



## Saintly Patriotism: Vicente Grez and the Women of the Chilean Independence Movement

Tina Melstrom

*Cuán dignas de ser amadas, de ser adoradas de rodillas, eran aquellas nobles mujeres, que, olvidándose de que eran esposas y madres, se inspiraban sólo en el amor a la patria. Así, con el ejemplo de su heroísmo, engrandecían la familia e inculcaban en el alma de aquella generación la idea del deber y del sacrificio, hoy al parecer tan debilitada. (Grez 66)*

The Chilean Independence Movement (1810-1823) is an epoch that has captured the popular imagination of twentieth and twenty-first century Chileans; the stories of the *próceres patrios* (national patriotic heroes) have resounded in Chilean popular culture.<sup>1</sup> However, the canonical body of literature that deals with this revolutionary epoch in Chilean history often focuses primarily on the victorious heroes—and not the heroines—who ultimately established the independent Chilean state. As reporter Natalia Núñez, a writer for *Revista Ya* of the top-selling Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*, rightly notes: “Detrás de ellos [los héroes de la independencia], hubo mujeres que fueron confidentes, amantes y amigas.” While few publications—academic or popular—dedicate themselves to these feminine “victors” of the Independence Movement, their stories have not always been relegated to playing a secondary role in Chilean history. In 1878, Vicente Grez—a renowned reporter, writer, editor, and civil servant of nineteenth century Chile—published one of his first historical texts titled *Las mujeres de la independencia*.<sup>2</sup> This text is composed of a series of short, biographical essays that narrate the lives of the women of the “Generation of 1810” who played central roles in the movement for Chilean autonomy and sovereignty, including names like Javiera Carrera, Luisa Recabarren, and Mercedes Fuentecilla. While Grez’s accounts of these women are largely secular in nature, his hyperbolic and idealized descriptions of the Generation of 1810 and their efforts are reminiscent of the hagiographical texts of the medieval and early modern period. In secularizing the hagiographical genre, I argue that Grez creates a number of lay saints who—by their example—contribute to the consolidation of Chilean national identity. Their function as secular saints is to spread a new religion, a religion that makes sense in an increasingly anti-clerical climate: patriotism.

Hagiography, also known as spiritual autobiography or *vita*, is a term applied to a specific literary genre that details the lives of saints or other holy figures. As a genre, hagiography typically includes conventions like annunciation, vocation, trial, martyrdom, iconoclasm and reliquary inscription (Lupton xxi). In the case of Christianity—or, more specifically, Catholicism—these literary conventions carried out practical goals. The written accounts of the lives of the saints fulfilled two key functions within the Church. According to historian Ronald Morgan, its primary purpose was “[...] that of proving the protagonist’s sanctity and moving the faithful to veneration and imitation” while its secondary purpose was “[...] the articulation and reinforcement of group solidarity” (3-4).<sup>3</sup> Thus, these texts played an integral role in the power structure of the Church as these spiritual narrations reinforced notions of sanctity central to Catholic dogma while simultaneously bolstering a sense of community amongst its practitioners. Lawrence Cunningham takes this contention one step further, claiming that the sense of community one derives from hagiographic text is based upon personal identification with the saint whose life is narrated:

It is precisely because the saint is one who in his or her own life shows the deep possibilities of what it means to be truly religious that we call a saint “holy”...The saint sets forth the meaning of God in the living out of her life. True hagiography should be an ideal locus for what Sallie TeSelle calls “intermediate theology,” that is, seeing in the lives of another not merely a consistency with certain doctrinal formulations, but a resonance and depth that reflects back upon the reader or observer of that life in such a way as to illuminate or clarify. In that sense, the life of the saint should act as a parable: It should shock us into a heightened and new sense of God’s presence (and judgment) in our own life. (79)

Morgan’s discussion of the real-world functions of hagiographical texts, coupled by TeSelle’s notion of intermediate theology applied to the *vitae* by Cunningham, in large part inspire my reading of Grez’s *Las mujeres de la independencia*. As I will argue, in the increasingly anti-clerical and laical society of nineteenth century Chile, the women of the Independence Movement in many ways become the new subjects worthy of veneration and imitation, inspiring Chilean patriots to come together in name of the *patria*, a community in large part reinforced and mediated through the lives of the women in Grez’s text.

