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Martín Rivas

MARTÍN RIVAS

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OXFORD

MARTÍN RIVAS

A Novel by
ALBERTO BLEST GANA

Translated from the Spanish by
TESS O'DWYER

With an Introduction by
JAIME CONCHA

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Printed in the United States of America
on acid free paper

To my mother and father
Chung Soon and Jack O'Dwyer

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Series Editors'
General Introduction

The Library of Latin America series makes available in translation major nineteenth-century authors whose work has been neglected in the English-speaking world. The titles for the translations from the Spanish and Portuguese were suggested by an editorial committee that included Jean Franco (general editor responsible for works in Spanish), Richard Graham (series editor responsible for works in Portuguese), Tulio Halperín Donghi (at the University of California, Berkeley), Iván Jaksic (at the University of Notre Dame), Naomi Lindstrom (at the University of Texas at Austin), Francine Masiello (at the University of California, Berkeley), and Eduardo Lozano of the Library at the University of Pittsburgh. The late Antonio Cornejo Polar of the University of California, Berkeley, was also one of the founding members of the committee. The translations have been funded thanks to the generosity of the Lampadia Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

During the period of national formation between 1810 and into the early years of the twentieth century, the new nations of Latin America fashioned their identities, drew up constitutions, engaged in bitter struggles over territory, and debated questions of education, government, ethnicity, and culture. This was a unique period

unlike the process of nation formation in Europe and one which should be more familiar than it is to students of comparative politics, history, and literature.

The image of the nation was envisioned by the lettered classes—a minority in countries in which indigenous, mestizo, black, or mulatto peasants and slaves predominated—although there were also alternative nationalisms at the grassroots level. The cultural elite were well educated in European thought and letters, but as statesmen, journalists, poets, and academics, they confronted the problem of the racial and linguistic heterogeneity of the continent and the difficulties of integrating the population into a modern nation-state. Some of the writers whose works will be translated in the Library of Latin America series played leading roles in politics. Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, a friar who translated Rousseau's *The Social Contract* and was one of the most colorful characters of the independence period, was faced with imprisonment and expulsion from Mexico for his heterodox beliefs; on his return, after independence, he was elected to the congress. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, exiled from his native Argentina under the presidency of Rosas, wrote *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie*, a stinging denunciation of that government. He returned after Rosas' overthrow and was elected president in 1868. Andrés Bello was born in Venezuela, lived in London where he published poetry during the independence period, settled in Chile where he founded the University, wrote his grammar of the Spanish language, and drew up the country's legal code.

These post-independence intelligentsia were not simply dreaming castles in the air, but vitally contributed to the founding of nations and the shaping of culture. The advantage of hindsight may make us aware of problems they themselves did not foresee, but this should not affect our assessment of their truly astonishing energies and achievements. It is still surprising that the writing of Andrés Bello, who contributed fundamental works to so many different fields, has never been translated into English. Although there is a recent translation of Sarmiento's celebrated *Facundo*, there is no translation of his memoirs, *Recuerdos de provincia* (*Provincial Recollections*). The predominance of memoirs in the Library of Latin America series is no accident—

many of these offer entertaining insights into a vast and complex continent.

Nor have we neglected the novel. The series includes new translations of the outstanding Brazilian writer Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis' work, including *Dom Casmurro* and *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*. There is no reason why other novels and writers who are not so well known outside Latin America—the Peruvian novelist Clorinda Matto de Turner's *Aves sin nido*, Nataniel Aguirre's *Juan de la Rosa*, José de Alencar's *Iracema*, Juana Manuela Gorriti's short stories—should not be read with as much interest as the political novels of Anthony Trollope.

A series on nineteenth-century Latin America cannot, however, be limited to literary genres such as the novel, the poem, and the short story. The literature of independent Latin America was eclectic and strongly influenced by the periodical press newly liberated from scrutiny by colonial authorities and the Inquisition. Newspapers were miscellanies of fiction, essays, poems, and translations from all manner of European writing. The novels written on the eve of Mexican Independence by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi included disquisitions on secular education and law, and denunciations of the evils of gaming and idleness. Other works, such as a well-known poem by Andrés Bello, "Ode to Tropical Agriculture," and novels such as *Amalia* by José Mármol and the Bolivian Nataniel Aguirre's *Juan de la Rosa*, were openly partisan. By the end of the century, sophisticated scholars were beginning to address the history of their countries, as did João Capistrano de Abreu in his *Capítulos de história colonial*.

It is often in memoirs such as those by Fray Servando Teresa de Mier or Sarmiento that we find the descriptions of everyday life that in Europe were incorporated into the realist novel. Latin American literature at this time was seen largely as a pedagogical tool, a "light" alternative to speeches, sermons, and philosophical tracts—though, in fact, especially in the early part of the century, even the readership for novels was quite small because of the high rate of illiteracy. Nevertheless, the vigorous orally transmitted culture of the gaucho and the urban underclasses became the linguistic repertoire of some of the most interesting nineteenth-century writers—most notably José Hernández, author of the "gauch-

esque" poem "Martín Fierro," which enjoyed an unparalleled popularity. But for many writers the task was not to appropriate popular language but to civilize, and their literary works were strongly influenced by the high style of political oratory.

The editorial committee has not attempted to limit its selection to the better-known writers such as Machado de Assis; it has also selected many works that have never appeared in translation or writers whose work has not been translated recently. The series now makes these works available to the English-speaking public.

Because of the preferences of funding organizations, the series initially focuses on writing from Brazil, the Southern Cone, the Andean region, and Mexico. Each of our editions will have an introduction that places the work in its appropriate context and includes explanatory notes.

We owe special thanks to Robert Glynn of the Lampadia Foundation, whose initiative gave the project a jump start, and to Richard Ekman of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which also generously supported the project. We also thank the Rockefeller Foundation for funding the 1996 symposium "Culture and Nation in Iberoamerica," organized by the editorial board of the Library of Latin America. We received substantial institutional support and personal encouragement from the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Texas at Austin. The support of Edward Barry of Oxford University Press has been crucial, as has the advice and help of Ellen Chodosh of Oxford University Press. The first volumes of the series were published after the untimely death, on July 3, 1997, of Maria C. Bulle, who, as an associate of the Lampadia Foundation, supported the idea from its beginning.

—*Jean Franco*
—*Richard Graham*

Introduction

JAIME CONCHA

I

The work of the Chilean novelist Alberto Blest Gana (1830–1920) has secured an unquestioned place among nineteenth-century Spanish-American writers of note. While lacking in the ideological complexity expressed in the work of the Argentine Domingo F. Sarmiento (1811–88) and surely very distant from the intellectual and political scope evident in Cuba's José Martí's work (1853–95), Blest Gana stands, nevertheless, as the author of a significant literary corpus, consisting principally of novels, which has across the years reached a wide audience, especially within Chile. Requisite reading in the education of Chileans as Chileans, his works have become key components of the national imagination. Admittedly, Blest Gana by no means possesses the esthetic sensibility of Jorge Isaacs, the Colombian author of *María* (1867), nor does he share the colonial background that provides breadth and richness to the works of Ricardo Palma (1833–1919), his Peruvian contemporary. And yet, fully understanding Chilean literature is inconceivable without accounting for Blest Gana's narrative project to tell the story—and the history—of the new South American republic from the early years of the struggles for independence on through to the gray, even obscure climate at the close of the nineteenth century.

One of the best, and clearly the most popular, of his novels is *Martín Rivas* (1863), a work that English-speaking readers can now read translated into the language of one of Blest Gana's forebears.

