



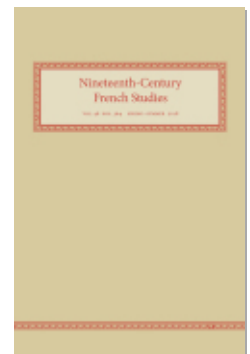
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From Spain's Moors to Spain's Colonies: Chateaubriand's
Mapping of Liberty and Equality in *Les Aventures du dernier
Abencérage*

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Nineteenth-Century French Studies, Volume 46, Numbers 3 & 4, Spring-Summer
2018, pp. 233-253 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncf.2018.0007>



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From Spain's Moors to Spain's Colonies

Chateaubriand's Mapping of Liberty and Equality
in *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*

FABIENNE MOORE

Where does Spain fit on the post-revolutionary map? Contemporary Spain remains marginalized at the periphery of European civilization, as if deemed not yet ready, like its colonies, to put Enlightenment ideals into practice. Chateaubriand perpetuates this remoteness of the Iberian Peninsula by setting an interracial, interfaith romance, *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*, in the distant past of Moorish Spain, when, in fact, interracial romances prompted much contemporary debate in the American colonies. This article analyzes the contrast between an idealized vision of aristocratic liberty and equality set in 1526 and the pragmatic politics of liberal imperialism when it came to Spain's future and the fate of its Spanish colonies. The first part interprets the story against the backdrop of its writing in 1810 shortly after Napoleon's invasion of Spain. The second part connects the novella's 1826 publication with Chateaubriand's political role when, named Minister of Foreign Affairs, he instigated a military intervention in Spain in 1823.

A ROMANCE OUT OF JOINT

It was during Napoleon's rise and fall (1799–1815) that Chateaubriand composed narratives most concerned with France's imperial and colonial legacies. As France's presence in America faded with the loss of Canada and the Louisiana Territory—the latter sold in the wake of the 1803 independence of Saint-Domingue—Napoleon contemplated the construction of a continental, European empire and also made forays into Africa, the Middle East, and Russia.¹ At times, Chateaubriand's writing absorbed and conveyed a widely shared discourse of domination about a France aspiring to re-conquer foreign territories and peoples.² In other instances, he subverted such a discourse with representations of colonialism's evils. This dissonance defines the new “liberal” imperialism of post-revolutionary France exemplified by Benjamin Constant and Alexis de Tocqueville, both of whom developed a liberal ideology of empire in reaction to Napoleon's tyranny and political fluctuations, as Jennifer Pitts explains:

[T]he nation's unstable and unsettling domestic regime for much of the nineteenth century led liberals, including Tocqueville, to embrace imperialism as a kind of national salvation. [. . .] The dominant strand of liberalism that was forged during this period was to be exclusionary and nationalist; and it would sit uneasily with the Revolution's apparent legacy of universal human equality and liberty.³

Tocqueville's elder, Chateaubriand, took a different, albeit still ambivalent, stance as he fictionalized the rejection of despotic conquest in favor of an "encounter" with suffering native populations. As his striking literary representations captured a whole century, they shaped the terms of a burning post-Rousseauian, post-revolutionary debate on how to reconcile liberty and equality. Marc Fumaroli contends that "Les deux écrivains [Chateaubriand and Tocqueville] partagent la même angoisse à l'idée d'un avenir démocratique déterminé par la seule passion de l'égalité et ne trouvant plus dans l'honneur et la magnanimité nobles dont le souvenir même serait effacé, les ressorts de la liberté" (732). But if egalitarianism had proved liberticidal during the Terror, liberalism, like colonialism, was turning out to be non-egalitarian: "ce fut une esclave qui me reçut sur la terre de la liberté," Chateaubriand observed pithily, as he reminisced about his first steps in North America after disembarking in Chesapeake bay (*Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, vol. 1, book 6, chapter 6, p. 344).

I argue that this debate between the dream of liberty and the pull of equality, born of a sense of crisis, forms the core of Chateaubriand's *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*, a romance inspired by Spain's Moorish past and set in the year 1526. The novella's central theme of resistance is the city of Granada as the Moors' lost paradise, figured in the hopeless love story between the Spanish Bianca and the last of the Moors' descendants, Aben-Hamet. This article analyzes the contrast between an idealized vision of aristocratic liberty and equality set in Spain's past and the pragmatic politics of liberal imperialism when it came to Spain's future, each a response to post-revolutionary aspirations and ambitions. Chateaubriand's Moors are written as a fantasy of aristocratic equality, while the love story between the Moor and the Christian is presented as the construction of religious equality coupled with religious freedom. The core of the story imagines a love and respect for an aristocratic Other that marries liberty and equality. Possible within the private realm of feelings, this marriage cannot be accomplished in public, just like the union of the Native American with the European in *Atala* and *Les Natchez* can never be consummated or at the risk of death: the politics of religion and identity cannot yet allow for hybridity, gesturing to a deficit in ideals of equality.

