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With the death of Rafael Altamira y Crevea in 1951 the Hispanic world mourned the end of a long career of an almost legendary prestige. Above all, his eminence as a historian stood out. Author of the first and the most satisfactory history of Spanish civilization, editor, bibliographer, professor, and director of research, he had been regarded for more than a half century as the foremost historian of Spain. He had also distinguished himself in pedagogical matters by promoting university extension work and by helping to reform the school system. With other patriotic Spaniards he had labored for years to bring about a general cultural and moral revival of his country. Altamira was one of the founders of the Pan-Hispanic movement to foster an intellectual community in Spain, Portugal, and Latin America. An apostle of international law, he served for two decades as a judge on the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague. He taught for years at the universities of Oviedo, Madrid, and Mexico, and he was a guest at one time or another in many of the other great centers of learning in Europe and the Americas. A bibliography of his published works, which turned out to be incomplete, ran to more than thirty pages of titles.[1] From the time he was twenty until his final illness at eighty-five, Rafael Altamira was a vigorous force for the causes of scholarship, public enlightenment, and international justice. He did not diminish his standing when he chose to end his days as a voluntary exile in Mexico City rather than in his homeland while it was ruled by a regime that mocked his ideals.

One of the penalties which Altamira paid for his distinction in several fields of endeavor was the eclipse of his not inconsequential contributions to literature. He frankly recognized and regretted this situation,[2] and he hoped the eventual publication of his creative and critical efforts in several volumes of his *Obras completas* would rehabilitate a forgotten aspect of his career.[3] For twenty-five years he devoted a great deal of effort to writing fiction and criticism, and for a time he seemed likely to move into the front rank of Spanish novelists. A just and somewhat tender-hearted critic, he enjoyed some fame about the turn of the century and was by no means without influence on Spanish letters. In 1907, however, he was so immersed in other activities that he decided to forsake creative writing altogether, reserving for himself, as he put it, a small corner of literature in the way of criticism.[4] He stood by this resolution for the remainder of his active career, but he was not altogether happy about it. He needed an escape from the ugliness of human reality which he encountered in a busy life and which he contemplated as a historian. A few articles on literary criticism came from his pen, and he continued to read as widely as he could. Finally, in his old age he returned to two abandoned literary projects and published them in exile.[5] While they possessed a certain originality and charm, they did little to recall the promise of his works of fiction many years earlier.

The only full-length novel Altamira published was *Reposo*,[6] which appeared in 1903, just when he was attaining a world-wide reputation as a result of his first two volumes of *Historia de España y de la civilización española*. The novel

deals with a crisis in the life of a fairly young man who resembles the Altamira of the 1880's and 1890's so much that the autobiographical inspiration cannot be disregarded. Yet the protagonist, Juan Uceda, is a beaten and bedeviled man, very different from Rafael Altamira in his maturity. For most of his life Altamira was serene, disciplined, sagacious, and moderate. At first glance he might have seemed something of a stuffed shirt, moving augustly from university hall to athenaeum, from international conference to world court, addressing learned groups on dull subjects. Closer scrutiny destroys any such caricature of a real man, who for all his eminence remained colorful and brilliant to the last. Furthermore, a reading of his speeches or writings dispels any suspicion that he merely pronounced high-minded platitudes. Indeed, Altamira knew tension, suffering, and indecision as perhaps only the very gifted do. The significant thing about his private struggles, which are reflected in this novel, is that he mastered them. In his *Máximas y reflexiones*[7] he intimates something of the way in which, from a feverish period, he emerged, through high purpose and sheer will, a triumphant personality, happy in disposition and fruitful in his labors. The nature of his own crisis he described earlier, when he wrote *Reposo* in the autumn of 1902, at a time when he was secure in his profession, married, and famous. He was able to put down without sentimentality an approximation of his own experiences as he composed his story of Juan Uceda, a man who went through an agonizing period of exhaustion and who almost defeated himself.

