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The Formation of a Colonial Scholar, 1781–1810

Andrés de Jesús María y José Bello López was born in Caracas on November 29, 1781, the eldest of eight children. His parents were both of Canary Islands descent, and though of modest means, they were able to provide the young Andrés with a stable upbringing and a solid education. Bartolomé Bello, Andrés' father, was a lawyer and an accomplished musician whose compositions, including a mass titled *Misa del Fiscal*, were performed in Venezuela for more than a century. Bartolomé Bello was also a minor government official in charge of the tobacco monopoly and the collection of taxes in the province of Cumaná, a duty that took him frequently and for extended periods out of Caracas. He was an efficient and respected public official, as we learn from the copious supporting documentation filed by his widow, Ana Antonia López, when he died in 1804, but appears to have had little influence on his eldest child.[1] Andrés Bello scarcely left mention of him or their relationship.

Andrés' mother, Ana Antonia, was thus the principal figure in the Bello household, supervising the family finances and the education of the children. She was born in Caracas in 1764 and came from a family of gifted artists. Her father, Juan Pedro López, was a famous painter in colonial Caracas. Ana Antonia's marriage to Bartolomé at the age of seventeen (he was twenty-three) seems to have been precipitated by pregnancy, as the difference between the ceremony and Andrés' birth was only three months (September 8 and November 29, 1781, respectively).[2] They married at

1 Ana Antonia filed the documentation about her husband's duties and performance in order to secure a pension from the Crown. The file of documents is at the *Archivo General de Indias* (Seville, Spain, henceforth *AGI*), Audiencia de Caracas, Legajo 395. See also Eduardo Lira Espejo, "El Padre de Don Andrés Bello," in Pedro Grases, ed., *Antología del Bellismo en Venezuela*, 2nd ed. (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1981), pp. 455–457.

2 This information comes from parish records provided by David W. Fernández, *Los Antepasados de Bello* (Caracas: La Casa de Bello, 1978). They are confirmed by historian Ildefonso Leal, who reproduced the documents concerning Bello's baptism and his parents' marriage. This documentation was required for the granting of university degrees. See Leal's *El Grado de Bachiller en Artes de Andrés Bello* (Caracas: La Casa de Bello, 1978). See also Alfredo Boulton, *El Solar Caraqueño de Andrés Bello* (Caracas: La Casa de Bello, 1978).

her home rather than at church, with permission from the Vicar General of the bishopric. It is difficult to assess the effect that this event may have had on the couple, or on their standing in the community, but it is clear that Andrés grew up closer to his mother than his father. Their bond was perhaps made stronger by the frequent absences of Bartolomé, which began in 1790, when Andrés was nine years old. The death of the elder Bello brought mother and son even closer, as they needed to join resources to support the younger members of the family. They were separated in 1810, never to see one another again, when Bello left Venezuela for London. Their correspondence, however, reveals a strong attachment that survived the ravages of the independence period and Bello's permanent relocation to Chile. Among his three brothers and four sisters, Andrés was closest to Carlos, with whom he mantained a correspondence throughout his life, and after whom he named his first-born son, Carlos Bello Boyland.[3]

Andrés Bello was born amid the flurry of government activity that brought together the six provinces of Venezuela, upgrading the area from a governorship into a Captaincy General in 1777. Shortly after Bello's birth, the Bourbon government abolished the Basque Guipúzcoa Company, also known as the Caracas Company. This was the chartered corporation that monopolized trade in Venezuela after 1728, causing much creole discontent in the process. Caracas was a city of over 20,000 inhabitants at the time of Bello's birth, and was rapidly developing into a vibrant urban center. Visiting in 1799, the great German scientist Alexander von Humboldt reported that Caracas "contains eight churches, five convents, and a theater capable of holding fifteen or eighteen hundred persons." He noted favorably that "I found in several families at Caracas a love of information, an acquaintance with the masterpieces of French and Italian literature, and a marked predilection for music, which is greatly cultivated."[4] The Bello family was one of those he visited.

