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Economic Crisis and the Politics of *Modernista* Prose

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Rubén Darío proclaimed that the *modernista* movement emerged from Spanish America rather than Spain due to “nuestro inmediato comercio material y espiritual con las distintas naciones del mundo, y principalmente porque existe en la nueva generación americana un inmenso deseo de progreso” (“Modernismo” 334). There is an irony in Darío's description of an “immense desire for progress” that allowed *modernismo* to take place in Spanish America and not Spain and the critical voice by *modernista* writers on the excesses of the dominant economic policies of the period. This tension is not something that has gone unexplored in *modernista* criticism. The chapters on *modernismo* in Julio Ramos's now classic work *Desencuentros de la modernidad* focus in on the fragmentation inherent in the extensive *modernista* journalistic production and poetic verse. Susana Rotker frames this professionalization in terms of a “site of condensation” where “formas diversas [se] junta[n]” described as “la dualidad como sistema, la escritura como tensión y punto de encuentro entre los antagonismos” (53). This dualistic and fragmented byproduct of

an increasingly liberalized economic system also brought the *modernista* movement into a sphere of continual literary renovation inherent in their constant journalistic production where they explored literary forms—Darío even explained that it was in the newspaper where he learned “mi manera el manejo de estilo”—for the poet it was truly a space of literary experimentation (*Autobiografía* 39). It is in this *crónica* format that *modernista* writers developed a crisis-based discourse as they explored the social and cultural consequences of the marketplace. I argue that this new generation on the American continent employed a rhetoric of crisis in order to negotiate this commercial and material immediacy that helped to maintain *modernista* literary prestige for over four decades at the turn of the twentieth century. Although many authors responded to the transformative social and economic ruptures occurring throughout the globe during the turn of the twentieth century, the *modernista* movement coalesced into a collective group of writers known for renewing literary language in the Hispanic world and strongly reacted to and revolutionized the transatlantic literary field through their poetics and extensive prose.

Economic liberalism was indeed appropriated by *modernista* writers as a trope that shaped their journalistic messaging and molded their own literary prestige. On the one hand *modernistas* expressed a continual distaste for utilitarianism in art—though, ironically, many of these manifestations took place in the mass-produced format of the newspaper. Further, they also praised the personal freedoms of liberalization and appropriated the trope of freedom of expression as one of their ideological touchstones. In this discursive trap, they were largely critical of monetary influence and the economic excesses of capitalism. The crisis of excess, the United States being the primary propagator of this market-based economy, was framed by *modernistas* in aesthetic terms. In fact, the *modernista* *modus de operandi* was to embellish language with a literary stylization throughout their textual production. Though prolific producers of prose, *modernistas* sought to maintain the poetic in seemingly utilitarian writings published in daily newspapers. In this way, even the most public of texts consumed by Spanish American masses were founded in the literary. This places *modernismo*, leaders of the Spanish American literary field for

decades, in direct collaboration with the mercantile production of newspapers across the region. A consequence of this intersection between the profitable newspapers and the extensive and poeticized *modernista* production found therein is the framing of national and international events in literary terms. This discursive framing of the confrontation between North American hegemony and the seemingly never ending work towards Spanish American national sovereignty sheds light on the role of the literary in public discourses of the region and exposes *modernista* writers as immersed in the political. This immersion is supported by the political posts held by central *modernista* figures and their extensive interaction with heads of state both in the Americas and across the Atlantic in Spain. The dynamics of the Hispanic textual marketplace, then, was saturated with an aestheticization with modernistas at the helm.

The political struggle inherent between utilitarianism and art, journalism and poetry, monetary excess and individual creativity is played out again and again in *modernista* literary production. The cosmopolitan essence of the movement points to a fragmentation of discourse where aesthetic reconciliation becomes an impossibility. By cosmopolitan here I am particularly referring to Kwame Appiah's two strands of European cosmopolitanism; an intense interest in art and culture and "the recognition that human beings are different and that we can learn from each other's differences" (4). The focus on these differences coupled with a culture of representational art and literature forced a *modernista* relationship with the market that facilitated an exploration of global and regional otherness and simultaneously caused that the encounter of such differences to become minimized and of limited scope because of the temporalities of the new media platforms of the period. José Martí stated that "el periódico desflora las ideas grandiosas," (Prólogo 64) yet all of his ideas were published in newspapers, journals, and magazines. As Ramos notes, the biggest threat to *modernista* artistic autonomy also allowed them to exist as artists.¹ Yet, although this is indeed the case, there is a profound

