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## Resisting and Reimagining: Flores, Ayguals, and 19th-Century Technological Innovation

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**Resisting and Reimagining:  
Flores, Ayguals, and 19<sup>th</sup>-Century  
Technological Innovation**

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[Hipertexto](#)

In 19<sup>th</sup>-century Madrid, new inventions such as the railroad and the telegraph dramatically changed daily life and interaction. In their study of the *Ensanche*, Carballo, Pallol and Vicente explain that the railroad had a profound impact on human history, not only as a method of transportation, but as a force that altered perceptions of distance and time (229). They also note that the gas plant, established in 1846, was “uno de los escasos símbolos de la nueva era industrial con los que contaba la capital del país” (271). In a European context, Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues that “technology creates an artificial environment which people become used to as a kind of second nature” (Schivelbusch 154), while in the context of Madrid, the city was “el espacio de esa burguesía tradicionalista, un espacio estático y estructurado que empieza a ser invadido por el progreso” (Arroyo 83).

Within the context of the Isabeline printing press, which was itself an innovative technology, one sees a complex reaction to new machines and the effects that they had on the human urban experience. In his work *La imprenta y las letras en la España romántica*, Lee Fontanella sets up two authors as opposite ends of a spectrum with regards to romantic writers who incorporated technology in their work. At one end is Wenceslao Ayguals de Izco, for whom the technological medium “es de tipo asociativo y colectivo y no exclusivamente individual” (17), while the other, Antonio Flores, “aplicaba la tecnología a la literatura pero, de todos modos, sus escritos normalmente representan la tendencia individual” (17-18). Fontanella claims that all romantic writers fall somewhere between Ayguals and Flores with regards to their presentation of technology and its effect on the individual and/or society. I do acknowledge two very distinct approaches to technology, but also maintain that despite their different ideological reactions to the advancements of the era, Ayguals and Flores both used technology to promote their own products and respond to the desires of their readers. The dichotomy between the two men – the resistance to new technologies contrasted with the celebratory innovation of the medium – captures the “unevenly modern city” (Sieburth 140) of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Madrid in all its complexity.

## Rage against the Machine: Flores and Technology

Flores's real psychological fears in the context of modernity were related to the creation of vanity and the loss of the individual in the face of excessive representation. With the proliferation of images and depictions of real life, Flores feared the loss of the true self, and much of Flores's work is a rallying cry against new modes of representation and their effect on the human condition, specifically against the commodification and distortion of the individual.<sup>1</sup> These new technologies changed the ways in which *madrileños* interacted with their environment and with each other, and if Flores is to be believed, they had a profound impact on human psychology as well.

This urban presence of progress and innovation seemed to have bothered Antonio Flores in ways that numerous scholars have recognized; Lee Fontanella explains Flores's "bewilderment before the face of a new medium...faced with problems that new technologies inevitably will present" ("Fashion and Styles" 186). Meanwhile, Edward Baker acknowledges that Flores "se mostró especialmente atento a aquello que hoy denominaríamos nuevas tecnologías y formas de comunicación y a las vivencias surgidas en torno a ellas" (86). Flores found visual media especially vexing; there is a persistent "antagonismo expresado por Flores hacia las nuevas tecnologías y medios visuales que hacen de la ciudad" (Haidt, "Flores en Babilonia" 300). His essays on the matter are often satirical and defensive in response to the proliferation of portraits; he complains in *Ayer, hoy y mañana* that "Nadie se escapa de ser retratado y de ser vendido" (IV 120). The novelty of capturing an image is bothersome to Flores because "Si estornudáis, os retrata estornudando; si bostezáis, copia el bostezo; y, en suma, el pistógrafo copia el pájaro que pasa volando por la ventanilla del coche" (*AHM* IV 119).

