

*Alberto Blest Gana and Clotario Blest. Literary and Political Legacy of an Irishman in Chile **

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Abstract: *A panorama of Chilean history is framed by three generations of the Blest family. The three characters of the saga were pioneers in their respective occupations: the first was the founder of medicine in Chile; the second was the initiator of the Chilean novel and the third was the creator of the Central Única de Trabajadores (CUT), the tenacious defenders of labour wrights in the twentieth century. Father, son and grandson describe their life stories as a sinuous and complex journey, as it generally is when history is observed in detail.*

Keywords: *Alberto Blest Gana; Clotario Blest; the Irish in Chile.*

The grandfather. William Cunningham Blest Maiben (1800-1884)



Much of the available information about the Irish immigrant William Cunningham Blest Maiben comes from the same source: the fascinating book, *Los médicos de antaño en el reino de Chile* [Doctors of ancient times in the kingdom of Chile], published in 1877, not by a doctor, but by Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, a close friend of the Blest Gana family. In its third part, the book devotes several pages to the Irish physician and the importance of his role in the history of modern medicine in Chile. Dr Cunningham Blest established a new paradigm in relation to the Spanish model of *protomedicato*, a type of controlling Inquisition of the profession. Through Vicuña Mackenna's detailed account of divergences with the

local doctors who commanded the so-called *Tribunal del Protomedicato*, it is clear that, thanks to the work of the persistent Irish physician, the practice of medicine in Chile moved away from colonial archaism founded on medieval concepts to a scientific and modern stage.

Blest's management also extended to reforms in the teaching of medicine, introducing the idea that the subject was not an anathema, but a liberal and dignified career. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the medical profession was so disparaged that a story circulated about a young woman of society whose family refused to accept her marriage because the suitor was merely an aspiring doctor (Ferrer 322).

Born in Sligo, the son of Albert Blest and Anna Maiben, William Cunningham Blest

attended Trinity College Dublin. In 1821, he received a PhD from the University of Edinburgh with a specialism in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, and he became a member of the Royal College of Surgeons in London.

The young doctor arrived in Valparaiso in 1823-24. He followed two of his many brothers, Andrew and John, who had already settled in Chile. The first had been working for a brewery since 1814; the second, John, also a doctor, alternated between Chile and Peru. Without having previously planned it, circumstances led William to settle in Chile permanently (Vicuña Mackenna 269).

In 1826, just two years after his arrival, Dr Cunningham Blest published an eighteen page study, *Observaciones sobre el estado de la medicina en Chile, con la propuesta de un plan para su mejora* [Observations on the State of medicine in Chile, with a proposed plan for its improvement] (Santiago IMP. Independiente, 1826), in which he judged sanitary conditions to be deplorable, denounced the lack of interest of the authorities in medical science and detailed a reform plan. The impact of the booklet was immediate and led to the creation of the medical society which would surpass the archaic system of Protomedicato which prevailed at that time.

His next study, *Ensayo sobre las causas más comunes de las enfermedades que se padecen en Chile; con indicaciones de los mejores medios para evitar su destructora influencia* [Essay on the most common causes of diseases that are suffered in Chile; with indications of the best ways to avoid their destructive influence] (Santiago, IMP. Renjifo, 1828)¹, revealed him to be an acute observer who studied the climate, habits, diseases, epidemics and endemic diseases that formed a pathological map of the Chilean society of the time. He wrote articles in the newspaper *El Araucano* about health, pharmacology, vaccines and the use of mineral waters, and others which remained unpublished (Ferrer 381). As the leader of the medical society, he exercised strong powers of arbitration in the award of licenses to practice medicine in the country. There were several immigrants to whom he denied professional rights, citing their lack of training and experience. There were many resulting controversies (Silva Castro 44), sustained through articles in the press with local doctors, such as that on the use of *secale cornutum* (ergot²) in obstetrics and gynaecology (Vicuña Mackenna 258).