II

Blest Gana's family background would seem to provide many keys to understanding the future writer's political and literary propensities. Alberto Blest Gana was born June 16, 1830, into the household of Guillermo Cunningham Blest and María de la Luz Gana, who had married in 1827. Born in Ireland, Guillermo Cunningham Blest had arrived in Chile in the early 1820s. Prospects in Chile were bright: Independence was secured and O'Higgins's government welcomed British immigration. Studying in Edinburgh and Dublin, where he trained as a physician, Blest Gana's father, with the support offered first by Minister Portales and later by Andrés Bello, would be instrumental in the development of the study and teaching of medicine in Chile. These political connections might suggest Cunningham Blest's Liberalism to be of a rather moderate character, akin to an English Liberalism linked to the 1688 revolution. His political stance and especially his participation in the university student-led condemnation of the government's banning of Bilbao's *Sociabilidad chilena/Chilean Society* in 1844 suggest that this was not, however, the case. What is clear is that both the father's Liberal political leanings and medical profession had a decisive influence on the young Blest Gana. The works of Walter Scott and Charles Dickens undoubtedly figured among his earliest readings. And while critics have tended to focus on the impact of French writers in his work (Balzac, Stendhal, Sue, and even Hugo),¹ it is obvious that narrative and compositional techniques, and even moral stances, in his first works point to an early formative influence of Dickens. While perhaps out of synch with the Chilean historical and literary milieu of the times, it should be noted that Blest Gana's father's profession probably led to his developing an analytical bent that contributed to the development of his observational and critical faculties.

Blest Gana's mother's family—of Basque origins—on the other hand, had already been in Chile for many years. Arriving in the

mid-eighteenth century, they belonged to the landholding class and several family members had pursued military careers; some of Blest Gana's maternal relatives were officials in the Chilean Independence struggles. This military background would have a formative role in Blest Gana's early education, as we see him enrolled in the National Institute in 1841 and later, in 1843, on the rolls of the Chilean Military Academy.

Cunningham Blest fathered several illegitimate children—not an uncommon occurrence in the Chile of the period, and elsewhere for that matter. The three “legitimate” male Blest Gana offspring, however, followed family tradition and pursued intellectual or literary careers. Alberto, of course, was to become a writer, but Guillermo, the eldest, and Joaquín, the youngest, would also both write and see their works published. Guillermo Blest Gana, best known as poet and historical playwright and writer of nationalist and intimist poetry, left three volumes of solid work. Despite the questionable overall caliber of Chilean romantic poetry when compared to that of other countries, Guillermo Blest Gana is without a doubt Chile's chief nineteenth-century romantic poet. When Rubén Darío visited Valparaíso at century's end, his appreciation for Guillermo Blest Gana's poetry appears genuine and not merely the perfunctory praises of a guest visiting Chile for the first time. Aside from Guillermo Blest Gana's poetry, we should also note his place in the political events that shaped Chile; in 1858 he took part in a revolt against the Montt government—for which activity he was sentenced to death and was saved only by his father's political connections and after agreeing to leave Chile. After living in exile in Perú for several years, Guillermo Blest Gana would be granted amnesty by the incoming president and return to Chile in 1862 to serve long and faithfully under Balmaceda.

Joaquín, the youngest Blest Gana brother, on the other hand, presents us with a much less likable figure. According to most versions, he was at best accommodating and at worst opportunistic in his dealings. A journalist and politician, he made it a point to curry favor with whatever party held power at a given time, a tactic that allowed him to benefit from his ties to the Ministries and Parliament.

What is striking in all of this is the fact that political behaviors

exhibited by the Blest Gana family are in direct correspondence to the various options characterized by “political agreement” of the ruling Chilean clans of the period. We have the meshing of the father’s professional bourgeoisie with the landed oligarchy represented by the mother’s side of the family; the former’s moderate and occasional strident Liberalism is taken to its extreme political limits by Guillermo but is blunted in the case of Joaquín. Alberto Blest Gana’s political stance, evidenced in *Martín Rivas* and his other works, assumes an intermediate, if contradictory, political positioning that allows for an exaltation of political action tempered by moderation. It is in this fashion that Blest Gana manages to inscribe the operating social and political reality of the period, evidenced as well within his own family: both moderate and radical versions of Liberalism were contemporaneous, mutually determined rather than mutually exclusive. In light of this, it is likely that Blest Gana’s playing out of these two political tracks derives less from the novelist’s attempt at providing an objective “take” on Chile’s political arena and more from Blest Gana’s well-honed practice of political prudence and equilibrium, traits that seem perhaps more in keeping with the tactics of a diplomat than those of a writer!

Despite inhabiting the always hazy and contradictory world of the diplomatic corps, Blest Gana was not marginal to the key political events that shaped both Chilean and world history. He was, in fact, an eyewitness to two of the pivotal events in the class-based struggles developing in Europe at the time: the June insurrection of 1848 and the Paris Commune in 1871. He is an 18-year-old military engineering student on a government scholarship in Versailles when the first great proletarian revolution erupts. When the *communards* take over Paris in 1871, Blest Gana, the diplomat, is in Paris once again, dealing principally with matters having to do with the recent Franco-Prussian War. And as far as events in Chile are concerned, Blest Gana would, upon his return from studying in Europe, witness the final moments of the 1851 Liberal uprising. His positioning as an eyewitness to these crucial Chilean and international nineteenth-century events could not have other than impacted Blest Gana and left its mark on his writings, especially since his works are profoundly invested in portraying both Chilean

history and the avatars of Liberal ideology. In light of this, to say that Blest Gana “was not drawn to politics. Social issues left him cold. The tumult of 1848 left no mark on him”² would seem, at best, unfounded.

There is, in fact, clear proof of the keen interest with which the young novelist observed the events that brought about the fall of France’s July Monarchy (1830–48). We find it in a brief novel entitled *Los desposados/The Newlyweds*, published in Santiago’s *Revista de Santiago* soon after Blest Gana’s return to Chile. While the narrative is primarily a romantic melodrama, it does offer a vivid portrayal of political events in Paris.

On June 23rd, 1848, the city of Paris was the scene of one of the bloodiest combats ever seen in this bristling center: the canon and gunshots echoed everywhere, all the streets were taken over by military forces and one could see the terror in the faces of the few who ventured out of their homes. It was a terrible battle to the death; the different factions waged an unbridled combat in the great capital city. There was talk of Legitimists allying with Bonapartists against the power of the National Assembly; it was said that both parties had roused tensions in the city and among workers on leave, which ultimately led to the rioting later to be known as the Revolution of June; these were days of great desolation and bloodshed, during which more than ten thousand citizens fell victim—either dead or wounded—in the course of that useless—even if valiant and stubborn—sacrifice.³

The melodrama’s key players stand for specific and identifiable social actors. The novel’s antagonist, Alphonse Dunoye, who stands as the chief obstacle to the lovers’ happiness, is described in clearly defined social terms:

A member of the French bourgeoisie class, this merchant, had by virtue of doing well in commerce and more notably by his holding a seat in the National Assembly, managed to surround himself with an aura of importance and intransigence that enabled him to exert a good measure of influence in government circles and absolute dominance in all matters relating to home.⁴

Later in the novel, drawing out this same description, Blest Gana terms Dunoye “a domestic tyrant”; this stands in marked contrast

to the portrayal of Luis d'Orville as "a poor student, without means or mentors" who is in love with Dunoye's daughter. The most the young hero can attain to is a position in the Ministry of Public Works, a post from which he is fired thanks to Dunoye's machinations in the Assembly. If in *The Newlyweds* we have the oppositional pair Dunoye versus d'Orville, in *Martín Rivas* a similar antagonistic relationship exists between Dámaso and Martín; moreover, d'Orville's character anticipates both *Martín Rivas*'s Rafael San Luis—in his battle in defense of Liberal ideology—as well as Martín Rivas, insofar as his social background and class status are concerned. This emphasis on the characters' social origins and location, as well as *The Newlyweds*' representation of the populace in arms as an "undisciplined and rabid mob," will foreshadow the portrayal of the masses in the 1862 novel.

III

The Newlyweds, published in 1855, belongs to what we could designate the first phase of Blest Gana's work. Having left the armed forces in 1853, the fledgling author secures a position in the civil service. Foremost in his mind, however, is becoming a writer; part of that project involves establishing the groundwork for a national Chilean literature. We can, in part, follow Blest Gana's project and his determination to focus on his literary undertaking in his correspondence with fellow Chilean José Antonio Donoso, who had been to Europe with Blest Gana. Even during these early years in which Blest Gana is still developing as a writer and delineating what will be his overarching literary project, he already has a clear vision of the primacy and urgency of "setting down the foundations of the literary edifice that the nation needs,"⁵ as he stresses to Donoso in an 1856 letter.

