

A Meditation on the Translation of *Our America*

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ABSTRACT: This translation of José Martí's *Nuestra América* (*Our America*) and accompanying essay offer English-speaking readers a new version of his seminal text, situating it more firmly within the realm of literary and translation studies, and decentering it from the world of Latin American history or politics, where the extant English translations tend to live in North American libraries. The translator's meditation focuses on some of the more poetic aspects of Martí's language and the logic he employs to create interconnected evolving metaphors and metonyms, while also explaining some of the lexical and syntactic choices made in key areas that have traditionally caused difficulty with previous translations of this essay.

KEY WORDS: José Martí, *Nuestra América*, *Our America*, Translation, Latin American Essay

José Martí's seminal essay, *Our America*, first published in *La Revista Ilustrada* in New York on January 1, 1891, and again on the 30th of that month in *El Partido Liberal* in Mexico, ostensibly stands as a prophet and martyr's wake-up call to Latin America, on the cusp of the new millennium and facing the threat of imperialistic ambitions. For Martí, those ambitions emanate from dangerous powers little known to the vast majority of the *campesino* population, who are generally 'ignorant of the comets' cosmic scuffle, hurtling through the sleepy air, devouring worlds.¹ The stage is set from the first paragraph with this image and that of the giant in seven-league boots, parting from the idea of a common threat and an idealized population—that very same 'natural man' who is ignorant of the comets—capable of combatting that threat. This initial incongruity in turn creates a contradictory ontological exploration throughout the essay, which results in advocating for both an essentialist, homogenous Latin American political identity and for preserving individual cultural identities—all filtered through the lens of Cuba, Martí's homeland. A frustration with the opposition between beliefs, values, and circumstances manifests in the contradictions and visceral arguments in his writing: behind a mask of optimism is fear for *Our America's* future, fear of the threat of effeminate and weak traitors, of repetition of the past, of imported ideas, governments and even social structures.

Alas, no one is a prophet in his own land, and the words destined for Martí's idealized *madre patria* must be written while living in New York during his 15-year exile, in the mouth of the giant. The seer, the poet, is at work in this essay: instead of reading a well-reasoned political treatise, one is swept through a whirlwind of evolving metonymic symbols and metaphors, such as the recurring *patria*, personified and feminine. In my translation I chose to also use 'patria,' a word accepted in English, to avoid the masculine association with a term like 'fatherland.' Within this essay's ethos,

the patria, *Our America*, is passive and to be defended from the imposition of more 'virile' nations. Paradoxically, to be a patriot within Martí's ethos would necessitate embodying the virile qualities of the imperialist, otherwise risk being an effeminate traitor. Although English nouns by and large aren't gendered, using 'she/her/herself' instead of 'it/its/itself' as pronouns for *patria* emphasizes a feminine association in the English rendering. It also retains the original's symbolic value and corporeal metonymy: first her bones are being gnawed by destructive insects, or traitors; later she is represented by the Indian apron she wears; then as an ill mother, of whom her son (a traitor), is ashamed and refuses to help—and whose masculinity must therefore be called into question: 'So then, who is the real man?'. I reinforce this symbolic relationship by employing 'Our America' as a proper noun throughout the essay.

Martí dialogues with his contemporaries and with Latin American history: with 19th-century Argentine intellectual and eventual president, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento ('There is no battle between civilization and barbarism, but between false erudition and Nature'); or by referencing Simón Bolívar and General José de San Martín ('nations began to arise, the Venezuelans in the North and the Argentines in the South. When the two heroes clashed, and the Continent was going to tremble, one, who was not the lesser man, gave up the reins'). During his generalized, quasi-metaphoric recounting of the processes of independence across Latin America, Martí criticizes the influx of foreign thought and influence and advocates for a turning inward. For all his fervor, he offers no concrete plan for Latin America, *Our America*.