Naturally, other technologies were problematic as well; Flores claimed that the electric telegraph was "un rey constitucional verdaderamente irresponsable" (*AHM* IV 144) and that "con las luces de gas, que no dejan rincones oscuros...los corrales han quedado convertidos en unos verdaderos templos de la inmortalidad" (*AHM* IV 56). Several of his objections took on a spatial component; the growth of the railroad, for example, was a necessary process that shortened the travel time between cities and allowed for more contact between people who would not have been able to meet in a previous century, but Flores quips that the "hombres de ayer no conocieron ni aun sospechaban que había de conocerse nunca" (*AHM* III 196). In the new age of trains and steam engines, "los viajeros, llenos de orgullo, van a merced de la máquina, en cuya invención todos reclaman su cacho de gloria" (*AHM* III 190). A traveler was defined by his choice of transportation, be it the peace and tranquility of the coach, or

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<sup>1</sup> For more, see:

Haidt, Rebecca. "Commodifying Place and Time: Photography, Memory, and Media Cultures around 1850." *On Photography, History, and Memory in Spain. Hispanic Issues On Line Debates* 3 (2011).

Haidt, Rebecca. "Flores en Babilonia: Los "gritos" de Madrid y el imaginario urbano hacia 1850." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*. 10:3 (2009): 299-318.

the formal, academic air of the omnibus (*AHM V* 36, 43), and seemed to be subjected to travel against his will.

One of Flores's most critical essays in *Ayer, hoy y mañana*, "El gran reloj del siglo XIX," speaks directly to his fear of the effects of technology on the human experience. The great clock that man carries in his pocket at all times is a symbol of a mathematical, statistical age that is turning him into a number. Time is increasingly divided and mathematical, and the metaphorical clock that divides up man's life "[no] señala la hora en que [vive], pero marca las horas que [ha] vivido, las que [ha] empleado en comer y en dormir y en trabajar y en hacer el vago" (III 154). The 19th century, in Flores's estimation, had become "el siglo de los matemáticos" (III 153), in which the personified statistic is ever mindful of what people do and how they spend their time, but cares nothing about their individual personalities. Flores addresses the reader directly, admonishing him: "Eres muy rico, eres muy sabio, estás casi a punto de ser omnipotente, pero has perdido tu personalidad" (III 151).

Although he was a member of the publishing industry, Flores even reacts negatively to the proliferation of dictionaries, manuals, and books, complaining that "La erudición ha salido a pública subasta" (*AHM V* 106). Whether or not he was willing to acknowledge it, Flores used new technologies on a daily basis, and his complaints about lithographs<sup>2</sup> and steam engines<sup>3</sup> were somewhat disingenuous as he was using both technologies to produce and distribute his materials. Ironically, Flores was promoting an awareness of technology; on a basic, textual level, he was talking about watches, trains, steam engines, and portraits, thus disseminating knowledge of these items through criticism, while on a visual level, Flores took advantage of lithographs and woodcuts to complement his texts during his leadership of *El Laberinto*. No later than the fifth issue of the paper<sup>4</sup>, readers began to see as many as two pages dedicated to graphic advertisements for other publications or novels:

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<sup>2</sup> "Me irritan los dibujantes / los grabadores, me angustian / los literatos, me abrasan / y en la imprenta me espeluznan" (*El Laberinto*, 16 de abril de 1845, 187).

<sup>3</sup> Flores claimed that inventors like James Watts were "dejando a cargo del vapor el cuidado de todos nuestros negocios." ("Cuadros de costumbres de actualidad," *La Época*, Núm. 1027, 4 de agosto de 1852, 5).

<sup>4</sup> Image from: *El Laberinto*, 1 de enero de 1844, 69.

## RIENZI, Ó EL ÚLTIMO TRIBUNO;

novela original

DE M. E. L. BULWER,

TRADUCIDA POR DON ANTONIO FERRER DEL RÍO.



Edición de lujo en 4.<sup>o</sup> mayor, ilustrada con grabados en el texto y láminas sueltas. Van publicadas siete entregas á 5 rs. cada una.

## VIAJE SENTIMENTAL DE STERNE

A PARIS,

por el señor de

Yald.



TRADUCIDA

libremente al

castellano.