For a long time, the main interest of *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage* resided in the titillating mystery of its biographical context and potential source

of inspiration, the author's amorous adventure with Natalie de Noailles (Regard 1347–55). For a long time as well, scholars have worked on the text's literary sources and placed it within a genealogy of literary idealization of Moors.⁴ A psychoanalytical reading has also illuminated latent meanings in the plot and the representation of chivalry (Glaudes 41–74). More recently, a socio-critical approach inscribed the contemporary history of early nineteenth century France as a major stake in the novella: "Le lecteur est [. . .] amené à pratiquer une lecture, disons à contretemps, à actualiser dans et à partir de l'Histoire contemporaine la leçon de la nouvelle. En termes sociocritiques, le lecteur est invité à pratiquer des co-textualisations différentes du récit" (Bourdenet 280). Accordingly, my objective is to bring a charged post-revolutionary context to bear upon two authorial decisions: first, the writing of the story in 1810 right after Napoleon's war with Spain; and second, its deferred publication in 1826, three years after Chateaubriand waged his own Spanish war when he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs. With this contextualization, I seek to remedy a curious avoidance in Chateaubriand scholarship to situate the author and his work within *colonial* history and politics.⁵ Furthermore, I hope to model an analysis of a more global Chateaubriand than a French national icon. Reopening his massive œuvre to rethink his stance on French imperialist missions in the Americas, the Orient, Spain, and competitive "liberal" projects with other European nations like Britain enables scholars and students to examine the way both the man (as politician and Minister of Foreign Affairs) and his literature are imbricated in a complicated network of interests and ideals that characterize the post-revolutionary world.

The first part of the article interprets the story against the backdrop of its writing in 1810 shortly after Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808, against which the Spaniards heroically resisted. Behind a narrative sympathetic to Spanish high culture is an indictment of Napoleon's despotism, so much so that Chateaubriand waited until 1826 to publish the story. Moving to the novella's actual 1826 publication, I connect it in the second part of the article with Chateaubriand's political role from 1822 to 1824 when, named Minister of Foreign Affairs under Louis XVIII, he instigated a military intervention in Spain in 1823 to maintain the throne of Ferdinand VII. Having overthrown Ferdinand VII in 1808, Napoleon proclaimed his brother Joseph Bonaparte King of Spain; back in power in 1813, Ferdinand VII's absolute monarchy remained unstable, and in 1820 faced a revolution that made him prisoner. The French war with Spain, which led to Ferdinand VII's release, was defended by Chateaubriand as a just interference, with an explicit warning to England occupying nearby Portugal. Chateaubriand played a contradictory political role during this complex history of Franco-Spanish relations in the wake of the French Revolution, as Ferdinand VII's repressive rule until his death in 1833 actually ran counter to

some of Chateaubriand's most cherished ideals. I address here Chateaubriand's paradoxical and understudied negotiations regarding Spanish colonies in Latin America⁶ as an attempt to construct independent Spanish colonies as constitutional monarchies—the political regime most apt to preserve freedom of the people in Chateaubriand's view. When, in 1824, barely a year after the war, Chateaubriand was dismissed from Foreign Affairs, this fall from grace did not let him complete negotiations with the Spanish colonies at the heart of his vision of favoring constitutional monarchies in exchange for recognizing their independence.

Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage defies categorizations as romantic, liberal, conservative, Eurocentric, exotic or Orientalist to reveal the singularity of Chateaubriand's stratification of time in space, and with it the imbrications of poetics, history, and politics. At the time of its writing, in 1810, Europe was under construction, with opposing views with regard to the legacy of the French Revolution on the one hand and Napoleon's conquests on the other. François Hartog has theorized the disorientation generated by the before and after of the French Revolution as a navigation between two "regimes of historicity." For Hartog, Chateaubriand "apparaît pris entre deux ordres du temps et tiraillé entre deux régimes d'historicité: l'ancien et le nouveau, le régime moderne. Car son écriture n'a jamais cessé de partir de ce changement de régime et de revenir sur cette brèche du temps, ouverte par 1789" (Hartog 21). Caught "between past and future," reeling "in the breach of time"—to use Hannah Arendt's phrase—Chateaubriand obsessively not only writes about, but also politicizes, time. Napoleon's despotism and his imperialistic views of Europe are set against a type of "liberal empire" advocated by Chateaubriand as well as Staël, Constant, and later Tocqueville.⁷ But if in 1810, Chateaubriand is liberal against Napoleon, at the time of the story's publication, in 1826, he is royalist against the liberals (of France, and of Spain and its colonies). Throughout, Chateaubriand remains politically closer to England's constitutional monarchy than to France's revolutionaries and their heirs, though his French nationalism always takes over in response to England's imperial ambitions and strategies.

But where does Spain fit on the post-revolutionary map? Contemporary Spain remains marginalized at the periphery of European civilization, as if deemed not yet ready, like its colonies, to put Enlightenment ideals into practice. Chateaubriand perpetuates this remoteness of the Iberian Peninsula, its closeness to Africa, by reimagining an interracial romance set in a distant past, when in fact interracial romances were a huge contemporary preoccupation in the Americas. Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of historicism challenges us to rethink how to read the text and context of Chateaubriand's romance: "Historicism—even the modern, European idea of history—[. . .] came to non-European peoples in the nineteenth century as somebody's way of saying 'not yet' to somebody else.

[. . .] That was what historicist consciousness was: a recommendation to the colonized to wait” (8). Though equal and free (in theory), the Moor must wait; though part of Europe (in theory), nineteenth-century Spain must wait; even if they gain independence, the Spanish colonies must wait. Is Chateaubriand deaf to the urgency, to the “global insistence on the ‘now’ that marks all popular movements toward democracy” (Chakrabarty 8)? Instead, the violent aftermath of the French and Haitian revolutions long continues to exert a powerful braking force on Chateaubriand’s psyche.⁸ I would like to suggest that the dual “regimes of historicity” pinpointed by Hartog correspond less to the frequently invoked, dynamic metaphor of Chateaubriand swimming between two banks, ancient and modern, than to a certain stasis: Chateaubriand himself caught in the “waiting room” of history, treading water.