If it is true, as Cunningham contends in *The Meaning of the Saints*, that “[h]agiography is Christianity from below rather than from above” (5), I will make the claim that narrating the lives of the Generation of 1810 is patriotism from below rather than above as women—a group relegated to the private domain—are assigned a number of tasks central to the successful indoctrination of national values and pride. A key part of this contention stems from the fact that hagiography provided a more democratic opening within the strict confines of the Church during the medieval period. Not only were laymen able to transcendently identify themselves with the sacred via hagiography, women were also able to find a space of increased inclusion through these sacred biographies (5). The *vitae* of female saints were a source of power for a community marginalized by its gender; not only were women often placed alongside their sacred

male counterparts, they were also occasionally represented as what Anneke Mulder-Bakker calls *holy mothers*. Mulder-Bakker does recognize that few saints are associated with motherhood—there are only 16 married canonized saints of which five are known mothers—but contends that where female saints were linked to maternity (as is the case of Ann, Mary, Regina, Ida of Boulogne, Ivetta of Huy, Elizabeth of Thuringia, and Birgitta of Sweden), their power was augmented and legitimated in unique ways. As Mulder-Bakker writes, these maternal saints were “[...] holy women whose public role in society was based on their status as spouse and mother; it was this status of motherhood that gave them entrance to the public sphere (in a similar way as entering the job market does now) and this opened for them the road to sanctitude” (4). Just as the medieval woman was textually brought into the bureaucracy of the church vis-à-vis the hagiographic text, Grez’s text serves to further concretize the incorporation of the Chilean woman into the discourse of the state.

Grez’s version of the secular *vitae* was published in a period of surging anti-clericalism in Chilean history; the late Nineteenth Century saw a transformation in Church-State relations in Chile just like in many other Latin American nations. In the Chilean case, however, a partial rupture with the Catholic Church was concretized during the Independence Movement but in actuality had an earlier precedent:

[L]a Iglesia chilena fue perdiendo poder desde la expulsión de los jesuitas en 1767. Entre 1750 y 1845 el número proporcional de sacerdotes por habitante se redujo un cien por ciento. Después de 1767, la Iglesia dejó de ser un importante terrateniente; sus principales fuentes financieras se limitaron al diezmo, a los censos, capellanías y obras pías. Además, desde el siglo XVIII, su influencia en el mundo rural fue notoriamente menor a la de otras regiones hispanoamericanas. (Letelier 278)

This breakdown of ecclesiastical power in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries was of paramount importance to the way the *próceres patrios* handled Church-State relations; the role afforded to Catholic thought was insignificant in Chile:

La ausencia del factor movilizador de la religión durante la Independencia—a diferencia de, por ejemplo, México—lo vuelve un aspecto marginal, relegado al plano meramente privado. Hay en esto una suerte de deísmo ilustrado que entibia, por lo menos en el grupo promotor de la cosa pública, posibles planeamientos religiosos de tipo tradicionalista, integrista o confesional. A la Iglesia había que tratarla como entidad institucionalizada; en cuanto a lo religioso, bastaba con silenciarlo de lo público. (Letelier 278-79)

Part of this silencing of the Church—and the colonial order—by the Chilean state may be evidenced by looking at the popularity of hagiographic texts; as Kathleen Myers points out, “By the mid-eighteenth century in Spanish America, the number of hagiographic texts dropped dramatically [...]” (166). What accounts for this decline?

As previously mentioned, spiritual autobiographies played an important role in the construction and consolidation of community and individual identity. During the colonial period, Ronald Morgan notes that these *vitae* were crucial to the formation of *criollo* identity and their conceptions of life in the Americas. While Morgan does not believe that there is a direct link between the spiritual biographies of the colonial period and the nationalism of the Nineteenth Century, he does believe that *criollos* “[...] used the saint’s Life and related media, both consciously and unconsciously, to exalt criollo achievement, defend criollo character, and define criollo identities” (4). As part of this process, *criollos* often pushed for the canonization of their own in attempts to establish a more level spiritual playing field between themselves and Europe (4). However, as independence movements took off across Latin America, this aspect of *criollo* identity formation would be in large part abandoned as the focus quickly would turn to establishing national identities in the newly formed and independent Latin American states.

As nations across the region fought for and gained their independence, the solidification of new, national identities became a key tenet of state formation. While early modern hagiography played a key role in identity formation in colonial Latin America, it was incapable of meeting the demands of such a political project in the Nineteenth Century:

New World saints were not primarily political symbols. In general, those who memorialized these holy persons’ lives through printed sermons and hagiographies were more interested in disseminating spiritual ideals than with fomenting civic pride or fueling criollo-peninsular polemics. The saints and the ritual activities surrounding their cults reflected a worldview that exalted obedience, humility, and historical continuity over individualism, arrogance, and progress. (Morgan 175-76)

Perhaps it is for this reason that traditional hagiography fell out of fashion. However, the hagiographic genre did not completely disappear. Just as Julia Lupton claims that hagiography and typology affected the structure of Renaissance literature (xxi), this religious genre affected the way in which Grez documented the patriotic contributions made by women during Chile’s independence movement in *Las mujeres de la independencia*.