Edición ilustrada con ciento y sesenta grabados en madera, intercalados en el texto, y doce tirados aparte. Un tomo en 4.<sup>o</sup> mayor 40 rs. en rústica.

## TRABAJOS Y MISERIAS DE LA VIDA HUMANA.



Entretimiento dividido en cuadros, jocos-serios; edición ilustrada con ciento veinte y tres grabados preciosos repartidos en el texto y veinte y dos láminas tiradas aparte. Un tomo en 4.<sup>o</sup> mayor 60 rs. rústica.

Figure 1: Advertisements from *El Laberinto*

Despite the contradictions that arise from a newspaper director who spoke out against technological innovation at every turn, and yet actively utilized technological advances in print journalism, Flores was remarkably consistent in his rhetoric, and this did sometimes manifest itself in the way he chose to run his publications. He directed *El Laberinto* for a year and a half, supervising 36 issues, all of which were 14 pages long and ended with his trademark fortnightly review called “Revista de la Quincena.” In May of 1845, the leadership of the paper was turned over to Antonio Ferrer del Río, at which point the fortnightly review was divided into local theater/bullfight announcements and European news, and the paper was shortened by half and published weekly. The announcement in *El Laberinto* explaining the changes attributed them to “el nuevo plan de nuestro periódico.”<sup>5</sup> Publications in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century were becoming shorter, more frequent, and more palatable to the technologically-aware public, and that was outside Flores’s realm of experience. After 36 issues, Antonio Flores ceased to be involved with *El Laberinto*, and the paper continued for five more months in his absence. The “Advertencia” in the 37<sup>th</sup> issue merely stated: “Ha cesado el señor don Antonio Flores en la dirección de *El Laberinto*,”<sup>6</sup> so it is unclear whether he quit or was edged out of the production. However, it is clear that his departure coincided with a

<sup>5</sup> “Advertencia,” *El Laberinto*. 1 de mayo de 1845, 193.

<sup>6</sup> “Advertencia,” *El Laberinto*. 1 de mayo de 1845, 194.

decisive reformatting of the paper; Flores's long-winded, detailed examinations of life in Madrid were replaced by shorter texts that could be published more frequently.

### **Information and Industry: Ayguals and Technology**

Ayguals de Izco took quite a different approach; as an entrepreneur and publishing innovator, he fell more into the category of the “pequeños burgueses que se lamentan de la progresiva desnaturalización del color local de la vida popular española, los que por otro lado manifiestan su admiración por el progreso técnico de Europa” (Ucelay 158). The mentions of technology in Ayguals's novels were much less frequent, and were often positive, praising the democratic nature of new technologies:

El telégrafo, el vapor y los ferro-carriles han herido de muerte a los tiranos. El telégrafo, el vapor y los ferro-carriles pasearán por el orbe entero la gloriosa insigne de la democracia. El telégrafo, el vapor y los ferro-carriles propagarán por do quiera el triunfo de la fraternidad universal. (*Palacio* I 738)

Other mentions were neutral, such as when he described how “millares de luces bañaban de inmenso resplandor los sinuosos salones del palacio de la marquesa de Verde-Rama” (*Pobres y ricos* 489). In his newspapers, Ayguals displayed almost none of the animosity toward technology that we see in Flores; he directed seven newspapers, several of which were even named after machines, such as *El Telégrafo* or *La linterna mágica*. Ayguals traveled to the 1851 International Exposition in London to procure new technologies, and he also supported the democratization of information. In collaboration with the *Sociedad Literaria*, Ayguals wrote and distributed encyclopedias, collections, anthologies, and even children's educational texts called *silabarios*.