Perhaps the most overlooked and fascinating aspect captured by *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage* is what Siep Stuurman terms “the two faces of modern equality” in his recent *Invention of Humanity*:

[M]odern equality is Janus-faced. One of its possible meanings, perhaps the dominant one, links it to the emergence of a universal culture. All humans will become equals to the extent that they ingest Enlightenment culture. To be equal means to be enlightened—that is, to make oneself over into the image of those who already are “equal.” The alternative defines *equality* as the equal right to the pursuit of happiness according to one’s own lights, only limited by the obligation to respect the autonomy of others. (338)

A consequence, as we will see, of Chateaubriand’s tangle with history is his mapping a “Janus-faced equality” onto Spain and its colonies.

CHATEAUBRIAND’S MOOR AS A PRIVATE FANTASY OF ARISTOCRATIC EQUALITY

Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage opens with a reminder of the fall of Granada followed by the displacement of the Moors to Africa, where they nurture nostalgic memories of the lost land.⁹ Of all the families in exile, the story singles out the Abencerrages, once a “race of warriors” now dedicated to botany and the curative virtues of plants, especially those “qui servaient à calmer les vains regrets, à dissiper les folles illusions et ces espérances de bonheur toujours naissantes, toujours déçues.”¹⁰ But the scent of plants transplanted from Granada to Cartagena acts like a “poison” as it triggers olfactory memories of the fatherland and an affective journey back in time.¹¹ The first three pages of the story paint a picture of exile and loss echoed in and transmitted by romances sung by mothers. A leitmotiv characteristic of Chateaubriand’s writing makes its first appearance here—layers of time inscribed in the landscape:

Aben-Hamet traversa les grandes bruyères et les bois de palmiers du royaume de Murcie: à la vieillesse de ces palmiers, il jugea qu'ils devaient avoir été plantés par ses pères, et son cœur fut pénétré de regrets. Là s'élevait une tour où veillait la sentinelle au temps de la guerre des Maures et des Chrétiens; ici se montrait une ruine dont l'architecture annonçait une origine moresque; autre sujet de douleur pour l'Abencérage! (206)

The vicissitudes of human history are invoked as strata: the Abencerrages' home was built on the site where the Christian crusader, King Saint Louis, died; it was located among the ruins of Cartagena facing the sea; and a Muslim hermitage now occupies the site, the narrator tells us. Against this backdrop and a temporal ellipse of twenty-four years, the main character, Aben-Hamet, is introduced as the very last survivor of the Abencerrages on his way to a pilgrimage to the land of the fathers, namely Spain, disguised as an Arab medicine man. We are in 1526, under the reign of Charles V, and the French King François I is a prisoner in Madrid. The story registers Aben-Hamet's admiration of the Spanish landscape, on the way to Granada, and his pained agitation at the discovery of the city and its extraordinary monuments. Chateaubriand drew his inspiration from his own brief visit to Granada in 1807, from contemporary travel narratives and engravings, and from Spanish and French fictions belonging to what has been termed the genre of the Moorish novel.¹² Granada is a presence in the text that has multiple functions: historical, religious, political, and symbolic.

The novella stages the encounter between the Muslim Moor and the Christian Spanish noblewoman Blanca as a reciprocal love at first sight subsequently thwarted by their respective faiths, which neither wants to abjure in order to marry the other, while at the same time each swears fidelity to the other. Their love survives the competing love of a French nobleman, Lautrec, and the passage of time during the three years when Aben-Hamet leaves Spain for Africa and returns yearly. As Aben-Hamet waits and contemplates conversion, he learns that Blanca and her brother are the last descendants of El Cid. He then reveals that he is himself the last descendant of the Abencerrages decimated by El Cid. Overwhelmed by the perspective of mixing their blood in a sacrilegious alliance, Aben-Hamet asks Blanca to decide his fate. Her sacrifice is to let him go: "Retourne au désert!" (243). The denouement is a tableau of solitude and death, with Blanca, the last of her prestigious lineage choosing to remain alone and faithful to her love, visiting the sites of their past happiness year after year. Aben-Hamet is never heard from again. The final paragraph returns the narrator/traveler to the ruins of Cartagena outside of Tunis, where someone points out to him the grave of the "last of the Abencerrages" simply marked, from a Moorish custom, with a small bowl chiseled in the funerary stone from which birds drink rainwater.¹³

As one critic puts it, Spain does not emerge fully in French literature until Chateaubriand uses it as “a sumptuous frame for his haughty melancholia” (Martinenche 13). What remains paradoxical is how the lost Muslim kingdom of Granada figures France’s lost Catholic monarchy in reverse, as if in a mirror. Like the American Indian also prominent in Chateaubriand’s imagination, the Moor in exile represents a counterpart to the wandering narrator who is sympathetic to the Moor’s expatriation and loss. The Moor is described as a *chevalier* throughout the story (albeit one with a saber, a turban, a flowing purple robe, and mounting an Andalusian horse), with heavy emphasis placed on a native nobility that puts him on an equal footing with the three other noblemen in the story: Blanca’s brother, Don Carlos; their father, the Duke of Santa-Fé; and a French nobleman, Thomas de Lautrec. The sharing, even rivaling, of noble values among the characters (such as valor and honor, fidelity and gallantry) clearly establishes their aristocratic equality. This concept is crucial to understanding the social ideal and noble values that were perceived as lost when the French Revolution established the equality of all citizens. The last of the Abencerrages is not just any Moor: he is the noblest. Therefore the Moor’s fate figures the political defeat of the French aristocracy *and* the social aspiration to preserve noble values when faced with a notice of extinction. We should note that this figuration also happens in Chateaubriand’s representation of Native Americans struggling to retain their pride as they lose their land.¹⁴ I would argue then, that orientalizing the Moor means projecting on him monarchical values: far from a savage Muslim, he is the epitome of nobility, dignity, faith, and high culture. What is astonishing, of course, is the valorization of the Moor by an apologist of Christianity, but religious affiliation matters less here than the historical situation of a vanquished people losing their paradise. Chateaubriand’s Orientalist gesture consists in establishing aristocratic equality with a noble race facing exile, in order to arouse empathy and nostalgia. The response to what critic Harry Liebersohn terms a “crisis of nobility” is “an aristocratic encounter” with another noble race (43–60). The fact that for over sixteen years, Chateaubriand refused to release the story to a general public, but saved it to read aloud in private circles and salons to a select audience (possibly including Louis XVIII) might signal a direct kinship between his noble characters and the remainder of France’s high society.