Even with its lack of concrete action for *Our America* to follow, it is regarded as a political/historical text, especially in English translations, and continues to be referenced as such. After translating the text, it is clear that what prevails are its literary qualities. Perhaps it is the language of smoke and mirrors, the secret of the seer, that has

given the text its enduring popularity. The tendency to speak in axiomatic metaphors and aphorisms results in phrases that truly vacillate between wisdom and vacuity: 'Resolving a problem after knowing its elements is easier than resolving it without knowing them... To know is to resolve.' Then the real seeds finally sown by this Grand Cemí are in fact those phrases of the prophet that can be imbued with myriad meanings, according to the dictates, or dictators, of the epoch. Imagery that implies but doesn't name explicitly—like *gusanos* and 'destructive insects' for traitors—offers later generations a rhetoric that can be recycled and repurposed: under the Cuban Revolution the specific enemies of Castro and the Revolution may be ever-evolving but can always be classified as *gusanos*. And one can't help but connect the *venas abiertas* ('open veins') described by Eduardo Galeano, a catchphrase that would affect generations of subsequent political thought and action in Latin America, to Martí's mention of *las venas que nos dejaron picadas nuestros dueños* ('the veins that our masters left open'), interpreted as the doomed cultural, political and economic inheritance of Latin America.

For all its political deficiencies, the text holds great literary value as a testament to the beauty of Martí's hand, and to his faith in the power of ideas and reason as the mightiest weapons in the birthing of a new nation. It is an example of lingering Romanticism and emerging *modernista* aesthetics in Martí's writing. A few quasi-surrealist images sprout up, precursory to the *Vanguardia* movement, such as the octopus from whose arms the young generation is springing forth in (false) hope, or the assertion that Latin Americans can no longer be 'a people made of leaves, living in the air, our crown loaded with flowers.' He also sets the stage for *Macondismo* (see J.J. Brunner, Emil Volek), an essentialist attitude that points toward the inherent 'uniqueness' of Latin America as a stumbling block to its modernization or integration into the modern world, which will pervade Latin American political thought and literary and cultural production, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century. As Martí proclaims: 'Let the world graft itself onto our republics; but the trunk must be our own.' It seems almost a conciliatory gesture toward the rest of the world on his behalf, but at its core, is an anti-assimilationist argument. Applied to literature—certainly Martí would agree, integral to the cultural identity of Latin America—that phrase could be emblematic of the *modernista* aesthetics to which he helped give early formation, as later, when he demands that going forth poetry cut its Zorrilla-esque mane in a rupture with Romanticism, and that prose now be 'sparkling and sifted...loaded with ideas.'

Although the poet is at work in the crafting and stylistics of the essay, the mask being shown is perhaps his favorite: the prophet-politico mask, looking to project a voice of certainty through aphorisms and axiomatic commandments, implying no room for error or doubts. Martí's passion comes through in a frenzied manner and sometimes leads him to contradict himself: at one point he speaks of the stagnant aboriginal race; at the end of the essay declares that there can't be hate among races because races don't exist and are

a construct of elitist intellectuals ('bookshelf races'), of false erudition. Martí is most impassioned in his loathing of those who don't support the cause for political and cultural independence, who are generally referred to throughout the essay with disparaging, homophobic epithets. Translators to English have had particular difficulty with the translation of the word *sietemesinos* (literally, those born prematurely, at seven months). Emil Volek addresses the problem and analyzes various attempts to translate the term into English, asserting that Martí equated its use in Spain to the use of *gratin* in France for the upper crust, decadent Parisian youth of the epoch ("*Nuestra América*" 2011). These *sietemesinos* are not only weaklings, and in Martí's macho ethos, effeminate and therefore traitors (Volek, "*Nuestra América*" 2011), but there is also an emphasis on farce and pretension versus authenticity, an idea that will appear in other metonymic symbols throughout the essay: the book and the cassock/Church, the artificial lettered man and false erudition, and the Greece that is or is not ours. Authenticity is virility. Or vice versa. Mimicry is passive, feminine, and weak. These weak arms appear as arms of Paris or Madrid that contribute nothing to the tree of Our America. In fact, they can't even reach its branches. Later, they get sent to the Prado park and to Café Tortoni's, but they are ridiculous posers (i.e. not authentic).

