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Mexican Travel Writing

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Introduction
'Mexicans Don't Write Travel Books'

Mexican Travel Writing

What might the 'Mexican' in the term 'Mexican travel writing' actually mean? In the field of English studies in the United Kingdom, its meaning is assumed to be quite straightforward. Thus a critic such as Nigel Leask can publish an article entitled 'The Ghost in Chapultepec: Fanny Calderón de la Barca, William Prescott and 19th Century Mexican Travel Accounts' safe in the knowledge that 'Mexican travel accounts' are those works written about travels in Mexico by foreign writers.[1] But in Mexico the two-volume publication *Viajes en México* (Mexican Journeys) is explicitly divided into 'Crónicas mexicanas' (Mexican chronicles or accounts) and 'Crónicas extranjeras' (foreign accounts).[2] So here, by dint of comparison, the 'Mexican' in 'Mexican accounts' refers quite clearly to those accounts that are written by writers of Mexican nationality. It seems perfectly acceptable that both meanings should co-exist – and indeed, to avoid confusion many publications concerning travel writing and a certain nation or nationality find ways to make questions of destination and the origin of the author(s) of the work more explicit. Nevertheless, the fact that almost no publications exist in the English language that understand the 'Mexican' in 'Mexican

1 Nigel Leask, 'The Ghost of Chapultepec: Fanny Calderón de la Barca, William Prescott and 19th Century Mexican Travel Accounts', in *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel*, ed. by Ján Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp. 184–209.

2 *Viajes en México: crónicas mexicana*s, ed. by Xavier Tavera Alfaro, ill. by Alberto Beltrán, 2nd edn (Secretaría de Obras Públicas, 1972); and *Viajes en México: crónicas extranjeras (1821–1855)*, ed. and trans. by Margo Glantz, ill. by Alberto Beltrán, 2nd edn (Secretaría de Obras Públicas, 1972).
See Chapter 1 of this study for a detailed analysis of the term '*crónica de viaje*'.

travel writing' to refer to citizens of Mexican nationality reveals a rather colonialist mentality at work: travellers are presumed to be citizens of the imperial powers of the Western World and places like Mexico are the passive receptors of their gazes. In other words, Mexicans are presumed not to write travel books so there is no need to distinguish quite what is meant by the adjective 'Mexican'.

It is my contention that, while evidently there exist travel books written by Mexican authors – the subheadings of Tavera Alfaro's *Viajes en México* are sufficient proof –, the prevailing metropolitan assumptions about travel writing and the motivations that underpin the genre's development mean that Mexican writers frequently display an ambivalent position in this regard, claiming that they do not write travel books, even as they do just that. Ambivalence towards the genre is hardly suprising. However, since Mexicans do write travel books, the most important question to address is how a genre that has been so closely linked with the construction of great empires can be practised by citizens of a former colony, and this will merit a detailed study of both the genre's politics and its rhetorical strategies.

The first section of this introduction addresses the first interpretation of the term 'Mexican travel writing', analysing the varying different types of travel writing written by foreigners such as Alexander von Humboldt and Fanny Calderón de la Barca on the subject of Mexico, and the impact of such works on Mexican writers. The second section then goes on to examine in detail two key statements by Mexican writers concerning their relationship to travel writing and imperialism/colonialism, the first made by Manuel Altamirano in the late nineteenth century and the second by José Emilio Pacheco in the late twentieth century. This analysis of the different types of 'Mexican' travel writing is designed to succinctly expose the politics of the genre. The remainder of the study will then go on to probe more closely the rhetorical features of the genre and how these work in tandem with its political underpinnings.

Mexican Travel Writing, I: The Legacy of Foreign Travel Writers in Mexico

The most significant demographic movement between Europe and Latin America has tended to flow from the metropolis to the colonies and this has generated an awful lot of travel writing penned by Europeans (and later citizens of the United States) on the subject of Latin America. Of this fact Latin Americans are painfully aware. In the case of Mexico, the names of the most significant foreign travel writers to have published their observations and impressions of Mexico are repeated *ad infinitum* in Mexican cultural production, both creative and critical.

The reasons why certain foreign travel writers have more impact than others in the country about which they are writing differ. Availability and translation into the native tongue might be one *a priori* factor. Broadly speaking, in the case of nineteenth-century Mexico it would appear that a lack of translations was not a factor that significantly hindered the capacity of a book written in English or French to reach Mexican readers and that the Mexican intelligentsia of the day avidly imported anything written on the subject of their new-born nation.[3] In the twentieth century, the translation into Spanish of foreign travel books has greatly widened the influence of such writers in the Mexican psyche. It started slowly in the early years of the century with a backlog of translations of nineteenth-century works: the Marquise Frances Calderón de la Barca's *Life in Mexico during a Residence of Two Years in that Country* (1843) was first published in translation in 1920 and Jean Frederic de Waldeck's *Voyage pittoresque et archéologique dans la Province d'Yucatan (Amérique Centrale) pendant les années 1834 et 1836* in 1930.[4] Brantz Mayer's *Mexico: As It Was and As It Is* (1844) appeared in 1953 in the Fondo de Cultura Económica's