The novel opens with Juan staring sullenly out of the windows of a train that is moving slowly on a hot summer morning through a region that seems to be Valencia or Alicante. The reader is told only that he has come from Madrid and that he is very tired and melancholy. His mood of thick gloom is ably depicted. When the train arrives at the town of Levantina he is met by his seventy-year-old uncle, Don Vicente, whom he has not seen for twenty years. As the two pass through the seaport town and the countryside Juan tells his uncle that he is profoundly tired of contending with human brutality, ignorance, evil, and routine. He has abandoned the combat and now he desires peace. Don Vicente, who is a doctor, is convinced that modern cities are an abomination, and he consoles Juan with the hope that he will find true repose and rehabilitation in the country. Soon, Juan is installed in a comfortable hacienda as a member of the family, which consists of his uncle and aunt and their spinster daughter and adolescent son. Everything is done to make him relax.

Throughout the book Altamira indulges, with admirable restraint to be sure, his deep affection for the Mediterranean coastland where he grew up. He was born in 1866 in Alicante, where his father was a retired band officer of the army, and he attended the University of Valencia, which he represented many years later in the Spanish Senate. He left the region for Madrid when he was twenty and never lived there again. Yet it remained very much in his system. He wrote a number of short stories and studies about his native province without, however, permitting his attachment to it to affect his politics, for he was a centralist and, in the best sense of the word, a nationalist. In *Reposo* he offers a rather skillful, impressionistic picture of the scenery and rural life. Not long descriptions, but revealing flashes, are used to light up the background of his essentially psychological novel. The brilliance and dramatic contrasts of the Levant have their effect on Juan. He drinks in the beauties of the stark mountains, the verdant valleys, and the Mediterranean as he walks for miles every day. Gradually, he feels a calm taking possession of him, and he is stimulated

to thoughts very different from those that have made him pale and nervous in Madrid.

From bits of dialogue and flashbacks interspersed throughout the novel the reader can infer what has been bothering Juan. He went to Madrid toward the end of the revolutionary period, probably in 1872 or 1873, as a precocious student from the Aragonese sierra. The capital was attracting many idealistic youths like him who were impatient to remake the country. Juan had thrown himself into the discussions and demonstrations of the day with great gusto, exulting in both the philosophy of democracy and the practical work of reform. The fall of the Republic caused him acute personal suffering, especially as he witnessed the impotence of the small group of liberals against what he regarded as the forces of ignorance and evil. His bitterness was intensified by his inability to obtain a foothold in a profession because of his radical activities. Reduced to the life of the intellectual proletariat, he tried to dedicate himself to learning. Cutting himself off from women, social life, and entertainment, and almost starving for several years, he wrote works of such excellence that, as the Restoration became more mellow, he was able to sell them. This circumstance embroiled him anew in politics, in shrill polemics and manifold enmities. His writings, never defined but apparently political in nature, brought him a certain fame and a little money, enough to enable him to go abroad occasionally. But he remained aloof from the ordinary pursuits of most men and devoted himself entirely to exposing the injustices of the regime and to liberalizing the country. Suddenly, the pressures were too much for him. He could go on no longer, and he fled.

Rafael Altamira underwent experiences in his youth which enabled him to provide a sympathetic description of Juan Uceda's struggle for fame and justice. He became a republican at the University of Valencia, where, with his friend Vicente Blasco-Ibáñez, he had baited the ultramontane and reactionary professors.[8] The young radicals squandered their funds on realistic novels, wrote stories and poems during some of their lectures, and talked boldly of revolution. They promoted tumults and circulated propaganda. Altamira managed to avoid falling afoul of the law the way Blasco-Ibáñez did, but he was a ringleader of the group of hot-heads even as he excelled, almost without trying, in his studies. In 1886 he went to Madrid and completed his doctorate in law within one year. His dissertation was pretentious and greatly overdecorated with what passed then for the trappings of erudition,[9] but when it was published it established him as a reputable scholar. His real interest, however, was journalism, and he published effusively in the leftist press. Furthermore, he counted as sponsors or friends such men as Leopoldo Alas, Benito Pérez Galdós, Nicolás Salmerón, Joaquín Costa, Gumersindo de Azcárate, and Francisco Giner de los Ríos.[10] While no one could deny that Altamira was extraordinarily able, his immediate acceptance at the age of twenty by the leading professors and men of letters in Madrid surely had something of a political basis. Unlike Juan Uceda, Altamira was not repressed by the government or blocked in his rise by political considerations (quite the contrary). Nevertheless, he knew men who had suffered severely a few years before, and he himself realized only too well what it meant to be pressed for money, overworked, maddened by the regime, and driven by ambition.