In Martí's paragraph about those weak arms and inauthentic posers, I originally wanted to use 'dandy' for *sietemesino* due to its similar implication of posing, but that proved inadequate, and didn't allow for the way Martí employs this imagery in a chain of causality from weakling to traitor to effeminate poser. So, they are introduced first as premature-born weaklings in my translation, which maintains the insinuation of a weak constitution and adds the possible connotation of a person unready for their times—in this case, to fight for Cuban independence and Latin American autonomy. Then, when they go to the Prado park in my translation, they go passing as coxcombs, an epoch-appropriate synonym for dandy and also a type of flower, which creates a double entendre accessible to the English-speaking reader. In Paris, the Café Tortoni, popular at the time, becomes a destination for those who are posing in high hats, which makes them appear as sipping straws, an object, in itself, of almost inconsequential value. Volek discusses Martí's proximity to Mexican and Puerto Rican Spanish, in which a *sorbete* can mean a type of high hat or a sipping straw, respectively. The translation, although it doesn't retain the same literal wordplay as the original, manages to transmit a new wordplay and a laughable image, as utilized by Martí for the very people who incited a most visceral reaction in his writing.

The barrage of symbols and metaphors are encased in a confusing and tangled syntax—often relying on devices like hyperbaton, asyndeton, and polysyndeton, apart from other poetic rhetoric—, suffering its own identity crisis between a Baroque inheritance, Romantic sensibilities and *modernista* aesthetics. The syntactical difficulties are perhaps the most challenging aspect for the translator. Occasionally it seems impossible to decipher his

code. I often had to resort to dissecting and diagraming sentences to clearly understand the correlations Martí wished to establish. And even then, sometimes, it felt futile, just beyond grasp, a tangle of prepositions and subordinate clauses with no clear antecedent, or metaphors that tended toward the quasi-surrealist and whose referent remained obscure.

I had to consider these syntactic factors, also keeping in mind that this text is rarely going to be heard anymore, but mostly read silently to oneself. As I worked on this translation, I first divided the essay by sentence, placing each one as a new line of text. The effect was an intensification of the poetic nature of the text, an emphasis on its reliance on axiomatic and aphoristic language, but also a heightening of the tangled syntax. In two instances, one sentence displayed as a single paragraph that spilled onto the next page. These sentences were structured by Martí as a series of causes listed in each independent clause, culminating in one subsequent effect; for example, all of the factors leading up to the assertion that 'America began to suffer, and still suffers.' I eventually settled on cutting out the 'as' or 'due to' initiating each clause/cause, and wrote them as a series of separate sentences that would paint the process undertaken in post-Independence American republics, such as the centralization of power and people in the cities/capitals and the importation of faulty knowledge through 'bibliogenic redeemers'—a neologism in Spanish, and so in its English rendering as well. Each enumeration of crimes against Our America now culminates in the final sentence of the paragraph, maintaining the cause-effect relationship established by Martí, while making the prose 'sparkling and sifted' for English-speaking readers.

As I recomposed the essay back into paragraphs, I divided the prose into more paragraphs—longer ones were broken up in places where a new, but still related, idea was presented. I intended to create divisions that not only made logical sense in English but also maintained the same cohesion and transitions between ideas as the original. My other guides were the often concise and always impactful axioms (whether wise or vacuous in their content), which tended to get lost amongst longer, more rambling explorations of thought. Sometimes, a series of axioms were inserted as a part of a larger theorem, truth in the Martí cosmos:

'The government must be born of the country. The spirit of the government must be that of the country. The form of government must comply with the natural constitution of the country. Government is nothing more than equilibrium of the natural elements of the country.'

In the original, this sentiment, which has a certain cadence building up toward a climax, was the closing of a paragraph, in which it was actually a new idea. I moved the last sentence to become the opener of the following paragraph to highlight the correlation of the natural process of achieving equilibrium with the natural man vanquishing the imported book, the idea that immediately follows

in Martí's essay. Aside from this type of structural cleanup, the order in which Martí espouses his vision for Our America is unchanged.

The original essay was in some ways a concretization of Martí's previously written 'Madre América' ('Mother America'), and was destined to be read aloud, written by the hand of a man who was also skilled at orating. Confronted with a text such as this—tangled syntax, complex constructions of causality and metaphor-heavy projections of Our America's past and future—an audience would be left with sound bites, floating imagery, and most importantly, raw emotion, to fan the patriotic flames in their hearts and 'thaw out the frozen America!' That is the true literary beauty and complexity of this text: Martí's ability to create an ambiguous text that accepts a superficial reading or listening and constant historical reinterpretation of its referents, while also being a masterful blending of poetics and politics, metaphors and symbolic histories, passion and reason, which resists a simple arrival at deeper meaning. Martí's own hymn has echoed through more than a century of human thought and politics, still seated proudly on the back of the condor, just out of reach of even the strongest arm.