¹ He writes that, "On the one hand, journalism relativises and subordinates the authority of the literary subject. Yet at the same time, this concern for a discrete demarcation between the proper field of the literary subject and other discursive functions (tied to journalism and the emergent urban cultural industry)

modernista consciousness of the struggles in what Pierre Bourdieu calls the field of power—the competing social spheres whose members struggle for authority and validation. This validation, for *modernista* writers, came because of economic liberalization yet also in spite of it. *Modernista* writers struggled in light of personal economic stagnation having to borrow money for book publications and turning to daily newspapers for their sustenance—and they also resisted the economic exuberances that turned the public away from the aesthetic. So, they turned to a rhetoric of crisis to re-center the literary in Spanish American societies, while using that same economic progress to fulfill this goal. In so doing, they were able to consolidate literary power and discourse and transform the literary into a more autonomous space than ever before on the American continent. They further wagered their critical economic discourse through highly public diplomatic and revolutionary positions appropriating institutionalized power to their textual production, though this power never completely escaped the realm of the cultural.

Darío, in his “Palabras liminares,” often considered as an important *modernista* manifesto, wrote that he proclaims an “estética acrática”—a stylization opposed to all authority. Citing German composer Richard Wagner he continues; “Lo primero, no imitar a nadie, y sobre todo, a mí” (10). This poetic anarchy implies a continual renovation and a repeated literary crisis in *modernismo*. In this struggle to create, the discursive and ideological stances expressed by the movement are in constant motion, in constant crisis. The ability of language to adapt to the epistemological, technological, scientific, religious, and economic crisis is at the forefront of the *modernista* literary ideal. This adaptation or “profound response to the crisis,” as framed by Cathy Jrade, is complicated by the anarchy represented in Darío.²

paradoxically made it possible to conceive the interior domain of modern poetry and poetic subjectivity in Latin America. In other words, within the very confines of the newspaper and in opposition to it, the literary subject brings himself into being” (87).

² Jrade expresses that the *modernista* response to crises was centered on a “faith in the poet and poetry” (12). I hope to expand on Jrade’s notion of response and show that it is through a more generalized literary response, primarily expressed through the *crónica* genre, that *modernistas* confronted the crises of

An anarchic crisis entails a response that shifts according to the nature of authority. The paradoxical nature of Darío's rhetoric seems to be compromised when *modernista* writers were complicit in the advancement of the same routes of power that they seemed to denounce. Ernesto Laclau's notion of hegemony assists in situating *modernismo* in a power struggle "requiring negotiation among mutually contradictory discursive surfaces" (93). This negotiation between contradictory elements is necessary in the power struggles between the literary and other social fields and the field of power that includes literary as a vocal and influential actor. Laclau's hegemony, nonetheless, does not lend itself to the anarchic aesthetics expressed by Darío, although the rhetorical embellishment of the Nicaraguan is situated well within the context of the poetic "Palabras liminares," but outside of the poetic and aristocratic context of the book of poetry power negotiations take a rather different turn. Though the practicality of the hegemonic struggle is quite different from the anarchistic, the struggle and negotiation for power by the literary is necessarily conflictive and opposes, in a somewhat anarchistic manner, the programmatic and institutional though this struggle must necessarily appear within official avenues in order to gain traction and eventually have real influence in encounters between social actors. Laclau's idea follows similar lines; "A hegemonic formation [...] embraces what opposes it, insofar as the opposing force accepts the system of basic articulations of that formation as something it negates, but the *place of the* negation is defined by the internal parameters of the formation itself" (139). The "estética acrática" that is expressed in *modernista* literature, then, when transferred into the social struggles played out in public discourse, was transformed by writers into a direct dialogue with the crises of the period, played out on the same turf as official discursive contests; the newspaper page.