A disenchanting observation from Chateaubriand’s *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* confirms how his *préjugé de classe* trumps the *préjugé de couleur*. As he describes the city of Jerusalem, the author comes upon a street:

Harat-el-Maugrarbé, rue des Maugrabins. Ces Maugrabins [. . .] sont les Occidentaux ou Barbaresques. On compte parmi eux quelques descendants des Maures chassés d’Espagne par Ferdinand et Isabelle. [. . .] Les héritiers des fiers Abencérages, les élégants architectes de l’Alhambra, sont devenus

à Jérusalem des portiers qu'on recherche à cause de leur intelligence, et des courriers estimés pour leur légèreté. Que dirait Saladin et Richard si, revenant tout à coup au monde, ils trouvaient les chevaliers maures transformés en concierges au Saint-Sépulcre, et les chevaliers chrétiens représentés par des Frères quêteurs? (386)

Invoking the ghosts of noble rival rulers, Saladin and Richard the Lionheart, Chateaubriand provokingly imagines their heads shaking at chivalry's extraordinary downfall into a prosaic present of subalterity. Equal in their past grandeur, equal in their subaltern status of caretakers and beggars, the once noble Muslim and the once noble Christian embody a ruined past and a confused post-revolutionary present. With a characteristic posture, the author, as if omniscient historian/narrator, gazes upon the rise and fall of religious empires, mapping Granada and Jerusalem respectively as the lost paradises of (noble) Muslims and (noble) Christians.

FREEDOM AND EQUALITY OF RELIGION IN THE
LOVE OF THE NOBLE MOOR AND THE NOBLE CHRISTIAN

The fact that Edward Said opened *Orientalism* with Chateaubriand projecting his narcissistic self onto foreign cultures gives the French author a place of (dis)honor that has frozen Chateaubriand in time as an Orientalist (1). The novella is evidence that Orientalism does not sufficiently account for the articulation of space and time, and poetics and politics in Chateaubriand's thought. If Chateaubriand is only construed as an Orientalist, it misses the political gesture at the origin of the story. As Chateaubriand explained in his preface, he wrote the chivalric romance in homage to the Spaniards' resistance against Napoleon's during his invasion of Spain. The explicit connection with Napoleon's war compels the reader to approach the story differently than as just a prototypical Westernizing tale; we must also read it as an exploration of freedom, as an anti-despotic and rebellious stance, as the poetic voicing of an impossible unity. The female heroine, Blanca, stands as an allegory of Spanish beauty, strength, fortitude, pride, and rebellion. In insisting on her Spanish identity, her moral integrity, and her complete independence, Chateaubriand creates a character that embodies her nation, and serves therefore as a tribute to the heroic resistance of the guerillas defending Spain against Napoleon's invasion.¹⁵ To the despair of her father and brother, she pledges her love to the Moor, and does so even before knowing of his noble origins. If her love supremely ignores ethnic and political prejudices, her marriage is contingent upon his conversion to Catholicism. Aben-Hamet's love is no less sweeping, even though Blanca represents the victorious nation that defeated and exiled his people. This multifaceted representation illuminates intersections of private and public

(individual vs. society) on the one hand, and on the other hand, the intersection of freedom and equality. In this story, the private is political. Namely, love between a Catholic and a Muslim is political: it stands as a rebellion against the order of things and for respect of independent choice. By rebellion, I mean there is no evidence in the text that the characters abandon their reciprocal love even as they choose abstinence and separation. It establishes a remarkable equality between the Moor and the Christian while keeping intact their respective freedom to privilege the absolute over compromise. There is a second example in the text of equality coinciding with liberty—the relationship between Blanca's brother, the Spanish nobleman Don Carlos de Bivar, and the French nobleman Lautrec. Even though the latter is a political enemy with an official status as prisoner, the two noblemen have established a private friendship based on mutual admiration and respect. In brief, the story creates the private as a realm of freedom and equality; moreover it fantasizes the resolution of Janus-faced modern equality, i.e. the reconciliation of "equality as sameness" vs. "equality as autonomy" (Stuurman 360). However, the narrative's political dream of universalist values is impossible in the public sphere. Blanca will not marry "an infidel" and rejects Aben-Hamet, I argue, to preserve his and her freedom albeit at the expense of their suffering. The story ends with the Moor disappearing and Blanca surviving but refusing to perpetuate "her race." Xavier Bourdenet interprets the conclusion as a warning against "un repli narcissique et autiste de l'aristocratie sur ses valeurs et la fidélité à ses origines" (281)—an aristocratic ideal that is not only *passé* but in denial of History, condemning the characters outside modernity. But it is also the public, political imperative not to mix blood that in effect ends in sterility. Equality becomes "a receding target, a history under the sign of the 'not yet'" (Stuurman 344).