¹ All English quotations of Martí are from my translation.

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Our America¹

The smug villager believes that his village is the whole world, and as long as he can become mayor, or the rival who stole his bride gets humiliated, or his piggy bank fills up, he assumes the universe to be in good order, ignorant of the giants in seven-league boots that could crush him, ignorant of the comets' cosmic scuffle, hurtling through the sleepy air, devouring worlds. What remains of the village in America must wake up. These are not times for sleeping in nightcaps, but with arms for pillows, like the elegiac heroes of Juan de Castellanos:² arms of reason, which defeat all others. A trench made of ideas is worth more than a trench made of stones.

No prow can slice through an aurora of ideas. An energetic idea, fluttering at the right time before the world like the mystical flag of Judgment Day, can detain a fleet of warships. The peoples of the continent who don't know one another should get acquainted, and quickly, as those who are going to come together in arms. Those who threaten one another with fists, like jealous brothers who desire the same land, or like one who lives in a smaller house and envies the brother who lives better, need to bring their two hands together as one. Those who, under the safeguard of a criminal tradition, amputated the lands of a defeated brother already punished far beyond his offenses, with a sword stained in blood from their own veins, must return their brother's lands if they do not wish to be called thieves. The honorable man does not call in debts of honor with money, at so much per wallop. We can no longer be a people made of leaves, living in the air, our crown loaded with flowers, crackling or humming with caresses from the capricious sunlight, or beating and thrashing from the storms: the trees must stand in line, so the giant in seven-league boots cannot pass! Now is the hour of reckoning, the time to march united, shoulder-to-shoulder, like the silver coursing through the veins of the Andes.

Only those born prematurely are lacking courage. Those who don't have faith in their land are premature-born weaklings. Because they are lacking courage, they deny it to other people. Their puny arms fall short of reaching the tree—their arms with bracelets and painted nails, arms of Paris or Madrid—, yet they say the branches are out of grasp. We must load our ships with these destructive insects gnawing at the bones of the very patria that nourishes them. If they are Parisians or from Madrid, let them stroll through the Prado passing as coxcombs, or go to Café Tortoni's in high hats, posing as sipping straws. These carpenter's sons, ashamed of their carpenter fathers! These sons of America, ashamed because they were raised behind the Indian apron of their mother, and then they reject that ailing mother, the scoundrels, abandoning her on her sickbed.

So then, who is the real man? The one who stays with his mother, to cure her illness, or the one who puts her to work out of sight, and lives from her sustenance on the corrupted lands, with a worm for a tie, cursing the breast that nursed him, displaying the sign of the traitor on the back of his paper coat and tails? These sons of Our America, who must save herself along with her Indians, and

is moving from worse to better, these deserters that ask for a rifle in the armies of North America, which drowns its Indians in blood, and goes from better to worse! These dandies, who are supposed to be men, and don't want to do the work of men! Well, the Washington that made this land, did he go live with the English in the years he saw them threatening his own country? These effete *incroyables* of honor drag that honor across foreign soil, just as their namesakes during the French Revolution, dancing and putting on airs, affected their speech.

In what other patria could a man have more pride than in our suffering American republics, which rose up amongst masses of silent Indians, to the sound of the struggle between the book and the cassock, upon the bloody arms of a hundred apostles? From such disparate factors, never, in less historic time, have such advanced and solid nations been forged. The arrogant man believes the land was made to serve as his pedestal, because he has an easy way with the pen or a colorful tongue, and accuses his native republic of being impotent and irredeemable because the pristine jungles don't provide him with the means to travel the world like a famous pasha, guiding Persian mares and spilling champagne. The impotency is not in the nascent country, seeking suitable forms and utilitarian greatness, but in those who want to govern original nations, of a unique and violent composition, with laws inherited from four centuries of their free practice in the United States, from nineteen centuries under monarchic rule in France. A decree from Hamilton does not halt the charge of the plainsman's colt. A phrase from Sieyès³ does not move the stagnant blood of the Indian race. In order to be able to govern well, one must attend to things as they are; the good leader in America is not he who knows how the French or the German govern themselves, but he who knows with which elements his country is made, and how to harness them in order to arrive, through methods and institutions born of the country itself, to that desired state where all men achieve self-fulfillment and exercise their rights, and everyone enjoys the bounty provided by Nature in the lands they enrich with their labor and defend with their lives. The government must be born of the country. The spirit of the government must be that of the country. The form of government must comply with the natural constitution of the country.