Later, in a highly expressive letter written to Vicuña Mackenna, we find Blest Gana explaining how "after reading Balzac,"⁶ and thanks to the master's example and inspiration, he moved away from his initial interest in writing lyric poetry—traces of which are especially evident in his early narratives. In breaking with poetry Blest Gana defines himself as a novelist and at the same time sets a separate literary course from that of his brother. Still, this poetic

prehistory, even if soon set aside, will leave marked traces in his earliest works, particularly in one of his key characters, often cast as a hero-poet or figured as a young and sensitive dreamer.

Blest Gana's turn toward narrative as a result of his reading the work of the principal European novelist of the first half of the nineteenth century is neither insignificant nor coincidental. The connection is revealing in several respects. First, there is a clear link between Balzac's *Human Comedy* and the history of revolutionary and postrevolutionary France (1789–1848) with Blest Gana's idea of a series of historical novels on Chile, a project that as early as 1860 is the driving force behind his work. Second, one can also see a correlation between this initial decade of novelistic trials and narrative experimentation that characterizes Blest Gana's work in the 1850s and 1860s and the early Balzac, say from his schematized play *Cromwell* in 1819 to his unsigned serialized novels. What we could term the apogee of Balzac's art has its seed in these early works. His *Human Comedy* is, as is well known, born in that little gem of a work, *Les chouans* (1829), which narrates the counterrevolutionary activities of the *Vendée* in France's western provinces. Third, like Balzac's narrative project for a series of historical novels, Blest Gana's, too, is conceived in a postrevolutionary period. Just as Balzac writes between 1830 and 1848, after the French July Revolution, and just as Zola, for his part, conceives of his tableau on the Second Empire after the events of the Paris Commune, so too Blest Gana, even if considered to be working in a minor scale, will take on the most representative part of his work once Chile's *Girondin* uprisings of 1851 and 1859 have taken place. Thus we encounter the bourgeois novel as—almost always—an attempt to carry out a retrieval of lost ideals, something patently evident in the very titles of Blest Gana's novels.

Aside from an isolated early attempt at writing a dramatic piece (*El jefe de la familia/Head of the Household*, 1858) Blest Gana writes seven short novels during this period. The events narrated take place as follows: two are set in Paris (the already mentioned *The Newlyweds*, 1855; and *La fascinación/Fascination*, 1858, the latter set in the world of *elegantes* and *artistes*); four, by contrast, have settings that are both Chilean and urban: *Una escena social/A Social Scene*, 1853; *Engaños y desengaños/Deceptions and Disillusionments*,

1855; *El primer amor/First Love*, 1858; and *Juan de Aria*, 1859; only one novel during this period presents a rural setting, *Un drama en el campo/A Drama in the Countryside*, 1859. The novel's denouements abound in suicides, deaths, and cases of madness, fixing the truculent and melodramatic tone of a good many scenes and episodes.⁷ Their national specificity aside, Eugène Sue's and Charles Dickens's influence converge here to provide us with strongly sentimentalized characters and a highly dramatic and rhetorical dialogue. At bottom, the problem Blest Gana faces in these narratives is the impossibility of reconciling feeling and reality, soul and society, love and money. There will be vestiges of this dilemma in the next phase of his work, in tales such as *El pago de las deudas/The Repayment of Debts* (1861) and *Venganza/Revenge* and *Marihúan*, the latter two appearing in 1864. It is evident that, at this stage in the novelist's development, Blest Gana has not yet come upon the appropriate formula for dealing with what he terms "the conditions of life" and "its everyday incidents."⁸ His perspective is wholly idealist at this stage. In order to more fully capture the nature of Chilean social life Blest Gana will not only have to work out his narratives further, but also work on his dialogue, descriptions, and character development, grounding these elements in solid national soil, that is, the historical humus that the Chile of the period provides him.

IV

In a letter dated December 7, 1863, addressed to the newspaper correspondent mentioned above, Blest Gana writes: "I need not tell you, I suppose, that the greater part of the scenes and characters in *El Ideal* are taken from reality. You know, of course, or I'll tell you in case you don't, that since I wrote *La aritmética del amor/The Arithmetic of Love*, that is, since I wrote the first novel which I consider Chilean literature, my artistic principle has been to copy the everyday accidents of life to the degree that Art can. I have been especially painstaking in applying this principle in *El ideal de un calavera/An Ideal Rogue*."⁹

Blest Gana had published three of his most important novels—

The Arithmetic of Love, (1860), *Martín Rivas* (1862), and *An Ideal Rogue* (1863)—by the time he wrote this letter. Thereafter, there is a marked hiatus in his literary production, principally due to his administrative duties as Governor in Colchagua, and later, his diplomatic postings to Washington, London, and Paris. Under President Balmaceda's administration he resigns from his post as Chilean representative, ending his long life in Paris, in 1920. Some of Blest Gana's most important novels belong to his later years, including *Durante la Reconquista/During the Reconquest* (1897), *The Uprooted* (1904), and *El loco Estero/The Madman Estero* (1909). These works reveal an entirely different problematic which goes beyond the scope of this introduction. They will be mentioned only tangentially insofar as they relate to *Martín Rivas*.

The three most important works of what we have termed Blest Gana's second phase are closely bound together. Their very inter-relatedness, in turn, sheds special light on each of the novels in question. *Martín Rivas* marks a decisive moment in Blest Gana's development as a writer, and assumes an intermediate point between *The Arithmetic of Love* and *An Ideal Rogue*. In *The Arithmetic of Love* the dominant tone is that of conciliation, while in *An Ideal Rogue*, we can see how the sociohistorical matrix provides the work with greater density and depth. Fortunato Esperanzado is linked to Martín in terms of his upward social mobility; for his part, Abelardo Manrique, *An Ideal Rogue's* hero, operates as Rafael San Luis's correlate. In this fashion, the increasingly historical specificity gives rise to our having the key bourgeois protagonist presented as a seemingly complementary double figure, although in the end the two ultimately develop as necessarily antithetical. This bourgeois Janus has Jacobin and Liberal faces, but they are body and soul of the selfsame historical reality that provides for the death of one and the triumph—however accommodating and prosaic—of the other. The anti-Portales rebel of 1837 and the *Girondin* hero of 1851 are vanquished in Blest Gana's novels, enabling the prototypical bourgeois figure to move forward and upward socially, as is the case with Martín Rivas, who emerges unscathed from the political battles and is newly positioned to be the ultimate winner. The particulars of this process is what will interest us next.

V

Blest Gana provides precise historical dates for the events narrated in *Martín Rivas*. The novel's plot begins in July 1850 and culminates in October 1851, not coincidentally framing a crucial moment in Chile's political history. It is during these years that Chile's first major Liberal revolution is shaped; starting with street riots and barracks uprisings, the revolt attains a national scope with events such as the rebellions in the northern provinces, the Army revolt in the south, and the bloody events led by Cambiaso in Punta Arenas, standing out as watershed moments of this major collective phenomenon.

There are incontrovertible links between these episodes in Chile and the events taking place in 1848 in France. Historians dealing with this period, including Vicuña Mackenna and Francisco Antonio Encina, are in agreement with respect to this connection. Speaking of the set of historical factors that led to the Chilean Liberal revolution, Encina remarks on "the powerful influence of the 1848 Revolution and the fall of the French monarchy."¹⁰ The key proponents of this version of history are none other than the so-called Chilean Girondins, expatriates living in France, like Francisco Bilbao or Santiago Arcos, who within the *Sociedad de la Igualdad* provide the movement with its driving force and radical Liberal ferment.

The weight and impact of French events in 1848 on Chile's national life is best seen in Blest Gana's writings, especially in his characters' dialogues. In the following exchange Don Dámaso's son refers to these events with his characteristic frivolity:

"In Paris there are many political parties," said Agustín. "The Orleanists, the Bourbon *brancha*, and the Republicans."

"The *brancha*?" asked Don Dámaso.

"The Bourbon line, in other words," replied Agustín.

"They say everyone up north belongs to the Opposition," said Don Dámaso, addressing Martín again.

"I think that is the generalization," he responded.¹¹

We should recall that Blest Gana comments on these events from a distance of ten years. From the onset, we should be aware that it

is not, however, a purely formal device alone that is at work here, separating the historical events from their literary representation. The interim period is in no way homogeneous, but rather defined by the vicissitudes of Chilean political life. The ten years or so from 1851 to 1862 cannot be taken as a simple temporal demarcation, but rather as an experience; they not only demarcate a temporal distance, but also what we might term an ethical distance. They signal, above and beyond all else, a rejection of a previous moment. Therein lies the real objective of the operation carried out by the novel upon its historical material.