However, it should not be forgotten, that as an identifying feature of the *crónica*, the poetic infused the particular discourse employed by the movement. In her recent article on Carlos Monsiváis's *crónicas* focusing on

modernity—which, in my view, are founded in part through economic liberalization.

the poetic centrality of the genre, Linda Egan writes: “The chronicle genre, most commonly characterized as literary journalism, is ‘literary’ in large part because of the poetic nature of its language, a discourse of indirection that prefers to suggest by symbol rather than to announce, to imprecate by metaphor rather than to denounce” (411). The metaphorical essence of the *crónica* is enhanced by the use of verse through the prose writings of the journalistic genre. The literary counteracts against the raw, grinding objectivity of representing a society immersed in the crisis inherent in global, regional, and local modernization. This multi-spacial construction throughout *modernista* prose attests to the wide influence of the literature throughout public spheres and the movement's interest in seeing and being seen on multiple levels.³

The political maneuvering inherent in *crónica* production prohibits interpreting *modernismo* on purely aesthetic terms. The critical approximation of the politics of *modernismo* was introduced perhaps most comprehensively by Ángel Rama over three decades ago an epistemological shift in *modernista* criticism modified and expanded upon up until the present. Rama's approach, primarily expressed in *Rubén Darío y el Modernismo*, tends to view the shifting economic transformations of the region having a direct and unmediated impact upon the literary movement. Mediation between the socioeconomic and literary production has been a critical focus ever since Rama's forceful unmediated position. From Aníbal González's mediating philology, Noé Jitrik's modeling of the writers in terms of a mechanized process as a mediating symbol to Julio Ramos' uneven modernity forcing *modernistas* into a textual exterior through journalism in order to maintain a sense of poetic and interior autonomy. These contributions have brought us much closer to understanding the relationship between the socio-cultural and literary yet the limiting factors

³ Martí's well-known quote “Decirlo es verlo,” from his *crónica* “El terremoto de Charleston,” comes to mind here. *Modernista* discursivity is employed on several modal fronts including a strong connection to the visual culture boom of the turn of the twentieth century. Many *crónicas* read like visual billboards announcing the aesthetic wares of the movement and writers held an intense interest to the cinematographic and photographic technologies of the period and often incorporated them into their journalistic based tropes such as Martí's “Escenas norteamericanas” and Darío's “Films de París.”

of a single mediating force or the overreach of a homogeneous economic depiction of Latin America leave open large investigative gaps still waiting to be explored. How do we reconcile the lack of congruence between Darío's capitalist violence and his strong support and praise for growing urbanism and economic progress in Buenos Aires, or his strong ties with José Santos Zelaya that reinforced his financial stability? What do we make of Martí's call for cultural recognition of the Latin American indigenous groups and his support for land expropriations of the Guatemalan Mayan populations? What about Gomez Carrillo's strong nationalistic support for the brutal dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera and his willful ignorance of Latin American indigenous culture and language during a Parisian encounter with Horacio Quiroga?⁴ The reductive reconciliation that can connect literary prestige and influence with political connection and power may prove an easy target in discussing these discursive discrepancies. May I propose a divergent line of thought: one that aligns with and hinges on the aesthetic freedoms, *artepurismo*, and creative power promoted by *modernistas* from the beginning? Aesthetic creation and centrality was threatened by capitalism and in order to find a space for *modernista* enunciation, poetic creation and the propagation of a poetic identity worked to create their own discursive space through prose writings that were contestatory, even anarchic, by design. This resistive formulation included an extensive stream of texts addressing the economic and material foundations of modernity. Aligning themselves both for and against the liberal marketplace in their journalistic prose, and doing so in a manner that announces crisis, underscores the negotiation of *modernistas* in the search for a space in the field of power. The literary foundations of the

⁴ This fascinating meeting is described as follows in one of Quiroga's journal entries while in Paris:

- "Diga, Carrillo, ¿V. habla guaraní?"

-¿Cómo?

-Si habla guaraní.

-No sé lo que es eso.

Me extrañó la cosa, pero nada dije.

-Y qué es eso? Insistió.

-¡Pues el idioma guaraní, de América.

[...] Y Vd, Montealegre, habla guaraní? [...]