Government is nothing more than equilibrium of the natural elements of the country. Because of that, in America the natural man has vanquished the imported book. The natural man has defeated the artificial, learned man. The autochthonous Mestizo has defeated the exotic Creole. There is no battle between civilization and barbarism, but between false erudition and Nature. The natural man is good and obedient and prizes superior intelligence in others, as long as that superior intelligence doesn't use his humility against him, or offend him by finding him dispensable, which is something the natural man doesn't easily forgive; he is disposed to use force to recover the respect of those who injure his sensitivities or are preju-

dicial to his interests. The tyrants of America have come into power by conforming to its disdained natural elements, and have fallen as soon as they betrayed them. Through those tyrannies, the republics have purged their inability to grasp the true elements of their country, to derive from them a form of government, and to govern with them. Leader, in a new nation, means creator.

In nations composed of both cultured and uncultured elements, where the cultured don't learn the art of governance, the uncultured will govern by their habit of bullying and resolving problems with their fists. The uncultured masses are lazy, and feeble in questions of intelligence, and they want to be governed well; but if the government hurts them, they will rebel and govern themselves. If there is no university in America that teaches the rudiments of the art of governance, that is, the analysis of the singular elements of the peoples of America, how are leaders supposed to emerge from those universities? As it stands, the young enter the world looking through Yankee or French spectacles and aspire to lead a nation they don't know. In political careers, entry should be denied to those who are unfamiliar with the rudiments of politics. Competition prizes should not go to the best ode, but to the best study of the factors of the country in which one lives. In the newspapers, in professorships, in the academy, the real factors of the country should be investigated. Knowing them without bandages or embellishments is enough; because he who puts aside part of the truth, voluntarily or from forgetfulness, will fail in the long run from that missing truth, which grows in its negligence, and topples that which is raised without it as a base. Resolving a problem after knowing its elements is easier than resolving it without knowing them. Here comes the natural man, indignant and strong, demolishing the justice accumulated through books because it is not administered in accordance with the clear necessities of the country.

To know is to resolve. Knowing the country, and governing it in accordance with that knowledge, is the only way to liberate it from tyrannies. The European university must cede to the American one. American history, the history of the Incas, should be learnt by heart, even if that means the archons of Greece will not be taught. Our Greece takes priority over the Greece that is not ours. It is more necessary to us. National politicians need to replace exotic ones. Let the world graft itself onto our republics; but the trunk must be our own. And the defeated pedant can be silent; there is no other patria in which a man can have more pride than in our suffering American republics.

With our steps guided by the rosary, with a white face and a bronzed body, Indians and Creoles, we came, undaunted, into the world of nations. Under the banner of the Virgin we went out to meet the conquest for liberty. A priest, a handful of lieutenants and a woman raise up the Republic in Mexico, on the shoulders of Indians.⁴ A Spanish cleric, under the cover of his priestly cope, instructs some magnificent young students in the French concept of liberty, who put the general of Spain as the leader of Central America against Spain.⁵ Dressed in monarchic habits, and with the sun on

their chest, nations began to arise, the Venezuelans in the North and the Argentines in the South. When the two heroes clashed, and the Continent was going to tremble, one, who was not the lesser man, gave up the reins.⁶

Since heroism during peacetime is less common because it is less glorious than during wartime, it is easier for a man to die with honor than to think with order. Governing when sentiments are unanimous and exalted is more feasible than leading diverse, arrogant, exotic, or ambitious thinking after wartime. The powers invested in the epic assault undermined, with the cunning of the feline species and the weight of reality, the building that had raised—in the coarse and singular regions of our Mestizo America, in the nations where bare legs clash with tailcoats from Paris—the flag of a people nourished by vital juices governing in the continual practice of liberty and reason. The hierarchical constitution of the colonies resisted the democratic organization of the republic, or the bow-tied capitals left their country boots and horseshoes in the vestibule, or the bibliogenic redeemers didn't understand that the revolution that triumphed with the soul of the land upon the voice of its savior, must be governed by soul of the land, not against her nor without her. America began to suffer, and still suffers, from the fatigue of accommodation between the discordant and hostile elements that it inherited from a malicious, despotic colonizer, and the imported ideas and patterns that have been retarding, due to their lack of correspondence to local reality, the logical form of government.

