a reply that must have been most satisfying:

'In that memorandum the familiar charges are repeated, albeit sometimes expressed in more pungent and offensive terms than before; resort is even made to sarcasm, and with respect to most of the accusations...no proof is offered beyond the exceptionally weak claims already made; but a new charge is made – more despicable, if that were possible, than the others, but this time unsupported by any factual evidence at all. I am interrogated; I am admonished for sophistry in what was a full, frank and unambiguous explanation; I am charged with a distortion, which, had I made it, would have rendered me unworthy of the office I hold...'⁵³

Bello's Pan-American vocation is undeniable. After all, this was a man who wrote to his brother Carlos, 'I cannot express to you the melancholy that now, more than ever afflicts me because of the distance between us. Caracas is in my thoughts at all times; Caracas is in my dreams. Last night I

⁵¹ Memoria sobre las incidencias ocurridas en el matrimonio del Honorable Señor Barton, Encargado de Negocios de los Estados Unidos de América, con doña Isabel Astaburnaga (Santiago, 1849).

⁵² It is unclear to me if this is the same vessel as the *Jeune Nelly* which featured in 'United States v. Guillem, 52 U.S. 47 (1850)', an important Supreme Court case relating to the rights of neutrals during naval blockades.

⁵³ Tocornal to Ragueneau, 7 Dec. 1833, OC *XII*, 88.

dreamt of being in the company of some beloved people from that wonderful time of our childhood.⁵⁴

A dozen years before Bello had thanked Carlos for a print of Caracas, 'which is hung opposite my bed, and will perhaps be the last object that my eyes will perceive before I depart this earth.'⁵⁵ For Bello, then, this was naturally a family affair. Spain was the 'madre-patria', and he told his biographer,

'Nature gives us one mother and one mother-land... In vain we try to adopt a new country; the heart gives itself but once. The hand may wave a foreign flag... and strangers call you fellow-citizen, but what does that matter? The land of our birth lives on in the human breast.'⁵⁶

Here we find the familiar blend of sentiment and practicality, and it is correspondingly expressed in the foreign policy of Chile during the Bello years, when the country seeks close relations, 'with all the states that form this great family of free peoples' and which 'have the same origins, speak the same language, profess the same religion, and... have the same customs'.⁵⁷

Yet, Santiago did not favour grand multilateral declarations or region-wide treaties, which carried the inescapable risk of binding her to commitments she could not fulfill, particularly over defence. Rather, the approach – then as now - was through a succession of bilateral trade treaties, not least because it was Bello's firm conviction that 'trade has done more to facilitate international relations

⁵⁴ To Carlos Bello, 30 Dec.1856, OC XXVI, 345.

⁵⁵ To Carlos Bello, 30 April 1842, Ibid., 78.

⁵⁶ El Araucano, 13 Nov.1844, OC, XII, li; Amunátegui, Vida, 301.

⁵⁷ Tocornal to Mexican foreign minister, 17 June 1836, OC, XII, 103.

than all other factors combined' – a belief that complemented his local view that participation in political affairs was less important to the citizenry than the security of their life and property.⁵⁸

The Institution of Reason

Bello's incrementalism, his evolutionary and empirical approach to these big questions is also to be found in the inaugural lecture of the University of Chile. There he affirms, in another domestic turn of phrase, that 'the diffusion of knowledge involves one or more hearths from which light is emitted and spread; and this light, expanding little by little through the intervening spaces will, at last seep into the furthest levels of society'.⁵⁹ And that is now assuredly where Bello wanted reason to be. He sought a 'gente educada', who would lift themselves out of Portales's 'weight of the night'. And he was now reconciled to this in a republican setting: 'In no type of association is education more important than in a republic'.⁶⁰

The university would not have its own buildings or even teach students directly for a number of years, but it was charged, under Bello's self-imposed mandate, to oversee Chile's entire educational system and so may properly be seen as 'one of the first truly national projects undertaken by the emerging Chilean state'.⁶¹ Bello's rectorship might seem a shoe-in nowadays, but it was controversial enough at the time – first because he was up against the conservative priest who had directed the old college of San Felipe, which was now to be incorporated into the University, and then because, breaking with the French tradition, he included a faculty of theology and so infuriated the energetically anti-clerical opposition.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.644.

