



**THE ART OF PATRIOTIC
EPISTEMOLOGY:
MAPPING NEW SPAIN IN RAFAEL
LANDÍVAR'S *RUSTICATIO
MEXICANA***

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Rafael Landívar's *Rusticatio Mexicana* (1781) offers a unique set of challenges and opportunities for scholars of late colonial Spanish America. A pioneering work that extols the resources, eulogizes the flora and fauna, and celebrates the agriculture and industry of New Spain in fifteen cantos, Landívar's epic poem is written in the lingua franca of eighteenth-century Spanish American Jesuits (Latin), a language typically only accessible to a handful of scholars. Spanning from his native Guatemala to the remote regions of California and Texas and wavering between local and regional expressions of place-based pride and affinity, Landívar's *Rusticatio Mexicana* signals a landmark moment in New World fiction. Yet despite its continental spatial parameters and cultural outlook, Landívar's epic poem remains largely overlooked in anthologies of Latin American criticism and literature.

A recent wave of scholarship that offers a renewed attention to the underlying causes of Spanish American independence (Adelman and Rojas) and that highlights the vital role of the Jesuit order in transmitting and mediating Enlightenment philosophy in the Hispanic New World (Cañizares-Esguerra and Stolley) now positions us to examine Landívar's literary production in a new light. By situating his epic poem in critical debates about the shifting dynamics of Spanish colonial rule (Bleichmar and Keuthe and Adrian and Paquette), the competing imperatives of elite and subaltern subjects in the formation of an incipient national consciousness in the region (Brading and Pagden) and in the permutations of sovereignty in the age of Atlantic revolutions (Adelman, Rojas, Van Young, Rodriguez and Tutino), I aim to demonstrate how Landívar's *Rusticatio Mexicana* establishes the preconditions of a poetics of independence during the waning days of Bourbon colonial rule.

Anticipating the poetics of continental unity found in the works of Andrés Bello and José Martí—two authors famous for promoting the idea of a unified Latin American culture by transforming literature into an instrument of nation-building during the first and second half of the nineteenth-century— Landívar's *Rusticatio Mexicana* offers the earliest

example of a New World epic poem.¹ By extolling the natural resources, eulogizing the flora and fauna, and celebrating the agriculture and industry of New Spain, the poet simultaneously registers its emergence from a period of informal independence and commercial autonomy to one of trade restrictions and limited local authority under Bourbon colonial rule (Lynch 1-36). Resulting in the expulsion of the Jesuit order to the Papal States, Landívar's condition as an exiled cleric informs the poem's nostalgic structure of desire. Seeking to recapture an idealized past rather than to imagine a possible future, the *Rusticatio Mexicana* enacts a poetics of restoration that longs for a previous political and economic order characterized by creole commercial and political autonomy. Yet in the process of registering discontent with the shifting dynamics of Spanish colonial rule, the poem unwittingly helps establish the conditions of a politics of independence.

Written in the context of eighteenth-century claims in the emerging field of natural history about the moral and physical degeneracy of the New World—claims Landívar encounters for the first time as an exiled cleric in Italy—the poem simultaneously addresses two distinct sets of readers. On the one hand, written with an eye toward European readers, and on the other, toward fellow Spanish Americans, the poem's ultimate meaning is contingent upon its reader's religious, cultural and ethnic identity. In other words, whereas a European reader may find his preconceived notions about New World degeneracy challenged, a Spanish American might develop a greater sense of pride and admiration for his homeland as a result. Moreover, whereas a cleric might interpret the poem as a chronicle of the Jesuit order's prior role as an entrepreneurial and intellectual elite, a layperson might identify moments within it that highlight New Spain's potential as an independent and prosperous nation. Finally, whereas a creole reader might find his homeland vindicated before prejudiced European representations, a peninsular might view the poem merely as a fanciful expression of American hubris.