¿Y cómo quiere Vd que Montealegre hable en guaraní? Ya que los americanos son bastante ridículos, todavía recuerdan sus cosas de allá.

Me chocó un tanto la impertinencia de la respuesta" (87-8).

movement, and the aesthetic representations even in the most utilitarian of formats, provided the writers with flexibility in their ideological underpinnings where their role as artists ennobled their cause and a discursive power was made available to principal writers of the movement for an extended period of time. A selection of these texts will help to confirm the nuanced negotiation with the economic norms of the turn of the twentieth century and the aesthetic intersection with the thematic of crisis.

Rubén Darío, in his essay “El hipogrifo,” symbolically depicts the violence of the hegemonic confrontation between economic authority and the role of the aesthetic as a validating factor in the struggle for representation of the political. In showing disgust for the Paris-Madrid road race organized by an elite aristocratic group, he writes that “Los gastos inútiles de energía los autoriza el progreso. La utilidad de una carrera loca de automóviles es absolutamente absurda. Eso pasa en el reino del irracional. Un hombre rico, sano, quizás feliz, va, deja sus comodidades, su hogar, su bella mujer, sus hijos, para lanzarse a devorar espacio. Y muere. Muere y mata” (179). Darío wishes to depict an epistemological break that occurs with the advent of so called “progress.” This technological and economic advancement turns the absurd and violent into the utilitarian that only ends in death. Happiness, family life, and health all disappear as man enters into irrationality disguised by the marketplace and sport. The event of progress is also an act of wasted energy that illogically takes away from life giving an illusion of vitality and action that results only in the end of such. Comforts and beauty once found in relationships are replaced with an absurd utility that devours, wastes and kills. He ends with the following admonition: “Se siente crujir los huesos del cráneo. Me apresuro a poner punto final pues corre peligro este artículo periodístico de acabar en poema en prosa. Y eso ya sería grave” (179-80). Darío finds difficulty in not converting his description of the crushing of bones, death, absurdity and irrationality into the poetic. This generic conversion would be “grave” because it would erase the notion of information-based writing inherent in the newspaper format. The struggle to maintain the descriptive and concrete is due to the extreme excesses resulting in death.

Concluding his 1888 *crónica* on New York's worst snowstorm of the nineteenth century, "Nueva York bajo la nieve," José Martí writes:

Más que a cualesquiera otros, conviene estas embestidas de lo desconocido a los pueblos utilitarios, en quienes como ayer se vio, las virtudes que el trabajo nutre, bastan a compensar en las horas solemnes la falta de aquellas que se debilitan con el egoísmo. ¡Qué bravos los niños, que puntuales los trabajadores, que infelices y nobles las mujeres, que generosos los hombres! La ciudad toda se habla en alta voz, como si tuviera miedo de quedarse sola. Los que se codean en el resto del año brutalmente, hoy se sonríen, se cuentan sus riesgos mortales, se dan las señas de sus casas, acompañan largo trecho a sus nuevos amigos. (Nueva York 297)

For the Cuban, the debilitating natural catastrophe that fell upon New York also stopped the utilitarian steam train and men were able to, but for a few short moments, live life again—to realize the good in the quotidian. This epistemological freedom came from a symptomatic experience of crisis and tragedy. Soon enough, though, life will return to normal—Martí understands this—that is why "*conviene estas embestidas desconocidas*," such as the horrible storm, to shift the reality of New York's inhabitants. This recalls one of Walter Benjamin's theses on the philosophy of history; "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (255). Martí seeks after this ontological awareness through crisis that allows the population at large to avoid the economic—that threat of death. Instead of subjugated industrial slaves, children became brave, instead of strike-prone threats, workers became punctual, instead of egotistical and materialistic monsters, men became generous givers. Martí, as a *cronista*, took a snapshot of the historical moment where the rumblings of New York, the egregious masses of Coney Island came to a standstill and humanity reigned. The economics of crisis in Martí's *crónica* allows the Cuban to concretize Benjamin's moment of danger and seal it up in the literary. Though Martí, throughout his career, does not completely eschew material progress, he is wary of its American intemperance and seeks to incorporate crisis as an historical benchmark to uncover unsightly truths behind the injustices of liberal excess. In this way, Martí reinforces the economic hegemony of the United States as well as his literary and

artistic position as critic of institutions that have the potential to bear down on Latin American nations.