3 The majority of the biographies of Bello are generally succinct on the Caracas period. The most valuable is by Miguel Luis Amunátegui, who had the incomparable advantage of interviewing Bello as well as enjoying his full confidence. See his *Vida de don Andrés Bello* (Santiago: Imprenta Pedro G. Ramírez, 1882). Miguel Luis and his brother Gregorio Víctor wrote an earlier biography, *Don Andrés Bello* (Santiago: Imprenta Nacional, 1854). This biography motivated the Venezuelan scholar Arístides Rojas (1826–1894) to check and expand on many of Bello's recollections about his life in Caracas. See his "Infancia y Juventud de Bello," *Segundo Libro de la Semana de Bello en Caracas* (Caracas: Ediciones del Ministerio de Educación, 1953), pp. 203–231. A recent useful biography is by Fernando Murillo Rubiera, *Andrés Bello: Historia de una Vida y de una Obra* (Caracas: La Casa de Bello, 1986). The volume *Bello y Caracas* (Caracas: La Casa de Bello, 1979), henceforth abbreviated *BYC*, provides useful information to complement the brief biographical coverage of the Caracas period.

4 Alexander von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America During the Years 1799–1804*, trans. and edited by Thomasina Ross, 3 vols. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1907), I, pp. 404, 415.

Much of the growth and importance of the city and province of Caracas resulted from the administrative reforms of the late Bourbon period. These reforms induced an economic boom based on the demand for agricultural products, especially cacao, exported to Mexican markets and increasingly to Spain. The administrative reforms included the introduction of the Intendancy in 1776, the creation of the Captaincy General in 1777, the foundation of the Real Audiencia (appeal court and administrative tribunal) in 1786, and the establishment of the Real Consulado (merchant guild) in 1793. Such measures represented the culmination of a decisive reassertion of Crown authority. As Robert Ferry has shown, this stronger royal presence in Venezuela was a response to the 1749 rebellion led by Canarian planters against the unpopular Guipúzcoa Company. More than a decade before the British invasion of Havana, when the Bourbon reforms picked up momentum, the Crown had moved swiftly to suppress the rebellion and restore control over the provinces of Venezuela.[5]

By the time of Bello's birth, the power of the Crown was well established, and there was little reason to predict the bloody struggle for independence that followed a generation later. The creoles of Caracas for the most part willingly sided with the Crown in its centralization efforts. The Caracas of the last two decades of the eighteenth century had reached a level of economic prosperity and political stability that was challenged only sporadically, and unsuccessfully, by a slave rebellion in Coro in 1795, the anti-Spanish conspiracy of Manuel Gual and José María España in 1797, and the ill-fated expedition of Francisco Miranda, the famous "Precursor" of independence in 1806.

The last was perhaps the most significant; Miranda was the greatest and most stubborn conspirator against the Spanish empire. Born in Caracas in 1750, he secured a commission in the Spanish army and fought for Spain in North Africa and in the Caribbean. After falling afoul of his superiors, he fled to the United States and then to Europe, where he arrived in 1785. Miranda styled himself as the representative of the oppressed peoples of Spanish America, and managed to secure the support of influential actors in Great Britain, Russia, and France. Although he had little, if any, support in his native Venezuela, Miranda received the backing of Catherine the Great in Russia, and even managed to become a general in the French revolutionary army. The Venezuelan agitator finally settled in Great Britain, where he was allowed to stay for more than twenty years, and where at times he had access to the highest levels of government. He was useful to the British as an important source of information but they never fully endorsed his plans for the liberation of Spanish America. Miranda's 1806

5 Robert J. Ferry, *The Colonial Elite of Early Caracas: Formation and Crisis, 1567–1767* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1989).

expedition to Venezuela was entirely of his own making. He secured some support from United States sources, mainly a volunteer army of fortune seekers, but the campaign was a complete fiasco. Landing in Coro, Venezuela, in August 1806, Miranda found that his calls for liberation were met with total distrust by the local population, and he soon found himself beating an inglorious retreat.[6] His skills as a commander, and even his character, were also sharply questioned by some of his own followers.[7]

The Miranda episode shows very clearly that Spanish control over Venezuela was not only strong but fully supported by a creole elite that was willing to trade a subordinate position in exchange for security and order. As P. Michael McKinley suggests, "no other colony, with the possible exception of Havana, experienced quite the combination of economic growth and internal political and social calm during the closing decades of the empire."[8] Tensions should not be minimized, however, especially after the slave rebellion in Haiti that led to the foundation of a republic in 1804, and which threatened to engulf other slave-holding societies in the Caribbean. Yet, even in that case creoles drew conclusions favorable to Spanish colonial control. The collapse of the imperial order in 1810 was precipitated, not by local discontent, but by events in Europe.