In this essay, I examine the poetics of restoration of the *Rusticatio Mexicana* by taking a synchronic rather than a diachronic approach to its fifteen chapters. In other words, rather than trace its evolution from beginning to end (an approach critics such as Antony Higgins and Andrew Laird have pursued in distinct ways), I focus on moments that reveal fissures and contradictions in the poem's idealized depiction of New Spain. By closely examining moments where its image of a geography of docile and productive bodies and prosperous and fertile landscapes reveals its own cracks and fissures, I demonstrate how it wavers between the

¹The U.S. poet Joel Barlow, began writing his now largely forgotten *Vision of Columbus* in 1780 but did not publish it until 1787.

competing and contradictory demands of its author's perspective as a creole cleric. Simultaneously attached to and disenchanted with Spanish imperial ideology, Landívar's position as an exiled and later defunct Jesuit informs the epic poem's multiple and contradictory set of meanings. Similarly, by drawing connections between its literary and visual modes of representations —connections that have been previously ignored by critics— I will demonstrate how the poem's depiction of slave labor and native pastimes serve to stage allegories of racial harmony and cultural autonomy. Helping to perpetuate a fiction of New Spain as a harmonious and autonomous society, the poem's visual depictions serve to conceal its stratified and violently racialized realities.

Mapping New Spain

Upon settling in the university community of Bologna where he becomes the director of a Jesuit center, Landívar pens his epic poem in 1782 with both fond memories of his previous life and vivid impressions of his new social and cultural milieu. Shifting between Mexico and Guatemala, between tropical and arid landscapes, and between industrial and agricultural spaces, Landívar establishes many of the literary and ideological parameters of Andrés Bello and José Martí, even as the latter author transforms these parameters into a discourse critical of U.S. imperial ambitions in the region. By casting its spaces in a poetic mode that extolls its natural resources and economic output, Landívar' epic poem imagines Spanish North America as a previously autonomous geography. Always casting his poetic gaze toward the past and never toward the present, Landívar is more interested in recapturing a lost era rather than in writing a new chapter in the continent's history. And yet whereas subsequent authors associated with the nation-building efforts of the independence era such as Andrés Bello and José Martí will often situate their nation-building aims in a tense or complementary relation to broader continental spaces (namely, Latin America and the United States), Landívar's identification remains squarely situated within the affective bounds of Spanish imperial ideology. Dedicating the poem to his native city, the poet describes his reasons for naming the poem after New Spain as a whole in the following terms:²

I have entitled this poem *Rusticatio Mexicana*, not only because nearly everything contained in it relates to the fields of Mexico, but also because I realize that it is customary in Europe to call the whole of New Spain, Mexico, without taking into account the different countries. (Laird 123)

² Andrew Laird's English translation will be used throughout this essay. See *The Epic of America: An Introduction to Rafael Landívar and the Rusticatio Mexicana*. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 2006.

Written with an eye toward European readers, Landívar seeks to reconcile his desire to make his subject matter legible to an unfamiliar audience with an attention to his own cultural specificity as a colonial subject from a distinct region within Spain's larger Mexican empire. Thus by continuously shifting his poetic gaze from local to regional spaces, and from nearby to distant landscapes in a colonial geography stretching from his native Guatemala to California and Texas, Landívar seeks to balance the competing demands of addressing internal differences as well as conveying the full extent of Spain's vast North American empire. Reflecting an awareness of the constraints he faces as a colonial subject from an unknown corner of Spain's New World empire, Landívar seeks to enlighten as well as to persuade European readers by inscribing the poem with a pedagogical (as well as an ideological) intention. In other words, by situating his native Guatemala within a broader and more recognizable geography from an eighteenth-century European reader's perspective (Mexico), Landívar simultaneously instructs readers on regional differences and extolls its natural wonders and economic output.