The first hagiographic trope evidenced in *Las mujeres de la independencia* that can be traced to the *vitae* is that of martyrdom and persecution. Indeed, the first Christian hagiographic texts were born in a moment of intense persecution:

The cult of the saints began in Christianity as a direct result of the Roman persecutions of the early Christians...the Christian communities kept records of these deaths [of Christians by the Roman government] from a relatively early period; and, by the second century, there is evidence that the Church publicly venerated these martyrs. (8)

In reading Grez’s text, there appears to be an attempt to demonstrate that many of the women of the Generation of 1810 also faced persecution, a cross that they willingly bore in name of the Chilean Republic and its future. Writing about the “anonymous heroines”

of the Chilean Independence Movement, Grez makes a clear reference to martyrdom when discussing the defeat at Rancagua<sup>4</sup>:

Las mujeres atemorizadas ante aquellas hordas se refugiaron en la iglesia de San Francisco, pero los vencedores la invadieron a caballo. El vértigo de la sangre y de la lujuria cegaba a los soldados. Los niños eran degollados y las mujeres violadas. El presbítero Laureano Díaz refiere en su relación de aquellos sucesos que una linda joven era desnudada y violada en medio del templo; una mujer murió de vergüenza y de horror; otras supieron matar a los miserables con sus propias armas; pero la mayor parte de las mujeres murieron asesinadas, pues prefirieron el martirio a la ignominia. (110)

This fragment of Grez's text graphically describes the terror of anonymous Chilean women and children willing to die for their country's independence; despite rape and beheadings, they held onto their patriotic fervor. To not do so, as the text claims, would be shameful.

For a more specific case of persecution narrated by Grez, we can turn to the martyrdom of Agueda Monasterio de Lattapiat. The wife of a French official who had fought in the Reconquest of Buenos Aires, Agueda Monasterio and her daughter Juana frequently wrote letters to men like José de San Martín who organized Chilean resistance out of Mendoza, Argentina.<sup>5</sup> When the two women are caught by Marcó, Grez writes, the punishment is severe: "Se preparó la horca en el costado norte de la plaza principal y se ordenó que antes de la ejecución el verdugo cortara la mano derecha de la niña Juana, por haber escrito con ella algunas de las correspondencias que le dictaba su madre" (69).<sup>6</sup> The execution was inexplicably cancelled moments before it was to be carried out. However, by then the suffering Agueda Monasterios faced had already taken its toll:

La humedad del calabozo, las mil privaciones de que se la hizo víctima, las amenazas continuas, el sentimiento de ver perdida la causa de la patria, el patíbulo que se alzaba al frente de su prisión, el martirio brutal de que se iba a hacer víctima a su hija, toda esta enormidad de dolores abatió su naturaleza, y al salir de la prisión la señora Monasterio llevaba impreso en la frente el sello de la muerte. (69)

This type of persecution and martyrdom harkens back to the sufferings narrated in hagiographical texts but, instead of enduring privations in the name of God, Agueda Monasterios does so in the name of Chile.

Furthermore, Agueda Monasterios is but one of many women who faced imprisonment for their involvement in the Independence Movement. Later in the text, Grez also discusses the imprisonment of Maria Cornelia Olivares who lived in the town of Chillán in Chile's Bío Bío region. Olivares, one of the many supporters of the cause who lived isolated from the metropolis of Santiago, was imprisoned for publicly advocating on behalf of the revolutionary project. In prison, her hair and eyebrows were shaved off and she was put on display between the hours of 10:00 am and 2:00 pm in the public square

of Chillán where she had spoken out against the Royalists (94). Grez writes: “Era algo característico de aquella tiranía su persecución a las mujeres y su empeño tenaz por ridiculizar a todas las que por su heroísmo y entusiasmo podían interesar a la multitud y arrastrar prosélitos” (94). Just as early Christians were persecuted for proselytizing in the name of their religion, the Generation of 1810 was persecuted for proselytizing in name of the *patria*.

According to Grez, the martyrdom that these women had to face was not solely limited to their defense of the Republic: “Todos los grandes sentimientos tomaron en la época de la independencia un vuelo gigantesco. Las mujeres no solo se sacrificaban por la patria sino también por el amor” (111). One such example is Mercedes Fuentecilla, the wife of José Miguel Carrera. Mercedes, enamored by her husband and his cause, willingly abnegated herself to both of them:

Siguiendo a su esposo por toda la extensión de la inmensa pampa argentina, formando parte del bagaje de su ejército, corriendo todos los peligros de tan tremenda situación, dando a luz a su hijo en medio del desierto, sufriendo el hambre y la sed—¡ella que había nacido rodeada de todas las comodidades y halagos de la fortuna!—, soportaba alegre y contenta tan terribles pruebas. (76)

Explaining Mercedes Fuentecilla’s sacrifice, Grez writes: “Esas almas generosas siempre son así: prefieren el sacrificio completo de su vida, tranquilo, sublime, silencioso, antes que la incertidumbre de hacer cambiar un porvenir, de ser un obstáculo a la gloria del hombre amado” (77). The similarities between this description of Fuentecilla’s sacrifice and those of the ascetic saints is quite striking.