Like Flores, Ayguals was influenced by the technological currents of the time, but he also contributed to the modernization of printing machinery and marketing. Critics like Sylvie Baulo, Juan Ignacio Ferreras and Víctor Carrillo have written about Ayguals's innovations and techniques; Sylvie Baulo in particular dedicates an entire article called “Prensa y publicidad” to the advances made by the *Sociedad Literaria*:

Ayguals de Izco utilizó métodos comerciales que merecen ser analizados por la modernidad que manifiestan en España. La estrategia global hizo de la Sociedad Literaria una empresa floreciente durante algunos años, razón por la que constituye, para los especialistas de la edición madrileña de mediados del siglo XIX, un modelo de empresa editorial. (63)

Commercially speaking, “la novela de entregas fue uno de los mejores negocios de la época” (Ferreras 36) in a time when industrial production was smaller-scale and focused on consumer goods like tobacco and shoes.<sup>7</sup> Ayguals did everything he could

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<sup>7</sup> See: Capella Martínez, Miguel. *La industria en Madrid: ensayo histórico crítico de la fabricación y artesanía madrileñas*. Vol. 2. Madrid: Cámara Oficial de la Industria en Madrid, 1963.

to further the success of newspapers, such as purchasing printing machines abroad, adapting the models of successful French novels, and experimenting with the length, formatting, and advertising content of serialized publications. He was an editor during a time period when that position began to have real possibilities for modernization and novelty. Ricardo Valladares Roldán cites other figures like Ayguals, who “llegaron a fundar periódicos que ellos mismos dirigían” (59) such as León Amarita (*El Censor*), Gregorio Estradam, (*La Litografía*), and Casimiro Rufino Ruiz (*Guía del Comercio*), identifying them as important figures in the cultural union of art, study, and intellectualism. However, it was largely because of innovators like Ayguals, who took the initiative to evolve the technology of the medium, that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was so transformative for the print industry.

### Technology and Promotion

The publications that Flores and Ayguals directed were technologically advanced for the time period, and these “adelantos tecnológicos...favorecieron la posibilidad de expresar la experiencia multivariada” (Fontanella, *La imprenta y las letras* 67). Some of the advances in printed technology were aimed at improving textual legibility, such as columns and clearer type<sup>8</sup>, but the majority were “tecnologías visuales...destinadas, de hecho, a fines plena y tradicionalmente didácticos y satíricos” (Haidt, “Flores en Babilonia” 301). In addition to textual content tailored to the interests and budget of a middle-class reader<sup>9</sup>, the newspapers also contained portraits, landscapes, flourishes, and decorative initials in order to make the reading experience more varied and exciting. Ayguals’s publications incorporated more and more images throughout the 1840s; *La Risa* (1843-1844) contained only two or three images per issue, while *El Dómine Lucas* (1844-1846) had 10-12 and *El Fandango* (1844-1846) had 15-18, especially caricatures and cartoons.<sup>10</sup> The introduction of images in publications was gradual, because Ayguals understood that “una tecnología sólo puede penetrar en la sociedad en la medida que venga a satisfacer determinadas demandas planteadas y lo haga de un modo eficaz y económicamente posible” (Riego 294). Given Flores’s aversion to technology, one might expect him to omit images from his publications, but *El Laberinto* included 15-20 images per issue, especially in the advertisements section.

Flores did not advertise as aggressively as Ayguals, but he still made effective use of the space in his own publications. For example, the “Anuncios” section of *El Laberinto* began to include images in 1844<sup>11</sup>, and often included up to two pages of

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<sup>8</sup> In “Dos estudios sobre Wenceslao Ayguals,” Víctor Carrillo mentions “los diferentes tipos de letra (hemos contado hasta ocho), lo que hace que la lectura sea fácil y llamativa para la vista” (13).

<sup>9</sup> “A la diversité des prix et aux facilités d’acquisition, Ayguals ajoute une autre technique: celle qui consiste à cibler des groupes particuliers” (Baulo, *La trilogie* 124).

<sup>10</sup> Sylvie Baulo explains that “*El Fandango* évoque l’illustration comme un critère de la qualité de l’œuvre et de sons succès qui va entraîner une argumentation du prix du roman” (*La trilogie* 146).