As we will later see, the poem's graphic illustrations further serve to reinforce the pedagogical (and inherently ideologically charged) aim of making European readers visualize Spanish North America as a geography with its own economic merits and culturally autonomous logic. Helping readers envision New Spain through graphic illustrations of sugar mills, Landívar traces components of its economy and cultural habits to moments in the poem that stage allegories of racial harmony. Thus by attempting to create points of correspondence between word and image in New Spain's colonial economy, Landívar's graphic illustrations serve to help readers not merely imagine, but more specifically, visualize it as a self-referential and harmonious multiracial society. In the process of helping readers view New Spain in such a light, Landívar unwittingly helps establish the preconditions of a politics of independence.

Situating Landívar within the Dispute over the New World

Not unlike many of his fellow Spanish American exiled Jesuits, Landívar wrote the *Rusticatio Mexicana* in response to widely held European beliefs about the physical and moral degeneracy of the New World, beliefs he sought to dispel by creating images of fertile and prosperous landscapes and by crafting scenes of racial harmony. Yet unlike other exiled Jesuits (Clavijero, Molina and Velasco) who took to the pen to contest the prevailing views of prominent European naturalists (Raynal, Robertson and De Pauw, Landívar's efforts to dispel their beliefs took on a far less polemical tone. Never directly confronting their views, Landívar appears content creating awe inspiring vistas of fertile and prosperous landscapes and rational and productive bodies. Yet in the process of depicting the landscapes of North and Central America as conducive to prosperous and

dynamic economies and productive and harmonious societies, Landívar overturns common tropes in the emerging field of natural history pertaining to the New World. The apparent success of the poem —published for a second time within a year of its original publication— is indicative of the impact he must have had in the imagination of Italian readers.

Despite his fame as one of the most accomplished Latin poets of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, little is known about Landívar's life in Italy. The only existing biography of Landívar written during his lifetime emphasizes his extraordinary piety as a priest who adapted successfully to his new cultural environment despite facing considerable financial and emotional hardships upon his arrival (Pérez Alonso 24-32). As Antony Higgins notes in one of the few English-language books of scholarship devoted to the creole cleric's work, Landívar sought to reconcile in the *Rusticatio Mexicana* and in his other works a new approach to knowledge based in scientific reasoning and eighteenth-century political philosophy with Catholic religious doctrine and medieval scholasticism. Higgins describes these conflicting impulses within Landívar's work as reflective of a broader and complex process of negotiation between colonial forms of knowledge associated with the baroque and an emergent discourse of enlightenment that Spanish American authors sought to redeploy for their own strategic purposes (109-166).

Following the footsteps of other illustrious Jesuits in eighteenth-century New Spain —he enters the religious order's famous seminary in Tepotzotlán where he excels in poetry and rhetoric— Landívar's *Rusticatio Mexicana* reflects many of the tensions and peculiarities of the Spanish American Enlightenment. Signaling not so much a break with colonial forms of knowledge, but rather, a re-elaboration of its modes of control and power, religious and secular belief systems and baroque and enlightenment discourses co-exist in Landívar's poem and persist at times as competing, and at times as complementary forms of knowledge (Higgins 1-20, 109-166).

Poetry and Exile

In one of the few available biographies written about Landívar during his lifetime, Félix Sebastián, a Spanish missionary acquainted with the community of Jesuits from the New World residing in Bologna, describes the Guatemalan cleric's transatlantic journey as a long and dangerous one (Pérez Alonso 24-32). According to Félix Sebastián, Landívar gained a reputation as an exceptionally devout and mild mannered cleric among the exiled community of Spanish American Jesuits in Bologna where he led a peaceful and happy life up until his death. Given the few yet revealing clues available about Landívar's existence in Bologna, establishing connections between his own exilic conditions and the *Rusticatio Mexicana* poses a number challenges for critics. These challenges are further complicated by

the relatively few references to his own experience of exile in the actual poem. By the same token, the few direct allusions to his own exile offer definitive clues about the relationship between exile and the poem's very conditions of creation. The textual dynamics of this relationship will be further examined shortly.

