

# Descriptions and Perceptions of the Republic of Chile in the United States during the Mid-Nineteenth Century

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*In the mid-nineteenth century, the Republic of Chile emerged as an unlikely topic of description and discussion by travelers, reporters, scientists, educators, and cartographers alike in the United States. Chile's combination of remarkable physical geography, strong economic conditions, a stable political system, and a vital port on the route between California and the east coast of the United States meant that the far-flung republic became a subject of frequent praise and admiration in the North American print record, which in turn likely informed an overall positive impression of Chile onto the reading public of the United States.*

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In the mid-nineteenth century, the Republic of Chile was a small and young nation, yet one that was quietly developing into a significant Latin American power. Running down the southern half of the continent along the narrow strip of land nestled between the frigid Pacific Ocean and the soaring Andes Mountains, at a glance Chile seemed unlikely to become one of South America's most prominent nations. As a part of the Spanish Empire, Chile had been a backwater compared to Mexico and Peru, as its geographic isolation and economic activities, mostly limited to agriculture in its central valleys, hindered it from taking on greater significance.<sup>1</sup> However, within a few decades of achieving its independence in 1818, Chile emerged as an important center of commerce and trade in the Americas, while its agricultural production and newfound mining operations brought further prosperity to the once "rough-and-tumble outpost" of Spanish America.<sup>2</sup>

For North Americans, the importance of Chile was clear. Much of its significance centered on the city of Valparaíso, which became one of the largest ports on the Pacific. Chiefly, the city served as a vital supply and repair center for European and U.S. ships engaged in Trans-Pacific trade or whaling activities in the South Pacific, which required rounding the dangerous waters of Cape Horn. By the mid-nineteenth century, Valparaíso's importance grew further as ships from the United States descended upon Cape Horn in droves on the way to newly acquired California. Chile's preeminence in North American interests was well-reflected in the travelogue record of the period: surprisingly, the country was the second most discussed South American nation in the 1850s (trailing only Brazil), with at least seventeen English language narratives, ten specifically from the United States, published in the decade.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas E. Skidmore, Peter H. Smith, and James N. Green, *Modern Latin America*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 280.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Naylor, *Accounts of Nineteenth-Century South America: An Annotated Checklist of Works by British and United States Observers* (London: The Athlone Press, 1969).

Chile, its resources, and its people were the subject of articles in North American periodicals and newspapers as well. The budding nation also benefited from vivid representation in maps and educational resources available in the United States at the time.

The Republic of Chile (often spelled “Chili” in English language sources of the period) enjoyed a comparatively positive image in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century. The combined factors of its logistical importance, economic prosperity, remarkable alpine geography, and political stability (relative to its Spanish-American peers) meant that, among the former colonies of Spain, Chile had a unique reputation in the United States. Its image was also shaped by the notorious resilience of the Mapuche peoples—then called the Araucanians—living beyond the country’s southern frontier: this indigenous group was not subjugated by the Chileans until the 1880s and was renowned for its fierce resistance to Chilean expansion. Though Chile’s image in the United States was by no means perfect, on the whole it was bolstered by favorable descriptions of the country found in various travelogues, magazines, newspapers, maps, and textbooks of the mid-nineteenth century.

### *Traversing the Cordillera: The Travelogue of Isaac G. Strain*

In part because of the country’s importance to the sea routes of the Pacific Ocean, Chile became a frequent topic of discussion in many travelogues of the mid-nineteenth century. A major portion of works that described the Republic primarily discussed the country’s chief cities, Valparaíso and the capital of Santiago, although other port cities such as Concepción and Coquimbo were also mentioned and described by some travelers. More in-depth examinations of the country also focused on its Andean character or the variability of its climate, with the Atacama Desert forming its northern boundary and Patagonia serving as its unofficial southern terminus. Other narratives even chose to focus primarily, if not exclusively, on the famed and unconquered Araucanians of Southern Chile, a phenomenon that emphasizes the intrigue that these peoples inspired in the United States and Europe at the time.<sup>4</sup>

The travel narrative of Isaac G. Strain, titled *Cordillera and Pampa, Mountain and Plain* and published in 1853, was typical of a narrative about Chile at the time. The work described the author’s journey across Chile (and Argentina) by land, taken so that the author could avoid “[doubling] Cape Horn for the third time [in] three years.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, his journey took him through Valparaíso, Santiago, and the Chilean countryside between the two cities. Strain was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy at the time of publishing. In the United States, he ultimately became most famous for leading the failed Darien Exploring Expedition of 1854, an operation organized by the United States government which sought to survey the treacherous Isthmus of Darién (an alternate name for Panama at the time) for the possible site of a future canal. Due to a reliance on highly inaccurate maps of Darién produced by a British engineer,<sup>6</sup> Strain and a sizeable portion of the expedition’s original crew perished in Panama. *Harper’s Magazine* published a lengthy account of the expedition in 1855.<sup>7</sup>

As the title of Strain’s travelogue suggests, Cordillera and Pampa provided

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 27-49.

