

***THE PARROT AND THE CANNON.  
JOURNALISM, LITERATURE AND POLITICS IN THE FORMATION OF LATIN AMERICAN  
IDENTITIES***

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
under the Executive Committee  
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

**Columbia University  
2011**

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## **Abstract**

### ***THE PARROT AND THE CANNON. JOURNALISM, LITERATURE AND POLITICS IN THE FORMATION OF LATIN AMERICAN IDENTITIES***

Pablo Calvi

The Parrot and the Cannon. Journalism, Literature and Politics in the Formation of Latin American Identities explores the emergence of literary journalism in Latin America as a central aspect in the formation of national identities. Focusing on five periods in Latin American history from the post-colonial times until the 1960s, it follows the evolution of this narrative genre in parallel with the consolidation of professional journalism, the modern Latin American mass media and the formation of nation states. In the process, this dissertation also studies literary journalism as a genre, as a professional practice, and most importantly as a political instrument. By exploring the connections between journalism, literature and politics, this dissertation also illustrates the difference between the notions of factuality, reality and journalistic truth as conceived in Latin America and the United States, while describing the origins of Latin American militant journalism as a social-historical formation.

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## **Acknowledgments**

Many thanks to Andie Tucher, Todd Gitlin and Graciela Montaldo for their mentoring and support. Their insightful observations and constant counseling helped me see both the tree and the forest in the vast jungle of Latin American journalism. Their generosity with time and ideas exceeded what I could have ever hoped for. Thanks to Brigitte Nacos who was always gentle, attentive and enthusiastic about this dissertation. Our conversations were unfailingly stimulating and fun, and helped me keep track of the rare occasions when I was aiming in the right direction.

A fellowship at CELSA, the Graduate School of Information and Communication Sciences of the Université Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV, allowed me to complete the final manuscript of this dissertation in a comfortable Parisian environment. The position also granted me the freedom to design and teach my first two graduate seminars on this topic, as a guest lecturer during the muggy and rainy French fall of 2010 and the breezy and sunny spring of 2011. To Veronique Richard and Kyle Schneider I wish to express my most sincere gratitude.

For their encouragement throughout the many years that took me to complete this doctoral project, but also for their friendship and support I am grateful to Helen Benedict, who rekindled in me the love for literary journalism, and to David Klatell, who was always ready and available for a pep talk. My colleagues at Columbia University Ph.D. program in Communications were all a constant source of

inspiration, but I am particularly grateful to Ben Peters, who spent more than one afternoon of his indefatigable energy reading my manuscripts, and to Chris W. Anderson, who walked me through the intricacies of teaching Contemporary Civilization.

I am also indebted to my dearest friend Ben Goldman, his masterful quill and his overwhelming generosity. Many nights in Fort Greene would have been lost without his company. I am deeply grateful to Kelly Sharp, who once flew from New York to Austin and back with the undeserving company of one of my first drafts. Her patience and kindness went beyond what I ever merited.

My friend and colleague Tessa Ditner read parts 3 and 4 of the manuscript with enthusiasm, dedication and care, and was kind to offer me invaluable advice. David Abrahamson, Todd Schack, Sue Joseph and John Hartsock, all colleagues and friends from the International Association of Literary Journalism Studies, were the sounding board for many of the ideas in this dissertation. Their generous support and disinterested advice helped me carry on through moments of uncertainty. Richard Keeble read section 2 of this dissertation and thought it deserving of becoming part of a book. The book is now in print, and I thank him for having offered me that fantastic opportunity.

My parents Jorge and Liliana, and my siblings María Virginia, Gabriel, María Laura and Juani, all in Buenos Aires, spent hours on the phone with me when I needed them most. I could never thank them enough for their unconditional love and support.

Lady Violet, the cuddliest bull terrier in the entire world, my loyal and loving companion of many early mornings and late nights of writing, also deserves my gratitude.

To Erika Stahlman, my wife, my friend, who shared with me moments of joy and moments of distress, and deserves all the credit for keeping our home livable, enjoyable and beautiful during times I could barely see beyond the white page in front of my eyes, goes all my love and gratitude.

All the merits of this work need to be shared with these and many other friends and colleagues who encouraged me throughout this experience. None of the limitations, errors and mistakes of this work, though, belong to anybody but me.

To Erika, Liliana and Jorge

## **Introduction. The Place of Literary Journalism in Latin American Studies**

We sometimes think of journalism as one stable, continuous set of practices with a clear goal: to inform the public about the present, the current developments in our town and our world, our daily culture and life. But both as a practice and as a form of social discourse, journalism is in actual fact, far more complex.

Considered as a form of social discourse, modern journalism encompasses narrative, descriptive and argumentative genres in an array of forms, produced with an array of techniques, and delivered on varied platforms and formats. These genres (defined both structurally and thematically) are in fact meant to *describe* (based on the mimetic premises of positivism), but also to *enlighten* (based on the idealistic premises of romanticism) certain aspects of our quotidian reality.<sup>1</sup>

Like all genres, the journalistic ones vary –sometimes a lot, sometimes not so much—across borders, societies and time. From epic poems to newscasts and breaking news, from open letters to the first modern interviews, from political editorials to video documentaries... news spots, human interest stories, profiles, local color stories, editorials, opinion columns, forecasts, all these forms have added

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<sup>1</sup> For a closer discussion about genres see Liddle 2009, Seriot 2007, and the classic studies of Bakhtin 1984 and Todorov 1970. For a historical approach to the journalistic genres see Gomis 2008.

their own defining features to journalism, and have presented variations from place to place and from one historical moment to the next.

Considered as concrete practices, journalistic forms have matured in newsrooms that were part of living cities, small and large, immersed in societies, central or peripheral, within specific social historical circumstances. These working practices were established, perfected and discussed by journalists: human beings who defined their own methods, deontological codes and strategies on the job in bars and cafes, press clubs, letters and lectures, in manuals of style, editorial meetings and foundational speeches. Like most human activities, journalistic practices have varied –sometimes more, sometimes less—across borders, cultures and time.

The emergence of the penny press in the United States during the 1830s, a period that historians have branded Jacksonian Democracy—a time of expansion of democratic institutions, urban middle classes and market capitalism— had a direct influence on the consolidation of modern American journalism and its forms; but also, and especially, on how newspapers were integrated into urban life, and how journalists thought of themselves and their work (Schudson 1978, 12-60, and Tucher 2006, 132). But as true as it may seem that historical, political and technological aspects are key to understanding the development of such professional tactics as the *inverted pyramid*, the *interview* the *feature story* and the emergence of the American journalistic model of objectivity in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century, these same factors in a different order, with a different timing, fostered the development of totally different genres such as the French *chronique* on the other side of the Atlantic, or the *crónica* in Latin America, in the same exact time period.

Originated far apart from each other, in a world much less interconnected than the one we live in today, these journalistic traditions do share some common origins, print capitalism and democracy being two of the most salient ones.<sup>2</sup> But it should be clear that market capitalism and democracy didn't evolve at the same pace, in the same historical phases, or even in the same direction in the United States, Europe and Latin America. And neither did journalism. In a sense, however, the general notion of market capitalism can still provide a preliminary framework to approach the evolution of certain journalistic genres and forms in different societies. But by studying the unique pace and processes of democratization and the expansion of market and print capitalism in Latin America, we can also begin to understand how and why certain specific journalistic conventions, models, forms and genres developed and consolidated in their specific configuration. Models and genres that, in their own particular way, have been part of the modern foundation of journalism and have defined the profession as we've known it for the past hundred years.

### **Literary Journalism in the Foundations of Latin America**

Through a historical, social and political approach, this dissertation will focus on the study of a group of genres that have accompanied the development of

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<sup>2</sup> For an exploration of the notion of print capitalism, see Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities*. For a succinct but convincing analysis of how a "democratic market society" was at the core of the development of the penny press, the first historical link in the chain of modern journalism, see Michael Schudson *Discovering the News*, esp. introduction and chapter 1, "The Age of Egalitarianism: the Penny Press."

modern Latin American journalism, literature and politics, and have had an impact on these three realms.<sup>3</sup> Following Norman Sims and Richard Keeble, we will group these genres under the umbrella of literary journalism.

However, before we begin with this study, the two categories at its core need to be discussed: the first one, Latin America as a political and cultural unit; the second one, literary journalism, as a particular form within the realm of the journalistic practice, and its specific Latin American manifestation.

To assume Latin American cultural, political, historical and geographical homogeneity, as historian Tulio Halperín Donghi has already noted, can be problematic (Halperin Donghi 1993, 10,11). Generally, studies that try to encompass the whole region end up presenting some twenty separate and fragmentary historical sequences, divergent processes of national constitution and an array of motley facts. But many times, even within the history of each Latin American nation taken separately, we can also observe the same dispersion and variety. Halperin Donghi has interestingly pointed out that it would be even hard to consider Mexican history, from the "indigenous splendor" to the revolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the unique frame for the constitution of a people. Historically, politically and culturally Mexico presents itself as a heterogeneous mix. Geographically, from

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<sup>3</sup> In the words of Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, genres are a way to access multiplicity through the unique. So in their uniqueness, concreteness and singularity, each one of the manifestations of literary journalism can also become a typical representation the genre. Structuralist linguist Tzvetan Todorov defined literary genres as sets of internal rules that functioned similarly across different texts, rigorous systems of rules that corresponded to series of probabilities and expectations (Todorov 1970, 10-11). Modern cognitive science follows, in part, these preliminary observations with scientific evidence that transcends structuralist case observations.

the plateaus to the deserts and the tropical coastal jungles, it could also be hard to perceive it as a unit if it were not for its forged national identity, which was a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Much the same could be said about the history of most other countries in the region. What is also true, however, is that beyond that multiplicity, there lies a transversal factor which is at the same time political, economic, cultural and historical: in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Latin America was incorporated to the world economy under a colonial pact and between then and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the entire region was ruled by one of the most archaic European nations of its time (Halperin Donghi 1993, 17,18).

The colonial rule and the incorporation of the Hispanic tradition to the region in a process that lasted more than 300 years, gave a common ground to the Latin American revolutionaries in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. When journalists, intellectuals and politicians all over the subcontinent, started a dialogue to move past the colonial model and enter modernity, Spain and its legacy provided a common point of departure, a common topic of debate and the potential for mutual understanding, but also the basic political structures to prepare for the revolution and a historical burden, a past that needed to be overcome.

This revolutionary dialogue was, in fact, started in public reunions of the elites in Argentina and Venezuela, and later on consolidated in the revolutionary press all over the subcontinent. First in Argentina and Venezuela, later on in Chile and Mexico, the post-colonial press in the region spread the voices of Esteban Echeverría, Francisco Bilbao, Domingo Sarmiento, Juan Bautista Alberdi, José Enrique Rodó, José Martí and many other intellectuals, journalists and politicians

who not only fostered and helped consolidate the independency and national identities of their own countries, but also coalesced in the definition of an overarching entity: Latin America. These journalists who were also writers and statesmen also read each other, debated in a common language and recognized also a common heritage. The cultural and political unit of Latin America, which existed in principle due a common colonial past and became a reality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was actually made possible by the revolutionary and the post-colonial press during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Domingo Sarmiento's *Revista de las Américas* or José Martí's letters from New York to *La Nación* newspaper were key in the consolidation of that already widespread notion of Pan-Hispanism. In that vein, literary journalism was also at the core of the process, a central instrument for the formation of that supra-national notion, a Latin American culture and identity. This idea takes us to the second point.

When we talk about literary journalism in Latin America we are referring to a genre that was already well established already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sarmiento, Rodó and Bilbao, to mention only a few names, considered themselves men of the press, but also literates and politicians. Their identities as intellectuals were expressed in the intersection between these three realms, and it couldn't have been otherwise. Without nations or markets, or a consolidated reading public, the role of these men of letters was to develop them as the conditions of possibility for the existence of their own work. Echeverría, Sarmiento, Rodó and others strived to constitute markets, to develop a republican culture and a reading public resorting to the raw materials that remained from the colonial past. The consolidation of nation states and national literatures, the education of citizens and the development of a

reading public, all required the adoption and the propagation of a strong set of core values inherited from the French and the American revolutions. Literary journalism in Latin America was, therefore, a heavily moral and deeply political genre too.

Of course, as a genre and a practice, literary journalism has had multiple manifestations throughout modern Latin American history. Since its inception, contemporary with the transitional *caudillist* period after the independence wars between the 1830s and 1880s, it ran parallel to the consolidation and development of republican systems. It was also pivotal for the constitution of national and trans-national narratives during the phase of stabilization and democratic transition of the 1880s and early 1900s: “civilization or barbarism” and “this America and the other America” are, for instance, two conceptual pairs originated in the works of Domingo Sarmiento and José Martí. Literary journalism provided a narrative framework for the integration of young Latin American nations into the world market, and had a central role in the development of narratives that impelled open, popular democratic systems after the passing of laws providing for secret, universal, and compulsory male suffrage in the mid-1910s. Finally, between the 1930s and 1970s, it played first an indifferent –if not supportive— then an antagonistic role before the emergence, development and consolidation of bureaucratic authoritarian regimes along the continent.<sup>4</sup>

In its many transformations, Latin American literary journalism has been

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<sup>4</sup> To explore the notion of bureaucratic authoritarianism, see Alain Rouquié *The Military and the State in Latin America*.

instrumental in the development of social and political narratives, the constitution of national and regional identities, and the national literatures in the region. And in part due to the late –and vertiginous—development of Latin American market capitalism, a process that took place in less than three decades between the 1900s and the 1930s, the spheres of journalism, politics and literature never gained complete autonomy from each other until much later –although it could even be argued that, compared to the United States, these spheres never became autonomous from each other at all.

There are certain structural and thematic aspects of Latin American literary journalism that could be summarized in a working definition of the genre: Latin American literary journalism comprehends a type of medium-to-long-form referential narrative, whose protagonists, characters and situations have documented existence in the real world, whose focus is usually a current event, and whose its intention is social, deeply political and actively militant.<sup>5</sup> In the United States, the notion of Literary Journalism as journalism that used literary techniques appeared for the first time coined by professor Edwin H. Ford, who taught in the Department of Journalism at the University of Minnesota and in 1937 published *A Bibliography of Literary Journalism in America* (Sims 2007, 8). In Latin America, the use of this notion dates from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it was journalist and author Juan José de Soiza Reilly who in 1909 popularized it: "...[T]oday's journalism is not the barren profession of years past. It is no longer a profession. It is not a craft. It's an art. A delicate and profound one. An art of goldsmiths. Of poets. Of philosophers. An art that has its heroes and victims. I imagine that you don't believe in what I say,

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed definition, see part 5 of this dissertation.

but I am talking –with utmost devotion—about literary journalism...” (Cilento 2009, 81).<sup>6</sup>

The notion of literary journalism defined figures such as José Martí and Rubén Darío, who not only used their articles as test benches for their poetry and narrative, but also as platforms to project their political ideas. In that vein, Latin American literary journalism accompanied most of the political processes during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century in the region and it is central to understand the constitution of Latin America as a political entity.

These overarching characteristics, however, require at least a brief contextualization. Historically, literary journalism was among the first modern narratives to come out of Latin America. The genre has its roots in the chronicles of the *conquistadores* from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, some forms of pre-Hispanic storytelling developed by aboriginal Latin American cultures, the romantic novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French journalistic *chronique*, the political journalism and pamphlets of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in Europe and the United States, and the American penny press of the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup>

One of its first manifestations, probably among most important ones, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s *Facundo* is an almost unclassifiable book that, as we will see in

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<sup>6</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed historical lineage of Latin American journalistic genres see Leonardo Ferreira, *Centuries of silence. The story of Latin American Journalism*. For a rigorous account of the impact of journalism on the development of Latin American narratives see Aníbal González, *Journalism and the development of Spanish American narrative*.

the first part of this work, sits on the border between journalistic investigation, the memoir, the romantic novel, the sociological treatise and the political pamphlet.

*Facundo* is a very particular type of referential narrative. By chronicling –and discussing—the life of dead caudillo Facundo Quiroga, writer, journalist and politician Domingo Sarmiento produced –during his political exile in Chile—the first serialized nonfiction in the history of Latin America, while setting the groundwork for the allegorical and metaphorical penchant the genre would develop in its more than 150 years of history. *Facundo* is the life story of caudillo Facundo Quiroga, long dead at the time the book was first published. In Facundo’s narrative, however, Sarmiento also found a reservoir of sources, materials and topics to polemicize, sometimes directly but mostly allegorically, with his personal political foe, strongman Juan Manuel de Rosas, a powerful caudillo and the governor of Buenos Aires.

Sarmiento did not consider his work allegorical, despite the multiple omissions, interpolations and unrestrained exaggerations, noted even by friends and political allies. He presented it as journalistic, literary, factual and political:

I have literary ambitions, my dear friend, and dedicate *many long nights, extensive research, and careful study* toward satisfying them. Facundo died in body at Barranca-Yaco, but his name in History was able to escape and survive for some years, without the exemplary punishment it deserved. The judgment of History has now fallen on him, and the repose of his grave is maintained through the suppression of his name and the scorn of the people (Sarmiento 2003, 40-41).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Facundo*. Sarmiento, Domingo. *Facundo. Civilization and Barbarism* (Translated by Kathleen Ross. Berkley: University of California Press. 2003). Italics are mine.

Sarmiento, like many of the journalists and writers we will introduce in this dissertation, did in fact seal with their readers an accuracy contract by emphasizing the referential nature of his work:

[But] I do state that in the notable events to which I refer, and which serve as *the basis for the explanations I give*, there is *irreproachable accuracy*, to which the existing *public documents* about those events will attest [...] Perhaps there will be a moment when, unburdened by the worries that have precipitated the writing of this little work, I may remold it according to a new plan, stripping it of accidental digression and supporting it with the numerous official documents to which I now make only passing reference (Sarmiento 2003, 29).<sup>9</sup>

However, the type of referentiality on which this contract was based, differed from the American modern journalistic notion of objectivity that became the dominant covenant in the United States between the 1880s and the 1920s, indelibly marking the profession in the years that followed.<sup>10</sup>

As Michael Schudson has argued when discussing the professionalization of journalism in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, “[c]ompeting with one another for circulation, newspapers tried to satisfy *public standards of truth, public ideas of decency, and public taste in entertainment*” (Schudson 1978, 70-71).<sup>11</sup> Clearly, these “public standards, ideas and taste” were not the same in Latin America, since

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<sup>9</sup> Italics are mine.

<sup>10</sup> See Michael Schudson, “The Ideal of Objectivity” in *Discovering the News. A Social History of American Newspapers*, Andie Tucher, Froth & Scum. *Truth, Beauty, Goodness and the Ax Murder in America’s First Mass Medium* and David Mindich, *Just the Facts. How “Objectivity” Came to Define American Journalism*.

<sup>11</sup> Italics are mine.

the public was also different. A different public, with different backgrounds, a different exposure to philosophical and political ideas, different social, political and economic realities, and a much different vision of the world, can explain in part some of the dissimilarities between Anglo and Latin American journalism that will become apparent along this dissertation.

In that light, one of the central questions of this work is how the main principles of factuality and referentiality developed in this Latin American journalistic genre – patterns that have ultimately transcended literary journalism to reach other journalistic genres— and why have them differed (if they actually have) from the ones contemporarily in vogue in the United States.

Through an exploration of the works of eight emblematic Latin American journalists and literary nonfiction writers, their context of production, their publics, media and ideas, this dissertation will discuss the ideological and material grounds for Latin American literary journalism, as a genre that stands on social, historical and political conditions of possibility.

This dissertation will attempt to show series of correlations between the works of these writers, their internal dialogue, and the contexts in which they were produced. It will focus on four periods that range from the 1840s to the 1970s. In the first period, between the 1840s and the 1880s, literary journalism accompanied the formation of Latin American nation-states. During the second one, between the 1880s until early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the genre contributed with the integration of the new nations to world commerce. During the third period, from

the early 1890s until the late 1920s, literary journalism followed the development of modern mass-market democracies. And finally from the 1930s up until the 1970s, it echoed and adapted to the rise of bureaucratic-authoritarian military regimes all over the region.

As part of that tradition, but also due to its particular social and political context of origin, Latin American literary journalism has always been imbued with a dominantly political undertone, and a progressive teleology, a sense of journalistic urgency, and a humane disgust for the aberrations committed by authoritarian regimes. These narratives have consistently expressed concerns for the dilemmas rooted in Latin American political instability, while displaying a moral vision aimed towards the democratic establishment/restoration in the region. This mostly anti-authoritarian undertone has not only given its stories an ethical imprint, but also resulted in a politically motivated stance that has defined the genre above its factual or aesthetical preoccupations.

Journalism, like history, produces narratives, accounts of sequentially and causally connected events. As such, literary journalism is a type of discourse that tells a story. But unlike other types of nonfiction, Latin American literary journalism has produced narratives that have systematically operated on at least two semantic levels: allegorical and referential. On the allegorical level, these narratives are produced as accounts of the present through the narration of past events. On the referential level, these stories can either be fully loaded with political undertones or plainly interpreted as a novelized historical record.

This dynamic, as we will start discussing in parts 1 and 2 through the journalistic works of Domingo Sarmiento and José Martí, was both a consequence of the political context in which these narratives were originated, but also a response to a writing tradition. Reporting in repressive, politically or economically unstable societies creates a number of hurdles not only in terms of the investigative process that literary nonfiction requires, but also and especially in terms of the “authorial stance towards one’s material” (Foster 1984, 42-43).

Due to the consolidation of literary journalism as a tradition, even when political restraints were momentarily lifted, these narratives were still produced and read through the lens of a strong writing tradition that responded to certain ticks and routines. The multiple connections between the writings of Domingo Sarmiento, José Martí, Juan José de Soiza Reilly, Roberto Arlt, Jorge Luis Borges and Rodolfo Walsh, among others, will be central in order to substantiate many of these ideas.

## **Part I. From the Personal to the Political: the Origins and Foundations of a Latin American Literary Journalism**

On the afternoon of June 17, 1844, hundreds of people gathered in an angry crowd outside the courthouses in Santiago de Chile. Hissing, whistling, booing and cursing were somewhat typical on such occasions, but the unruliness and high-voltage excitement surrounding the ending of a spectacular trial against obscure student Francisco Bilbao were unprecedented in the short history of this young republic.

Santiago numbered at the time a little more than 60,000 souls. Chile, whose first autonomous government had been formed in 1810, stretched for more than 4,700 kilometers from the aridity of the Atacama Desert in the north to the freezing Strait of Magellan at the southernmost tip of the American hemisphere. Most of the population, however, was concentrated in a modest fertile patch 600 kilometer long and 80 kilometers wide in the central valley, encased by the unconquerable Andes to the East, and a barren, inhospitable lower coastal stripe facing the Pacific Ocean to the West; a small patch of land that was soon to become the flower bed of the free press in Latin America.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For general historical and social data about Chile in the post-colonial years see Tulio Halperin Donghi. *The Contemporary History of Latin America* (United States, Duke University Press. 1993); David Bushnell & Neil Macaulay. *The emergence of Latin America in the nineteenth century* (Oxford University Press. 1994).

The development of Chile's journalism had been unusual. In the few years after the independence war that broke out in 1810, the nation had steadily moved towards a vigorous, liberal and democratic publishing industry. A constant influx of literate exiles and writers from neighboring countries, most of them under bloody dictatorships, pollinated Santiago's newsrooms with liberal ideas imported from England and France, ideas that soon started to spread across the Chilean borders back to the rest of Latin America. In that context of sustained and vibrant liberal expansion, the trial against Francisco Bilbao, a fairly unknown young journalist, dramatically polarized the opposition against conservatives in Chile and proved to have a tremendous impact on the direction, scope and nature of Latin American journalism and literature in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In those days, social divisions in Chile's central valley were fairly uncomplicated. According to David Bushnell and Neill Macaulay, "the dominant group was a creole landed aristocracy, whose great estates took in perhaps eighty percent of the good land, for a rate of land concentration matched in few other parts of Latin America." The rural lower classes, mainly mestizo, had a dependent position working either as service tenants –*inquilinos*, as Chileans called them—or as a "floating landless population whose members served as day laborers in harvest or other times of peak labor demand in return for little more than a temporary abundance of food and drink and associated fiesta type entertainment" (Bushnel and Macaulay 1994, 108-110).

The population of Chile reached about two million in the 1840s, including the Araucanian tribes that still ruled in the far south. The two main cities were the

administrative capital, Santiago, and the more cosmopolitan port of Valparaiso. They had flourished thanks to the easy transportation and communication provided by the thriving trans-Pacific commercial corridor, and had rapidly become key social and economic poles, where the most established and prosperous mining and tobacco businesses in the region were concentrated.

On April 25, 1844, almost twenty years after the end of the devastating revolutionary war, the Royal Family finally recognized Chile as an independent state, and the tension between the former colony and Queen Isabella started to subside. But a post-war, anti-Hispanic sentiment continued to spread among the Chilean middle classes and its liberal intellectuals, while conservative circles, led by president Manuel Bulnes, were still permeable to the cultural and moral direction set by the monarchy in Madrid and the Papacy in Rome.

A hero of the decisive 1839 battle of Yungay and son of an army officer, Bulnes was a strong advocate of a free press, and it was in part thanks to his commitment to freedom of expression that Chile soon became the beacon of independent journalism in Latin America. During Bulnes' tenure between September 1841 and September 1851 a flurry of newspapers came to existence supported in part by their own sales, but also by the national budget and progressive printing legislation. The government's decision to underwrite newspaper subscriptions, contrary to US practice, was emblematic of the importance it placed on the press as a means for economic and social development.<sup>13</sup> The press law of 1828 already

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<sup>13</sup> As Diego Barros Arana mentions, news publishers usually received discretionary support from the government through the purchase of yearly subscriptions for public

included provisions to enforce the free circulation of newspapers and to guarantee intellectual property. By 1833, the Chilean Congress had also incorporated norms to prevent prior censorship, adding a progressive twist to an already liberal body of law. And by 1843, the Chilean legislation also included a privacy clause that put newspapers at the same level of inviolability as private correspondence (Alberdi 1846, 21-22).

Until the independence wars, the Spanish crown had exercised a tight control over the printing presses in the subcontinent, and for the most part banished local newspapers. The press was controlled directly by the Church or the Crown, and until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, only Mexico City and Lima had active printing business (Anderson 1983, 61 and Kanellos 2005, 688). However, with the revolutionary uprisings, the local patriots started to circumvent these controls until the newly established republican governments finally abrogated the Spanish regulations.<sup>14</sup> As a consequence, by 1812 many Latin American countries had already fairly well established newspapers. But due to caudillism, and a complicated transition to republicanism, many of these young republics were waylaid on their road to a free press until the late nineteenth century.

Chile's printing business had a late start and a precocious maturity compared to

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offices. He gives the example of Manuel Rivadeneyra's *El Mercurio de Valparaíso* which had "twenty subscriptions counting particulars and four for the Ministry of Public Instruction." See Diego Barros Arana, "Un decenio de la historia de Chile 1841-1851." In *Obras completas*, Vol. XV. Santiago: Imprenta Litografía Encuadernación 'Barcelona, 1913, II, 461.

<sup>14</sup> Closely overseen by the Spanish Crown, Mexico acquired its first press in 1540; Lima in 1584; Santo Domingo in 1600; Paraguay in 1715; and Buenos Aires in 1780 (Campbell 1962, 545).

that of other Latin American countries. Mateo Arnaldo Havel, a Swedish refugee and a later nationalized Chilean citizen who had been involved in the assassination of Gustav III, imported from New York the first printing press to operate in Chile. In April 1811, at the beginning of the independence war, the equipment arrived in the port of Valparaíso aboard the frigate *Gallervais*, together with three American master printers –Samuel B. Johnston, Guillermo H. Burbidge and Simon Garrison— and a tall pile of republican newspapers (Alberdi 1846, 14).

“In our hands is the great and precious instrument of universal enlightenment – the printing press,” read a letter addressed to Havel from the Chilean congress. And right they were to hail its arrival, since the machine would soon become the cornerstone of the *Imprenta del Supremo Gobierno* (the Printing Office of the Supreme Government) in Santiago, and a key weapon in the war with Spain.

On Thursday February 13, 1812, *La Aurora*, the first Chilean periodical, saw the light of day.<sup>15</sup> Under its logo, the publication announced it was a *Periódico Ministerial*, an official organ of the new Chilean government. Its epigraph read: *Viva la Unión, la Patria y el Rei* (*Long Live Union, the Motherland and the King*).<sup>16</sup> Directed by republican

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<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, the newspaper bore the name of the Philadelphia Aurora, founded by Benjamin Franklyn’s grandson, Benjamin Bache.

<sup>16</sup> After ascending to the throne in March 1808 in the course of the Napoleonic invasion to the Iberian peninsula, Spanish King Fernando VII was captured by the French and confined in the Chateau de Valençay for six years. During his captivity, a local junta was formed in Sevilla to run the state business and fight the invaders. The *Junta de Sevilla* – as it was called—also named viceroys to administer the King’s business in the colonies. But the creole elites in America banished these delegates, arguing that in the absence of the king the locals were entitled “by divine right” to form their own provisional governments. These patriotic governments usually incorporated prominent members of the colonial society, especially clergymen, military officers and lawyers, and other members of the white local elite who had lived or studied in Spain.

priest Camilo Henríquez, who had been commissioned by the first government junta and would receive a salary of 600 pesos, *La Aurora* disseminated the new republican ideas with passion and ardent lyricism. "The printing press is in our hands... the voice of reason and truth will be heard among us after the sad and insufferable silence of three centuries," wrote the priest in one of his first articles for the paper (Lipp 1975, 6-7).

Unlike most of its neighbors, Chile had a particularly smooth transition to republicanism. Its progressive press legislation, a sustained growth in commerce and the rapid development of the financial and mining sectors in the 1800s turned the young trans-Andean republic into the most fertile ground in Latin America for the establishment of a thriving printing business. By the mid 1840s, only 30 years after the *Gallervais* docked in Valparaíso, Chile had developed the strongest and most vibrant free press system in Latin America (Jaksic 1994, 55).

Of course, Chile's liberal and naturally democratic media system soon started to confront the backward remnants of the Catholic-Hispanic colonial culture. And this antagonism was one of the main elements that, in June 1844, triggered the curious trial against an obscure student, 21-year-old Francisco Bilbao.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For information about the trial against Francisco Bilbao, see: Francisco Bilbao. "Sociabilidad Chilena." *Obras Completas. Francisco Bilbao* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta de "El Correo," 1897); Manuel Bilbao. "Vida de Francisco Bilbao." *Obras completas de Francisco Bilbao*, Vol. I (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Buenos Aires. 1866); Jaime Eyzaguirre. *Fisonomía Histórica de Chile* (Santiago: Editorial del Pacífico, 1948); José Victorino Lastarria. *Recuerdos Literarios* (Santiago de Chile: Librería de M. Servat. 1885); Solomon Lipp. *Three Chilean Thinkers* (Waterloo, ON, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 1975), and Mme. Quinet. "Un gran patriota americano." *Obras completas. Francisco Bilbao* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta de "El Correo." 1869).

### **The Curious Trial of Francisco Bilbao**

After six uneventful months, the early days of June 1844 brought an explosive debate that escalated almost to a civil upheaval in the otherwise calm and isolated Chilean capital. On June 1<sup>st</sup> *El Crepúsculo*, a liberal, up-and-coming, independent monthly, released the second number of its second volume, featuring “La Sociabilidad Chilena,” an article by a young student, aspiring philosopher and poet, Francisco Bilbao.

The article was a 40-page Saint Simonian-Rousseauian tirade against Spain’s religious monarchy, its morals, uses, and the ideas it had infused into the Chilean society during the times of the colony. In it Bilbao claimed among other things that Spain represented Latin America’s past: “Spain is the Middle Ages,” and the future of Latin America belonged to France, where a “new era is blossoming” (Bilbao 1897, 11-24). The article irritated a group of catholic government officials, who took the young journalist to trial for blasphemy, immorality and sedition. But the conservative reaction was met with exasperation by liberal sectors in Santiago who confronted the government of Manuel Bulnes with a vigorous liberal opposition and an emerging liberal press. By expanding its demands for openness, democracy, freedom of speech, religion and thought, the liberal sectors pushed to become not only the government’s watchdog, but also an agent of cultural change in Chile and Latin America.