The inclusion of amorous martyrdom in Grez’s secular version of the hagiographic text is also very telling of woman’s devotion to her country. As Doris Sommer has convincingly argued in her seminal text on nineteenth century Latin American literature, nationalism and eroticism (represented by the hegemonic modern state and the heterosexual couple, respectively) are intertwined in the literature of the period:

Love plots and political plotting keep overlapping with each other. Instead of the metaphoric parallelism, say between passion and patriotism, that readers may expect from allegory, we will see here a metonymic association between romantic love that needs the state’s blessing and political legitimacy that needs to be founded on love. (41)

Essentially, the love stories between figures like Mercedes Fuentecilla and José Miguel Carrera narrated by Grez are real-life versions of the canonical novels of the Nineteenth Century. At the same time, these heterosexual, national love stories can be viewed as secular versions of the love between Christians and God that sustained the Catholic Church throughout the medieval and early modern periods.

Furthermore, this heterosexual, secular love would mean nothing without the family. As Sommer points out,



[i]t would seem, to follow the historians, that families were a stabilizing force, a ‘cause’ of national security. But we also may reckon the high seriousness attributed to family ties as a possible ‘effect’ of the nation. Without the goal of nationhood, alliances and stability would be perhaps less transparently desirable than they were. (20)

Perhaps one of the most important duties assigned to the nineteenth century woman vis-à-vis the state was that of providing new “believers,” or patriots, to ensure its survival. This goal is not left unnoticed by Grez:

Y esas mujeres, que mecieron la cuna de la libre patria eran dignas de inspirar los más elevados sentimientos: parece que la naturaleza, en aquella primera aurora de libertad, se hubiera complacido en hacerlas más bellas y esforzadas de lo que son y fueron jamás. Tan apasionadas o más que los hombres, deseaban que las teorías revolucionarias se convirtieran pronto en hecho, querían ver formarse una gran patria *y ser ellas las que dieran vida y aliento a los nuevos héroes* [my emphasis]. (54)

If, as Cunningham contends, the primary function of hagiography was to prove a holy person’s sanctity in order to henceforth inspire future generations to imitate their spirituality, perhaps what we see here is a variant on this theme: the mother, playing the role of the idealized secular saint devoted to the *patria*, serves to inspire her offspring to “venerate” it as well.

There are a number of examples in *Las mujeres de la independencia* that point to the heavy emphasis that the author places on maternity. Grez opens his short biography on Agueda Monasterio, the very same woman who was ordered to face the hangman for having collaborated with the rebels on the other side of the *cordillera*, with the following story:

El 1º de abril de 1811, en medio del estruendo del motín de Figueroa, tenía lugar en el teatro mismo de los sucesos una escena dramática y conmovedora: una dama distinguida, una mujer hermosa y joven todavía, que olvidándose completamente del peligro que corría se lanzaba en medio del combate. ¿Cuál era la causa de tan heroica acción? Era una madre que buscaba a su hijo, a quien se suponía herido o agonizante entre los combatientes. (67)

In addition to narrating a number of similar events that highlight the bond between mother and child, Grez makes a concerted effort to demonstrate the Generation of 1810’s maternal capacity to serve as patriotic role models, much like a saint would have served as a spiritual role model. In the case of Manuela Guzmán, an avowed Republican, her daughter Candelaria Soto daringly stood up to a colonial *gobernador*, refusing to deny her desire to see the independent *patria* come into existence (98). This decision resulted in her imprisonment in the fortress at Penco; when her mother’s request to accompany Candelaria was denied, Candelaria threatened her own life, clutching a knife (99).<sup>7</sup> Just like many of the women in Grez’s text, this beautiful young woman—following the example of her mother—was willing to give up her life for the *patria*.

Even the youngest of children were inspired to similar acts; speaking once again of the horrible events at Rancagua, Grez explains: “La indignación hizo prodigios. Una niña de nueve años enterró un puñal en la garganta de un soldado que insultaba a su madre. Los niños, cuando se indignan, tienen a veces las fuerzas de los gigantes” (110). The way in which Grez describes the inculcation of values from mother to child in both this episode and that of Candelaria Soto in *Las mujeres de la independencia* is reminiscent of the holy mother-saints like Saint Regina described by Mulder-Bakker: “[...] a noble Saxon woman, wife of Count Adalbert of Oostervant, was the epitome of a saintly mother. She gave birth to ten daughters, who, carefully nurtured in religion by the saint, all became consecrated virgins of God” (3). Just like Regina’s ten daughters, the children of the Generation of 1810 became consecrated patriots of the Republic.