3 Juan A. Ortega y Medina, *Humboldt desde México* (UNAM, 1960), pp. 24–25.

4 Fanny Calderón de la Barca, *La vida en México*, 2 vols, trans. by Enrique Martínez Sobral, prol. by Manuel Romero de Terreros (Librería de la Viuda de Bouret, 1920); Federico de Waldeck, *Viaje pintoresco y arqueológico a la Provincia de Yucatán, 1834 y 1836*, trans. by Manuel Mestre Ghigliazza (Mérida: Carlos R. Menéndez, 1930).

'Biblioteca Americana, Serie de Viajeros' – the first initiative by a Mexican publisher to edit a series of foreign travel writing. And from the 1970s onwards the printing and reprinting of foreign travel writing has become a major enterprise for Mexican publishers. Indeed, a sizeable percentage of the two thousand six hundred authors listed in Iturriaga de la Fuente's extensive bibliography of foreign travel writing concerning travels in Mexico has now been published in the country.[5] The publishers most closely involved in the enterprise to translate and/or reprint works of foreign travel writing on the subject of journeys in Mexico have been the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) with the series 'SepSententas' and 'Sep/80' in the 1970s and 80s; the Fondo de Cultura Económica (FCE), working in conjunction with the SEP, in its first 'Cien de México' series in the 1980s; and, since the 1990s, the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (CNCA) has continued the efforts of both the SEP and the FCE with its 'Lecturas Mexicanas' and 'Mirada Viajera' series. The fact that so many of these publishers are government-sponsored institutions gives an idea of quite how important and/or inescapable many Mexicans deem foreign travel writing on the subject of their country to be.[6]

Sheer availability, however, is not enough to explain the impact of such books, merely their potential for impact. In fact the influence of a foreign travel book is dependent upon either how strategically helpful the foreign writer might be to the local intelligentsia or how controversial or offensive the writer's observations are, with the more appreciative texts falling somewhere in between these two poles. Over time the reasons for impact have changed. The stategically helpful account had more influence in the early Independence period – the first half of the nineteenth century – when Mexicans most urgently needed to define themselves as a nation and when 'homegrown' material was in short supply. The interest in more offensive texts has existed all along, but current Mexican writers' fascination with the whole back catalogue

5 José Iturriaga de la Fuente, *Anecdotario de viajeros extranjeros en México, siglos XVI-XX*, 1st edn, reprinted, 4 vols (FCE, 1993–94), I, 251–314; IV, 327–59.

6 A foreign travel writer's personal contacts in Mexico would constitute another *a priori* reason which might have an impact on their circulation in Mexico.

of such texts is perhaps the ultimate proof of the irony inherent in one contemporary travel writer's comment that 'Nuestra relación con el extranjero no da para resentimientos de largo alcance'.[7]

The obvious example of the strategically helpful account is the work of Baron Alexander von Humboldt. Humboldt was one of the very few foreign travellers that Spain allowed to visit her American colonies in the years before they variously gained independence, making his trip to Mexico in 1803–04.[8] His most immediately influential publication in Mexico concerning his time there was the *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne* (1811) although his *Vues des cordillères et monumens* (sic) *des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique* (1810) would grow in terms of its importance to Mexicans by the late nineteenth century.[9]

The effect of these publications on the Mexican intelligentsia of the day was far reaching. Although relying on substantial amounts of information provided by various local institutions and individuals, Humboldt's *Essai politique* provided a comprehensive analytical overview of the country, particularly its material wealth. For this synthesis of available information, many Mexicans were genuinely grateful.[10] Furthermore, the terms in which Humboldt couched such an analysis 'granted [Mexicans] parity' with Europe – they were an 'antique' culture.[11] And, following on from this, Humboldt's work was thus 'partly aimed at vindicating the American continent and its inhabitants from criticisms made by enlightenment savants' such as the

7 Juan Villoro, 'Todos somos gondoleros', *LJS*, 17 May 1998, p. 15.

8 Insurrection against the Spanish crown dates from 1810 although Mexicans did not officially gain independence until 1821.

9 The 'primer bosquejo' of Humboldt's *Essai*, the 'Tablas Geográficas Políticas del Reyno de Nueva España', was actually distributed in Mexico in December 1803 (Ulrike Leitner, 'Humboldt's Works on Mexico', in *Alexander von Humboldt im Netz*, 1:1 [2000], http://www.uni-potsdam.de/u/romanistik/humboldt/hin/leitner3.htm, accessed 22 June 2006).

10 Ortega y Medina, *Humboldt desde México*, p. 23.

11 Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770–1840: 'From an Antique Land'* (Oxford: Oxford UP), p 258. Leask notes that, despite this, Humboldt simultaneously tried to 'insist upon [Latin America's] cultural *difference* from, and hierarchical subordination to, Europe' (author's italics).