In *Reposo*, bits of Juan Uceda's experiences are revealed as the story moves along neatly. The emphasis in the first half of the novel is on his response to the idyllic life of the country. The affection of his solicitous relatives, the scenery, exercise, and wholesome rural characters

have their effect on him. As he attains a certain serenity he dreams of remaining and building a useful life there without the type of intellectual activity that so nearly broke his nerves. His uncle is an inspiring example. The old man engages in an extensive medical practice, much of it charitable, and he spends several hours each day advising the peasants on all sorts of problems. He is always busy and contented. Another model is a priest who performs countless good works among the lowly, and who is himself so humble he is despised by his unappreciative parishioners. Like Altamira, Juan is unorthodox in his religion, but he is attracted to a life of service in behalf of others. Most of the time, however, he is unable to think of the future. Poised and refreshed as the weeks pass, he believes his flight from life is being vindicated.

The fragility of his state of mind is revealed in several significant incidents. At a tertulia he is shaken and annoyed when he is compelled to hear, even for a few minutes, the opinions of Carlists. Then, a local intellectual seeks him out, hoping at last for good conversation with an informed liberal like Juan. But Juan cannot bear to be stirred by political discussions. He is almost cruel in snubbing and avoiding the man. For the first time in years he does not read at all, although his uncle has a good library. Both the classics and the newspapers, he fears, are likely to arouse his old passions. The arrival of letters throws him into terror, for so much of his correspondence had been devoted to exchanging insults and prolonging polemical disputes.

Another ghost threatens Juan's new life when he visits some picturesque fishermen. An old man berates the younger generation for its shame-faced acceptance of the defeats of Spain in the recent war with the United States. Juan agrees whole-heartedly with the tirade and regains his composure only after several hours of angry thoughts about the absence of national pride among so many of his fellow citizens. This episode constitutes a minor flaw in the novel, an odd one for a historian to make, for Juan would be at least forty-two by the time of the Spanish-American war if he had gone to Madrid around 1873 when he was about seventeen, as we are led to believe. In making his character inadvertently about ten years older than he seems otherwise to be, Altamira was revealing his own obsession with the defeat of 1898. He had been profoundly hurt by Spain's poor showing in the war, which inspired him to try to vindicate the history of his country, to summon broad-minded patriots to action, and to promote Pan-Hispanism. One of his important books, *Psicología del pueblo español*,[11] which made him prominent as a commentator on national affairs, deals with the long-range aspects of Spain's predicament as it was thrown into relief by the war. Probably Altamira could not resist an opportunity to drive home a point while he was writing his novel by attributing to Juan Uceda his own sentiments about the defeat.

The ruin of Juan's readjustment begins when the novel is half over. For some time he has idly wondered about the irrigation arrangements by which the farmers paid dearly for the privilege of watering their fields from the ditches. When he witnesses a so-called water market in progress, with the poor competing desperately for a chance to purchase water, he becomes curious. Why should they pay at all? To find the answer he inevitably has to direct himself to books of law and history, in violation of his resolutions. As his research widens the dreary history of exploitation becomes clarified, and he perceives that over the centuries a few monopolists had more or less illegally acquired control of irrigation. Aghast at the injustice of the situation, Juan becomes his old self again and longs to do something. At a Sunday afternoon social gathering his temper flares and

he makes a scene over the issue. Then, he compels himself to pause. His truce with life must not be jeopardized. He has struggled entirely too hard to attain a mental equilibrium to get himself involved again in such matters.

