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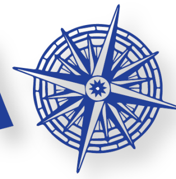
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The Estate Must Be Protected! Work and the Necessity of Restraint in Roa Bárcena's *La quinta modelo* (1857)

Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón

Left to his own devices, man succumbs to vagrancy, idleness and, ultimately, death. That is the lesson that lies behind the political parody and moralizing polemic that is *La quinta modelo* (1857), a novel penned by Mexican Catholic writer José María Roa Bárcena (1827-1908). Written in the eve of the Reform War (1857-1861), *La quinta modelo* staged the confrontation between a traditional and providential order, and what it considered the foreign and dangerous idealism of Mexican liberals in the domestic space of an *hacendado* family. Published in the Mexico City press of the time, the novel served not only as a cautionary tale of the dangers of the political and constitutional platform of the Partido Liberal, which had come to power after the Revolution of Ayutla (1854-1855), but also as a condemnation of what Roa Bárcena foresaw as an imminant and dangerous war.[1]

In this article I study how, because of the entrenched and admonitory character of Roa Bárcena's novel, the Catholic theological premise of man's impure inclination towards sin becomes accentuated and articulated as a natural propensity for the interruption of labor. It offers a rich glimpse into the idea of work as it existed in the imaginary of a nineteenth-century conservative Mexican letrado. I argue that Roa Bárcena's focus on the estate should not only be read as synecdoche for the nation. In addition, it should be taken as what, for him, is the fundamental element of a necessary and providential social order which restrains the constitutive interruption of man; his innate predisposition for the sin of sloth. At stake in Roa Bárcena's prioritizing of the estate's wellbeing—the *oikos*—over the nation's—the *polis*—is an understanding of what man's role should be with regards to the divine order of all things: not politics with its commitment to change and reform, but economics, understood as the virtuous administration of all of God's things. Thus, for Roa Bárcena, as we will see, any attempt to tamper with the celestial division of labor that goes beyond its conservation can only lead to the interruption of work and, consequently, of life, as it comes to happen in the novel.

Set in the late 1840s, after the American invasion of Mexico, the novel tells the story of how *pater familias* and quixotic liberal Gaspar Rodríguez returns from political exile only to become involved in the supposedly corrupt and vague politics of the *Partido Liberal*.[2] His involvement eventually leads him to attempt to bring his ideals into implementation by transforming his estate into an example of a utopian republic where laborers, freed from

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their traditional obligations, dedicate themselves to work. This political experiment ultimately ends in the interruption of all work, the destruction of the estate's economy and of Gaspar's sanity, as well as the death of the family's heir, Enrique. Opposite to the *hacendado* and his wayward son, are his wife and daughter, Octaviana and Amelia, a Jesuit priest and a faithful administrator, all standard-bearers of catholicism and the conservative order. Beyond the novel's overt reference and parodical assault on Mexican liberals, lies its injunction of the political and ontological implications of liberal and democratic ideas, especially with regards to the question of work and its interruption. In what follows, I will argue that what catalyzes Roa Bárcena's speculation is his belief that the democracy of the Mexican liberals threatens to destroy the existing and predestined order of the world, shunning its virtuous economy understood as *oikos-nomia*, the balance of the household, for an immoral economy which makes the mistake of ignoring man's Adamic nature. Put simply, what moves the novel is the Catholic belief that, if not under duress, man will always avoid work.

In Mexico, like elsewhere, the Nineteenth Century brought the question of work to the fore, not only as an autonomous economic category, but as an integral question to the social and political life of men. Notwithstanding ideological differences, both conservative and liberal *letrados* sought an inculcation of a productive mentality to banish vices that, in their opinion, the country had inherited from the Spanish colony—the scorn of work, unproductivity, and the aspiration for public employment (Hale 275)—and which they blamed for the underdeveloped national economy. Concerned with the economic grounds of the nation, *letrados* of all stripes thought that "until the Mexican people were employed in productive industry, the country would remain economically impoverished and politically chaotic" (275). Whereas when it came to economics the differences between conservatives and liberals were minimal (Rodríguez Piña 17), debates around what to make of work, how to understand it, and what its role was in human life and societies raged throughout the cultural panorama, seeping into constitutional congresses, newspapers, literature, philosophical disquisition, and theological pamphlets.

Under Roa Bárcena's Catholic purview, work is both denigrated and celebrated. It is denigrated because its necessity is punitive—God's penalty for man's original sin—and celebrated because its compliance and actualization can only be penitential. Work's place, within the providential order in which it existed, was far from being one of centrality, as it came to be for liberals and political economists. As Ruth MacKay has said, before the Enlightenment and the development of the liberal tradition, labor "as an autonomous economic concept would not have been a familiar notion to anybody" (262). In other words, in the Christian worldview work appears as secondary to concerns of more importance such as duty, virtue, and charity. As such, unlike in liberalism, which insists on individualism and self-interest, Catholic ideas of work exist embedded in a larger providential economy of the world that transcends the sphere of action of the human individual, and inserts the worker within a larger hierarchical social and celestial structure bound by obligation, responsibility, and tradition.