CHATEAUBRIAND'S OWN SPANISH RECONQUEST

Let's now move forward in time, from 1810 to 1826 when the novella was published, and leave the story's sixteenth-century backdrop in order to connect with a changed contemporaneity, the Restoration. It is then that Chateaubriand earned his reputation as the ultimate conservative, an ultra-royalist, though his rocky relationship to power meant that his political career collapsed each time he was unable to compromise with the government. Under the French Restoration, the competition between French and British empires played itself out in part in the fate of lands such as Spain, Northern Africa, and Latin America. The troubadour genre of the narrative, by generating a displacement from modern to chivalric times, diverts attention away from this contemporaneous colonial history. The short preface orients readers toward a specific reading—nostalgia for bygone times—by playing with multiple layers of past and present. In a preliminary version, Chateaubriand justified his historical setting with the

paradox that since he did not see enough of Spanish people during his visit, past events offered greater authenticity than a contemporary background:

Je n'ai pas assez vu les Espagnols d'aujourd'hui pour les connaître. J'ai donc reporté ma scène sous le règne de Charles Quint, afin de n'avoir à peindre que des mœurs historiques et pour *placer en même temps des personnages maures au milieu des monuments mauresques*. On sait que Boabdil fut le dernier roi de Grenade, que ce roi imprudent et fastueux s'amusait à donner des fêtes tandis que Ferdinand et Isabelle s'approchaient pour le chasser de son royaume . . .¹⁶ (emphasis added)

The orientalizing search for *couleur locale* so decried by Said (“placer . . . des personnages maures au milieu des monuments mauresques”) certainly rubs against the grain of our modern sensibilities, but it works to elude a second historicization that I want to bring to the fore: Chateaubriand emphasizes the “twenty years” that have nearly passed since the unfavorable context of Napoleon’s reign of censorship during which the story was composed when he states that “*Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage* sont écrites depuis à peu près une vingtaine d’années: le portrait que j’ai tracé des Espagnols explique assez pourquoi cette Nouvelle n’a pu être imprimée sous le gouvernement impérial.”¹⁷ What remains unstated is how to situate the fiction vis-à-vis the contemporaneous urgency of imperial projects and the story’s connection with and/or representation of the relationships of empires to their colonies. The timeline offered in the preface should be contextualized politically and historically on a scale larger than the Iberian Peninsula and metropolitan France: in 1810, when Chateaubriand wrote the romance, Spain represented an empire (with its colonies, though never explicitly stated) that unsuccessfully resisted the French invasion. By 1826, when Chateaubriand decided to publish the novella, Spain represented a falling empire. It had become clear that “even if the Napoleonic period did not lead immediately to proclamations of independence, it left favorable attitudes toward autonomy in its wake, attitudes that fueled the momentous transformation of Latin America’s political situation.”¹⁸ Also unstated in the preface is the author’s own political role. According to his own testimony and that of his contemporaries, the high point of Chateaubriand’s political career was France’s military intervention in Spain in 1823 (“*ma* guerre d’Espagne”), which he pushed for as soon as he became minister of Foreign Affairs.¹⁹ In a speech to defend the war (“Les deux guerres d’Espagne. Discours sur l’Intervention prononcé à la Chambre des pairs en mai 1823”), Chateaubriand argued against opponents who erroneously compared it to the Peninsular War—aka the Spanish War of Independence—waged against Napoleon for six long years: “Buonaparte fit la guerre la plus injuste, la plus violente aux rois et à la nation espagnole; nous, nous prenons les armes pour ce même roi et cette même nation” (*Œuvres complètes* 31: 165). Nonetheless, the

urgency of Chateaubriand's war with Spain was to wrap up the business of the colonies so as to "tear them away" from the hands of England:

On sait notre projet: nous voulions arracher celles-ci à l'Angleterre et les transformer en royautes représentatives sous des princes de la maison de Bourbon. Nous estimions la forme monarchique plus convenable à ces colonies que la forme républicaine [. . .] Quand la première éducation manque à un peuple, cette éducation ne peut être que l'ouvrage des années. (*Congrès* 2:231)

The war's ultimate goal was to intervene to reassert France's preeminence and reorient an anticipated colonial loss favorable to England into what we could dub a (colonial) "Restoration of all liberties": "L'Espagne délivrée de la révolution, la France reprenant son rang en Europe et retrouvant une armée, la légitimité acquérant la seule force qui lui manquait encore, voilà, messieurs, ce qu'aura produit une guerre passagère que nous n'avons pas voulue, mais que nous avons acceptée" (166–67). The stated goal to "free Spain from the revolution" also implied instituting an alternative order in the Spanish colonies where the modern political principles of liberty and equality would obey an ideal of aristocratic liberalism, rather than universal liberty and equality, considered too dangerously close to despotism. As Regina Pozzi has demonstrated, Chateaubriand's 1814 *Réflexions politiques* dream of another possible history for France, that of a constitutional monarchy *à l'anglaise* (170). While Pozzi does not draw any inference regarding Chateaubriand's foreign policy when he became Foreign Minister, I argue that he transferred the dream of an alternative history onto the Spanish colonies to spare them what he considered the feared despotism of equality spawned by revolutions, and instead install Bourbon monarchs who would ensure (aristocratic) liberty.