The Continent, disjointed for three centuries because of governance that negated man's right to exercise reason, overlooking or unheeding the ignorant masses that had helped it to redeem itself, entered into a government based on reason, of everybody for the common good, and not one man's university-learned reason over the homegrown reasoning of others. The problem of independence wasn't the change in forms, but the change in spirit. With the oppressed there needed to be made a common cause, to establish a system opposite to the interests and habits of command of the oppressors. The tiger, frightened from the fire, returns at night to the place of his prey. He dies with flames shooting from his eyes and with his claws in the air. He can't be heard approaching; he draws nearer with his paws of velvet. When the prey awakes, the tiger is upon it. The Colony continued living on in the Republic; and Our America is saving herself from her grand errors—the arrogance of the capital cities, the blind triumph of the scorned countrymen, the excessive importation of extraneous ideas and formulas, the iniquitous and imprudent disdain of the aboriginal race—by way of the superior virtue, fertilized with necessary bloodshed, of the Republic that combats the Colony. The tiger waits, lurking behind every tree, crouched in every corner. He will die, with his claws in the air and flames shooting from his eyes.

But, 'these countries will save themselves,' announced the Argentine Rivadavia,⁷ whose only sin was being a refined man in rough times; a machete isn't housed in a silken sheathe, nor can a country that was won with the sword leave it behind, because it becomes

angered, and stands in the door of Iturbide's Congress⁸ demanding that 'they make the fair-haired guy emperor.' These countries will be saved because—due to the moderate temperament that appears to reign, due to the serene harmony of Nature within the continent of light, and due to the flow of critical thought in Europe succeeding the utopic experimentation and Fourier's imagined phalanstery that saturated the previous generation—in America, in these real times, the real man is emerging.

We were a vision, with an athlete's chest, the hands of a dandy, and the forehead of a child. We were a mask, with European stockings, a Parisian vest, an American short coat and the cap of a Spanish bullfighter. The silent Indian hovered around us and went to the mountain, high up to the top of the mountain, to baptize his children. The Negro, under scornful vigil, sang the music of his heart throughout the night, alone and unknown, among the waves and the beasts. The countryman, the creator, blind with indignation, revolted against the disdainful city, against his own creation.

We were epaulets and togas, in countries that came to the world with rope sandals on their feet and headdresses on their heads. The genius would have been in uniting, with the founders' boldness and charity of heart, the headdress and the toga; in stirring the stagnant Indian; in making space for the able Negro; in bestowing liberty upon the bodies that rose up and fought for her. We were left with the judge, and the general, and the scholar, and the prebendary. The angelic youth, as if rising from the arms of an octopus, threw their heads to the heavens, only to let them fall in sterile grace, crowned with clouds. The native people, driven by instinct, blind with triumph, crushed the golden staffs that ruled them. Neither European nor Yankee books provided the clues needed to crack the Hispano-American enigma. Hatred was tried out, and the countries worsened each year. Tired of useless hatred, of the resistance of the book to the sword, of reason against the cassock, of the city against the countryside, of the impossible empire of urban castes spread across the tempestuous or inert natural nation, love, almost inadvertently, begins to be tried out.

The nations rise up and greet one another. 'How are we?' they ask each other, and one-by-one they say how they are. When a problem arises in Cojimar, they don't look for the solution in Danzig. The frockcoats are still French, but the thinking begins to be from America. The youth of America roll their sleeves up to their elbows, put their hands in the dough, and make it rise with the leavening from their sweat. They understand that imitation happens too often, and that to create is salvation. To create is the prerogative of this generation. The wine, from plantains; and if it comes out sour, at least it is our wine!