Bello's upbringing in this environment would shape his views on the colonial past; his fond memories of the comparative prosperity and tranquility of Caracas, made brighter by his long years of residence in England and Chile, would drive his life-long search for stable and legitimate institutions. His childhood and young adulthood were generally peaceful, to be looked back on nostalgically in later years. Bello's life in Caracas was clouded only by the death of his father in 1804, the financial need that followed, and the tense months leading to the creation of the first Caracas junta in 1810, when Spain's hold on Venezuela began to weaken.

6 The best sources on Miranda continue to be by William Spence Robertson, *The Life of Miranda*, 2 vols. (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1969), and Miranda's own lengthy collection of documents. A published version is *Archivo del General Miranda*, 24 vols. (Caracas and Havana: Editorial Sur-América and Editorial Lex, 1929–1950). See also Gary Miller, "Francisco Miranda," in Barbara Tenenbaum, ed., *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, 5 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996), IV, pp. 67–69. An account of the 1806 expedition is in Mario Rodríguez, *"William Burke" and Francisco Miranda: The Word and the Deed in Spanish America's Emancipation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 83–121. On Miranda and Russia, see Russell H. Bartley, *Imperial Russia and the Struggle for Latin American Independence, 1808–1828* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978).

7 See, for example, Moses Smith, *History of the Adventures and Suffering of Moses Smith, During 5 Years of His life, from the Beginning of 1806, When he was Betrayed into the Miranda Expedition* (Brooklyn: Thomas Kirk, for the author, 1812), and James Biggs, *The History of Don Francisco de Miranda's attempt to effect a Revolution in South America, in a Series of Letters* (Boston: Oliver and Munroe, 1808).

8 P. Michael McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas: Politics, Economy, and Society, 1777–1811* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 98.

Bello's Education

Bello's education after elementary school began at the Mercedarian Order's convent, which was located a few yards from his birthplace in downtown Caracas. Bello's education was supervised by Fr. Cristóbal de Quesada, an accomplished scholar of Latin literature who instructed the youngster in the classics as well as in vernacular Spanish for four years, 1792–1796. Fr. Quesada had joined the Mercedarian Order early in life, and had confronted some vocational doubts that led him to leave the Order in the 1770s. He was, however, reinstated, and was an active scholar and teacher at the time of his contact with young Bello in the early 1790s. He was also in charge of the convent's library.[9] Bello admired Quesada's teaching, and communicated a fond recollection of his mentor's abilities and engaging personality to his own disciple, Miguel Luis Amunátegui. Quesada, apparently, introduced Bello to the study of grammar and literary style through reading of the Latin classics, and especially the poetry of Horace and Virgil. The quality of Bello's Latin training became clear when, after Quesada's death in 1796, he was sufficiently prepared to join the advanced Latin class at the Santa Rosa Seminary. This class was taught by another notable Venezuelan Latinist, Fr. José Antonio Montenegro, and Bello's impressive performance earned him the first prize in Latin translation. Bello's preparation allowed him to complete the Latin *trienio*, or three-year course of study, one year later, in 1797.

Quesada also introduced Bello to the Spanish classics, and to a life-long love of Cervantes, Calderón de la Barca, and Lope de Vega. But clearly the main emphasis of teaching was Latin, which was a requisite for university studies. Upon completion of the *trienio* under Montenegro, Bello was admitted to the Royal and Pontifical University of Caracas in 1797,[10] to pursue a course of studies in philosophy leading to the Bachelor of Arts degree, which he obtained on June 14, 1800. From a comment by Montenegro that Bello passed on to Amunátegui, it is clear that by 1797 he had also learned to read French (a little later he taught himself English

9 On Fr. Cristóbal de Quesada, see Lucas Guillermo Castillo Lara, "Nuevos Elementos Documentales sobre Fray Cristóbal de Quesada," in *BYC*, pp. 111–163.

10 A condition for admission at the University of Caracas was demonstration of birth in a white family [*Padres blancos*]. The document of admission, signed by Pedro Martínes, is in the "Colección de Manuscritos Originales" at the Fundación La Casa de Bello in Caracas, Venezuela, henceforth *CMO* and *FLCB* (which I will use to refer to the library), respectively. The collection of manuscripts, which is distributed in two boxes, is not organized but it is clearly labeled. I will number the items in the order in which I found them. Hence, "Constancia expedida por Pedro Martínes, maestre de escuelas de la Catedral de Caracas, a Bello para cursar estudios en la Real y Pontificia Universidad de Caracas," September 17, 1797, in *CMO*, Box 2, item 62.

from a grammar book and practiced by reading British newspapers). When Fr. Montenegro saw Bello reading a play by Racine he exclaimed with dismay "what a pity, my friend, that you should have learned French!" perhaps worrying about the kinds of literature to which Bello could now have access.[11] Indeed, Bello practiced his French by translating Voltaire's *Zulime*. He told Amunátegui that the well-read Simón Bolívar, a member of the same literary circle in Caracas, curtly observed that this was a very poor choice. *Zulime* is indeed a rather dismal piece of literature, certainly not the most memorable work of Voltaire, but Bello's unconvincing defense in response to Bolívar was that his translation was at least new.[12] The anecdote underscores, however, Bello's intellectual curiosity and facility for languages.