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Manuel Bulnes understood the importance of a vibrant press. Following a decree of 1825, his administration guaranteed a government subscription of 200 issues for every paper published in the country. The norm was easily put into effect when there were no more than 20 or 30 papers in Chile, but with the unprecedented expansion of the periodical press in the 1840s its implementation became almost impossible. Thus the norm started to be applied discretionally, favoring only those publications “which due to their enlightened principles contained useful ideas, and which deserved to be communicated to the people” (Alberdi 1846, 57-58).<sup>18</sup>

In those days the press was the epicenter of a heated discussion between liberals

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<sup>18</sup> The government, however, was still designating 16,468 pesos of its 3 million budget to support newspapers, journals and magazines. The importance of this number becomes clear when it is compared to the allocation for the National University, which in 1843 was 14,000 pesos. Between 1853 and 1858, funds destined to the press remained steady at 16,000 pesos, increasing substantially in 1859 to 40,000 pesos, only to be reduced again to 20,000 pesos between 1861 and 1863, and cut to 10,000 between 1863 and 1876. By 1876 the increasingly meager contributions had finally disappeared from the national budget altogether (Jaksic 1994, 40-41, 58). Argentine politician, lawyer, and the main author of the Argentine Constitution of 1853, Juan Bautista Alberdi noted the originality of the Chilean press legislation during his exile in Chile: “The government (and in these matters Chile’s is the only one in the world), aside from protecting the inviolability of press circulation, fosters and supports it through *strong stimuli*,” he wrote in his 1846 study of the Chilean press. Although it proved harder to implement with the sustained expansion of the trans-Andean press in during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Alberdi noted that government subscriptions to newspapers still counted as a significant portion of the Chilean budget, at least until 1846. “On November 23, 1825, ‘willing the government (these are the words of the decree) to stimulate the distribution of writings in the Republic and to protect as much as the treasury permits both journalists and printers... the government subscribes to two hundred copies of *every paper* to be published [in Chile],” transcribed Alberdi from a November 23, 1825 decree. Alberdi noted that, due to the large number of new publications appeared after the 1840s, the government was forced to cancel its subscription to many publications, but still continued “favoring those papers that due to their enlightened principles contained and promoted useful ideas, and which deserved to be communicated to the people,” Juan Bautista Alberdi *Lejislación de la Prensa en Chile. Manual del Escritor, del Impresor y del Jurado*. Valparaíso: Imprenta del Mercurio, 1846, 57-58. Italics and translation from Spanish is mine.

and conservatives about Latin American traditions and the development of its post-colonial identity. To American observers like Lieutenant James Melville Gillis, who had already seen the emergence of the penny press in the U.S., the political nature of the Chilean press –which, in fact, set an early editorial direction for the Latin American press at large—was not only noticeable, but also worth mentioning.<sup>19</sup> Leader of the U.S. Naval Astronomical Expedition in Chile between the 1840s and the 1850s, Gillis wrote in his travelogue that “the taste for the reading of current events is not very general; and one may perhaps justly infer that there is a like indifference to more serious literature” (Jaksic 1994, 41).<sup>20</sup>

Recently appeared, *El Crepúsculo* was clearly inscribed in that journalistic tradition. In 1844 the paper counted little more than 200 subscribers, a small following compared to other more established publications, but large enough to be self-sustaining, granted that 450 readers was the benchmark for many Chilean weeklies at that time (Lastarria 1885, 200-201, Prieto 1994, 259-271). Like most Chilean monthlies, the paper enjoyed some level of government support, materialized in the form of subscriptions destined to public dependencies, libraries and colleges.

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<sup>19</sup>Even in exile, the overwhelming motive for Latin Americans to bear the costs of printing and distribution of their books and newspapers was to influence the politics in their homelands (Kanellos 2005, 687-692).

<sup>20</sup> Gillis’ observations may however have been tinted by the fact that, an avid reader himself, the Georgetown-born official had grown accustomed to a different type of literature, journalism, and press. In 1833, Gillis entered the University of Virginia, but he lasted less than a year. According to his memoir: “Excessive study impaired his health, and a severe inflammation of the eyes confined him for many weeks to a dark room. Upon his partial recovery he made a fourth cruise, ending in October, 1835, after which he resumed his studies in Paris, and pursued them there for about six months, before returning to his professional duties” in the U.S. Navy. In Benjamin Apthoep Gould, *A Biographical Memoir of James Melville Gillis*. Read before the National Academy, Jan. 26 1866.

*El Crepúsculo* had started as the brainchild of a group of Chilean liberal intellectuals, the Sociedad Literaria, formed in Santiago in 1842 in the context of a traditional rivalry between Chilean and Argentine intellectuals. The Sociedad Literaria was a response to the arrival in Chile of a vigorous Argentine liberal intelligentsia fleeing the clout of Buenos Aires dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas.

“[Our] distinguished youth that not too long ago was reduced to the offspring, and some creatures belonging to the dominant oligarchy [...] received a strong boost [...] by an enlightened and boisterous Argentine immigration,” wrote in his memoir José Victoriano Lastarria, prominent among Chilean intellectuals, member of the Bulnes administration at the time, and one of the founders of the Sociedad Literaria and *El Crepúsculo*. “In that commerce of honest and cordial relations, the notable clarity and knowledge of the sons of el Plata was always a highlight, and excited not few arrests of jealousy, while making the narrowness of our literary knowledge all too apparent [...] That jealousy served the author of this memory to encourage his colleagues and disciples [...] in order to form a literary society” (Lastarria 1885, 85). Thus geared to regain the lead in the battle for public opinion, the *Sociedad Literaria* launched *El Crepúsculo*.<sup>21</sup>

Expectations run high for the new monthly among the liberal elites. But after a

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted, however, that the public opinion in Chile, like in the rest of Latin America, presented differences from what is commonly understood in the Habermasian literature on the topic. The forms of publicity in post-colonial Latin America differed substantially from the practices observed in Europe and the United States. In fact, in Chile in those years, less than 17% of the population was literate (Jaksic 1994, 41). For an excellent contextualization of the idea of publicity in post-colonial Latin America, see Juan Carlos Garavaglia’s *Construir el estado, inventar la nación*, Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2007.

year of existence *El Crepúsculo* never garnered the attention of the reading public in Santiago. And had it not been for Bilbao's piece, the paper would have easily remained under the government's radar.

In fact, even "La Sociabilidad Chilena" was largely unnoticed until Bilbao was unexpectedly indicted by a government official. It was only then that the acerbic anti-Catholic, anti-Hispanic piece began to gain notoriety in town, progressively becoming the manifestation of a power struggle within the Chilean elites.<sup>22</sup>

Almost 22 years after Francisco's trial, his brother Manuel described how the Chilean society reacted to the article: "Those who have found themselves in the middle of a volcanic cataclysm; those who have witnessed the sudden collapse of a population; those who have felt a lightning bolt striking at their feet, only those could have an idea of the effect that the appearance of 'La Sociabilidad Chilena' produced in Chile's capital" (Bilbao 1866, 24-26).<sup>23</sup>

Yet, according to Lastarria, one the editors at *El Crepúsculo*, the influence that "La Sociabilidad Chilena" was meant to have on the Chilean society had been, at least, overstated by the government (Lastarria 1885, 282-83).

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<sup>22</sup> According to José Victorino Lastarria's *Recuerdos Literarios*, *El Crepúsculo* had started coming out regularly once a month, on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1843. It was manufactured in a print property of Juan N. Espejo and Juan José Cárdenas, which was later bought by businessman Cristóbal Valdés, and the articles were written by some of the "most enthusiastic young members of the Sociedad Literaria," (Lastarria, 1885, 276). All translations of Lastarria's *Recuerdos Literarios* are mine.

<sup>23</sup> All translations of Bilbao's complete works are mine.

In terms of its content the article wasn't particularly new, or even remotely revolutionary, and to the majority of the metropolitan newspaper-reading public it was, pretty much, of no concern.

In fact, the core of the ideas that Bilbao was introducing as his own were if not commonsensical to the liberal intellectuals in Santiago at least probably a little clichéd. Lastarria mentions in his memoir, that before publication the article had even been questioned in its originality by some of the editorial members of *El Crepúsculo*. This was later acknowledged by Bilbao himself who admitted that his piece "had been an extrapolation of 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas regurgitated by a young soul" (Lastarria 1885, 281).

Almost patronizing, Lastarria also noted in his memoir that "La Sociabilidad Chilena" was, in fact, anchored in an 18<sup>th</sup> century ideological mind frame. And this could easily be noted "in the criticism to which [...] Bilbao subjected our catholic and feudal past, our revolution, the governments that understood or opposed it, the *pelucón* [conservative] party that reacted against the revolution and aimed at reestablishing and strengthen our Spanish and colonial past." For Lastarria, Bilbao's article didn't even present "with enough clarity the criticism that had been cast in various forms against Catholicism throughout the past century" (Lastarria 1885, 282-83).

However, it was also true that the article touched a sensitive nerve with some of the most recalcitrant conservatives in Santiago. Just two days after the issue was out, ultra-catholic government prosecutor Máximo Mujica indicted Bilbao accusing

him of blasphemy, immorality and sedition in the third degree, the three highest possible violations of the Chilean press code (Alberdi 1846, 34-38). Sedition in the third degree was punishable with up to four years of exile or imprisonment. A sentence of sedition in the first or second degree was easily commuted for a fine of 200 or 400 pesos respectively, the equivalent of one-sixth or one-third of the yearly salary of a highly qualified press worker such as a typist, an editor or a star writer.<sup>24</sup> In Bilbao's case, however, the charge of sedition was dropped as soon as the trial began.

The accusation took Bilbao's circle by surprise, and at first most of his colleagues offered the young student their warm support. Even some government officials like Lastarria himself, who was at the time attached to the Ministry of Interior, and intellectuals like Francisco P. de Matta, who edited *El Crepúsculo* with Lastarria, voiced their opposition to Bilbao's indictment in several editorials.

But soon thereafter, likely trying to protect his own interests, Matta, who was also publisher of *El Siglo*, started to slowly detach himself from Bilbao writing several pieces that presented "La Sociabilidad Chilena" as the individual expression of the young man's ideas, not necessarily shared by his colleagues in the paper. Later on, Matta even described the article as "the expression of intellectual anarchy in our society" (Lastarria 1885, 285).

Bilbao still had some friends in the government. Ramon Luis Irazaval, who was by then Minister of Interior and would become interim vice president of the republic

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<sup>24</sup> For more details about the press law see Alberdi 1846, and Jaksic 1994.

in October 1844, made unsuccessful efforts to have the prosecutor withdraw the charges. This failure led Lastarria, a key mediator between Bilbao and the political power, to present his resignation at the ministry in protest of the whole affair.

A student at the time, Bilbao was enrolled in the Instituto Nacional, the oldest and most prestigious high school in Chile. But when conservatives led by Mariano Egaña, dean of the Law School, main writer of the Chilean constitution of 1833 and editor of the conservative weekly *La Abeja Chilena* –the *Chilean Bee*—noted Irrazaval's attempt to downplay the implications of the “Sociabilidad Chilena” affaire, they started crying for blood.

The case became an ideological crusade for Egaña, and as a result of his pressure Bilbao was expelled from the Instituto Nacional. Following the expulsion, a strong grassroots movement organized to repudiate Chile's most liberal institutions, its newspapers, and crowds of conservatives poured through the streets to the tribunals to protest against Bilbao and his supporters.

Backed by the conservative press, the Catholic factions in power, and large parts of the public, Mujica demanded the complete destruction of the issue of *El Crepusculo* containing Bilbao's article in an overwrought demonstration of defiance and political bravado. There were no provisions for such action in the Chilean press legislation, so the prosecutor was forced to appeal to the Supreme Court. And on the basis of an obscure Spanish law of 1609, the high tribunal finally authorized the burning of the newspaper by an executioner in a public ceremony –an unprecedented and unusually spectacular display of the political backwardness of

Chilean conservative power.<sup>25</sup>

The decision caused consternation among most liberals, who stirred up the debate, making it clear that from that point on the main issue at stake was Chile's freedom of the press. The debate, however, only further escalated the conservative backlash.

Franciso's brother, Manuel, remembered the agitation that ensued:

Churches opened their doors, and from the pulpits, and in the public plazas, and on the streets, propaganda was voiced against the 'heretic, the atheist, the corrupt, the immoral, the one who burns in the depths of hell and against whom society needs to raise its arms of extermination as an offering to God.' This was the main topic in sermons. Fathers forbade their children to see Bilbao; thus he suffered abandonment from a good part of his friends. Liberals in politics thought their cause would be ruined if they opened their ranks to anyone who was attacking dogmas: they denied him, they declared him a calamity. Conservatives were sensible excommunicating him from the mother country. The spirits had reached such a high degree of mental estrangement and crazy dementia, that people who passed by in front of Bilbao's windows would do the sign of the cross and then traverse the street (Manuel Bilbao 1866, Vol I, XXIV-XXVI)

Naturally, the accusation fueled a sudden public interest in both Bilbao's piece and the trial, which in turn opened an avalanche of small fractures within the ruling party, forcing some of the most liberal members of the government to resign.

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<sup>25</sup> The incident is narrated in detail by Lastarría (1885, 285-86), who also transcribed the Supreme Court verdict, putting special emphasis on the curious fact that, according to the resolution, Bilbao's article had to be burned by a *verdugo* (an executioner). The reasoning was anchored in an ancient law of the Spanish East India Company. Lastarria also gives the names of the judges who signed the resolution. In a footnote, Jaksic (1994, 57) offers a brief but interesting interpretation of the event.

Defiant, while at the same time trying to capitalize on the sudden public interest in the article, *El Crepúsculo* added a second edition to its first one, which had quickly sold out. And “La Sociabilidad Chilena” was also published separately as a short pamphlet, which raised Bilbao’s status to that of a new star in the firmament of Latin America’s public opinion.

Despite its lack of originality and some evident philosophical inconsistencies, the article catalyzed a political dispute floating latent in the undercurrents of the post-colonial Chilean society. The intellectual fermentation of which the article was the clearest sign had its origins in the social and economic changes led by a reformist liberal and Francophile ascendant urban bourgeoisie. Imbued with British parliamentary ideals, the *pipiolo*s, who favored a federalist type of government, found themselves in blatant opposition to the traditional Chilean, pro-Hispanic, centralizing upper classes –the *pelucones* or big wigs—directly associated with the decaying colonial ranks.

Bilbao, of course, wasn’t alone in his attacks on the Church and what he perceived as the backward nature of Chile’s colonial heritage. Lastarria and many others at *El Crepúsculo* and *El Siglo* had already voiced their criticism of the conservative elites and the Catholic church, denouncing religion as an instrument of despotism, rather than the basis of freedom, civilization and a guarantee of the rights of men (Lipp 1975, 13). Many liberals became also concerned about the censorship role that conservatives wanted to play amidst the strong journalistic, literary and ideological revolution that was taking Chile by storm during those years. But it was Bilbao’s piece, his Quixotic approach to the indictment and the controversy that ensued,

that turned the young man into the main target for conservative anger and indignation. Bilbao, a liberal romantic interested in the works of Rousseau, Lamennais, Quinet and Michelet –he would, later in life, become fervent reader of Bakunin and Marx—was the perfect scapegoat in the eyes of the *pelucones* and the Catholic Church.

The trial was short and intense.<sup>26</sup> Bilbao, who was “a beautiful man of Spartan aspect and words,” undertook his own defense, and one by one addressed the charges with eloquence and sometimes even a little arrogance.<sup>27</sup>

Solomon Lipp has suggested that Bilbao’s profound knowledge of the Bible, and his readings of French philosophical and political writer Lamennais –in particular, *Le Livre du Peuple*—molded the young man’s oratorical style, shaping its declamatory, aphoristic, and argumentative liveliness. According to Lipp, “Bilbao spoke like a man possessed [revealing] startling flashes of imagery which compensated for inconsistencies in content” (Lipp 1975, 19-20). Bilbao’s vehemence is central to this short exchange between the judge, the prosecutor and the young writer, and a clear example of how unapologetic, sarcastic, and tenacious his self-defense was:

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<sup>26</sup> The whole transcript of the trial was published by Francisco’s brother, Manuel. in *Obras completas de Francisco Bilbao*, 1866. (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Buenos Aires).

<sup>27</sup> Aside from Bilbao’s portraits, we base our description of the young writer on an article that Mme. Quinet, wife of French Philosopher Edgar Quinet, Bilbao’s professor at the College de France, published in the Argentine Newspaper *La República*, in commemoration of Bilbao’s death (Bilbao, *Obras completas*, pp 2).

Defendant: "Mr. Prosecutor, all you have done is condemn innovation. For look you at my crime. Now . . . who are you, you who make yourself the echo of the society I have analyzed; you who oppose innovation, hiding behind Spanish laws..."

Judge: "Sir, you are not here to accuse the Prosecutor."

Defendant: "I do not accuse, Your Honor; I merely classify. Philosophy, too, has its code of laws, and that code is eternal. Philosophy has assigned to you the name 'reactionary.' Well then, innovator— that is what I am; reactionary— that is what you are."

Judge: "Come to order. Do not be insulting..."

Defendant: "I do not insult, Your Honor. Let the Prosecutor say what he is. Mr. Prosecutor: do you consider yourself insulted by virtue of my having told you the truth?"

Prosecutor: (smiling): "You are just a ridiculous creature; you are not capable of insulting."

Defendant: "Ignorance always clothes its replies with the sarcasm of impotence." In Solomon Lipp. *Three Chilean Thinkers*, 6-22 (Waterloo, ON, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.1975).

On the afternoon of June 17, 1844, after sedition charges were dropped, the tribunal sentenced Bilbao to six months in prison with the option of paying a fine of 1,200 pesos.<sup>28</sup> The sentence could have meant an immediate victory for the conservative *pelucones*. But in fact, during the ten days of the process, "La Sociabilidad Chilena" had spread like wild fire all over Chile and its neighboring countries, turning Bilbao into a celebrity, a modern romantic martyr and hero, and the first victim of political censorship in post-colonial Chile. The trial had also put the Chilean young republic on the brink of an explosive liberal backlash, due to what was starting to be perceived by the *pipiolos* as a recalcitrant, inflexible and retrograde government. In Santiago and Valparaíso everybody had at least heard of "La Sociabilidad Chilena," and opinions in favor of and against the Catholic Church, the conservative government and its laws were the order of the day. Bilbao was the talk of the town, and the spectacular oratorical display at the courthouses

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<sup>28</sup> The exact amount of the fine is, in fact, subject of debate. Some sources affirm that it only amounted to 600 pesos. In any case, the same sources agree that the fine was unusually high at the time. See Lastarria 1885, Jacksic 1994, Manuel Bilbao 1866.

of Santiago had triggered the mobilization of large crowds of supporters of both bands, who gathered in public to root either for the impetuous prosecutor Mujica, or the brave, heroic and romantic Bilbao. Lastarria argues, though, that few people had clearly understood the young writer's piece. But that didn't prevent anybody from taking sides.

Added to the general agitation, as if the situation hadn't backfired enough on the conservatives, right after the sentence was pronounced a group of Bilbao's followers collected the monies for the fine, paid Bilbao's dues to the tribunal and, amidst joyful celebration, demanded that the prisoner be liberated, and that the judges be handed over to people (Lipp 1975, 18-19).

Feeling cornered by the liberals, the Bulnes administration soon introduced more restrictions in the press law, adding two notorious articles to the code of 1846: Article 5, which stated that "he who attacks or ridicules the official religion of the state, or any of its dogmas" would be subject to a maximum penalty of four years in prison and a fine of 1,000 pesos, and Article 16, which prohibited the public raising of funds to pay for fines imposed as a result of the judicial process (Jaksic 1994, 39).

The disruptions and protests against the government, which escalated in the following years after a notable expansion of the liberal press, became another topic of concern for the administration. In 1845, a few months after Bilbao's trial, the government sued Pedro Godoy's *El Diario de Santiago* for libel, but lost. And the celebrations of Godoy's supporters turned into a series of violent clashes with the

police. The fight lasted for a few hours until a heavy rain finally dispersed the crowds.

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After the trial, exhausted and disappointed in the Chilean political system, young Bilbao retired to Valparaíso, a city he considered more tolerable than backward Santiago. Then, still unhappy in Chile, he undertook a long and self-imposed exile that led him to France in the early stages of the 1848 revolution, and then to Prague, Munich, Vienna and Rome.

In Paris, he studied philosophy at the College de France, and was mentored by Lamennais, Michelet and Quinet. He finally returned to Chile in 1850 to fund the *Sociedad de la Igualdad* (the Society for Equality) with his friend, businessman and traveling companion Santiago Arcos.<sup>29</sup> However, soon after his return, it became apparent that Chile would not welcome him back with open arms. His books and publications were systematically suppressed and attacked by the conservatives, and after being finally excommunicated from the Catholic Church, Bilbao fled first to Perú and later on to Buenos Aires, where he died in January 1865.

The trial against *La Sociabilidad Chilena* became a benchmark in Latin America's history of the press. It polarized the opposition against the conservative government of Manuel Bulnes, opening the way for the liberal sectors, which

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<sup>29</sup> Incidentally, years later Arcos also became Domingo Sarmiento's traveling companion in the United States.

would expand their demands for democracy and freedom of speech, religion, thought and the press. The trial cleared space for a more active and vibrant journalism, which would not only become the government watchdog, but also an agent of education and ideological dissemination in the new republics.

In the years to come, the press in Chile would undergo an extraordinary expansion. Between 1828 –the year when the first comprehensive press law was passed—and 1851, at least 152 newspapers that lasted more than one issue were published in the young republic, the largest number of them during the 1840s, under Bulnes administrations (Jaksic 1994, 35). These papers were conceived, produced and nurtured not only by the local intelligentsia, but also and very especially by a large group of literate immigrants arriving from different corners of the continent, avid to enjoy the freedom of expression and thought they lacked in their respective countries. Paradoxically, many of these immigrants had learned about Chilean freedom of expression thanks to the Bilbao affair.

Years after Francisco's death, his brother Manuel published a letter that Rafael Bilbao, their father, had sent to the young student during those difficult months of 1844. An old-time democrat, member of Congress, and one of the most fervent advocates of religious and press freedom in Chile, Rafael Bilbao set the tone in his letter for what the liberal press movement would accomplish in Chile in the years to come. "It matters not that you may be condemned..." wrote Bilbao to his son. "You are not going to appear as a criminal, but as a man . . . who favors oppressed humanity... If I could only sit by your side... I repeat, calmness and courage. It is the first time that you perform a public act, one of great importance for your father.

Head up, for you have not committed any crime" (Lipp 1975, 15-17).

Bilbao's defense and the public reaction after the trial against "La Sociabilidad Chilena" were the first public acts in support of a liberal Latin American press, the first move towards the affirmation of freedom of speech, and a firm step towards the consolidation of democracy and a free market society in the region. As public acts, they also bore a tremendous impact on the direction, scope and nature of the region's literature and journalism, especially during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Origins of Latin American Nonfiction in the Hands of a Political Exile**

One evening in 1833, Major Mardones, a veteran who had shed Spanish blood in the Argentine war of independence, invited a very unusual guest for dinner. Social life was scarce in the Chilean town of Copiapó, where Mardones had been managing a mining operation since the end of the war. So the former soldier and his wife grew accustomed to entertaining a conspicuous group of expatriates, mostly Argentine miners under Mardones' supervision, almost every evening. After work, the boisterous bunch, sometimes three, sometimes five, oftentimes more, would gather at the Mardones' and hang out by the stove discussing politics and the future of the fatherland for hours on end.

Some 800 kilometers north of thriving Santiago, Copiapó was the capital of the Atacama region. The town, connected to the metropolis by the river of the same

name, was an unlikely vibrant spot of civilization containing no more than a few thousand settlers, tired miners and avid entrepreneurs, in the rainless heart of the Atacama Desert. Mardones and his wife had a tidy, comfortable house in the town of Placilla, not far from the center of Copiapó, and that night, aside from the regulars, their special guest from Santiago made an appearance at dinner.

The visitor, Mr. Codecido, a sybaritic city type from Santiago, was a talkative gentleman. It was therefore no surprise that, after a few drinks, he was immediately engaged in conversation with the locals, monopolizing the gathering with his unending complaints about the inconveniences and hard work of the mine. In the kitchen, he shared the news from Santiago with excitement, and exchanged thoughts and jokes with the other guests, with the exception of a hulking man with a colossal head, sitting alone in the corner. A regular at these gatherings, the fellow sported the miner's standard attire: slippers with woolen outer socks, blue pants and a striped work shirt, a red cap crowning the head, and a ribbed leather belt –the kind that Argentine gauchos were keen on wearing—tied around the waist from which a large bag hung like a pendulating marsupial pouch.

The conversation veered from local and Argentine politics to European current events, history, and finally geography, while Codecido, a full-fledged urbanite, did his best to ignore the man's presence in the room. But at a certain point, when disagreement arose around a few names and facts, the miners turned their heads to the giant, clearly expecting him to set matters straight. And moving toward the center of the kitchen, the colossal head began to dispense a detailed lecture on the topics at hand.

[...] I set them straight, but in such dogmatic terms and with such a wealth of details that Codecido's jaw dropped lower and lower as page after page of information poured forth from the lips of one whom he had taken for a simple miner [...] The reason for his mistake was explained to him, in the midst of general laughter, and from then on I remained in his good graces (Sarmiento 1850, 163-164).<sup>30</sup>

In fact, the mistake had not been such at all, but perhaps something more like a practical joke played on Mr. Codecido. The big man on the corner was no miner, but the 24-year-old foreman, autodidact and teacher Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, who did have an extravagant taste in clothing, and enjoyed playing mind games with strangers. Sarmiento had crossed the Andes fleeing the Argentine government in March 1831, settling first in the port of Valparaíso and then in Copiapó where he would stay until his return to San Juan in 1836.

At the time, the young Argentine was, in the words of historian Tulio Halperín Donghi, "obscure among the obscure" (Halperín Donghi 1994, 20). Destined to become the most prominent figure in Latin American literature until the first decade of the twentieth century, and one of the most influential Argentine politicians of all time, Sarmiento had been denied a formal education due both to the loss of his family's economic position in post-colonial San Juan, and the rise to

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<sup>30</sup> This anecdote is recounted by Sarmiento in his 1850 autobiographical *Recollections of a Provincial Past*. In order to complete the picture, I consulted Sarmiento's correspondence with Manuel Montt, with Félix Frías and finally with his family. Also consulted, was Altamirano and Sarlo's 1994 essay "The Autodidact and the Learning Machine," and Sylvia Molloy's "The Unquiet Self: Mnemonic Strategies in Sarmiento's Autobiographies," in which the author elegantly argues that *Recollections of a Provincial Past* is *the* founding text of the Spanish American autobiographical genre.

power of the federalist caudillo Facundo Quiroga.<sup>31</sup> After being home schooled by his uncle, the priest José de Oro, Sarmiento grew eager to fight the caudillos whom he blamed for the backwardness of Argentina and the hardships he personally had to endure. He was only 16 years old when in 1828 he joined the Unitarianist ranks under the command of Manuel Gregorio Quiroga, governor of San Juan, at whose orders he fought in the battles of Niviquil and Pilar. After the last battle, a Unitarianist defeat sent him under a house arrest for five months. Soon thereafter, he went into his first exile in republican Chile –first in Valparaíso and later on in the town of Copiapó to work in the silver mines.

But that momentary defeat was only the beginning of Sarmiento's story. In fact, his journalism and literature would flourish under Chile's blooming democracy. And a combination of passion, determination, talent and shameless self-promotion would soon catapult the young man into a stellar career in multiple fields—a career that, thanks to Sarmiento's genius, would revolutionize Latin America's culture, reuniting journalism, politics and literature in one common path, once and for all.

### **Hyperbole and the Development of a Political Agenda**

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<sup>31</sup> In 1823, young Sarmiento lost his first opportunity to receive a state scholarship to go to Buenos Aires and study at the prestigious School of Moral Science. After leaving to San Luis in 1825, to undertake a regimented schooling under his uncle, the federalist priest José de Oro, in 1827 Sarmiento received the good news that San Juan's liberal governor had finally agreed to concede him the scholarship to study in Buenos Aires. But the very same day he returned to his hometown, the government was deposed by caudillo Facundo Quiroga, and his scholarship denied.

Sarmiento believed that Latin America's only possible answer to underdevelopment and poverty was education. Since his early days as a teacher in San Juan, he was a fierce advocate of public schools, which he considered the only path to modernity. Sarmiento was convinced that education for the masses was possible even in the poorest nations, but it could be achieved only within the context of a firmly established democratic system. He therefore aimed most of his political, journalistic and literary efforts to that end, writing extensively and brilliantly about the evils of totalitarianism and the rule of caudillos, charismatic political strongmen whose power typically rested on force and land ownership. In pursuit of public education Sarmiento not only fought the caudillos in Argentina, but also turned his own life into a mythical-literary example, and the living proof that success was possible, if the path was that of perseverance, self-sacrifice and abnegation.

In his 1850 memoir, definitely hyperbolic, Sarmiento showed on the one hand the trials and tribulations of a young intellectual struggling to overcome adversity. But on a deeper level, the book was a powerful literary-political instrument devised by a brilliant newspaperman in order to place a success story on the public agenda before running for president in 1868. *Recollections of a Provincial Past* shows how Sarmiento as a writer and a politician masterfully used literature and journalism in order to achieve his electoral goals and his political objectives in the longer run. But the book also serves as a perfect introduction to some of the rhetorical devices Sarmiento put to use in order to integrate facts and literature – devices that would soon become a trademark of Latin American literary journalism as a genre.

Sarmiento never wrote a single line, not literary, not in a news article, nor even in a letter, without a political purpose. That understanding colors the reading of some passages of *Recollections* in which he describes how he taught himself French and English.

I got the idea of learning it with a Frenchman, a soldier of Napoleon, who did not know Spanish or understand the grammar of his own language. But my greed had been aroused by the sight of a French library belonging to Don José Ignacio de la Rosa, and with a borrowed dictionary and grammar, after one month and eleven days of having begun my solitary study, I had translated twelve volumes, among them the *Mémoires* of Josephine (Sarmiento 1850, 168).

By narrating how during those five months of house arrest after the battle of Pilar, by the candlelight, with the only company of a French dictionary and a borrowed grammar he devoted his hours to the higher goal of learning the language of Rousseau, Sarmiento was creating one of the most enduring myths of self accomplishment in the history of Latin American literature, while crafting at the same time an extremely powerful ideological instrument, one that would become central throughout his entire political career.

Just as in the anecdote about Copiapó, here Sarmiento has clearly manipulated the scene in order to show his readers how, through self-sacrifice and education, a final reward can be achieved. In Copiapó, education and the articulate well-timed expression of knowledge helped Sarmiento make the transition from the peripheral kitchen corner to the center of the scene; from being the object of cold indifference to becoming the center of respectful consideration from a complete

stranger (Altamirano and Sarlo 1994, 167).<sup>32</sup> The rewards of his solitary study would soon multiply, together with the increasing satisfactions offered by knowledge.

In 1833 I was a clerk in a firm in Valparaíso at a salary of one onza per month, and of this I spent half on my English teacher Richard and two reales a week on the night watchman of the barrio to wake me up at two in the morning to study my English. On Saturdays, I stayed up all night to make of them a single piece with Sunday, and after a month and a half of lessons, Richard told me that all I had left to learn was pronunciation, which to this day I still have not been able to master. I went to Copiapó, and as an unworthy foreman of [the mine called] La Colorada, which hid so much silver bullion from my eyes, I translated the whole sixty novels by Walter Scott at a rate of one volume a day, and many other works that I owed to the solicitousness of Md. Edward Abbott. Many people in Copiapó will remember the miner who was always reading... (Sarmiento 1850, 163).

In Chile, where he spent a substantial part of his life, Sarmiento was nicknamed “Señor YO” (Mr. ME). And in Argentina he soon became famous for his megalomaniac outbursts and tendencies. This caricature of him, barbed wire roll in hand, walking over the Argentine Constitution on telegraph wires – Sarmiento brought both technical advancements from the United States to Argentina and Chile— was published on October 12, 1873, during the final years of his presidency in *El Mosquito* (Year XI, Number 562). The illustration gives an idea of how Sarmiento was perceived by the public in those days. The epigraph of the image read: “Imbeciles! As if the President couldn’t be everywhere!... / The Constitution! Without the

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<sup>32</sup> In their thorough study of this anecdote, Altamirano and Sarlo speculate that Sarmiento accommodates the narration to fit the mythical structure of the “change of fortune.” In this episode, Sarmiento dresses as a miner in part because of his extravagant taste in clothig, and in part for comfort’s sake. “A visitor takes him for a miner, but in a twist of the conversation, Sarmiento reveals a level of culture and language inappropriate to his (apparent) social condition [...] in order to postpone and consequently increase the pleasure of the eventual recognition, the man does not intervene in a conversation that had already covered several topics” (Altamirano and Sarlo 1994, 166).

President, without *ME*, what is it?/ And I, the President, what do I need it for?"



In that vein, it is hard to believe that the readers of *Recollections of a Provincial Past*, which had been published 23 years before this caricature, in 1850, would have thought that Sarmiento's anecdote wasn't overblown, and his linguistic learning curve a little bit too steep.