In fact, Martín Rivas entirely omits mentioning the 1859 revolution and gives relative short shrift to the events of 1851. No mention is made of the key uprisings in the country's north, and the novel's plot deals exclusively with events in the capital, focusing only on Urriola's revolt and ending precisely prior to the spreading of the revolt throughout the country. Blest Gana's bracketing of the revolt—halting the narrative precisely prior to its taking on a national character—cannot but have a special significance, as it reveals to us Blest Gana's system of exclusions and preferences as he looks back on these events from a distance of ten years. Blest Gana's selection allows him, on the one hand, to avoid dealing with his own family's involvement in the revolution (i.e., his brother's role in the revolt) while, simultaneously, and more importantly, privileging and giving special weight to one particular event within a complex historical process. In order to understand better Blest Gana's political positioning we need to consider carefully the whys and wherefores of these series of choices.

To understand what is at stake it is worthwhile to look for a moment at what takes place in *The Arithmetic of Love*, as it is highly revealing. Critics have commented in detail on the novel's Part II, arguing that it lacks cohesion and that it fails to follow through on its premise of fully portraying the world it seeks to represent. One crucial issue, however, has gone curiously unnoticed: the novel's plot and intrigues—all taking place in some unnamed provincial town—can, in a sense, be seen as a grotesque parody of the confusing and highly contested state of national politics of the period in question. The struggles and antipathies portrayed, the backroom pacts between the novel's Selgas and Ruipán factions, for example,

are but thinly veiled transpositions of the divisions, most more apparent than real, which characterized the Chilean political scene of the period. Despite its being granted a prize by the Universidad de Chile, there is a way in which we can speak, then, of *The Arithmetic of Love* as a failed attempt; but it is precisely where it fails that is of interest to us since it reveals what will be increasingly evident in Blest Gana's novels: his inability or unwillingness to deal with historical material that he finds ever more unpalatable, leading him to focus his next novel, *Martín Rivas*, on the events of 1851.

We should recall that it is precisely during this period in Chile that the political parties standing in opposition to Manuel Montt's government undergo a major reshuffling. At the beginning of Montt's second term, the majority of the Liberal Party makes an alliance (some have termed it a fusion) with an important segment of the Conservative Party, a coalition that had perhaps more to do with common interests and less to do with what some have posited as a shared hate for Montt. Be that as it may, this union of parties had the effect of blurring the lines between Liberals and Conservatives. Organized by Manuel Antonio Tocornal and Domingo Santa María, that unseemly coalition of political enemies would seem untenable to a whole set of Liberals who upheld the hard-line Pipiolist principles and who considered it ideologically unthinkable to amalgamate proclergy precepts with rationalist notions. This 1857 alliance, deemed unacceptable by many Liberals, is at the very core of Blest Gana's critique.

In his *The Arithmetic of Love* Blest Gana takes on his own party members' political opportunism and ideological vagaries, making them the object of a sardonic comical representation. His portrayal of these meandering Liberals dovetails with that made by a contemporary historian who states:

In order to please the few survivors—headed by don Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna—who were in an uproar, as well as to appease the future Radicals, the owners of Copiapó and of the greatest fortunes of the period poised to be invested in Chile's regeneration, a farce was agreed upon. Tocornal would open the door to a formal agreement between parties, by asking the Liberals how they saw matters, and Domingo Santa María would, in turn, consent to the

alliance with the stipulation that the 1833 Constitution be amended to provide for freedom of religion.¹²

It is apparent that *The Arithmetic of Love* reenacts this same “farce,” the same lack of ideological coherence and conviction that Blest Gana detected and critiqued in the bourgeoisie of the period. Even so, his bracketing of the events of 1851, along with his blindness in regard to the events of 1859, obliges us to see that Blest Gana’s highly selective thematic choices in *Martín Rivas* are in no way arbitrary. On the contrary, the justification must be sought out in the novel’s implicit rejection of the political deal-making between Liberals and Conservatives in the year 1857, a highly significant date, moreover, in Blest Gana’s literary production. It is in this polemical political light that we can better understand why subsequent editions of *Martín Rivas* dispensed with the Blest Gana’s original subtitle: *A Novel of Politico-Social Customs*.

Among the many novels subsequently written by Blest Gana, none hereafter deal with national events after that crucial 1857 date. In fact, his most important works (excepting *The Uprooted*, 1904, dealing with the lives of Chilean expatriate bourgeoisie—which either remains outside these considerations or ratifies them decisively) present us with settings that recede in Chile’s historical time. *An Ideal Rogue* narrates the assassination of Minister Portales in 1837; *The Madman Estero* is set at the end of the Chilean war against the Peruvian-Bolivian Confederation; and most patently, *During the Reconquest* pretends to seek out something akin to the roots of Chile’s nationhood in the bygone days of the struggles for Independence. The particular circumstances surrounding this last novel are especially revealing. *During the Reconquest* appeared in 1897, some years after the events of the civil war of 1891, which although Blest Gana followed from abroad undoubtedly had a profound impact on him. In this novel Blest Gana carefully scrutinizes and selects from the complex process of Chilean Independence the phase that reveals the greatest display of patriotic energies and involvement of popular forces, that is, the guerrillas and the peasant uprisings of Manuel Rodríguez. Interestingly, Blest Gana’s rendering of this period contrasts sharply with, for example, that of Luis Orrego Luco, whose novel, 1810. *Memorias de un*

voluntario de la Patria Vieja/Memoirs of a Volunteer of the Early Independence, focuses on the initial stages of the struggle for Independence, centering on the political intrigue and legalistic debates of the period and necessarily highlighting the role played by the lawyer Juan Martínez de Rozas.

Thus, if we follow the trajectory of his works, there is for Blest Gana one watershed period in Chile's history: the middle decade of the century, and more concretely, the year 1857. This year stands out as the moment of crisis and insuperable horizon for Blest Gana's Liberal ideology. Later, as the century winds down and the twentieth begins, Blest Gana will increasingly focus on the early years of the Chilean nation. His 1897 novel, *During the Reconquest*, deals, as we have already seen, with events of the year 1814; these dates give us two historical poles between which lies a great chasm, precisely the one produced by the ideological crisis that arises and that underpins the historical events narrated in *Martín Rivas*. This goes far in explaining why the Urriola revolt is placed at center stage in the narrative and is the focal point around which the novel's events revolve. Involving as it did large sectors of the population, Blest Gana selects this turbulent historical scenario for underscoring the heroic agency of the bourgeoisie. Only there, within Chile's national boundaries, do we find an instance in which personal élan, the crowning superiority of the leader, is coupled with the fighting zeal of the anonymous popular masses. We thus find these masses—portrayed picturesquely elsewhere in the novel via quaint *costumbrista* sketches of manners, as in the section dealing with the national patriotic celebrations—take on, in the key Plaza de Armas scene, an entirely different role: they are now the substrate, both collective and popular, which buttresses and gives impetus to the acts of Chile's Liberal and progressive political forces.¹³

As so it is that in *Martín Rivas*, Rafael San Luis's sacrifice, along with Martín's wounding during the key battle, enables the investiture of a heroic scope for the events of April 1851 for Chile's history. Henceforth, precisely after *Martín Rivas*, the confluence of the hero and the popular masses in Blest Gana's novels will no longer be the motor force of historical events; rather the contrary will be the case, with the notion that such a shared vision is something

only to be reminisced about and realized only through a process of novelistic reconstruction. How, then, are we to understand the exaltation and centrality given to the popular masses in *During the Reconquest*? Here we must observe with care that this exalted representation is depicted as belonging to a glorious but entirely by-gone era, a glorious but closed chapter in the nation's past. So it is that *During the Reconquest*, despite its popular, Liberal, and even revolutionary subject matter, represents in reality the death knell of Blest Gana's Liberal political ideals. With the turn of events at mid-century, the actualization of a Liberal politics in Chile lies henceforth for Blest Gana outside the realm of possibility.