Bello's philosophy studies at the University of Caracas, also in the form of a *trienio*, consisted of a first year of logic (when he also learned mathematics and geometry), a second year of natural philosophy, and a third year of metaphysics. This was the format that dominated philosophical studies, heavily influenced by Aristotle, throughout the colonial period. By the 1790s, the Bourbon reforms were placing a significant emphasis on practical science, and faculty members became more willing to absorb the scientific literature of the age. One of these academics was Fr. Rafael Escalona, who taught Bello until 1799 and who may have influenced him to study medicine. Bello did not pursue this field for long, but he did develop a long-standing interest in scientific matters, and a remarkable gift for scientific popularization.[13]

In addition to scientific subjects, Bello absorbed much of the modern philosophy that became common currency at the University of Caracas thanks to the teaching of Baltasar Marrero in 1778. Like other universities in Spanish America during the second half of the eighteenth century, the faculty at the University of Caracas was openly critical of traditional scholasticism in general, and the use of the syllogism as an instrument of knowledge, in particular. In his classic study of the philosophy curriculum at the University of Caracas during Bello's years as a student, Caracciolo Parra-León lists the following modern philosophers introduced by Marrero and taught by his successors: Descartes, Leibniz, Berkeley, Locke,

11 Amunátegui, *Vida*, p. 16.

12 Ibid., 61.

13 The Venezuelan historian Ildefonso Leal located Bello's registration at the Faculty of Medicine, but there is no record showing how long he studied this field. See his "Bello y la Universidad de Caracas," in *BYC*, pp. 180–181. Bello himself communicated to Amunátegui that he abandoned the study of medicine early and moved on to study law. At any rate, it is clear that he could only have studied these subjects between 1800 and 1802, because in the latter year he began his full-time administrative duties in the colonial government.

and Condillac, among others.[14] Of these, the latter two had an influence on Bello that can be traced to his Caracas education. He read, and may even have translated parts of Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Condillac's work was an important component of the university's curriculum, and Bello demonstrated his command of the French philosopher's central ideas in the examinations required for graduation. On May 9, 1800, Bello defended the following thesis: *Vim habet sola analysis claras exactasque ideas gignendi* [Only analysis can produce clear and exact ideas], which is advanced by Condillac in the *Logique* (1780) and other writings.[15] Bello continued his studies of Condillac's work on grammar, of which more will be said later, in order to test its application to the conjugation of the Spanish verb. For Bello modern philosophy meant, above all, an exposure to intellectual trends that connected Locke, Condillac, and the new and briefly fashionable French school of "ideology." These authors and schools all devoted considerable attention to sense-experience as the basis for the acquisition of ideas. Bello retained this emphasis, enriched it with his study of the Scottish philosophers of the Common Sense School a few years later, and ultimately gave it a systematic exposition in his *Filosofía del Entendimiento*, written mostly during the 1840s but published posthumously in 1881.[16]

Bello was reputedly a first-rate student who impressed faculty and classmates alike with his abilities in various fields. In 1796, he won the prize for Latin translation in the course on rhetoric. The following year, he won another prize, for mastery of Spanish orthography, in a public competition. In 1799, he won the prize in natural philosophy. In May 1800, he had no trouble passing examinations in the five areas (*Ex Logica*, *Ex Physica*, *Ex Generatione*, *Ex Anima*, and *Ex Metaphysica*) required for completion of the baccalaureate. His performance was rewarded with a first place in that year's graduation.[17] Bello was singularly well-prepared academically, and

14 Caracciolo Parra-León, *Filosofía Universitaria Venezolana*, in *Obras* (Madrid: Editorial J. B., 1954), p. 310. See also Ildefonso Leal, "Bello y la Universidad," pp. 172–179.

15 Part I, Chap. III of the *Logique* by Condillac states, for instance, that "only analysis can generate exact ideas, and true knowledge." This is the text that circulated in Spanish America, for it was published in Spanish translation by Bernardo María de Calzada in 1784. See *La Lógica, o los Primeros Elementos del Arte de Pensar* (Madrid: Joachim Ibarra, 1784).