Comte de Buffon, the Abbé Raynal and William Robertson,[12] arguing that there was nothing inherently inferior about the Mexican 'race', simply that they were the product of many centuries of colonial misrule.[13] As a result, Humboldt's works can be seen to have helped Mexicans free themselves from the shackles of the Spanish Empire by proving their suitability for independence, even though he never 'publicly fomented revolution'.[14] Mexican historians of the era repeatedly cite Humboldt as 'el incitador de la Independencia' both for what he wrote about the country as well as for what he brought with him in terms of ideological baggage from the French Revolution.[15]

Furthermore, some Mexicans writing later in the century, after independence was well established, felt that, as an independent nation, Mexicans really needed to cultivate all branches of the arts and the sciences themselves. Where they perceived a certain scarcity in the field of travel writing, Humboldt's works also proposed a pertinent aesthetic model to follow. Ortega y Medina notes that there was a revival of interest in Humboldt's work in the late 1860s and early 1870. Whereas in earlier decades appreciation of his work had been more focused on the political message and the strategic information that it contained, after 1869 appreciation turned to the literary qualities of his work – he even became the object of 'romanticisation' in some Mexican writers' imaginations.[16] And in terms of the proposal of an aesthetic model for travel writing, nineteenth-century Mexican travel writing tends to correspond to the 'integrated' model of travel writing that Wilson credits Humboldt with having popularised in Europe, a

12 Leask, *Curiosity*, p. 257.

13 Rayfred Lionel Stevens-Middleton, *La obra de Alexander von Humboldt en México: fundamento de la geografía moderna* (Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia / Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística, 1956), p. 219.

14 Jason Wilson, introduction to Alexander von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative of a Journey to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent*, abridged and translated by Jason Wilson, with an historical introduction by Malcolm Nicholson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. xlvi.

15 See, for example, Ortega y Medina, *Humboldt desde México*, pp. 1–30.

16 Ortega y Medina, *Humboldt desde México*, p. 84.

model that combines the strictly scientific with the literary and/or the popular, observation and enquiry with the personal impressions and experiences of the traveller.[17] Furthermore, particularly in his *Vues des cordillères*, Humboldt helped trigger the development of a new aesthetic awareness in Mexico. Although it cannot be claimed that he was the first to describe Mexican flora, fauna or climate – Francisco Xavier Clavijero and other Mexican 'encyclopaedists' had already laid strong foundations for this in the eighteenth century – Humboldt was the first to describe Mexican 'landscapes'.[18] He also revived interest in the pre-Columbian civilisations of Mexico and gave an aesthetic appreciation of their architecture and artefacts.

To sum up, Humboldt's works significantly enhanced Mexicans' political and aesthetic self-awareness. His writings, in particular the *Essai politique*, are referred to and quoted from endlessly in nineteenth-century Mexican writing, both for the factual data they contain and for their descriptions of the country. Nevertheless, his most enduring legacy is perhaps not to be found in his own works, but in the hordes of other works by foreign travellers that his accounts inspired. While some of these were, at least in part, in the spirit of Humboldt's own enterprise – see for example John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood's *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (1843) – they also tended to correspond to the interests of a group that Mary Louise Pratt terms 'the capitalist vanguard'; travellers who functioned as 'advance scouts

17 Wilson, introduction to Alexander von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative* p. lxii. It should nevertheless be noted that it was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who initiated this model and Humboldt who popularised it (see section on *Paisajismo* in Chapter 1), and that Humboldt was not the only conduit through which Rousseau's influence would have reached Mexico.

Wilson's claims for Humboldt's popularisation of the integrated model stand in contrast to Leask's argument that Humboldt is the '*terminus*' for such accounts (Leask, *Curiosity*, p. 282 [author's italics]). As an endorsement of Wilson's argument, it should be noted that the disintegration of the Humboldtian model only occurs in Mexican travel writing at the very beginning of the twentieth century.

18 Humboldt did not invent the Romantic topos of the description of landscape, but he was the first to describe specifically Mexican landscapes in this way (see Ortega y Medina, *Humboldt desde México*, p. 182). See section on *Paisajismo* in Chapter 1.

for [predominantly] European capital' and who made inroads on Mexico in the years after Spain had reliquished her hold on the ex-colony.[19] Despite Humboldt's best efforts, it is these sorts of works that have led Mexicans to view foreign travel writing as the genre *par excellence* that accompanies imperialist exploitation. And it is on account of these exploitative accounts that Humboldt himself has been condemned as an out-and-out 'colonialist' by some.[20]