<sup>5</sup> Isaac G. Strain, *Cordillera and Pampa, Mountain and Plain: Sketches of a Journey in Chili, and the Argentine Provinces in 1849* (New York: Horace H. Moore, 1853).

<sup>6</sup> Peter H. Dana, “Cutting Across,” in *Mapping Latin America: Space and Society, 1492- 2000*, eds. Karl Offen and Jordana Dym (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 135-138.

<sup>7</sup> J.T. Headley, “Darien Exploring Expedition, Under Command of Lieut. Isaac Grier Strain,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, March 1855, 433-458.

descriptions of both Chile and Argentina. A greater portion of the work, however, focused on Chile. Indeed, the book opened with his description of Valparaíso, depicting a city with positive and negative aspects alike. He noted, for example, that the name Valparaíso itself—Spanish for “Vale of Paradise”—seemed a misnomer for the city based on its rather “sterile and parched appearance” (see Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the bay that the city straddled was prohibitively deep, making it difficult to construct proper port facilities. This necessitated the use of rowboats to transport people and cargo from ships, which were anchored out in the waters of the bay, into the city itself.<sup>9</sup> Strain also noted that the public buildings of the city were for the most part “remarkable neither for size nor architecture”—this fact being especially true of the city’s churches.<sup>10</sup> He attributed this fact, which made Valparaíso “[contrast] unfavourably with Lima, a city of nearly the same size,” as being a result of the city’s growth largely taking place in Chile’s post-colonial period.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the city’s apparent shortcomings, Strain also made note of Valparaíso’s positive aspects. He discussed, for example, the fact that the city’s “natural disadvantages” had not hindered it from growing to a population of 60,000 inhabitants (making it larger than Albany, New York, then the tenth largest city in the U.S.). This was thanks in no small part to its “convenient location...for procuring supplies after passing Cape Horn,” which in turn made the city an “entrepot” for trade with Europe, the United States, China, and the East Indies within the South Pacific.<sup>12</sup> Speaking on the port’s rapid rise to prominence and prosperity, Strain noted that the city was densely built upon a “narrow shelf,” with various neighborhoods constructed on the hills above. The lower city served as “the scene of commerce” within

Valparaíso.<sup>13</sup> As to the city’s architectural character—architecture being important marker of progress and civilization to North American readers at the time—Strain highlighted the city’s Custom House as a “well built” structure with a “neat” interior and a distinct belfry to top it off. Strain also complimented the city’s theater, which he considered “very pretty” and “superior in decoration” to the then famous

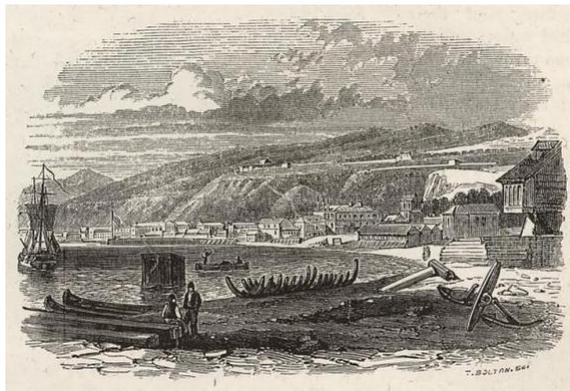


Figure 1: Isaac Strain’s Drawing of Chile

Park Theater in New York City.<sup>14</sup> The homes of Valparaíso’s foreign merchants possessed extensive gardens, which cast “an air of rural luxury” that contrasted well with the otherwise “miserable” appearance of “sailors’ boarding-houses” that lined the upper portions of the city’s hills.<sup>15</sup> Buildings of the lower town, meanwhile, were noted for being “Spanish in architecture.” Built of stucco-covered stone, they also had

<sup>8</sup> Strain, *Cordillera and Pampa*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

tiled, rather than the flat and archetypically Spanish appearing, roofs.<sup>16</sup>

On the whole, however, Strain showed greater praise for Chilean capital, Santiago. He lauded, for example, the city's famous Alameda promenade, which ran for about a mile through the center of the city and was lined with poplar trees, masonry benches, and a mountain stream. Strain considered this particular attraction to "certainly [merit] its celebrity."<sup>17</sup> Strain also made extensive notes on views of the city found at the fort of Santa Luzia, situated atop a "rocky eminence" in the center of the city.<sup>18</sup> From here, the city was "laid out like a map," as the fort provided a vantage of Santiago's suburban beauty that Strain deemed "seldom...equaled, and never surpassed," as well as views of the "surrounding fertile and highly cultivated plain." These reminded him of scenes found in the rural United States—and, in the distance, glimpses of the "colossal" Andean Cordillera.<sup>19</sup> The fort itself was deemed relatively unimpressive, however, because of its age and small size.<sup>20</sup> Santiago was also home to numerous churches which, like those in Valparaíso, were architecturally "unremarkable"—save for their "rich...internal decorations."<sup>21</sup> These mediocre churches were redeemed by the beauty and imposing nature of the city's cathedral, which was even praised for "exceling" the larger Cathedral of Lima through its "solidity and chasteness of style."<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, however, it was the Mint at Santiago which Strain, and evidently other authors, ultimately considered to be the capital's "architectural ornament" (though he did not specify why it deserved this title).<sup>23</sup> The city's markets, meanwhile, were generally spacious and well-supplied, while most of its houses were compact structures built of adobe and almost exclusively one-story, so as to ensure "greater safety" during the city's "frequent earthquakes."<sup>24</sup> The city was even served by a river, the Maypucho, whose breakwaters at the "Taja Mar" were "handsomely constructed" and thus doubled as a "fine" stone promenade lined with poplar trees.<sup>25</sup>