16 Murillo, *Andrés Bello*, pp. 83–93. See also Arturo Ardao, "La Iniciación Filosófica de Bello. Su *Análisis Ideológica* de los Tiempos Verbales," in *BYC*, pp. 329–390. Ardao is understandably skeptical, contrary to Amunátegui's assertion, that Bello may have translated Locke's *Essay*. Bello, who translated for the purposes of study rather than dissemination, may have translated at least portions of Locke's work.

17 See Leal, "Bello y la Universidad," and *El Grado de Bachiller*, p. 25. The areas of examination corresponded roughly to the subjects of logic, natural philosophy, natural history, psychology, and metaphysics, subjects that were also studied in England and the United States at the time.

enjoyed the recognition of the most learned scholars and institutions in the colony.

Bolívar and Humboldt

Between his years of study in the mid-1790s and the year of his employment in the colonial administration in 1802, Bello came into contact with two notable individuals. One was the future Liberator, Simón Bolívar, only two years his junior, to whom he gave lessons in geography and literature from 1797 until Bolívar's departure for Spain in 1799.[18] Bello recounted this experience to Amunátegui, who devoted a few brief paragraphs to it in his biography.[19] Bello and Bolívar knew each other well, and eventually traveled together to London as diplomatic representatives of Venezuela. Their subsequent relationship was plagued with misunderstandings, which probably colored Bello's recollections as he reflected on Bolívar later in life. Bolívar himself left a clear testimony of their early relationship as student and teacher in a letter to the poet and diplomat José Fernández Madrid in 1829: "I know the superior talents of [Bello]. He was my mentor when we were of the same [young] age, and I loved him with respect."[20] He also told Colombian statesman Francisco de Paula Santander that "our celebrated Bello taught me the art of composition and geography."[21] The two young men often met at the household of the distinguished *mantuano* (upper class) Ustáriz family, which was noted for its cultural gatherings. Moreover, Bello and Bolívar had many opportunities to interact socially and intellectually in the first decade of the nineteenth century, at least when Bolívar was back home in Venezuela after his two European visits. Their relationship was thus close enough during the years they lived in Caracas. Bolívar retained distinct memories of it, but he also recognized with sadness the distance that later developed between them, a theme which will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Also of great importance is Bello's acquaintance with Alexander von Humboldt, who visited Caracas from November 1799 to February 1800.

18 Oscar Sambrano Urdaneta, "Cronología de Bello en Caracas," en *BYC*, p. 96. See also Pedro Grases, "Andrés Bello, Humanista de Caracas," in *Estudios Sobre Andrés Bello* [Henceforth *ESAB*], 2 vols. (Caracas, Barcelona, Mexico: Editorial Seix Barral, 1982), II, p. 20. See also Gerhard Masur, *Simon Bolivar*, rev. ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), p. 24.

19 Amunátegui, *Vida*, pp. 26–27.

20 Simón Bolívar to José Fernández Madrid, April 27, 1829, in *Cartas del Libertador*, 8 vols. (Caracas: Fundación Vicente Lecuna, 1969), VII, p. 128.

21 Bolívar to Santander, May 20, 1825, in Simón Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, ed. by Vicente Lecuna and Harold Bierck, trans. by Lewis Bertrand, 2 vols. (New York: The Colonial Press, 1951), II, p. 501.

Bello was finishing his university studies at the time, and was therefore conversant with scientific subjects, as well as philosophy and literature. For the eighteen-year-old Caracas student, the visit of Humboldt and his coresearcher Aimé Bonpland was something of an intellectual revelation, for he could observe first hand the work of experienced naturalists and their scientific instruments. Bello accompanied Humboldt and Bonpland in their ascent of Mount Avila, the impressive mountain overlooking Caracas. Although he tried, he was physically weak and could not reach the top. But he accompanied Humboldt on other excursions and appears also to have met him on social occasions. Humboldt cared enough for Bello to suggest to his parents that they dissuade him from constant study. It seems clear that Bello benefited from Humboldt's acquaintance, and learned more of the art of conversation.[22] More importantly, Bello's contact with Humboldt inspired him to develop a strong interest in natural science, which became the theme of his later writings. It is likely that from the exchanges with Humboldt, that Bello learned of the views of Alexander's brother Wilhelm on language and society, which would become central to Bello's own intellectual project.[23] Humboldt himself retained memories of Bello more than fifty years later, when he surprised Chilean historian Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna with a reference to the Venezuelan at their meeting in Berlin in June 1855.[24]