It was with the authority granted by a sense of duty and responsibility, theologically-grounded on the conviction of a providential economy of the world, that certain mid-nineteenth century Mexican Catholics like Roa Bárcena cried foul in the eve of the

Reform War as they saw liberals (successfully) push forward an agenda and constitution that they deemed too naively foreign and metaphysical, too inconsiderate of the material circumstances of the Mexican populace (Connaughton 350; Galeana de Valadés 50). Despite the fact that Roa Bárcena's catholicism was particularly radical when compared to most conservatives, for most supporters of the *Partido Conservador* and conservatism in general, the liberals' push for a federal republic "marked by the equality of all citizens in which corporatism neither constrained individual rights not competed with the state for the individual's allegiance" threatened the social structure inherited from the Spanish colonial era, with its assortment of distinct interest groups, communal landholding traditions, and legal privileges (Haworth 93). Engaging liberalism, Catholics were also drawn to the sphere of work, even if only to place the Christian conception of labor as a duty at the forefront and to insist on its essence as the theologically necessary restrainer that kept man from his sinful tendencies and self-destruction. For conservatives in general, liberal forgetfulness of local circumstance had led to the continuous failure of liberal policies that, in the name of freedom, had brought about more damage than good. For Catholics in particular, as *La quinta modelo* goes on to illustrate, these foreign conceptualizations of work eroded the structures of solidarity, responsibility, and duty that, in theory, characterized the regime inherited from the Spanish Crown, leading only to anarchy and the further exploitation of those in need.

For liberals, it was the existing and traditional order of the world defended by Roa Bárcena which had brought the Mexican economy to a standstill. The liberal position could be summarized by rewriting this article's lede: left to his own devices, man dedicates his life to work, productivity, and, ultimately, freedom. In fact, this liberal maxim, antipodal to Roa Bárcena's, was proper to most economic thought of the Nineteenth Century and was constantly brought to bear as the grounds on which a productive, entrepreneurial citizenry had to be built in order to develop the nascent nation. We see this, for example, when Ignacio Vallarta, standing in front of the liberal Constitutional Congress of 1856 in defense of freedom of work, confidently asserted that "[e]l derecho al trabajo libre es una exigencia imperiosa del hombre, porque es una condición indispensable para el desarrollo de su personalidad" (qtd. in Montiel y Duarte 390). In his spiel, Vallarta went on to insist that this principle was so explicit, and universally known and agreed upon by the other members of the Congress, that he did not feel the need to prove it or expound on the many "teorías económicas, jurídicas y morales que extraña" (390). For Vallarta and his fellow congressmen, and according to him, everybody else there, it was a truism that work was the constitutional activity of man's development. Vallarta and his fellow constitutionalists were, of course, average liberals for their time. As such, his brief remark proved the silent profession of a double conceptualization of work produced by a hundred odd years of enlightened and liberal politico-economic thought: to name work was to name both an ontological category and the limited, historical and material category of actual, bodily work.

As we will see, Roa Bárcena believed that all liberals, whether consciously or not, were invariably arguing in favor of socialism. While there were some liberals in the midst of the Reform War who did in fact embrace a variety of utopian socialism and who placed the liberal concept of work as the foundation for a successful utopia, as was the case of Nicolás Pizarro Suárez (see Illades; Illades and Sandoval; Rodríguez; and Pizarro Suárez),

they were few and far between. Because of the twin origin of liberalism and utopian socialism, a vast majority of the key influential Mexican liberals felt the need to shun socialism in different occasions through a variety of arguments. This was the case even with Ignacio Ramírez, who was otherwise one of the main ideologues of a more socialized strand of Mexican liberalism, and who reasoned himself away from socialist positions, even if elliptically, as Carlos Illades has shown (37). Illades writes that, for Ramírez, the right to work could only be truly fulfilled in communism, yet, in said system, it would cease to be a right and become an obligation: "y por tanto, una negación de la libertad asentada en la Constitución Mexicana bajo los principios de libertad de trabajo y de industria" (37). In other words, despite Roa Bárcena's radicalization of his opponents' positions, liberals, like conservatives, were on their guard and ready to attack socialist ideas on sight, precisely because certain utopian socialisms often spun off liberalism's own ideological tenet.

José María Roa Bárcena is most commonly known for his later work as historian and chronicler of the Mexican-American War published as *Recuerdos de la invasión norteamericana por un joven de entonces* between 1879 and 1882. The son of a Catholic family proud of its Spanish roots (Rico Mansard 7; López Aparicio 34), he served for most of his life as businessman, journalist and writer, under the protection of famed conservative *letrado* Lucas Alamán. Throughout the first half of his life he was a key figure in conservative newspapers and journals of the time, among which we find *El Universal*, *El Eco Nacional*, *La Cruz*, and *La Sociedad*, the most clamorous of these publication which he himself edited (Rico Mansard 8, Haworth 109). During the decade of 1850, Roa Bárcena was a prolific polemicist, publishing some of the most ardent and Catholic arguments for the necessity of conservatism, whether in the form of newspaper articles or the serialized *La quinta modelo*, and zealously championing the conservative cause, warning over and over again of the cataclysmic effect of a confrontation between liberals and conservatives, a confrontation that could not but be a "fight to the death" (qtd. in Haworth 109). After the failure, in the following decade, of the French Invasion and the Second Mexican Empire of Maximilian I, whom Roa Bárcena supported, he retired from journalism and public life so as to dedicate himself to business (Rico Mansard 7-9).[3] The end of the Nineteenth Century found him as a collaborator in Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera's *Revista Azul*.[4]

La quinta modelo was published in installments in the Catholic bulwark *La Cruz* in 1857 to serve, as I have said before, as a cautionary tale of the dangers of the political influence of the *Partido Liberal* (Rico Mansard 13).[5] In fact, the novel is distinctively geared to critique the democratization of work that liberals espoused in their writings, which became law in the same year of 1857, when the liberal government ratified a constitution in which articles IV and V overtly took on the question regarding work. The first of these made the freedom to work—and to not work, according to some—, an inalienable right of the Mexican citizenry.[6] Article V prohibited any compulsion to work without the full consent of the citizen and made it legally impossible to authorize "ningún contrato que tenga por objeto la pérdida o el irrevocable sacrificio de la libertad del hombre, ya sea por causa de trabajo, de educación, o de voto religioso" ("Constitución Política" 2). The ratification of the Constitution of 1857 finalized the ideological polarization of Mexican politics, which inevitably led, as Roa Bárcena warned, to open warfare.