If traditional hagiographic texts in the Catholic Church served the function of inspiring Christian faith in its audience, Grez’s secular hagiographic text serves to underscore and inspire a national faith: patriotism. In *Patriotism and Religion*, Shailer Matthews notes what he terms a “companionship” between these two concepts in the United States:

As one attempts thus to express the new devotion which has called our nation to arms and has filled America with a militant loyalty, a sense of companionship is at once detected. This passion of service, this readiness to sacrifice health and life for national ideals—what is it but a counterpart of religion?” (5)

Is this not what one sees in Grez’s account of revolutionary Chile? Grez clearly documents the Generation of 1810’s readiness to sacrifice health and life in name of the nation, but his comparison of the independence movement to spiritual faith goes even deeper. During the *Reconquista española*, Luisa Recabarren refused to give up her faith: “[T]enía profunda fe en el resultado final de la empresa, y cuando todo parecía perdido, Luisa aseguraba que era imposible volver a esclavizar a un pueblo que había probado, siquiera por una hora, las delicias de la libertad” (65). While here the relationship between religious and patriotic faith appears ambiguous at best, there can be no doubt as to the parallel Grez desires to establish between these two notions in his discussion of Antonia Salas:

Si alguna vez necesitó Chile que el ángel de la caridad y del consuelo extendiera sobre él sus alas protectoras, fue durante los años de la guerra de la independencia...en medio de esas horas de angustia apareció una mujer animosa, uno de esos espíritus celestes creados exclusivamente para el bien; una de esas mujeres que tienen alas y que llevan consigo, como una atmósfera propia, ese encanto irresistible y misterioso que hace nacer la dicha en los corazones desgraciados y brotar la fe en el alma incrédula. Esa mujer se llamaba Antonia Salas. (101)

This woman, whose death was mourned by widows and orphans alike (103), ardently supported the movement for Chilean autonomy and dedicated her life to acts of charity: not only did she work in hospitals during the flu epidemic, she also volunteered during the 1822 earthquake (102-03).



In yet another comparison between the Christian faith of the saints and the patriotic faith of the Generation of 1810, Grez is quick to point out the importance of proselytization. Perhaps the most striking account of this is documented in the case of María Cornelia Olivares, who:

[P]redicaba en todas partes, hasta en la plaza pública [de Chillán], el odio a los extraños opresores de la patria, y exhortaba a todos la lucha, sin temer las consecuencias a que tal conducta podía arrastrarla...parecía a veces una mujer iluminada, encargada de alguna misión providencial como Juana de Arco. (93)

In this instance, the parallels between the venerated women of the Catholic Church and the venerated women of the independence movement is clearly drawn by Grez himself as he alludes to Joan of Arc.

In addition to sacrificing their lives and love for the sake of their *patria*, acting angelically on earth, and preaching in the name of independence, some women even willingly donated money to the cause (much like a tithe or money collection that continues to this day in many places of worship). Such is the case of Manuela Rozas:

La señora Rozas prestó a la causa de la independencia no sólo la valiosa cooperación de sus trabajos personales, de la influencia de su nombre y de sus relaciones, sino también de su fortuna. Entre nosotros es muy fácil encontrar héroes dispuestos a dar por la patria su sangre, pero es muy difícil encontrar quienes le den su dinero. La señora Rozas llevó ambas ofrendas al altar de la revolución. (90)

Here, the revolution is represented as a sacred and holy entity that represents God himself—and it is the women of the Generation of 1810 who piously prostrate themselves before it.

The women of the Generation of 1810 are clearly idealized and represented as models for generations of future Chileans. These “immortal and divine” (114) women who “[...] amaban el deber más que sus comodidades, la patria más que la familia, la gloria más que la seda y los encajes” (47) were not only beautiful and dedicated to the Independence Movement, but many of them were also on an intellectual par with their male counterparts. Much like the famed Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Luisa Recabarren, the wife of Gaspar Marín:

Fue una de las mujeres de su época que conoció mejor la literatura francesa, cuyo idioma poseía con perfección; brillante en la conversación y en la polémica, discutía cualquier asunto social o histórico, político o religioso, con una elevación de criterio que asombraba a los hombres eminentes que frecuentaban su salón. (64)

This, however, is not the only comparison that can be made between this generation of women and the holy women that were venerated during the time of the colonies.