In 1832, Blest also participated in the creation of a Central Board of charities and public health, which influenced the improvement of cemeteries and hospitals. His culminating work was the creation of the first course of medical sciences, in 1833, which was established in the San Juan de Dios Hospital, under the academic direction and financial administration of the National Institute. On this course he was professor of pathology and internal clinician until 1853, and director between 1865 and 1867. Three successive generations of students were shaped by him. His words at the inauguration of the school show his deep pride in his achievement:

Gentlemen, students: the constant and ardent desire of my life has been to help the beneficent tendency, dignity, importance and respect of the profession to which I belong, and since I am the first to have the honour to open the majestic doors of medicine to the Chilean people, an illustrious science which enables me to be useful to the country, my spirit is moved by a sentiment of gratitude to the Government which has provided the means to fulfil my wish, and ensures that my name may be found in its future history.³ (In Ferrer 336)

In addition to his professional activity William Cunningham Blest also featured on the national political stage. In 1831, he was elected Deputy for Rancagua, and held the position of Senator of the Republic for three years. He arrived in Chile during the decades of political anarchy following the departure of Bernardo O'Higgins which were characterised by the dizzying succession of Presidents. However, Blest was asserting himself as the great authority of the period in the field of medicine. Later, when Diego Portales came to power, Blest continued to be influential, partly due to his friendship with the Prime Minister. Raúl Silva Castro, the great critic of Alberto Blest Gana's work, has noted some contradiction in the support provided to conservative governments by the doctor and his extreme liberalism manifested throughout his life. In 1844, for example, when Francisco Bilbao was sentenced for the publication of his anarchist libel, *La sociabilidad chilena* (Chilean sociability), Cunningham Blest was among those who celebrated the verdict, which had adverse repercussions for him and led him to be sanctioned by the University Council.

In general, however, he was a man who kept a low profile. It is possible to glimpse in his conciliatory spirit and non-partisanship, characteristics which would be shared by his son Alberto. His grandson, Clotario, although never shying away from controversial attitudes in his trade union activities, also revealed conciliatory virtues, defending the fight for the word, and against armed conflict... But I am getting ahead of myself.

The sketch drawn of Cunningham Blest by Dr Augusto Orrego Luco⁴, who met him at the premises of the San Juan de Dios Hospital and was a student of his disciples is touching:

When I look back at my memories of my old-school times the figure of a tall, slim, slender, man of a haughty and elegant bearing often appears... His clear eyes and his blond hair accentuated his distinguished Irish type. But what most attracted our attention when we saw him go through the hospital aisles and rooms, was both his imposing figure, and the veneration with which everyone was looking at him. Our teachers, nuns, nurses, everybody, greeted him with respect and came close to his way. ... He never walked alone, some of the doctors always surrounded him [...] I heard him speaking in a rare Spanish with a strong British pronunciation, which made his language singularly expressive.⁵ (Orrego Luco 125/132)

Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, who knew the family and was a friend of Cunningham Blest's children, drew this portrait: "His arrogant figure could not pass unnoticed; he attracted attention from the time he visited the sick in his early years on horseback, protected in the summers by a colourful sunshade, in his elegant carriage."⁶ (In Silva Castro 24).

Dr Cunningham Blest married twice. His first marriage was in 1827, to María de la Luz Gana, who belonged to a powerful family of Basque descendance, with influence in politics and the military. They lived in the Alameda de las Delicias, in the larger of two houses in front of the headquarters of the artillery, next to San Juan de Dios Hospital where Blest worked. The owners lived in the more modest house at the back, and the Blest Gana family rented the larger one facing the street.⁷ After the early death of his wife, in 1851, he went to live with his children in the mansion of the Gana López family, located on the Mall opposite the convent of the Poor Clares, which is now the site of the National Library, next to Santa Lucia Hill, which in those days was arid and rocky.

According to Silva Castro, the marriage gave him "the best friends that Chile could

provide in the first half of the nineteenth century. Don Diego Portales, Don Andrés Bello, Don Diego Antonio Barros (Diego Barros Arana's father), Don Antonio Jacobo Vial, Don José Manuel Valdés, Don Juan de la Cruz Gandarillas and Don Juan de Dios Correa de Saa are among those who were his friends." (Silva Castro 20).

Of the eleven children he had with María de la Luz, seven reached adulthood and three stood out as men of letters and politics: Guillermo, Alberto and Joaquin. The first was a diplomat and a romantic poet of great prestige in the mid-nineteenth century; the second was Chile's greatest nineteenth-century novelist and also a diplomat; and the third distinguished himself as a lawyer, journalist and politician.

In 1879, the widower married a second time to María del Carmen Ugarte de los Reyes, mother of his three youngest children: two boys and a daughter. The only one who reached the age of maturity was Ricardo Blest Ugarte, future father of Clotario Blest.