It is understood that the forms of governance of a country should conform to its natural elements; that absolute ideas, in order not to fail due to an error in form, should become relative forms; that freedom, in order to be viable, needs to be sincere and complete; and if the republic doesn't embrace all and move forward with all, it dies. The tiger within enters by way of the crevice, as does

the tiger without. In the march, the general holds back the cavalry to the pace of the infantry. If he leaves the infantry behind, the enemy surrounds the cavalry. Strategy is politics. Nations must live criticizing one another, because criticism is health, but only with one heart and one mind. Stoop down to those who are miserable and raise them up in your arms! With the fire in your hearts, thaw out the frozen America! Send the natural blood of the country bubbling and burning through her veins!

On foot, with the happy eyes of workers, the new American men greet one another, from one nation to another. The natural statesmen arise out of the direct study of Nature. They read to apply knowledge, but not to imitate. Economists study the origins of problems. Orators begin to wise up. Dramatists bring native characters to the stage. Academies discuss practical topics. Poetry cuts its romantic Zorrilla-esque mane and hangs its red vest on the glorious tree.⁹ Prose, sparkling and sifted, is loaded with ideas. Leaders, in the lands of Indians, learn to speak Indian.

From all of her dangers, America is saving herself. Over a few republics the octopus still lays dormant. Others, because of the natural law of equilibrium, run like mad to the sea to recover, with crazy and sublime haste, the lost centuries. Others ride on a carriage of wind with soap bubbles for a coachman, forgetting that Juárez rode around on a mule-cart;¹⁰ poisonous luxury, the enemy of freedom, corrupts the fragile man and opens the door to the foreigner. Others refine their virile character with the epic spirit of threatened independence. Others raise, in predatory war against their neighbor, a military that can devour them.

And, perhaps *Our America* runs the risk of yet another danger that doesn't come from within, but from the differences in origins, methods and interests between the two continental factors. Soon the time will come when an enterprising, booming nation that disdains her and isn't familiar with her, draws near, demanding intimate relations. Virile nations that have made the shotgun and the law their own, love and only love other virile nations. The time of excess and ambition—from which North America will hopefully escape, thanks to the predominance of the purest of its blood, or into which she may be plunged by her sordid and vengeful masses, the tradition of conquest, and the interest of an able caudillo—is still not so close to the eyes of the timid that there not be time to test discreet and continuous high-mindedness, with which it could be challenged and diverted. As her decorum as a republic before the attentive nations of the Universe puts a brake on North America that should not be removed by foolish provocation or ostentatious arrogance, to the parricidal discordance of *Our America*, the urgent task of *Our America* is to show herself as she is, one in soul and intent, fierce defeater of a suffocating past, only stained by the fertile blood drawn out of hands battling against ruins and from the veins that our masters left open.

The disdain of a formidable neighbor that doesn't know her is the biggest threat to *Our America*; and it is urgent, because the day of the visit is nigh, the neighbor must know her, and know her

soon, so as not to scorn her. Avarice may enter into her out of ignorance. But, upon knowing her, he would take his hands away out of respect. One must have faith in the best of man and mistrust in the worst of man. You must give occasion that the best of man will reveal itself and prevail over the worst. If not, the worst prevails. Nations should have a pillory for those who foment useless hatred, and another for those who don't tell the truth on time.

There is no hatred among races because there are no races. Feeble thinkers, candlelight thinkers, mix up and reheat bookshelf races, which the just traveler and the cordial observer look for in vain in the justice of Nature, where instead the universal identity of man stands out, in victorious love and turbulent appetite. The soul emanates, equal and eternal, from bodies diverse in shape and color. He who foments and propagates opposition and hatred among races sins against Humanity. But with the proximity of other diverse peoples, in the dough of the nations are condensed peculiar and active characteristics—of ideas and habits, of expansion and acquisition, of vanity and avarice—that from a latent state of national preoccupations could, in a period of internal disorder or of the pre-

cipitation of the accumulated national character, become a grave threat to neighboring lands, isolated and weak, which the stronger country determines to be perishable or inferior. To think is to serve.