Concluding her book *Neither Saints nor Sinners*—dedicated to many of the religious women during the colonial period in Latin America including Rosa de Lima, Catarina de San Juan (*La china poblana*), Madre María de San José, Sor Juana, Úrsula Suarez, and Catalina de Erauso—Kathleen Myers writes:

The memories of the women studied here did not die. We saw how their lives were reinterpreted yet again in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After Independence, Rosa became a symbol of Peruvian national identity and Catarina de San Juan was refashioned into a popular local heroine known as ‘La China Poblana.’ By the middle of the twentieth century, María de San José’s two convents were converted into museums. Late in the twentieth century, Sor Juana once again became an icon of Mexico’s artistic achievements, while in the United States she has been discovered as an early supporter of women’s rights. For her part, Catalina de Erauso has become a popular figure in Latin America, Spain and the United States: she is heralded as a bold sexual rebel. The only exception to this rewriting of meaning and identity has been Ursula Suarez. Her story only reappeared in the 1980s, so the time has yet come for her promotion as a symbol of Chilean identity. (166-67)

In all of their idealized glory, the women of the Generation of 1810 have not died either and, unlike Úrsula Suarez, never disappeared from the national imagination. They have found a permanent place in Chilean collective memory—even if their acts of valor and courage during the independence era have not been as canonically documented as those of their male counterparts. Parting from Grez’s publication of *Las mujeres de la independencia*, these women’s exemplary lives have been set forth as models for Chilean female identity.

In addition to bolstering patriotic sentiment by secularizing the hagiographic genre, Grez’s account of the women of the Independence Movement came at an important juncture for women in Chilean history. Between 1875 and 1895, the gap between male and female literacy was rapidly closing in Chile. By 1895, 34.4% of Chilean men and 29.2% of Chilean women could be classified as “letrados,” while in 1854, 17.3% of men and 9.7% of women met this classification and in 1865 the figures were 20.2% and 13.8% (Poblete 38). As these female literacy rates were climbing, so was recognition of the value held by Chile’s female citizens. Poblete highlights the state’s interest in properly educating women given their task of educating future Chilean patriots (113), and argues that another renowned Chilean author of the Nineteenth Century, Alberto Blest Gana, kept this political interest in mind by writing national novels like the literary classic *Martín Rivas*. According to Poblete, Blest Gana noticed the growing power of the written word for Chilean women and responded to the state’s desire to “hacer que las mujeres leyeran algo que fuese correcto para su género y que no conspirara con las sagradas funciones que la patria les encomendaba en la forma de hijos y esposos” (30). In other words, Blest Gana recognized the written word and education as spaces from which Chilean women could learn, reinforce, and emulate citizenship practices valuable to the nation.

In a sense, Grez’s *Las mujeres de la independencia* can be read in a similar light—especially considering that the opening paragraph of his text reads:

[S]i se hubiera dicho a principios de este siglo a uno de aquellos avanzados políticos y filósofos que ya meditaban en la revolución: “Es necesario que deis a vuestras hijas una educación esmerada; ellas pueden llegar a ser tan útiles a la familia y a la sociedad como vuestros hijos varones...”, es seguro que aquel hombre tan ilustrado os hubiera oído sin comprenderos y os hubiera mirado fijamente, compadecido de vuestra demencia. (45)

Grez goes on to state that Chilean women have always been exceptional mothers and homemakers, knowing how to instill younger generations with patriotic fervor while managing the economics of a household (45). He then goes one step further, reflecting upon how the Chileans of the second half of the Nineteenth Century questioned how the “glorious and fecund” Generation of 1810 was born. His answer?

¡Ah!, era que nuestras mujeres ya habían principiado a educarse, como lo manifestaban las muchas mujeres instruidas que figuraron en la revolución; era también que las grandes ideas de los filósofos del siglo XVIII llegaron hasta ellas, y fue tanto más poderosa la impresión que recibieron cuanto más hondo era el abismo de ignominia y de esclavitud en que vivían. Del contraste de esas dos situaciones brotó sin duda un gran pensamiento, una aspiración sublime por crear una patria independiente y libre, y fue tal vez en ese momento supremo en que, engrandecidas por una idea divina, nació la gigantesca generación de 1810. (46)

Thus, Grez calls for the continuing education of women in name of the *patria*. While the education of women was a polemical issue during the Nineteenth Century, Chile opened its universities to women in 1877—one year before Grez published *Las mujeres de la independencia*. Given this context, Grez’s emphasis on the links between education, citizenship, and patriotism takes a stand in this debate.