It is precisely this temporal and historical demarcation that enables positing as a valid hypothesis what we might term an ulterior ideological motivation underpinning *Martín Rivas*. The fact that the novel is dedicated to Manuel Antonio Matta, among the most stalwart defenders of the anticlerical wing of Chile's Liberals, is not without relevance. Matta, as is well known, would soon become the driving force behind the creation of Chile's Radical party. The publishing house that prints *Martín Rivas* also publishes the newspaper *La Voz de Chile*, which will enable the voice of disenchanted Chilean Liberals to coalesce until they break off to form a new political party. In fact, *Martín Rivas* first appears in serialized form in this same evening paper, which also published essays written by Isidoro Errázuriz, the Gallos, and Matta himself. Among the many telling articles published in *La Voz* we find, for example, that Matta penned numerous opinion pieces; in *Política*, for example, the writer moves away from issues of individual will, the cornerstone of early Liberal thought, calling instead for a series of laws to monitor the arbitrariness of behaviors. We are here obviously faced with a different phase of Chilean Liberalism, a different sense of an organization with its attendant class ideology. Matta's article, *Proposal for a Law Exempting Taxation on Copper Smelted with Native Fuels*,¹⁴ for example, advocates waiving tariffs for copper export across the board and not on a case by case basis—in keeping with Courcelle-Seneuil principles—and strictly in line with the financial interests of Chile's mining bourgeoisie; so too in another piece, *Chile's Coal*,¹⁵ we find Matta espousing a clear sense of shared goals when he states: "We do not wish to see the creation

of antagonisms between the mining interests of the northern and southern sectors of the Republic.”

We need to keep this particular context in mind as we consider the portrayal of the novel's hero, Martín Rivas, as representative of the northern mining provinces; more specifically, we need to see him as a prototype of the sector of mining bourgeoisie which would be the motor force behind the emergence of the new political party. Thus Martín Rivas is not to be taken so much as an exemplar of a compromised Chilean Liberalism but rather more as a prototype of a new—still at this stage inchoate—political entity. Moreover, it would be conceivable to suggest that the novel *Martín Rivas*, in fact, becomes the ideological vehicle by which this emergent mentality, and therefore ideology, is expressed and disseminated. As was the case with Lastarria in the 1840s, once again we find Chile's literature paralleling or even anticipating mind-sets that will afterward manifest themselves in the political sphere.

This observation allows for a point of clarification on a common misreading of Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas*. Melfi, for example, terms Martín Rivas *a hero of the middle class*, and, in a suspect and anachronistic move, links Blest Gana's mid-nineteenth-century protagonist to Chile's emergent middle class in the twentieth.¹⁶ For his part, Alone exults on *Martín Rivas*, proposing that the novel reveals “the triumph of the poor, yet intelligent and hard-working middle class, over the pompous—although not entirely without merit—upper class.”¹⁷ Accounting for this assessment—this mirage, really—is only possible if we trace the class composition of adherents of Chile's Radical party, whose bourgeois nucleus managed to attain the consensus of other, less wealthy, sectors of the populace, also in search of political representation.

In sum, what we have in Martín Rivas is a character ostensibly born during the burgeoning of Pipiolismo, that is, before the Battle of Lircay (1830). We can infer this from the fact that in 1850, as the narrator states, Martín is 22 or 23. We know, too, that he arrives in the capital from the northern mining districts of Coquimbo and Copiapó, unquestioned strongholds of the new bourgeoisie; his shaky financial situation notwithstanding, Martín Rivas pursues a career that during the period was the purview of only the wealthiest sectors of society.¹⁸ All these features point to Martín Rivas as

a clear stand-in for the national bourgeoisie; but we need to be clear on one point: he is an exemplar of this class not at its stage of full economic consolidation, but rather at its ideological moment of inception.

VI

The years covered in *Martín Rivas* coincide with a period of formidable capitalist development in Chile. We need only consider the following: national income grows fourfold in the space of sixteen years, derived principally from agricultural and mining exports (silver and copper).¹⁹ Twice Blest Gana's novel makes mention of the importance that exports of grain to California have had for the Chilean economy. It is worth recalling that the market created as a result of California's Gold Rush firmly consolidated the export-oriented character of Chile's economy while at the same time set in motion a set of circumstances in which the interests of the ascendant Chilean industrial bourgeoisie would also be tied to investments in land and agriculture. This in turn led to a fusion between the traditional landed *hacendado* class and Chile's new capitalist sectors.²⁰ Against this historical and economic backdrop, *Martín Rivas* focuses on two perfectly identifiable moments—discrete and yet interrelated—in the constitution of Chile's bourgeoisie. These are given to us in the novel on two chronological planes, which allows for differences and nuance in the representation.

The character of Don Dámaso emblemizes the origins of the class in question; his ascendancy and shady dealings result in greater wealth and influence via the route made available then by Chile's capitalist development. Blest Gana's position is absolutely clear and in a few brief lines he summarizes for us the benchmarks of this class's ascendancy:

At the age of 24, Don Dámaso had married Doña Engracia Núñez, more for social advancement than for love. Back then, Doña Engracia's want of beauty was compensated by an inheritance of 30,000 pesos, which so incited the passions of the young Encina that he asked for her hand in marriage. Don Dámaso was employed

by a commercial lending house in Valparaíso, and his meagre salary was all that lined his purse. However, the day after his wedding he had at his disposal 30,000 pesos with which to paint the town, and since then his ambitions knew no limit.²¹

In describing Don Dámaso's association with the father of Martín Rivas, Blest Gana provides us with information on Don Dámaso's mining investments, his financial speculation—still termed by the narrator “usury on a grand scale”—the purchase of a ranch near Santiago and a mansion in the Capital. We are also given Don Dámaso's ultimate ambition: his aspirations to secure a senator's seat in the nation's Parliament, the crowning touch of his bourgeois aspirations. Fostered by the heated economic environment generated by British commerce and investments, which were centered particularly in the city of Valparaíso, Blest Gana has us follow the course of Don Dámaso's social ascendancy: originally a simple employee he becomes rich with the boom in the silver market (these are the years of the Chañarcillo boom in the early 1830s) and soon thereafter we find him in the role of agricultural entrepreneur, rubbing shoulders with the old landed aristocracy and seeking to consolidate his economic position by means of access to political and legislative power. What in fact Blest Gana lays out before us is Martín Rivas's class apprenticeship and an itinerary for social ascendancy. It is worth remarking, for example, that as the novel opens we have Don Dámaso asking for the day's newspapers. As he does his daily reading, Don Dámaso is, in effect, reading himself and his social class. His reading of Government and Opposition viewpoints contained in the newspapers can be taken, moreover, as the height of class introspection!

Don Dámaso's social and financial ascent is launched at the age of 24. Martín Rivas, the text indicates, is—tellingly—“22 or 23” in the year 1850. Martín will marry at exactly the same age as his mentor. That the two coincide in this regard signals the contiguity that is established in the text between the bourgeois exemplar at the height of power and the young man who, poised to initiate his ascent, does so with a markedly higher degree of awareness of his social location and class agenda. Martín Rivas's narrative projection will be played out on three levels: his background and social

origins, the friendships he establishes, and, finally, the object of his amorous affections.

Martín's Background

Martín is the son of José Rivas, who is described as an adventurer, a prospector in Chile's mining country, "a madman" who had lost his fortunes searching for an imaginary mother lode. In this sense, we can take Martín's father to stand for the epitome of individualist élan, the vitality of individual will and effort that corresponds to the earliest forms of capitalist development. In Chile, it has its correlate in the fabled figure of the prospector Juan Godoy, whose legend was picked up and later monopolized by men such as the Cousiños, the Gallos, and the Urmenetas. Within Blest Gana's narrative, the story of the intrepid miner José Rivas and his ultimate economic downfall offers a moving prehistory that stands in contrast to the cold and calculating prose of the consolidated bourgeoisie whose fortunes are diversified and secure. Foregrounding the values of unyielding tenacity and self-sacrifice that ostensibly characterized the beginnings of the bourgeois class, the figure of José Rivas provides Martín with a link to a more "heroic" class ancestry, that of its initial stages.