Granted, the division of nineteenth-century Mexican political ideologies between two camps broadly defined as "liberales" and "conservadores" is often used in a rather simplistic and flattening manner.[7] However, it is a particularly apt representation of the period spanning approximately from 1849, when Lucas Alamán founded the *Partido Conservador*, until 1867, when, with the restoration of the Liberal Republic, most conservative forces were absorbed by liberalism—and, in fact, came to define many of the policies of the ruling liberal camp, as Humberto Morales and Will Fowler have argued (22).[8] Self-avowed conservative politics as such emerged in the midst of the wide-spread disillusionment among the political classes that characterized the mid-1840s. Decades of economic stagnation and the calamity of the Mexican-American War led to a schism in the political debate which intensified through the following century (Morales and Fowler 17). It was in this context, and a year after the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty of 1848, which officially ended the conflict with the northern neighbor, that Alamán, Roa Bárcena's protector, gave conservative politics its main intellectual platform. Among the many points espoused in Alamán's ideology of conservatism, which is directly related to the discussion of *La quinta modelo*, was the belief that "todo proyecto politico debía estar basado en las necesidades reales y la cultura presente y pasada del país" (Morales and Fowler 18). For Alamán and others, the imposition of foreign ideas would only continue to lead the nation to chaos if it did not take into consideration the material reality of the Mexican circumstance (Hamnett, "Mexican Conservatives" 189). It was not politics that the moment called for; instead, it was administration.[9]

Alamán's political project attracted all sorts of conservatives. The majority of the *Partido Conservador*, however, was formed by moderates who did not only defend traditionalist morality and ethics, but who also believed wholeheartedly that the development and stability of the Mexican economy depended on foreign investors, who in turn could be attracted through the projections of an image of the order and stability proper of a monarchy (Morales and Fowler 18).[10] Yet, a minority to which Roa Bárcena belonged, as well as, among many others, strident Catholic José Joaquin Pesado, his colleague and editor at *La Cruz*, were drawn to the party not only for the aforementioned reasons. They also believed the new conservative faction was the best chance to preserve both colonial traditions and the privileges, and the status of the Church in the face of rabid anticlericalism (18).

The analysis that follows attempts to break with the few published studies of Roa Bárcena's novel as it tries to read his arguments beyond his qualification as a conservative and retrograde, under the belief that a study of conservative thought, such as the one displayed in Roa Bárcena's work, can help us construct a counterpoint that goes beyond the liberal paradigms of the productive subject which became hegemonic in intellectual production around this same time. In this vein, I follow the work of Simon During, who in *Against Democracy* (2012) points out that in literary texts historically categorized as conservative, we find, today, "a reservoir, if not exactly of hope or radical will, then at least of experiences and values at odds with (or even incommensurate with) current social conditions" (viii). For During, "[c]onservatism happens, then, whenever the past tribunalizes the present and, by the same stroke, when a check to progressivism is administered" (43). In other words, conservative thought, recuperated and properly contextualized, can offer a perch from which to articulate a more nuanced critique of

ideas that have since become deeply entrenched, as is the case with liberal conceptualizations of work.

Scholarly approaches to Roa Bárcena's *La quinta modelo* have been limited to ideological surveys that stop after qualifying the novel as conservative or reactionary, taking it to be a mere historical curiosity. This gesture participates in what Ignacio Sánchez Prado has, most recently, called the "liberal matrix" of Mexican political thought, a hegemonic teleology according to which all roads lead to liberalism ("El impasse liberal"). Despite its participation in this logic, Beatriz Alba-Koch's article is the most incisive, and one of the few that go beyond a mere plot summary of the novel. Alba-Koch reads the novel as a conservative "counter-utopia," which she proceeds to read against Pizarro Suárez's *El monedero* (1862) and Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's *Navidad en las montañas* (1871).[11] However, her analysis of *La quinta modelo* reveals itself to be preliminary when compared to the more extended analysis of the other two novels, precisely because conservative points of view have traditionally been seen simply as reactionary and superficial.

Alba-Koch's, however, is not the only article written on the novel. In "The Literary Personality of José María Roa Bárcena" (1951), J.S. Brushwood dismissed the novel as an impassioned political slip in the otherwise romantic and "restrained" work of the author (206). John Hays Hammond's 1949 article provided a quick sketch of Roa Bárcena as a "Mexican Champion of Catholicism," dedicating only a paragraph to the novel in order to describe it as the "Don Quijote of Liberalism" (52). Howard Wheeler, in his 1935 dissertation, recurred to *La quinta modelo* as a sociohistorical tool to understand nineteenth-century Mexico, which led him to the thesis that the novel was the "most complete exposition of the problem of the peons as presented in the Mexican novel and as an example of how an author can, in his very blindness to conditions, foresee coming events without ever realizing that he is playing the part of a prophet" (160-161). The most recent article by Begoña Arteta's repeats the rest of the scholarship. Arteta briefly outlines the ideas and plot points of the novel as an example of the social and political use of the nineteenth-century Mexican novel. Moreover, Rico Mansard's biography of Roa Bárcena also contains a few pages of analysis dedicated to surveying the general ideological panorama of the novel, which the author concludes by stating that Roa Bárcena did not offer a solution to the problems presented in the story and, thus, decided to merely return to an anachronic, Catholic form of life (27).