These anecdotes, however, do show a very frequent *topos* in Sarmiento's narrative: the transition from poverty to riches, from barbarism to civilization, from ignorance to enlightenment thanks to the painstaking efforts invested in education –which is usually pursued during the dark hours. Persistence and dedication to study paid off, on the one hand, in the joyful success of granting Sarmiento access to culture: after learning English, he was able to read *sixty novels* in English. But it also led to

the satisfaction of granting that access to others too, by translating at a rate of *one volume a day* –a clearly hyperbolic figure—these same works. As a symbolic plus, Sarmiento also gained the recognition of Copiapó's settlers, who praised the miner who spent his days reading.

The transition from darkness into light, from painstaking dedication to success, from barbarism to civilization, is a central structuring element in Sarmiento's nonfiction. This transition is also presented as the result of a personal or a collective investment, aimed towards self-improvement and self-development. Sarmiento usually describes the passage from one state to the other with overblown exaggeration, as if he meant to demonstrate in sharp contrasts the differences between a *before* and an *after*.

Altamirano and Sarlo have suggested that the mythological aspect of these success stories is confirmed by the fact that, in reality, "Sarmiento does not speak English [and] he probably speaks French with serious difficulty [...] yet he talks about learning these languages as if he had reached all his objectives" (Altamirano and Sarlo 1994, 162). In fact, Sarmiento resorts to these narratives once and again, and such is the power of these myths that it would make little sense to consider them as a purely rhetorical device or circumscribe them to their immediate narrative function.

In fact, these anecdotes and their underlying structuring myths go far beyond that. They do more than just create Sarmiento's literary persona and present to the public his aggrandized sense of self-worth; they actually delineate the political

direction pursued by Sarmiento as a statesman.

Like most Latin American intellectuals of his time, Sarmiento believed that progress –upward social mobility, but also and especially a radical, positive and desirable social conversion to European and American social models—could be achieved only through public education and democracy. This direction, akin to Sarmiento’s most profound philosophical ideas and his notions of civilization and progress, was deeply imbued in his literary journalism. But since in his vision, ideas and action were inseparable, and as a good romantic he was also a man of action, Sarmiento intently aimed each one of his literary and journalistic efforts toward the realization of this political cause. In that vein, his articles and literary journalism can and should be read as a theoretical cornerstone, a means for the author to achieve his political objectives, and as the definitive road map for his political career.

Considered in this context, the mechanisms of hyperbole and exaggeration in Sarmiento’s factual narratives –either literary or journalistic—should be interpreted not as the violation of a factuality agreement between a journalist and his readers, but as the realization of a contract of a different order. Personal, social, political and cultural *progress* –in that order—were Sarmiento’s programmatic goals and the underlying motivations for both his journalism and literature. In that vein, truth for Sarmiento was secondary to the realization of his political goals.

None of the contemporary reviews or critiques of *Recollections* or the earlier *Facundo* delved into questioning Sarmiento’s factuality, objectivity or accuracy in regards to these structuring myths, which suggests that his readers were probably attuned to,

and comfortable with this particular reading contract or the ideas associated with it. Truthfulness, in this scenario, was of secondary importance, and the lack thereof did not necessarily undermine the straightforward expression of the political messages, which were clearly, to both author and reader, the central element of Sarmiento's narratives.

If sacrifice led to knowledge and knowledge to personal and social progress, the effort was probably worth making. And surely enough, Sarmiento, who had already walked the walk, was someone worthy to be followed despite all his self-promotional stunts.

Exaggeration and hyperbole, therefore, should be understood not only as a purely narrative device, but also and more importantly as a mechanism that connects Sarmiento's nonfiction with its extra-literary goals. A seasoned publicist, Sarmiento knew that aspiration drives action. And, in that vein, hyperbolic statements prepared the reader and the general public to understand the advantages of his political program, favoring the proposed transitions between the world of written ideas and the political realm of action.

Sarmiento was probably the first Latin American intellectual to clearly understand to what degree nonfiction narratives and journalism in its multiple forms would function to become the most efficient ways to seduce the young, avid and growing public sphere with an array of new and exciting political ideas. But Sarmiento's public takeoff would have to wait a few more years, until his second exile in Chile in the early 1840s.

### **The Political Role of Caudillos in Post-Colonial Latin America**

In 1835, after four years in exile, for his part in the Unitarianist rebellion, Sarmiento fell seriously ill with typhoid fever. Still in Copiapó he managed to obtain special permission, issued by Federalist strongman Nazario Benavídez, to return to the homeland. Benavídez, *el caudillo manso* (the *serene caudillo*), had always tried to maintain a reputation for fairness and benevolence in his province. And although Sarmiento was an old political enemy, the caudillo saw no harm in consenting to his return for what was expected to be a long convalescence.

Sarmiento was back home in 1836. He worked as a schoolteacher and remained in the shadows for months, increasing his political activities only at the slow pace of his physical recovery. On July 9, 1839, his health and his visibility almost totally regained, he inaugurated the Santa Rosa School for Girls. And on July 20, with his friend and political ally Manuel Quiroga Rosas, he co-founded *El Zonda*, the first weekly newspaper in San Juan, starting a ferocious campaign against the local government and the national Federalist caudillos (Garrels 2005, xvii-lxxxiii).

In order to understand Sarmiento's animosity towards these provincial strongmen, and the real influence of caudillos in post-colonial Latin America, it is necessary to briefly go back to the end of the Spanish rule, and review the process through which Latin American nations gained their independence.

Since the early years of the colonies, all commercial and social activities in the Spanish viceroyalties were dependent on urban networks formed along the routes to the mining centers of Alto Perú and México. These economic networks generated much of the social infrastructure upon which Latin American cities were later established.

With independence wars starting in Venezuela in 1809 and Argentina and Mexico in 1810, the colonial centers and their cities became separate entities. Mining ceased to be the main economic activity and the whole political and bureaucratic structure inherited from the motherland soon began to obsolesce and implode (Cortés Conde 1994, 115-117).

Amidst a prolonged campaign against Spain, and without the backing of silver wealth, Latin American central governments began to lose control over long stretches of former colonial territories, and had to resort to a system of regional strongmen, the caudillos, in order to fight back. These caudillos had access to arms and horses on account of their own personal wealth and charisma, and functioning as regional commanders they sealed the Spanish defeat.

But the war had so drastically depleted the resources of central administrations that the young republican governments found their authority reduced to a nominal shadow, with little or no power to collect taxes or pass law, much less to enforce it. At the same time it became clear that the caudillos still held the real military power in the provinces, and were proving reluctant to lay down their arms and leave the authority they felt they had earned in battle in the hands of small

groups of urban intellectuals.

Organizing politically, many of these caudillos aimed to maintain their provincial autonomy under the guise of an allegedly federative political system (Losada 1983, 131-140). In the Río de la Plata, antagonism between the provincial caudillos and an urban central government soon led into a bloody civil war that lasted more than 30 years.

The two political factions disputing the national government in the Southern Cone were the Unitarianists, a Francophile group to which most intellectual, urban types adhered, and the Federal caudillos, described by many historians as bands of gauchos united in their disdain for urban centers, European culture and letters (González Echevarría 2003, 1-15).

Sarmiento, who had been born in 1811, just one year after Argentina formed its first national government, witnessed the rise to power of these regional leaders during the independence war, and had developed a personal animosity against many of them, particularly Facundo Quiroga, the leading caudillo in the North western provinces, and Juan Manuel de Rosas, the most powerful rancher in Buenos Aires.

Both Sarmiento and his friend Manuel Quiroga Rosas had pledged allegiance to the Unitarianists, and had also adhered to the May Association, a clandestine group founded by lawyer and constitutionalist Juan Bautista Alberdi to spread republican ideas in South America. Using their newspaper *El Zonda*, Sarmiento and Quiroga

Rosas set in motion a vigorous ideological crusade against not only the regional federalist government, but also Rosas' powerful central administration.

Rosas was a wealthy rancher and businessman who had started his career as the owner of a meat-salting plant in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. After the war with Spain he had garnered enough political and military power to become the governor of his province and on March 7, 1835, he was granted the *suma del poder público* (*the sum of all public powers*). By virtue of this title Rosas controlled the three branches of the Argentine government and the foreign relations of the Confederation, functioning in practice as a for-life head of state until he was deposed on February 3, 1852 (Katra 1996, 144-234).

The press played a central role in the activities of the May Association against Rosas' profoundly anti-intellectual regime. While directing its efforts towards the organization of an armed resistance to depose the caudillo, Alberdi and his followers found it necessary to reach out to the public in order to disseminate republican ideas. To this end they wrote for newspapers wherever they went. And, as William Katra has noted, "this was not only their preferred means of earning a living, it was also a most effective weapon for carrying their struggle" (Katra 1996, 68).

The activities of the Association involved not only the publication of republican editorials, but also the translation and publication in the popular press of the most important European theorists of social romanticism: Saint Simon, Leroux and Lamennais.

[José] Mármol, [Luis] Domínguez and [José] Rivera Indarte [three of the youngest members of the Association] were the principal names associated with several short-lived newspapers from among the young generation. Three of these newspapers –*El grito argentino* (The Argentine Shout), *¡Muera Rosas!* (Death to Rosas!), and *El puñal* (The Dagger)—had the specific goal of disseminating a highly politicized, negative image of Rosas. Later *El Talismán* (The Talisman) and *El Tiroteo* (Gunshot), directed by [Juan María] Gutiérrez and Rivera Indarte; *La nueva era* (The New Era), under the direction of Andrés Lamas and Alberdi's *El Corsario* (The Privateer) would join the list of progressive publications. After the demise of most these publications, Florencio Varela's *El comercio del Plata* (Commerce of the River Plate), founded in 1845, would become the region's most praised organ for disseminating democratic thought [...] In the provinces the impact of the young militants' journalistic activities was also substantial. In San Juan, Quiroga Rosas and Sarmiento published several issues of *El Zonda* (Zonda) during 1839 (Katra 1996, 68-69).

Although short lived –*El Zonda* lasted only six issues until August 25 1839—the newspaper was instrumental in Sarmiento's ideological battle against the caudillos. But, as expected, the federalist governor of San Juan soon shut it down, and in 1840 imprisoned Sarmiento under the charge of conspiracy. By November, barely surviving an attempted lynching by a federalist mob, the writer fled to his second and most productive exile in Chile, where together with his colleague Quiroga Rosas he continued his battle against the powerful governor of Buenos Aires from the pages of *El Mercurio* and *La Revista de Valparaíso*.<sup>33</sup>

Sarmiento's exile in Chile was not an isolated incident. During Rosas' tenure in

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<sup>33</sup> “On the night of November 17, at two o'clock in the morning, a group on horseback came to a stop in front of the prison, shouting: ‘Death to the Unitarian savages!’ So unmotivated was this manifestation, so cold and composed was that cry that issued from the mouths of those who pronounced it, that it was clear it was a calculated, concerted, and passionless act” (Sarmiento 1850, 181) Sarmiento's escape from the mob, which inspired one of the most powerful literary pieces of the period, Esteban Echeverría's *El Matadero*, can also be found at the end of *Chapter 16* of Sarmiento's *Recollection of a Provincial Past*.

Argentina, which was contemporary with the ruling of other powerful caudillos in Central and South America, a large number of dissident republican intellectuals found themselves heading over the Andes to become part of the openness of Chile's young democracy, and to spread their ideas through the vehicle provided by its free press.

Regrouping in Chile, writers like Sarmiento, Vicente Fidel López and Juan Bautista Alberdi from Argentina, Juan García del Río from Colombia and Andrés Bello from Venezuela (the latter had accompanied Alexander von Humboldt during part of his Latin American expedition and was considered at the time to be the best educated man in Latin America) continued to project their influence across the Andes, stimulating the development of a lively public sphere in Santiago and Valparaíso that would soon spread to the rest of Latin America.

In the 1845 introduction to *Facundo*, in a passage that would reappear in the fourth edition of the book in 1872, Sarmiento eloquently praised the Chilean press for having offered a home to all those republican exiles, and for providing them with a fundamental perspective to understand the state of affairs of their own countries:

From Chile, there is nothing we can give *to those who persevere* in the struggle [...] Nothing, except for ideas, except for consolation, except for encouragement; no weapon is ours to bring to those combatants beyond the one that the *free press* of Chile provides to all free men. The press! The press! Behold, tyrant, the enemy you suffocated among us. Behold the golden fleeces we try to win. Behold how the presses of France, England, Brazil, Montevideo, Chile and Corrientes will disturb your slumber, amid your victims' sepulchral silence; behold how you have been compelled to steal the gift of language in order to excuse your evil, a gift given only to promote good. Behold how you stoop to justify yourself, and how you go among all

the peoples of Europe and America begging for a venal, fratricidal pen to defend, through the press, the one who put it in chains! Why don't you permit in your homeland the discussion you maintain with all other peoples? For what were so many thousands of victims sacrificed by the dagger? What were so many battles for if, in the end, you had to decide on a peaceful discussion in the press? (Sarmiento 2003, 36-37)

### **The Uses of Journalism: Sarmiento's Second Exile in Chile**

Back in Chile in 1840, Sarmiento found himself completely devoted to his journalism. The first article he published, on February 11, 1841, was an anonymous first-person piece written in the voice of a fictitious man, an aging veteran of the battle of Chacabuco. *12 de Febrero de 1817* –February 12, 1817, such its title—was published by Chile's then only daily newspaper, *El Mercurio de Valparaíso*, four days before Sarmiento's thirtieth birthday (Garrels 2005, Lvi). In *Recollections of a Provincial Past*, the author described how emotionally groundbreaking the experience was:

Those who have received a systematic education, attended classes, taken examinations, felt empowered by the acquisition of diplomas, are incapable of appreciating the emotions of novelty, of terror, of hope, and of fear that assailed me when I launched my first article in the Chilean press. If I had asked myself at the time whether I knew anything about politics, economics, or criticism, I would have answered frankly, 'No,' and like the lone traveler approaching a big city who sees only the domes, roofs, and towers of the lofty buildings, I did not see a public before me, but only names, like Bello, Oro, Olañeta, and schools, chambers, courts, and other such centers of knowledge and opinion (Sarmiento 1850, 186-87).

The article caused quite a commotion in Santiago. Before Sarmiento became a staff writer at *El Mercurio*, the paper had usually reproduced pieces on science, literature, art, history, and politics taken from American and European newspapers, and

would only sporadically publish political columns by young Chilean authors. But Sarmiento's piece changed the editorial line of the paper so drastically that historian José Peláez y Tapia compared it to a "long, vibrant trumpet call to battle, aggressive and rumbling like a cannon."<sup>34</sup>

"Whether or not the *Mercurio de Valparaíso* was edited by Argentine quills or rocking along in pleasant apathy, one thing was certain [...] Sarmiento brought new life and vitality to the paper, and impetus to the nascent national literature," proposed Margaret Campbell in her 1962 study of the Chilean press (Campbell 1962, 551).

In fact, Sarmiento's writing talent and literary genius were extremely well received in Santiago. The public, accustomed to the sober style that Venezuelan Andrés Bello had popularized in Chile, applauded Sarmiento and received his journalism like a breeze of fresh air. So swift was his rise to popularity that he was immediately offered a staff position at *El Mercurio*. Not long after, Sarmiento was also approached both by the liberal pipiolos, to work for the presidential campaign of their candidate, and by their political enemies, the pelucones, to support the candidacy of Manuel Bulnes.

Curiously, Sarmiento, who openly identified with the liberal opposition to Rosas in Argentina, turned down the offer from the Chilean liberals and began to collaborate with the pelucones, co-editing with Miguel de la Barra the conservative *Tribuna Nacional*. This publication ran only nine issues, until July 7, 1841, but was

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<sup>34</sup> José Peláez y Tapia, *Historia de "El Mercurio."* Un siglo de periodismo chileno (Santiago, Chile: Talleres de "El Mercurio," 1927) 88.

instrumental in the projection of Bulnes to the presidency. In those days, Sarmiento worked closely with the head of the conservative party, future Chilean president Manuel Montt, who became his long lasting friend and ally, and was instrumental to Sarmiento's permanence in Chile despite Rosas several requests for his extradition.

Very few people in nineteenth century Latin America were more aware than Sarmiento of the power of the press as a medium for social, cultural and political change (Kirkpatrick and Masiello 1994, 11). Working as an editor, the Argentine always undertook the responsibility of building a readership that could fully support his publications. That's why at *El Mercurio* he devoted so much time and attention to understanding the mechanisms through which a publication could become popular, while at the same time still realizing the pedagogical and political roles that were its missions in the context of a young democracy.

Sarmiento and his colleagues at the May Association –most of them also living in exile—all believed in a press whose main social function was to promote freedom and public education, a press that was also responsible for calling for political changes in the direction of an open society. But Sarmiento wasn't naïve. He was also aware that, especially in young democracies, the press needed its limits in order not to become a politically destabilizing force. In many of his articles at *El Mercurio* he discussed the role of the government when confronted with particularly belligerent papers such as *La Guerra a la Tiranía*, which routinely engaged in slanderous attacks on political leaders of opposing views (Jaksic 1994,

43).<sup>35</sup>

On September 10, 1842, having garnered enough experience as an editor at *El Mercurio*, Sarmiento founded the first daily newspaper in Santiago, *El Progreso*, which would publish nine hundred numbers during its three years of life. The paper, owned by the powerful Vial family, soon became a laboratory for Sarmiento's ideas and a platform for his best works of nonfiction. As a *redactor*, or principal staff writer, the Argentine enjoyed enough freedom to experiment with supplements, new sections and columns, while he focused on expanding the paper's readership and its political clout. But Sarmiento also used *El Progreso* to consolidate his public persona, both as the brilliant writer and the extraordinary politician he was.

Newspaper subscriptions were particularly weak in Chile. Until 1842, *El Mercurio* – published in Valparaíso—was the sole national daily, with only 18 subscribers in Santiago, a city of 60,000. Sarmiento knew these numbers made any publication in Chile basically unsustainable. And, in an article in *El Progreso* on November 26, 1842 comparing Santiago to other Latin American cities, he argued that, in order to cover printing costs alone, a newspaper in Chile needed at least two hundred subscribers. In this same article, Sarmiento also complained about the lack of support Chileans offered to their own press. As quoted by Adolfo Prieto, Sarmiento said:

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<sup>35</sup> See for instance “Un jurado de imprenta,” *El Mercurio*, March 16, 1841, and “Cosas de estudiantes,” *El Mercurio*, April 3, 1841, included in *Obras Completas*, 1:17-19; and “Libertad de Imprenta,” *El Mercurio*, March 8, 1841, in *Obras Completas*, 9:55-59.

There are in Buenos Aires, and there have been for the past twenty years, two and three thousand subscribers to the different papers. In Montevideo the figure stands above a thousand for the Spanish, French, English, and Italian papers; even in Lima, *El Comercio* has more than eight hundred; and in Santiago we cannot secure enough subscribers to support a fledgling publication whose length, interest and importance always stand in relationship to the number of subscribers (*El Progreso*, no. 15, November 26, 1842. In Prieto 1994, 270)

After five months of work, however, Sarmiento's efforts were modestly rewarded. By February 1843 the newspaper had garnered more than one hundred subscribers. We know this thanks to a curious editorial note in which the publishers at *El Progreso* apologized to their readers for the distribution problems of the previous evening. The piece, quoted again by Adolfo Prieto, said that "more than one hundred subscribers, that is to say, nearly all of them, [had] failed to receive their papers" because two of the distributors decided to kill some time in a tavern, neglecting their obligations after one drink too many. The article proceeded to argue half jokingly that there was no way to keep those in charge of distribution from "killing time where time is exchanged for liquor" (*El Progreso*, no. 127, April 10, 1843. In Prieto 1994, 265, 270).

But subscriptions at *El Progreso* continued to stall. And although by 1843 the readership wasn't still generating enough revenue to fully cover printing costs, and it had also become apparent that the paper would never reach the self-sustainability for which its publishers had aimed, vital government support through the printing of official announcements infused new life into the project, while the connections with the government proved vital for Sarmiento's personal agenda.

During his years at *El Progreso*, Sarmiento became extremely knowledgeable in at least three aspects of publicity: First, thanks to his role in the printing business, he had developed extensive experience as a newspaperman. He knew that the press couldn't survive without subscribers, and Chileans –or Latin Americans in general, for that matter—wouldn't buy their papers as a pure act of patriotism. Therefore, Sarmiento began experimenting with different forms of entertainment, publishing feuilletons, articles on theatre, fashion, gossip and humorous columns. As Ivan Jaksic has noted, the *folletines* were Sarmiento's most legitimate vehicles for capturing the public interest in a context where, due to the lack of resources –few libraries, and no book stores—the reading public resorted to the press as its main source of information and education (Jaksic 1994, 44).

Second, due to his frequent contacts with the government, Sarmiento was able to test-drive in Chile some of his ideas on cultural and educative policy. In 1842, for instance, he invested all his efforts into a linguistic reform of the Castilian language, which was finally adopted by the Chilean Academy and some newspapers in Chile, Perú and Argentina. Success in this crusade, however, came at the high cost of exposing him to slanderous attacks from opposing intellectuals and politicians.

In those years, thanks to his closeness to minister Manuel Montt, Sarmiento could also pursue his ideological attrition warfare against Rosas in Argentina without risking the possibility of being extradited. For despite a constant diplomatic request from Rosas' delegates in Chile, the Chilean authorities systematically

denied Sarmiento's repatriation, causing a strain on the trans-Andean relations.<sup>36</sup>

Sarmiento would later say in his memoirs that in America, great personalities not only built their own destinies, but also and more importantly the theater for their actions. And in a way, his battles for public education and against the tyranny of caudillos were certainly preparing the theater for Sarmiento's own work (Altamirano and Sarlo 1994, 164).

Finally, as the extraordinary writer he was, undoubtedly the best and most prolific of his generation, Sarmiento used his years at *El Progreso* to develop his own literary persona, consolidating all of the aspects of his political, journalistic and pedagogical aspirations in one single node. On May 2, 1845, at a time when he was already considered one of the most influential intellectuals, pedagogues and writers in Latin America, the Argentine started publishing his masterpiece *Facundo* in a series of installments at the *folletín* section of *El Progreso*.<sup>37</sup> A work of the most unorthodox nonfiction, *Facundo* is the first major piece in the convoluted puzzle of Latin American literature, and has been plausibly described as "the most important book written by a Latin American in any discipline or genre."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In April 1845, Rosas sent an emissary, Baldomero García, to Santiago in order to persuade the government of Manuel Bulnes to control the Argentine agitation against his government in the Chilean press. Andrés Bello, who was an official in the Foreign Relations ministry, indicated in *El Araucano* that the government had no authority to dictate what the press did (Jaksic 1994, 47).

<sup>37</sup> The exact name of the book was: *Civilization and Barbarism. Life of Juan Facundo Quiroga and physical aspect, customs and habits of the Argentine Republic.*

<sup>38</sup> Roberto González Echevarría, "Facundo: An Introduction." In Domingo Sarmiento. *Facundo. Civilization and Barbarism.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. 1-15).

*Facundo* is, in principle, a journalistic biography of caudillo Facundo Quiroga, a strongman who ruled in the Argentine North West since 1820 until his assassination in 1835. But, of course, there are a large number of caveats to this affirmation. Unlike traditional biographies, the book begins with a taxonomical description of the pampas and its social types, followed by the actual biographical section, and a few final chapters that delve into the parallels between Quiroga's rule in La Rioja and Juan Manuel de Rosas' tyranny over the Argentine Confederation. *Facundo* doesn't necessarily follow a strict chronological order, but actually interlaces a flow of anecdotes, colorful descriptions and vignettes, generally followed by Sarmiento's attempts to make sense of them through some philosophical concepts derived from French romanticism, and pseudo-sociological analyses grounded on the phrenological studies of Franz Joseph Gall's.

After appearing as a *folletín*, by the end of July 1845 with two new chapters added, *Facundo* was published as a hardcover at the printing press of *El Progreso*. The success was immediate. The book received glowing reviews all over Latin America and Europe, and turned Sarmiento into a literary celebrity. And while his new status brought the writer an avalanche of public recognition, it also made his situation as a guest of the Chilean government –already under extreme pressure from Juan Manuel de Rosas—much more uncomfortable.

### **Books and Enlightenment in the Land of the Ranchers**

To say that for Sarmiento a book could make a man's fortune is not only figurative. It is, in fact, an accurate description of how Sarmiento felt about European culture (Altamirano and Sarlo 1994, 163).

In *Ambas Américas (Both Americas)*, a magazine that he published for four numbers in 1867 while posted in Washington as a plenipotentiary minister of the Argentine government in the United States, Sarmiento expressed his conviction that culture and writing could have a handsome payback, even at a pecuniary level.

We don't know, in fact, if there are men in the Argentine Republic that have garnered the fat of the land, fortune, glory, status and power, without having opened a book in their lives, or without even being able to read. We do know that Walter Scott paid his debts with his novels, that Victor Hugo is rich thanks to his own, and that Dumas would be a millionaire, had he not been so profligate (Sarmiento 1867, 96).<sup>39</sup>

Sarmiento had only anecdotal knowledge of the extent to which the powerful ranchers in the Argentine countryside were detached from the European enlightenment, its literature, philosophy, customs and morals. But today we have a much clearer sense of how disconnected the upper rural classes in young Latin America were from European modernity, at least until the late 1870s. This gap was accurately described by the study of more than 800 ranch inventories undertaken by Juan Carlos Garavaglia.

Garavaglia found that, with rare exceptions, the norm was the quasi-total absence of books in rural homes. In fact, in more than 800 inventories of ranches and small

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<sup>39</sup> All translations of *Ambas Américas* are mine.

farms analyzed from the period between 1750-1850, only few accounted for books, mostly religious (Garavaglia 2007, 144-45).<sup>40</sup>

If this was the case with the ranchers, who constituted the more educated echelons of rural Latin America, one can only imagine how little exposure to modernity there was among the lower social strata.

Garavaglia has also explained that most European ideas reaching the countryside in the early days of the Latin American republics were spread by readings at bars and pulperías. These small stores were the center of rural social life, and also where most provisions, including alcohol, were sold. The local middle and lower classes would hang out in these pulperías to learn about current events, have a drink, talk politics, play cards, domino or craps, play guitar, bet in cock fights and sometimes engage in riskier activities like dueling. By the mid-1800s, Buenos Aires and its periphery counted with more than 400 pulperías, while the illiteracy rate both in Argentina and Chile was still high (Garavaglia 2007, 132).<sup>41</sup>

Sarmiento thought that one of the central reasons for what he identified as *backwardness* and *barbarism* –two concepts he fully developed in his *Facundo* and were reutilized afterwards by many of his followers—was the Spanish heritage.

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<sup>40</sup> All translations from Garavaglia's are mine.

<sup>41</sup> In the 1840s, less than 17% of the population in Chile was literate (Jaksic 1994, 41). In Argentina, after the scholar census of 1884, which was prepared right before the parliamentary debate on the Ley the Educación Común (the Law for Common Education), there was a population of 497,947 school-age children, of whom only 145,660, or 29%, attended classes. The illiteracy rate was up to 40% (Bustamante 1989, 212).

As a newcomer in Chile, the Argentine had decided to stay away from the heated debate around “La Sociabilidad Chilena,” and had in fact assumed a neutral position vis-à-vis Bilbao’s article. However, by the time he published *Facundo* in 1845, and later on in his writings from the United States, it became clear that Sarmiento had agreed with Bilbao all along. The political and cultural systems of the former colonies and their anachronistic totalitarian governments were, according to Sarmiento, deeply rooted in the customs that Latin American societies had acquired during the Spanish rule, undoubtedly influenced by the Catholic Church.

Years later, Sarmiento expressed these ideas very clearly in the first issue of *Ambas Américas*:

With the books written in Castilian [the Spanish language] currently in circulation in South America, no nation can be civilized; those books that, from Spain’s past literature, have been passed on to us, have been the result of a spiritual development in a direction contrary to the one in which we are moving in current times, and nothing except for the formation of our language could concern us about those books today (Sarmiento 1867, 63).

The need to separate Latin America from its Spanish heritage became even more urgent for Sarmiento following his first trip to Europe and the United States, particularly after witnessing the vitality and scope of the American publishing industry in 1847.

### **Facundo: a Parrot and a Cannon as Passports into the World**

Books and newspapers were powerful ideological tools, and Sarmiento knew how to use them. *Facundo* had been mainly conceived as means to challenge the government of Rosas in Buenos Aires and it certainly did.

But as a literary work *Facundo* also positioned Sarmiento among the most respected writers in Hispanic America. And while delivering the author's ideas about progress and modernity, it also presented before the reading public a clear political platform that would soon put Sarmiento on his way to the presidency of Argentina, connecting him with the most relevant intellectual and political figures in Chile, Europe and the United States.

*Facundo* was the realization of Sarmiento's literary, political and editorial dreams all at once. As a feuilleton, the book was widely read and extensively reviewed, and had a tremendous impact on *El Progreso's* sales, prestige and political clout. It was thanks to Sarmiento that *El Progreso* started to incorporate serialized novels into its pages, and in the words of French critic Paul Verdevoye, it was the Argentine who "inoculated" the Chilean –we could very well say the Latin American—press with the "virus of the 'feuilleton'" (Verdevoye 1963, 268). In fact, the melodramatic style of *Facundo* probably owes to Sarmiento's readings of Eugene Sue's *Les Mysteres de Paris*

and his desire to introduce the aesthetics of romanticism in Chile and Latin America.<sup>42</sup>

The conflation of fiction and history, of ideas and stories that Sarmiento brilliantly weaved into his masterpiece, empowered not only the author's own status as a savvy newspaperman and extraordinary writer, but also as an intellectual who had succeeded at developing a completely new literary genre, and a writer skillful enough to push his political program to the top of the public agenda.

*Facundo* gave birth to a purely Latin American literature, with a writing style anchored in reality, evocative, allegorical and militantly political all at once. His description of the city of Córdoba may suffice for now to show some of these aspects in his writing:

Córdoba was—I shall not say the most coquettish of American cities, because that would offend its Spanish gravity, but certainly one of the prettiest cities of the continent. Situated in a hollow formed by an elevated terrain called Los Altos, it has been forced to fold back over itself, to crowd and push together its symmetrical buildings. The sky is very pure, the winter, dry and tonic, the summer, hot and stormy. On the eastern side, it has a beautiful promenade of capricious shapes, suddenly magical to the eye. It consists of a pool of water squared in by a broad walkway, shaded by colossal, ancient willows. Each side is a block long, enclosed by wrought-iron grating with enormous doors in the centers of the four sides, so that the promenade is an enchanted prison within which one circles, always around a gorgeous pavilion with Greek architecture. In the main plaza is the magnificent Gothic cathedral, with its enormous cupola carved into arabesques, the only example I know of in South America of medieval architecture [...] This learned city to this day has not had

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<sup>42</sup> As Elizabeth Garrels has noted, however, Sarmiento considerably altered the rules of the feuilleton, sometimes translating and publishing in that format, texts that had not been conceived as serialized novels but as complete books (Garrels 1988, 425, 436).

a public theater, has known no opera, still has no daily newspapers, and the printing industry has not been able to establish itself there. The spirit of Córdoba, up to 1829, was monastic and scholastic; drawing-room conversations always revolved around processions, saints' days celebrations, about university examinations, nuns' professions, the receiving of a doctor's tassel (Sarmiento 2003, 118-119).

The passage shows one of the main driving tensions in Sarmiento's book. The one between a glorious medieval past symbolized by the "monastic and scholastic" spirit of Córdoba, and a still unattained modern future in which daily newspapers, public theaters, and a thriving printing industry become the emblems of progress.

*Facundo* was without a doubt the first major accomplishment in Latin American literature and in many ways it still remains in the center of Hispanic-American literature today. But equally important, for its author the book became a powerful ideological weapon in order to combat the remnants of the colonial traditions in the region.

In the words of Kirkpatrick and Masiello: "[u]sing the literary metaphor to represent projects of state, [Sarmiento] also saw in literature the potential for one's rise to power" (Kirkpatrick and Masiello 1994, 9). Literature and political action were for Sarmiento one and the same thing.

After the publication of *Facundo*, however, it became clear that the writer's presence in Chile and his ever-increasing journalistic activities against Rosas were putting a heavy strain on the relations between Santiago and Buenos Aires. And in an attempt to tone down the intensity of his activities, and reestablish the flow of

international relations with Argentina, Manuel Montt, Sarmiento's longtime friend and a minister in Bulnes' government, proposed that Sarmiento travel under the auspices of the Ministry of Education to study educational systems in Europe and the United States.

Sarmiento embraced the idea enthusiastically, and by October 1845 was on his way from Valparaíso to Paris. As a delegate of the Chilean government he stayed in Europe until July 1847 and, extremely disappointed in the French Revolution and the extreme poverty he witnessed in France, set sail to the United States with only six hundred dollars in his pocket. The money would have been barely enough to make a return trip to Chile around Cape Horn; and it would have been certainly not enough to enjoy even the shortest stay in the United States, had he not casually encountered a wealthy Chilean businessman and Francisco Bilbao's dearest friend, Santiago Arcos, upon arrival in New York. Arcos, who became Sarmiento's traveling companion during the two months the Argentine spent in North America, also helped fund his return to Chile (Rockland 1970, 16-18).