Again, Benjamin speaks to these technological advancements in representing the present. He writes that “A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. [...] He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history” (262). The journalistic *crónica* and its repeated production, week after week, covering several decades, allows for this teleological implosion where each instance expresses a difference. Additionally, this difference is controlled, at least by some measure, by *crónica* producers as they repeatedly define the present. This process of “blasting open” historical progress by representing each present as difference and the microscopic affect of such as display is shown through Martí’s New York storm. Halting progress, through the event of the storm, or likewise through a newspaper text allows a mining of details unseen which can be drawn out, polished, stylized, ideologically shaped and then reproduced as moments of truth that not only have the ability to shape a literary movement, but the cultural, historical, and political dynamics of an entire region. So, Benjamin’s “moment of danger” comes to fruition through a selective historicization situated outside the contexts of progress.

Though situating *modernista* writers within a tradition of Marxist criticism is a stretch considering the fact that much of their textual production lacks any sort of explicit or implicit representation of economic activism, nor is the economic and its role in history and society a major thematic in *modernista* prose, the form and materiality of their journalistic production and the shared ideology of freedom of expression reveals traces of an intense focus on how modernization affected the Spanish American citizenry of the period. The very fragmentation of journalism as a practice and the need for constant textual renewal placed a burden on *modernista* writers to often examine the very industry in which they extensively participated.⁵ The focalization of the press and the influence of the

⁵ Indeed, a prominent subgenre of the *crónica modernista* is what I call the “metacrónica.” In the vast corpus of literary journalism produced by

newspaper format and processes throughout the lives of *modernista* writers caused them to keenly assess the interaction between members of the literary field and to consider their own positionality as both poets and journalists.

Turning to a text that specifically speaks to the political and economic state of the U.S., Martí further describes his journalistic function in producing transparency for Spanish American nation states. He desires to, “ayudar al conocimiento de la realidad política de América y acompañar o corregir, con la fuerza serena del hecho, el encomio inconsulto—y en lo excesivo, pernicioso—de la vida política y el carácter norteamericanos” (“La verdad” 180). For the Cuban, Spanish America is superior despite its, “masa revuelta de clérigos logreros, imperitos ideólogos e ignorantes o silvestres indios” (La verdad” 180). Nevertheless, “el carácter crudo, desigual y decadente de los Estados Unidos y la existencia, en ellos continua, de todas las violencias, discordias, inmoralidades y desórdenes de que culpa a los pueblos hispanoamericanos” (“La verdad” 181). Martí’s role in uncovering what he describes as the crude, violent, and immoral character of the U.S. while also admitting Spanish America’s own faults that mimic those of their North American neighbor, speaks to the didactical nature of the crises portrayed. Through the self-destruction of the U.S., Spanish America will gain increased life and freedom as it has, as evidenced by justice and “legítima ciencia social,” (“La verdad” 180) surpassed the ever descending integrity and character of the U.S. The ability to speak “La verdad sobre los Estados Unidos”—a flourish that Martí uses to title his *crónica*, is facilitated by technological advances of mass communication. David Laraway, in his analysis of the Cuban’s poem “Amor de ciudad grande,” explains that the shift in media technologies corresponds to a transformation in poetic voice, which, “owed to its communicability by technological means” (296). Modern subjectivity as well as literary production, for Martí, is born of the technological advances of the period. Laraway adds that the revelatory nature of poetry is conflated with Heidegger’s *techne*, and its mode of “bringing forth” in Martí’s verse (297).

modernista writers there is a prevalent amount of texts that explore the inner workings of the journalistic field of the period and describe the integral part of journalism industry in the elaboration of the literary.

The metonymical symbol of revelation that runs throughout “Amor de ciudad grande,” including in the poem’s title, reveals the power of urban and industrial progress in defining literary discourse. This is also evidenced throughout the journalistic careers of *modernista* authors. The embracing of a textual production that is driven by mass production and reproduction allows *modernistas* to disseminate their “verdades” surrounding the economic power relationships across the region becoming effective mouthpieces raising awareness of hegemonic relationships, national and foreign policies, and social injustices.