Contrary to Rico Mansard, I believe that Roa Bárcena was far from being anachronistic. Such a characterization has to be understood as yet another aspect of the retrospective liberalization of the Nineteenth Century that historian Josefina Zoraida Vázquez has consistently critiqued (621). In the context of the emergence of conservative politics as such, which I presented above, *La quinta modelo* appears neither as the expression of an outdated Catholic ideology nor as merely a reactionary outburst. *La quinta modelo* was very much a product of the milieu in which it was published; an attempt to respond to the disillusionment of the previous decade and to the threats of a liberalism considered too ideologically radical with a positive project of its own, even if one that is articulated as a critique of the opposing party. In fact, for an ideology so embattled with the dangers implicit in idealism and utopia, *La quinta modelo* presents us, perhaps against its own will, with what could be called a conservative utopia. Further distancing myself from the

corpus on the Catholic author, I believe that an understanding of Catholic and conservative thought is seminal to any approach to the question of work that attempts to go beyond the liberal consensus on the topic. As Gerardo Necochea has insisted, the multiple searches and disaggregated forays that throughout the Nineteenth Century gave way to what only seems like a relatively stable concept of work, were always in tension between a divine and a secularized vision that subjected labor to the material domains of men (55).

La quinta modelo is Roa Bárcena's novelization of one of these disaggregated forays into the question of work. In the novel, politics is the slippery slope that leads Gaspar Rodríguez to the undoing of his estate's virtuous economy and to the interruption of work. The reader first encounters the patriarch at the moment of his repatriation, aboard a steamboat that returns him from the United States to the shores of Veracruz, on a cold October morning of 1848 or 1849, after the ratification of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Having been exiled for a period due to his harsh critique against the regime then in power, Gaspar is welcomed by an assembly of like-minded politicos that, in the form of two letters, pressure him to make a choice between the state and his estate. The first informs Gaspar of his election as district representative to serve in the Constituent Congress as deputy, and of "lo mucho que el pueblo espera de ti" (100). The second, on the other hand, urges him to visit his estate as soon as possible, not only because his family misses him dearly, but also because a fire has decimated the property (100). Unfortunately for his wife and children, Gaspar quickly forgets his household's tragedy after hearing of his election. After all, writes Roa Bárcena, "estaba escrito en el catálogo de sus más íntimas convicciones que el individuo y la familia nada son ante la sociedad, nada son ante el pueblo" (101). In other words, when given the choice between politics and economics, of the polis and the *oikos*, Gaspar does not hesitate in his decision for the former. Of this, the author comments: "¡Singular modo de raciocinar! Se acepta el todo y se quiere reducir a la nada sus elementos constitutivos" (101).

As I briefly noted at the beginning of the article, Roa Bárcena places Gaspar Rodríguez's estate and its management, the *oikos* and its *nomos*, not only as the centerpiece of the novel, but also as the "constitutive element" of the rational and divine disposition of the world. As such, the estate becomes the minimal social denominator, the unit out of which the providential social order spawns. In turn, the estate's administration, insofar as it is the administration of an eternal and closed system that strives towards equilibrium, assumes the form of the representation of rectitude and of virtuous conduct. The correct management and balance of the *oikos* implies a celestial distribution and division of labor across the social strata. Unlike in liberal thought, in Roa Bárcena's worldview, Catholic theology and mercantilist political economy, labor is not an ends to itself, but part of a Christian logic of asceticism and of social and religious duty. In this sense, the procurement of work occupies a fundamental part of the good life—the life of grace and charity—as it conduces to the Christian virtue of obedience and penitence, and contributes to the conservation of the divine order and balance. Inasmuch as work is read as occupation (*ocupatio*), as the social, religious, political and moral duty of subjects, it is inevitable not to understand it in a negative sense, and, even more, because it is an imposition, whether received with resignation or not, it is unavoidably forced labor (Díez 75).

According to Sigfried Wenzel, this appraisal of human worldly activity, which became part of Christian ethics between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, and which seeped into the political economic thought of the age, canvassed the whole universe, from inanimate bodies, plants, animals, and men, in order to show that everything in the "created" world was active and busy in fulfilling its intended purposes: "The sun rises and sets every day, 'and is never lazy, from day to day, winter or summer, to fulfill God's command; trees grow and bear leaf, flower, and fruit; ants work and gather provisions; all are busy," wrote a religious commentator of the time (93). This theological understanding of work set man as subject to a life of duty and penance as preordained by God, who structured human society in a stratified manner, with each level being assigned its own clearly defined obligations. Failure to fulfill these preassigned roles represents an affront to his divine will and are, without recourse, sinful. Likewise, in the scholastic economic thought that it initiated, this idea was phrased as the condemnation of the interruption of "profitable" spiritual and material enterprises, where "profitable" was understood as the satisfaction of necessity and obligation, and not necessarily surplus value and wealth, as in later capitalist political economy.[12]