While he is miserable with indecision, Juan is stirred by a wholly unexpected meeting with Andrea, an Aragonese provincial who is visiting one of the neighbors. While she is now about thirty and stout and has a hard expression, she is still somewhat attractive. They pretend not to know each other when they are introduced. Somewhat guiltily, Juan recalls her as the tender, home-town girl to whom he had once been engaged. During the time of his greatest despair and frustration in Madrid he had concluded that the only honorable thing to do was to break the engagement and leave her free to marry a man who could make her a living. She had remained single, however, and Juan had forgotten her and all other women while he devoted himself to his work. Even during his rest cure in the country he has maintained his aloofness to women, notwithstanding the good-natured efforts of some of the local match-makers to get him interested. Now, with Andrea reviving his dormant passion, he hurriedly concludes that reparation of the broken romance will be in itself desirable, and that it will complete his rehabilitation.

Stealing into the garden while she is cutting flowers, Juan confronts Andrea. His murmurs of apology and explanation are cut short and a distressing scene takes place. Andrea, her eyes bitter and her voice strident, turns on him with all the suffering and sense of outrage she has endured for ten years. She tells him that she had adored him and never lost faith in him. His affected sacrifice for her benefit had been in reality a brutal jilting. Although she is gratified by his triumphant career, she makes it clear that she hates him and can never forgive him. Without finishing she drops her flowers and runs crazily into the house. Conscience-stricken and disappointed, Juan strides about the fields for hours. Finally, he goes home and tells the whole story to his aunt. As she predicts, he is soon able to put the affair out of his mind.

Another period of studied self-control follows. Juan clings to his supposed serenity as neurotically as he had once thrown himself into his work. Autumn comes, and Don Vicente is hopeful that Juan will remain with him. Gradually, however, Juan is overcome by the devils of thought and passion. The irrigation situation nags his mind and finally gets control of him. He faces the fact that he cannot maintain his composure in the midst of injustice, that he must take the lead in fighting wrongs in the country as well as in Madrid. Exalted by his devotion to the cause, he spends several happy weeks going about acquainting the farmers with their rights. Just when he has planned a mass meeting to draw up a remonstrance to the government, he is blocked by his uncle. Don Vicente knows his hot-tempered neighbors. An innocent meeting to devise a petition would easily degenerate into a fiery demonstration. The authorities would surely step in, as the alcalde hints they will. The only result would be the familiar one of violence and, as had happened so regularly over the centuries, the exploitation would simply become worse.

In making this issue a part of his novel the author was dealing with a subject well within his competence. Like his friend Blasco-Ibáñez and his character Uceda, Altamira was deeply sympathetic to the farmers. He wrote articles on the complicated legal history of the water rights during the 1890's, and two years after *Reposo* appeared he published an excellent little social history of Alicante.[12] Passionately as he felt about the inequities, however, Altamira does not permit Juan Uceda to interfere decisively in the

situation. Rather, he bows to Don Vicente, who asserts himself not only as the patriarch of the region, but as his doctor. Feeling like a deserter, Juan allows himself to be persuaded not to attend the mass meeting but to take a holiday on the coast with his uncle. It is his last flight.

Don Vicente takes his nephew to an isolated hacienda owned by a very individualistic friend of his, located where the mountain chains run into the Mediterranean. There are four or five days of climbing peaks and contemplating the magnificent scenery. Juan surrenders to the atmosphere and achieves a sublime mood, again having separated himself from human problems. It is all in vain. A chance encounter with a water-witch, a few comments by his host on the urgent need to improve the irrigation system, and Juan is aflame. He becomes oblivious to the scenery. His repose suddenly seems artificial and cowardly. Fairly vibrating with zeal, he summons his uncle and lets him know the game is over. He must obey his compulsions to fight the good fight for a better society.