Darío, in his short story “Morbo et umbra”—Latin for sickness or disease and shadow—speaks to these injustices and tells the tale of the poor Nicasia who’s young grandson recently died from the measles. He also describes, “un hombre alegre [quien] vende los ataúdes en el almacén de la calle cercana [y que] suele decir a los compradores unas bromas muy a tiempo que le han hecho el más popular de los fúnebres comerciantes” (103). Nicasia, upon finding an appropriate casket inquires; “¿cuánto vale? El hombre alegre, paseándose siempre son su risa imborrable: —Vamos, que no sea usted avara, abuelita: siete pesos. —¿Siete pesos?... No, no, es imposible. Vea usted: cinco traje, cinco tengo. [...] ¿Cinco? Imposible, mi señora. Dos pesos más y es suyo. ¡Bien quería usted al nieto! Yo lo conocí. Era vivo, travieso, diablazo. ¿No era el ruciecito?” (105). Darío hyperbolically situates the casket seller as a humorous extreme, poking fun at those suffering, changing the subject from death to frivolities, with intentions sharply focused on profits while becoming the most popular of his trade because of the jokes that he told to his clientele. Nicasia, though, desired otherwise; “Velorio no quiso [...] Lo quisiera tener a su niño; pero ino así, no, no, que se lo llevan!” (106). The same casket seller quickly came on the day of the burial to take the boy to his gravesite. As the grandmother watched the two slowly drive away, “en su profunda tristeza estiró al cielo opaco sus dos brazos secos y arrugados, y apretando los puños, con un gesto terrible —¿hablaría con alguna de vosotras, oh, Muerte, oh, Providencia?— exclamó con voz que tenía de gemido y de imprecación: — ¡Bandida!, ibandida!” (108). The sacrificial grandmother was robbed of son and resources by a crisis that denigrated the woman’s life at every step.

Darío describes the economics of death as detached from reality, similar to the economically subjugated New York population. Nicasia's concluding cry was aimed not at the unscrupulous casket seller, but at both life and death, indeed her very existence points to a lack of expression, a torturous gesture of helplessness, of lack of solace due to her loss and her economic state of existence. Contrastingly, the comfortable casket seller is full of words—his material success resulting in an overabundance of expressive and utilitarian means. Both his words and economic successes stem from an industry of death—literally sucking the life from the living. The crisis of death is delicious (and indeed, a thrill—thinking about Darío's description of the Paris-Madrid race) for the economically powerful but results in the destruction of humanity for some—resulting in a mere cry for help to the unknown. The title, “Morbo et umbra,” suggests that the unruly nature of liberal economics results in a consequence that is twofold. It is clear in the story that a sickness, both of body and spirit, affects those that are involved in the exchange of goods. The casket seller, despite his charm, is shallow and morally bankrupt and Nicasia, by the end of the text, is consumed by despair. This despair is a result of the emotionally debilitating effects of not being able to economically provide her grandson with an appropriate funeral and the very death of the child which brings about the economic tension in question. The shadow spoken of in the title is symbolic of the deaths that bring the story into being. Death is what keeps the casket seller in business, him literally living off of physical death. The death of Nicasia's grandson is also a shadow trope Darío incorporates to permeate every corner of the story. The shadow of the dead youth brings despair, even through the lighthearted personality of the casket attempts to combat the seriousness of death and disease. Nicasia's cry that ends the story announces the triumph of the shadow of death and situates despair as truth in the utilitarian and market-based interaction between seller and consumer.