It is a misunderstanding with regards to what is kept in check by this social order that leads Gaspar Rodríguez to condemn the fate of his family. After concluding his legislative duties in the city, the patriarch returns to the homestead and, under the influence of his friend Márquez, sets out to make of his estate a "quinta modelo": a model estate that would announce the coming republic. Márquez suggests that, even if the country is still not ready for the realization of the "teorías democráticas," "¿quién nos impediría que las practicásemos, o ensayásemos por lo menos, en la hacienda de usted?" (145). Yet, in order to make citizens out of farmers and laborers, they must first make them workers. Márquez asks: "¿No podríamos estimular y ennoblecer el trabajo dando a los mozos una parte del suelo en enfiteusis? ¿No podríamos dividir ese mismo trabajo estableciendo nuevas oficinas?" (145). If successful, the model estate would attest to the possibilities of the newest and most modern agricultural, manufacturing, and administrative methods (151). Furthermore, the model estate would assert the viability of the ideas that radical liberals like Gaspar had espoused in the Constitutional Congress, but which had been held in check by the moderation of other congressmen. The suggestion hits a nerve with Gaspar, and, after spending some time reading "todos los sistemas socialistas y comunistas, desde el origen del falansterio hasta la teoría de la república universal" (152), he decides to "fundar un establecimiento que, a la vez que fuese la glorificación del trabajo, diese idea exacta, aunque en pequeño de una república pequeña" (153). There, in Roa Bárcena's enunciation of Gaspar's project, we see precisely how work comes to the forefront of any liberal project—or, at least, of any conservative *letrado's* rendition of a liberal project—that implies a rearrangement of the social order unhinged from the providential structures of the Christian worldview. Once man's celestial destiny is abolished, and his earthly existence is brought to the center, it is his own work that becomes the base of his wealth, personal happiness, and social existence. It is for this reason that Márquez insists that it is necessary to ennoble work, to relieve it of its connotation of resignation and penitence.

Ironically, key to the materialization of Gaspar's reverie, is his role as lord and master of his property. After all,

> El principal obstáculo con que se tropiezan siempre los innovadores y reformistas, viene a ser la voluntad del pueblo. Por mucho que ellos, valiéndose de una eterna palabrería, demuestren teóricamente las ventajas de sus planes y proyectos, el pueblo, que entonces deja de ser soberano para convertirse en bárbaro, se obstina en no admitirlos. (151)

The executive power already granted by his ownership of the land allows him the possibility of imposing his reform in the name of his subjects' future happiness "sin que nadie tuviese derecho de quejarse ni de reclamarle" (151), which was, for Roa Bárcena, precisely the situation of Mexico under liberal rule. This would be Gaspar's last action as owner and sovereign of the estate: to establish a reign of confraternity and equality that would consequently render him powerless and equal to his peons. Hence, after calling a meeting with his laborers and providing them with "tinas de pulque" that would "desterrar de ellos el natural encogimiento," he announced that from that day on,

> iban a ser enteramente iguales el amo y el mozo; cada uno de éstos recibiría un trozo de terreno, a fin de cultivarlo por su cuenta, sin perjuicio de desempeñar sus anteriores obligaciones respecto de la hacienda. Los mozos quedaban en absoluta libertad de trabajar o no: ya no habría castigos corporales, y el más insignificante de los peones podría ser alcalde de la ranchería y juzgar a Gaspar, puesto que quedaban abolidos toda especie de fueros. El administrador de la hacienda no podría emplear coacción alguna para obligar a los mozos al trabajo; cierto número de ellos compondrían un jurado, ante el cual se haría comparecer el administrador siempre que en el desempeño de su cargo traspasara la órbita de sus facultades legales, y las del jurado se extendían hasta deponer al administrador. (154)

Hoping to further the appreciation for their newfound freedom, Gaspar establishes a night school for the development of the laborers' arts and work that would also provide them with the "catecismo de los derechos del ciudadano," and arm them with a moral education completely based on republicanism that would in turn replace their Christian upbringing and foster their enjoyment of work (154). By redistributing land and freeing the laborers of all coercive, structural, and religious restraints in a local enactment of the aforementioned articles IV and V of the 1857 Constitution, Gaspar believes that the natural predispositions of man would steer the laborers to pursue their wellbeing and their families', and consequently, the estate's. Alas, it is the opposite that comes to happen. In typical liberal fashion, for Gaspar it is the traditional conservative system inherited from colonial times that interrupts work inasmuch as it cultivates a backward subservience in its subjects. This complacency and subservience instill in the laboring populace nothing but the contempt for work, consequently limiting man's progress and mobility.

Earlier in the novel, Roa Bárcena begins the intellectual biography of liberal protagonist Gaspar Rodríguez by stressing the Liberal Party's tendency to ignore the facticity of

catholicism and the traditional arrangement of work in everyday Mexican life, echoing Lucas Alamán's program for the *Partido Conservador*. Gaspar's anti-clericalism and dismissal of all ritual and tradition is essential to the story, according to the author, who intervenes in the narrative, especially because it arises "sólo en virtud de sus lecturas filosóficas" (98). This readerly origin of his dismissal of the material conditions and mores of Mexico is pivotal because Roa Bárcena's condemnation of liberalism and liberal thought arises from its complete disregard for Mexico's *habitus*. In the words of Lois Wacquant, by "habitus" Pierre Bourdieu meant "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinate ways, which then guide them" (qtd. in Wacquant 316).[13] For Roa Bárcena, liberals, including fictional Gaspar Rodríguez, erred insofar as they ignored the material practices, habits, forms of life, and worldviews of the Mexican people, in order to strive for illusory ideas that were mostly foreign and unrealistic. Roa Bárcena's insistence on the Mexican habitus, however, differs radically from Bourdieu's understanding, because for the Mexican Catholic conservative—and in this case his belonging to the most religiously radical wing of the *Partido Conservador* is key—this set of dispositions and propensities is to be understood as a fixed and divine structure. This structure, in turn, is in constant need of protection from reformist assaults whose end-result would be the material and spiritual damnation of the Mexican people. It is this blindness to the sacred habitus of the laborers of his estate that ushers Gaspar Rodríguez to overlook the productivity of their orderly lives under a system characterized by a traditional stratification of labor.