From the day he published it, Sarmiento relied on *Facundo* as his passport, a key to access the highest echelons of the *civilized* world. Therefore, in his trips, he always carried a few copies of his book. In Paris, Sarmiento had *Facundo* translated and published, and after glowing reviews from French critic Charles de Mazade in the prestigious *Revue Des Deux Mondes*, the Argentine also put a few French copies of the book in his luggage to the United States.

Years later, in 1867, already appointed as Argentine Ambassador in Washington,

Sarmiento again made sure to bring several French copies of *Facundo*. The book was a proof of his cultural accomplishment, and had the symbolic power to position him not only as an internationally acclaimed writer, but also as a serious political analyst, competent and knowledgeable in the realities of Latin America and Europe. "This book serves me as a means of introduction" he wrote to his friend, lover and confidant Aurelia Vélez in a letter dated in October 15, 1865. "Being Minister isn't everything, and being an educator is not so distinguishing in a nation of professors and teachers. But I still have my *Facundo*, my parrot and my cannon. No one resists it." (Sarmiento, Letter to Aurelia Velez, Obras XXIX, 67).

### **The political Power of Books**

*Facundo* is a difficult book to pigeonhole for many reasons that aren't related only to its literary unclassifiability. Due to its instrumental nature, and its ever-changing political functions, *Facundo* was since the beginning a text subject to constant mutations, suppressions and additions. Ancillary to Sarmiento's political agenda, *Facundo* operated on a number of different, sometimes contradicting levels: it was first a *feuilleton* aimed at increasing the readership of *El Progreso*; it was also an irate pamphlet against the tyranny of Rosas in Buenos Aires; then, after Rosas' fall, *Facundo* rapidly became a generational roadmap to build the new Argentina on the "deserted grounds" of the Pampas; and finally, the book was, from the get-go, Sarmiento's letter of presentation, a key to open before its author the doors to social, academic and political circles in Europe and the United States.

In part due to the instability of Sarmiento's political alliances and his often-changing ideas, sympathies, needs and aspirations, but centrally because it was perceived by Sarmiento as an instrument and not as an end in itself, *Facundo* became a malleable text, subject to frequent alterations and internal contradictions.

Clear indications of these changes were, in fact, *Facundo's* name revisions throughout its successive editions. When it was first published in 1845 in Santiago, the book was called *Civilización y Barbarie. Vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga y aspecto físico, costumbres y hábitos de la República Argentina* (or *Civilization and Barbarism. Life of Juan Facundo Quiroga and physical aspect, customs and habits of the Argentine Republic*). In its second edition in 1851, Sarmiento dropped the controversial *Civilización y Barbarie* pair, calling the book *Vida de Facundo Quiroga y aspecto físico, costumbres y hábitos de la República Argentina, seguida de apuntes biográficos sobre el general Fray Félix Aldao* (*Life of Facundo Quiroga and physical aspect, customs and habits of the Argentine Republic, followed by biographic sketches on the general Friar Félix Aldao*).

There were several editions of the book throughout Sarmiento's life, one printed in English in New York in 1868, and another one in French, printed in Paris in 1874 (González Echevarría 1994, 224-5). And it is clear that all the substantial changes between impressions –we are not talking here about changes in vocabulary or printing errors—can be attributed to political reasons. A fascinating example of these variations are the suppressions in the 1851 edition of chapters *XIV Unitarianist Government* and chapter *XV Present and Future*, the two final chapters of the original *Facundo*.

Following suggestion by Valentín Alsina, the powerful leader of the Partido Autonomista Porteño (The Autonomist Party of Buenos Aires), Sarmiento banned these two chapters in the 1851 edition, so that the book then ended with the death of Facundo Quiroga. By suppressing the final part of *Facundo*, Sarmiento cut out of his book the most explicit connections between Facundo Quiroga and Rosas in chapter XIV, and some of his own ideas about the consolidation of the Argentine state, laid down in chapter XV. With these changes, Alsina believed, the animosities between the political factions that had supported Rosas and those that had opposed the federalist caudillo would heal, and both groups would become more likely to back the government of Justo José de Urquiza, who had deposed Rosas in the battle of Caseros. In 1852 Alsina was elected Governor of Buenos Aires, but resigned soon after due to disagreements with Urquiza, and joined forces against him with Sarmiento and the powerful newspaperman Bartolomé Mitre. After the fall of Urquiza in 1861, Alsina turned into a close political ally to Sarmiento, and became his vice president when they won the elections of 1868.

Sarmiento never hesitated to change his *Facundo* whenever he had a political reason to do so, making addenda, suppressions or corrections if the occasion so required. Literary and political ambitions were always intertwined for the Argentine, but it is clear that his political goals were always a priority. This becomes apparent in a 1851 letter Sarmiento sent to Alsina, thanking his friend for the notes to *Facundo*, a letter Sarmiento included in that year's edition of the book.

I have literary ambitions, my dear friend, and dedicate many long nights, extensive research, and careful study toward satisfying them.

Facundo died in body at Barranca-Yaco, but his name in History was able to escape and survive for some years, without the exemplary punishment it deserved. The judgment of History has now fallen on him, and the repose of his grave is maintained through the suppression of his name and the scorn of the people (Sarmiento 2003, 40-41).<sup>43</sup>

Of course, Sarmiento believed that his *Facundo*, and he indirectly, had operated as historical agents delivering a punishment that Quiroga rightfully deserved. Like any good romantic writer, he portrayed Quiroga as a Hegelian hero, assuming in his writing an equivalent historical role himself.

In 1868 when the writer ran for president with Alsina, *Facundo* was edited once again. But this time the author dropped a section where he proposed the transformation of the city of Buenos Aires into the capital of Argentina while federalizing its port. According to the Argentine critic Noé Jitrik, Sarmiento was politically motivated to edit out this section of the book, given that the Autonomists, Sarmiento's party, opposed the federalization of Buenos Aires' port and would have not supported his candidacy otherwise (Jitrik 1993, 19-20).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For this section of my analysis, I will use Kathleen Ross' translation of *Facundo*. Sarmiento, Domingo. *Facundo. Civilization and Barbarism* (Translated by Kathleen Ross. Berkley: University of California Press. 2003).

<sup>44</sup> "I have omitted the introduction as useless, and the last two chapters as superfluous today, recalling something you indicated in Montevideo in 1846, when you insinuated to me that the book was finished with the death of Quiroga." Domingo Sarmiento, "Letter to Sr. Valentín Alsina," in *Facundo Civilization and Barbarism* (translated by Kathleen Ross. Berkley: University of California Press, 2003, 43-44).

It is so far clear that, to a certain degree, the connection between literature and history in Sarmiento's work is anchored in his romantic background, although as a writer the Argentine always put his political goals before his literary ambitions. There were, however, other forces that motivated Sarmiento to write his masterpiece. Letters, articles, and passages of his later work make clear that his first impulses to write *Facundo* had more to do with Sarmiento's training as a journalist, than with his aspirations as a writer.

On May 1<sup>st</sup> 1845, an article signed by Sarmiento in the *folletín* section of *El Progreso* announced the publication of *Facundo*: "A momentary interest of mine, pressing and urgent in my judgment, makes me rapidly trace the lines of a picture I thought I would be able to present some day, as complete as I believed possible. I have thought it necessary to crowd onto the paper my ideas as they appear before me, sacrificing all literary pretenses to the need of preventing an evil that could be transcendental for us" (Quoted by Jitrik 1993, 3).

Both the urgency of the task and the "momentary interest," fueled by the celerity with which Sarmiento is set to accomplish his objective, speak to the author's journalistic frame of mind and training. In fact, the idea of *political urgency* as the central motivation for a book would soon thereafter become one of the most frequent *topoi* in Latin American literary journalism. More than a century later, it still resonates in the works of authors like Rodolfo Walsh and Gabriel García Márquez.

In a sense, *Facundo's* opening lines also bear testimony to the journalistic nature of Sarmiento's enterprise. In the *Advertencia del Autor* (*Author's Forewarning*), which was

suppressed by Sarmiento in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> editions, but reincorporated to the book in the Vol. VII of the *Obras*, Sarmiento's first phrases define *Facundo* as a work that, even before publication, has already undergone several corrections. These amendments that Sarmiento has garnered "from different friends" amount to "several facts" and were the result of "a work done quickly, far from the scene of the events, and on a topic about which nothing had been written" until then.

The emphasis on the factual nature of *Facundo* is carried along to the following paragraphs, where Sarmiento describes the difficulty of a writing process that involved "[b]ringing together incidents that took place in different and distant provinces and at diverse times, consulting an eye witness on some point, searching through rapidly written manuscripts, or invoking personal recollections" in what feels like a fairly journalistic reporting process (Sarmiento 2003, 29).

At the end of this forewarning, Sarmiento seals what reads like an accuracy pact with his readers: "[But] I do state that in the notable events to which I refer, and which serve as *the basis for the explanations I give*, there is irreproachable accuracy, to which the existing public documents about those events will attest [...] Perhaps there will be a moment when, unburdened by the worries that have precipitated the writing of this little work, I may remold it according to a new plan, stripping it of accidental digression and supporting it with the numerous official documents to which I now make only passing reference" (Sarmiento 2003, 29).<sup>45</sup>

Although this pact may resemble the factuality agreement that gained relevance

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<sup>45</sup> Italics are mine.

with the emergence of the penny press in the United States, it is worth recalling here that, for Sarmiento, facts were just the groundwork for his political goals. In the author's own words, facts were the basis for explanations. In that vein, objectivity and reporting were, by definition, always subordinated to political ideas and aspirations, which was the bottom line of *Facundo*.

*Facundo's* style floats between the novel, the confession, the epic, the scientific treatise, the political pamphlet and the travelogue (González Echevarría 2003, 2) but, as most critics have noticed, the book is extremely hard to classify under any of the traditional genres born and popularized in Europe during modernity.

A journalistic biography of caudillo Facundo Quiroga, a taxonomical description of the pampas and its social types, and a comparison between Quiroga's rule in La Rioja and Juan Manuel de Rosas' tyranny over the Argentine Confederation, *Facundo* is structured around a series of anecdotes, colorful descriptions and vignettes, generally followed by Sarmiento's attempts to make sense of them, as mentioned before, through some philosophical concepts derived from French romanticism, and pseudo-sociological analyses.

It could be argued that the book evolves dialectically, from the "general aspects" of the Argentine republic and its types to the particular events of the 1810 revolution and the life of Facundo Quiroga in La Rioja until his assassination in Barranca Yaco, then back to the generalities of a hypothetical future of the Argentine nation under the tyranny of Rosas, and its potential for development under a democratic

regime.<sup>46</sup>

On the chapter level, the narrative structure follows a *conclusion-evocation* pattern typical of the journalism that preceded the development of the inverted pyramid in the mid 1800s by the Associated Press.<sup>47</sup> The structure is succinctly presented by Sarmiento in the introduction: "It has occurred to me to explain the Argentine Revolution with the biography of Juan Facundo Quiroga because I believe he sufficiently explains one of the tendencies, one of the two different aspects that struggle in the bosom of that singular society." Of course, Sarmiento is talking about Quiroga's tendency to barbarism (Sarmiento 2003, 37).

There are innumerable examples of this technique throughout the book, but one example is worth quoting here, where Sarmiento refers to the nature of the Argentines:

The result is that the Argentine people are poets by character, by nature. How could they not be, when, in the middle of a serene, pleasant afternoon, a grim, black cloud appears from who knows where, stretches itself across the sky before two words can be said, and suddenly a stampede of thunder announces a storm that leaves the traveler cold and holding his breath, for fear of attracting one of the thousands of lightning bolts coming down and around him? Darkness is followed by light; death is everywhere; a terrible, incomparable power in one moment has made him go inside himself and feel his nothingness in the midst of that disturbed nature, to feel God, to put it plainly, in the terrifying magnificence of His works. Is this color enough for the palette of fantasy? Masses of darkness that cloud the day, masses of trembling, livid light that illuminate the

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<sup>46</sup> For a quick approach to the dialectical method, see Hegel, G. *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988).

<sup>47</sup> See Chalaby, 1996 and Tucher, 2006.

darkness for an instant and show the infinite distance of the Pampas, lightning flashing across them, the final symbol of power. These images are meant to stay deeply engrained. Thus, when the storm passes, the gaucho is left sad, pensive, serious, and the succession of light and darkness continues in his imagination, in the same way that the disk of the sun stays on the retina for a long time when we stare at it.

Ask the gaucho whom the lightning bolts prefer to kill, and he will introduce you to a world of moral and religious idealization, mixed with badly understood facts of nature and superstitious, crude traditions. Add to this, if it is true that electric fluid is part of the economy of human life and is the same as what they call nervous fluid, which when excited, arouses passions and sparks enthusiasm, that a people inhabiting an atmosphere charged with electricity to the point where clothing, if rubbed, gives sparks like a cat's fur stroked the wrong way, must be quite disposed to the workings of the imagination.

How could he who witnesses these impressive scenes not be a poet?  
(Sarmiento 2003, 61-62)

Both structures, the dialectical operating on a macro level, and the conclusion-evocation, on the micro level, show that *Facundo* was neither conceived as a biography, nor as a confession, nor as an epic or a novel: Sarmiento wrote it as another journalistic piece, following some of the standards of mid-nineteen century European news writing.<sup>48</sup> However, due to the Argentine's enormous talent as a storyteller, and a series of innovative narrative resources he implemented, the book produced its own deviations from the norms of the European factual-referential genres, delivering a very particular rendition of both, with its special style, flavor and idiosyncrasy.

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<sup>48</sup> "Specifically, journalism insists on language's utilitarian aspect –particularly its subordination to the laws of the market, to money, --and on language's transitivity, its transparency as a medium through which information is conveyed as objectively as possible" González 1993, 5.

Not only was *Facundo* published in a newspaper as a feuilleton. Sarmiento also presented it as journalistic in the *Author's Note*, and this is probably one of the reasons why the author treated his book as an adaptable, mutable and contingent piece. The book followed the precepts of French Romanticism, with overwhelming descriptions of the natural and biological forces at stake in the Pampas, and the creation of larger-than-life heroic characters and types. Just a hint of this appears in the book's grand introduction:

Terrible specter of Facundo, I will evoke you, so that you may rise, shaking off the bloody dust covering your ashes, and explain the hidden life and the inner convulsions that tear at the bowels of a noble people! (Sarmiento 2003, 31).

But Sarmiento also introduced a few of his personal favorite condiments to the mix enhancing the book's militant nature. I have already described the political use of hyperbole in Sarmiento's narrative. Sarmiento also used this rhetorical mechanism in his *Facundo*. But on a deeper level, his masterpiece was also structured as an allegory: by talking about caudillo Facundo Quiroga, Sarmiento was really referring to the authoritarian threat of Juan Manuel de Rosas, the contemporary strongman from Buenos Aires. The author anchored the metaphorical reference to Rosas in the following statement, also included in the forewarning: "Writing the life of Rosas would be an affront to History, and to remind our homeland, after its rehabilitation, of the degradation it went through would be humiliating" (Sarmiento 2003, 40-41). Yet, writing about the caudillo is exactly what Sarmiento does, indirectly slandering the rancher by attacking Quiroga. Putting some distance between himself and Rosas, Sarmiento was, in fact, anchoring the metaphorical referent to the rancher, while preparing the reader for a relentless attack on his

political enemy.

Of course everybody, the public, Rosas and the Chilean government included, understood this mechanism, and read the book more as an attack on the powerful governor of Buenos Aires than as a reflection on the life of Facundo Quiroga, murdered ten years before *Facundo* was even published. In a famous quote that Adolfo Saldías transcribed in his *Historia de la Confederación Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1973. 2ed. Viii, 193) Rosas praises *Facundo* by acknowledging it as a masterful political strike: “the book by that crazy Sarmiento is by far the best that has been written against me: that’s how you attack someone, yes sir: you will see, sir, that nobody defends me so well.”<sup>49</sup>

Distancing himself from Rosas, while writing about his homologous Quiroga, Sarmiento developed one of the most durable literary-political strategies in Latin American nonfiction: an allegorical referentiality through which the central topics of a narrative are centrifugally displaced towards a *metaphoric-allegorical* axis that still dominates the core of the plot. In that vein, Sarmiento inaugurated Latin American literary journalism as a political-allegorical genre that obliquely refers to the present by narrating past events; a genre that could both be interpreted as an indirect account of current events, or as a purely novelized historical record.

An example of this technique, which became standard for Latin American writers throughout the 20th century, can be found in a passage of Sarmiento’s *Recollections*

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<sup>49</sup> Translation is mine.

*of a Provincial Past*.<sup>50</sup> In this fragment, Sarmiento writes about the enormous yet idle wealth of his family during colonial times. By so doing, he correlates a feudal past with the dismal poverty of the provinces under the current Federalist rule. And by showing the backwardness of both colonial and present times, he finally notes that in the United States, enormous sources of wealth have become available as a result of industry, education and democracy, laying down the third term in the comparison, which opens a political question about the future: what type of nation do Argentines want for their children?

In the house, once or twice a year, a strange activity would take place. The heavy doors to the street, studded with enormous copper nails, would be closed shut, and both patios would be sealed off from each other, in order to keep the children and the servants out; then, my mother tells me, the black woman Rosa, cunning and curious like a monkey, would whisper the news to her: 'There's a *sunning* today!' Cautiously placing a small ladder under a window that faced the patio, the crafty slave lifted up my mother, still but a slight child, taking care that very little of her head showed, in order that she might spy on what was going on in the big patio. My mother, who is truth incarnate, tells me that, large as it was, the patio was covered with hides upon which they had laid out in the sun a thick layer of blackened pieces of eight so as to rid them of their mold; and two old Negroes who were the custodians of the treasure moved from hide to hide carefully turning the sonorous grain. Patriarchal customs of those bygone times, in which slavery did not corrupt the good qualities of the loyal Negro! I have known Uncle Agustín, and another black, Antonio, a master mason, who belonged to the estate of Don Pedro del Carril, the last man of enormous wealth and power in San Juan, who together, until 1840, held two bars of gold and several bags of coins in safekeeping for their master's family. It was the mania of the colonials to hoard peso upon peso, and to take pride in doing so. In San Juan people still talk of caches of silver buried by the old-timers, a popular tradition that recalls the past opulence, and not even three years ago, the storehouse and patios of Rufino's vineyard were excavated in search of the thousands that he

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<sup>50</sup> I am using the Oxford University Press edition, with translations by Elizabeth Garrels and Asa Zatz. Domingo Sarmiento, *Recollections of a Provincial Past*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

was said to have left and that at his death could not be found. What could have happened, oh you colonials, to the fortunes of your grandfathers? And you, federal governors, military scourges of the people, could you amass, by squeezing dry, by torturing an entire city, the sum of pesos that only sixty years ago was enclosed in a single patio belonging to Doña Antonia Irarrázabal?

I have been astounded in the United States to see one or two banks in every town of a thousand souls, and to know that there are millionaire property owners everywhere. In San Juan not a single fortune remains after twenty years of confederation: the Carrils, Rosas, Rojos, Oros, Rufinos, Jofrés, Limas, and many other powerful families lie prostrated in poverty, and descend day by day into the mass of the destitute. The Spanish colonies had their way of life, and they got along well under the king's indulgent tutelage; but you people, convinced that the least qualified is the one who governs best, have invented kings with long roweled spurs who just dismounted from the colts they were taming on the *estancias*. The wealth of modern nations is the exclusive issue of cultivated intelligence. It is fomented by the railroads, steamships, machinery, the fruits of science; they give life, liberty for all, free movement, the postal service, the telegraph, newspapers, debate, in short, liberty. Barbarians! You are committing suicide; in ten years time your sons will be beggars or highwaymen. Consider England, France, and the United States, where there is no *Restaurador de las Leyes* [Restorer of the Laws], nor stupid *Héroe del Desierto* [Hero of the Desert], armed with a whip, a dagger, and a gang of wretches to shout and put into effect the slogan of 'Death to the *savage* unitarianists,' that is to say, those who no longer exist, and among whom there were so many distinguished Argentineans!

Have you heard, re-echoing throughout the world, any names other than those of Cobden, the wise English reformer; Lamartine, the poet; or those of Thiers and Guizot, the historians; and always everywhere, on the rostrums, in congresses, the government, savants and not peasants or rude herdsmen, like the ones you, at your own peril, have endowed with absolute power? (Sarmiento 1850, 44-45)

The passage, which perfectly synthesizes Sarmiento's rhetorical battery, not only follows the conclusion-evocation structure. It also anticipates some of the techniques that would be used in Latin American literature throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a style that blends marvelous, exceptional elements into a realistic situation, delivering an effect of *magical realism*.

Sarmiento truly believed in the power of books. But an anecdote recounted by Mary Peabody Mann, *Facundo's* first translator into English and the wife of pedagogue and Sarmiento's lifelong friend Horace Mann, may show to what extent the Argentine believed in the power of symbols. Mann wrote this as part of Sarmiento's biographical sketch, published in 1868, in the introduction to the first edition of *Facundo* in English:

Thus prepared, and matured by study, experience, travels in foreign lands, and years of beneficent action in a true cosmopolitan spirit, he left Chili [sic] in 1851 with the present President, Colonel Mitre, and the present General Paunero, to incorporate himself in the army of General Urquiza, who was about to open the campaign against Rosas. The battle of Caseros, which disposed of Rosas, took place on the third of February, 1852, and Senor, now *Colonel Sarmiento*, had the pleasure of writing a description of it upon the tyrant's own table with the tyrant's own pen. Six days after, he left Urquiza's army, for he saw that that old servant of Rosas meant no good to the country, but purposed to make himself a tyrant in Rosas' place. Derqui had been made President, who fell in with Urquiza's plans. The event proved that his prophecy was right, though Urquiza was not wholly successful (Mann 1868, 359).<sup>51</sup>

Sarmiento's ultimate means of overpowering Rosas was to take the caudillo's place in front of his desk and, with Rosas' own pen, write the chronicle of the battle in which the rancher was finally defeated. In a way, Sarmiento took that same approach to reign over what he considered the more barbaric aspects of Latin America. Through words, through his newspaper articles and his literary journalism, he strived to tame barbarism, paving the way for progress. His presidency in Argentina, between 1874 and 1879, opened a 30-year-long period of sustained

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<sup>51</sup> Italics are mine.

occidentalization, democratization, and economic expansion in the region. But this only happened at the expense of silencing the groups that, in Sarmiento's view, resisted the modernizing push.

### **Sarmiento's First Journey to the United States: Misunderstanding the Penny Press**

Sarmiento arrived in the United States for the first time on September 15, 1847. He was deeply disappointed with Europe's social conditions. As a passenger of the *Montezuma*, "a large sailing packet which did eleven miles per hour with the slightest breeze," he had shared the trip with 480 Irish emigrants who had just escaped starvation and a complete lack of prospects in the Old World. And this was probably the final impression that Europe made on the writer.

I have just come from going about Europe, from admiring her monuments, prostrating myself in front of her science, and I am still astonished by the wonders of her arts. But I have seen her millions of peasants, proletarians, and mean workmen, and I have seen how degraded and unworthy of being counted as men they are. The rust of filth which covers their bodies and the rags and tatters in which they are dressed do not sufficiently reveal the darkness of their spirits; and with regard to politics and social organization that darkness is enough to obscure the minds of the wise men, of the bankers, and of the nobles (Rockland 1970, 14).

This experience stood in high contrast with what he was about to witness in the United States. Comparing his observations on both sides of the Atlantic, he would soon write in his *Travels*:

The only country in the world where the ability to read is universal, where writing is practiced by all in their daily lives, where 2,000 periodicals satisfy public curiosity, and where education, like welfare, is everywhere available to all those who want it is the United States (Rockland 1970, 152).

In the United States, Sarmiento found the avant-garde of a journalistic, political and pedagogical movement that, he concluded, would set the direction towards a more democratic and freer society. And although he headed back to Chile some six months before the formation of the Associated Press and didn't experience the unprecedented cultural impact that the newspaper syndicate led by *New York Sun's* cautious editor Moses Yale Beach had on American journalism, in New England the Argentine did in fact witness some of the early incarnations of the neutral reportorial style soon to become the AP's standard. Sarmiento bought and read newspapers in the States—as efficiently as his poor English permitted. He praised them for their power to spread and encourage the adoption of new technologies and ideas:

There are no unconquerable habits that retard for centuries the adoption of an obvious improvement, and, on the other hand, there is a predisposition to try anything. An advertisement in one newspaper for a new kind of plow, for example, is carried in every paper in the Union next day. The day after that they are talking about it on every plantation, and the blacksmiths and manufacturers in two hundred places are at the same time considering putting out the new model. Soon the new machines are put on sale, and a year later they are in use all over the Union. You would have to wait a century for something like this to happen in Spain, or in France, or in our part of America (Rockland 1970, 132-33).

Sarmiento saw newspapers as the beachhead of modernization. In his *Travels*, the Argentine paid special attention to what he defined as the “civilizing and catalytic influence of the periodical press” in the United States (Rockland 1970, 192). He also

understood the enormous impact that the connections between newspapers and the new communication technologies had on America's urban life. Thanks to telegraphic lines, the news could be carried even "200 leagues through the thickest forests." And when a new settlement emerged around "coal or an iron mines," the new settler "draws up a city plan, gives the city a name, and returns to the settlements to announce by means of the thousand echoes of journalism the discovery he has made of the site of a famous city of the future, the crossing point of one hundred commercial routes." When the public read the announcement in the paper, another "Babel raises up in the middle of the forest [...] Communications are inaugurated. The newspaper of the place keeps everyone informed of society's progress. Agriculture gets underway. Temples, hotels, docks and banks rise up" (Rockland 1970, 159-67).

Sarmiento, however, didn't seem to notice any differences between these new American popular newspapers and the more elitist political press that, although dwindling in the United States, was still the dominant type in Latin America.<sup>52</sup> Either because he was not fully competent in English, or because the penny papers were still actively political, or simply because he was reluctant to embrace the mercantile model of the penny press, Sarmiento portrayed American newspapers as still "expressing the interests, passions, and ideas of various groups" rather than as the means for distraction and popular entertainment which were actually becoming. The entertainment model was, in fact, the dominant paradigm at the time when Sarmiento returned to the United States in 1865, appointed

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<sup>52</sup> For an introduction to the idea of objectivity, factuality and the changes introduced by the penny press, see Tucher 1994 and 2006; Chalaby 1996; and Robertson 1997.

Plenipotentiary Minister to the United States, a position he held until elected president of Argentina in 1868 (Rockland 1970, 175-76).<sup>53</sup>

For Sarmiento, the American literary sphere of “20 million men who know quite a bit, who daily read what is necessary to exercise their reason and public and political passions,” was in fact a product of popular education and democracy (Rockland 1970, 176). And democracy, was in turn a direct consequence of the American system: “When there is a school in town, a press in the city, a ship on the sea, and an asylum for the sick, democracy and equality begin to exist. The result of all this is that the power of the mass is immense” (Rockland 1970, 267).

The tremendous literary market in the U.S. had allowed for a separation between the spheres of literature and journalism, spheres which in Latin America remained largely overlapping until at least the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sarmiento understood that the American literary sphere was still deeply connected to England’s and in part that was the reason why it could afford for this division of literary labor. But the Argentine also foresaw the tremendous potential of American literary production, and anticipated in his *Travels* that the U.S. book market would soon outpace the English:

It is enough to say that, in the twelve years from 1830 to 1842, 106 original works of biography were published; 118 books on American history and geography; 91 in the same fields on other countries; 10 on philosophy; 103 books of poetry; and 115 novels. In almost the

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<sup>53</sup> I don’t intend to argue here against the popular notion amongst historians and theoreticians of journalism about the role of information and newspapers in the formation of a community.

same period of time 382 original American works have been reprinted in England and accepted by that same public which twenty years before asked through the medium of a magazine: 'Who reads American books? (Rockland 1970, 283).

In the 1840s, the industrial revolution on both sides of the Atlantic was entering a time of fast-paced expansion. Steamboats and locomotives enhanced commerce between the former colonies and London, and an expanding industrial working class highly concentrated in the urban centers launched a demand for new and different forms of entertainment.<sup>54</sup>

In the United States, Sarmiento witnessed the consolidation of an industrial and commercial bourgeoisie and the unprecedented growth of a literate working class. The increase in leisure time was fostering an expansion of popular genres like the novel, and many authors had begun catering to these new audiences while introducing original styles and topics. The consolidation of the publishing industry in New York and other American big cities, helped by technological innovations like typesetting machines, faster printing presses and the development of wood-pulp paper, made books cheaper and easier to manufacture.

Three decades later, in post-Civil War America, the growth of this incipient literary market made room for the separation between journalists and writers not only in different professional circles but also in different social castes (Tucher 2006).

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<sup>54</sup> It is not automatically clear, however, why the expansion of urban centers triggered a higher demand for entertainment. Several concurrent reasons are explored by Todd Gitlin in *Media Unlimited* and Michael Schudson *Discovering the News*.

Novels were mainly aimed at female readers, while newspapers at males. William Dean Howells used to say about pre-war Bostonians that only women read books but men read nothing but newspapers. “The man of letters must make up his mind that in the United States the fate of a book is in the hands of the women,” the author noted in his “Man of Letters.” In fact, a majority of the writers and readers of novels in the United States of the post Civil War were women, contrarily to those of journalism, a mainly masculine craft and pastime (Robertson 1997, 30-37).

As Michael Schudson, Andie Tucher and Michael Robertson have noted, after the Civil War most metropolitan newspapers had expanded from four or eight to sixteen pages. This expansion intensified the demand for reporters, while increasing the professionalization of journalism and the separation between two different occupational groups: fiction writers and journalists.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> “Within months of the war’s end, three of the original Bohemians had rushed into print with thick memoirs of their wartime experiences” (Tucher 2006, 139). In these books “intended for a mass audience [for the first time, journalists] recorded what they thought about the work they did. They pictured themselves as a special kind of person, doing a special job [...] In fact, journalists were seeking a double distinction, differentiating themselves not just from ordinary people but also from the many other kinds of authors – novelists, playwrights, poets—who were also struggling to define themselves as skilled professionals [...] Taken together, their insouciance about money, their devotion to their art, their unconventionality, and of course their talent made them feel radically, irremediably *not like* other people even as they were like each other, a community apart, exclusive and close-knit and special [...]” (Tucher 2006, 132, 137-138).

Fiction writers also tried to separate themselves from journalists. In *A Modern Instance* (1882) novelist Dean Howells, features a newspaper reporter as its central character –a weak, morally obtuse man whose writings function as a counter-text to the novel. The reporter’s articles, as described by Howells, cover the same events narrated in his book but develop an exploitative, condescending view of the subjects. The articles are marked, in Howells’ words, by an “essential cheapness” (Robertson 1997, 1-9).

Henry James’ portrayal of daily reporters in *The Bostonians* was also negative. The novelist showed them as basic, lowly and disreputable characters. Journalists’ bad public image Robertson claims, only started to change after the Civil War, thanks to skillful writers like Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser and Ernest Hemingway, who had begun their careers as journalists. The early ambivalence towards reporters could also

Sarmiento was perfectly aware that, contrary to what was happening in the United States in the mid-1800s, Latin America was far from developing an independent literary market. The metropolitan centers in Spain were still deeply tied to a retrograde rural economy. The Iberian Peninsula was undergoing a series of staggering financial and political difficulties that would slowly evolve into a long and painful civil war, and the publishing industry both in the Spain and its former colonies was stalling.<sup>56</sup>

Illiteracy rates in Spain were high and, where it did exist, the literary market was dependent on obsolete forms, patronage and government subsidies. The literary and poetic renovation of the Spanish language would have to wait the advent of *modernismo* and the generation of 1898. But this renovation would, for the most part, be originated in the vibrant metropolitan centers of Latin America and within Spanish-speaking communities of Cuban exiles in the United States.

In the former colonies and those territories in Central America and the Caribbean still ruled by the Spanish Crown, illiteracy was even higher than in the metropolis. A local bourgeoisie, mainly agrarian, was in formation, but the urban centers hadn't yet reached a size considerable enough to allow for the development of a newspaper public, let alone a dynamic public sphere. Sarmiento was very aware of

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be read as part of the complex relationship between high and low culture in the United States during the late 19th, early 20th centuries (Robertson 1997, 1-74).

<sup>56</sup> Between a few republican attempts and a series of upheavals, intestine coups, and the reestablishment of the Borbons in Power, Spain's story of the late 1800s and early 1900s is too rich and complex to be presented even synoptically in a few paragraphs here. Some of that story, however, will be mentioed in this dissertation chapter.

these limitations. That's why he devoted most of his efforts to stimulate migratory inflows from Europe. Education and the press were unquestioned mechanisms of *civilization*.