In the case of the more controversial and/or offensive accounts, there are countless examples to be taken, from the Marquise Frances Calderón de la Barca's *Life in Mexico* of 1843 to the writings of expatriate British novelists, the French Surrealists or members of the North American Beat Generation in the course of the twentieth century. Calderón de la Barca, for example, was a gifted social satirist, with access to all the most important figures of the day – she was the wife of the first Spanish ambassador in Mexico after Independence. Her acerbic criticisms of Mexican society and its mores were the subject of much irritation in Mexico at the time of her book's publication and her impact in the Republic clearly has a lot to do with Mexican writers' usually defensive reactions to her depiction of their culture.[21] In particular, the Mexican intelligentsia of her time objected not just to what she got

19 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 146. For an interesting study of the balance of imperialism and Humboldtian scientific observation in the work of John Lloyd Stephens, see Daniel Cooper Alarcón, 'The Ruins of Manifest Destiny: John L. Stephens's *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*', in *A través del espejo: viajes, viajeros y la construcción de la alteridad en América Latina*, ed. by Lourdes de Ita Rubio and Gerardo Sánchez Díaz, (Morelia: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás Hidalgo, 2005), pp. 333–42.

20 Daniel Cosío Villegas, cited in Ortega y Medina, *Humboldt desde México*, p. 36.

21 See *Women through Women's Eyes: Latin American Women in Nineteenth-Century Travel Accounts,* ed. by June E. Hahner (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1998), p. xx. María Bono López also comments on the number of Mexican intellectuals, as well as foreign travel writers, who expressed criticism of Calderón de la Barca's work (María Bono López, 'Frances Erskine Inglis Calderón de la Barca y el mundo indígena mexicano', http://www.bibliojuridica.org/libros/1/252/8.pdf, p. 4, accessed 5 September 2005).

wrong or misinterpreted based on partial knowledge or prejudiced views, but more to the flippant and willfully mordant way in which she described members of the social élite. She contravened the strict rules of respect, courtesy and hospitality that govern Mexican social relations.[22]

Other writers who have since acquired equal infamy in the Republic to Calderón de la Barca have achieved this in similar ways: through their partial knowledge and their misinterpretations, through their prejudices – particularly with respect to race –, but also through their often witty prose style which at once seduces on a literary level and repulses when one happens to identify with the object of such writers' attentions. For writers such as Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, D.H. Lawrence, and later William Burroughs, despite the perhaps exaggerated appeal of the country which prompted them to travel there in the first place – the Revolution, the 'magical' aspects, the indigenous lifeways and handicrafts, and of course the availability of drugs – Mexico largely produced a feeling of disillusionment, or at least of radical ambivalence. Their texts do not seek to fully describe or explain the country and its cultures, but to capture a deliberately fragmentary perspective, highly coloured by the author's personality and experience. Graham Greene in *The Lawless Roads* (1939) claimed that the food was awful, said that he hated all Mexicans because they were over-demonstrative, and dismissed the ruins at Palenque as uninteresting simply because he had dysentery at the time.[23] In *Queer* (written 1951–53; published 1985), William Burroughs was equally as offensive with respect to Mexicans and Mexican culture for similarly petty reasons.[24] D.H. Lawrence acknowledged that *Mornings in Mexico* (1927) was made up of the limited number of mornings he spent sitting at a desk in a courtyard in a small town in Mexico, although he still extrapolated

22 Michael P. Costeloe, 'Prescott's *History of the Conquest* and Calderón de la Barca's *Life in Mexico*: Mexican Reaction, 1843–44', *The Americas*, 47:3 (1991), 337–48. I would like to thank Claire Lindsay for alerting me to Costeloe's work.

23 Graham Greene, *The Lawless Roads* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 35, 48, 139–42.

24 William S. Burroughs, *Queer* (New York: Viking, 1985).

wildly to encompass the whole country in his fatalistic vision.[25] And Evelyn Waugh famously refused to re-edit his *Robbery Under Law: The Mexican Object Lesson* (1939) because even he acknowledged its libellous nature. Of course, all of these texts, even Waugh's, are currently available in translation in Mexico.[26] And while these texts do not focus on the direct exploitation of Mexico as those of the 'capitalist vanguard' did, they quite clearly all partake of the discourse of imperial relations where independent Mexico is still all too often posited as undeveloped, uncultured, unstable, unhealty and/or unsuited to self-governance. This discourse is prevalent in the genre of travel writing as practiced in the West.[27]

Mexican Travel Writing, II: Why Mexicans Say They Don't Write Travel Books

In a succinct overview of the importance of foreign travel writers in Mexico from the time of the Conquest to the 1990s, Mexican journalist and critic Hermann Bellinghausen has noted,

> En general, los extranjeros no han entendido a México, pero lo han mirado con una atención que se agradece: Madame Calderón de la Barca, D.H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, Malcolm Lowry, Max Frish (*sic*), Humboldt, Lumholtz, Artaud, Kerouac, Huxley, Calvino. Pero sólo aquellos suficientemente locos como para parecer mexicanos dieron en el clavo: Bernal Díaz, John Reed, y algún otro (como los cineastas Eisenstein y Buñuel). Los demás cronistas que importan, sin excepción, son mexicanos.[28]

25 D.H. Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 7.

26 Greene, Lawrence and Waugh were all published in the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes's 'Mirada Viajera' series in the mid-1990s. Burroughs was published by Anagrama in 2002.