Roa Bárcena does not give much depth to Gaspar's argument, reducing his protagonist to a mere echo of fashionable liberal ideas. Yet, this superficiality must not be taken for granted. For the author, it is precisely this liberal propensity to not see past the surface of their ideas and their readings, to misconstrue the theological and natural principle of man and the world, which leads them to confuse the content for its form. Gaspar's ideas with regards to work, for example, crystallized during his exile in the United States, when, Roa Bárcena tells us, "[d]esdeñando el fondo de las cosas," he ascribed the industriousness and fondness of work of the "raza anglosajona" to the political form of their government, "en vez de considerar este mismo gobierno como resultado forzoso de aquel espíritu" (97). That is to say, for Roa Bárcena, Gaspar and his liberal brethren err in thinking that the political economy of a government is the form that constitutes the people as its content, that the productivity perceived in the North Americans is a result of their republican constitution, when it is, in fact, the other way around. It is the spirit of the people and their habitus that form and constitute the political organization of their state. This spirit, in turn, is God's will, and man's sole duty is to observe and administer it.

Furthermore, Gaspar's "político-mania" prevents him from taking notice of the material circumstance of his estate. Before his intervention, for example, and under the management of his trustworthy administrator, his estate had been a fruitful and productive enterprise. In fact, it was the conscientious administration of his lands that had guaranteed his wellbeing during his exile in the United States, as well as his congressional foray into the political world of Mexico City. More to the point, notes the author, was the fact that it was thanks to the "old and able" administrator's care, that Gaspar had had the time to immerse himself in the readings that led him to the decision to revamp the

political economy of his property (139). His pious wife, Octaviana, warns of the consequences of his decision, arguing that "bajo el pretexto de reformas, iba a introducir un verdadero y espantoso desorden en la hacienda, destruyendo así el único medio de subsistencia de toda la familia" (151). Mistaking her sound advice for the expected and conservative resistance of the "privileged classes," who "strive for the destruction of common happiness," he dismisses her while making sure he informs her that she represents "la familia del propietario, que engorda y se refocila a costa de las familias de los obreros" (152). Thus, Gaspar proceeds with his dictatorial enforcement of democracy.

The imposition of Gaspar's ideal structure onto the body politic of the estate, or, what is the same, the removal of all structure whatsoever, opens the floodgates of anarchy. It took only a week for the orderly manor to devolve into chaos. In the first few days, Roa Bárcena informs us, work had been carried out by a minority of laborers, but most declined to do so, understanding that one of the first articles of their new progressive constitution stated that "nadie podía ser obligado a trabajar" (156). By the week's end, not much had changed, and Octaviana noted that the peons had started to become unruly and, since they had not sold the produce, there were not enough funds to pay their wages (159). A witness to all of this, Gaspar considered these early mishaps as predictable, an unavoidable result of the laborer's "antigua y viciosa educación" (166). It was a matter of time before the workers got accustomed to their newfound liberty and, realizing the pleasures and satisfaction to be begotten from their own labor, abandoned their old predispositions to work only under the coercion of a taskmaster. Under the secularizing instruction of Enrique, Gaspar's wayward son, the laborers began to doubt the existence of God and the immortality of the soul (164). Soon enough, and educated in a liberal fashion, the author tells us, they formed a high idea of themselves, assured that the private and public acts of man should not find restraints either in religion, morality, or social authority "porque todo lo que tiende a coartar la libertad del pensamiento y de acción es una tiranía más o menos disfrazada, cuyo yugo debe romperse a toda costa" (165). Without the need of priests or civil authorities, the citizens of the estate did as they willed, baptizing their children without the proper form, marrying their spouses without benediction. As a result, the domestic sphere devolved into "un infierno de prostitución y miseria" (165), forsaking the remaining and most elemental features of the previous regime. Roa Bárcena interrupts his narration to inform the reader that

> Nada he visto yo que dé idea de un país en estado de anarquía como la quinta de Gaspar, pocos días después de acaecido lo descrito en el último capítulo. Los proletarios se resistían abiertamente a trabajar, no ya sólo en las labores de la hacienda, sino aun en la de sus propios terrenos. El desorden les había conducido insensiblemente a la pereza y la ociosidad. Ésta hizo que les repugnara seguir ganando el pan de sus familias con el diario sudor de su rostro . . . . (163)

In a matter of months, the estate collapses both morally and economically. The impossibility to pay wages gives way to mass depression, and, worsened by the "falta de orden y vigilancia," the laborers begin to drunkenly pillage and destroy the property (164). When Gaspar tries to retake the reigns of his subjects, it is too late. The mass of vagrants reaches the main house of the estate and loots it, taking "[l]os muebles, la ropa,

los libros, los arneses de montar, todo salía y desaparecía violentamente en medio de gritos horribles inspirados por la codicia y la embriaguez" (174). It is only upon finding the corpse of his firstborn, abandoned in the wilderness, that Gaspar surrenders his political dreams, and with them his sanity: "en aquel momento no era político, y las desgracias domésticas le abrumaban como a un hombre cualquiera" (174).