Until the end of his life William Cunningham Blest lived in a house on Eighteenth Street which he acquired at auction. He alternated between his modest residence and his property in San Bernardo, where he died on 7 February 1884, at the age of 84. Despite the titles and fame that he enjoyed during his golden years, he was not a man attached to money and social glamour. With the passage of time and as he aged, he moved away from public life, devoting himself to the practice of medicine and philanthropic activities. His son Joaquín had died and his novelist son had not been living in Chile since 1867. There are no traces of correspondence with his son in the vast collection of Alberto Blest Gana's letters, so little is known about those last years. After his death, in spite of his funeral and several obituaries in the local press, there was no memorial homage in the annals of the Universidad de Chile that year. The following year, there was a benefit on behalf of his children, the result of his second marriage, whose economic situation was always difficult (Silva Castro 26).

In 1955, Don Raúl Silva Castro noted that there was no street in Santiago named after Guillermo C. Blest. Today we find some two or three on the map of the Chilean Capital with the names of his sons William and Alberto, and his grandson Clotario; however, to the best of my knowledge, there is still no street that carries Blest's name.

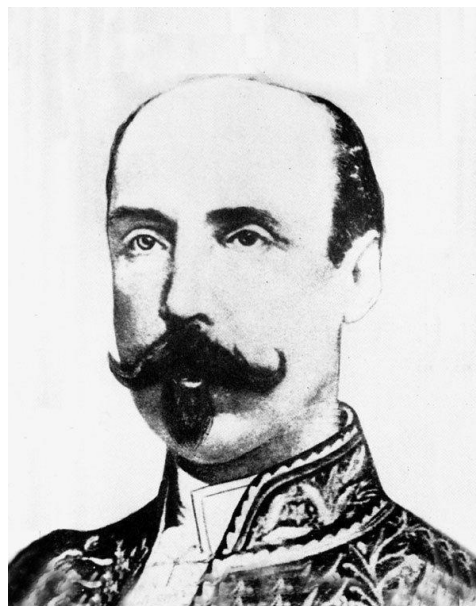
In fact, as recently as September 2017, Dr Alejandro Goic, of the National Academy of Medicine, published the following statement in the newspaper, El Mercurio:

Despite his inestimable trajectory, until the twentieth century there was no hospital, clinic or street to celebrate his name. Aware of this omission, in 1993 we inaugurated the Plaza Blest in the precinct of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile. Unfortunately, it was recently dismantled due to the requirements of the future subway Line 3. Perhaps, an initial step of recognition would be to name the station next to the Faculty as "Doctor Blest". Furthermore, an expression of citizen's gratitude demands a sculpture that would incorporate into the daily collective gaze the figure of such an illustrious character in the history of nineteenth-century Chile.⁸ ("El doctor Blest", El Mercurio, 15 de septiembre de 2017)

2. The son. Alberto Blest Gana (1830-1920)

Alberto was the third child of Blest's first marriage. His childhood at Alameda House, in front of the headquarters of the artillery, was marked by an austere education, which, despite the games played in the garden during the day, included readings by candlelight of books from his father's library: Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Miguel de Cervantes and other writers in English and Spanish.

At the age of 15, Alberto showed an interest in pursuing a military career, inspired by several of his maternal uncles. He was sent to Paris, at the end of 1847, to attend the military school in Versailles, where he was caught up in the events of the revolution in February 1848. In France, he also studied topographical engineering, but after his rich experience in what was then considered the "city of cities", in 1851, he returned to Chile, saddened by the death of his mother during his absence. He was also convinced that his future lay not in arms but letters.



Before becoming a novelist destined to enter Chilean history, Alberto started writing poetry, like his brother Guillermo, until, after "reading Balzac one day"⁹, he threw his verses into the fire, determined to imitate the prose of the great French role model. During the first two years after his return, the young lieutenant served as teacher of Mathematics at the Military Academy, and he was commissioned by the Ministry of War to produce a topographical chart of Santiago. Then in 1853, at the age of twenty-three, he left the ranks of the army to enter the civil service. He married Carmen Bascuñán and published his first novel, *Una escena social* (A Social Sketch), in six instalments in the periodical *El Museo*, edited by his friend Diego Barros Arana.