While Grez does utilize tools of the hagiographic genre, he does not do so in order to support the Church or to represent Chilean women as ideal Catholics; rather, he does so in order to represent them as ideal citizens (hence, the term “secular” or “lay” saints), with rights to an education. The sacrifices and humiliations that the women of the Generation of 1810 undergo are not carried out in God’s name, but in the name of an independent Chile. The episodes that Grez highlights in each biography serve to underscore that, like their male counterparts, educated women were integral to the formation of the Chilean Republic—and not just the specific women whose lives are highlighted. Rather, as Silva Castro points out in his prologue to the 1966 edition of *Las mujeres de la independencia*, Grez also had in mind the many other anonymous women who supported their country’s independence cause (22). In the penultimate chapter of his text, Grez takes a moment to recognize that his work is not all-inclusive, emphasizing:

[P]ero aún quedaría mucho que referir si nos propusiéramos contar también todos los actos de abnegación ejecutados por mujeres desconocidas, pero no por eso menos meritorias. Había entonces un mundo de sacrificios y de esfuerzos más dignos de admiración cuanto que no tenían ni la recompensa ni la gloria. (109)

By recognizing many more women than those mentioned played an important role in the formation of the Republic, Grez makes clear that all *chilenas* should be viewed as potentially heroic individuals worthy of the term citizen.<sup>8</sup>

By all accounts, this call appears to have resounded within the Chilean psyche. After the initial publication of *Las mujeres de la independencia*, the book was re-released twice: once in 1910 (to celebrate Chile's Centennial), and again in 1946. In 1900, journalist Mario Centore praised Grez's work, writing:

El señor Grez, literariamente, ha hecho labor Hermosa y sólida. Su primer libro, *Las mujeres de la independencia*, le mostró como escritor original y serio, no menos que ameno e instructivo. Describe en él con delicadeza y arte la vida y los episodios más culminantes de las mujeres ilustres de la Independencia y se revela ya en ese libro un escritor de raza y un temperamento artístico en buena gestión. (38)

This praise for *Las mujeres de la independencia* continued and, in 1966, Zig-Zag decided to publish a new edition of the book with a prologue and notes by Raúl Silva Castro. In 1967, *El Mercurio* published a review of the book that called it one of the great classics of Chilean literature, referring to it as “el más adecuado para la lectura complementaria de las jóvenes que hoy estudian en Chile...[también es] llamado a trazar profunda huella en el alma de la mujer chilena de todos los tiempos” (Campaña 5).

By the 1970s, it appears that this mark Campaña referred to was left. The lives of many of the women from *Las mujeres de la independencia* were invoked by a new generation of Chilean women engaged in battle against the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende. One group even named itself after Javiera Carrera (Baldez, “Nonpartisanship” 20), the very woman with whom Grez chooses to open his text. As Baldez maintains, “The women who mobilized against Allende referred to themselves as the direct descendants of Chile's national heroines, women who had played significant roles in the founding of the Chilean nation, such as Inés de Suarez and Paula Jaraquemada” (*Why Women Protest* 164). Given that Grez's work was edited and republished in 1966, it may very well be that his words—along with the actions of his female protagonists—resonated with this new generation, the “Generation of 1970-73.” It appears that Grez's final words were heeded by this group of twentieth-century women:

¡Jóvenes!, si alguna vez llega para la patria un momento supremo como el de 1810, imitad a las mujeres de entonces. Ellas no estaban preparadas como vosotras por la educación, y sin embargo el peligro las encontró vigorosas y sonrieron en su presencia, como los ángeles sonríen ante la muerte. No tenían una patria y la crearon. Ellas hicieron un héroe de cada hombre. (113)

The right-wing women who called for the end of the Popular Unity Government did in many ways view 1973, the year of the coup that installed the Pinochet dictatorship, as a “supreme moment” parallel to 1810. Despite the dictatorship's record of human rights abuses, those who supported the coup celebrated it as a second “Día de la liberación

nacional” and, as part of this imagining, the heroines of the independence period served as models deemed worthy of emulation.