But Strain's praise for Santiago extended far beyond his favorable descriptions of the city's architectural character. Indeed, he went so far as to corroborate previous authors' statements that claimed the "esteemed [Santiago] as the most beautiful South American capital," which Strain explained was due to its natural position and "the beauty of the surrounding countryside."<sup>26</sup> It was the scenery of Santiago's hinterlands which seemed to leave the most powerful impression on Strain during his travels. From his view atop Santa Luzia, Strain indicated his belief that "such scenes of fertility and cultivation," as were found surrounding Santiago, were "rare in South America" (or, he also noted, "seldom met with out of Europe").<sup>27</sup> Such scenery, complete with images of "a farm-house, peering from among the ornamental trees" and a pasture's "bright green" grasses contrasting "with the light yellow of the fields" of grain, created such an impression of "industry, wealth, and happiness." In consequence, Strain deemed the scenery of Santiago, and indeed of all Chile, to be

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 61, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 54.

preferable “to that of any country in which I have sojourned.”<sup>28</sup> During his travels, Strain repeatedly described the wide, cultivated valleys which he traversed; on his journey between Santiago and the Argentine city of Mendoza, for example, Strain considered the land to be a “fine champagne country” where the color of straw beautifully contrasted with green meadows, landlords’ estates, peasants’ cottages, and church steeples of the Chilean countryside.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the loftiest praise of all, however, was reserved for the alpine aspects of Chile’s geography. Strain went so far as to suggest that there were only two scenes of natural beauty that he had personally witnessed in his entire life which “did not fail to realize my expectations,” and both of these scenes concerned the Chilean Andes: the first was the winter view of the Andes from Valparaíso and the second was the sight atop the summit of the Andean mountain pass at Uspallata.<sup>30</sup> Despite traversing a portion of the country occupied by “the stern climate of a northern winter,”<sup>31</sup> Strain remained continually mesmerized by the beauty of the Chilean *cordillera*. Along Strain’s route, scenes of particular beauty in the Chilean Andes included a tiny stream, the “Ojo de Agua,” which “glittered” as it flowed over the smooth stones of its streambed and was among “the most clear and sparkling streams” he had ever seen; and the “Lago Encantada [sic],” a mountain lake whose size and beauty aroused great interest in Strain over its curious scientific origins.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, while traversing the great mountain passes of the Andes, Strain’s view of the “enormous white column” of the Tupungato stratovolcano, combined with the “gloomy chasm” which lay beneath, compelled him to make an apt comparison of the awe-inspiring scene with the “Valley and Shadow of Death,” which was described in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.<sup>33</sup> This reference may have been well-appreciated in the United States at the time due to the work’s fame and popularity as a religious allegory.

Strain also spent significant effort discussing the more human aspects of the Republic of Chile—such as its economic success—during his visit to the country. This discussion was marked by pointing to the nation’s plethora of natural resources. Of its mineral resources, for example, Strain pointed out that copper, rather than silver or gold, brought in much of Chile’s mining revenue and was thus a key part of its economic output (though silver and gold were also exported from the country in sizeable amounts).<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, Strain also praised Chile’s agriculture for its quality as well as for its extensiveness: the garden fruits and vegetables found in the markets of Santiago were considered “excellent” and “justly celebrated,” while Chilean beef was similarly regarded (though Strain too noted that cattle-raising was not especially common in Chile due to the country’s confined geography).<sup>35</sup> It was Chilean grain, however, which Strain held with an especial regard. He considered the flour produced in the country to be “of a fine quality, and of a flavor unsurpassed in any part of the world” which he had previously visited.<sup>36</sup> Strain also provided a more general outline of Chile’s productions on a provincial level, most of which described the same goods and resources noted above. This discussion, however, also highlighted the fact that the province of Concepción was unique in the country for its wines, “which...attain

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 168-169.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 61, 166.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 21.

an excellence not found elsewhere in South America.” It was also noted that Concepción also possessed an “important” coal bank—no doubt a high praise given these goods’ more general associations with the agricultural and industrial powers of Europe.<sup>37</sup>