Dealing him a cold hand, Roa Bárcena seems to imply that Gaspar's liberal mistake does not lie in the identification of the old, Christian order as restrainer. He is correct in asserting that the virtuous economy of the household does in fact restrain. Gaspar's mistake lies, instead, in misjudging what is curbed and held in check by the providential deterrent: not the unbridled and progressive productivity of man's work and development, but the metastasis of his Adamic inheritance, his sinful proclivity to the interruption of work. Upon the annulment of forced labor and the coercion of task masters, the workers instinctively turned against their own selves and wellbeing, not only rejecting labor in all forms, but also refusing their most basic needs to procure and provide for their own survival. If it had not been for Enrique's preordained death, brought upon by the invisible hand of God—"¿Quién ignora que la mano del Señor hizo todas estas cosas?" (176)—the whole population of the estate would have perished in the chaos. In Roa Bárcena's novel, the interruption of work has still not become an interruption of productivity, like it would for liberal thought, but the literal interruption of all labors understood as vital processes that assure society's order and reproduction. In other words, the waste to be found in work's opposite is not understood for Roa Bárcena as the missed or lost potential of surplus, but rather, as a betrayal of God's ordering of society and, thus, as a waste of life.

Against Gaspar, religious Octaviana, Amelia, the Jesuit priest and the devout administrator emerge as examples of the good Christian citizen, of those who do God's work. Throughout the novel, each and every single one of their actions is formed out of a will to conform to the obligations respective to their position, as is prescribed by tradition and divine law. What emerges out of these exemplary figures, opposite to the interruption of work brought about by Gaspar, his son Enrique, and his liberal cohort, is not work per se, but the "work" of duty. Against the rising liberal worldview in which work comes to occupy the definite place of positive activity, Roa Bárcena's *La quinta modelo* argues for an understanding of human activity that resists the intensifying assault that seeks to sunder the providential relation between individual and society. For the author, the insistence on work and the attempt to place it at the center only leads, ironically, to its interruption. In contrast, duty is understood by Roa Bárcena as the embrace of restraint and of the joy and piety of a life according to the national and sacred habitus, to tradition, to providential and natural rule. Industriousness is thus not qualified in relation to a paradigm of productivity, but as the striving for the satisfaction of man's moral, religious, and social obligation.

Roa Bárcena portrays the estate's failure as both ideological and providential. By characterizing the foundations of freedom, self-interest, and work that underlie Gaspar's political economy as morally and politically unfeasible, Roa Bárcena frames the limitations of liberal ideology as ontological. Gaspar's project functions in the author's discourse as a materialization of the violent impropriety of liberal *letrados'* ideas and of

their incapacity to even consider the divine habitus of the Mexican people. For Roa Bárcena, the suicidal disorder Gaspar decrees on his estate is the inevitable outcome of the ideas that composed nineteenth-century Mexican liberal discourse, and a clear and present danger at a moment when the liberal Constitutional Congresses were taking place. The unknown forces that lay beyond the traditional organization of society promise—and in the novel, deliver—a break from the certain that does not only risk the destruction of an already weak economy, but also of the very structures that guarantee human conviviality. Very few liberals in Mexico actually longed for the implementation of socialist structure in the Mesoamerican landscape.[14] However, like Roa Bárcena seems to point out, the dreams of the early utopian socialists, like Henry de Saint-Simon's and Charles Fourier's, resonated with those of liberals as they seemed to be the logical conclusion of the arguments they had been espousing for in the extreme polarization that marked the interregnum between the Mexican-American War and the Reform War (1848-1857).

Read in the twenty-first century, accounts like Roa Bárcena's, regularly dismissed because of their conservative character, affirm the once-hegemonic force of the Catholic political imaginary in the nineteenth-century Mexican milieu by rendering a critique to liberal ideology and its quest to redefine man's entire essence without taking into consideration its material (and providential, for the author) conditions of existence. To a certain degree, Roa Bárcena's was the qualm of all conservative thought that augured the destruction of society in the face of any reform or innovation. And yet, in the conservative recrimination present in *La quinta modelo*, which insists on how liberalism ignores the materiality of life, with its affects and habits, we see registered the limits and fragility of a liberal subjectivity and politico-philosophical paradigm that was in the process of becoming hegemonic.

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Notes

[1] The Revolution of Ayutla emerged out of the Plan the Ayutla of 1 March 1854, which called for an end to Antonio López de Santa Anna's dictatorship, and convened a constituent assembly. Despite making no mention of liberalism or of a reform of Church-state relations, as Brian Hamnett has pointed out, it marked the rise of the Liberal Party to power and paved the way for what would become the Reform War. See Hamnett, *Roots of Insurgency*; Thomson.

[2] For a comparative analysis of how the U.S.–Mexico War was used, both historiographically and rhetorically, in American and Mexican literatures of the subsequent decades, see Rodríguez' *The Literatures of the U.S.-Mexican War*.

[3] For more on Roa Bárcena's more radical articulation of his catholicism and conservatism, see note 5 below.

[4] For an analysis of the politics, aesthetics, and contradictions of the *Revista Azul* in the larger context of the development of *Modernismo*, see Pineda Franco.

[5] *La Cruz* was founded, according to its director Joaquin Pesado, as a "periódico exclusivamente religioso, establecido exprofeso para difundir las doctrinas ortodoxas y vindicarlas de los errores dominantes" (qtd. in Rico Mansard 21). Roa Bárcena published in the newspaper's pages between the decades of the 1850s and 1860s, during which time he developed some of his most radical Catholic ideas, anxieties and arguments that culminated in *La quinta modelo* (21). Interestingly enough, despite being published in Mexico City, the stronghold of conservatism, and surviving the first round of newspaper closures in the opening months of the Reform War, the paper was also censored by the administration of conservative President Féliz María Zuloaga in mid-July 1858. As Haworth has shown, because the newspaper's editor Pesado called for the defense of the interests of the Catholic Church and not exclusively of the *Partido Conservador*, "[h]e went so far as to call for theocracy, and thus indirectly challenged the legitimacy of the military leadership" (109). While Pesado's *La Cruz* disappeared at that moment, Roa Bárcena's *La Sociedad*, where his own articles differed from the more markedly Catholic writings he himself published in Pesado's publication (like *La quinta modelo*), survived (109).