*Michigan State University*

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> One such example is Chile's *Canal 13*'s recent broadcast of a television series called *Héroes* that recreates the life stories of Chile's national heroes. However, this recreation "[...] ha realizado una mirada masculina de los hitos que marcaron la formación de Chile" (Núñez).
- <sup>2</sup> Vicente Grez (1847-1909) contributed to a number of Chilean journals and newspapers as editor and author during the Nineteenth Century, including (among others) *El Charivari*, *La República* and *La época*. Grez also wrote four novels (*Emilia Reynals* [1883], *La dote de una joven* [1884], *Marianita* [1885], and *El ideal de una esposa* [1887]) as well as a book detailing his short exile to Peru due to the 1891 Chilean Civil War (*Viaje de destierro* [1893]). In addition to his literary endeavors, Grez held the post of deputy of Arauco and became the second vice-president of Chile's Chamber of Deputies in 1890. See Raúl Silva Castro's biographical account of Grez's life, "Evocación de Vicente Grez," as well as his prologue to the 1966 edition of *Las mujeres de la independencia*.
- <sup>3</sup> Michael Goodich also defends this notion of community:
- Each cult [dedicated to a saint] delineated the boundaries of community and remained an integral part of the economy of the supernatural by bringing together victim, family, friends, neighbors, fellow countrymen, and believers in a community of the faithful. The cult and miracle served as a sacred means of spiritually circumscribing the village, urban, and national community within a geographic space populated by a defined group of people and as a socially and religiously legitimate agency for the expression of familial, communal, or patriotic pride and cohesion. (150)
- <sup>4</sup> The defeat at Rancagua is a key event in the history of Chilean independence. It marked the exile of an estimated 3,000 Chileans to Mendoza (where San Martín and O'Higgins would continue leading the resistance movement) and marked the beginning of the Spanish Reconquest that effectively reestablished the Inquisition and the Royal *Audiencia* in Chile (Letelier 164).
- <sup>5</sup> See note 4.
- <sup>6</sup> Grez frequently refers to "Marcó" in his text; it would appear that he is alluding to Francisco Marcó del Pont. Marcó del Pont was the last Spaniard to hold the office of Royal Governor of Chile, a post he obtained after the defeat in Rancagua and held from 1815-1817. Historian Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt Letelier describes his royalist government as absolutist, repressive and invasive (169). Simon Collier also points to Marcó del Pont's rule as a moment of "savagely repression" (225), stating that "Marcó del Pont's basic policy can best be summed up in his own dictum that he would not even leave the Chileans tears with which to weep" (225-26).
- <sup>7</sup> Penco is a port city in the Bío Bío region of Chile.
- <sup>8</sup> While many of the biographical essays in Grez's text refer to women who have become a part of canonical Chilean history (i.e., Javiera Carrera or Paula Jaraquemada), others refer to women that have been in large part ignored. As part of Chile's Bicentennial Celebration, a non-governmental feminist organization known as "Corporación Humanas" published a book with the support of UNESCO titled



---

*Algunas, otras. Linaje de mujeres para el Bicentenario 1810-2010.* The book aims to *rescatar* (recover) the memory of 21 women who have been forgotten or ignored by “el discurso hegemónico cultural masculino” (7). For one of the women featured, María Cornelia Olivares, Grez serves as an important source.

---

**Works Cited**

- Baldez, Lisa. "Nonpartisanship as Political Strategy: Women Left, Right and Center in Chile." *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right*. Ed. Victoria Gonzalez and Karen Kampwirth. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2001. 273-98. Print.
- . *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.
- Campaña, Zenón. "Las mujeres de la independencia." *El Mercurio* 28 May 1967: 5. Print.
- Centore, Mario. "Los maestros viejos." *La Revista Blanca* 3 (Jan. 1900). 37-39. Print.
- Collier, Simon. *Ideas and Politics of Chilean Independence 1808-1833*. London: Cambridge UP, 1967. Print.
- Corporación Humanas. *Algunas, otras. Linaje de mujeres para el Bicentenario 1810-2010*. Ed. Ximena Zavala San Martín. Santiago, Chile: Corporación Humanas, 2010. Print.
- Cunningham, Lawrence S. *The Meaning of Saints*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980. Print.
- Goodich, Michael E. *Violence and Miracle in the Fourteenth Century*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.
- Grez, Vicente. *Las mujeres de la independencia*. Ed. Raúl Silva Castro. Santiago: Zig-Zag, 1966. Print.
- Letelier, Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt. *La independencia de Chile: Tradición, modernización y mito*. Madrid: MAPFRE, 1992. Print.
- Lupton, Julia Reinhard. *Afterlives of the Saints: Hagiography, Typology and Renaissance Literature*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996. Print.
- Matthews, Shailer. *Patriotism and Religion*. New York: MacMillan Company, 1918. Print.
- Morgan, Ronald J. *Spanish American Saints and the Rhetoric of Identity 1600-1810*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2002. Print.
- Mulder-Bakker, Anneke. Introduction. *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Anneke Mulder-Bakker. New York: Garland, 1995. 1-30. Print.
- Myers, Kathleen. *Neither Saints nor Sinners: Writing the Lives of Women in Spanish America*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.
- Nuñez, Natalia. "Actrices reviven a heroínas chilenas." *Revista Ya / El Mercurio*. 24 Apr. 2007: n. pag. Print.
- Poblete, Juan. *Literatura chilena del siglo XIX: Entre públicos lectores y figuras autoriales*. Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2003. Print.
- Silva Castro, Raúl. "Evocación de Vicente Grez." *Atenea* 384 (Apr.-June 1959): 79-94. Print.
- Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1991. Print.