Hegel's notion of tragedy helps to show how Darío's protagonist—suffering from both emotional and spiritual death caused by the market and physical death—shuts down notions of personal liberty, a result viewed positively by *modernista* writers and incorporated into the rhetoric of the

movement. Regarding the tragic hero, he writes that, “They act in accordance with a specific character, a specific pathos, for the simple reason that they are this character, this pathos. In such a case there is no lack of decision and no choice. The strength of these great characters consists precisely in this that they do not choose, but are entirely and absolutely just that which they will and achieve” (70). Subjectivity, then, in the case of Nicasia is reduced to an a priori death due to the abuses received by an over-discursive authority possessing economic prowess and ultimately exercising control over the life and livelihood of the grandmother. By contrast, the casket seller is free to speak and act according to his conscious, despite the crisis of the economy forcing him to earn from this bodily and spiritual destruction. This illusion of freedom, where discursivity and supposed agency actually results in the suffering of others, is the thrust of *modernista* angst and resistance of utilitarianism. As Hegel notes, Nicasia, the tragic hero of “Morbo et Umbra,” is a strong character because, try as she may, she lacks power to resist authority. Darío constructs the narrative of the story by demonstrating that she is unable to choose, that in her lack of choice she is still able to act. The few actions of the grandmother are forced out of the shadows of her grandson’s death and into the forefront of the narrative. Though her agency is gone, and death is imminent, her lament fills the void with absolute despair. The yell of desperation through a lack of discursive power overrides the overdiscursive casket seller because of its strength as tragedy. The action of not choosing or not being able to choose comes to the forefront of the narrative structure and is centralized as the driving thematic of the text. The crisis of lack of freedom again, constantly threatened by a biopolitical influence that threatens death and is subsequently overshadowed by the death of those that have gone before.

In contrast to these *crónicas*, Modernista writers were not immune to the market forces of the period and even collaborated in economic development through their textual output. Jorge Camacho, whose recent work has shed important light on the connections between liberalism and *modernista* literary production, writes that many of Martí’s journalistic texts are, “consustancial al mismo proyecto liberal de las elites

latinoamericanos en el siglo XIX con su énfasis en el positivismo, el progreso económico y la búsqueda de un remedio para ‘reformular’ las razas” (433). Indeed, Martí, though critical of the excesses of the free market system in the U.S., advanced a liberalized agenda for Latin America that was a far cry from the aestheticism and ideology of beauty and personal creativity that often typifies the *modernista* movement. Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera also exemplifies a complex and often contradictory relationship toward economic advancement in his *crónicas*. As a friend of the Porfiriato who often wrote favorably about state politics and the president and his family, Nájera's economic viewpoints often echoed that of Díaz. In his article “Las miserias de los ricos,” the Mexican *modernista* rails against economic policies and outside influence that deflated Mexican currency causing dramatic negative effects upon the Mexican upper classes. Published in 1890 in *El partido liberal*, Nájera asserts:

Ha habido, y nada menos que en esta gran tribuna de la prensa, quien incluye al Gobierno, porque no exige de las otras naciones, por la vía diplomática o por la fuerza de las armas, la integridad del peso mexicano, y las obligue a recibirlo por el valor o precio que él le dé [...] el capital mexicano tenga razón, tal vez, en ser cobarde. Tiene miedo a la prensa, que exige en cada rico la caridad y las virtudes de San Juan de Dios o de San Vicente de Paul. —Da tu dinero a los pobres y sígueme!—dice a los ricos. Pero ni en los cielos ni en la tierra tiene un reino que ofrecerles. (1)

For Nájera, the lack of “integrity” of the Mexican peso isolates and undervalues the country's rich. Much of the blame for the devaluation of currency lies on the press and their alleged anti-liberal sentiment. The *modernista* poet points to a tension central to the public rhetoric of the period particularly in states such as Mexico that experienced rapid economic expansion during the period; the threat against national sovereignty based on European and American economic development. The colonialist critique against the U.S., still fresh in Mexican society almost half a century after the war between the two states, is mocked in Gutiérrez Nájera's *crónica* and its opening lines: “Ante todo, para los grandes patriotas no debe haber más que ricos mexicanos. Hemos proclamado la independencia y la soberanía de nuestros pesos. Un *dollar* es un enemigo, uno de los invasores de 47” (1). Pointing out the irony of the economic