Sarmiento explored many of these ideas in a number of treaties, papers, journalistic articles and long nonfiction pieces, but especially in his *Facundo*. And after his first visit to the United States, the Argentine focused much of his energy on exporting the pedagogical developments he had witnessed in Massachusetts to the southern nations. Developed by his friend Horace Mann, this educational model would serve Sarmiento as both a case study and a roadmap to modernity: Latin America needed its own teachers, its own literature, its own mores and its own culture. Toward that end, the development of a literary sphere, a free press, and a solid school system was of utmost urgency.

"In England and the United States more books are published every year than all the ones, old, modern, foreign and in translation, that are kept in the Library of the [American] Senate," Sarmiento would concede in the first issue of his *Revista de Ambas Américas* in 1867. "When we examine the dates of the books we've been dealing with [he is talking about the books published in Spain] it becomes apparent that the Spanish thought was more active in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries than today; and it was also more solicitous in translating and acquiring books from other nations in the Eighteenth century than today" (Sarmiento 1867, 67).

It was clear that improvements were past due. And Sarmiento, a politically

interested witness of some of the journalistic and pedagogical advances in the United States, continued raising his authorized voice, both as a journalist and a scholar, to argue against authoritarianism and in favor of public education in the daily columns of newspapers like Chileans *El Mercurio*, *La Crónica* and *La Tribuna*, and a few years later in Argentine newspapers *El Nacional*, *La Tribuna* and *La Nación*. But most of his ideas had already been introduced in his brilliant literary journalism, particularly *Facundo* and *Recollections of a Provincial Past*, two of the earliest masterpieces in Latin American literature.

Education would soon become the cornerstone of most Latin American national projects. And undoubtedly, newspapers, the main *tribunes of doctrine* in the region, would supply a still weak literary market and a growing public sphere with vibrant daily and weekly columns about actuality, education, literature and politics.<sup>57</sup> The role of the press in Latin America was to weave the first ideological fibers in the fabric of nations. The Latin American daily press and its literary journalism would soon carry the development of the region's ideas about civilization, education, and its literary and political public spheres.<sup>58</sup>

It was not therefore by chance that, basing his continental position on the

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<sup>57</sup> *Tribune of Doctrine* was *La Nación*'s leitmotif. The newspaper, one of the most important ones in Latin America until the Second World War, published not only some of Sarmiento's articles and travel chronicles, but also and more importantly, most of José Martí's foreign correspondence from the United States. In Martí 2002.

<sup>58</sup> "Early in the nineteenth century, journalism posed little threat to literature. The typical daily newspaper of the era was a four-page journal, sold only by subscription and aimed at a relatively small and almost exclusively male audience interested in business and politics. Newspapers existed to give financial and mercantile information and to promote the viewpoint of a political party or faction." In Robertson 1997, 2-3.

presidency of the Argentine Republic between October 1868 and October 1874, Sarmiento led the region into a movement towards the American model of progress he so much admired. Undoubtedly controversial, Sarmiento's presidential term was marked by a number of quandaries: a ruinous war against Paraguay, a yellow fever epidemic that decimated the population of Buenos Aires, and a blind devotion to European immigration that all but paved the way for the violent extermination of the native populations of South America, which took place in the decades to come. These setbacks, added to the many complaints about Sarmiento's personalism and caudillo-like style, turned the writer into an extremely controversial political figure.

His talents as a writer and ideologue brought Sarmiento to power. And as the best Latin American author of his generation, the Argentine devoted his skills as a literary journalist to catapult a political agenda over the barbarism of the caudillos, and set the groundwork for modernity in the region. But when Sarmiento reached the pinnacle of political power, writing became secondary, less relevant to him. Quoting Manuel Gálvez, the Argentine author Ricardo Piglia points out that, after winning the presidential race, Sarmiento, the most brilliant, prolific and eloquent writer and orator in the Americas couldn't produce an acceptable inauguration speech. Despite the many attempts, Sarmiento's drafts were systematically rejected by his ministers until a final version was composed by minister of Justice and Education Nicolás Avellaneda, a journalist himself. The time for writing was over for Sarmiento.

It is unquestionable that as a newspaperman, an author and a politician, the

Argentine put Latin America on a long democratic path that, with a few exceptions, would last for more than three decades uninterrupted. Clearly enough, this political accomplishment shouldn't be separated from Sarmiento's literary and journalistic achievements.

It is in this context that *Facundo* becomes relevant as a primordial link in the tradition of Latin American literary journalism. The book stands at the crossroads of Sarmiento's political, literary and journalistic activities, and delivers a perfect synthesis of the three. In its structure, quality and scope, *Facundo* also had a tremendous stylistic impact on the Latin American literature that followed. But perhaps more importantly, in its journalistic nature, Sarmiento's masterpiece became a lethally efficient political instrument, marking the direction of a young Latin American literary journalism, permanently bounding it to the sphere of politics.

## **Part II. José Martí and the Chronicles that built Modern Latin America**

Soaked in the grey cold rain of a late-September morning in 1889, the U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Manhattan* crossed New York Bay. It carried a diplomatic mission composed of a representative of the United States government, Charles R. Flint; two delegates of the business world in New York, William H.T. Hughes and F. G. Pierra; one from the Chamber of Commerce, Henry Hertz; envoys of the Argentine and Uruguayan governments in the United States, and a thin, pale journalist all dressed in black who wore a silver ring engraved with the word *Cuba* as his only adornment.

Not long after six A.M. the cutter approached its target: *City of Paris*, a 560-foot-long mooring steamer with double black chimneys and three masts towering above the lapping waves. Inside, a group of high-ranking visitors had just arrived in New York after a long journey from South America. Using a hand ladder, the envoys on the *Manhattan* climbed aboard the steamer and, after fetching umbrellas and raincoats, waited on deck for a few minutes until an officer invited everyone inside. In the library, two Argentine politicians, Manuel Quintana and his assistant Roque Sáenz Peña awaited them.<sup>59</sup>

Quintana, a white bearded, 53-year-old statesman, and Sáenz Peña, 15 years younger, were the last diplomats to arrive in the United States for the first Pan

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<sup>59</sup> For details about the arrival of the envoys from South America, *New York Times*, "Greeting the Delegates," September 25, 1889.

American Conference. The event, they knew, could change the course of history for the American hemisphere. The Argentines would soon join the representatives of 16 other Latin American countries, all invited to the U.S. by President Benjamin Harrison and his high profile Secretary of State, James Gillespie Blaine (Karras 1974, 77-99). The Pan American meeting was scheduled to begin on October 2<sup>nd</sup> in Washington D.C. and last until early 1890. It was the first official attempt by the U.S. to establish its hemispheric dominance, arguing for the formation of a customs union stretching along the continent, the implementation of an inter-American arbitration system, and the development of a Pan-American common currency.<sup>60</sup> On October 5<sup>th</sup>, the guests were to take part in an excursion trip of 6,000 miles by train, complete with a dining car serving French cuisine, to some of the most inspiring destinations in the United States, a not so discreet attempt to dazzle them with scenes of American industry and its unparalleled prosperity (Karras 1974, 86-87). The trip, however, never took place. Although the meeting did start on schedule, the conference completed its agenda only in April, 1891, a year after planned, with the dissolution of the Inter-American Monetary Commission. Blaine's brainchild, the conference also became his worst political misstep.

Although some Latin American countries could afford a permanent diplomatic mission in the north, and had kept their delegates busy with briefings, letters and memos, most other statesmen in the hemisphere had remained updated on the

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<sup>60</sup> For details about the conference, Dardo Cúneo: *José Martí, Argentina y la Primera Conferencia Panamericana*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Transición. 1955. For details about Blaine's plan, Edward Crapol: *Blaine. Architect of Empire*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc. 2000.

preliminaries through the daily press. It was no surprise, then, that many of the envoys were familiar with the slightly built Cuban journalist with the black moustache, now shaking hands with the Argentines. In a curious case of performing multiple roles at the same time, with a series of articles from New York for *La Nación* newspaper of Buenos Aires and his diplomatic letters to the Uruguayan and Argentine chancellors, José Julián Martí had already planted in the press –and in the minds of the participants—an inauspicious seed that would set the hostile tone for the encounter ahead.

Thanks to his role of delegate to the Inter-American Monetary Commission of 1890 and 1891, for Uruguay first, and later on for Argentina and Paraguay, Martí was able to take an active part in the discussions opposing the creation of a common hemispheric currency. But long before that, his stories in the press were key to initiating a Hispanic American understanding based on culture, interests and shared political goals, which deepened the regional reluctance to follow Blaine's agenda (Karras 1974, 77-99). In many ways, Martí's literary journalism helped debunk Blaine's proposals while establishing the groundwork for a new Latin American covenant.

For months after the announcement of the invitations, Martí had been consumed with anxiety about this first encounter with the Argentines. Now, with the steamer approaching the docks, he was starting to feel some sense of relief.

Although this was their first personal encounter with the Cuban, Quintana and Sáenz Peña had long been acquainted with Martí's work for *La Nación*. And at least

one of the members in the Argentine mission, Miguel Tedín –in New York since early 1888—had already met him in person. Tedín confessed years later that more than anyone else in the United States, he wanted to meet the writer: “One of my first projects was to look for Martí whose correspondence to *La Nación* had impressed me vividly” (Martí 1911, 9). Between 1882 and 1889 the Cuban had dispatched from New York more than 200 chronicles for *La Nación* in the style of the best literary journalism of its time. His pieces appeared every two weeks in the front page of the Buenos Aires daily, and added to an impressive body of literary work, one that would be central in the renovation of the Spanish language fostered by *modernismo*.

The chronicles of this gifted 36-year-old writer, poet, journalist and Cuban revolutionary not only marked one of the highest points in the young literature of the region, they also consolidated the foundations of Latin American literary journalism as a political, artistic and journalistic genre. Martí’s dispatches, and especially those written between 1889 and 1891 in the militant tradition inaugurated by Domingo Sarmiento, show to what extent, to borrow the words of Nobel Prize laureate poet Chilean Gabriela Mistral, the Cuban writer “divided himself like a pomegranate into two uneven halves—the literary and the civic” (Mañach 1950, XV).

Thanks to his writings for the daily press, Martí became one of the most respected political voices in the Americas, and the impact of his ideas on the delegates would have a central role in the final outcome of this first Pan American encounter. In a way, Martí’s premonition about the Argentines was correct, as they, following his

ideas in the front pages of Argentine daily *La Nación*, would rapidly become a polarizing Latin American force during the historic meeting.

### **Economic and Societal Changes: the Latin American Expansion between 1880s and 1900**

In those final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Martí witnessed a Latin America in the process of extraordinary change. Trailing behind the United States both politically and economically, by the 1880s the subcontinent was starting to become a relevant force in the world of international commerce. Fully functioning modern states had started to provide a stable framework for political treaties and private commercial agreements with Europe, increasingly in need of primary goods to enter the second phase of its industrial revolution. These new republican structures ended a hundred years of caudillism in the region (Halperin Donghi 1969, Chapter 3). With a substantial improvement in transatlantic communications, and the consolidation of an international division of labor, the Americas were poised to become Europe's main supplier of primary goods, while entering what historian Tulio Halperin Donghi has called the "age of economics" (Halperin Donghi 1969, Chapter 3).

"Order and progress", Brazil's national motto – inspired in a phrase by Auguste Comte– and "peace and administration" coined by Argentine President General Julio Argentino Roca, crystallised the political and ideological aspects of this shift

towards modernisation.<sup>61</sup> Roca, whose campaigns in the Pampas during the late 1870s had decimated the native population of the Southern Cone, became the ninth constitutional president of Argentina in 1880 with a motto that many other leaders in the region would probably have agreed with: “revolutions –that is political uprisings—are not quoted on the Stock Exchange in London” (Rouquié 1982, 61).

Between the 1850s and the 1880s, the goal of state building was progressively achieved in South America and Mexico, while many of the countries in Central America such as Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic would be consistently torn by political convulsions until well entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, especially between the early 1880s and the First World War, Latin America experienced a rapid economic expansion that was accompanied by significant social changes. In Mexico, the Porfirio Díaz administration opened the economy to a large inflow of

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<sup>61</sup> Since the days of the 1889 republic –during which the national motto “Ordem e Progresso” was coined-- Brazilian politicians from the influential state of Rio Grande do Sul were particularly influenced by French philosopher Auguste Comte. Some of these political men were known as the Brazilian positivists. They rose to power between 1900 and 1930 and the most emblematic among them was Getúlio Vargas, who was a dictator in Brazil between 1930 and 1945. Some of their ideas were adapted from Auguste Comte’s Positive Philosophy. See Freyre and Horton 1986: XVI.

“It cannot be necessary to prove to anybody who reads this work that Ideas govern the world, or throw it into chaos; in other words, that all social mechanism rests upon opinions. The great political and moral crisis that societies are now undergoing is shown by a rigid analysis to arise out of *intellectual anarchy*. While stability in fundamental maxims is the first condition of genuine *social order*, we are suffering under an utter disagreement which may be called universal. *Till a certain number of general ideas can be acknowledged as a rallying-point of social doctrine, the nations will remain in a revolutionary state*, whatever palliatives may be devised; and their institutions can be only provisional. But whenever the necessary agreement on first principles can be obtained, appropriate institutions will arise from the, without shock or resistance; for the causes of disorder will have been arrested by the mere fact of the agreement. It is in this direction that those must look who desire a natural and regular, a normal state of society” (Comte 2000: 40). Italics are mine.

foreign capital to facilitate mineral production. After its victory in the War of the Pacific against Bolivia and Peru, Chile achieved a monopoly on nitrates. Cuba, even before its independence, multiplied tenfold its economic integration with the United States through an unprecedented expansion of its sugar production. In Brazil, the spread of coffee plantations over the Sao Paulo highlands and a sustained inflow of European immigrants separately contributed to the collapse of slave economy. And in Argentina, the largest economy in Latin America, a massive wave of European immigration was also accompanied by a large influx of European capital (Furtado 1970, 50-51).

A closer look at the three largest nation states in the region, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, reveals in further detail the depth and speed of these changes.

In Mexico, between 1877 and 1910, the population increased from 9.4 million to 15.2 million, while the GDP per capita grew at 3.1 percent annually, just one percentage point below the U.S. rate during the Gilded Age.<sup>62</sup> Oil and mineral production skyrocketed at a rate of 7.2% annually, twice as fast as the manufacturing sector and three times as fast as agriculture.

In Brazil, the population grew from 10.1 million in 1872 to 17.3 million in 1900, and more than 600,000 European immigrants moved into the country. In the three decades after 1880, the total length of railways in Brazil increased from 3,400 to

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<sup>62</sup> From the *Statistical Abstract of the United States. 1900*. Twenty Third Number, Bureau of the Census Library. Washington: Government Printing Office 1901. Also online at <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/statab1878-1900.htm>.

21,300 kilometers –still less than one tenth of the U.S. mileage by 1900.<sup>63</sup> Coffee exports, which had averaged 240 million kilograms during the 1890s, reached 600 million in 1900, and cacao and rubber exports multiplied seven times in those years to reach 40,000 tons in 1900.

But the most rapid changes during the period took place in Argentina. Between 1890 and 1904 the population doubled, from 3.6 million to 7.2 million. Railroad networks, thanks to Sarmiento's modernizing impulse, extended from 12,700 to 31,100 kilometers –exactly one tenth of the mileage in the U.S.—, cereal exports rose from 1 million to 5.29 million tons, and frozen meat exports grew from 0.027 million tons to 0.376 million tons (Furtado 1970, 51-3).

The astounding level and the extremely swift pace of this economic development paired with the rapid increase in population in metropolitan areas, triggered a series of radical social and political changes. Middle and working classes slowly started to take part in the electoral process while Latin American presidential democracies began to decentralize (Negretto and Aguilar-Rivera 2000, 361-397). But unlike in Europe or the United States, where the Reformation had triggered an increase in literacy levels, leading in turn to the development of a public sphere and the subsequent democratic revolutions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Latin America the independence processes took place before any systematic increase in

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<sup>63</sup> From the *Statistical Abstract of the United States. 1900*. Twenty Third Number, Bureau of the Census Library. Washington: Government Printing Office 1901. Also online at <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/statab1878-1900.htm>.

literacy levels. Therefore literacy, key to enter modernity, had to be pursued as a state policy.

In the late 1800s, the highest literacy rates in the region –close to 60%- were Argentina's and Uruguay's. A distant second tier of nations included Chile, Colombia, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Guyana and Cuba, with rates averaging 30% to 45%, followed by a third echelon including Brazil and Mexico with rates between 14% and 30% (Núñez 2005, 127).

While these rates were low compared to Europe and the United States, which averaged 80%, Latin American levels had grown so fast that in some cases the reading public had tripled, quadrupled and even multiplied tenfold in only a few decades (Rama 1978, 111 and Núñez 2005, 117-135). Countries such as Argentina and Uruguay, had made literacy mandatory by law, and although primary school dropouts were usually high –between 90% and 97% in the first two years of instruction—the new reading public grew stronger by the day, increasing the demand for literature, journalism and other forms of educated entertainment (Rotker 1999).

Consequently a publishing boom, especially in journalism, accompanied the expansion of the reading public. In 1877 Argentina already had 148 newspapers for 2,347,000 inhabitants, one newspaper for every 15,700, becoming the fourth country in newspaper-habitant ratio worldwide, only to advance to the third place in 1882. The U.S., with a substantially longer print tradition, was barely double this rate (Rotker 1992 and 2000, 38).

The print tradition consolidated at the pace of democracy and Latin America's integration to world commerce increased. And a self-(national)-awareness that paired the expansion of the public sphere, the press and the development of national literatures, stimulated an interest on European and North American events. Thus foreign correspondents like Martí soon became part of that equation.

### **The Reporter and the Foreign Correspondent**

Martí was not strictly a reporter but rather a foreign correspondent. In that vein, and contrary to the trend of journalist-witness that had started in American journalism during the Civil War, the Cuban was rarely a direct witness of the events he wrote about (González 1993, 91; Tucher 2006, 145). With a few notable exceptions, Martí's chronicles from New York were summaries of weekly events gathered from local newspapers, magazines and other news sources. It is therefore relevant to note that, as Kessel Schwartz has documented following Martí's coverage of the assassination of President James Garfield, in his compositions "Martí relied heavily on and rephrased, paraphrased, and plagiarized from his favorite newspaper, the *New York Herald*" (Schwartz 1973, 335-342).

A paragraph from the *Herald* coverage of Garfield's assassination quoted by Schwartz stands out as the proof of this mechanism. By an unknown *Herald's* writer it reads:

No verdict of yours can recall him. He sleeps the sleep that knows no waking on the banks of Lake Erie whose limpid waters wash the boundaries of his native state, overlooking the city he loved so well, and beneath the sod of that State whose people had crowned his life with the highest honors. It is too late to call that husband back to the bereaved wife and fatherless children. For that waiting little mother whose face will never fade from the nation's memory there will be no relief in this world. The fatal deed is done, and its horrors and griefs must remain (Schwartz 1973, 337).

Without attribution, Martí translated for his article in *La Nación* as follows:

Ningún veredicto vuestro, decía a los jurados, puede ya llamarlo: duerme el ilustre Garfield el sueño que no conoce despertar, sobre la pacífica ribera del lago Erie, cuyas límpidas aguas bañan los límites de su nativo Estado; duerme en aquella ciudad que él amó tanto, y bajo el suelo del Estado aquel que coronó su vida con os más altos honores. Es demasiado tarde para volver aquel esposo a la doliente esposa, a los desheredados hijos: que en cuanto aquella vigilante madrecita, cuyo rostro no se borrará jamás de la memoria de la Nación, no hay ya en la tierra alivio para ella. Cierto es el fatal caso, y vivos quedan para siempre sus horrores y penas (Schwartz 1973, 337).

In other cases, also without attribution, the Cuban used the New York paper as factual reference, or as direct inspiration for style and structure, adding to his translations a touch of invention, metaphorical intensification, narrative condensation and drama.

Martí often intensified the narrative and evocative impact of the stories by avoiding long digressions, dialogue fragments, or even descriptions, (Schwartz 1973, 340). He also tended to aggressively amplify and embellish the material. An example of this is his article about the Charleston earthquake, which relies on the *Sun*, *The New York Times*, the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Tribune* coverage of 2, 3 and 4 September 1886, but adds Martí's moral imprint to the report:

The fifty thousand inhabitants of Charleston, caught by surprise in the early hours of the night by the earthquake that shook their homes just like straw nests, are still living in the streets and plazas, on coaches under tents, under shacks made with their own clothes. Eight million pesos rolled into dust in twenty-five seconds. Sixty have died: some crushed by the walls falling, others of horror. And in the same dreadful hour, many children came to life.<sup>64</sup>

Although he was never present in Charleston to experience the earthquake or its aftermath, Martí offered no indication of that in his article. The piece contained also extraordinary images such as “statues [that] have descended from their pedestals” or “men [flapping] about like half winged-birds” that are nowhere to be found in the originals. These amplifications enhanced the story both visually and rhythmically, providing also a narrative frame: life and death, capital and gain, are negligible forces compared to the power of nature; and an evocative-mythical tint that wasn’t present in the original story (Rotker 2000, 99).

### **Politics and the Press**

At the time of the 1889 Pan-American conference, Martí had already organized revolutionary groups in exile, had lectured and fundraised for Cuban revolutionaries during the Little War (an insurgent movement that between 1879 and 1880 was led in Cuba by General Calixto García). He had also published magazines and plays, and created a newspaper, *Patria*, which was edited by

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<sup>64</sup> Martí, J. El terremoto de Charleston.” In *Escenas extraordinarias*, p. 66. Translation is mine.

expatriate Puerto Rican Sotero Figueroa in New York's *Imprenta América*, and would become the organ of the Cuban Revolutionary Party (Kanellos 2005, 689).<sup>65</sup> Martí's journalistic career, however, had started much earlier in his life.

Born in Cuba in 1853 of Spanish parents, as early as in high school Martí became an advocate of Cuban independence. By 1870, accused of "anti-Spanish activities," he was sentenced to six years of hard labor, a punishment that due to his poor health was ultimately commuted to exile.<sup>66</sup> Thus, at less than 17 years of age, Martí was sent to Spain where he enrolled in college and earned a law degree, a degree in letters and one in philosophy. In those formative years, he also became an active contributor to political newspapers and magazines and started to see journalism as a way to advance the revolutionary movement in Cuba. During his exile he also traveled to France, the Netherlands and Italy, only to return to America in 1875 eager to start working for the Cuban revolutionary movement. His comeback was, in fact, somewhat of an odyssey, with a journey that included two visits to Mexico, a professorial position in Guatemala, two stays in Cuba under a false identity, a

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<sup>65</sup> In *Patria*, Martí documented some of his ideas and basis for a Cuban independent government. In one of his founding editorials he wrote: "The Republic [...] should not be the unjust predomination of one class of citizens over the rest, but the open and sincere equilibrium of all the real forces of the country, and of the free thought and desire of all the citizens" (Gray 1963, 249-56).

<sup>66</sup> From that experience came Martí's first important political text, "El Presidio Político en Cuba" ("Political Prison in Cuba"). The text shows to what extent the independence wars in Latin America shaped even the earliest manifestations of literary journalism in the region. Written in 1871, the article was produced with the intention of shaking public opinion in Spain, while shedding some light into the aberrations that the Colonial government was perpetrating in Cuba. "Political Prison in Cuba" was Martí's account of the story of Lino Figueredo, a 12-year-old sentenced to forced labor by Spain's colonial government in the island. The piece was written at the beginning of the Martí's exile in Spain.

second travel to Spain, a professorial position in Venezuela and two stays in the United States, the last one between 1881 and 1895, the year of his death.

Martí saw journalism as a means to promote the ideals of the modern revolutions in Latin America. Trained in classical Greek and Roman literature and philosophy, he was also an avid multilingual reader. In Europe he was exposed to French enlightenment in the works Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Montaigne. He became familiar with John Locke's contractualism, and European romanticism through Mary Shelley, Víctor Hugo, Thomas Carlyle and Oscar Wilde. He read Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Henry James and some of the best American writers of his generation, and devoured some of the finest contemporary literature available in French and Spanish. Before it was translated, Martí reviewed in Spanish Gustave Flaubert's last, incomplete, novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.<sup>67</sup> And, despite some controversy around this issue, he was most likely familiar with Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin.<sup>68</sup>

Well versed in Latin American history and political theory, Martí had also read Sarmiento, who became a model for his journalism. But back from Europe, he soon discovered other Latin American authors such as Diego Barros Arana, whose *Historia de la Guerra del Pacífico* he came across while working as a teacher in Venezuela (Ward 2007, 108). Unlike Sarmiento, however, Martí advocated against

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<sup>67</sup> See Molloy 1997 and Dupont 2004.

<sup>68</sup> In fact, Martí wrote an obituary of Karl Marx: "Karl Marx was not only a titanic mover of the anger of the European workers, but a profound seer in the reasons for human misery, and in the destinies of men. He was a man eaten with the desire to do good" (Gray 1963, 254).

the “whitening” of Latin America through the eradication of native cultures and the intensification of European immigration. In “Our America,” for instance, the Cuban would stand against Latin America’s acculturation insisting on the incorporation of subaltern subjects to the discussion on national identity, the study of native languages and cultures in universities, and the incorporation of their political and philosophical ideas as active elements in the conformation of the State bureaucracy (Gomariz 2007, 187-190).

Martí wrote his first journalistic articles as a teenager. In 1869 he published an editorial piece in *El Diablo Cojuelo* (*The Lame Devil*), a newspaper created by Fermín Valdez Domínguez in support of Cuban independence during the Ten Years War. In the course of his Spanish exile, he contributed to *Revista Universal* under the pen name Orestes. But his journalistic activities really took off after 1874, when he graduated as a Civil and Canonical Lawyer, and a Baccalaureate in Letters and Philosophy at the University of Zaragoza. The constant travels back to Cuba and around the Americas after that year would have a lifelong impact on his journalism, and inspire a form of political-journalistic writing that could be read in many ways as a defense of the supranational integration of Latin America.

Professionally, however, Martí began to live off of his journalism only in 1881, during a short stay in Venezuela. After participating in the foundation of the *Revista Venezolana* –the *Venezuelan Review*—whose democratic tone raised the wrath of dictator Antonio Guzmán Blanco, Martí became a correspondent for *La Pluma* (*The Quill*) of Bogotá, Colombia. And soon noticed by industrialist Fausto Teodoro de

Aldrey, he also started with contributions to *La Opinión Nacional de Caracas*, a large and prestigious Venezuelan daily belonging to the tycoon.

*La Opinión* was an extremely influential publication in the Americas. Progressive in tone, interested in modernization, science, education and international politics, it reproduced articles from the *London Times*, the *New York Hour* and the *Paris Herald*, and included literary translations and articles about the main cultural figures in France, the United States, Germany and Spain. According to critic Susana Rotker, the most translated author in the paper was Victor Hugo, followed by Goethe (Rotker 2000, 34-35). *La Opinión* was also regularly distributed in Paris, London and New York and, owned by Aldrey, maintained a contradictory relationship with Guzmán Blanco, who not only wrote editorials for the paper, but was also constantly praised in its pages as “the illustrious,” “the civilizer,” “the creator of the glorious septennial,” and the hero of “forty years of combat between radical democratic ideas and conservative oligarchic principles, both pernicious extremes.” Martí disagreed with all these epithets, something Guzmán Blanco was aware of. Thus Aldrey asked the Cuban to sign his articles under a pseudonym, “M. de Z.”

Martí contributed to *La Opinión* until the summer of 1882. He even had his own section “Sección Constante” (or “Constant Section”) where he wrote about the most diverse topics in different genres, always with striking literary flair. The “Sección Constante” used a mixing of styles. In it, Martí polished his approach and started to push the boundaries of factuality. An example of this is a fragment of an article about a series of scientific experiments with flies:

Thanks to the microphone, an English chemist has been able to prove that those miserable flies, for which we have no compassion and which so often perish at the hands of naughty boys, suffer as vividly as the most sensitive mortals. They express their pain in prolonged and anxious moans which the microphone distinctly transmits to the ear, and which sound like the neighing of a horse" (Rotker 2000, 35).

The meticulous use of description had the effect of projecting Martí's pieces into a different category of writing, much more sophisticated and experimental than the type of news coverage that was the norm at the time. The effect of juxtaposing layers of comparison and colorful similes with what was strictly news content expanded Martí's production into a different, unexplored territory, intermediate between the journalistic and the literary, at a time when the boundaries between fact and fiction writing were still blurred (Rotker 2000, 36).

Another example of Martí's writing for *La Opinión* was "El Rostro Rehecho" ("The Remade Face"), a piece about one of the first plastic surgeries ever performed. Martí didn't attribute the information to any sources, but the emphasis on style and description in this piece also overrides its informative side.

They made an incision in the index finger of her right hand, that went from the first joint to the thumb; they put the right hand on the left arm, and after sewing the piece of skin on the incision in the finger with silver wire, they attached the arm and the hand with strong bandages. After a week, the piece of skin had grown on to the hand, although it was fed mostly by the arm. To change the flow of nutrition, they gradually cut the skin from the arm, and when it was about to separate, the skin was receiving its nutrients from the finger, and not from the arm, from which it had been taken. This separated it definitively from the arm. The hand, with the piece of hanging skin it was supporting, was taken to the patient's face. They lifted the scarred skin that covered her right cheek and injected the skin under it. With new bandages, they left the hand attached to the cheek... Today she walks around, lovely (Rotker 2000, 35-36).

Martí's contributions to *La Opinión* lasted about a year. The political tension between him and Guzmán Blanco, exacerbated by the Cuban's friendship with the government critic Cecilio Acosta, ended up forcing him out of the country to avoid the dictator's anger.

On July 27, 1881, before sailing to New York from the port of La Guayra, Martí wrote a farewell letter to Aldrey in which he explained with sadness the promptness of his decision: "In such haste have I decided upon this trip that I do not have time, before going, to shake the friendly hands this city has extended to me" (Mañach 1950, 206).

Aldrey, however, didn't intend to lose through distance the value of Martí's contributions, and asked the Cuban to continue corresponding with *La Opinión* from New York. But the agreement lasted only until the summer of 1882, when Aldrey revealed to his public that "M. de Z." was in fact José Martí (Mañach 1950, 215-16 and Rotker 2000, 35). It's been suggested that, after revealing "M. de Z."s identity, Aldrey was forced by Guzmán Blanco to stop publishing Martí's pieces. But instead of explaining this to Martí, the editor tried to introduce a series of changes to the "Sección Constante," probably aware that the Cuban would be unlikely to accept them. In order to continue his collaborations, Martí had to change his topics ("readers in this country want political news and anecdotes and the least literature possible"), his style ("shorter paragraphs") and finally come to terms with the fact that the "Sección Constante," if continued, would become less prominent in the

paper.<sup>69</sup> Martí rightfully interpreted these changes as a veiled dismissal, and stopped contributing to the daily altogether (Mañach 1950, 215-16). Years later, in a letter he sent to his friend Gonzalo de Quesada, the Cuban revealed that he had abandoned *La Opinión Nacional* “for having been a condition to continue in it to praise in its pages the abominations of Guzmán Blanco” (Scarano 2003, 21).

Nevertheless it was thanks to his contributions to the Venezuelan daily that Martí’s fame spread like a whirlwind over the Americas. He was constantly invited to collaborate with new publications in Spanish, and soon blipped upon the radar of New York publisher Charles Anderson Dana. Martí met Dana—who was known as a friend of Cuban revolutionaries—through their common acquaintance, artist Guillermo Collazo, and the publisher immediately realized that Martí would be an excellent addition to his staff. Dana invited Martí to contribute to *The Hour* and not long after that to his famous newspaper *The Sun*. It didn’t take long until both men developed a cordial friendship. Years later, after learning that Martí had been killed by Spanish bullets in Dos Ríos, Dana himself wrote a tribute to the Cuban in the obituary section of *The Sun*. On May 23, 1895, the piece read:

We learn with poignant sorrow of the death in battle of José Martí, the well-known leader of the Cuban revolutionista. We knew him long and well and esteemed him profoundly. For a protracted period, beginning twenty-odd years ago, he was employed as a contributor to the *Sun*, writing on subjects and questions of the fine arts. In these

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<sup>69</sup> “[T]he public is complaining about your latest reviews of Darwin, Emerson, etc., because readers in this country want political news and anecdotes and the least literature possible. In this regard I am relegating [to a secondary position in the newspaper] the *Sección Constante* because people are grumbling about it, saying that it talks a lot about books and poets. Furthermore, the paragraphs are too long. This Section, which I would like to continue, must have short paragraphs,” wrote Aldrey to Martí. In Rotker 2000, 37.

things his learning was solid and extensive, and his ideas and conclusions were original and brilliant. He was a man of genius, of imagination, of hope and of courage, one of those descendants of the Spanish race whose American birth and instincts seem to have added to the revolutionary tincture which all modern Spaniards inherit. His heart was warm and affectionate, his opinions ardent and aspiring, and he died as such a man wish to die, battling for liberty and democracy. Of such heroes there are not too many in the world, and his warlike grave testifies that even in a positive and material age there are spirits that can give all for their principles without thinking of any selfish return for themselves.