La monarchie représentative eût été mieux appropriée au génie espagnol, à l'état des personnes et des choses, dans un pays où la grande propriété territoriale domine, où le nombre des Européens est petit, celui des nègres et des Indiens considérable, où l'esclavage est d'usage public, où l'instruction manque dans les classes populaires. Les colonies espagnoles, formées en des monarchies constitutionnelles, auraient achevé leur éducation politique à l'abri des orages dont les républiques naissantes peuvent être bouleversées. L'histoire a trop vérifié nos prévisions: dans quel état sont aujourd'hui ces colonies? Une guerre civile éternelle, des tyrans successifs derrière le nom permanent de la liberté. (*Congrès* 2: 233–34)

The past conditional tense registers Chateaubriand's construction of constitutional monarchies as the political regime most apt to teach the people freedom, to educate a diverse, divided and unequal population gradually. In

referring to “des tyrans successifs derrière le nom permanent de la liberté,” Chateaubriand gestures not only to the new rulers of Spanish colonies but *in fine* to the Jacobins of the French Revolution, succeeded by an emperor, all curtailing freedom in the name of nation building. His post facto analysis of the negotiations with the Spanish colonies underscores a sense of lost opportunity, of history taking a republican turn by default instead of by choice, in contradistinction to the United States:

Les colonies espagnoles n’ont point été, comme les États-Unis, poussées à l’émancipation par un principe naturel de liberté; ce principe n’a pas eu dans l’origine la vitalité, la force de volonté congéniale d’une nation. Les colonies se détachèrent de l’Espagne, parce que l’Espagne était envahie par Bonaparte; ensuite, elles se donnèrent des constitutions, comme les Cortès en donnaient à la mère-patrie; enfin, on ne leur proposait rien de raisonnable, et elles ne voulurent pas reprendre le joug. (*Congrès 2*: 232–33)

Chateaubriand contrasts the emancipation of North vs. South America where Spanish colonies became republics less by national will than “in spite of themselves”:

L’influence du climat, le défaut de chemins et de culture, rendraient infructueux les efforts que tenteraient les Espagnols contre ces *républiques malgré elles*. Vingt années de révolution ont créé des droits, des propriétés, des places qu’une camarilla ou un décret de Madrid ne détruirait pas facilement. La génération nouvelle, née dans le cours de la révolution d’outre-mer, est pleine du sentiment d’une indépendance dont elle n’espérerait rien si elle dépendait de la mère-patrie. (*Congrès 2*: 233; emphasis added)

With unfulfilled dreams of Bourbon monarchies on his mind, a resigned Chateaubriand observes how emancipation, albeit precipitated, took root, thus acknowledging here how the passage of time and the coming of a new generation accomplished a communal, cherished sense of autonomy that is irreversible, and even protected from further peninsular interference thanks to an adverse climate and a lack of infrastructure and culture. Chateaubriand’s ultimate plan was to trump England’s project to recognize the independence of former colonies, but how? Recognizing illegitimacy in South America while supporting legitimacy in Spain would have been, Chateaubriand argues repeatedly, “une inconséquence monstrueuse” (*Congrès 2*: 246; 253). His role instead was to encourage any “arrangement généreux entre l’Espagne et ses colonies”; namely, in exchange for accepting a constitutional monarchy the best suited to “regulate” liberty, the colonies would see their independence accepted by Europe. This multilateral agreement to which Chateaubriand believed England itself was becoming

favorable, collapsed, he alleges, only because of his own political downfall (*Congrès* 2: 246). Chateaubriand even transcribes this political compromise into short hypothetical speeches to the Spanish colonies and to Spain, warning the former against the intoxication of dreams and passions born of an obsession for theories, pitching to the latter commercial benefits to offset the irremediable loss of the colonies.²⁰

This conservative project, however, does not capture the extent and ambivalence of Chateaubriand's perspective on past and contemporaneous colonial history. Returning to the novella, we find that he takes on this history explicitly via the character of Don Carlos in *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*. The characterization of Don Carlos is an invitation to consider the story not only from the vantage point of Moorish Spain, but also from the rise and fall of empires. With Don Carlos, Chateaubriand invents a character whose experience combines being present alongside Cortez in his 1519 expedition to overthrow the Aztec Empire in Mexico, with fighting a few years later in Europe as the French tried to conquer Northern Italy in 1525. Therefore Don Carlos stands as a living witness to the Spanish conquest of the Americas as it leads to the destruction of the Aztec Empire, *and* of the French defeat in its attempt to conquer Northern Italy. No scholar to my knowledge has remarked upon the agency (or lack thereof) of Blanca's brother within transatlantic and intra-European colonial history:

Don Carlos comptait à peine quatorze ans, lorsqu'il suivit Cortez au Mexique: il avait supporté tous les dangers, il avait été témoin de toutes les horreurs de cette étonnante aventure; il avait assisté à la chute du dernier roi d'un monde jusqu'alors inconnu. Trois ans après cette catastrophe, don Carlos s'était trouvé en Europe à la bataille de Pavie, comme pour voir l'honneur et la vaillance couronnés succomber sous les coups de la fortune. L'aspect d'un nouvel univers, de longs voyages sur les mers non encore parcourues, le spectre des révolutions et des vicissitudes du sort, avait fortement ébranlé l'imagination religieuse et mélancolique de don Carlos.²¹

Far from a source of national pride, Don Carlos's witnessing of the fall of the Aztec Empire is couched in terms of a profound revulsion: the oxymoronic register of the phrase "horreurs de cette étonnante aventure" registers an extraordinary ambivalence, further emphasized by the word "catastrophe" to encapsulate the destruction of the Aztec Empire. Witnessing "la chute du dernier roi d'un monde jusqu'alors inconnu" posits a triple loss: of a dynasty, of an empire, and of a civilization. The trauma is restated one more time in vivid language, "le spectre des révolutions" having "strongly shaken Don Carlos's religious and melancholy imagination" to the point of renouncing marriage. What did Spain do to the Aztecs? What did it do to the Moors? What cultural riches disappeared? How did religious principles compromise themselves in

seconding territorial and political conquest? Could Don Carlos's melancholy be the consequence of his early exposure to the catastrophic results of colonial expansion? Later in the story, when Don Carlos is asked to narrate the conquest, the epic drive neutralizes this earlier glimpse of a revolted witness:

On pria don Carlos de raconter la découverte du Mexique. Il parla de ce monde inconnu avec l'éloquence pompeuse naturelle à la nation espagnole. Il dit les malheurs de Montézume, les mœurs des Américains, les prodiges de la valeur castillane, et même les cruautés de ses compatriotes qui ne lui semblaient mériter ni blâme ni louanges. (235)

It is as if, to dispel the specter of revolutions, Chateaubriand fashions his Spaniard into impersonating the ancestor El Cid: after the epic narration, the character sings a romance and "Don Carlos avait paru si fier, en chantant ces paroles d'une voix male et sonore, qu'on l'aurait pris pour le Cid lui-même" (240). Don Carlos's virility *à la Cid* is but a "paraître," a clichéd cover compensating for the character's sterility. His simultaneous acknowledgement of his countrymen's cruelties and the deliberate absence of moral condemnation, while a trope in representations of the Spanish conquest, has new valence under Chateaubriand's pen, the source of a melancholy that matches the author's disenchantment with empire building.

"UN ESPACE ENTRE LE PASSÉ ET L'AVENIR"

Chateaubriand experienced time in a moment when time itself was in crisis, when, following the revolutionary upheaval, the articulation of past, present, and future had lost its intelligibility (Hartog, *Régimes* 27). *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage* emerged out of this disjunction. Chateaubriand "fait de la brèche du temps, de l'écart irrémédiable entre l'ancien et le nouveau régime d'historicité, le principe (de réalité et de plaisir) de son écriture" (Hartog, *Régimes* 100). Memory and ruins that speak of memories trigger the authorial voice in the preface to *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*, but also the narrative voice and the character's travels in the novella. In 1810, the author reacts to Napoleon's ruinous invasion of Spain by writing a romance about Spain's chivalric past; in 1826, the author reminisces about Napoleon's past reign as he writes the preface to the story he has now decided to publish. I re-read the story as the tale of the Moors' loss of Spain, which itself maps Spain's future loss of her Spanish colonies. From beginning to end, the focalization of the story is not from the Spanish victors' perspective but from the viewpoint of the vanquished Moor. The preface of the novella captures this *décalage* between events taking place at the time of writing and new momentous events and changes that have occurred before the

time of publication. Like his contemporaries, Chateaubriand perceives time as acceleration, so that no matter what history he attempts to write, he is out of sync (Hartog, *Régimes* 92–93). The time—and writing—is out of joint, but so is space: considering the fate of the Spanish colonies, Chateaubriand’s negotiations could not catch up with the movement toward independence of the South American continent, perhaps because it fundamentally differed from North American independence.²² The latter epitomized, according to Chateaubriand, the rapid passage from ancient to modern liberty, from the liberty of native people in the state of nature to the invention of a new liberty brought about by a representative democracy. This vision of “the miracle of American history (which is the product of an acceleration of time)” is laid out in the oft-quoted passage from the *Voyage en Amérique*:

Cet événement a prouvé [. . .] qu’il y a deux espèces de libertés praticables: l’une appartient à l’enfance des peuples; elle est fille des mœurs et de la vertu; c’était celle des premiers Grecs et des premiers Romains, c’était celle des Sauvages de l’Amérique; l’autre naît de la vieillesse des peuples; elle est fille des lumières et de la raison; c’est cette liberté des États-Unis qui remplace la liberté de l’indien. Terre Heureuse, qui, dans l’espace de moins de trois siècles, a passé de l’une à l’autre liberté presque sans effort, et par une lutte qui n’a pas duré plus de huit années!²³

The aporia in this “Terre Heureuse” of modern freedom is the presence of slavery. In Venezuela, to take the most well known example, Bolivar attempted to liberate the people not only from Spain but also from slavery, and to grant equality as a logical consequence of a miscegenation that made it “impossible to determine exactly which human family we belong to” (qtd. in Losurdo 150). Not yet ready for this radical outcome, Chateaubriand instead justified his politics during the Spanish negotiations as “moderate,” concluding:

Donnez la main au siècle pour l’accompagner en le *modérant*. Marchez-vous derrière lui ? il vous emportera. Marchez-vous devant lui? il vous foulera aux pieds. Dans la destinée des peuples, un moment est à saisir: il existait un espace entre le passé et l’avenir; l’Europe monarchique s’y pouvait mouvoir en sûreté, jusqu’au terme assigné à son existence. Sortie hâtivement de ce milieu, où ira-t-elle? (*Congrès* 2: 264; emphasis added)

If Chateaubriand historicizes liberty as evolving from ancient to modern, and the United States as the “laboratory” for this change, Spain performs a similar role with regard to the other key revolutionary principle—equality—and its eventual development. Chateaubriand historicizes equality as aristocratic when choosing

Moorish Spain as the time/space of his narrative. Modern equality, meanwhile, remains in waiting.