To the last, while the train pulls out of Levantina for Madrid, Don Vicente beseeches Juan to remain. The old man is so sure that Madrid is evil, like all modern cities, and that it will kill him. But Juan can no longer be touched by such arguments. He has found himself. For those who carry the germ of calm in their souls, he says, Don Vicente may be right. But for men like Juan repose is possible only for brief periods and is always at the mercy of an incident. Perhaps it will be found at the moment of death, but until then life is struggle. A man must do what he feels he has to do and not attempt to flee. Having come to terms with himself, Juan departs for Madrid to resume his career.

Altamira might have drawn upon two experiences in his own youth for his story of Juan Uceda's crisis and its implicit moral. In 1889, after three years of frenzied activity in Madrid, Altamira had to break off from his work for a time because of a nervous trouble brought on, he said, by too much intellectual pressure.[13] Restored after a few months, he went back to work, this time centering his activities about the pedagogical museum, of which he was secretary, and also doing historical research, writing fiction, traveling over Spain and France, and for a time taking over the editorship of the centralist republican newspaper, *La Justicia*. Probably he lived the type of life he depicted in the story of Juan Uceda, taking no time for love or simple pleasures, driven by demons to learn and write about everything, and regarding political ills as personal afflictions. In 1893 he underwent another crisis, one which caused him to elevate his forces to a higher plane. He was always reticent about this incident. It had something to do with his presence at a noisy convention of Spanish and Portuguese republicans at Badajoz which was regarded, as those affairs went, as a success. Somehow Altamira was soured. He concluded that politics on that level did not suit his temperament, and he firmly renounced further political activity.[14] Henceforth he remained above the shrill disputes of the factions and the parties and wasted no more effort in political squabbles and propaganda. While he was always known to be a republican, even when in later years he accepted honors and posts from King Alfonso XIII, Altamira channeled his energies into truly enduring work. He became a great scholar and not a mere propagandist, a civilized patriot and not an angry partisan.

Between Altamira's renunciation of politics in 1893 and the writing of *Reposo* in 1902 he found much fruitful work to do. He published several books of a literary nature, the best of which were a novelette, *Fatalidad*,[15] a group of short stories about Alicante, *Cuentos de Levante*,[16] and *Eco de Madrid*,[17] an effort to

recapture in print the slang spoken in the capital. His creative writings won praise, and he was regarded as quite promising in this field.[18] His criticisms, which were notable for their balance and justice, pleased such an acerbic writer as Leopoldo Alas,[19] who had discerned Altamira's potentialities when he was an undergraduate. From 1895 to 1902 Altamira was founder, editor or co-editor, and sometimes financial backer of the journal, *Revista crítica de historia y literatura española, portuguesa e hispano-americana,* which sought to stimulate the scholarly and literary interests of the Hispanic world. During this time he was writing bibliographical articles for the foremost foreign historical journals and working, until 1897, at the pedagogical museum. He then won a professorship at the University of Oviedo and took his chair just before the Spanish-American war. When he was thirty-three, in 1899, he began a happy marriage which terminated only with his death fifty-two years later. The first volume of his history of Spanish civilization appeared in 1900. Intended only as a modern textbook, it was recognized from the first as a great historical work, one which to this day is seldom disputed and frequently quoted. Altamira had reached the top of his profession quickly, and he remained there. Acclaim greeted most of his subsequent writings, and honors and responsibilities filled the remainder of his life.