Strain’s praise of the Chilean economic situation was not confined strictly to a discussion of its natural resources and productions. Indeed, he lauded similar praise on the Chilean government for its evident foresight and wisdom in fostering the conditions that allowed the country to flourish in the first place. Of these, perhaps the most controversial was, in Strain’s opinion, Chile’s decision to go to war with the nascent Peru-Bolivian Confederation in 1836. This decision was guided above all else by a desire to prevent Peru-Bolivia, and especially its port of Callao (now a suburb of Lima), from wresting the monopoly on Pacific trade and commerce away from Valparaíso.<sup>38</sup> The war was indeed a success for Chile, and it secured Valparaíso’s position as the dominant Pacific port of the Americas for a time; though Strain also predicted that the city would meet a grim future, as the fledgling port of San Francisco, California looked poised to soon overtake Valparaíso in importance.<sup>39</sup> Apart from this, Strain’s assessments tended to be rather positive. For example, although he lamented the future of Chile’s agricultural prospects due to inevitable competition with other nations’ productions (owing to Chile’s small size and population), Strain praised the country’s fiscal institutions for their seeming ability to completely raise the country out of foreign debt.<sup>40</sup> He also applauded the Chilean government for their shrewd decision to charge tariffs only on goods destined for eventual internal consumption, a decision that Strain believed greatly contributed to Valparaíso’s unlikely rise as Latin America’s chief commercial port in the Pacific.<sup>41</sup>

But praise of the Chilean government did not end with its successful economic initiatives. Indeed, one of Strain’s greatest praises for Chile and “her administration” was directed at the country’s extensive road system. According to Strain, it was Chile, which, despite its small size, possessed a greater number of “regularly constructed roads, upon which wheeled vehicles can travel” than any other nation in South America, including the “great empire of Brazil... [which] appears satisfied with the primeval bridle paths.”<sup>42</sup> Given that Strain also considered “the presence of good roads” to be “one of the salient evidences of civilization”<sup>43</sup> and that readers in the United States envisioned good roads as a measure of a nation’s level of civilization (harkening back to the road building acumen of Rome),<sup>44</sup> this was indeed high praise for Chile.

Strain also held the Chilean military in high regard. After its victory in the recent War of the Confederation, Strain saw the country’s National Guard as the continent’s most “efficient” and “well-drilled” land force, while its relatively strong navy gave it supremacy over all of Latin America, save Brazil.<sup>45</sup> As to Chile’s actual governmental apparatus, Strain provided what could be taken as indirect praise. He described it as a federal system structured similarly to the government of the United

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 112-113.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 125-127.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ann Norton Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 50.

<sup>45</sup> Strain, *Cordillera and Pampa*, 140, 141.

States (i.e., composed of Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches) that pursued peaceful and amicable relations with all other nations of the earth.<sup>46</sup> Further noting symbols of Chile's progress, Strain also commented on the country's continual efforts to reform its "imperfect, but improving" prison system (which he saw to be a difficult, though commendable task, due to the apparent "horrors" inherent to "Spanish prison[s]"),<sup>47</sup> as well as the demonstrable results of providing greater access to education at all age levels among Chile's "higher classes"—and though these reforms had yet to reach Chile's peasantry, Strain believed that "great improvement" would soon come to them too.<sup>48</sup>

As for Chilean society and culture, Strain offered up a view that was relatively amicable towards the country's social character. His description of the country created a clear dichotomy between its affluent upper-class citizens and its poorer, mestizo peasants, who were known as "gausos" (not to be confused with *gauchos* (cowboys), of the Platine region). Though Strain himself did not appear to have many encounters with the former during his travels (as Santiago's "fashionables" tended to leave the city during the summer months), he nevertheless felt believed that Chile's high society possessed the same "refined and agreeable" disposition that he had found among "the educated classes in all parts of the world" he had already visited.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, Strain saw Chile's peasantry in an overall positive light, though he noted that most peasants were uneducated and locked within a pseudo-feudal economic system (whereby peasants lived on a proprietor's land in exchange for agricultural services).<sup>50</sup> Generally, he regarded the peasantry as being "happy, industrious, and...very polite to strangers."<sup>51</sup> Their relatively unfortunate situation in life did not stop them from toiling in their work with "boisterous hilarity" and a "mirth, and merriment" that made even the labor of the harvest seem like "a general festival."<sup>52</sup> This particular arrangement between peasants and proprietors, Strain noted, developed out of apparent economic necessity, with the cities of Chile historically having too few employment opportunities to effectively absorb the large labor pool available in the country.<sup>53</sup> Despite the relative crudeness of such a defining aspect of Chile's social system, Strain also noted that the country had long since abolished both slavery and the *encomienda* system (the forced labor regimes of indigenous peoples under conquistador masters) by the 1850s.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Strain's positive representation of the Chilean peasantry was likely colored by his own aversions to slavery in the United States (he originally hailed from Pennsylvania).