⁵⁹ SW, 124-137.

⁶⁰ 'On the Aims of Education' (1836), SW, 110; OC XXII, 658.

⁶¹ I.Jaksic and S.Serrano, 'In the Service of the Nation: The Establishment and Consolidation of the Universidad de Chile, 1842-79', Hispanic American Historical Review, 70:1 (1990)139.

The university could not, of course, replace the Church, but, Bello declared, 'Morality (which I consider inseparable from religion) is the very life of society'. Like Newman, he did not see how an intellectual training of the whole mind could exclude this branch of learning, but he wanted to create a practical institution of learning, in the vernacular tongue and a secular setting.

Here he is in Kantian mode, with 'God as the moral author of the world', although at the time this was taken by some as simply a craven capitulation before the status quo. Yet Bello's approach defies simple forward-backward linkages, just as it escapes any easy right-left spectrum. These issues are to the fore of philosophical debate today over ethics, and particularly the qualities of evil. Terry Eagleton and Peter Dews would have had no trouble with this side of the new university's mission, or indeed with Bello's insistence that teachers undertake research and his celebration of inter-disciplinarity that likewise remain high on the agenda of higher education.⁶²

Here we might draw assistance from our second Nelly - la Nelly avant-garde, Nelly Richard, who stands opposed to Bello in many aspects, not least his repudiation of Romanticism and licence as 'an orgy of the imagination' and his promotion of clarity in speech and written expression, which she takes to have long since mutated into the local hegemonic voice.⁶³

Richard makes a densely worded but perfectly reasonable claim for a post-modern perspective in that, 'Tradition and modernity...cease to be in opposition under an axis of antagonism between the old (repetition) and the new (transformation): post-modernity disorganizes and reorganizes the

⁶² T.Eagleton, *Trouble with Strangers: a Study of Ethics* (London, 2009); P.Dews, *The Idea of Evil*, (Oxford, 2008).

⁶³ 'Her texts have insisted on micropractices of difference and an aesthetic of the fragmentary, partial and oblique as opening new discursive and artistic possibilities for contesting hegemonic discourses.' *The Insubordination of Signs*, Durham NC, 2004, .xiv-xv. In a debate included in this volume Germán Bravo declared, 'I think that just as Portales can be seen as a kind of paradigm for the politico-institutional, Andrés Bello appears as the paradigm of the notion of culture based on the prevention of "orgies of the imagination"...' Ibid., 87.

procedure of phases thanks to transverse connections that intercalate pasts and presents disturbed by the operation of historical referencing.⁶⁴

That is pretty much what Bello gets up to in the inaugural lecture, giving most public expression to his own imagination. Mid-way through the talk he takes his disquisition at the birth of a new seat of learning to the very point of death, or, rather, to the point of preparing for death. 'Letters and science', he told his distinguished audience, 'are the best preparation for the moment of death':

'On the eve of drinking the hemlock, Socrates illumined the cell with the most sublime speculations on the future of human destinies that have been left to us by pagan antiquity...Chenier wrote his last verses while awaiting death within instants, leaving them unfinished when he went to the scaffold'.

And, just for once, he puts himself in the picture:

'Letters adorned the morning of my life with joyous bursts of light and still retain some glimmerings in my soul, like a flower that lends beauty to ruins...Letters...have sustained me in my long pilgrimage and guided my steps to this soil of freedom and peace, this adoptive country that has offered me such benevolent hospitality'.⁶⁵

We know, of course, that Lola's recent death will have been to the fore of his mind when composing these lines, which came to be tested over the next dozen years as a further six children, aged between 23 and 39, were felled by TB or childbirth. Suffice it to say, then, that Andrés Bello believed in ghosts with reason.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ 'Latinoamérica y la posmodernidad', *Escritos*, 13-14, Jan.-Dec. 1996, 276.

⁶⁵ SW, 128.