<sup>11</sup> *El Laberinto* Núm. 5, 1 de enero de 1844.

advertisements for almanacs, biographies, translations, and works of fiction, such as *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos*<sup>12</sup> and Flores's translation of *Les mystères de Paris*.<sup>13</sup> Flores also advertised *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos* in the newspaper *El Clamor Público*,<sup>14</sup> which did not use images to draw attention to the ads, but rather large, block capital letters.<sup>15</sup> Ayguals, meanwhile, advertised primarily in his own publications; his multiple newspapers gave him many opportunities for cross-promotion. In an issue of *El Fandango*<sup>16</sup>, he dedicated almost 2 ½ pages to advertisements for *María* and *El cancionero del pueblo*, including a half-page ad for *María* that he reused in the October 1<sup>st</sup> issue of *El Dómine Lucas*. Advertising was a complex process; the newspaper directors had to offer enough content to keep their subscribers happy and enough promotion to interest them in future publications, all while keeping the newspaper small enough so that printing costs did not outweigh profits.

### The Ticking Clock of Immediacy

The central question when considering the technologies of the era seems to be time; the time it took to perform tasks, learn information, capture an image, travel from one place to another, or even publish a newspaper was shortened. The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was a time when “Machinery and speed seemed to capture fleeting reality” (Haidt, “Commodifying Place” 17), when important historical events were reported with increasing immediacy<sup>17</sup>, when the world was beginning to be “perceived to be ‘smaller’ than it used to be, a phenomenon known as time-space compression” (Reynolds 19), and when transportation innovations were shortening distances and allowing people to travel across Spain in a matter of hours.<sup>18</sup> Many of the spatial innovations of the time such as mapping and railway construction also had temporal ramifications such as time zones and travel itineraries. Thus, time became more standardized and uniform for the

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<sup>12</sup> *El Laberinto* Núm. 5, 1 de enero de 1844, 70.

<sup>13</sup> *El Laberinto* Núm. 9, 1 de marzo de 1844, 126.

<sup>14</sup> *El Clamor Público*, 7 de septiembre de 1844, p. 4 & 24 de octubre de 1844, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ayguals also advertised his translation of Sue's *El judío errante* in *El Clamor Público*, 14 de noviembre de 1844, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Num. 10, 15 de septiembre de 1845, pp. 153-155.

<sup>17</sup> See: Henkin, David H. *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. Standage, Tom. *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-Line Pioneers*. New York: Walker & Co., 1998.

<sup>18</sup> See: Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century*. New York: Urizen, 1979.

Gómez Mendoza, Antonio. *Ferrocarriles y cambio económico en España 1855-1913: Un Enfoque De Nueva Historia Económica*. Madrid: Alianza, 2007.

Additionally, for a discussion of the impact of the railway on print media, see:

Sinnema, Peter W. *Dynamics of the pictured page: representing the nation in the Illustrated London News*. Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998.



sake of public order<sup>19</sup>, and chapters in Ayguals's and Flores's novels often started with a temporal marker such as "El reloj de San Isidro acababa de dar las tres de la tarde" (*María* 141) or "permíteme que te hable del día 17 de junio de 1834" (*FEC* I 42). These mentions of time all fit into the "eje modal" of narration, the axis which determines the ways in which the content of the story – or the "eje proairético" – is organized (Romero Tobar 81). The temporal markers were necessary because of the short chapters, which could leave readers confused from one issue to the next. The short chapters were just another symptom of the rhythm of the century, which "presses for ever shorter pauses in the change of impressions – cigarettes can be smoked more rapidly than cigars – and this more impatient tempo is irresistibly drawn to temporal boundaries, to beginnings and endings, to comings and goings" (Connerton 61). Authors were subject to the public demand for a temporal shift, while their publications contributed to the episodic nature of literature. And yet, even with the shrinking time of the present, both Ayguals and Flores frequently turned their gazes toward the future; Ayguals hoped for political reform and insisted that "la democracia es ya sin duda el único puerto de salvación que nos queda,"<sup>20</sup> while Flores pleaded: "Olvidemos lo que somos y lo que fuimos, para no pensar en otra cosa sino en lo que vamos a ser más adelante" (*AHM* IV 41).

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<sup>19</sup> For more on this phenomenon, see Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

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