Martín's Friendships

If in the novel José Rivas is meant to be emblematic of a certain type of economic activity, Rafael San Luis carries out a similar role with respect to the realm of ideas and political action. This is precisely what makes the pairing of the two young friends especially noteworthy. *Martín Rivas* is very much about the "heroic dreams" of the bourgeoisie. Martín will be wounded in the same battle in which his friend Rafael will perish; as a survivor of that combat in which Rafael gives up his life, Martín is cast as actively participating and sharing in these "heroic illusions." Rafael San Luis's passion and piercing gaze is manifest in Martín Rivas not outwardly, but by an invisible burning within, as evident in eyes that gaze out darkly, and Rafael's vigor and commitment are forever fixed in his friend's heart. Thus the portrayal of Martín Rivas, this meditative,

somewhat austere, even cold exemplar of the new class, is—curiously and significantly—anchored, on the one hand, by a father's Quixotic economic background and, on the other, with the pathos of his best friend's sacrifice to Liberal ideals. The figure of Martín Rivas stands before us as the spawn of his own class, of its avatars and struggles, the product of individual wanderings in the desert and of bloody collective combats: the measured and well-groomed bourgeois man, full of talent and potential.

Martín's Loves

It should be clear by now that Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas* is about much more than affairs of the heart and romantic liaisons. The nature of the relationship that develops between Martín and Leonor, wherein the social coefficient is so pronounced, has the effect of catalyzing the expression of a class ideology. Thus, where José Rivas sublimates material practices and Rafael San Luis highlights political ideals, the figure of Leonor invests the class with spirit or soul—particularly in regard to its cultural endowment. The depiction of the novel's heroine bears this out:

Their luxury served as a magnificent frame around the beautiful Leonor. Had anyone seen this 19-year-old girl in a shabby setting, he would have accused Fortune of being capricious for not creating an ambiance befitting her beauty. Thus, to behold her reclining upon a majestic sofa lined with celestial brocatelle, to catch her image reflected in a gothic mirror, to see her petite foot grazing free and easy over a Persian rug, anyone would have to admire the lavishness of Nature in blissful accord with the favors of Destiny. Leonor sparkled like a diamond surrounded by gold and precious gems.²²

One cannot but remark on the fact that we are first given this portrait and the material splendor surrounding her in a description that resembles a finely inlaid piece of marquetry all prior to the description of Leonor's face. She is presented as yet another beautiful objet d'art among the ubiquitous markers of class, wealth, and refinement in the Encina household. This stands in stark contrast to how the novel brings Martín into focus; we see him first outside

the house and progressively he is placed within it. The opposite is the case with Leonor; she first appears depicted in the interior scene mentioned above with all the trappings of her class; later, we see her again at her toilette when her brother Agustín pays her a visit; later still we come upon her as she looks at herself in the vestibule mirror as she is about to leave the house. In each case her portrait is accompanied by concrete references to various cultural registers, especially the arts. We find her continually and in various ways linked to different artistic forms; playing the piano she demonstrates the artistic education befitting her class; the *pose nonchalante* in which she is given to us as she reclines on the sofa is meant to invoke sculptural forms; painting is also clearly summoned when Blest Gana gives us Leonor as reflected in mirrors. More subtly perhaps, in the description of her graceful and lithe-some movements is there not an allusion to the gestures of dance? Always appearing as an icon of bourgeois refinement, Leonor's beauty is continually tied to her elegance and cultivation of the arts. In the novel, Beauty and Elegance are taken as synonymous; conjoined as they are in Leonor, it is precisely that subtle halo of elegance, in combination with her physical beauty, which first impresses Martín and draws him to her.

Drawing prestige from the figure of the lone adventurer of his father; sharing in, but surviving, the battle for the "heroic ideals" that claim his friend San Luis; and finally, in marrying Leonor, Martín Rivas stands before us as the quintessential expression of ascendant bourgeois manhood. He stands for and upholds the constitutive characteristics and values of the class: first, although initially economically disadvantaged, he is financially savvy; second, in standing with San Luis he is brave and can lay claim to political righteousness; and third, from his association with Leonor, Martín derives cultural capital from her elegance and spirituality.

If, then, this constellation of traits makes Martín Rivas a full-fledged ideological bourgeois being, why, one might ask, does the novel insist upon the need to draw out for us his entry into this same class? What appears in the novel as an ambiguous and at times difficult-to-understand issue brings us back to the matter of the mistaken view of Martín as "a hero of the middle class," to

which we referred above. We must perhaps look at the matter from a different perspective. As a representative of the mining bourgeoisie of the north, Martín Rivas comes to be incorporated into the national bourgeoisie which is, in the Chilean context, by definition based in agriculture, commerce, and finance. It is in this sense that we must read the novel's need for Martín's trip, arrival, and adaptation to the culture of the capital city of Santiago; Martín represents the incorporation of a sector—a new and emergent sector—into a constituted and already considered traditional bourgeois class; it is therefore entirely a matter of nineteenth-century intraclass dynamics.

Running parallel to the novel's representation of hegemonic class dynamics, however, there is also clearly an abstract and ideal operation at work in *Martín Rivas*. While possessing the requisite traits and clearly standing as an archetype of his class, Martín Rivas is, curiously, lacking in one key area: capital and private property. It is as if Blest Gana were tracing out for us what could be termed the ontological proof of the Chilean bourgeoisie. In an operation in line with that of many Christian philosophers, like Saint Anselm, who deduced the existence of God from the attributes implicit in his perfect essence, so too in *Martín Rivas* we have first the image of the ideal bourgeois, awaiting its materialization, its investiture as it were; the realization will be enabled by accessing Leonor's wealth.

The above is suggested to us particularly in the details of the portraits drawn for us of Martín Rivas. The image of Martín that first springs to mind is that of the provincial newcomer to the city who dresses anachronistically and knows nothing of cosmopolitan elegance. While noting his unfashionable attire, the novel immediately goes on to emphasize Martín's certain air of distinction; again his physical presence is what stands out: his eyes that gaze out darkly; his commanding stance, the absence of a too-perfect set of features, culminating in the following revealing portrait:

Martín looked mechanically at the mirror over the mahogany sink and found himself pale and homely; but the voice of reason persuaded him to abandon his childish discouragement before it dampened his spirits.²³

The novel offers up to us that truth resides neither in dress nor physical attributes; it is to be found within the individual and consists precisely of those traits of determination, willpower, and rational thought with which Martín Rivas is fully endowed. While seemingly simple and unimportant, we must view these representations of Martín in their dialectical relationship to the character's overall portrayal; his dress contrasts with his "air of distinction"; his awareness of his lack of comeliness strengthens his determination all the more. Insofar as portrayals of Martín are concerned, the "negatives" attributed to him in the novel's early pages ultimately add dimension and personality to his character. Afterward, in an inverse process, Martín fits in seamlessly as he takes on the trappings of dress, manners, speech, and taste of the class whose essence he ostensibly carries within him. This process starts early on in the novel, precisely in the Plaza de Armas scene where Martín comes off rather badly, as much due to his own lack of savoir faire as to his interaction with his "compatriot worker comrades" in the city:

A peddler approached him, saying, "Patent leather boots, Señor?"

These words brought to mind Agustín's shiny footwear and the reason Martín had left the house. He thought that with a swank pair of leather boots he would fare better with the stylish family who had opened their doors to him. Inexperienced and unintimidated, Martín hesitantly looked at the peddler, who had already begun to walk off, and the man returned immediately.

"Let's see the boots," said Martín.

"Here ya go, buddy," replied the man, luring the newcomer with the glassy reflection of his goods.²⁴

Here again, we have Martín viewing all to which he aspires in the reflection of the shiny surface; the scene militates against the idea of his lack of comeliness. Thus, despite the derision he suffers, despite the comical jailing he undergoes—anticipating his later, more dramatic, jail stay—Martín, starting at his feet, initiates the material realization his nature requires in order to rise slowly and stand firmly upon the ground. His meditative qualities ensure that he is up to the task. Going far beyond any romantic melancholia, Martín's pensiveness and reflective nature are everywhere stressed

in the novel; he thinks, he ponders, he extracts lessons from what he sees and develops maxims from these lived experiences: "Having run all of his errands, he returned to Don Dámaso's studio and sat down to work at his des, saying to himself, 'She doesn't disdain me.'"²⁵

There is a way, too, in which the moral development of the character of Martín Rivas brings to mind the work of Blest Gana's contemporary, Samuel Smiles, apologist of the English middle class and author of such prosaic works as *Character* (1871), *Thrift* (1875), *Duty* (1880), and, particularly, *Self-Help* (1859), books that undoubtedly served as models for all subsequent self-help manuals published in the United States for a successful and prosperous life.