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NOTES

1. See the campaigns in Egypt and Syria (1798–1801); the Peninsular War of 1808–14; the 1812 invasion of Russia. See Benot, *La Démence coloniale*.
2. “[S]kepticism about both particular imperial ventures and the general project of unlimited expansion was, by the 1780s, received wisdom among liberal intellectuals. Just fifty years later, however, we find no prominent thinkers in Europe criticizing the European imperial project. Indeed the greatest liberals of the nineteenth century, including Tocqueville and J.S. Mill, were avid imperialists.” Pitts, “Introduction,” *Alexis de Tocqueville*, p. xxxiii.
3. Pitts, “Introduction,” *Alexis de Tocqueville*, xxxiv. On the tangle of freedom and oppression in liberal thought, see also Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, Metha and Losurdo.
4. See Cazenave, Chaplyn, Huré.
5. One notable exception is Jean-Marie Roulin’s inscription of “colonial desire” within his important study of Chateaubriand’s “fictional Mediterranean.”
6. In the 1968 proceedings marking the 200th anniversary of Chateaubriand’s birth, Aldridge examined his politics vis-à-vis the Spanish colonies.
7. See Pitt, editor and translator, *Alexis de Tocqueville*.
8. The scope of this article does not allow me to develop the connection Chateaubriand establishes between the French and Haitian revolutions, and in relation with the Cortès regime: “c’est sous le gouvernement des Cortès, sous ce régime de liberté, lequel aurait dû plaire aux colonies, que ces colonies ont rompu les derniers nœuds dont elles étaient enchaînées à l’Espagne, comme Saint-Domingue s’est séparé de la France pendant notre révolution” (*Congrès de Vérone* 2: 237; emphasis added). On this separate and lesser-known publication from 1838, only parts of which Chateaubriand incorporated in the *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*, see Berchet, “Notice des livres XXV à XXXIII,” *Mémoires* 4–5.
9. On the characters as “figures de la déterritorialisation,” see Roulin’s “Chateaubriand: la fiction émigrée.”
10. Chateaubriand, *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*, edited by Jean-Claude Berchet. 205. Subsequent references will be to this edition and noted parenthetically within the text.
11. Similar to Rousseau’s periwinkle and Proust’s madeleine, the more positively connoted examples of “mémoire sensitive.”
12. See Jean-Claude Berchet’s introduction and notes to *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage* and to *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*. Also see Chaplyn. For Chateaubriand’s

sources of inspiration, see Pérez de Hita, Sané, La Fayette, Cottin, Florian, Laborde. On the importance of Florian, see Moore. On “Maurophilia” see Fuchs. Fuchs also edited and translated two fascinating sixteenth-century Spanish novellas, *The Abencerraje* and *Ozmin and Daraja*. The permutations in the intersections between race, class and gender in these various paratexts vs. *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage* deserve a comparative study of its own.

13. 244. For an interpretation of this enigmatic image, see Pierre Glaudes’s compelling analysis in the conclusion of “Chateaubriand troubadour,” 72–74.

14. See Chateaubriand, *Les Natchez* and *Voyage en Amérique*.

15. Commemorated by Francisco Goya’s famous painting “El Tres de Mayo de 1808” (1814).

16. This excerpt is from an older *Avertissement* (perhaps around 1811). See Berchet’s note 371, in Chateaubriand, *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*, 283.

17. Chateaubriand, “Avertissement,” *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*, 201.

18. Petiteau 303. The volume examines in detail the “wide-ranging influence of Napoleonic policies that directly or indirectly shaped political life” *outré-atlantique*, arguing for an “Atlantic Napoleon.” Of particular note is the fact that “aside from being his most egregious betrayal of revolutionary ideals, Napoleon’s insistence on reimposing slavery in Saint-Domingue and Guadeloupe proved a mistake of strategic importance. Planters and other whites throughout the circum-Caribbean observed these events with horror, and attitudes toward slavery and abolition changed in fundamental ways from Richmond to London and Paris; while the flood of refugees shaped communities from Havana to New Orleans to Philadelphia.” In terms of Napoleon’s 1807 invasion of Spain, “forced abdication of Ferdinand VII and imposition of Napoleon’s brother Joseph, unleashed a different dynamic [than the invasion of Portugal] The absence of a representative of the House of Bourbon provided the excuse for Spanish American demands of self-government and later independence on the grounds that the people had the legitimate authority to act and govern in the absence of their sovereign [. . .]; the ensuing power vacuum set off a series of discussions, debates, revolts and eventually independence movements which resulted in the colonies of mainland Spanish America’s independence within 20 years later.” Introduction, 5–6.

19. “Ma guerre d’Espagne, le grand évènement politique de ma vie, était une gigantesque entreprise. [. . .] Enjamber d’un pas les Espagnes, réussir sur le même sol où naguère les armées de l’homme fatigué avaient eu des revers, faire en six mois ce qu’il n’avait pu faire en sept ans, qui aurait pu prétendre à ce prodige? C’est pourtant ce que j’ai fait; mais par combien de malédictions ma tête a été frappée à la table de jeu où la Restauration m’avait assis! [. . .] Il ne se passait pas de jour que je ne reçusse des lettres qui m’annonçaient une catastrophe, car la guerre avec l’Espagne n’était pas du tout populaire, ni en France, ni en Europe. En effet, quelque temps après mes succès dans la Péninsule, ma chute ne tarda pas à arriver.” Chateaubriand, “Délivrance du Roi d’Espagne.—Ma destitution,” *Mémoires d’outré-tombe*, vol. II, livre 28, 121–22.

20. In quotation marks and in the indicative mode, the two speeches are linked by a sentence in a past conditional mode: “Après avoir tenu ce langage aux colonies, nous nous serions adressé à l’Espagne” (*Congrès* 2: 264).

21. 214. Also cited by Glaudes (50–51) for whom this attitude as “spectateur mélancolique des modifications irréversibles de l’histoire” creates a kinship with René.

22. On this divergence, see Losurdo, especially chapter 5, “The Revolution in France and Santo Domingo, the crisis of the English and American Models, and the Formation of Radicalism Either Side of the Atlantic,” 127–80.

23. Chateaubriand, *Voyage en Amérique*. Quoted by Hartog, *Régimes* 97. See also Aldridge 203.

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