'Honor to the memory of José Martí, and peace to his manly and generous soul!' (Harrison Wilson 1907, 498-499).

It was *The Hour*, however, a literary magazine dedicated to "social interests" and towards "making New York resemble Victorian London as much as possible," that published Martí's first three features in English (Mañach 1950, 183). Under the title "Impressions of America (by a very fresh Spaniard)," the Cuban took a foreigner's view of New York, and expressed first his admiration, but also some of his growing apprehensions about some aspects of American culture.

Martí openly admired American work ethics, and the freedom people enjoyed in New York to go about their own business: "I am, at last, in a country where everyone looks like his own master," he wrote in his first article for the magazine. His critical observations focused on materialism, racism, the apolitical nature of American citizens, and a marked tendency in the U.S. towards some forms of plutocracy. "The United States was really the hope of the world, but did it possess all the spiritual factors necessary to serve as a solid home for truth, liberty and human dignity?" he questioned (Mañach 1950, 188).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> In one of his articles Martí criticized the mayor of Brooklyn as "soft wax in the hands of the real 'boss,' the organizer of the political associations in the city" (Kirk 1977, 280).

Collaborating with *The Sun* and *The Hour*, Martí's saw his popularity grow at an astounding pace. And, while his letters to *La Opinión* were being put into book form in the summer of 1882, the Cuban received a momentous invitation to contribute with the largest, most prestigious and modern newspaper in Latin America: Argentine *La Nación*. From the tribune of the Buenos Aires daily, Martí would cast his fiercest attacks against his most dreaded and powerful political enemy: the Republican Secretary of State James Gillespie Blaine.

### **Martí and Blaine**

Martí had started to form his opinion about Blaine soon after moving to New York. Covering the presidential campaign of 1884, in which Blaine lost to the Democratic candidate Grover Cleveland, the Cuban scrutinized in his articles every move and declaration of the Pennsylvania-born politician. Critic Bill Karras noted that no other names, apart from God, were more frequently mentioned by Martí in his work than those of Blaine and president Grover Cleveland. And although he never dedicated an entire profile to either of them as he had done with Buffalo Bill, Jesse James and some 25 other American personalities, he certainly devoted a great many paragraphs to both in his chronicles.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> In early 1889, after Cleveland was defeated by Harrison and Blaine became Secretary of State, Martí was called upon to write a portrait of Blaine. He never did. In turn, in a letter to a friend he expressed how deeply the election's outcome had affected him: "I'm not myself anymore. What I have all along feared and said would happen is on top of us—the policy of conquest of the United States. A man can take more than he think

Martí professed a special admiration for Cleveland. He praised his “ingenuity and audacity [and his being] of the people.” He would also say that, “[though] young, he’s one of those first Americans with an iron hand and eagle eye, who hasn’t taken his boots off yet” (Karras 1974, 79). And, at least until 1883, his esteem for Blaine had been equally as high. In several essays before 1883, Martí applauded Blaine’s “healthy politics” and his “friendship with Southern America” (Ward 2007, 106). But after 1883, Martí started to focus on the more questionable aspects of Blaine’s history and character: “[Blaine] did not think it shameful to use force when one had it [and] thought that now was the time to nail the world, as far as the arm could reach, to the growing edifice of what was once called the home of liberty” (Karras 1974, 79). Already by 1884, Blaine represented for Martí the most negative aspects of American culture, politics and foreign policy.

The Cuban understood that, aimed in the wrong direction, the tremendous military and economic power of the United States could lead to the subjugation of the whole hemisphere under the false pretense of freedom and capitalism. Therefore, he started to portray the Republican as a dangerous enemy of Latin American independence. “If [Blaine] had his country in his hands, [he] would give it a navy for spurs, an army for horse and with a slap, send it to conquer the world. [It would be a day of mourning for *our* America], whose knees are still weak [...] if this sharp

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before he dies; because I have been dead a long time, yet I am still alive. If one thing could have killed me, it would have been this. O console myself with my usual medicine, the only cure for pain, imagined or real, and it leaves me with my respect and dignity intact—work” (Karras 1974, 83).

fearless and unshackled man came into the presidency of the United States" (Karras 1974, 82).

Blaine lost the presidential race to Cleveland in 1884, but by the time the Pan American Conference began in 1889, the Republican Benjamin Harrison had succeeded the anti-imperialist democrat from New Jersey. To Martí's deep dismay, Blaine easily ascended to the position of Secretary of State, and was suspected by many to be the power behind the curtains of Harrison's government. The president himself had given Blaine free rein to plan the first hemispheric encounter at full force.

In fact, Harrison had been Blaine's mentee for almost ten years, and during the 1884 campaign the future president ranked Blaine as a statesman comparable in ability to Europe's most sagacious diplomats. Much later, in a letter offering the post of Secretary of State to Blaine, Harrison explained his choice: "We have already a pretty full understanding of each other's views as to the general policy which should characterize our foreign relations. I am especially interested in the improvement of our relations with the Central and South American states." Blaine responded in the same cozy tone: "I am glad to find myself in the heartiest accord with the principles and policies which you briefly outline for your administration, and I am especially pleased with what you say in regard to Foreign Affairs" (Crapol 2000, 112).

Blaine's intentions to control the Pan American Conference became clear after he was named its president despite not being one of the official ten U.S. delegates to

the meeting. The presidency offered him enough leverage to promote his economic and political agenda. And many speculated that he would have largely succeeded, had it not been for Martí, who, with his poignant articles for *La Nación*, and a series of speeches, editorials, and diplomatic maneuvers, effectively counterbalanced Blaine's influence over the Latin American envoys.

### ***La Nación* of Buenos Aires**

Martí had been first contacted by *La Nación* in 1882, thanks to Carlos Carranza. The Argentine General Consul in New York and one of the many devoted followers and friends of Martí in the city tried to convince Martí to publish in South America after he stopped his contributions to *La Opinión*. Carranza kept close contacts with the former Argentine president, writer and journalist Domingo Sarmiento and historian and newspaperman Bartolomé Mitre, so it didn't take him long to acquaint Martí with these two brilliant Argentine publicists. Mitre and his son, journalist Bartolomé Nicolás Mitre y Vedia, had founded *La Nación* of Buenos Aires in 1870, and by 1882 the broadsheet was already by far the most serious, prestigious and modern newspaper in Latin America. The region, undergoing a tremendous economic and social expansion influenced by Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Sarmiento, was ravenous for information and culture from all over the world. Up to the challenge, the daily soon became one of the main modernizing forces in Argentina and the subcontinent, delivering in its articles up-to-date snippets of European and American literature, politics, culture, sciences, arts and ideas.

By 1882 *La Nación* had become the mouthpiece for the Argentine liberal party. It had already installed a telegraph in its newsroom, and so was able to incorporate cables in its articles. It had at least five foreign correspondents on staff: John Roe in Africa, Brocha Gorda writing about the Guerra del Pacífico (the war that between 1879 and 1883 pitted Chile against Bolivia and Perú), Ernesto García Ladevese in France, Aníbal Latino in Italy, G.Z. in England, and collaborators in Chile and Uruguay. The breadth of its international coverage turned the newspaper into one of the most lucrative in the region, selling an average of 35,000 copies a day between 1887 and 1890 (Rotker 1992, 103-113, Quesada 1883).

Between 1880 and 1895 its layout remained essentially the same. At the bottom of the front page, separated from the rest, there always appeared a segment of a serial novel, normally translated from the English, French or German, rarely from a Spanish author, and almost never from a Latin American. Everything else on page one had an identical design, which for the readers facilitated the transition – sometimes confusion—between facts, opinion and fiction. Except for the editorial, which appeared on the first column on the left, news, essays and even short stories were, from a design point of view, undifferentiated. Sometimes, however, informative pieces were preceded by a brief summary, but even when some illustrations started to be included in the paper –photography was still unexplored in Latin American dailies—they generally appeared in the advertising and the commercial sections (Rotker 1992, 104).

This lack of differentiation between genres and styles was critical in the development of some early modern forms of nonfiction like the *crónica* (the

*chronicle*), a form of brief article meant to be both entertaining, informative and more often than not, extremely political (González 1993, 83-100 and Rotker 2000). A very clear example of the dual nature of this genre appears in the editor's introduction to a piece written by Martí about the presidential race of 1888, which presents the factual coverage as if it were purely fictional:

Martí has wanted to give us a sample of the creative power of his privileged imagination, sending us a fantasy that, due to the inventiveness of its topic, and the animated and picturesque scenic development, becomes of interest of the reader. Only to José Martí, an always new and original writer, it could occur to paint a town, in the advanced days we are living, dedicated in full to ridiculous electoral tasks [...] (Rotker 1992, 105).<sup>72</sup>

After being introduced by Carranza, it didn't take long for the editors of *La Nación* to become interested in Martí. Mitre and Sarmiento were both seasoned newspapermen and ideologues, and for decades had been fascinated with the scientific, pedagogic and political developments happening in United States, a nation that represented the triumph of civilization in the American continent. When Carranza sent them examples of Martí's journalism, they didn't hesitate to incorporate the New York-based Cuban to their staff.

Martí received Mitre's letter in July 1882, and was less pleased by the honor itself than by the opportunity that writing for *La Nación* would offer to further the political cause of Cuban independence in the Americas. In a personal letter to the editor, the Cuban started delineating a plan for his future contributions:

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<sup>72</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

...I will send you in my news-letter, which I will make varied, deep and animated, whatever occurrences that due to their general character, or to the particular interest for your country, happened here. The picturesque will lighten up any seriousness, and its literariness will liven up its more political aspects (Vargas 2003, 62).<sup>73</sup>

Right after accepting the invitation, Martí contacted Enrique Trujillo, director of the New York based Cuban revolutionary newspaper *El Porvenir*, who also saw Martí's hiring as a fantastic opportunity to further the Cuban cause. That very same night, Trujillo invited Martí and revolutionary leader Flor Crombet, a handsome *mestizo* of French descent, to discuss the timing and potential for a new uprising on the island (Mañach 1950, 216).

Already by September 13, 1882 *La Nación* published Martí's first article, on the trial and hanging of Charles J. Guiteau, the murderer of the American president James Garfield. Mitre's son reported to Martí that the piece had been read "in this country and adjacent ones, with marked interest and it deserves to be widely reprinted," and also expressed satisfaction at having –as he wrote in English—“the right man in the right place” (Mañach 1950, 217).<sup>74</sup> However, in the same letter, he gave Martí a few admonitions concerning future articles. In his first piece, Martí had displayed some harsh criticism of a few aspects of American culture, but Mitre decided to edit out those parts “so as not to create a wrong impression that he was opening a campaign of denunciation of the United States” (Mañach 1950, 217). Mitre had a clearly commercial vision of what *La Nación* was meant to become as a daily. The

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<sup>73</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

<sup>74</sup> In fact, Martí's articles soon became so popular that were vastly reproduced without authorization throughout the entire region.

paper, Mitre said in his letter apologizing for “the brutality of the word used for the sake of accuracy,” was a “commodity that looks for its proper placement in the market.” And in the Argentine market, the United States was then in very great favor (Mañach 1950, 217 and Rotker 1992, 111).<sup>75</sup>

Throughout the years, Martí collaborated with many other newspapers and magazines: *El Partido Liberal*, of Mexico, *La República* of Honduras, and *El Economista Americano*, in New York. And in his chronicles, the Latin American perspective was always one of the main features. As he had editorialized in *La América*, he conceived his articles as means to “define, advise, alert, and reveal the secrets of the seemingly –and only seemingly—marvelous success of [the United States]” (Martí 2002, 140).

His Latin American fervor was such that even Sarmiento became at times irritated by it: “I wish that Martí would offer us less of Martí, less of the Latino, and of the Spanish race, and less of the South American, to give us a little more of the Yankee,” he once wrote to his friend Mitre (Rotker 1992, 120). Sarmiento, nevertheless, was also well aware of Martí’s talent. In a letter to his friend Paul Groussac he urged the Frenchman to translate an article Martí had written on the Statue of Liberty into French since “[i]n Spanish there is nothing else like the clarion calls of Martí, and in France herself since Victor Hugo, there has been nothing like this tocsin-tone of resonance” (Mañach 1950, 217).

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<sup>75</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

***Escenas Norteamericanas: Forewarnings About the Power of a Rising Empire***

Back in New York after his forced departure from Venezuela in 1881, it became clear to Martí –as well as to some of the press in the United States—that James Blaine’s policies posed a threat to Latin America, especially to Cuba. The agenda of the new Secretary of State was tinted with an excessive belligerence and assertiveness, two attitudes that in the press gained him the nickname of “Jingo Jim” (Crapol 2000, 82-83). After a decade of opposing the acquisition of Cuba, Blaine now favored it, and in his closing testimony to the Congressional Investigative Committee, and later in a defense of his Latin American program published in September 1882, the statesman declared he was still convinced that the United States should maintain its trade dominance in the hemisphere and prevent European nations from taking advantage of a weak American diplomatic position: “if the commercial empire that legitimately belongs to us is to be ours, we must not lie idle and witness its transfer to others” (Crapol 2000, 83).

Throughout 1881, until his resignation after Garfield’s assassination in September, Blaine spoke and wrote numerous times about the dangers that Cuba would pose to the United States in the event that, released from Spain, it fell to German hands.

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, only 18 days before leaving office, Blaine addressed his concern in a letter to the Senate: “that rich island, the key to the Gulf of Mexico, and the field for our most extended trade in the Western Hemisphere, is, though in the hands of Spain, a part of the American commercial system... If ever ceasing to be Spanish,

Cuba must necessarily become American and not fall under any other European domination” (Crapol 2000, 83).

Although Garfield’s assassination prevented Blaine from pursuing this agenda, his ideas on foreign policy radicalized even more in the years that followed. On several occasions between 1884 –during the presidential campaign—and 1890, *The New York Times* reported on Blaine’s intentions to purchase Cuba for the sum of \$500,000,000. The paper also addressed the candidate’s concern that Cuba’s foreign debt, mostly in German hands, could easily translate into a German appropriation of the island, creating and an extremely uncomfortable geopolitical conundrum for the U.S., if it still wanted to project its political and economic influence over the Americas.<sup>76</sup>

By 1882, Martí felt that he had finally understood Blaine, and the agenda behind his diplomatic maneuvers. In his columns and chronicles, but also from his position as a diplomatic envoy for Uruguay since 1887, he did as much as he could to prevent the realization of Blaine’s annexationist plans, and his ascent to the presidency in 1884. Martí believed that, particularly after the presidency of Grover

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<sup>76</sup> “The Cubans residing in Florida and pursuing the vocations either of cigar-makers or of political refugees, are, upon this authority, enthusiastic for BLAINE. They believe that if he were President Cuba would be acquired by purchase. Mr. WICKER, the ex-Collector in question, tells how Mr. BLAINE told him that the island would be worth \$500,000,000 to the United States. The Cubans are to carry Florida for BLAINE and BLAINE is to buy Cuba for the Cubans [...] It is none the less characteristic that any man with a wild-cat scheme of this kind on his hands or in his mind should desire the election of BLAINE as the first step toward the realization of his scheme. The favor with which his nomination is received by these people will naturally have the effect of setting still more strongly against him the sober and settled part of the community, who expect to get their living by working and not by flying kites” (*New York Times*, “Blaine and Cuba,” June 17, 1884.)

Cleveland, the United States could not accept as their leader a man like Blaine, so “rapacious egoist, majestic [and] bold as an eagle” (Karras 1974, 77). At first, the Cuban believed that there was a disconnect between Blaine’s predatory intentions and the American people at large. But in 1889 he changed his mind. On March 16, the *Philadelphia Manufacturer* published a critical article titled “Do We Want Cuba?” which was later reprinted by the *Evening Post* in New York. The piece stated that:

The people of Cuba are divided into three classes, Spaniards, native Cubans of Spanish descent and negroes. The men of Spanish birth are probably less fitted than men of any other white race to become American citizens. They have ruled Cuba for centuries. They rule it now upon almost precisely the same methods that they have always employed, methods which combine bigotry with tyranny, and silly pride with fathomless corruption. The less we have of them the better. The native Cubans are not much more desirable: to the faults of the men of the parent race they add effeminacy and a distaste for exertion which amounts really to disease. They are helpless, idle, of defective morals and unfitted by nature and experience to discharging the obligations of citizenship in a great and free republic. Their lack of manly force and self-respect is demonstrated by the supineness with which they have so long submitted to the Spanish oppression, and even their attempts at rebellion have been so pitifully ineffective that they have risen little above the dignity of fare. To clothe such men with the responsibilities of directing this government, and to give them the same measure of power that is wielded by the freemen of our Northern States, would be to summon them to the performance of functions for which they have not the smallest capacity [added to this section copied literally from the *Philadelphia Manufacturer*, a second part was added by a writer of the *Post*]. All of this we emphatically endorse, and it may be added that if we have now a Southern question which disturbs us more or less, we should have it in a more aggravated form if Cuba were added to the Union, with near a million blacks, much inferior to our own in point of civilization, who must, of course, be armed with the ballot and put on the same level politically with their former masters. [The only hope] we could have of opening Cuba to the dignity of becoming a State, would be to Americanize it in full, covering it with people of our own race, (Martí 2000, 262-262 and Kirk 1977, 284)<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> As analyzed by Mindich (1998), in the popular press, criticisms related to a deviant or an uncivilized nature, and unmanliness were part of the prevailing racist views of both race and gender of the time.

Martí, furious, wrote a six-page rebuttal, "Vindication of Cuba," showing an irrevocable disillusionment with the American press, its politics, and its public opinion. The *Post* published Martí's letter in full:

This is not the occasion to discuss the question of the annexation of Cuba. It is probable that no self-respecting Cuban would like to see his country annexed to a nation where the leaders of opinion share towards him the prejudices excusable only to vulgar jingoism or rampant ignorance [...] There are some Cubans who, from honorable motives, from an ardent admiration for progress and liberty, from a prescience of their own powers under better political conditions, from an unhappy ignorance of the history and tendency of annexation, would like to see the island annexed to the United States. But those who have fought in war and learned in exile, who have built, by the work of hands and mind, a virtuous home in the heart of an unfriendly community; who by their successful efforts as scientists and merchants, as railroad builders and engineers, as teachers, artists, lawyers, journalists, orators and poets, as men of alert intelligence and uncommon activity, are honored wherever their powers have been called into action and the people are just enough to understand them; those who have raised, with their less prepared elements, a town of workingmen where the United States had previously a few huts in a barren cliff; those more numerous than the others, do not desire the annexation of Cuba to the United States. They do not need it. They admire this nation, the greatest ever built by liberty; but they dislike the evil conditions that, like worms in the heart, have begun in this mighty Republic their work of destruction. They have made of the heroes of this country their own heroes [...] but they can't honestly believe that excessive individualism, the glorification of wealth, and the protracted exultation of a terrible victory, are preparing the United States to be the typical nation of liberty, where no opinion is to be based in greed, and no triumph or acquisition reached against charity or justice. We love the country of Lincoln, as much as we fear the motherland of Cutting (Martí 2000, 263-264 and Kirk 1977, 284-285).<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> I've revised, compared with its Spanish version, and improved parts of the translation in this fragment. The Cutting case, which made it to Grover Cleveland's State of the Union speech in 1886, was a diplomatic incident between the United States and Mexico that almost escalated to an armed conflict. It was triggered by the imprisonment in Mexico of A. K. Cutting, an American newspaper editor, who was charged with the commission libel in Texas, of which a Mexican citizen was the object (Sarracino 2003).

In those days of 1889 Martí was corresponding with an array of newspapers in Latin America and the United States. He lived with Carmen, the mother of his only son, in a rented, newly built luxury cottage in Brooklyn. Adding to his pay from *La Nación*, he also received some extras for translations of French and English manuals he prepared for Appleton's Latin America. His friend Enrique Estrázulas, the Uruguayan consul to whom Martí had dedicated his poetry book *Ismaelillo* in 1882, had finally succeeded in having the Cuban appointed as Uruguay's vice-consul, and the writer's economic situation in New York seemed to be finally stabilizing.

Martí worked in a small office on the fourth floor of 120 Front Street, just below Wall Street, in an old somber brick building with iron steps and shallow halls facing the waterfront. His office, however, was filled with light. It was furnished modestly: a desk always crowded with papers, and a writing chair, gift from the Argentine delegation to the Pan American Conference, which had also presented the writer with a fur skin to warm his feet during New York's winter. Against the walls, a few bookshelves of white pine, some of which Martí had crafted himself, held the Cuban's favorite volumes of Latin American literature, the magazines and literary reviews he published and edited in New York, and a large collection of his favorite American fiction. A portrait of his father Mariano and a few portraits that still trigger some controversy today hung from the walls: one of Víctor Hugo, one of Karl Marx, one of Charles Darwin and one of Simón Bolívar (Kirk 1980, 139, Mañach 1950, 248 and Aparicio 1969). Also hanging from the wall was the only adornment that Martí had brought from Cuba: an iron ring, a gift of his mother made of the

chain the writer had worn in prison in his teens. The ring, he wrote, represented “a magic talisman in his pilgrimage for his country’s liberty” (Karras 1974, 88).

The office was well known to Hispanic-Americans in the city. There, the Cuban would take care of diplomatic affairs, and sometimes meet independentist leaders to plot upheavals and the next revolution in Cuba. In the evenings Martí used his commute on the ferryboat to read his favorite newspapers, especially the *Herald*, and to write his “literature under pressure,” (Rotker 2000, 43). His schedule required him to “leave home on cold, early mornings and to return well-wrapped up in the dark of night,” rarely giving him enough time to sit down and write in the office or at home (Mañach 1950, 219).

In New York, Latin Americans of all origins knew that the doors at 120 Front Street were always open for them. And on one fall morning of 1889, a compact group of envoys to the Pan American Conference visited Martí to ask for advice. After a warm welcome, and a brief discussion about Henry James’ most recent novel, Martí admonished them to follow in detail “the opinions on the Conference of the [New York] Tribune, El Avisador [Hispanoamericano], the [New York] Post, the [New York] Herald, and the [New York] Times,” to see and feel by themselves the state of American public opinion, and understand to what extent freedom in their countries was dependent on their performance at the momentous meeting (Mañach 1950, 248 and Karras 1974, 89).

### **Modernismo, Martí, and a Radical Renovation of the Spanish Language**

On December 1889, *La Nación* began to publish Martí's coverage of the Pan American summit under the Cuban's usual header, "Escenas Norteamericanas, Cartas desde Nueva York" ("North American Scenes, Letters from New York"). The *Escenas*, more than four hundred chronicles that Martí submitted to different newspapers in the hemisphere, but with particular frequency and quality to Argentina's *La Nación* between 1881 and 1890, were usually front-page features about life, culture and politics in the United States, with a direct lineage to the political-journalistic tradition inaugurated by Domingo Sarmiento in Chile. In full, the chronicles constitute more than one half of Martí's 74 volumes of published work, and are central to understanding not only his political ideas, but also one of the most dramatic changes of the Castilian language to take place since the times of Miguel de Cervantes (Rotker 1992, 13-27; Gray 1963, 249-256).

The deeply political nature of Martí's chronicles and their undeniable urgency didn't prevent them from becoming the most poetic, elegant and progressive forms of literature to be written in Spanish in centuries. And although there isn't in Martí's writings a defined border between aesthetic and political concerns or a clear divide between fact, fiction and opinion, he could not be considered purely an aesthete, since writing was for him, first and foremost, a form of social service (Anderson Imbert 1953, 515-525).

The poetic nature of Martí's prose, even in those chronicles that were political at their deepest core, was always accompanied with innovation, power and elegance. The Cuban himself didn't differentiate between his more literary writings and the

more militant ones, as proven in his testament, a letter sent a few days before his death to his secretary and friend Gonzalo de Quesada. In it, Martí left instructions for his literary estate to be organized and published thematically in chapters that mixed, almost indiscriminately, his purely literary writings with the more political ones (Rodríguez-Luis 1999, XI).

The linguistic renovation that Martí kick-started in the Castilian language took place in the context of an aesthetic movement called *modernismo*. Historically, *modernismo* was the literary acknowledgement of modernity, an era of speed, fast changes and intercommunications. Railroads, steamboats, factories, telegraphs, telephones, daily newspapers and an array of technological and scientific developments opened what was until then the local and communal to a number of international influences. Internationalism and transcontinentalism, concepts which until then were only conceivable, became possible. There was a general feeling that nature could be ruled upon, enhanced and indefinitely corrected by artificial means, which in turn heightened the expectations for an unbounded and ever improving future.

The main expressions of this technological era were the expansions in global communications, traveling and the extraordinary development of metropolitan areas (Rotker 1992, 30-31, Rotker 2000, 1-3). In Latin America, cities like Buenos Aires and Mexico grew exponentially. In the 50 years after 1880, "almost every capital city in Latin America duplicated or tripled its population" (Romero 1976, 252). By 1890, Mexico had 400,000 inhabitants, as many as Rome; Buenos Aires had more than 500,000, while New York, had close to 1,500,000 and London, the most important

industrial center in the Western Hemisphere at the time, counted 3,500,000 (Romero 1976, 250-59). Cities became communication nodes, reached by waves of international information in the form of books, journals and newspapers, magazines, and new and different forms of journalism.

Due to the growth of metropolitan areas, a new division of intellectual labor became possible. This phenomenon, still in its infancy in Latin America, opened a window of opportunity for those interested in intellectual pursuits to veer away from careers in government and politics, and become journalists, writers, educators or a combination of the three (Henríquez Ureña 1949, 164-65). As Susana Rotker has noted, however, this division of labor didn't mean that the new journalists had necessarily abandoned their political pursuits. And, in cases like Martí, José Enrique Rodó and Alcides Arguedas, among others, modernistas still worked as part time diplomats, politicians and, in one way or another, stayed connected to politics and government affairs (Rotker 192, 66).

Modernistas, though, didn't write for the new urban masses, and the nature of their production was, at least, somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, many of them like Rubén Darío, the most representative member of this movement, or Martí himself produced extremely innovative, avant-garde poetry and literature, sometimes only accessible to sophisticated critics and elite connoisseurs. On the other hand, these same authors spread their ideas and programs through the daily press, without concerning themselves with whether they would be understood by the populace. In the words of Darío: "The cries of three hundred geese will not keep you, woodsman, from playing your charming flute, as long as your friend the

nightingale is pleased with your melody. When he is no longer there to hear you, close your eyes and play for the inhabitants of your interior kingdom" (Rotker 2000, 22).<sup>79</sup>

In a way, many aspects of the modernist renovation became possible after Martí, forefather of the movement, relocated to New York. In the most modern metropolis of its time, the Cuban gained access to ideas, magazines, newspapers, books and fashion, and all the elements of a culture that, sometimes imported from France, sometimes originated locally and exported to Europe, was becoming more and more international. It didn't take long for Martí to understand that in order to benefit from this exciting array of ideas and develop an intercontinental refinement, it was necessary to overcome some archaic notions connected to nationalism, one of the ideological cores of romanticism. For Martí, to become international meant primarily to bypass the oppressive political and linguistic influence from Spain: "To know diverse literatures is the means for freeing oneself from the tyranny of some of them," he wrote (Rama 1983, 97).<sup>80</sup>

As a literary tradition, *modernismo* appeared in Latin America in the early 1880s. After Martí, Uruguayan essayist José Enrique Rodó, Guatemalan diplomat and poet Enrique Gómez Carrillo, Colombian poet José Asunción Silva, Cuban poet Julián del Casal, Mexican writer Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, and Mexican poet Amado Nervo, all

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<sup>79</sup> It is necessary to note that critic Roberto González Etchevarría has rejected the notion of a Hispanic-American modernism, due to the fact that the Latin American nations were founded in the outset of modernity, and, therefore, had not seen a different past, like Europe.

<sup>80</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

of them journalists, continued its linguistic and literary renovation. In their writings, they all resorted to images of technology, urban development and speed, combining with *tropoi* anchored in the Spanish tradition of the Golden Age, and rhetorical techniques developed by medieval writers like Santa Teresa de Jesús, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Francisco de Quevedo, Baltasar Gracián and Diego de Saavedra Fajardo. Characterized by its elegant prose, its openness to Anglicisms and Gallicisms and a somewhat flamboyant style of versification and prose, incorporating elements of French symbolism, parnasianism and impressionism, and acknowledging that different forms of internationalization would become a norm for Latin American culture –and for culture in general—this linguistic and cultural revolution reached its maturity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the advent of Nicaraguan powerhouse poet Rubén Darío (Gicovate 1964, 217-226; Schulman 1958, 61-64 and Rama 1983, 96-135).

But Góngora's hyperbaton, Calderón's baroque phrasing, Baltasar Gracián's conceptual and lexical wit, and the abundant use of aphorisms, impersonal constructions and neologisms, were already present in Martí's chronicles. An example of this rhetorical arsenal is displayed in this fragment of an article Martí wrote about the execution of four anarchists held responsible for the Haymarket bombing in Chicago, on November 11, 1887.

Spies's face is a prayer; Fischer's is steadfastness itself; Parson's radiant pride; Engel ducks his head and makes his deputy laugh with a joke. Each one in turn has his legs bound with a strap. Then hoods are flung over the four heads like candlesnuffers putting out four flames: first Spies, then Fischer, then Engel, then Parsons. And while his companions' heads are being covered, Spies's voice rings out in a tone that strikes deep into the flesh of all who hear it: 'The time will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you are throttling today.' 'This is the happiest moment of my life,' Fischer

says, while the deputy is attending to Engel. 'Hurray for anarchy!' says Engel, who, beneath the grave-clothes, was moving his bound hands toward the sheriff. "Will I be allowed to speak, O men of America..." Parsons begins. A signal, a sound, the trapdoor gives way, the four bodies drop simultaneously, circling and knocking against each other. Parsons has died in the fall; one quick turn, and he stops. Fischer swings, shuddering, tries to work his neck free of the knot, extends his legs, draws them in, and dies. Engel rocks in his floating hangman's robes his chest rising and falling like the swell of the sea, and strangles. Spies dangles, twisting in a horrible dance like a sackful of grimaces, doubles up and heaves himself to one side, banging his knees against his forehead, lifts one leg, kicks out with both, shakes his arms, beating against the air, and finally expires, his broken neck bent forward, his head saluting the spectators (Martí 2000, 217-218)<sup>81</sup>

The scenic construction, the rapid succession of images, the interlaced dialogue, and the cinematic cadence in phrasing show Martí's groundbreaking literary techniques devoted to the coverage of current, political events, using a completely new style of storytelling.

Although he was indeed an innovator Martí was not an uncritical adopter, or a purely slavish follower of social and technological changes. A profound admirer of science, technology and progress, the Cuban was also one of its most vocal critics. In many of his pieces, but particularly in those written after 1884, admonitions and warnings about some by-products of American modernity, such as racism, exploitation, greed and imperialism, abound.<sup>82</sup> Sometimes in these same pieces,

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<sup>81</sup> The fragment was part of "Class War in Chicago: A Terrible Drama," a several pages chronicle Martí wrote on November 13, 1887 and was published in *La Nación* of Buenos Aires on January 1, 1888.

<sup>82</sup> Susana Rotker identifies three periods of Martí in the United States: the first one, between 1881 to 1884, when his texts show admiration for the American culture and its accomplishments, the second period between 1884 and 1892, when Martí becomes more critical of the United States –possibly because of his disenchantment due to the Pan American Conference and American expansionism—and the third period, between

Martí even proposed wistful palliatives to the excesses, such as universal education, solidarity and kindness (Jrade 1999, 3).

*Modernismo* was not only unique in its form and content. It was also extraordinary in the degree to which, as a movement, it depended on journalism to evolve and spread. Most Latin American modernistas relied on the press to publish their work, make a living, and reach their specific, sometimes minimal audiences. That is partly why, many of these authors excelled at writing *crónicas*.

While criticizing the ephemeral nature of journalism and its impersonal style, which could turn according to the demands of the newspaper, a monarchist into a republican or a freethinker into a Catholic, Cuban modernist poet Julián del Casal also praised journalism for being “the benefactor that puts money in our pockets, bread on our table and wine in our cup [although] it will never be the tutelary deity that encircles our brow with a crown of laurel leaves” (González 1993, 86). Newspapers, the region’s first massive media, were also the main vehicles for this new Latin American form of journalistic literature.