27 See for example Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*; David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993), and Steve Clark, ed., *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

28 Hermann Bellinghausen, 'Testigos del caso: la crónica en México', *Nexos*, 162 (June 1991), 17. In a similar line-up Carlos Fuentes has deemed Antonin

Although Bellinghausen does his best in the last sentence to promote the value of Mexican contributions to the genre of chronicles written about the country, some of which fall within the parameters of travel writing, many other Mexican writers have expressed concern about Mexicans' ability to write travel books. Furthermore, this concern has most often been expressed in the course of works of travel writing themselves, or in introductions or critical responses to such works. The fact is that Mexicans say that they do not write travel books while simultaneously writing them, and it is the function of such a rhetorical strategy that interests me in this study.

The reasons that Mexican writers most often put forth for the dearth of Mexican travel writing are the following: Mexicans do not have either the means or the desire to travel; they are put off by, or simply choose to rely on, the sheer volume of foreign accounts concerning the country; and/or, perhaps most importantly, they have reservations about their relationship to the genre of travel writing as such. The focus on the latter reason has grown in importance over time as a postcolonialist sensibility has taken root in the country.

By way of example, the Liberal statesman, pedagogue and novelist Ignacio Manuel Altamirano made the following, deliberately provocative, remarks in his introduction to the Mexican writer Luis Malanco's *Viaje a Oriente* published in 1882:

> Los mexicanos viajan poco, y los que viajan no escriben, ni publican sus impresiones o sus recuerdos. Esta es una verdad tan notoria en México, que no necesita demostrarse. […]
>
> Sólo los mexicanos hemos escrito poco a cerca de nuestro país. Figúrasenos que hablar de nuestras poblaciones, de nuestras montañas, de nuestros ríos, de nuestros desiertos, de nuestros mares, de nuestras costumbres y de nuestro carácter, es asunto baladí, y que al ver escrito en una página de viaje un nombre indio, todo el mundo ha de hacer un gesto de desdén. […]
>
> Hay cierta repugnancia para conocer el país nativo, y ésta es la causa de que no puedan desarrollarse vigorosamente todas las ramas de nuestra literatura

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Artaud to be the writer who comes closest to understanding Mexico (prologue to Fernando Benítez's *Los indios de México: antología*, edited by Héctor Manjarrez [Era, 1989], pp. 13–14).

> nacional. Sólo el tiempo y la civilización harán desaparecer estos hábitos de la vida colonial.
>
> Por eso nuestra literatura de viajes, en el interior del país, es singularmente escasa. No tenemos una sola colección pintoresca o descriptiva; artículos sueltos, narraciones aisladas, algún pequeño estudio publicado hace años en el *Museo Mexicano*, en el *Liceo*, en el *Álbum*; algunas estampas litográficas: eso es todo. Muchas veces tenemos que acudir a los libros extranjeros para tomar algunos datos.[29]

Altamirano corroborates the first two reasons listed above to justify why Mexicans do not write travel books: they do not travel in the first place and they rely on the texts of foreign travellers for strategically helpful information – he is clearly referring to Humboldt and his followers here. But this reliance on foreigners' accounts is a *faute-de-mieux* rather than a choice in Altamirano's argument – what he really wanted was to stimulate Mexicans to travel in their own newly-formed nation-state and to write about it in order to describe and prescribe what the recipe for independent Mexican national identity might be. When he observes that Mexicans feel awkward about writing travel books about their own country because of its indigenous cultures he clearly has his own axe to grind since he was himself from an indigenous Nahua community in the state of Guerrero and wanted to contest the racism of the *criollo* and *mestizo* sectors of contemporary Mexican society by locating the essence of independent Mexican national identity in the indigenous communities. In Altamirano's words, this racism, this constant privileging of the European over the indigenous, is a 'colonial habit' and an impediment to the creation of a sense of national identity.

Altamirano wanted Mexicans to get over this impediment, but rather than identifying foreign travel writing on the subject of Mexico as another colonial/imperial problem because of the nature of its discourse, Altamirano simply advocated that Mexicans should get out more in their own country and write about it following the generic mould formed by foreign writers such as Humboldt. This would be a 'creolisation' of the genre – one which worked well for his nation-building purposes – but

29 Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, *Obras completas*, ed. by Nicole Girón (SEP, 1986-), 13 vols, *Escritos de literatura y arte, II* (1988), pp. 215, 229–30.

it would not really take into account the all too frequent imperialist associations of the genre *per se*.[30] It should be noted that this creolising manoeuvre was quite typical of Mexican culture at this historical juncture rather than an oversight or failing on the part of Altamirano and friends – as Jorge Klor de Alva notes, Latin American society in the post-Independence era was founded on its desire to emulate Europe (particularly Spain and France) and was thus not postcolonial in any critical sense, and although there are the seeds of a postcolonialist sensibility in Altamirano's comments regarding colonial habits, he was perhaps the exception to the rule by dint of his indigenous ancestry.[31]