limitations of the Mexican citizenry and the connection between extreme patriotism and monetary isolationism the writer advocates for the rich and increased commercial flexibility within the State. Although the patriots proclaim a sovereign peso, for Gutiérrez Nájera, this same nationalism limits the profitability of the Mexican aristocracy. The general sentiment of this text proposes a correction in the reactionary anti-Americanism in Mexico and proposes that a diminished critique of the rich by state-influenced institutions such as the government and the press would actually increase the economic power of state citizens. Here, economic expansion is not viewed in terms of negative crises but as a force that must be appropriated in Latin American nations and used for the benefit of the state. This self-appropriation is centered in the same Latin American notion of sovereignty that results in the excesses of biopolitics and the subjugation of minoritized populations. The rhetoric of friend/enemy inherent in this discourse of the sovereign perpetuates absolute national power while resisting international economic interference. This irony, the railings against U.S. and European materialism and excess, and the praise for Latin American economic protectionism and progress based on the same models used in the aforementioned regions, helped *modernistas* consolidate their own literary prestige in the region. It also allowed them to unfettered access to those in power assisting them gain important governmental posts and relationships that furthered their careers as *litteratos* and public intellectuals. This positionality allowed for *modernista* writers to sharply criticize colonialist practices coming from Western Europe and the US while praising and garnering favors from the despots in their own countries. Hence the liberal economic policies that were implemented in Latin America, despite their dangerous outcomes, became touchstones for *modernista* writers in expressing their own Latin Americanist rhetoric. This Latin Americanism, writes José González, “se inserta entre la dualidad del artepurismo y el comercialismo y reordena las coordenadas del campo literario” (226). This reorganization of the literary field based on an internalized projection of the region as an authority to establish a coherent cultural, ethic and even racialized identity had wide implications for *modernista* writers. González continues:

Por supuesto que esto no significa que los sentimientos de los autores, especialmente los que hacen del latinoamericanismo el centro de su poética, como Martí, sean menos sinceros o genuinos en su preocupación por la cultura local, pero si quiere reconocer que el aparente 'interés en defender la cultura' también se convierte en parte lo que determinará su posición en la jerarquía del campo hispanoamericano. (227)

The keen interest in reinforcing Latin American or nation-based interest and ideology presupposes a struggle in social power and the *modernista* textual production in the newspapers of the region reinforces a discourse that strives to be central in the intersection between literary and cultural work and the political. For this reason, seemingly disinterested writers such as Enrique Gómez Carrillo who was extremely well known in Europe and Latin American for his frivolous and aloof *crónicas*, and who rarely set foot back on the American continent after leaving for Europe, still relied on close connections with Guatemalan political leaders. These leaders financially supported Gómez Carrillo while abroad and the writer produced a steady stream of textual production that supported the Estrada Cabrera regime.

Therefore, the expression of grief from the excesses of capitalism is rarely expressed in the context of economic expansion, progress and policy inside of the geopolitics of Latin America. On the other hand, when discussing the global economic dominance of the outside, it is easily derided, and railed against, even when some of the same policies are supported and repeated textually within Latin America. The colonialist rhetoric that is used by *modernista* writers as a response to North American and Western European expansion is diminished by the fact that there remained a strong nationalist trend that upheld norms of subjugation of the impoverished and the ascendancy of the wealthy aristocracy of the richest members of Latin American society.

The *modernista* aesthetic ideology of creation, individuality, and freedom together with their concrete steps that formed an identity of public poetics initiated a discourse coupled with action that permeated an immutable textual production from approximately 1880 to 1930 with the anxiety of capitalism trailing at every step. Aníbal Quijano describes the how Spanish American history has dictated the flow of capital as the

principal actor in the power relationships of the region. This has created an “historical-structurally heterogeneous model of power with discontinuous relations and conflicts among its components.” He continues: “In Latin America there was not an evolutionist sequence between modes of production; there was no previous feudalism detached from and antagonistic to capital; there was no feudal seignior in control of the state whom a bourgeoisie urgently in need of power would have to evict by revolutionary means” (219). Quijano explains that this shared colonialist domination separates the region from a Eurocentric framework where a socialist revolution remains a possibility because of the heterogeneity of race and class in Spanish American societies. The *modernista* phase of increased insertion in the global marketplace that eventually led to civil conflict and revolution during the first half of the twentieth century, demonstrates a negotiation and reassessment of the economic dynamics of the region. This site of enunciation is marked by crisis, narrating and foreseeing Spanish American conflicts between the oppressions of the marketplace and the insatiable attractions of progress and prosperity.

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