In addition, that same year, he began his career as a local newspaper reporter, a career that lasted eleven years. In his chronicles (using pseudonyms including Abege and Nadie), he wrote about the Santiago bourgeoisie from different angles, criticizing its abulia: "what lasts long here are yawns - he said - because nobody makes them short"¹⁰. He noted with irony the social gestures (dances, family reunions, the street life, national festivities), providing a stark study of the situation of women in that context. He commented on the internal disagreements that marked the relations between *pipiolos* (liberals) and *pelucones* (conservatives) on the political scene. He also registered episodes such as the arrival of a delegation of eighty Araucano chieftains in Santiago, in 1862 with the impact this event caused in the conservative and reactionary local society. He provided early observations on the task of writing Literature, "the mania of writing", describing it almost like a vice, an obsession that disqualified writers like himself, without sufficient means for their subsistence, from society. He had to support a growing family. The problem of money, or rather the lack of it, was a recurrent subject for Blest Gana, as many of his letters attest in various stages of his life.

In the young chronicler we find a melancholic, disillusioned and ironic tone that is less evident in the narrator of his novels. Nonetheless, a detailed study of the rich material contained in his chronicles would relativise too narrow and triumphalist readings of his

fiction.

However, it was as a novelist that Alberto Blest Gana was to be immortalised in the history of Chilean literature. He brought a reality and dynamism to the form that was lacking in the novels produced by his contemporaries, such as *La vida de un amigo* (1846), by Wenceslao Vial, *Don Guillermo* (1860), by José Victorino Lastarria, and *El pirata de Guayas* (1865), by Manuel Bilbao.

He persevered in the craft of writing, although he never devoted himself exclusively to literature. He received his salary as head of a section at the Ministry of War, meanwhile publishing one novel after another, testing forms of narration, bringing focus to reality, building worlds with an autonomous life of their own and developing a singular language. After *Una escena social*, he published *Engaños y desengaños* (1855), *Los desposados* (1855), *El primer amor* (1858), *Juan de Aria* (1858), *La fascinación* (1858), *Un día de campo* (1859), *La aritmética en el amor* (1860) and *El pago de las deudas* (1861).

In 1861, he received the national prize for literature with *La aritmética en el amor*. It was the first edition of the prize, inaugurated by José Victorino Lastarria to promote national literature. This was the only public recognition he received in his long life apart from his appointment as a member of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Chile, on which occasion he gave the famous speech, “Chilean literature: some considerations on it”, in which he set out his artistic manifesto and principles.

By 1861, Blest Gana had already published nine novels, but the award gave him the recognition and awareness of his status as writer. Proof of this is that, in the following year, he published fourteen chronicles and three novels that differed considerably from one another: *La venganza*, *Martín Rivas* and *Mariluán*. Unlike the two other novels, which soon fell into the darkness of oblivion, the success of *Martín Rivas* was immediate while it was still being published as a newspaper serial in the daily newspaper, *La voz de Chile*. The letters of protest from readers when there was some delay in delivery and the various manifestations of acclaim filled him with pride, as can be seen in one of the few letters in which he reveals his feelings to a friend, exclaiming proudly that “everything rains over the author like a rain of flowers”¹¹. As if that were not enough, Don Andrés Bello, then rector of the University, claimed that “the author of *Martín Rivas* was predestined to compose great novels” (In Alone 165).

It is not possible, in the short span of this paper, to analyse that novel, which has become a classic in Chile. What should be emphasised is that it combines a romantic treatment of the characters with a realistic approach to situations, all within a romance scheme that is clearly linked to its newspaper serial (*feuilleton*) origin. It must have contributed strongly to its success at that time, the fact that it portrayed the class of its readers, who identified themselves with it as though it were a mirror, a new experience for Chilean readers. An experience that modern novel as a new genre came to proportion.

This model was expanded and perfected in some of his five subsequent novels. Two of these – *El ideal de un calavera* (1863) and *La flor de la higuera* (1864) – were published prior to the mysterious interval of nearly thirty years (1864-97) that Blest Gana imposed on himself until his monumental historical novel, *Durante la Reconquista*, was published in France.

Over more than twenty years, in fact, Alberto Blest Gana transformed himself, like a chameleon, into a pre-eminent Chilean diplomat, leaving literature completely aside. Certainly, the promise of a more attractive salary than what he was receiving in Colchagua as

mayor in his last years in Chile, was pivotal in his decision to accept the offer of service abroad. What remains a mystery is why he did not continue to write, as many writers have done before and after him, alternating their diplomatic activities with their literary life.