In his role as one of the key figures in the development of the modern nation-state of Mexico and of the attempt to create a corresponding sense of national identity, particularly in the field of literature, Altamirano was determined that there should be a national brand of travel writing to compete with the works of Europeans and United States citizens regarding travels in Mexico, particularly those with imperialist designs on the country. From at least 1870 he was making statements to this effect, and indeed, by the early 1880s his words were beginning to produce results. A significant number of travel books were published

30 See Susan Castillo, *Performing America: Colonial Encounters in New World Writing, 1500–1786* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 189–90 for a good discussion of 'creolisation'.

Altamirano's comments on the lack of Mexican travel literature have since been quoted and annotated on a number of occasions: by Felipe Teixidor in the prologue to the first edition of his anthology of Mexican travel writing at home and abroad, *Viajeros mexicanos: siglos XIX y XX* [1939], 2nd edition (Porrúa, 1982), pp. 3–4; by Francisco López Cámara in his book *Los viajes de Guillermo Prieto: estudio introductorio* (Cuernavaca: Centro Regional de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias, UNAM, 1994), pp. 13–14; and again by Emmanuel Carballo in the introduction to his anthology of Mexican travel writing concerning travel in the United States, *¿Qué país es éste?: los Estados Unidos y los gringos vistos por escritores mexicanos de los siglos XIX y XX* (CNCA, 1996), pp. 11–12. Ironically, given the context, all three critics uphold (with nuances) Altamirano's declarations on the lack of Mexican travel writing.

31 Jorge Klor de Alva, 'The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of "Colonialism," "Postcolonialism," and "Mestizaje"', in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. by Gyan Prakash (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995).

in the 1870s, and from the 1880s onwards many more came into print – even ones concerning travel well before that date were finally written up and published.[32] By the time that Altamirano made the statements quoted above Mexicans were already busy making up for lost time. His comments that only three writers – Antonio García Cubas, Guillermo Prieto and Ignacio Ramírez – had bothered to publish travel books or articles on the subject of Mexico and that there was even less material by Mexicans concerning travel abroad are, of course, a deliberately exaggerated view, designed to provoke even more Mexicans to publish travel books.[33] As proof of the success of the efforts of Altamirano and his friends and colleagues at *El Renacimiento*, the literary journal he founded in 1869, the contemporary cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis has since identified travel writing as the 'género decimonónico predilecto' in Mexico.[34]

Writing over a hundred years after Altamirano's 'manifesto for Mexican travel writing', Mexican novelist, journalist and poet José Emilio Pacheco, returns once again to the question of why Mexicans do not write travel books. The sheer volume of foreign accounts – particularly the offensive sort – are mentioned as an impediment, but Pacheco is more precise:

> El libro de viajes es sobre todo un género del Norte: la mirada sobre las tierras conquistadas o por conquistar. […]
>
> Si los toros pudieran escribir una historia de la tauromaquia seguramente no contendría el elogio de los grandes diestros. Los mexicanos estamos en una situación parecida respecto de los libros de viajes. No debe de haber muchos otros países que hayan inspirado tantos relatos donde se juzgue a sus habitantes con tal vehemencia para condenar y con tan poca generosidad para entender.[35]

Jorge Klor de Alva has argued that a tacit and retrospective/ anachronistic postcolonialist sensibility reached Latin America in the

32 See the bibliography to Teixidor's *Viajeros mexicanos*, pp. 221–25.

33 Carballo corroborates the bias and selectiveness of Altamirano's vision in *¿Qué país es éste?*, p. 12.

34 Carlos Monsiváis, *A ustedes les consta: antología de la crónica en México* (Era, 1980), p. 347.

35 José Emilio Pacheco, 'Bitácoras', *Hoja por hoja*, 13 December 1997, p. 13.

late 1970s.[36] Thus in Pacheco's analysis of Mexicans' relationship with travel writing, the problem is not the 'colonial habit' of being embarrassed about one's own non-European country, but that travel writing itself is cited as an imperialist genre and hence as something with which a technically postcolonial people will necessarily have a problem. Pacheco subsequently overlooks Altamirano's success in stimulating a tradition of Mexican travel writing and implies that Mexicans simply do not write travel books. Nevertheless, towards the end of his article Pacheco inadvertently reveals that the genre of travel writing is practised in contemporary Mexico and, indeed, is booming:

> En los tiempos del turismo masivo, la internet, el correo electrónico, los discos que ponen en nuestra pantalla el Museo del Prado o los tesoros del Nilo sin riesgo de ser aniquilados por los integristas, el libro de viajes se diría un género tan anacrónico como la novela epistolar o la tragedia en cinco actos y en verso. A pesar de todo, en las grandes librerías se alza un estante dedicado a estas obras y en los grandes periódicos dominicales este tipo de narración se ejerce cada semana. Hay, por lo visto, algo que sólo pueden transmitir las palabras sobre la página.[37]