Within his cultural descriptions, Strain held a high regard for rural Chileans' adeptness as horse riders. He considered the Chileans, rather than the Argentines, to possess the continent's best horsemanship, and he praised them for both their riding skills and their training regimen for horses.<sup>55</sup> In the cities, meanwhile, Strain noted that the theaters of both Valparaíso and Santiago hosted musical performances. This included a "very respectable Italian opera troupe" based out of Valparaíso that performed all along the continent's western coast (which no doubt catered to readers'

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 131

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

associations with European high culture as a mark of civilization), as well as a play in Santiago that commemorated the Chilean victory over Peru at the Battle of Yungai during the War of the Confederation.<sup>56</sup> Dance was also an apparent staple throughout Chilean culture; Strain noted that the activity was likely, in the absence of other “public amusements,” the general pastime in Santiago. He considered the “Sama Cueca”, Chile’s national dance, to be “as pleasing and more expressive than any other dance” he had ever seen, and thus superior to the waltz and polka popular in “Europe and both Americas.”<sup>57</sup> One other interesting aspect of Strain’s writings was his relative silence on the matter of religion in Chile, with him only mentioning his opinion that the Chilean people’s “utilitarianism” was the reason behind the relative rarity of convents within the country, and that Chilean efforts to spread Christianity to the Araucanians of southern Chile constituted a largely futile enterprise.<sup>58</sup>

As for the subject of the Araucanians, Strain displayed a more hostile—albeit typical for the period—response. On one hand, Strain conveyed a certain respect for the Araucanians’ ability to remain an independent people, despite repeated efforts by Chile (and Spain before it) to suppress them. He went so far as to call the Araucanians “the most untamable of all the Indian tribes of either America” as part of a chapter that described the Araucanians’ remarkable success against early Spanish attempts to conquer the region of Araucanía.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, Strain’s descriptions of the Araucanians were also rife with demeaning, if not outright racist, language and assumptions: he considered it inherently impossible for them to “live in towns or villages,” an apparent result of “the opposition to civilization [that] is an evil inherent to the [Indian] race.”<sup>60</sup> Strain thus believed that the Araucanians’ best means of obtaining “the progress of improvement” lay in their eventual “mingling” with and “absorption” by other peoples<sup>61</sup>—in other words, the complete extinction of their very identity and way of life (a view which was not unlike the United States’ own policies against its indigenous populations in the nineteenth century).

On the whole, however, Isaac Strain’s discussion of the Republic of Chile in *Cordillera and Pampa* showcased the nation in a largely positive light. His writings conveyed the sense that Chile was unique among its peers in Spanish America for its remarkable governmental institutions, stability, and longevity, and that it had consequently begun to reap the economic fruits of prosperity of effective governance. Its people, meanwhile, were of an industrious and vibrant character, with both their propensity for diligent work and spirited pursuit of jovial culture helping to contribute to the larger successes of Chile as a nation. To Strain, Chile was also blessed with a remarkable combination of geographic beauty; on the one hand, its most prominent feature, the mighty Andean *cordillera*, epitomized the might of nature found in South America (echoing prior sentiments of naturalists such as Humboldt). Meanwhile, the tamer aspects of its physiography, found within its numerous cultivated valleys, represented yet again the prosperity that the Chilean nation and people had achieved in mere decades, despite the country’s relatively meager population and geographic isolation.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 24, 59.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 62, 26.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 133

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 66, 64-77.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 133, 134.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

### ***Descriptions and Perceptions of Chile in the United States Print Record***

As with the travelogues of the period, periodical articles on the Republic of Chile tended to present the nation in an overall favorable light. Within these articles, the subject of Chile was typically narrowed down to specific characteristics of the country, such as particular aspects of its physical geography or sketches of its major cities (especially Valparaíso). But regardless of which subject was presented by individual newspaper or magazine accounts, the majority agreed that Chile was unique among the former Spanish colonies, and that of all the South American nations, “not one... [had] made such continuous and steady progress as Chili,” in no small part thanks to its avoidance of “the political struggles and internal discussions which...disturb the peace and order of society” in the other South American republics.<sup>62</sup>

Some articles proved to be especially glowing in their praise of the country. One such example was found in an 1851 edition of the *Hartford Daily Courant*, which called for U.S. politicians to pursue more amicable relations with Chile—in part because the United States apparently suffered from a poor reputation in Chile: one of a nation “bent on territorial aggrandizement” as a result of the Mexican-American War.<sup>63</sup> The article’s argument was based around the benefits that such an arrangement would bolster the United States’ efforts to “carry the Monroe policy into the Southern hemisphere.”<sup>64</sup> In highlighting the relative strength that Chile possessed within South America, the article went to great lengths to uncover the reasons that “the Chilians are unlike the rest of the South American nations,” with possible answers including the nation’s “climate and soil” (which rendered it “the New England of South America”) or its descent from “Spaniards of the Asturian provinces” (the portion of Iberia never conquered by the Moors).<sup>65</sup> It also praised Chile’s government for being the continent’s “best modeled” and asserted that the country’s balance between liberalism and conservatism prevented serious “revolutionary ebullition” from ruining its remarkable prosperity.<sup>66</sup> It was Chile above all others, then, that was “designed to fill a place in the history of South America,” and it thus “becomes a matter of policy with [the United States] to conciliate their friendship.”<sup>67</sup>