As his later testimony makes clear, the young Bello enjoyed walks around Caracas, usually by himself, but also in the company of classmates and friends. He was particularly fond of the "rivers" Catuche, Guaire, and Anauco, creeks which were all within walking distance from his house. His home was just a few blocks away from Bolívar's in the Callejón de la Merced (today's intersection of Mercedes and Luneta streets), and only yards from the house where Humboldt stayed while in Caracas.[25] Bello roamed widely in the Caracas Valley and farther afield to places like Petare, Los Teques, and the Aragua Valley. At Petare, some miles east of Caracas, the Bello family acquired in 1806 a small coffee farm called "El Helechal," which provided him with additional opportunities to visit the interior of

22 Amunátegui, *Vida*, p. 25; Rojas, "Infancia y Juventud," pp. 219–221.

23 See Amado Alonso, "Introducción a los Estudios Gramaticales de Andrés Bello," in Andrés Bello, *Gramática*, in *Obras Completas* [henceforth *OC*], 26 vols. (Caracas: La Casa de Bello, 1981–1984), IV, xxvi–xxvii. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) made significant contributions to the comparative study of linguistics, including ground-breaking studies of Basque and Kawi, the ancient language of Java.

24 Ricardo Donoso, *Don Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna. Su Vida, sus Escritos y su Tiempo, 1831–1886* (Santiago: Imprenta Universitaria, 1925), p. 65.

25 For a description of Caracas during Bello's time, see François Depons, *Travels in Parts of South America, During the Years 1801, 1802, 1803 & 1804* (London: J. G. Barnard, 1806). See also Armila Troconis de Veracoechea, *Caracas* (Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, 1992).

the province. Agustín Codazzi, the Italian geographer who surveyed Venezuela in the 1820s and 1830s, described the area as "located in a beautiful position: it overlooks the entire Guaire Valley and even the capital of the republic." He also praised "its proximity to the city, its fertile territory, and its lovely and healthy climate."[26] This area, and the scenery of Caracas, which remains beautiful to this day, provided Bello with a rich source of materials for his writings, not least the poetry he was beginning to compose, and also for his subsequent memories of the land of his birth.

Colonial Official

From 1802 until 1810, Bello served three governors (*Capitanes Generales*) of Venezuela: Manuel Guevara Vasconcelos (1802–1807), Juan de Casas (1807–1809), and Vicente Emparán (1809–1810). That a young creole with a university education and a facility for languages should have been identified and recruited early by the royal government is not entirely surprising. But Bello seems to have attracted unusual attention in government circles, for he was recruited before completion of his legal studies. A recommendation by Pedro González Ortega, *Oficial Mayor* (First Secretary) of the Captaincy General, provides a clear indication of Bello's precocious reputation: "[Bello] has concentrated on literature with such success that both public opinion and that of the learned recommend him highly to royal service. I have seen several works by him. Some are translations of the classics, and some are original works which, albeit inferior to the former, reveal an outstanding talent . . . combined with superior judgment."[27] On the strength of González's recommendation, and the support of another influential creole, Luis Ustáriz, Governor Guevara Vasconcelos appointed Bello *Oficial Segundo* (Second Secretary) of the Captaincy General on November 6, 1802, shortly before his twenty-first birthday, thus giving him an early stake in the colonial order.[28]

Bello's work for the Captaincy General was primarily administrative: He prepared reports, maintained records, and translated correspondence from the French and British islands in the Caribbean. Between 1802 and 1810, as Pedro Grases puts it, "there is no cultural or political event at the Captaincy General, where Bello's presence and hand are not

26 Agustín Codazzi, *Resumen de la Geografía de Venezuela (Venezuela en 1841)*, 3 vols. (Caracas: Biblioteca Venezolana de Cultura, 1940), III, p. 29. Andrés Bello later recalled, in a letter to Antonio Leocadio Guzmán dated September 24, 1864, El Helechal "which for some years belonged to me and my brothers and sisters, and which during the Wars of Independence passed into other hands." In *SW*, p. 225, and *OC*, XXVI, 449.

27 Quoted by Murillo, *Andrés Bello*, p. 62.

28 "Nombramiento de Bello como Oficial Segundo de la Capitanía General de Venezuela, firmada por Manuel Guevara Vasconcelos, Capitán General," November 6, 1802, in *CMO*, Box 2, item 63.