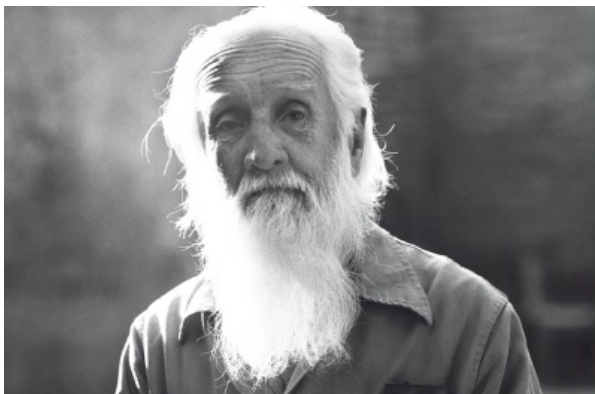
His experience abroad began with a brief stay in Washington, followed by a year in London. In 1870, he settled in Paris, never to return to Chile, not even for a visit, the beginning of fifty years of voluntary exile until his death in 1920.

During those two decades of literary silence, he devoted himself body and soul to Chilean Foreign Affairs, most notably his active and decisive management during the Pacific War from 1879 to 1883. Blest Gana safeguarded the image of Chile in Europe during the conflict, as well as purchasing ships, uniforms for soldiers, weapons and ammunition.

It was only when he left the diplomatic service that he took up his pen once more and devoted himself to rewriting the outline of his historical novel about the Spanish reconquest. This was followed by *Los trasplantados*, published in 1904, about the pathetic experience of a Hispanic American family exiled in Paris, and *El loco Estero* (1909), the beautiful novel reminiscing about the years of his childhood. The last of his eighteen novels *Gladys Fairfield* (1912) is based on his family history.

In addition to his novels, Blest wrote a comedy, *El jefe de la familia* (1858), which was never staged, and two beautiful travel narratives about the hot springs of Chillán (1860) and Niagara Falls (1867). His body of work marks the beginning of realism in nineteenth-century Chile with a type of novel which, without discarding touches of romanticism, points to a concrete and factual observation of reality. Blest Gana, although not a social critic, was an observer whose writings were perhaps more audacious than he himself intended. Today it is important to reread him.

3. The grandson. Clotario Blest Riffo (1899-1990)



Clotario Blest Riffo was the son of Leopoldina Riffo Bustos and Ricardo Blest Ugarte, descendants of Dr Blest's second family. According to the testimony of Blest's grandson, the Gana family never admitted any relationship with this branch of the family, which they considered illegitimate. In fact, no mention of them can be found in letters or other documents related to Alberto Blest Gana and his family.

The father, an army officer, died after seven years of marriage, leaving his wife in poverty. She and her three children lived on the miserable salary she received as a primary teacher; she frequently had to resort to loans to survive. In an interview with Mónica Echeverría in 1978, Clotario Blest recalls: "I will never forget a few very strong knocks on our door indicating the presence of a collector eager for an overdue account. I approached the door and bolted it to make sure that they could not enter. These collectors were the 'bogeymen' of my childhood. How I hated them!" (Echeverría 44).

Clotario's brother and sister died young, so he stayed with his mother and dedicated his life, body and soul, to the cause of the workers. He neither married nor had children, and

he always lived in conditions of extreme poverty which, towards the end of his life, led to destitution; the friars of the convent of San Francisco welcomed him and looked after him until his death, at the age of ninety, in 1990.

His intellectual training was largely self-taught. In 1918, after primary and secondary education in Catholic seminaries, he wanted to study law at the University of Chile, but, as he had a job in the General Treasury of the State, and a law was enacted in those years preventing tax employees from following courses at public universities, he saw his dream of becoming a lawyer frustrated. Even so, he continued his studies in an unsystematic way, attending courses in philosophy, law and chemistry at the Catholic University.

At the same time, he joined groups and popular organisations where he came into contact with historical trade unionists like Emilio Recabarren and Father Antonio Vives Solar, who would deeply influence his career. Around 1938, he was already a militant trade unionist and decided to organise his coworkers from the General Treasury. An official decree banned public servants from joining unions, so he created an ostensibly apolitical group, the Sports Association of the Public Institutions, which would be the direct antecedent of the National Association of Tax Collectors (ANEF), founded in 1943.