Echoing Strain in some respects, periodicals of the time also celebrated Chile’s physical geography. For example, the works of the U.S. Naval Astronomical Expedition under Lieutenant J.M. Gilliss, which included meticulous descriptions of Chile and its physiography, appear to have been closely followed and analyzed by periodical publishers in the United States. One article from the September 1856 edition of *Putnam’s Monthly* (a predecessor of *The Atlantic*), went into great depth summarizing the scientific findings of the expedition as they related to Chile.

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<sup>62</sup> “Chili - Its Resources and Position,” *The New York Herald*, July 31, 1854, 6.

<sup>63</sup> “Chili,” *Hartford Daily Courant*, February 17, 1851, 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

These included vivid descriptions of the nation's various Andean passes and peaks (such as the aforementioned volcano of Tupungato), as well as the nation's apparent propensity for and vulnerability to intense, often destructive, earthquakes and tsunamis.<sup>68</sup> In tandem with these physical features was the "beautiful" climate of "this mountain land," varying based on one's latitude but generally consisting of "bright... skies, soft... breezes, and delightful... temperature[s]."<sup>69</sup> The exception to this was the Atacama Desert, Chile's northern frontier and the driest location on Earth. Yet even the Atacama did not damage Chile's reputation for natural beauty, as another article detailing a different expedition wrote that despite the omnipresent "silence of death" and the graveyard of animal skeletons "like mummies" occupying this "dreary waste," the Atacama still proved to be magnificent in its own right, with its beautiful sunsets and the "golden mist" of its parched air through which one gazed at the Andes only further contributing to notions that Chile possessed incredible natural beauty.<sup>70</sup>

From an economic standpoint, U.S. perspectives of Chile considered the possibility of Chilean subservience to the United States more instead of heaping outright praise of the South American nation. One such example was found in New Orleans's *Daily Picayune*, which published a letter from a North American visitor to Santiago describing new economic developments in "this forlorn part of the world."<sup>71</sup> These developments included the "Yankee"-led completion of both railroads and telegraph lines between Santiago and Valparaíso, as well as another "Yankee" project to establish a cheaper omnibus alternative to the system of "birlochos," or horse-carriages, commonly found in Chile at the time (which Isaac Strain discussed and praised in *Cordillera and Pampa*).<sup>72</sup> These examples demonstrated the United States' desire to spread "progress" and "innovation" to Chile, even if such activities were driven purely by motives of profit. Other articles more specifically outlined precise facts and figures concerning Chile's economic state, including an article in *The New York Herald* which provided thorough statistics on the nation's agricultural and mineral exports.<sup>73</sup>



Figure 2: Chilean Plow

On the other hand, a few articles of the period were critical of Chile. In one article, Chilean agriculture was looked down upon as being in "a very primitive state" because of its widespread reliance on relatively rudimentary tools, such as "the crooked stick for a plow" (see Figure 2)<sup>74</sup> at a time when North Americans viewed modern plows as a symbol of development. Chile's estate system was even more harshly criticized for creating "a degree of poverty and want unknown among the industrious sons of the north," with one author going so far as to

<sup>68</sup> "Chile," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art* 8, no. 45, September 1856, 229-230.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>70</sup> "A Traveler's Notes on Chili," *The Ladies' Repository; A Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Art and Religion* 13, February 1853, 89.

<sup>71</sup> "Letter from Chili," *The Daily Picayune*, October 18, 1852, 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> "Chili - Its Resources and Position," *New York Herald*, 6.

<sup>74</sup> "Agriculture and Other Improvements in Chili," *The Genesee Farmer* 15, no. 8, August 1854.

proclaim a similarity in the conditions of Chilean “peon laborers” to that of slaves in the Southern United States.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, while the port of Valparaíso was well-known to U.S. citizens of the period, its actual reputation was perhaps more mixed than might have otherwise been suggested by Isaac Strain’s positive description of the city. One author suggested that Valparaíso be renamed altogether because of its failure to live up to its title as the “Vale of Paradise,”



Figure 3: J.H. Colton’s 1855 Map of South America

with his description of the city instead detailing it as a generally filthy, cramped, and immoral locale that was insufficient as a trade port (though he nevertheless considered it to be South America’s “most civilized city”).<sup>76</sup> As would probably be expected, Chile’s Catholic character was also looked down upon in the largely Protestant United States, with one article noting that Catholicism had rendered the nation’s citizens “ignorant and superstitious”—though it also reserved hope that Chile (and “all South America”) would eventually become “open to the Gospel” and thus cast aside their Catholic faith.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps equally unsurprising was the treatment of the Araucanians in North American periodicals. While some did recognize their “[eminence] among the aborigines of America for the tenacity with which [they] resisted...the whites,”<sup>78</sup> mentions of the Araucanians—perhaps made frequent by interest spurred from the United States’ own encounters with Native Americans in the western frontier—tended to focus exclusively on their “warlike” nature in a more negative sense.<sup>79</sup>