But although modernistas made use of newspapers, that didn’t mean they actually liked them. In his essay “Cómo ha de ser un diario” (“What should a daily newspaper be like”) Uruguayan essayist José Enrique Rodó argued that good newspaper craftsmanship responded in a way to the “Spencerian theory of style,” reducing “the secret of good literary form to an economy of attention” (González

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1892 and his death in 1895, when Martí interrupts his collaboration with the press and becomes a full time revolutionary (Rotker 1999, 25).

1993, 104). Mexican writer Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, who also wrote for dailies, usually complained about the “brutal nature” of the telegraph, which had become one of the main tools in the newsroom: “Telegrams have no literature, no grammar or orthography...” (Rotker 1992, 103). Even Argentine Joaquín V. González characterized the daily press as a “monster that devours in one day enormous quantities of ideas [which are then melted and processed by journalists] as if it were a factory, [due to the populace’s] scarce need for intelligent concepts.” That was for González the reason for which “journalistic literature rarely raised to the heights of the sublime” (González, 1936, 344).<sup>83</sup> In fact, modernistas as a rule didn’t take their journalistic texts all too seriously, and gave more attention to their poetry, which they considered a real, innovative and durable art form. But still, newspapers were for modernistas an effective means to establish contact with a growing readership, helping connect their literature with the products of an incipient massive culture (Montaldo, 1995).

In the late nineteenth century, it also became clear that a schism was developing between journalism and literature. In an editorial published in *La Nación* in 1889, some affirmations such as “journalism and literature agree just like holy water and the devil” or “a good journalist cannot let his pen go astray into the fields of fantasy” show to what extent these spheres had started to split (Rotker 1992, 109).

Martí, writing at the inception of modernismo, also believed in the aesthetic limits of journalism, and he expressed this eloquently during his stay in Mexico. “The

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<sup>83</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

newspaper writer cannot pretend to be sublime. The sublime is the essence of life: the mountain peaks in its summit: the sublime is the mountain's peak [...] He who is not the owner of himself cannot wait the hour [of inspiration] to take advantage of it. The writer in a daily, who can sometimes be sublime, should be content being at least a pleasant writer" (Rotker 1992, 115). However, his opinion started to change when he arrived in New York and became exposed to new, vibrant forms of journalism blooming in the United States. One newspaper in particular, the *New York Herald*, revived the Cuban's enthusiasm for the narrative possibilities offered by the daily press: "There are no minor facts [...] Every day can be a poem [...] In a good newspaper everything beats and scintillates" he said in early 1880 (Rotker 1992, 125). And only a few years later, in 1884, he would conclude: "reading a good magazine is like reading dozens of good books" (Fountain 2003, 15). In his New York years, Martí also became an avid reader of Jacob Riis, the Danish critic who wrote with style and distinction for both the *New York Tribune* and the *Evening Sun*, and whose defense of New York's lower classes –a cause dear to Martí—later reappeared as a book in *How the Other Half Lives* (Rotker 2000, 63).

Another newspaper that Martí found inspiring was Charles Anderson Dana's *The Sun*, a daily for which he wrote, and was geared to a working class audience, primarily immigrants and small merchants, but with the idea of not compromising in literary quality or style. Dana's reporters resorted to an array of narrative devices in order to catch the reader's attention, while creating a vivid and accurate picture of daily events. The Cuban soon learned from *The Sun* that his rhetorical toolbox would be put to good use in daily journalism too, because "the facts would be there, but their point was as often to entertain as to inform" (Schudson 1976, 64).

## Rethinking a Mass Medium

“Martí was a masterful orator, and he used all the catchphrases and all the persuasion devices of which our language is capable,” declared critic Enrique Anderson Imbert. “While writing, animated by that practical will or shaken by some declamatory impetus, he used to imbue to his prose the structure of a sermon, of a speech, of a proclaim, of a prayer. It is not the classical architecture, not even the one used by our predecessors during the Golden Age [...] but there is in its eloquence the makings of a laborious architect” (Anderson Imbert 1953, 522).<sup>84</sup>

It is also true, however, that Martí’s prose feels at times like a succession of grammatical derailments, in which new emotions and effects are delivered through different and totally new means. Ellipsis, pleonasm, neologisms, hyperbatons, nominal phrases, and dispersed syntactic nuclei, paint Martí’s impressionistic, emotive imagery. A good example of this is his 1882 chronicle about the death of Jesse James in Missouri:

These days in which New York has been a party, have been of great confusion in Missouri, where there was a bandit of high forehead, beautiful face and a hand made to kill, who didn’t steal bags but banks, not houses but towns, and wouldn’t jump balconies but trains. He was a hero of the jungle. His fierceness was so exceptional that the people of his land esteemed it above his crimes. He was not born of mean father, but of clergyman, didn’t look like a villain, but like a knight, neither he married a bad woman, but a schoolteacher.

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<sup>84</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

And some say he was a political leader in one of his hideouts, or that he lived under false name and came as elected official to the last Democratic convention to vote for president. There are the lands of Missouri and those of Kansas, covered in woods and deep forests. Jesse James and his men knew the recesses of those jungles, the hiding places by the roads, the fords in the marshes, and the hollow trees. His house was armory, and another armory was his belt, because around his waistband he carried two cartridge belts loaded with handguns. He came to life during a war, and tore the life away of many long bearded men when he still had no beard. In times of Alba, he would have been captain in Flanders. In times of Pizarro, his lieutenant. In these times, he was a soldier, and was then bandit. He wasn't one of those magnificent soldiers of Sheridan, who fought for this land to be one, and the slave free, and raised the flag of the North in tenacious Confederate forts. Neither he was one of those other patient soldiers of silent Grant, who rounded up the rebels in terror, like the serene hunter to the hungry boar. He was among the guerrillas of the South, for whom the flag was plundering booty. His hand was an instrument of killing. He'd leave the dead on the ground, and laden with booty go to dole out generously with his fellows in crime, smaller cubs that licked the paws of that great tiger (Martí, *La Opinión Nacional*, Caracas, 1882).<sup>85</sup>

In Jesse James profile, cultural associations and extrapolations push the more mundane news content of a daily event into the terrain of a literary epic by introducing mythical elements, such as a comparison between Jesse James and a Spanish captain in Flandes or a lieutenant of Pizarro's army (Rotker 1992, 206). These mechanisms make Martí's chronicles transcend the momentary relevance of a daily piece to enter the perennial terrain of literature. Through this and other profiles, Martí was meant to introduce the American character to the Latin American public. But when read years later, immediate references are lost, and the epic elements persist, dominating the story and making it still interesting, readable and enjoyable.

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<sup>85</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

One of Martí's most commonly used literary devices was a metaphorical bestiary that ranged from terrestrial animals and insects, characterized as mostly carnal and weak yet sometimes humanely sublime, to the pure, aerial and spiritual eagles, and other creatures of the sky, which could sometimes be base and grotesque. This interplay between high and low beasts is key to understanding Martí's metaphorical apparatus, and appears with eloquence in his introduction to Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde's Poem of Niagara: the "aguila rastrera" or pedestrian eagle, is an oxymoron that speaks in the poem about certain types of political power that, when combined with greed, move against the current of public interest. (Rama 1983, 113)

Although Martí was extremely concerned with the elegance of his prose, he wasn't a pure aesthete. When in January 1882 the Cuban covered for *La Nación* the lecture English writer Oscar Wilde offered at Chickering Hall in New York, he portrayed Wilde as a dandy, and was skeptical about his attempt to focus on "pure forms." In discussing Wilde—who was at the time the author of a slim volume of poetry with an impressionistic twist, but hadn't yet achieved the notoriety he would reach years later—Martí emphasized the need for language to become a tool for social justice and the development of a just society. In that sense, contrary to Wilde's approach, which led to art nouveau and symbolism, and a view of literature in which language as a sphere was completely separated from society—thus, symbolism's necessary response to realistic literature—the Cuban advocated for a stronger emphasis on reality (Pym 1992, 163). In that direction, the development of a stabilized form of Castilian in Latin America was for Martí a prerequisite to the development of objectivity and humanism (Rama 1983, 134). On a linguistic level,

*modernismo* tried to adapt and incorporate a series of values, fixed and stable, during a time of extreme dynamism, renovation, changing values and uncertainty.

### **Covering the Pan American Conference**

While Martí considered himself to be an impartial journalist, it was clear that he would not make any attempts to conceal his opinions about the Pan American Conference: "From Independence down to today, never was a subject more in need of examination than the invitation of the United States to the Pan American Conference. The truth is that the hour has come for Spanish America to declare its second independence," he wrote in one of his first pieces about it (Karras 1974, 89). In fact, Martí had already prefigured a set of clear, direct, and strategic political goals for his coverage of the Conference. And, in that vein, his articles were studded with sometimes open, sometimes more or less indirect warnings to the attendees about the expansionist intentions of their host, Secretary James Gillespie Blaine, together with fragments of a political program for a future Latin America (Mañach 1950, 259).

Martí's chronicles from the Pan American Conference had three main political objectives: they were written first as an alert to the Latin American attendees about Blaine's hegemonic intentions. In the Cuban's own words, the Secretary of State was looking "[...] for subsidies at Latin American expense," to secure via a series of commercial agreements the access to Latin American markets for some U.S. products that, due to over-pricing or excessive tariffs, didn't find buyers in more

traditional markets within the United States or Europe (Karras 1974, 78). This notion was not foreign to the local press. In an article about reciprocity agreements published in the *New York Times* on July 24, 1890, the author referred to “[A]ll the reports from South America, and some of them very recent reports, too [that] say that the chief obstacle in the way of increased consumption of American products is their great cost. Specified articles, of which samples and prices have been submitted from American manufacturers, are declared to be so much higher in price than similar articles sent from Europe that it would not be possible to sell the American articles in competition.”

In that vein, Martí’s position regarding the creation of a pan-American customs union and the development of an inter-American common currency can be read as a post-colonial criticism *avant la lettre*. The Cuban argued that free trade agreements between an economic power like the United States and pre-modern economies such as Cuba and others in Central and South America would hinder the potential for development of the smaller nations. And underdevelopment would, in turn, manifest itself in multiple forms of political dependency:

“Whoever says economic union also means political union [...] Commerce should be balanced to reassure freedom [...] The excessive influence of one country on the commerce of another one turns into political influence [...] A people who want to be free, must also be free to conduct its own business” (Martí 1964, 254-255).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

As a second goal, Martí's chronicles aimed to create a symbolic union of Latin American nations behind a common agenda based on progress and a shared identity. The goal was to eventually offset the U.S.'s hegemonic and cultural claims on the region, gearing the nations south of the Río Grande towards a new political and philosophical stance, critical of market individualism and the expansive capitalism proposed from the north. As part of that strategy, Martí coined the notion of *Nuestra América*, a claim for Latin American nations to acknowledge their past, heritage and traditions and to take from other cultures only what is useful in order to reinvent their own future. Martí's rejection of Pan-Americanism in favor of Pan-Hispanism was also a leitmotif in his essays (Kirk 1980, 131). The notion of *Our America* as a separate entity from, and opposed to, the United States was systematically outlined in an essay Martí published in 1891, towards the end of the Pan American Monetary Conference, at *El Partido Liberal*, an influential Mexican daily. In it, he described the United States as a giant seven-leagues tall, and an octopus with its tentacles wrapped around Latin America:

These are not times for going to bed in a sleeping cap, but rather, like Juan de Castellanos' men, with our weapons for a pillow, weapons of the mind, which vanquish all others. Trenches of ideas are worth more than trenches of stone [...]

We can no longer be a nation of fluttering leaves, spending our lives in the air, our treetop crowned in flowers, humming or creaking, caressed by the caprices of sunlight or thrashed and felled by tempests. The trees must form ranks to block the seven-league giant! It is the hour of reckoning and of marching in unison, and we must move in lines as compact as the veins of silver that lie at the roots of the Andes "[...] What are we like?" they ask, and begin telling each other what they are like. When a problem arises in Cojimar they no longer seek the solution in Danzig. The frock-coats are still French, but the thinking begins to be American. The young men of America are rolling up their sleeves and plunging their hands into the dough, and making it rise with the leavening of their sweat. They understand that there is too much imitation, and that salvation lies in creating.

Create is this generation's password. Make wine from plantains; it may be sour, but it is our wine! It is now understood that a country's form of government must adapt to its natural elements, that absolute ideas, in order not to collapse over an error of form, must be expressed in relative forms; that liberty, in order to be viable, must be sincere and full, that if the republic does not open its arms to all and include all in its progress, it dies. [...] Standing tall, the workmen's eyes full of joy, the new men of America are saluting each other from one country to another [...] America is saving herself from all her dangers. Over some republics the octopus sleeps still, but by the law of equilibrium, other republics are running into the sea to recover the lost centuries with mad and sublime swiftness [...] But our America may also face another danger, which comes not from within but from the differing origins, methods, and interests of the continent's two factions. The hour is near when she will be approached by an enterprising and forceful nation that will demand intimate relations with her, though it does not know her and disdains her. And virile nations self-made by the rifle and the law love other virile nations, and love only them. The hour of unbridled passion and ambition from which North America may escape by the ascendancy of the purest element in its blood-or into which its vengeful and sordid masses, its tradition of conquest, and the self-interest of a cunning leader could plunge it-is not yet so close, even to the most apprehensive eye, that there is no time for it to be confronted and averted by the manifestation of a discreet and unswerving pride, for its dignity as a republic, in the eyes of the watchful nations of the Universe, places upon North America a brake that our America must not remove by puerile provocation, ostentatious arrogance, or patricidal discord (Martí 2000, 288).

The notion of *Our America* had long been present in Martí's writings.<sup>87</sup> After the acquisition of Florida and Louisiana, it was clear for the Cuban that the United States had become well aware of Spanish colonial decadence, and was eager to annex Cuba. In a letter to his friend and secretary Gonzalo de Quesada dated December 14, 1889, he wrote:

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<sup>87</sup> See for instance the separation that Martí operates between Americans and Latin Americans in his chronicle of Coney Island: "These people eat quantity; we, class." (Martí 2002, 93).

We don't have to make any effort for the island to become North American, because if we don't use well the little time that we have left to avoid it becoming so, that is what will happen due to its own disintegration. That is what this country [the United States, from where he writes] is waiting for and what we should oppose [because] once the United States is in Cuba, who would manage to get it out? (Rodríguez-Luis 1999, XVI).

Cuban independence, Martí wrote in a letter sent to his friend Manuel Mercado the day before his death, on May 18, 1885, would surely prevent the United States from "stretching out over the Antilles and falling, with added force, on our American lands" (Rodríguez-Luis 1999, XVI).

Martí also believed it was part of his duty as a foreign correspondent to inform the Latin American public about the complexities inherent to the U.S. If he could deliver the right message to the right audience, Blaine and his delegates wouldn't be able to take advantage of potential factionalisms between the new republics in the South, or to set in motion a political and economic agenda contrary to their needs and traditions (Karras 1974, 77-99).

It was this feeling of an imminent danger dawning over the Americas that led Martí into resorting to the techniques he had developed for his literary journalism in order to create in his coverage of the Pan American Conference, an inclusive Latin American "Us." This rhetorical movement entailed the exclusion and reification of the North and its attributes –reason, commerce, science, industry, profit—and the appropriation of aspects contrary to its character --beauty, disinterest, spirit, tradition, the subaltern—in a construction that would soon spread through the pages of the Latin American press: *Nuestra América* (Ramos 2000, 204). In his prose,

Martí laid down the groundwork for this mythic and ideological construct as a second foundation of Latin America, while his efforts towards the unification of the delegations were propped up and consolidated through concrete political actions (Rotker 1999 and Kanellos 2005). In a sense, Latin America as an organized, demarcated territory with its corresponding identity did not exist prior to Martí's rhetorical construction (Ramos 2000, 298).

When "Nuestra America" appeared in Mexico in 1891 in *El Partido Liberal*, an official newspaper of the pro-development state, it was the peak of the Porfirian regime. Porfirio Díaz had opened his country to foreign capital and the discourse of an autochthonous Latin America in "Nuestra América" can also be partly read as a critique to the alienating direction of Mexican modernization (Ramos 2000, 305-306):

Over the heads of some republics the octopus is sleeping. Other [republics], which have forgotten that [Benito] Juárez once went about in a coach drawn by mules, hitch their carriages to the wind, with a soap bubble as their coachman; for poisonous luxury, the enemy of freedom, corrupts the lascivious man and opens the door to the foreigner (Ramos 2000, 305-306).

Clearly, Martí was concerned about American imperialism, and his fears were not unfounded. Despite Blaine's official pronouncements, which spoke to commercial agreements, the development of communications, arbitration and other matters of little sensitivity, many articles in the New York daily press urged for a more aggressive role of the United States before its southern neighbors. The *New York Tribune*, for instance, exhorted Americans to "reconquer their commercial supremacy... and to exercise a direct and general influence in the affairs of the

American continent” (Mañach 1950, 259). Martí was also aware of legislation introduced in Congress by Senator Call, which authorized the president of the United States to open negotiations with the Spanish government and induce it to consent to the independence of Cuba by means of an indemnity payable by the island. A month after introducing this legislation, the same senator had called Washington’s attention to the dangers of Cuban debt falling into the hands of German financiers. To complete the picture, in February, when funding for a larger Navy was being discussed in Congress, Senator Chandler, former secretary of the Navy, urged the construction of an armada: “superior to that of any nation in the Western Hemisphere and to that of the nation which owns the island of Cuba...” (Mañach 1950, 259)

A third goal for Martí’s articles, and one that was perhaps more concealed in his chronicles, was to convince his fellow Cubans that, despite an unlikely alignment of Latin America behind the United States, the only option that would lead Cuba to its independence was a war. Spain was still holding to its last colonial enclave in the Americas, and was extremely unlikely to release from its orbit the jewel of its crown, an important source of income for the treasury, and the main producer of sugar cane in the world (Rodríguez Luis 1999, XI). And although the reestablished monarchy had shown signs of good will towards the independentists –signs interpreted by a few of them as an open possibility to negotiate the terms of Cuba’s independence without shedding blood—Martí was convinced that Spain’s intentions were oblique. As strongly as he opposed to the negotiated independence with Spain, Martí was also against a growing annexionistic movement supported by groups of Cuban exiles in the U.S. Martí’s argument was

mostly cultural: to impose the traditions and mores of Anglo-Saxon America onto Hispanic-American Cuba would mean to obliterate, even despise, all that made the fabric of Cuban identity.

Only "iron and blood," he wrote, would set Cuba free from both Spain and the covetous eyes of the United States (Karras 1974, 77). On the way to revolution, the Pan American Conference was, in Martí's view, the last obstacle to overcome.

### **Martí's Republican Program**

Martí did not operate on impulse or hunches. In fact, he detailed his plan for the constitution of a new Cuban Republic in three documents that, before Cuban independence, also served as guidelines for the ideological formation of revolutionary republican groups in the U.S. The first of these documents was *Resoluciones*, signed on November 28, 1891 by him and a party of Cuban exiles in Tampa, Florida; the second one, revealed on January 5, 1892, was the *Bases y Estatutos secretos del Partido Revolucionario Cubano*, the cornerstone of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. The third and final was the *Manifiesto de Montecristi* signed on March 25, 1895 by Martí and General Máximo Gómez in the Dominican Republic (Gray 1963, 294-256).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Following a rise in U.S. tariffs for tobacco imports in the 1860s, and the Ten Year War in 1870, many cigar and cigarette factories formerly on the island relocated to Florida. These fresh Cuban immigrants were Martí's main target for his speeches, political platforms and manifestos (Rodríguez Luis 1999, XX).

Each one of these documents stressed a different aspect of the future Cuban republic. For instance, in *Bases*, Martí stated the importance of a revolution conducted by all Cubans without distinction of class or race. "The Cuban Revolutionary Party does not have as its object to bring to Cuba a victorious group that would consider the island as its prize and dominion" (Gray 1963, 250).

Martí was aware of the historical role of military caudillos during the Latin American independency wars, so since the beginning of the revolutionary process he advocated against the formation of these militias in Cuba. Although the Cuban war had to be fought by an army, the conduction of the revolutionary army and the development of republican institutions had to be headed by civilians:

The Cuban Revolutionary Party does not propose to perpetuate in the Cuban Republic, with new forms or with changes more apparent than real, the authoritarian spirit and bureaucratic composition of the colony, but to found in the free and cordial exercise of the legitimate capacities of a man a new people and a true democracy capable of overcoming through hard work and the equilibrium of social forces the dangers of sudden liberty in a society composed for slavery (In *Bases* quoted by Gray 1963, 250).

Martí's opposition to caudillism was sealed in 1884, when he rejected General Máximo Gómez' revolutionary plans, putting distance between him and the Ten Years War commander due to the latter's caudillo-type aspirations. Martí expressed his disagreement in a personal letter to Gómez:

[I]t's my determination not to contribute an ounce, for the sake of a blind love to an idea that is taking my life, with bringing into my land a regime of personal despotism, even more shameful and unfortunate than the political despotism that it now endures... A

nation is not founded, General, in the same way that you rule over a regiment (Kirk 1980, 277).<sup>89</sup>

In terms of identity, Martí also talked about the importance of developing governmental forms derived from the native foundations of Cuba, and this was a relevant theme in his *Manifiesto*: “Our country is to be constituted from its very roots with workable forms, grown in Cuba, in such a way that an inappropriate government may not end in favoritism or tyranny” (Gray 1963, 251).

Martí also proposed an economic platform for Cuba to develop during its new Republican phase. And, although he was not an industrialist, he was a vocal critic of one-crop economies and economies dependent on industrialized nations. A nation wanting its political independence would also have to sell more than one product in the international market, and unlike the Cuba of his time, would have to develop a diversified production to avoid dependence on the United States or Europe.

Finally, in order to prevent the dominance of a certain class or race over others, Martí constantly stressed in his articles the need of a cordial equilibrium between all the forces involved in the revolutionary process.

Many of these ideas appeared in his chronicles, articles, editorials and were more directly expressed in *Patria*, the revolutionary publication he founded in New York. “[T]he Republic [...] should not be the unjust predomination of one class of citizens over the rest, but the open and sincere equilibrium of all the real forces of the

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<sup>89</sup> Martí and Gómez later reached an agreement that led to the *Manifiesto de Montecristi* in 1895. Translation from Spanish is mine.

country, and of the free thought and desire of all the citizens," he wrote in 1891 (Gray 1963, 249-56). By April 3, of that same year, the dissolution of the Inter-American Monetary Commission, offered Martí his final victory over James Gillespie Blaine and his expansionist attempts.

More than sixty years later, during the early days of the Communist revolution, after the 1953 Moncada uprising, Martí became again an ideological focal point. Fidel Castro, on trial for his attempted coup d'état, attributed to the journalist the intellectual authorship of the conspiracy. And seven years after that, Ernesto "Che" Guevara reiterated Martí's connection with the Cuban revolution:

[Martí] suffered and died in order to realize the ideal that what we are realizing today [...] This is why we try to honor him trying to accomplish what he tried to accomplish [...] Martí was the direct mentor of our Revolution, the man whose word is required to interpret with justice the historical phenomena we were living or the man whose word we have to remember every time we want to say or do something transcendent in this Motherland (Kirk 1980).

It would be virtually impossible, however, to prove whether or not Martí would have agreed with the ideas –let alone the methods— with which the Castro regime has ruled upon Cuba during half a century of communism.

### **Part III. Modernity, Markets and Urban Bohemia in Buenos Aires in the**

#### **Early 20th Century**

At the astounding speed of 30 kilometers per hour, it would take Juan José de Soiza Reilly only twenty minutes –stops included—to cover the 8.5 kilometers that separated the still bucolic neighborhood of Flores from the noisy and vibrant area of Plaza de Mayo in the heart of traditional downtown Buenos Aires.

Soiza's house on 95 Membrillar St., surrounded by lush gardens, dirt roads, and open avenues, was only two blocks away from Flores Square. From there, an electric tram would take him directly to *Caras y Caretas* magazine, at 151 Chacabuco St., or to the informal editorial meetings held at the New Bar on Venezuela street, on the corner with Bolívar. This type of mass transit commute, part of Soiza's everyday life, was a new phenomenon in an increasingly modern Buenos Aires.

Juan José de Soiza Reilly's parents were immigrants. Thus, he did not belong to the downtown-dwelling Argentine upper classes, whose bylines dominated Buenos Aires' newspapers and the literary canon in Argentina and Latin America at the turn of the century. However, in the context of a rapidly expanding society, Soiza's background as a young writer from the suburbs was instrumental for his success as one of the first best-selling mass journalists in Latin America. Soiza's affiliation with the new urban middle classes and his intermediate social position –equidistant from Buenos Aires' underbelly and the city's enclaves of phenomenal wealth—were important aspects in his journalistic and literary success.

Soiza Reilly turned his back on the elitist idea that journalism and literature were for the few. Instead, he embraced a growing middle class public and professionalized his journalism, perfecting genres such as the interview and the *crónica* to a point where they became new forms of mass literature. Through journalism, Soiza tapped into a growing audience avid for information and culture, one that had been overlooked by the lettered elites in the region. As a journalist and writer, Soiza Reilly became the emblem of the emergent mass media, and the first true media personality in Argentina and Latin America at the turn of the century.

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When Juan José de Soiza Reilly's parents, Juan José de Soiza and Catalina Reilly, first moved to Flores from neighboring Uruguay in the early 1890s, a commute of only 30 minutes between Flores and downtown Buenos Aires was impossible. The distance between the city's center and its suburbs was stretched by a mix of sketchy, unfinished urban planning, a lack of straight wide avenues running East-West, and a chaotic urban transit system led by horse-drawn trolleys, carts, and expensive taxis that only sporadically connected the economic and financial center of the city with its outskirts. All that however, was poised to change.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Sometimes considered the Argentine Haussmann, in reference to the famous French urban planner, Torcuato de Alvear undertook a series of reforms during his tenure as mayor of Buenos Aires, between May 10, 1883 and May 10, 1887. Strongly supported by then president Julio Roca, the reforms included the emplacement of a series of boulevards running East-West, the laying of cobblestone, the emplacement of a sewer

The Soizas, like most immigrants at the time, had come from Europe. Portuguese Juan José Sr. and Irish Catalina were employed in the meat-salting industry in Uruguay, but after a few years of hard work and having brought up five children (they would still have five more), they decided to try their luck on the other bank of the river, in promising Buenos Aires.

After the economic crisis of 1890, Buenos Aires, declared the Federal Capital of the Argentine Republic in 1880, had entered its first phase of suburbanization, a process that took place between the second national census in 1894 and the third one in 1914 (Torres 1975, 281-306). At the expense of heavy foreign investment and an increase in the levels of sovereign debt, the national government –also the administrative power in Buenos Aires—was committed to introducing a series of structural improvements in the city: paved streets with cobblestones brought from the island of Martín García, the first urban sewer system and the first electric grid, an efficient urban cleaning system, a social security network with world class hospitals and clinics, and a reliable public transportation network with horse-drawn tramways in 1870 first, followed by the electric trams in 1898, and the first subway system in Latin America by 1913.<sup>91</sup>

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system and the electric grid. These improvements weren't fully realized until a few years after Alvear's death in 1887 (Torres 1975, 281-306 and Sargent 1972).

<sup>91</sup> Between 1860 and 1914, the total foreign investment in Argentina represented almost 8.5% of the total foreign investment made by central nations (capital exporters) worldwide. It was also equivalent to 33% of the total foreign investment destined to Latin America, and 42% of the total investment coming from the United Kingdom into the region. That's why, according to Torres, most of the census data was published bilingually, in Spanish and English, to entice both foreign investment and immigration (Torres 1975, 282-83).

The suburbs soon became more desirable, and thousands of working class families relocated. This was accompanied by an intense wave of immigration that peaked between 1904 and 1914. In areas like Flores and Belgrano, the West and North of the city, 20,000 to 30,000 plots of land were sold yearly in 40, 80 and 120 monthly payments. Home ownership in Buenos Aires grew accordingly from 8% in 1887 to 11.7% in 1914 (Torres 1975, 289).

The southern part of Flores, under Camino Real –renamed Rivadavia in the early 1900s—was one of those new suburban Meccas. An area prone to floods and rich in marshes, it was also home to large estancias which, after being subdivided and plotted, became the driving force behind a speculative real estate market that mainly targeted immigrants. The small parcels of land, still detached from the central sewer system and the electric grid, were preyed on by the more entrepreneurial segments of the growing urban working class, who found in them an opportunity to set permanent residency in the city by investing in land, building their first family –sometimes multi-family—residences, while materializing dreams of upward social mobility (Torres 1975, 288-89).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Torres estimates that on average, these plots of land could be bought in 12 years by saving the pay of two days a month, considering that the monthly salary of a skilled worker between 1904 and 1912 was about 2.5 gold pesos, and these plots could cost between 200 and 500 gold pesos. Among these immigrants, the Italians had the most access to these sections of land. In 1904 barely 35% of them owned real estate, but only five years later, in 1909, more than 43% had bought either a plot or a house (Torres 1975, 289-290).

The Soizas took advantage of this opportunity. And so did their fifth son, Juan José de Soiza Reilly, after marrying Emma Martínez Lobato in 1908. Following their wedding, the young couple moved into a house only a few blocks away from the Plaza Flores. By 1909 they had their first child, Rubén Darío, named after the modernist powerhouse Nicaraguan poet.<sup>93</sup> By 1919 they had a daughter christened after her mother, as was customary.

In those early days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cultural associations and local societies sprung up all over the city, helping to integrate the newcomers to communal and metropolitan life. Many times, these social gatherings, literary and political meetings in coffee shops, salons, and private residences, crystallized in newspapers, magazines, literary magazines and fanzines, becoming the springboard for more serious writers to join a growing number of larger professional publications (Saítta 2000, 19).<sup>94</sup>

Juan José de Soiza Reilly had studied to be a schoolteacher at the Escuela Normal in Entre Ríos, and throughout his life held positions as a teacher and sometimes as a librarian –but also an array of odd jobs ranging from newspaper boy to security guard and justice of peace, which probably contributed to his street savvy personality. After moving to Buenos Aires he soon started collaborating with some

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<sup>93</sup> For scarce and sometimes contradictory and problematic biographical information about Juan José De Soiza Reilly I have consulted Mirelman 1975, Ludmer 1999, Mizraje 2007, Escalés 2008, and Cilento 2009.

<sup>94</sup> One of the most prestigious neighborhood newspapers in Flores was *La Idea*. Every Wednesday evening, the newspaper held a social gathering organized by neighborhood poet Félix V. Visillac, to which soon-to-become nationally renowned poets, journalists and writers like Conrado Nalé Roxlo and Roberto Arlt, also attended (Saítta 2000, 19).

of the neighborhood newspapers (Escalés 2008, 10). And, by 1902, his byline and pseudonym, Agapito Candileja, began appearing in one of the most popular and innovative Latin American magazines of the period, *Caras y Caretas* (Cilento 2009, 67-86). Soon thereafter Soiza Reilly would become one of the most important journalists of his time in Latin America, and a visible face of the emerging written mass media in the region.

In order to understand Soiza's ascent to media stardom, it is key to map his strategic position as an intermediary between modernism, the masses, immigration and the new urban readers, as well as his central role as an agent of a young mass publishing industry ready to experience an unprecedented expansion.

### **The Publishing Boom of the 1910s**

By the end of the first decade of the new century Argentina was poised for one of the most vertiginous changes to be experienced by any Latin American country over the next hundred years. The democratic consolidation thanks to the passing in 1912 of the Sáenz Peña Law –which established universal, and compulsory male suffrage by secret ballot—led in 1916 to the presidency of Hipólito Yrigoyen, the first popularly endorsed Argentine head of state after decades of electoral fraud.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> See Natalio Botana, “El Marco Histórico Institucional: Leyes Electorales, Alternancia y Competencia entre Partidos,” in Natalio Botana, et al., *La Argentina electoral* (Buenos Aires, 1985), 17; and a number of documents compiled in Ezequiel Gallo and Natalio Botana, *De la república posible a la república verdadera* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007), esp. 599-634.