Clotario Blest was President of the Chilean Workers Central (CUT) between 1953 and 1960, the strongest and most influential years of the organisation in the history of national politics. Not affiliated to any party, Clotario was always an arbitrator between antagonistic sides within the movement; he managed to unite forces for basic achievements of trade unionism. During the Allende Government, he strongly resisted the appointment of the CUT President as Minister of Labour. It seemed to him an intolerable contradiction. In the years of the dictatorship, he became a fierce critic of the regime and a protective angel of refugees and relatives of missing persons. He transformed his home into a shelter for every fugitive from the military regime. Throughout a life dedicated to the proletarian struggle, he was arrested more than twenty times.

In addition to promoting and establishing social organisations throughout the country, Blest participated in different international associations: in the 1950s he joined the National Committee of supporters of peace together with figures such as Volodia Teitelboim, Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral. In 1955, he was appointed member of the World Council for Peace by the World Assembly, and he was nominated by that same international entity for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980 - the same year that it was awarded to the Polish proletarian leader Lech Walesa.

Clotario mentioned his grandfather, Guillermo Cunningham Blest, with love and admiration. He was proud of him, of sharing his blood, and he thanked him for his surname. Clotario felt that he was linked to him in the spirit of struggle, his detachment from money, and in his concern for the welfare of his fellows (Echeverría 30). He preserved a photograph that he displayed with pride, and he kept a collection of the prestigious journal *The Lancet*, the world's oldest medical journal, which had been part of his grandfather's library (Silva Castro 23). Of his uncle Alberto, whom he never met, he recognised his work, particularly the novel *Los trasplantados*, which, according to Clotario, offered a critical view of his own class.

There is a beautiful 1992 documentary¹² in which he emerges with a very fragile physical appearance, but with a spiritual strength that is captured through his energetic tone and calm voice. We see an old man with an impressively long white beard looking back on his life. He clearly remembers the times when he accompanied his widowed mother to withdraw

her monthly stipend from his paternal family at the back door of the Palace of the Gana López. The contempt that the family felt for him fed a deep resentment, which was transformed into contempt for the oligarchy and became a dogma. His point of view was always that of the working class. His objective was always social justice, in which there was little progress throughout his life. His speech reveals the religious training he received when he was very young, which helped him to formulate his utopian beliefs.

Against all forms of oppression and contempt of the oligarchies and the “wealthy families with prestigious surnames that underestimate the rest of the people” (his own words), and against all forms of injustice, Clotario built an image of himself. Those around him admired his stoic morality and ethical rigour.

4. Two houses, two doors, two measures.

In conclusion, I would like to concentrate on an episode in the life of the labor leader, narrated by himself on several occasions. When he was very young, at the primary school of La Moneda, some two hundred students were gathered one morning in the large schoolyard, when the director called him by name and surname in front of everyone and asked him to step forward. There, in front of all his companions, he asked him directly: “Why are you wearing worn-out shoes?” Clotario panicked, and responded with the purest truth: “Sir, it is because I am poor.” For Clotario, that experience of deliberate humiliation marked him for life and forged his destiny.

The episode brings to mind one of the first scenes of Blest Gana’s most famous novel. Martín Rivas has just arrived at Santiago, from Copiapó. As a poor country boy, he feels humiliated when he compares his old-fashioned garb with the clothes worn by the residents of the elegant mansion of Don Dámaso Encina, where he is hosted. The glances of disapproval from the servants confirm the imbalance and increase his sense of humiliation. In his first excursion downtown, he reaches the Plaza de Armas, where a peddler shows him a pair of shiny leather ankle boots. The possibility of exchanging his old boots for new ones seduces him and he tries them on. But then he remembers that he does not have a penny in his pocket and rises, promising to return the next day. Recognising his fragility and surrounding him, the sellers challenge him, calling him a “poor ragged man”. Martín feels insulted and other vendors reply that being poor is no insult since all of them are. Then they fight and end up in jail, where Rivas surrenders to a “sad reflection” that leads him to curse his fate: “...and he asked Heaven to justify the poverty of some and the wealth of others. No sooner had his thoughts turned to the inequities of fate when he felt in his heart a sudden, obscure rage against Fortune’s favorites” (2000. 33).

But, unlike Clotario, who transformed his experience of humiliation and exclusion into a driving element of struggle, Blest Gana’s protagonist decides to integrate into the world that spurned him, very soon forgetting the “obscure rage” that had disturbed him in the barracks. In the first scene of the novel, Martín accesses the main door of the Encina palace, shy and scared, carrying an envelope containing a letter written by his late father to facilitate his entrance to the opulent family; in real life, Clotario had to go to the back door of the Gana López mansion to receive the envelope with money to help his family.