[6] For a defense and an analysis of Article IV of the Constitution of 1857, which highlights the right to not work, see Prieto.

[7] This argument is essential for the "revisionist" historiographical current that arose in the 1990s which called for a nuanced approach to nineteenth-century Mexico that moved beyond its characterization as a century of chaos. See, for example, the many works by Josefina Vázquez, Bárbara Tenenbaum, and Humberto Morales and Will Fowler. Moreover, recent works by Carlos Herrejón, Brian Connaughton and Scott Eastman have further problematized this division through a nuanced study of the rise of certain strands of liberalism in the early Nineteenth Century from within Spanish and Spanish American religious discourse.

[8] As these historians have shown, these categories are anachronistic when used to speak about the first two decades of an Independent Mexico (Morales and Fowler14). For this earlier period, it would be more appropriate to speak of degrees of traditionalism among political ideas, in which the strongest opponents of more liberal tendencies were those who, without being fully against modernity, advocated for a slower and more careful reformation of the nation, while preserving "esos valores tradicionales

que consideraban no sólo fundamentalmente para preservar el orden, sino que también eran una parte íntegra y esencial de la nueva y emergente nacionalidad mexicana" (14). In fact, during this period, the term "conservative" referred not to politics, but to morality, in the sense of "sentimientos conservadores" (12).

[9] This insistence on administration justified the need of a centralized and interventionist state, more geared towards the development of the national economy than to the application of political ideas. See Stevens, *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico*. Morales and Fowler make a parallel between Alamán's preference for administration over politics and a similar position espoused during the administration of Porfirio Díaz (19-20).

[10] For more on this, see Bárbara Tenenbaum.

[11] Alba-Koch's article is not the only work that reads *La quinta modelo* perfunctorily to approach Pizarro Suárez's own novels. For examples, see Abramson ("Fouriérisme et roman" 181-183) and López Aparicio (86-89). In her article, Alba-Koch finds parallels between Roa Bárcena's protagonist and real-life liberal Melchor Ocampo's "enlightened administration" of his large estate (20). Alba-Koch subsequently points out that Roa Bárcena's novel can be seen as the continuation, in the pages of *La Cruz*, of a debate between Morelia's bishop Jesús Munguía and Melchor Ocampo (21). The two men had been engaged in the diatribe regarding the relationship between Church and State since 1851. Munguía believed that the freedom of religion and of thought defended by Ocampo and other liberals was extremely dangerous, because the European enactment of such principles had served the causes of socialism, and if they were to be accepted in Mexico, it would bring about "universal devastation" (21). Alba-Koch states that *La quinta modelo* entered the exchange just as the debate became even more pressing for conservatives, seeing as the liberals were in power and had been introducing measures that would greatly reduce the political and economic power of the church (21). Abramson's article "Fouriérisme et roman au Mexique du XIXe siècle, à travers *La quinta modelo* de José María Roa Bárcena, *El monedero* de Nicolás Pizarro Suárez et *La navidad en las montañas* d'Ignacio Manuel Altamirano" follows Alba-Koch very closely, with the addition that he highlights the influence of Charles Fourier in the three texts.

[12] According to Wenzel's work, which to my knowledge is the only prolonged and monographic study on the topic, a genealogy of the specifically Christian vice or sin of sloth points towards a rhizomatic constellation in which the main coordinates are found in the Bible, its Jewish and Christian commentators, early ascetic movements, Gnosticism, Hellenistic psychology and Eastern mythology (3). Surely, *acedia* is not a literal translation of sloth, if one is to understand the latter as idleness or laziness, per se. In fact, in its earliest iteration in Christian thought, in the fourth century Egyptian desert monks of Alexandria, *acedia* named the temptation of the "noonday demon," which attacked the ascetic monk causing him psychic exhaustion and listlessness, leading him to be overcome by the monotony of life. In its earliest usage, *acedia*, understood as one of the eight vices that would eventually become the seven deadly sins, named an interruption of the desert monk's ascetic constitution, a prolonged assault by weariness, lustful thoughts and plain boredom that caused "spiritual listlessness and slackened attention" (8), and threatened the very notion of a Christian life. For centuries, the vice remained conscripted to monastic life, but starting in the third century CE its importance began growing steadily, until the ninth century, when

the vice metastasized and spread outside of monastic and cenobitic life to touch the moral life of the laity. This transition, which happened slowly, came accompanied with a widening of meaning in which the "boredom with the cell" that had characterized the monk's temptation, came to become "something like 'negligence in the fulfillment of spiritual duties'" and idleness. The semantic proliferation quickly disseminated and became open for interpretation, making sloth an umbrella term for any and all interruptions of work. The equation of *acedia* with idleness would catch on and by the twelfth century, as Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* shows, reaches its apogee. At that point, it was understood, by Aquinas and others, as the abstract psychological state of "aversion of the appetite from its own good because of bodily hardships that accompany its attainment" (Wenzel 46).

[13] I have preferred Wacquant's definition for its concise nature. For the uses of "habitus" see Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984). For an account of the development of the concept itself through Bourdieu's work, see his own "The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and Field."

[14] For a study of utopian socialists and radical liberals in Mexico, see Illades. For a study on utopian thought in nineteenth-century Latin America, see Abramson (1999). For a more general overview of non-Marxian socialisms during the same century, see Claeys.

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