Yet on the whole, Chile enjoyed a favorable reception in U.S. periodical writings of the mid-nineteenth century. Its reputation emerged as one of, above all else, political and economic stability that was unprecedented in Spanish America. This made any criticisms of its society or cities seem tame by comparison, given its position relative to much of Latin America. For the most part, this reputation was also indirectly reflected in the cartographic depictions of the country at the time, as was the country’s impressive and picturesque physical geography. Because of Chile’s unusual geographic (i.e., narrow) shape, maps from the mid-nineteenth century which depicted only Chile were quite rare, with it simply being more convenient for cartographers to include Chile on maps depicting the rest of central and southern South America as well. One example was J.H. Colton’s 1855 map of central South America (see Figure 3). His depiction of Chile promoted the nation’s economic and technological progress by showing the railroad network which ran between Valparaíso, Santiago, and Talca. Nevertheless, other maps managed to elevate the status and importance of Chile in the continent through more direct means.

Perhaps the best means of emphasizing the importance of Chile on maps was

<sup>75</sup> “Chile,” *Putnam’s Monthly*, 229.

<sup>76</sup> Cosmo [pseud.], “South American Civilization,” *Saturday Evening Post*, July 7, 1866, 3.

<sup>77</sup> “Religious State of Chili,” *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 2, no. 62, February 7, 1850, 22.

<sup>78</sup> “Review 2 - The Araucanians,” *Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* 47, no. 5, November 1855, 468.

<sup>79</sup> “Chile,” *Putnam’s Monthly*, 229

through the use of artistic flourishes to highlight particular scenes or points of interest. What is remarkable is that despite the fact that the country was usually shown on maps alongside neighboring South American countries, in some cases it was only Chile which was represented with flourishes. One such prominent example was an A.J. Johnson map from 1862, which focused on a region stretching from Venezuela all the way to Bolivia (see Figure 4). Unique to this map was an additional inset map that depicted Chile separately, deliberately isolated from the rest of the South American nations, as if to



Figure 4: Johnson's 1862 Map of Central and South America

draw greater attention to it. Additionally, of all the nations represented on this map, Johnson chose to only artistically represent Chile, and this was done with two different flourishes: one depicting a view of Valparaíso from its bay, and another showing the Juan Fernandez Islands, which were made famous in the English-speaking world through theories that the novel *Robinson Crusoe* was based on the events of Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk's life as a castaway on this Chilean archipelago.<sup>80</sup>

But Johnson's engravings of Chile were not confined to one map; in fact, his 1861 map of the entire continent of South America dedicated its single flourish to an image of Cape Horn (see Figure 5). The cape was not only claimed as a territory by Chile, but was also well associated with the country, thanks to Valparaíso's role as a principal stop on the route to California. Johnson's maps thus illustrate the unequivocal importance that Chile took on in perceptions and descriptions of South America in the mid-nineteenth century. Though he could have easily chosen to depict other features on the engravings in place of Chilean landmarks—such as the mighty volcanoes of Ecuador, a panoramic view of Lima, or an interior tropical forest of Brazil or New Granada—Johnson ultimately felt it most appropriate to make Chile the primary focus of his South American maps. This almost assuredly demonstrates



Figure 5: Johnson's 1861 Map of Chile

that the Republic of Chile occupied a prominent, if not dominant position in perceptions of South America at the time, thanks to its familiarity and geopolitical importance to people in the United States.

Meanwhile, an examination of the encyclopedias and textbooks of the period provides additional insight into how reference and educational resources presented Chile in a positive light to the North American public.

Samuel Goodrich's *A Pictorial Geography of the World* was, for example, glowing in its descriptions of Chile. It regarded the country as being “perhaps blessed with the most salubrious and delightful climate on the globe,” while also noting that “the soil is remarkably fruitful, and the products are rich and varied,” and that Chile “abounds”

<sup>80</sup> Samuel G. Goodrich, *A Pictorial Geography of the World*, 13th ed. (Boston: C.D. Strong, 1845), 178-187.

in a supply of gold, silver, and copper.<sup>81</sup> It also noted that the Araucanians—with an entire section devoted to describing their history and culture—were a people defined as being “well- formed and vigorous, intrepid, warlike, and jealous of liberty and honor.”<sup>82</sup> It even stated that Chileans were generally skilled with using the lasso (though this was noted as being “general in South America”),<sup>83</sup> and that, curiously enough, Chile’s government was in “an unsettled state” due to apparent “agitations” between federalists and centralists.<sup>84</sup> Of the Chilean people, the book noted both their general hospitability and their manner of dress (divided between the European fashion of men and “that of Peru” for the women), while also stating that Chile was “free from dangerous or venomous animals.”<sup>85</sup>