Pacheco's statement is ambivalent. Since he has so far omitted to acknowledge the existence of Mexican travel writing, one might presume that the bookshelves dedicated to travel literature and the articles in the Sunday papers are those that Pacheco has seen in the United States or in Europe. Nevertheless, one cannot help suspecting that this statement does acknowledge the existence of Mexican travel writing: Pacheco's article was published in Mexico for a Mexican reading public, and the contents of these bookshelves and newspapers must surely be accessible to the Mexicans for whom he is writing. Thus, although for different reasons, Altamirano and Pacheco concur in their denial of a practice that they inadvertently reveal to exist.

Indeed, travel writing in contemporary Mexico is booming. 1989 saw the launch of a short-lived but influential series of travel writing by Alianza Editorial Mexicana designed to revive the nineteenth-century

36 Klor de Alva, 'The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience', p. 263.

37 Pacheco, 'Bitácoras', p. 13.

Mexican tradition of travel writing, as well as to wrest the description of the country, once again, from the hands of foreign travel writers.[38] As the editors of the series noted on the back cover of the first of the texts published in that series, Juan Villoro's *Palmeras de la brisa rápida: un viaje a Yucatán* (1989):

> En un país como el nuestro, pródigo en paisajes naturales y humanos retratados con abundancia durante el siglo XIX, extraña no encontrar hoy en día una literatura igualmente copiosa que lo describa, acote y reflexione sobre él. […]
>
> Con este volumen, Alianza Editorial Mexicana inicia una colección de relatos de viajes que pretende cubrir las notorias ausencias en este género.[39]

And with respect to the work of foreign travel writers in Mexico, René Solís, vice-president of Alianza at the time of the commissioning of the series, also noted pointedly that the field of travel writing about Mexico, 'había sido monopolizado por viajeros extranjeros que escribieron sus observaciones y experiencias de viaje, de Thomas Gage hasta Lawrence, Greene, Waugh, Paul Theroux *et al.*',[40] and that the series aimed to redress the balance in that regard.

The success of Villoro's chronicle subsequently inspired a further series – Cuadernos de Viaje – which was published during the 1990s by the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.[41] Although a travel

38 Information concerning the series stems from personal interviews with René Solís, 24 May 1996, and with Sealtiel Alatriste, series editor at Alianza Editorial Mexicana at the time, 19 July 1996. The chronicles published in the series are Juan Villoro's *Palmeras de la brisa rápida: un viaje a Yucatán* (1989), Rafael Ramírez Heredia's *Por los caminos del sur: vámonos para Guerrero* (1990), a translation of Tom Miller's *On the Border*, *En la frontera: imágenes desconocidas de nuestra frontera norte* (1991) and Dante Medina's *Sólo los viajeros saben que al sur está el verano: un viaje por Francia, Italia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria y Grecia* (1993).

39 Villoro, *Palmeras de la brisa rápida*, back cover.

40 René Solís, personal letter, 8 November 1995.

41 Information concerning the 'Cuaderno de viaje' series stems from personal interviews with Alfonso de María y Campos, director of publications at the CNCA at the time of the commissioning of the series, 21 May 1996, and Aurelia Álvarez Urbajtel, series editor at the CNCA at the time, 20 January 1997. The travel chronicles published in the series up until 1998 are Fernando Solana Olivares's

writing competition dreamt up by Alianza Editorial Mexicana in the early 1990s to coincide with their reinvention of Mexican travel writing was never organised, another international travel writing competition promoted by the Catalan publisher Ediciones B in conjunction with Iberia airlines has helped to raise the profile of Hispanic travel writing as a whole since the late 1990s.[42] Finally, two large international conferences on the subject of the conjunction of Latin America and travel writing have been organised in the country since 2003 and academic interest in travel writing by Mexican authors is growing.[43]

But if travel writing is booming in Mexico, we must ask whether contemporary travel narratives can offer any advance on Altamirano's appropriation of the genre; whether they can effectively challenge its imperialist associations? It is my contention that where contemporary Mexican travel writing takes on board certain aesthetic innovations associated with postmodernist literature, in so far as they can be applied to this stubbornly Realist narrative form, it can offer a variety of travel writing that challenges the genre's imperialist legacy. This, I will argue, takes place at the level of the chronotope, whereby the imperialist 'chronotope of the road' is exchanged in more contemporary,

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Oaxaca: crónicas sonámbulas (1994), Hugo Diego Blanco's *Ángelus* (1995), Francisco Hinojosa's *Un taxi en L.A.* (1995), María Luisa Puga's *Crónicas de una oriunda del kilómetro X en Michoacán* (1995), Luis Zapata's *Paisaje con amigos: un viaje al occidente de México* (1995), Orlando Ortiz's *Crónica de las Huastecas: en las tierras del caimán y la sirena* (1995), Héctor Perea's *México: crónica en espiral* (1996), Silvia Molina's *Campeche: imagen de eternidad* (1996), Alvaro Ruiz Abreu's *Los ojos del paisaje* (1996), Ana García Bergua's *Postales desde el puerto* (1997), Hernán Lara Zavala's *Viaje al corazón de la península* (1988), José Martínez Torres's *Chiapas: crónica de dos tiempos* (1998) and Adolfo Castañón's *Lugares que pasan* (1998).