One may only conjecture what the author had in mind for the future of Juan Uceda. The novel, which is underwritten all the way through, terminates quite simply with the train leaving for Madrid. An Argentine judge who admired Altamira and who praised *Reposo* enthusiastically found fault with what he took to be the author's point, that a man must drive himself to fight for success at all cost.[20] That interpretation has some foundation, for Altamira was extremely ambitious to be known and heard. There was a great deal more to him than that, however. He was also an idealist, like Juan Uceda. There was nothing insincere or self-seeking about his passion to regenerate Spain, to educate all who would learn, to stimulate Pan-Hispanism, and to promote international justice. He also carried out to an exhausting degree the practices of Don Vicente and the priest in *Reposo* of doing good among lowly people. Altamira devoted years of humble labors to reducing illiteracy among the miners of Asturias[21] and to improving the training and condition of the schoolteachers of Spain.[22] To the last, nothing delighted him more than an opportunity to assist young scholars, no matter how obscure or immature they were. Not only was he patient and generous with all sorts of people, but he strove unrelentingly, and with considerable success, to perfect his own character. Probably he meant to suggest that Juan Uceda would develop as he himself had, once his hardest lessons had been learned, winning poise not in flight from life but in hard work and virtue and directing his talents into spheres where his efforts would reward both society and himself.

NOTES

[1] *Bibliografía y biografía de Rafael Altamira y Crevea* (Mexico, 1946). A number of titles omitted in this collection were supplied in an *Apéndice*, published in Mexico in 1948.

[2] In a note to the author, November 1944.

[3] Altamira, *Arte y realidad* (Barcelona, 1921), p. 7.

[4] Ibid., p. 9.

[5] *Cartas de hombres, 1927–1941* (Lisbon, 1944) and *Tierras y hombres de Asturias* (Mexico, 1949).

[6] Barcelona, 1903. This is one of a series in the *Biblioteca de novelistas del siglo xx* published by Henrich y Compañía.

[7] Mexico, 1948. An earlier edition was published in Madrid in 1919.

[8] Altamira, *Ideario pedagógico* (Madrid, 1923), pp. 353–356.

[9] *Historia de la propiedad comunal* (Madrid, 1890). This superficial sketch of the history of common property since ancient times was surely more praised than read.

[10] *Bibliografía y biografía*, pp. 55–56; "Rafael Altamira," *Diccionario enciclopédico hispano americano de literatura, ciencias y artes* (Barcelona, 1898), XXIV. This entry is so full of intimate details that it must have been compiled by Altamira himself, who was not always modest, or by an admirer who knew him very well.

[11] Barcelona, 1902. Most of the book had been published as a series of articles in *La España Moderna* during 1899.

[12] *Derecho consuetudinario y economía popular de la provincia de Alicante* (Madrid, 1905).

[13] Altamira, *España en América* (Valencia, 1908), p. 35.

[14] "Rafael Altamira", loc. cit.

[15] In a volume, *Novelas* (Madrid, 1894), by Altamira, Juan Ochoa, and Tomás Carretero.

[16] Madrid, 1895.

[17] Leipzig, 1895. The date is erroneously given as 1893 in *Bibliografía*.

[18] Reviews by F. H. Graser of *Fatalidad* in *Revue Hispanique*, I (1894), p. 214, and by R. Foulché-Delbosc of *Eco de Madrid*, Ibid., II (1895), pp. 199–200.

[19] In a prologue to Altamira's *Mi primera campaña* (Madrid, 1893), pp. v–xi.

[20] Ernesto Quesada, *Tristezas y esperanzas* (Buenos Aires, 1908), pp. 15–16, 20, and 58.

[21] Altamira, *Tierras y hombres de Asturias*, pp. 178–180.

[22] Altamira was Director general of primary teaching for Spain from 1911 to 1913. His energetic policies won him much applause but brought about a forced resignation. An extremely unkind estimate of Altamira by Ramiro Maeztu published on this occasion provoked hundreds of outraged protests. The criticism and most of the replies, including Altamira's own characteristic appeal to close the controversy, appear in *Homenajes a don Rafael Altamira con motivo de su dimisión de Director general de primaria enseñanza e incidentes con ella relacionados* (Madrid, 1914). See also the comments of Professor Roger B. Merriman in the *American Historical Review*, Vol. XX, No. 1 (October 1914), pp. 185–186.