Nor should one presume, out of provincial antipathy, an innate and fatal evilness in the fair-skinned peoples of the Continent because they don't speak our language, nor see the home as we do, nor resemble us in their political scars, which are different from ours, nor esteem much the querulous mulatto, nor look charitably, from their as-yet unsecure eminence, at those who, less favored by History, build the way to republics through heroic deeds. The patient information should not be hidden about the problem that can be resolved, for the peace of centuries, with the opportune study and tacit and urgent union of the continental soul. The unanimous hymn is already sounding; the current generation bears the weight, along the path fertilized by our sublime forefathers, the working America. From the Río Grande to the Strait of Magellan, the Great Cemí,¹¹ seated on the back of the condor, has sown, among the romantic nations of the Continent and the suffering islands of the sea, the seed of the New America!

NOTES

¹ Helpful for establishing context and for exegesis during the translation process were: 'Nuestra América, texto cenital de José Martí' edited by Cintio Vitier and published in *José Martí a Cien Años de Nuestra América* (1993), and English translations by Onís (1953); Randall (1977); Allen (2002); and Shnookal and Muñiz (2007). An earlier version of this translation appeared as an appendix to my dissertation (Brown 2016).

² 'Elegiac heroes of Juan de Castellanos': (1552–1607) Spanish epic poet, soldier and later priest. The heroes Martí refers to are from Castellanos's *Elegías de varones ilustres de Indias* (1589), written in Nueva Granada (now Colombia), 113, 609 lines that recount various aspects of the Conquest. Here, importantly, Martí establishes a connection with Latin American history since the Conquest, as well as with literary antecedents.

³ Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836): French clergyman and author of *Qu'est-ce que le tiers-état? (What is the Third Estate?)* preceding the French Revolution (1789), later became one of its leading figures. Involved in drafting the Declaration of the Rights of Man (August 26, 1789).

⁴ 'Under the banner of the Virgin... A priest, a handful of lieutenants and a woman': The Virgin of Guadalupe, whose image was used by the armed forces led by Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753–1811), an elderly priest. He initiated the Mexican Revolution in the town of Dolores on September 16, 1810. The woman Martí refers to is Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez (1768–1829), wife of the chief magistrate of Querétaro.

⁵ 'Put the general of Spain as leader': Martí is referring to General Gabino Gaínza, of Basque origin, who on September 15, 1821, was named leader of the new Central American government, separated from the Spanish crown.

⁶ 'When the two heroes clashed...': Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) and General José de San Martín (1778–1850). Bolívar led revolutions of independence beginning in 1810 in Venezuela and moving south. San Martín began in Argentina in 1813 and moved north. On July 26–27, 1822, they met in

Guayaquil. San Martín accepted Bolívar as uncontested leader, renounced his title as Protector of Peru and retired to France.

⁷ Bernardino Rivadavia (1780–1845): Argentine politician and dignitary, involved in the independence struggle and elected as the first president of the United Provinces of Río de la Plata in 1826. He promoted a Unitarian Constitution and improvements to the cultural institutions and infrastructure of Buenos Aires. Faced with Federalist opposition he resigned in 1827 and spent his life in exile, eventually dying in the Spanish city of Cádiz.

⁸ 'Iturbide's Congress': Agustín de Iturbide (1783–1824), Mexican general and leader of a conservative faction in Mexico's independence movement. On May 18, 1822, Sergeant Pío Marcha declared him emperor, an act that the new Mexican Congress had to ratify, and to which Martí is alluding here. Iturbide's conservative ideology was not in line with the liberal state envisioned by many during the fight for independence, and in March of 1823 he abdicated and was eventually executed.

⁹ 'Zorilla-esque mane...glorious tree': A reference to Spanish Romantic poet José Zorrilla (1817–1893), and the *gilet flamboyant* (red vest) described by Victor Hugo, symbolizing the triumph of Romanticism in France. The glorious tree, according to Cintio Vitier, is the laurel, the tree of artistic fame. History is to be revered, but Martí is calling for a change in aesthetics and ideology.

¹⁰ Benito Juárez (1806–1872): Of Zapotec origin, Juárez served for five terms as constitutional president of Mexico from 1858 until his death. He is a widely revered nineteenth-century liberal political figure.

¹¹ 'Cemí': Martí closes with a particularly Caribbean image, connecting it with the condor, symbolic of the Andean peoples and the South American Continent in general. The cemíes were spirits worshipped by the Taíno peoples, and the term also refers to the (often) tri-cornered clay objects that represented and housed those spirits.