42 Carlos García-Tort, 'Escriba (una crónica de viajes) ahora, viaje (con un premio) después', *LJS*, 23 May 1999, p. 11. The only Latin American to win the prize to date is the Argentine writer Mempo Giardinelli for his *Final de novela en Patagonia* (2000).

43 The conferences were the II Congreso Internacional Alexander von Humboldt, Morelia, Michoacán, 2003 and the III Congreso Internacional Alexander von Humboldt, Veracruz, 2005. The most recent Mexican publication on the subject travel writing by Mexicans and others is *Espacio, viajes y viajeros*, ed. by Luz Elena Zamudio (Aldus and UAM – Unidad Iztapalapa, 2004).

postmodernist work for the 'chronotope of the net'.[44] While such a form of travel writing may not be the exclusive preserve of 'postcolonial' authors, it does suggest a way in which writers from former colonies might reconcile themselves with such a pervasive and persuasive vehicle for imperialist discourse.

Although much contemporary travel writing overlooks the challenge that the absorption of modernist and postmodernist narrative innovations might present, casting itself in a traditional, popular, Realist mould, notable examples of Mexican travel writing from the late 1980s and 1990s question the founding principles of the travel narrative as practised in Mexico, its aesthetics and politics. Such texts include Villoro's *Palmeras de la brisa rápida: un viaje a Yucatán* of 1989; Héctor Perea's *México: crónica en espiral* (CNCA,1996) and Fernando Solana Olivares's *Oaxaca: crónicas sonámbulas* (CNCA, 1994). Villoro's text is particularly interesting for its postmodernist deconstruction of the traditional generic mould of travel writing in conjunction with what I define as a 'postimperialist' critique of the genre of travel writing, as well as of the tourist industry in late twentieth-century Mexico.[45] Perea's and Solana Olivares's works are both important for the ways in which they establish an intense dialogue with a wide variety of other (travel) narratives, thus revealing their disinclination to produce 'totalising', coherent, authoritive forms of travel narrative themselves.[46] Perea's is also notable for its exploration of the complexities of Spanish–Mexican postcolonial relations through such dialogue. Solana Olivares's text constitutes what I will define as a postmodernist 'archival' form of travel chronicle that blends the 'postimperialist' critique found in Villoro's work with the exploration

44 For more on chronotopes see Chapter 1 and 3 in this study.

45 I use the term 'postimperialism' in this study to refer to a contestatory attitude expressed by Mexicans vis-à-vis nineteenth- and twentieth-century Northern European and United States imperialism as distinguished from a contestatory attitude vis-à-vis Spanish colonialism which the term postcolonialism might imply. The 'post'-prefix clearly refers to the contestatory stance adopted rather than to any sense of having moved beyond imperialism.

46 For postmodernism's assault on 'totalising' narratives see Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), especially pp. 62–92.

of Mexican postcolonialism found in Perea's.[47] In particular Solana Olivares offers a *mestizo,* Mexican, anti-totalising reading of Western modes of historiography and an implicit critique of the validity of the traditional imperialist travel narrative in Mexico. Despite their different approaches, however, all three authors can be seen to use postmodernist narrative strategies to postcolonialist effect.

Synopsis of the Book

In order to answer fully the questions raised in this introduction, the remainder of this study is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to key critical concepts and terminology relevant to the study of specifically Mexican travel writing as well as considers the imperialist propensity of the genre to be found in its basic 'chronotope' – Mikhail Bakhtin's 'chronotope of the road'. Chapter 2 evaluates the development of a tradition of Mexican travel writing during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century with regard to its major achievements in the creation of a discourse of Mexican national identity, as well as in the light of critical work on imperialist discourse in travel writing. Chapter 3 then makes a case for the, albeit problematic, development of postmodernism and postcolonialism in contemporary Mexican culture. Specifically, it examines the development of forms of postmodernist and/or postcolonialist writing travel writing in said context, thus mapping out the theoretical terrain for the following chapters. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus in detail on the works mentioned above by Juan Villoro, Héctor Perea and Fernando Solana Olivares which can all be viewed as offering a variety of postmodernist-informed responses to the conundrum of how one might write a travel narrative in and of contemporary Mexico, and which also unpick the imperialist legacy of the genre.

47 For an analysis of Latin American 'archival fictions' see Roberto González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), especially pp. 142–86. See also Chapter 6 in this study.