As its title suggests, Landívar's *Rusticatio Mexicana* evokes the rural landscapes of New Spain by extolling its animal and vegetable life, underscoring its role as an engine of Spain's global economy and reflecting upon its unique position as a crossroads of Christian and indigenous belief systems and cultural forms. As José Mata Gavidia has noted, even though Landívar modeled his *Rusticatio* after Virgil's *Georgics*, his work differs from this classical epic poem in important respects. Whereas Virgil sought to capture the vanishing lifestyle country living had previously afforded citizens of the Roman republic, Landívar aims to give readers a glimpse of a cultural and natural landscape anchored in a continuous present. And whereas Virgil's exile is largely self-imposed and symbolic, Landívar's is occasioned by events and imperial policies dictated from afar and thus beyond his own control. Serving as the *sine qua non* of the poem's creation, the theme of exile has a far more immediate connection to Landívar's conception of his *Rusticatio Mexicana* than in Virgil's *Georgics*. Yet despite its personal immediacy, as Andrew Laird states, his exile is rarely referenced in the poem (Laird 59-61). In one rare moment, he identifies the pain of exile and displacement as the very condition of the poem's creation:

Oh that I might be permitted again, when wearied, to enjoy those baths of old, to visit those waters crystal-clear, and to enjoy once more the pleasant sky and land!

But since cruel fortune denies me every relief, I shall repair to the fields singing sweet melodies to the accompaniment of the lyre, and beside the learned waters of Helicon I shall alleviate my depressing weariness with a song of the country. (Laird 224)

Serving as a compensatory form of relief, the poem itself can be understood as an effort to manage and cope with the pain of exile and homesickness. The optimistic tone of the poem—that is, its ceaseless celebration of New Spain's natural and commercial landscapes from beginning to end—thus masques a more somber reality. The very process of poetically retracing the spatial parameters of his homeland prompts bittersweet memories in the poet's imagination. Serving as a structuring device in the poem, his desire to return to a lost homeland lies hidden beneath the poet's idealization of Mexico's geography. In other words, Landívar's desire "to enjoy those baths of old, those waters crystal clear," reveals a longing for a return to a spatial environment associated with life-giving and revivifying images. Similarly, by seeking "to enjoy once more the pleasant sky and land," he situates his desire within a geographically circumscribed location. Well

aware of the impossibility of returning (“But since cruel fortune denies me every relief”), Landívar finds solace in poetically re-imagining his homeland from the rural landscape of his adopted homeland (“I shall repair to the fields singing sweet melodies to the accompaniment of the lyre”). Thus by “seek[ing] to alleviate [his] depressing weariness with a song of the country,” the Italian countryside paradoxically serves as a reminder of his impossible return and as a space that enables mental recovery and solace through literary recollection.

New World Sublime

Well aware that writing an epic poem in Latin that extols the landscapes and communities of a region unknown to the ancient world poses a problem from a literary point of view, Landívar frames this challenge as a crisis of representation in the poem’s preface. Paraphrasing the medieval Latin poet Golmaro Marsigliano, he reveals an anxiety about capturing realities that exceed classical literary norms and cultural models: “Alas! How difficult it is to find words, and to fit those words to the meter when the subject is wholly new. Often words will fail me (even now I foresee it), often the meter itself will rebel against the words.” Demonstrating a tension between the New World realities he seeks to portray and the constraints placed upon him by the epic genre and Latin language, Landívar’s *Rusticatio Mexicana* anticipates many of the reservations twentieth-century Latin American authors express about using European literary norms and categories in their writing. In other words, by framing the difficulty of his task as a breakdown in language (“Often words will fail me”), Landívar creates an understanding of his poem as a work that emerges from the impossibility of transmitting New World cultural forms and realities in a European literary register and language. Mindful of the extent of the problem even before he begins his poem (“even now I foresee it”), Landívar imagines his task as an effort to make the rhythm of the epic genre conform to a foreign vocabulary despite its inherent reluctance (“often the meter itself will rebel against the words”).