Other works produced similar descriptions of the country, even if they may have been less thorough. Charles Savage’s *The World* did not provide extensive elaborations in its discussion on Chile, although it included statistics on the economic and monetary outputs of Chilean goods and resources. This book did, however, mention the “variety of grand, wild, and beautiful scenery” that could be found in the Chilean Andes.<sup>86</sup> It also remarked on the fame of the Juan Hernandez Islands and their link to *Robinson Crusoe*, in addition to providing a separate section that discussed Araucanía and its inhabitants.<sup>87</sup> Charles Goodrich’s *The Universal Traveller*, meanwhile, expounded on Chilean culture, including the dress, dance, music, festivities, and cuisine of the country, as well as the superiority of Santiago over most other South American cities “in point of structure, convenience, and healthiness.”<sup>88</sup> But J.H. Colton’s *Illustrated Cabinet Atlas* provided perhaps the best means of conveying its perception of Chile onto readers, thanks to a combination of extensive maps, engravings, and statistics that complemented its text. The book’s chapter on Chile provided an incredibly thorough description of the nation’s physical geography and economic situation. However, perhaps the most notable aspect of Colton’s description was the positive language used to describe the nation’s various institutions. This included one portion indicating that “the public finances of Chile are in a more prosperous condition than those of any others of the South American republics,” as well as another which noted that “education is liberally provided for,” and that “the periodical press is creditable and well-organized.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the chapter concluded by proclaiming Chile to be “the best governed, most prosperous, and happy of all the South American states,” a rather bold and illustrious claim to make about a country with respect to an entire continent’s worth of peers.<sup>90</sup>

Meanwhile, textbooks were perhaps an even more important source for diffusing knowledge and perceptions about Chile within the United States. These works, too, seemed to echo many of the same sentiments about the country that have been previously discussed. *An Improved System of Geography* by Francis McNally, for example, uses its descriptive portion to outline Chile’s “healthful” climate, the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 466.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 467.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 468.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 466-467, 465.

<sup>86</sup> Charles C Savage, *The World, Geographical, Historical, and Statistical* (New York: Ensign, Bridgman, and Fanning, 1855), 282.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>88</sup> C. A. Goodrich, *The Universal Traveller: Designed to Introduce Readers at Home to an Acquaintance with the Arts, Customs, and Manners of the Principal Modern Nations on the Globe* (Hartford, Connecticut: H.E. Robins and Company, 1850), 178-187.

<sup>89</sup> G. Woolworth Colton and Richard Fisher, 205.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 206.

existence of a region in the country's north "where no rain falls" (this being the Atacama Desert), the frequency of earthquakes, and the existence of "an independent tribe of Indians" in Araucanía.<sup>91</sup> Cartographer S.A. Mitchell's textbook, *Mitchell's School Geography*, noted that Chile's possession of "romantic scenes" and its distinct combination of climate, geography, and cuisine led to it being called by some "the Italy of America."<sup>92</sup> Indeed, this book noted the country's extensive production of fruit and wine, as well as its extraction of gold, silver, copper, and even the coal found in the mines of Concepción (also mentioned by Isaac Strain).<sup>93</sup> In addition, it noted the presence of the Araucanians, "a warlike race of Indians," in southern Chile, the Juan Fernandez Islands and their connection to *Robinson Crusoe*, and the apparent fact that "Chili has been for some years past regarded as the best governed and most prosperous of the South American republics."<sup>94</sup>

Though individual printed sources of the period may have varied or disagreed in certain aspects of their presentation of the Republic of Chile when directly compared to one another, it is quite clear that by the mid-nineteenth century, a generally positive impression of the country was espoused by the print media of the United States. This impression was one that regarded Chile as a beautiful and healthful land: home to the most stable and effective government in Spanish South America and blessed with an abundance of natural resources and unparalleled economic prosperity (which could potentially be exploited). The notoriety of such aspects of Chile as Cape Horn, the Araucanians, the Juan Fernandez Islands, and the Atacama Desert all helped give the nation a slew of reference points that made it relatively memorable or familiar to readers of the time. Furthermore, the fact that Chile was so important to North American trade and migration during the mid-nineteenth century also suggests that, compared to other nations in South America, it received a numerically greater exposure in print media than many, if not most, of its peers in Latin America. Thus, the positive image of Chile sketched in the works of various authors, publishers, and cartographers throughout the mid-nineteenth century is also one that almost certainly became the dominant perception of Chile in the minds of those living in the United States.

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<sup>91</sup> Francis McNally, *An Improved System of Geography: Designed for Schools, Academies and Seminars* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Burr, 1855), 59.

<sup>92</sup> S. Augustus Mitchell, *Mitchell's School Geography: A System of Modern Geography, Comprising a Description of the Present State of the World, and Its Five Great Divisions* (Philadelphia: E.H. Butler and Company, 1860), 203.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-204.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

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