In the former, fictional, case, the envelope accompanies Martín to the mansion to shed light on the spurious past of the Encina fortune. In the latter case, from real life, the envelope emerges from inside the mansion to neutralise the uncomfortable, socially

inconvenient past linking the wealthy Blest Gana with the poor Blest Ugarte. The two scenes complement each other and speak of the fundamental power of capital and its social implications. The truth of Chilean history, a history of profound injustices, with its contradictions and paradoxes, appears in both situations: the real and the fictional, with overwhelming force.

Notes

* Text revised by Peter James Harris.

- 1 This work contains many observations on the general hygiene of Chilean society at its different levels, which is a valuable source for the historical study of customs. (Silva Castro 16).
- 2 Ergot is a fungal parasite of rye and other cereals. It contains numerous compounds, especially lipids, sterols, glycosides and amines, but especially the alkaloids of ergot: ergocristine, ergocryptine, ergotamine and ergometrine. In the past, ergot (*cornezuelo de centeno*) was used during childbirth for its uterotonic properties. Nowadays it is preferred to use oxytocin or a similar synthetic of this hormone. However, metilergometrine (a semi-synthetic derivative of ergometrine) is used to reduce uterine haemorrhages after childbirth or a scraping.
- 3 Señores, alumnos: El constante y ardiente deseo de mi vida ha sido el coadyuvar a la benéfica tendencia, dignidad, importancia y respeto de la profesión a que pertenezco, y siendo yo el primero que tiene la honra de abrir las majestuosas puertas de la medicina al pueblo chileno, ciencia ilustre que me pone en circunstancias de poder ser útil al país, mi pecho se conmueve por un sentimiento de gratitud hacia el gobierno que me ha proporcionado los medios de llenar mis anhelos, y de que mi nombre se encuentre en su futura historia.
- 4 Older brother of Luis Orrego Luco, author of the novel *Casa grande* (1908).
- 5 Cuando vuelvo la vista hacia los tiempos lejanos de la vieja escuela suele a veces asomar entre mis recuerdos la figura de un hombre alto, delgado, esbelto, de un porte altivo y elegante... Sus ojos muy claros y sus cabellos rubios acentuaban el tipo de los irlandeses-distinguidos. Pero lo que más nos llamaba la atención cuando lo veíamos pasar por los corredores o las salas de hospital, no era tanto su figura imponente, como la veneración con que todos lo miraban. Nuestros profesores, las monjas, los enfermeros, todo el mundo, lo saludaba con respeto y se inclinaba a su paso... Nunca iba solo, siempre lo rodeaban algunos de los médicos [...] lo oí hablar un español de rara corrección y de una pronunciación británica cerrada, que hacía singularmente expresivo su lenguaje. (Orrego Luco, 125/132)
- 6 Su arrogante figura no podía pasar inadvertida, llamaba la atención desde el tiempo en que visitaba a los enfermos en sus primeros años a caballo, protegido en los veranos por un ancho plumero de colores a guisa de quitasol, en su elegante birlocho. (In Silva Castro).
- 7 Alberto Blest Gana evokes this residence in his later novel, *El loco Estero*, 1904.
- 8 Pese a su inestimable trayectoria, hasta avanzado el siglo XX no había ningún hospital, consultorio o calle que lo recordara. Conscientes de esta omisión inauguramos en 1993 la Plaza Blest en los recintos de la Facultad de Medicina de la Universidad de Chile. Por desgracia, fue recientemente desmantelada por los requerimientos de la futura Línea 3 del Metro. Tal vez, un paso inicial de reconocimiento sería nominar "Doctor Blest" a la estación aledaña a la Facultad. Sin perjuicio de ello, una expresión de gratitud ciudadana demanda una escultura que incorpore a la mirada colectiva cotidiana la figura de un personaje ilustre de la historia de Chile del siglo XIX.
- 9 Letter to Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna.
- 10 "Los placeres de Santiago. Estudios de costumbres", in *La Semana*, 16 June 1859.
- 11 Letter to Antonio José Donoso, 1 September 1862, in *Epistolario de ABG*. Vol. 1. Santiago: DIBAM. 2011. 28.

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