Landívar transforms this problem into an opportunity by extolling the novelty of his subject. In other words, in the process of extolling the beauty of his homeland, he seeks to cast the landscapes of New Spain as spaces that surpass the ancient world in their aesthetic beauty and power, inviting readers to familiarize themselves with this region of the world. Framed in an eighteenth-century vocabulary of the sublime, Landívar transforms the terms of European aesthetic philosophy by conveying an image of his native Guatemala as a space of unparalleled natural beauty. As Antony Higgins demonstrates in his authoritative work on the poetics of space and creole subjectivity in the *Rusticatio Mexicana*, Landívar provocatively redefines the sublime as an aesthetic feeling or emotion that inherently springs from the New World (Higgins 167-210). From his overpowering

feeling of pride and emotion in recalling the waterfalls of his native Guatemala in Book 3 to his admiring depictions of the lakes of Mexico in Book 4, Landívar repeatedly traces the sublime to the landscapes of Spanish North America. His depiction of the valley surrounding his native city is no exception:

Let the people of Egypt keep silent about their green fields enriched by the fertile waters of the bountiful Nile, and let the ancient world keep silent concerning its idly-heralded seven wonders. This valley surpasses in beauty all wonders, affording unparalleled shade for the modest nymphs ever scented with fragrant mountain flowers, and always reverberating with the sweet song of birds. (Laird 148)

Landívar provocatively frames the question of sublime emotion by contrasting the wonders of the ancient and modern world. In other words, by comparing the Nile basin to the Valley of Guatemala, he aims to advance a concept of the sublime grounded in New World soil, belittling the former in order to extol the properties of the latter. Thus by suggesting that “the people of Egypt keep silent about their green fields enriched by the fertile waters of the bountiful Nile,” he tempts readers to imagine a more formidable landscape both in terms of its natural resources and aesthetic sublimity. Similarly, by suggesting that “the ancient world keep silent concerning its idly-heralded seven wonders,” Landívar seeks to expand the parameters of the sublime not only to include New World spaces, but moreover, in order to identify his native Guatemala as its very source.

Thus by repeatedly urging those who sing its praises to remain silent, Landívar simultaneously clears the path for a new expression of the sublime grounded in a landscape that he extolls as superior both in terms of its natural beauty and fecundity. The valley of Guatemala “surpasses in beauty all wonders” not so much because it evokes an overpowering emotion that borders on terror (as in the Burkean conception of the sublime), but rather, due to its “unparalleled shade” and its state of “always reverberating with the sweet song of birds.” Never approximating the intensity of dread, fear or terror described by his northern European counterparts, Landívar’s conception of the sublime is more reminiscent of milder emotions. Evoking feelings of solace, relief and tranquility, his reconceptualization of the sublime is inherently rooted in his condition as an exiled cleric. Paradoxically, his very separation from the Valley of Guatemala structures his understanding of the sublime as a revitalizing feeling of relief, solace and tranquility—an understanding that stems from his condition as an exiled Spanish American Jesuit.

Allegories of Racial Harmony

Landívar’s depiction of his native Guatemala as a space of unrivaled natural beauty stands in sharp contrast to popular eighteenth-century

philosophical accounts of the New World as a desolate, shriveled and inhospitable continent found in the works of natural historians such as Robertson, De Pauw and Raynal. While never making direct reference to their writings, his depiction of Spanish North America as a sublime landscape of unparalleled beauty and natural resources offers a literary counterpoint to their influential visions. Implicit in Landívar's poetic depiction is an effort to stake a claim in what Antonello Gerbi described as the dispute over the New World—that is, the competing theories about its climate, geography, animal and vegetable life in the emerging field of natural history (Gerbi xi-xiii, xv-xviii). Coming across these theories for the first time in Italy, Landívar sought to dispel many of their beliefs by offering an alternative mapping of its natural, cultural and political geography. And just as some European natural historians extended their theory of the New World degeneracy to the continent's inhabitants (Robertson and Depauw), so too, does Landívar seek to contest their prejudiced visions. By extolling the agricultural ingenuity and physical vigor of the Mexican planter, Landívar seeks to draw an image of his homeland's inhabitants as rational and productive subjects:

The treasures hidden in the bowels of the rich earth may be the delight of the crowd. My delight is found in condensing sweet honey in earthen molds, not what the Sicilian bee gathers in the fields and industriously stores in the hollow trunks of trees, but what the Mexican planter, having pressed in the mill and condensed in copper kettles over the fire, takes as white sugar from one-shaped molds of clay. (Laird 188)

Making allusion to Virgil's *Georgics*, Landívar signals here his departure from the Latin poet's major work. In other words, even though he models his poem after Virgil, he strategically turns our gaze away from the honeycombs of Sicily and toward the sugar plantations of Mexico to reveal not the work ethic of bees but rather, the agricultural ingenuity of plantation farmers. By highlighting the planter's hard work and ingenuity—that is, both his physical strength and mental capacity—Landívar sets the stage for a broader image of capable and hardworking bodies cultivating sugar in a prosperous colonial landscape, thereby revealing the dual purpose of his poem. Seeking to celebrate both its natural wonders and its agriculture, both its physical vitality and its technological ingenuity, Landívar depicts before European readers an idyllic and seductive colonial landscape based on sugar production. Perhaps more to the point, Landívar reveals here the inner workings of an emerging Spanish American creole consciousness, a consciousness that imagines the landscapes of the Americas not merely as spaces of aesthetic wonder, but moreover, as spaces of productive labor and economic prosperity.

One of the most conspicuous absences in this idealized landscape is the existence of bonded labor and racial violence fundamental to sugar plantations. Rather than reveal the stratified nature of plantation economies or the routine character of racialized violence central to their existence, Landívar focuses on the mechanics of sugar mills and on the technical aspects of sugar extraction. In some ways more reminiscent of an instructor's manual than a chapter from an epic poem, his canto on sugar extraction includes two illustrations: a water-drawn and a mule-drawn sugar mill. Offering a painstaking description of each mill's component parts and mechanical function, Landívar creates an image of man and machine seamlessly working together in harmony. The aim in both of these illustrations is to highlight the technological ingenuity of each kind of mill and to demonstrate their modernity and sophistication by offering a visual example to compliment his poetic descriptions. Thus by creating a complementary relation between word and image—that is, between a literary and a visual medium of representation—Landívar offers a window into the inner workings of a creole subjectivity that seeks to imagine the plantation economies of Mexico and Guatemala as a harmonious balance between labor and industry, man and machine.





In keeping with the aims of providing European readers an idyllic depiction of Mexico's plantation economy, Landívar describes slave laborers as "Africans, with skin scorched by the blazing sun, noted for their strength and hard work, whom the torrid land of Libya sends us to work unceasingly on the sugar plantations" (Laird 188). Landívar conveniently elides any allusion to the slave trade in his characterization of black slaves by focusing on their dark complexion, physical strength and hard work. Similarly, by omitting any reference to the forced nature and traumatic conditions of their migration from Africa to the Americas, Landívar perpetuates an image of strong and hard working bodies with an endless capacity to endure hard labor and strenuous living conditions.