⁶⁶ In the *Filosofía* he states, 'There is for man a future destiny capable of satisfying his aspirations. The human soul survives death...' OC, III, 221. Lastarria ridiculed Bello for his conviction that a wealthy merchant and his new young

I have left somebody out. The very person who must have preyed on Bello's mind the most – his mother. Ana Antonia López de Bello, who had been born in 1764, lived until the age of 94, hearing this story in fragments from afar. The first of a sparse but emotional 50-year series of letters from her son never reached Doña Ana because the mail it was contained in was seized by the Puerto Rican pirate ship Valiente Rovira in 1812. That does seem to have been something of an ill omen, first with respect to her belief in Bello's promises of impending return home; secondly for her love for her grandchildren, only one of whom she ever met and so many of whom died before her; and thirdly for her son's exceptional waywardness – she chided him that several years had passed and he had still to reveal the name of his second wife.⁶⁷

I have to say that I am generally unpersuaded by Karen Racine's explanation of Bello's London identity in terms of Jungian psychoanalysis, but one does have reason to pause when severe homesickness is explained in terms of 'unresolved problems arising from a conflict relationship with the mother'.⁶⁸

'Read these lines to my mother', Bello wrote to his sister-in-law in 1847. 'Tell her that her memory never leaves me, that I am not capable of forgetting her, and that there is neither morning nor night when I do not remember her'.⁶⁹ Ana Antonia died just seven years before Bello himself.

He, we know, was too blind to see the etching of Caracas in his final hours, but he had correctly predicted the solace of letters, mumbling muddled verses from the Iliad and the Aeneid which he

spouse had seen the ghost of his first, murdered wife at a banquet, saying he had heard it as evidence in their subsequent trial. Bocaz, 204. .

⁶⁷ Ana Antonia López de Bello, Caracas, to Bello, 17 Sept.1826, OC XXV, 201.

⁶⁸ L and R.Grimberg, Psychanalytic Perspectives on Migration and Exile (Yale, 1989), 20, cited in K.Racine, 'Evolution of Andrés Bello's American Identity in London', in Strange Pilgrimages. Exile, Travel and National Identity in Latin America 1800-1990s, I.Fry and K.Racine (eds.), (Wilmington, 2000, 7-8.

⁶⁹ Bello to Concha Rodríguez, 27 May 1847, OC, XXVI, 153.

thought he saw half-erased on the walls.⁷⁰ And the man who had affirmed that animals possessed souls beyond the sphere of materialism could only be separated from his cat, Misifuz, when the coffin containing his mortal remains was removed to the nearby cathedral.⁷¹

Andrés Bello is buried in Santiago's Cementerio General. He is also commemorated in the National Pantheon in Caracas. Yet it is an engaging mark of this complex man, who lived in time and thought so resolutely outside of it, that he believed that his true *Patria*, like that of all civil persons, lay not in any given place but in the embrace of the law.⁷² His reputation may not deserve some Soviet-style 'rehabilitation', but it certainly merits some prising away from the teleologies imposed by the mental world of 'modernity'. His legacy for Spanish America has certainly not yet crystallized two centuries after its liberal possibilities first took constitutional form. Today, whether tested in the Venezuela of a once-boisterous Hugo Chávez or in the nervous conservatism of Chile, it retains all the validity and disconcertedness of profound statesmanship.

⁷⁰ O. Sambrano Urdaneta, Cronología de Andrés Bello 1781-1865 (Caracas, 1990), 64.

⁷¹ 'Animals have a sort of intelligence in which sensitivity enters as one of the elemental faculties'. Filosofía, quoted in Caldera, p.63.

⁷² 'Our true *Patria* is that rule of conduct indicated by the rights, obligations and functions that we have and that we owe each other; it is that rule which establishes public and private order, which strengthens, secures and imparts all their vigor to the relationships that unite us, and forms that body of associations of rational beings in which we find the only good, the only desirable thing in our country. Therefore that rule is our *Patria*, and that rule is law, without which everything disappears'. 'On the Observance of the Laws' (1836), SW, 263. .