Again we must bear all this in mind to fully understand Martín Rivas's place in the novel's dynamics. Taken by the character's presence and its social connotations, criticism on the novel has made much about the differences between Martín Rivas and Don Dámaso or his son Agustín. But in fact the bourgeois world of *Martín Rivas* is a unitary whole, with a panoply of characters serving as variations of the same human type. The notion of "situational analogies" is useful in this instance to talk about the novel's plots and subplots, and productive as well in viewing the work's many structured and intentional contiguities and congruencies. The preponderance of these is such that they merit listing: the nearness in ages (the young Dámaso, Martín, Rafael, and Agustín are all 23 or 24 years old); the amount of Don Dámaso's 30,000 peso dowry is picked up again in the 30,000 peso purse Agustín travels to France with; Clemente Valencia has a 300,000 peso capital at his disposal; Leonor's other suitor, Emilio Mendoza's salary is 3,000 pesos; and finally, Martín Rivas earns a very modest 30 pesos for his services as Don Dámaso's secretary. These numbers mark clear distinctions, but they are somehow also meant to ally the different characters and circumstances. Martín can be taken as a morally superior, evolved rendering of Don Dámaso and, likewise, an intellectually superior version of Agustín. He is their ideological complement, seeking to find in them, as we noted earlier, his societal grounding. Martín is distilled moral virtue, distilled talent, and this is his only capital. His capital—and the zeros that go with it—will increase later, but his essential "worth" is given at the onset.

About the novel's ending it has rightfully been said that "Blest Gana here applies the notion of commutative justice: Dámaso Encina has become wealthy at the expense of his former partner; these men's daughter and son fall in love and the better part of Encina's fortune is to ultimately be passed on to the former partner's son via marriage, when Martín conquers Santiago as well as the heart of the haughty heiress."²⁶

Two key letters frame the novel's beginning and end and allow us to situate Martín Rivas further. Early in the novel we find the letter written by his father which introduces Martín to the man who will be his mentor in Santiago. As the novel draws to a close, we have the letter in which Martín informs his mother and sister that he is to marry Leonor. The two halves of the narrative romance are thus joined, giving us a perfect sphere. It is interesting to note how Blest Gana's novel's resolution stands in marked contrast with other nineteenth-century Latin American works; without intimating incest, as is the case in Juan León Mera's Ecuadorian novel *Cumandá*, or suggesting the semi-incestuous situation we find between Efraín and his cousin in Jorge Isaac's *María*, and refusing the close-knit family scenario typical of so many romantic idylls, Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas* sketches out a different problematic, an economic incest of sorts, in that Martín and Leonor are rooted, that is, they are the offspring of the same capitalist entity. Thus, in effect, Martín inherits the business from Don Dámaso, as would a son:

Don Dámaso Encina turned all of his business affairs over to Martín Rivas in order to devote himself more freely to the political fluctuations which he hoped would one day land him in the House of Senate. Don Dámaso was one of many master-weavers who disguised his lack of conviction by acting in the name of Moderation.²⁷

VII

At first glance, nothing could be more simple or direct than the narrative emplotment of Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas*. The narrative movement advances and rests upon a series of successive and interconnected mistaken identities and entanglements. Each link in

this series of chains is made up by a pair of lovers: Leonor–Rafael; Matilde–Rafael; Rafael–Adelaida; Adelaida–Agustín; Agustín–Matilde; Ricardo–Edelmira; Edelmira–Martín; Martín–Leonor. The entire set of circles links up and fits in perfectly in line with the conventions of the *comedia de enredos* or those of the serialized melodrama. Let the following serve as one of the more noteworthy examples of these entanglements: at the novel's start Martín believes Leonor to be in love with Rafael. It is under the shadow of this belief that the youth's love grows. And farther down the line we also see Leonor's love for Martín grow when she believes him to be smitten by Edelmira. Three points stand out when considering the string of these narrative complications in the novel:

1. These entanglements are generally established between members of different social groups, more precisely, between a member of the upper class and one from the lower middle class.
2. The development and denouement of these situations—be they sentimental, comical, or dramatic in nature—are parallel with and correlated to shifts in Martín's social and sentimental situation.
3. Specifically, in the case of the novel's hero, his personality is in fact defined by the two poles of his sentimental attraction: Leonor and Edelmira.

As to the first point, it is clear that Martín moves not only up socially as Don Dámaso's secretary and advisor. The benefits his mentor derives from Martín's counsel are not limited to the business realm exclusively, but involve another more problematic domain that casts Martín in the role of intermediary or facilitator in matters of love. In this odd alchemy, Martín is always the agent of amorous affinities that ultimately belie clear class-based filters. His intervention manages to bring together those that are socially homogenous while driving apart those that are not. He is, for example, the go-between for linking Matilde and Rafael, but at the same time is responsible for separating Rafael from Adelaida. As for Martín himself, we see that he is drawn closer to Leonor but

cut off from Edelmira, who, readers of *Martín Rivas* undoubtedly recall, selflessly sacrifices herself for him. In an odd fashion then, Martín operates as a go-between in reverse in this and in other places in the narrative. It is curious indeed that critics have for the most part neglected this negative agency, this double directionality in the novel's love emplotments which is signaled positively with respect to Leonor and, (sadly,) negatively in regard to Edelmira. Martín's talent rests then on his savvy application of the laws of class valences to ensure socially "legitimate" amorous associations. Indeed, it is on these grounds that Martín can make the following highly revealing comments in a letter to his sister:

I went to Alameda my second day back, which was Sunday. I was walking arm in arm with Leonor (you can imagine my pride) when we came upon a couple coming toward us from the opposite direction. I recognized it was Ricardo Castaños, who with a triumphant air, offered his arm to Edelmira. We spoke with them a while. Later I asked myself whether this poor girl, born into a social class inferior to her noble sentiments, was happy. I really couldn't say because the serenity and joy of her words seemed to contradict the melancholic expression in her eyes.²⁸

Surely the image of the "opposite directions" in which the two couples move in this scene speaks to much more than a simple spatial orientation!

It is thus that, despite the sympathetic eye with which the narrator views Martín Rivas's moral physiognomy, there are in the novel fuzzier zones that reveal the degree to which the actual social conditions determine behaviors. Above all an ethical subject, Martín Rivas is bound to the rules of his own class, to its prejudices and constraints. It is also to Blest Gana's artistic credit that the novel's complexity and stress-points reveal themselves in the narrative interstices. While the work is above all else an unabashed apologia for the personality, both ethical and social, of Martín Rivas, the novel also brings to bear upon him an underlying ironic critique. Like other great works of the period, even if in a more modest key, *Martín Rivas's* narrative richness allows for the potential double reading requisite of all significant works. The interplay

of greatness and madness in *Don Quixote*, the ascent and decline of Julien Sorel, the splendor and misery of Emma Bovary, the rebelliousness and pettiness of Mathieu Delarue—to this incomplete list of contrasting narrative representations the addition of Martín Rivas's conjoined honesty and scheming seems plausible.

If we pursue this notion of narrative duplicity, we become aware that it is a fundamental thread in the narrative. The novel's narrator, for example, goes on at length—giving it nearly a full page—to explain what Santiago's society understands by the phrase *servir mucho*/to render great service, saying:

"The expression 'he'll be very useful to me' must be clarified within its social context.

Love, the guiding star of youth, leads a young man into a salon where the stillness in the air prevents him from voicing the adoration in his eyes, for fear of being overheard. However, the knot in his throat dissolves when *Simple Admiration* evolves into *Tender Admiration*—to quote Stendhal—because glances no longer satisfy the demands of the heart. It becomes necessary to hear the lady's voice and to confess to her all the sweet afflictions of his lovesick soul. In order to steal an intimate moment to elaborate his choppy, suspenseful phrases, the young man engages an accomplice to entertain her mother or her sisters, who are always quicker to lend an ear to the banalities of a young bachelor.