One moment in the canto stands apart in its graphic depiction of violence and bodily injury that slave laborers faced on a daily basis. Even though he makes no reference to danger emanating from humans — planters are consistently portrayed as wise and benevolent overseers— he describes the threat that operating the sugar mills posed to slave laborers. Landívar describes the threat of bodily injury that slave laborers faced on a daily basis with remarkable detail:

But woe to that one whose fingers are accidentally caught in the mill! For indeed the hand follows the fingers, and then, the arm, and finally the whole body is dragged in by the arm. It is necessary in such a case to reverse the direction of the mules, or suddenly to stop the fall of the water, or rather to amputate the crushed member, lest the cruel machine

grind the body between its fierce teeth. Ah! how many times have I been stricken with grief and bitterly mourned the misfortune of one who suffered the loss of his limbs. It is important, therefore, for them to avoid falling asleep at night by carrying on conversations, or to keep awake through the night by singing. (Laird 193)

Thus by strategically shifting the source of danger and violence away from the planter and onto the sugar mill itself, Landívar steers away from the polemical subject of slavery. His aim here is not to defend or repudiate slavery—although his conspicuous silence on the matter leads one to think he did not find it objectionable—but rather, to reveal the inherent danger that operating a sugar mill entails. Perhaps struggling to reconcile his desire to extoll the prosperity of Mexico's sugar plantations with the potential outcry that a subject as touchy as slavery might illicit among European readers, Landívar's display of empathy for injured black bodies comes across as perfunctory. Especially when viewed in light of the disproportionate amount of attention devoted to the economic prosperity of plantations relative to the scant attention given to the injuries or deaths incurred as a result of operating sugar mills in the canto, his expression of grief and regret over their human cost is more reminiscent of an obligatory afterthought than of a genuine expression of emotion. Seeking to draw to a close a grim moment in an otherwise cheerful canto, Landívar concludes with a suggestion on strategies for minimizing the dangers of operating sugar mills.

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Just as he underscores the prosperity and technological ingenuity of Mexico's sugar plantations, so, too, does he extoll other sectors of its economy. As various critics have noted (Higgins and Laird), the *Rusticatio Mexicana* can be read as offering a model for obtaining a greater degree of autonomy from Spain through the diversification of Mexico and Guatemala's economy. Thus by devoting entire cantos not only to sugar, but moreover, to indigo and silk dyes, Landívar offers an image of New Spain as a model economy based in both agricultural and industrial production. Surpassing Spain in output and productivity by some estimates, Mexico's economic success during the first half of the eighteenth century was inextricably linked to the critical role of the Jesuit order as a landowning and entrepreneurial elite. Their expulsion from New Spain and the New World as a whole was part of a broader series of reforms implemented by a new Bourbon state that sought to generate more revenue by making the colonies more economically dependent on the metropole.

When viewed in light of these shifting colonial realities, an undercurrent of discontent can be detected in Landívar's poetic depiction of economic prosperity. In the process of remembering an idealized past,

Landívar seeks to recapture in the realm of poetry a previous era characterized by prosperity and relative autonomy. Well aware that his effort to recapture this loss in the realm of poetry merely offers fleeting moments of solace and diversion, Landívar conceives of the *Rusticatio Mexicana* primarily as a means to relieve his own feelings of homesickness and nostalgia:

These things will always foster in me a love for my native land, and they will be a sweet relief in my adversities... Receive, meanwhile, my harsh strains, a consolation for my grief, and be, for your part, my source of satisfaction. (Laird 121)

Above and beyond Landívar's conscious motivations for writing his epic poem—motivations made starkly clear in its dedication—exist the unmistakable traces of an emerging structure of discontent with Bourbon colonial rule. As I have sought to demonstrate, Landívar offers a relatively uncontroversial mapping of Spanish American colonial realities among his fellow Jesuit compatriots exiled in Italy. Yet underneath his poetic depictions of docile and productive colonial bodies working together to form a vision of racial harmony, also lies an understanding of its social and economic landscape as a geography undergoing dramatic historical and ideological changes. Structured by a poetics of restoration—that is, by a nostalgic desire to return to a previous era characterized by economic permissiveness and informal independence—Landívar's *Rusticatio Mexicana* seeks to recover a lost past yet stops short of imagining a possible future. In the process of attempting to recapture a previous age of commercial prosperity and relative autonomy, he simultaneously helps establish the literary conditions for a politics of independence.

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