It is in this context that Agustín thought Rivas could be very useful to him at the home of Doña Bernarda, whose vigilance was all the sharper because the stakes were all the higher, granted that the suitor was the son of a very well-to-do family."²⁹

If we look only at this passage dealing with the intervention and aid provided by someone in advancing a lover's courting, we can understand the way in which the phrase *servir mucho* applies perfectly to Martín's role as a go-between in amorous affairs. It is precisely here, however, that through the author's explicit intervention, the expression takes on its fuller meaning in the novel, as it foregrounds Martín Rivas's location and agency in the narrative. The narrator's deliberate emphasis on this point is in this way explained. We can also more fully understand in this light the elder Encina's use of *servirme mucho* as he considers taking on Martín as his secretary:

"I've been thinking," said Don Dámaso to his wife, "that Martín may be able to assist me in keeping my books."

"He seems like a nice young man, and I appreciate the fact that he doesn't smoke," said Doña Engracia.³⁰

It is important here to draw attention to how the expression *servir mucho* is used in the novel both in regard to the official and publicly recognized tasks tied to Martín's bourgeois apprenticeship under Encina, as to the more secretive dealings and clandestine arrangements in the social realm. We are likewise made to see the continual linkages established between Don Dámaso and Martín in the novel. For Leonor, for example, her main underlying concern in arranging Matilde's and Rafael's happiness is undoing the harm done by her father: "Yes, another reason. I want to make amends for my father's actions. As we both know, he was largely responsible for throwing Rafael out of your house."³¹

For his part, in aiding Leonor, Martín repairs the wrongs committed by Don Dámaso. In doing so, however, he simultaneously creates a situation that, while perhaps not as self-serving, is not entirely unlike that unleashed by Don Dámaso's meddling. To be sure, interfering in the marriage of Adelaida and Agustín is justified, in part, in view of the trickery involved; nevertheless, Martín's advice is nothing short of brutal. We can likewise find echoed traits or gestures among the key characters as when we see Martín employing a Gallicism (*Usted hiere la dificultad*)—likening him to the Frenchified Agustín—as he speaks to Adelaida: "You miss the point, Señorita," Martín replied. "What we are talking about here is buying."

But what are we to make of the relationship between Adelaida and Rafael? Here our attention is diverted to the greed of her wastrel brother, Amador. Our doubts remain, however, unresolved and Martín acts unwillingly and ill-humored; if there is any remorse, it is meager.

It would be surprising if in *Martín Rivas* Blest Gana were not sometimes to toy with his characters' names as he does in *The Arithmetic of Love*. Here he baptizes some characters with comical names that border on the Rabelaisian, as is the case of Fortunato Esperanzano, whose every hope is set on his exceedingly slim

chances of coming upon a fortune, or the caricaturesque name of Ciriaco Ayunales, given to a monk who has little to do with candles and even less with fasting. Earlier, in *The Newlyweds*, characters' names have to do with making a different kind of point. Blest Gana perhaps drew on Eugène Sue's serialized novel *Thérèse Dunoyer*—published in Copiapó's newspaper *El Pueblo* at about the time when Blest Gana was returning from Europe³²—when it came to choosing a name for his novel's antagonist. For a French speaker, the association of the word with the image of drowning has been, in all probability, lost; not so, however, for a non-native speaker. Thus it is that just as the lovers in Sue's novel find their death in the Seine River, so too in *The Newlyweds* the name Dunoye foreshadows the death by suicide of the young lovers. It is worth remarking as well that if one were to trace back the history of Blest Gana's selection of character names, one would note a marked shift from his earlier novels. *A Social Scene* (1853), for example, both opens and closes with the figure of the servant Martín, whose time upon the novel's stage is longer even than of the main protagonist Alfredo. The latter describes his servant as follows:

"Martín was my servant and confidant, he was 45 years old and had a great deal of experience of the world; he was French by birth and was bound to me by ties of great affection; his countenance was as grave as one of La Rouchefoucauld's maxims; his hair, at most two centimeters long, gave him a certain Puritan air (. . .) Martín was one of that sort of men that, though born into the lower orders, upon close observation revealed themselves to be most interesting (. . .) He had a curious way of expressing himself; by drawing on his native tongue he would somehow give each phrase a certain French twist."³³

The ironic relationship between the servant Martín in Blest Gana's 1853 novel and *Martín Rivas's* titular hero had to have been clear in the author's mind as he chose to give the same name to both characters. The broad experience and severe countenance ascribed to the one correlate with the moral attributes associated with the other. Taken further, the first Martín's "Puritan" qualities might also explain the almost Lutheran sense of Rivas's first name, which stands in marked contrast to the patently Catholic names of

Rivas's friend Rafael San Luis. The Frenchified speech and manners of *Martín Rivas's* Agustín Encina are likewise also anticipated in "the French-born" servant Martín of *A Social Scene*. There is then a way in which the early figure of Martín the servant holds possibilities that are later drawn upon and developed in several of Blest Gana's subsequent characters.

But that the figure of Martín is not the only one to reveal this curious inversion must respond in some way to Blest Gana's overarching project for a series of novels on Chilean society. Adelaida de Farcy, the heroine of Blest Gana's 1858 novel *Fascination*, for example, is a lady of the aristocracy who carries the same name as Doña Bernarda Cordero's meretricious and ambitious daughter. In Blest Gana's 1862 *Martín Rivas* Adelaida is downgraded and Martín's homologue is ennobled. One can trace these curious reversals of fortune among namesake characters in other Blest Gana novels, but even within *Martín Rivas* fortuitous ironies of this sort are suggested as we can see in the following scene: "Her daughters are Adelaida and Edelmira. The elder was named by her godfather, and the younger by her mother who came up with a theatrical name because she was with child when she saw *Othello*."³⁴

Are we to think Doña Bernarda mistook Edelmira for Emilia, Desdemona's servant? Might it be an oblique reference to some diva of the period? Neither guess can be substantiated, but in any case the semantic connection is made to some staged event, seen and admired. One also might consider the correspondences and phonetic links between other characters' names in the narrative. Dámaso-Diamela-Damián; here two fathers, one from the bourgeoisie and one from the lower orders, not only share the same first three letters of their respective names but resemble all too closely that of Doña Engracia's pet lap dog, Diamela. Rafael's and Fidel's names are also worth mentioning in regard to Matilde: both the zealous father's and the dismissed suitor's names rhyme. We also find a phonetic pairing in the surnames Elías-Rivas: the first, the prototype of political inconstancy and the latter, the hero of the April Liberal uprising. And just as there is an absolute consonant rhyme between Martín-Agustín, yoking the homegrown *criollo* with the Francophile, the novel also asks us to note how, in the pairing of the surnames of the two central families in the novel,

Encina-Molina, their names belie a certain kinship, despite belonging to entirely different social spheres.³⁵

It is in this sense that the above-mentioned “rhyme structure,” these fragmentary superpositions as it were, allow us to see in the character’s names in *Martín Rivas* a crossword puzzle of sorts that, at one basic level at least, points to a number of meaningful analogies in the text. When taken with the novel’s already mentioned reiterative use of certain numbers, names, and ages, these correspondences underscore a particular set of relationships within the text.

Special mention needs to be made of Martín Rivas’s name; standing opposite Rafael San Luis’s, linked to Fidel Elías’s, jingling like Agustín’s, summoning up that of an old French servant, Martín’s name is charged with a series of connotations. These various social resonances, coupled with Martín’s surname, Rivas, suggest a possible link with Balzac’s emplotment of the arriviste.³⁶

VIII

Martín Rivas takes place in a distinctly urban environment. This narrative space is that of Chile’s capital city, Santiago. This itself marks a point of divergence when we consider *Martín Rivas* vis-à-vis other key nineteenth-century Latin American novels. This fact is attributable, at least in part, to Chile’s relative higher degree of economic and political development and the attainment of greater centralization of social life within the nation-state. Politics is a topic under constant discussion by the majority of the novel’s characters; they live and breathe it daily. The interrelatedness of the public and the private is foregrounded, culminating in the April rebellion that, for a short while at least, throws bourgeois family life into turmoil. When men gather at Don Dámaso’s tertulia, talk centers openly and unabashed on the political news of the day and national affairs. It is especially worth remarking that even women characters in *Martín Rivas* interest themselves in political matters. Don Fidel’s wife, for example, manifests a clear interest in social and cultural issues and even considers herself to be a follower of George Sand’s brand of feminism. This representation stands in sharp contrast to that of women in novels like *Cumandá* or *María*,