A sustained increase in population, helped by the steady immigration inflow from Europe –actively promoted by the government— created a workforce broad enough to complete the full integration of Argentina’s economy to world trade as a first tier provider of raw materials (Furtado 1970, 50-51; Halperin Donghi 1969, Chapter 3). The incorporation of new workers into Argentina’s political life was facilitated in part by the National Law of Education passed on June 26, 1884, which granted free, secular primary education to all residents on Argentine soil. The Láinez Law was also instrumental in the professionalization of workers, triggering a pronounced drop in illiteracy rates –which fell from 78% in 1869 to 35% in 1914–, while fostering a new reading public (Eujanian 1999, 21).<sup>96</sup>

These changes had an impact on the development of a new reading market in several ways. With the technical ability to read and write, but without the skills, habits or a developed interest to navigate a book catalogue or browse a public library, the new readers, eager to partake in a changing and evermore exciting new world, found it easier to purchase newspapers and magazines directly available in newsstands. On December 6, 1924, when launching *Biblioteca Crítica*, a series of cheap books that accompanied *Crítica* newspaper, an editorial reinforced that idea:

The man who, oppressed by his hard day work, wishes to entertain his leisure time with some reading, stumbles into a big dilemma: what can he read? He lacks time to browse in a library what is most

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<sup>96</sup> The government was actively involved in these processes. In 1906, the Láinez Law destined 10,000,000 pesos to the creation of 700 new schools. And despite the high dropout rates (sometimes estimated above 75%), by 1910 most of the school-age population in Argentina could read and write (Eujanian 1999, 21).

convenient for his temperament. He ignores both authors and titles; he is no erudite and would want a book enjoyable and instructive at the same time.<sup>97</sup>

In Argentina, as well as in the rest of Latin America, the mass media would play – with its intrinsic limitations—a key role, opening the world of written knowledge to the new reading public. Purchasing a morning paper for 20 cents, twice the price of a tramway ticket in Buenos Aires, the daily commuter would gradually start to develop new reading habits, accessing and consolidating a new imagined community of readers (Eujanián 1999, 24).

Aside from the news sections, heavy on crime and human-interest stories, popular newspapers during the turn of the century also included serialized novels and other types of easy reading. The transformation of the political press model into a modern, information-based press was underway. Interested in the city and its occurrences, the new mass public disfavored the opinionated political style favored by the elites, which coincidentally was also being challenged inside the newsrooms by the new information paradigm that spread from some newspapers coming from the United States and Europe. A 1914 editorial from *La Nación* shows the growing concern to separate pure *facts* from *opinions*:

Our reviews aren't the result of the judgment, or are put under the evaluation of a committee; our sympathies or our disagreements don't force us to assimilate, to promote or resist current or upcoming opinion forces [...] We were a party newspaper, open and frankly, in days of great and famous debates, but we've stopped being so,

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<sup>97</sup> *Crítica*, “Biblioteca de Crítica” Dec. 6, 1924. In Saítta 1997, 74. Translation from Spanish is mine.

especially when the virtue inspired by our preach closed the circle of its own action (In *La Nación*, April 3, 1914).<sup>98</sup>

By adopting new styles and genres, newspapers gained access to a broad new public in steep expansion. Buenos Aires had 663,854 inhabitants in 1895 and 1,575,814 by 1914, and this growth was also echoed in an increase of its daily publications. In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the number of daily newspapers in Buenos Aires more than doubled, from only six dailies in 1895, to 14 by 1914 (Saítta 1999, 29).

But newspapers were not the only thriving players in the new mass media landscape. Already at the dawn of the 1910s, mass magazines added to the supply of reading options for the daily commuter (Eujanián 1999, 22-51). Between 1900 and 1941 at least 1,039 titles were published in the province of Buenos Aires and 637 in rest of the country. And in just the city of Buenos Aires the number grew from 36 in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to 552 in the 1930s (Fernández 1943 as cited by Eujanián 1999, 30). These new magazines not only offered an array of atemporal information but, unlike newspapers, their content was also suited for women and children. It was these magazines that created the new reading contract that mass newspapers like *Crítica* would start to tap into by the mid-1920s.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> In Ricardo Sidicaro, *La Política Mirada desde Arriba; Las Ideas del Diario La Nación 1909-1989*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1993.

<sup>99</sup> Howard M. Fraser argues that “*Caras y Caretas* might itself be called an exposition of Argentina during the turn of the century” (Fraser 1987, 9).

There were also some sectors in the publishing business that lagged behind, especially those connected to the book industry. From 400 yearly released titles between 1900 and 1910, to 750 by 1931, the expansion in book publication remained negligible in Argentina. In June 30, 1932, the passing of Law 11,588 exempted from taxes all imported paper destined to newspaper, book, magazine printing, and other types of public interest publications (García 1965, 58). The new printing law, which accompanied the early stages of the import-substitution industrialization process –a trend that gained full force during World War II—had a clearly beneficial impact on book publishing. From only a few printing houses in the late 1920s, almost 2,000 were in operation in Buenos Aires by the end of 1932. These new printing presses employed at least 20,000 specialized workers (García 1965, 78-132).

A few years later, the Spanish Civil War had an even more potent effect. Between 1936 and 1939, a large number of Spanish editors and publishers migrated with their businesses to both Argentina and Mexico, fueling an even more astounding increase in book exports: between 1933 and 1941 the number of titles shipped from Argentina grew from 68,960 to 121,670. Mailing orders also increased from 291,000 titles in 1942 to 339,000 in 1950 (Eujanián 1999, 27).

Despite modernization and the changes taking place in the news paradigm, information-centered newspapers would have to wait until the mid 1920s for the consolidation of the new style embodied in the mass press. It was in 1923 that, after a deep renovation, *Crítica*, a daily paper founded in 1913 by Uruguayan journalist Natalio Botana, became the “voice of the people.” Its importance in Latin

America would be equivalent to Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, in the American newspaper industry thirty years before.<sup>100</sup>

### **Argentina, A Unique Setting for the Development of a Mass Publishing Industry**

Although the effects of modernity and integration to world commerce were felt all over Latin America, a confluence of circumstances put Argentina substantially ahead of the curve, thus making its changing media landscape central to understanding the development of the mass media in the entire region. In fact, compared to Argentina, most other countries still lagged behind in the political process of democratic consolidation and its consequent development of a mass audience.

Mexico was closest to Argentina in the development of this type of news market. But certain political and social conditions we will briefly discuss delayed for decades the full development of its mass media. During the Porfirian years—the period lasting between 1881 and 1911 when Porfirio Díaz was Mexico's head of

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<sup>100</sup> Botana, an Uruguayan journalist and émigré, is credited with introducing the techniques of serial novels in news writing in Argentina, which added a dramatic effect close to what we now know as yellow journalism. *Crítica* incorporated into its newsroom, located in one of the first Art Deco buildings in Buenos Aires in Avenida de Mayo 1333, an array of professional, well established writers, to improve the quality of its journalism. And, when in 1933, 20 years after its foundation, it started publishing the *Revista Multicolor de los Sábados* (the *Full-Color Saturday Magazine*) Botana hired as co-editors a young Jorge Luis Borges and poet Ulises Petit de Murat. Between 1933 and 1934, in the Saturday magazine, Borges would first publish a series of fact-based short stories that in 1935 became his first narrative book, *Universal History of Infamy* (Saítta 1999).

state— dissent and opposing political parties were generally banned from the public debate, and elections –when held—were either fraudulent or suppressed. Díaz was efficient at eliminating all centers of institutional and political opposition and ruling over the Mexican provinces by means of economic inducements (Negretto and Aguilar 2000, 385-386). But the lack of a political opposition and his perpetuation in power debilitated some core democratic tendencies, slowing down also some of its accompanying processes like the increase in literacy levels, the development of a politically active reading public, and the consolidation of a vibrant political public sphere and free press.

Unlike Argentina, where the gap between the elites and the lower classes had started to dwindle and continually narrowed until the early 1930s, and political participation with the ascent of the Unión Cívica Radical was based on the inclusion of popular sectors to political life through education and the expansion of the public sphere, the Porfirian regime based Mexico's incorporation to world commerce on opening the national economy to foreign capitals on key sectors like transportation, communications, and the oil industry. The incorporation of the masses to public life was, therefore, secondary.

During the 30 years of the Porfirian regime, illiteracy in Mexico remained at an average 80%, education was generally conceived as a privilege for the upper classes, and new schools only opened in big cities and urban centers (Ortiz and Duarte 2010, 3). There were however some isolated efforts to make education accessible to the popular sectors. After the First National Education Congress of 1889-1890, primary schooling was declared mandatory, free and secular for every

child between 6 and 12 years of age, and by 1901 there were already 45 normal schools in the country (Ortiz and Duarte 2010, 4).

The absence of a reading public kept the Mexican publishing industry its infancy until the late 1920s, when the dust of the 1911 revolution settled. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there were at least 2,579 newspapers in Mexico, of which 579 were sold in Mexico City. Most were published irregularly, and distributed erratically. Still geared to political opinion rather than information, newspapers were also expensive, with prices ranging between 1c and 50c.<sup>101</sup> But that was not the only reason for which they were considered sumptuary articles: in fact, at the end of the Porfirian regime in 1910, barely 30% of the population could read and write (Ortiz and Duarte 2010, 5).

At the turn of the century, the largest Mexican newspapers were *El Imparcial*, *el Monitor Republicano* and *El Universal*. They issued between 15,000 and 20,000 copies a day, with no more than a dozen pages. These numbers were well behind the circulation of most Argentine national newspapers: *La Prensa*, by then the most important one, was well above 95,000 daily copies, *La Nación* was close to 70,000, and *La Razón*, also above 60,000. Articles in the Mexican press usually appeared unsigned, and when they covered political activities, Porfirian government officials

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<sup>101</sup> It could be misleading to compare the price of a newspaper with the average wage of a Mexican worker during the Porfiriato, especially because Mexico was a rural economy, and oftentimes compensations were offered in kind. That said, during the strikes of textile workers in Río Blanco, which anticipated the Mexican Revolution, the protesters demanded a minimum monthly wage of 5 pesos, and an eight-hour workday. In that context, newspapers would have been out of reach for a majority of Mexicans. See Friedrich Katz. 1980. *La servidumbre agraria en México en la época porfiriana*. Mexico: Ediciones Era.

were portrayed in laudatory terms. In contrast, critical views were common in the Argentine press, and the figure of the reporter signing his own articles was in ascent.

With the technical improvements in the printing industry, newspapers like *El Imparcial* –the first mass newspaper in Mexico—started to incorporate photographs, also unsigned, and for certain special events could issue up to 100,000 daily copies. Those improvements, however, were overwhelmingly offset by the strict control that the Porfirian regime exerted on the press, which made for a sluggish growth in the publishing industry in Mexico at least until the aftermath of the Revolution (Ortiz and Duarte 2010, 6).

The picture was bleaker in the rest of Latin America with Argentina as the only exception. There, the publishing industry was consolidated and blooming. During the period from 1900 to 1930 a new type of mass newspaper was born in the South, focused on information and grounded on a new, dynamic relationship with its audience. And this new contract was directly imported from the popular magazines of the early 1900s.

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, magazines had been the stars of the printing business in the Southern Cone. And among several big players like *Don Quijote*, which claimed circulation peaks of 61,000 in the 1890s, *PBT* and *Fray Mocho*, it was undoubtedly *Caras y Caretas* the most emblematic, relevant and influential of all Argentine –and Latin American—new publications in those early years of the new century (Eujanian 1999, 28).

It was, in fact, thanks to his articles in *Caras y Caretas* that Juan José de Soiza Reilly jumped into the public eye. His constant presence in magazines and mass newspapers soon turned him into the most renowned journalist of his generation.

### **Caras y Caretas**

Although it was undoubtedly a cornerstone of the Argentine magazine boom in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Caras y Caretas* was neither born Argentine, nor in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nor was it conceived by an Argentine.

*Caras y Caretas* was first published in Montevideo, Uruguay in 1890, by 30-year-old Spanish poet and humorist Eustaquio Pellicer. The Uruguayan version of the weekly was short lived, and by 1892, Pellicer was invited to Buenos Aires by his friend Bartolomé Mitre y Vedia, son of former Argentine president Bartolomé Mitre and co-director with his father of the influential newspaper *La Nación* (Pignatelli 1997, 274).

Pellicer and Mitre Jr. planned to publish *Caras y Caretas* in Buenos Aires with Pellicer as director. But the revolutionary war in Cuba and the growing pro-Latin American sentiment in the region made it unwise for a native Spaniard to front a mass publication. The direction would have naturally fallen upon Mitre y Vedia, but his father believed that *La Nación* and the family name would be compromised if Bartolito –as he was known—became the editor of a satiric publication.

Mitre y Vedia, thus declined any further association with the weekly, and *Caras y Caretas* appeared on Saturday, October 8, 1898 under the direction of journalist and writer José S. Álvarez, best known by his pseudonym, Fray Mocho. The first issue included a letter from Mitre y Vedia in which he apologized to the readers for “having mistakenly considered [himself] strong enough to commit to an endeavor which, [he] soon learned, largely surpassed [his] forces” (Pignatelli 1997, 281).<sup>102</sup>

Alvarez had started his career at *El Nacional* newspaper in 1879, and had acquired a vast experience in crime reporting working for *La Patria Argentina* and *La Razón*, the largest Argentine newspaper of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He had also penned a few serial novels, and for a brief period of his life, between October 16, 1896 and August 3, 1897, he was appointed as Commissioner of Investigations for the Buenos Aires Police Department. In that year he published the *Galería de Ladrones de la Capital 1880-1887* (the *Gallery of Thieves of Capital City 1880-1887*), a treatise that included 200 portraits of the most famous thieves in Buenos Aires “accompanied with a description of each individual, an enumeration of his crimes, his criminal record and a small review of his personal habits” (Pignatelli 1996, 277).<sup>103</sup> Also In 1897, under his pseudonym, Fabio Carrizo, Alvarez wrote *Memorias de un vigilante* (*Memoirs of a Street Cop*) which consecrated him as the foremost interpreter of Buenos Aires’ underbelly.

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<sup>102</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

<sup>103</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

Alvarez' editorial line separated *Caras y Caretas* from other magazines and newspapers in Buenos Aires by focusing on human-interest stories rather than politics. Known, among other things, for having interviewed Sergeant Andrés Chirino, responsible for the death of popular hero Juan Moreira, Alvarez was probably the one who first invited Soiza Reilly to collaborate with *Caras y Caretas*. Born in Entre Ríos like Soiza, Alvarez also had an interest in pickpockets, street criminals and hookers, and wrote about them as often as he could (Cilento 2009, 72).

*Caras y Caretas'* reading contract was radically new. It required a new type of rapport between magazine and readers based on complicities and shared expectations that hadn't been pursued by any Latin American medium before. The relationship was also permeated by a growing democratic feeling, and tended to put writers and readers on an even field.

*El Caricareta*, as it was called by paperboys in newsstands, tramways and the most populated corners of Buenos Aires, received a warm welcome by publishers and the most influential newspapers of its time. *La Prensa*, with a national daily circulation of 160,000 copies (90,000 in Buenos Aires and the rest in the provinces), deemed the "most powerful press institution of South and Central America, and one of the leading newspapers worldwide," published a cordial editorial welcoming the magazine on October 8, 1898 (Saítta 1999, 30):

The festive weekly, announced with so much grace by its founders, has just appeared, and its first issue has not only delivered the promises they had made fulfilling the hopes of our publics, but it has

exceedingly done so. Mr. Bartolomé Mitre y Vedia, who was meant to be its director, has announced in this first number that he had decided to resign his position with a great deal of sadness, due to external forces and the exigencies of his multiple occupations [...] Illustrations, text, and even the vignettes that accompany the ads, everything in this new weekly is original, varied and bubbly (Pignatelli 1997, 275).<sup>104</sup>

So did *El Nacional* on October 9 and 10, joining the general excitement:

With some delay has reached our hands *Caras y Caretas*. Its first number has responded to the high hopes the public had deposited on it, and it's to be expected that this critical-joyful weekly will make its way among the ones of its genre. We kindly salute it wishing it a happy and prosperous life (Pignatelli 1997, 275).<sup>105</sup>

*Caras y Catetas'* motto, *semanario festivo, literario, artístico y de actualidades* (festive, literary artistic and actualities weekly) presented the magazine as a lighthearted, ironical publication along the lines of disappeared *El Mosquito* (1863-1893) and *Don Quijote* (1884-1905), which had heavily relied on graphic humor. *Caras y Caretas*, however, was much more innovative than its predecessors. The magazine was probably the first print mass medium in Latin America to use photography and photo-engravings for illustration, and photojournalism as a storytelling technique.

*Caras y Caretas* was "an encyclopedia of its time" (Ludmer 1999, 251). It blended high and low culture, science, literature, politics and global journalism, fact and fiction, written and graphic journalism, advertising and the market. These distinctive markers of modernity, the professionalization of photojournalism, the innovative

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<sup>104</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

<sup>105</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

use of genres such as the *crónicas*, investigative news stories, and the abundance of interviews, developed into a radically different way of reaching the public. *Caras y Caretas*, thus prepared the new field of the mass media for the foundation in 1913 of the revolutionary newspaper *Critica*.

On November 26, 1898, an announcement requesting all amateur photographers in Argentina and abroad to send their pictures of unique and curious events to be considered for publication, crystallized the new rapport that *Caras y Caretas* wanted to establish with its public. The announcement was also an indication that the increasingly professionalized Argentine audience was starting to be perceived as a partner in an equal, balanced relationship, on the information field. The mass public was not anymore an abstract entity, a void that needed to be filled in with information or guided with ideas. The new mass public was educated, prepared, ready and able to make informed decisions about what was worth their attention, and what was not. This new public had acquired a number of technical skills that would also become instrumental to the publishing business. This leveled playing field was another direct consequence of an increasingly democratic Argentine society:

Despite the fact that our weekly has a complete service of correspondents in the country and abroad, the pursuit of guaranteeing the most complete graphic information coverage has led us to ask for the collaboration of all amateur photographers in Argentina and abroad under the following conditions: 1) *Caras...* will pay 5 pesos for photographs in 8x9 to 13x18, and 10 pesos for 13x18 to 18x24; 2) Photographs should reproduce events, or anything that represents a curious topic; 3) Copies will be printed on paper, without prejudice of their clearness; 4) It is indispensable that the photographs haven't been reproduced by any other publication; 5)

Published photos will show the author's name at the epigraph (Caras y Caretas, Nov. 26, 1898).<sup>106</sup>

For the first time in Latin America, paid photographs were incorporated to a news publication as material of journalistic interest. As a practice, photography not only required a basic knowledge of optics, physics and photometry, but also a more sophisticated understanding of electromagnetism and chemistry in order to control chemical reactions, mixing and manipulating emulsions, and developing film. These scientific and practical skills, seldom taught in schools, were generally learned from technical manuals and magazines such as those edited by Italian publisher Hoepli, and broadly read by hobbyists in Buenos Aires during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were also part of a knowhow that little had to do with the learning and education of the elites (Sarlo 1992, 23). The monetization of these new technical skills thus spoke not only to the professionalization of the journalistic field –which now paid photographers for their work, incorporating the discipline as a new facet of the journalistic profession—but also to the integration of a modern, middle class practice into the sphere of remunerated activities under an increasingly modern society.

The growing importance of science became increasingly evident in those years, when Soiza Reilly and other authors and journalists such as Horacio Quiroga and Roberto Arlt began to incorporate it both to their journalistic and fictional stories. Soon enough science became not only a topic of news articles, but also –in the

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<sup>106</sup> Pignatelli 1999, 280-81. Translation from Spanish is mine.

figure of the expert and the scientist—a way to validate ideas, claims, observations, and positions.

To engage its public in conversation, *Caras y Caretas* kept on introducing editorial innovations that went beyond photography. Some of them, like the drawing contests, offered prizes in cash –payable in French Francs—or kind. Many of these competitions were developed around national symbols or heroes. The participants –generally children—were asked to send portrayals of an Argentine founding father, or some other national icon.<sup>107</sup> As part of the prize, the drawings would even appear on the cover of *Caras y Caretas*. One of these amateur contributions, for instance, was chosen to illustrate a special issue commemorating the centennial of the May Revolution of 1810, which had a circulation of more than 400,000 (Pignatelli 1999, 317).

At the beginning, *Caras y Caretas* counted no more than two-dozen pages, a quarter of which were advertising. But the page count soon increased to an average of 100. Some special numbers, however, came out with even four times as much. The special May 1910 issue included 372 pages, 87 of which were ads. In the editorial page, the publishers flaunted their satisfaction saying that, had the copies been piled on each other, they would have reached an altitude of 3,017 meters or 35 times the height of the building of the National Congress. And, had they been

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<sup>107</sup> These pictorial representations of the founding fathers and other symbols of the motherland in magazines and newspapers had a strong institutional value, and were instrumental in the consolidation of the Argentine national identity (Varela. 1994. *Los Hombres Ilustres del Billiken*).

aligned next to each other, they would have stretched 20,910,000 meters, the distance between the North Pole and the South Pole (Eujanian 1999, 29).

*Caras y Caretas* was an immediate hit. Its circulation grew astoundingly and consistently from 80,760 in 1904 to 111,800 in 1912, stabilizing at around 100,000 in 1913, to begin a slow decline that would lead to its closure in 1941. Between 1898 and 1912, the weekly used its cartoons for political humor and opinion. In fact, much of the editorial line rested in the hands of *Caras y Caretas'* political cartoonists such as Manuel Mayol and José María Cao Luaces (Cao), both of Spanish origin, brothers Cándido Villalobos and Francisco Redondo, also Spanish, Italian Mario Zavataro, and Argentine Aurelio Giménez.

They all considered themselves “periodistas dibujantes” (“journalist-illustrators”) and not mere illustrators (Pignatelli 1999, 279). But in 1912, probably as a consequence of the increasing political tensions in Europe, the editorial line started to veer in order to focus predominantly on international news. With this shift, *Caras y Caretas'* style also changed, illustrations lost ground to information, and the editorial line moved closer to the information model practiced by the international news services frequently consulted in the newsroom.

The change didn't go unnoticed. Some of the founding members argued that a neutral position and the emphasis on international news were contrary to the original spirit of the weekly, so when an agreement with the editorial board proved impossible, a key part of the staff set sail for two new magazines: *PBT* and *Fray Mocho* –the latter founded by *Caras y Caretas'* chief illustrator, Cao, and named after

José Alvarez, the magazine's praised and recently deceased first editor. Even Eustaquio Pellicer stepped down from the editorial board to found *PBT*, which would carry on the tone and original editorial style of *Caras y Caretas*.

The expansion of the international section and an increased emphasis on the informative approach to the news, presented a superb opportunity for experimentation for those who stayed with the magazine. New, avant-garde narrative forms and the Great War would offer writers like Soiza Reilly the opportunity, the tools, and the substance to explore new ideas and topics, and develop their writing in the context of modern journalistic genres and styles.

### **The Mass Public and the Modern City**

Since the beginning *Caras y Caretas* was conceived as a magazine for the people, and that was reflected in its cover price. Until its 13<sup>th</sup> issue, *Caras y Caretas* cost 25 cents in newstands –a little more than twice the value of a two-way working-class tramway ticket (the “boleto obrero”). But starting with the 14<sup>th</sup> issue, its price was reduced to 20 cents and stayed the same until 1939 (Pignatelli 1999, 281).

Matching *Caras y Caretas'* cover price with the round trip cost of a tramway ticket was not a random move. Public transportation had become a central aspect of urban life in Buenos Aires. New forms of metropolitan transportation not only were changing the urban landscape. They were also instrumental to the incorporation of

the suburbs and its inhabitants to the life of the city, while drastically changing the way people accessed culture and information.

Buenos Aires' electric tram network was inaugurated on April 22, 1897 and had only two sections at first: one that ran between Canning Avenue and the Zoo in Plaza Italia in the Northern side of town, and another one in the West, running along Avenue Primera Junta –formerly known as Camino Real and later on renamed Rivadavia. The North-bound line, managed by *Tranvía Eléctrico de Buenos Aires*, was built by American engineer Charles Bright. The West-bound section, inaugurated in December of that same year, which connected the corner of San Juan Avenue and Entre Ríos, with Plaza Flores, was managed by *Tramways La Capital*.

Electric streetcars, one of the clearest signs of modernity in a city that by the 1900s was already considered among the most advanced metropolitan centers in the world, had not only started to change the pulse of the town, but also helped incorporate a large mass of immigrants, mostly living in the peripheries, into the workforce. At 10c per roundtrip, the *boleto obrero* (*worker's ticket*) was an omen of the tremendous transformation about to occur in Buenos Aires. Upward social mobility, and the rapid development of new economic sectors like services and finances, were some aspects of the development of a vibrant mass culture, already showing signs of tremendous vitality.

In the two decades that followed, the tram network spread at full speed, and by the mid 1920s, when it reached its maturity, it already covered 875 kilometers of tracks, ran more than 3,000 cars, employed 12,000 workers, and offered 99 urban routes,

transporting an average of 650,000,000 annual commuters. Buenos Aires soon earned a new moniker, the “City of Tramways,” and the system became instrumental to suburban joining a growing middle class in an expansion totally unprecedented for Latin America.<sup>108</sup>

Urban public transportation was also a boon for the consumption of mass media. People started to take advantage of their daily commute in order to read. And, as a new space in the public sphere, buses and trams opened different types of social interaction, anonymous and sometimes purely based on appearances. External signs became increasingly relevant markers of cultural, social and political identity. Newspapers and magazines soon became emblems of status and social association, helping define expectations, affiliations and interests. It was not only important to be seen reading in the bus or the train. Different types of reading also defined different ideological, political and social interests and ranks.

*La novela universitaria*, one among the many popular magazines in those years, advertised itself as a “sign of good literary taste. When you carry *La novela universitaria* in the train or the tramway, there’s no reason to hide it: those who see it will know that you are an intellectually distinguished person, a person of culture” (Mizraje 2006, 46-49)<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> For more information about the social history of tramways in Buenos Aires, García Heras 1992, and Torres 1975, Also Aquilino González Podestá. *Apuntes sobre la historia del tranvía en Buenos Aires*. Asociación Amigos del Tranvía. And Biblioteca Popular Federico Lacroze, n/d.

<sup>109</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

The title of avant-garde poet Oliverio Girondo's first book *Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía* (*Twenty poems to be read in the tramway*) published in 1922, also spoke to the habits and nature of this developing mass public, which took advantage of long urban commutes to gain access to the new forms of modern mass culture while displaying its objects as social symbols of class and identity.

### **The Journalism of Soiza Reilly**

Soiza Reilly's articles made a good tramway read. During his many years with *Caras y Caretas*, he consolidated his ascent in the new journalistic paradigm with extraordinary success. Soiza's first articles for the magazine focused on the byproducts of Buenos Aires' modernity, and also on some of the most blatant contradictions of his time: the development of urban underclasses, the new poor, the freaks, and the uncanny world of crime in a city that, unlike the rest of Latin America, was becoming cosmopolitan at a fast pace.<sup>110</sup> During 1905, using both his name and his pseudonym, Agapito Candileja, Soiza Reilly published five stories in *Caras y Caretas*, four of them journalistic crónicas, and the last one a philosophical

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<sup>110</sup> An example of Buenos Aires cosmopolitanism is an editorial that *Crítica* published on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1927 to celebrate the inauguration of its new printing facilities in Avenida de Mayo 1333. The article, published in Spanish, English, French and the "languages of all the collectivities in Buenos Aires," saluted the readers celebrating the acquisition of a new building, the new machines and *Crítica's* new format: "An organ of Buenos Aires, and interpreter of the cosmopolitan city, *Crítica*, which has a trained ear for foreign accents, has many times noticed, among the rumors of this new Babel, those who are the humblest, those of anonymous pain, those whose complaint and protest nobody listens to [...]" Saítta 1996, 88. Translation from Spanish is mine.

short story (Cilento 2009, 72).<sup>111</sup> After the First World War, however, Soiza's interests started to veer towards money-related crime stories.

In his early writings, Soiza Reilly produced one of the first journalistic records of gay activity in Latin America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In those years, immigration, deviance and crime were widespread preoccupations in growing metropolises around the world. A massive migratory influx from Europe, the consolidation of the legal apparatus and the development of notions of citizenship and civil norms, triggered a taxonomical, classificatory interest on deviance that fostered the development of such disciplines as eugenics, positive criminology and phrenology (Ludmer 1999, 130-147). Realism and naturalism in literature were clearly connected to these preoccupations.

Soiza was among the first modern Latin American journalists to tap into those topics. Magazines and newspaper articles –but also certain forms of literature– started to resort to science and legal terminology to back up stories and ideas, connecting with a public increasingly interested in those new types of knowledge.<sup>112</sup> In “Ladrones Vestidos de Mujer” (“Thieves Dressed Like Women”), an article published in *Fray Mocho*, Soiza reported about the underworld clique of 3,000

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<sup>111</sup> The crónicas were: “El filósofo de los perros” n. 343, 29-4; “En las regiones de la pobreza” n. 345, 13-15; “El invierno de los pobres” n. 348, 3-6 and “Un pueblo misterioso” n. 370, 4-11, an article we will discuss later. The philosophical short story was “El alma de los perros” n. 378.

<sup>112</sup> See Sarlo 1992.

transvestite burglars he called the “manly Eves,” who dressed like high-class women in order to rob men in downtown Buenos Aires.<sup>113</sup>

Using his encounter with an old friend turned burglar as a narrative stepping stone, Soiza began his journey into the world of this guild of marginal pickpockets, blackmailers and thieves who lurked in the dark corners of the fanciest streets in town.

“Initiated.” “Aesthetes.” They resort to their effeminate looks to exploit the ingenuous vanity of the provincial Don Juan... Their operation is extremely simple. Young boys, neurotic and sickened, some of them with beautiful features, dress up like women, with elegance. Even with *chic*... They walk the dark streets. They see someone coming, unsuspecting. They approach him. They say they are astray...

-Dear sir, I am lost. You look like a kind and distinguished gentleman, couldn't you walk with me? I am scared, I'm a widower.

Deep inside every gentleman there's a knave.

-Of course I can escort you home, Madam –the “distinguished gentleman” answers. And so he does.

They jump into a taxi car. And while the false lady, softly sighs and cries, she steals from her Don Juan his wallet.

Soon thereafter, Don Juan will complain to his family or to a police agent:

-Someone in the trolley stole my wallet (Soiza Reilly 2006, 232-233).<sup>114</sup>

Through a technique that both Sarmiento and Martí had perfected, Soiza traced back the genealogy of this unholy profession to ancient Greece, the Bible, and the

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<sup>113</sup> The dates of publication for this article differ according to two sources. In 2006, María Gabriela Mizraje's Comp. *La Ciudad de los Locos* the article is dated in *Fray Mocho*, Year 1, May 17, 1912. In 2007 Idez and Nuñez' piece, it's dated also in *Fray Mocho* but on June 7, 1912.

<sup>114</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

European kingdoms of Henry III of France, and Henry VIII of England, presenting it in the context of a larger series of human activities.

Theft by “men dressed as women” is, in fact, nothing modern. If this type of weird delinquent wanted to claim an illustrious origin, it would take them not too much of an erudite inquiry [...] Saint Paul in his letter to the Christians of Rome mentions some of them and says “they deserve to die” [...] Moses had to pass very severe laws against Midianite thieves [...] Among the false divinities, the Holy Scriptures mention Baal-Fagor, who dressed as women to steal stars from Jacob [...] Henry the VIII of England was proud of his buffoon: Will Summers, an effeminate guy and the “court’s burglar.” Henry admired him so much that he requested Holbein, the first portrait artist of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, to work on two paintings of the great buffoon in a women’s attire [...] Both remain in London. One in the Antiquarian’s Hall. The other one at the British Museum (Soiza Reilly 2006, 234-235).<sup>115</sup>

To back up his facts, Soiza quoted authoritative scientific and legal sources. His medical sources described cross-dressing as a pathology and his police sources showed him statistics of burglaries recently committed by cross-dressers in Buenos Aires. Soiza ended the article with two cases, the ones of Luis Fernández also known as “La Princesa de Borbón” (the Bourbon Princess) and Culpiano Álvarez, known as “Bella Otero.” “In their majority, these thieves are refined and educated men [...] Almost all of them love music, flowers, sewing and poetry,” he adds. “They play the piano. They live off of stolen property” (Soiza Reilly 2006, 236-237).

By revealing the particularities of Buenos Aires’ modernity while at the same time inserting the city into a larger, universal context, Soiza was gearing his narratives towards a new reading public. In his articles, Soiza wrote for the new urban middle classes, and offered them scientific, technical and legal information useful to

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<sup>115</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

interpret their city under the larger frame of universal culture. For the first time Soiza showed these new audiences a world as seen through the lens of the mass media.

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But Soiza wasn't an uncritical defender of modernity. Compassionate towards those who were left on the margins of progress, he was also a strong critic of superfluity and greed, and had developed a somewhat idealistic and romanticized view of the urban poor. In fact, in his idealization of the underclasses, he channeled some of his mistrust for science, progress and the market.

Soiza usually portrayed the penniless as voluntarily distanced from mundane temptations and the vices of modern society. He called them dogs, in reference to Diogenes the Cynic, his dog-like behavior and his usual companions, but also in allusion to Saint Rocco, the mendicant pilgrim and Catholic saint:

Surrounded by the dirt of his rags, his cans, his dogs and his madness, the hirsute tramp lives the legendary life of his brother Rocco –the pilgrim saint—and of his brother Job –the sad and dreadful. Far from the clownish laughter that reigns over the city of progress; free from contact with people who suffer the dementia of living a sane life, immune to the cramps triggered by the thirst for vain ambitions; fugitive of noise, he sees the hours pass one by one. He sees them pass with patriarchal indifference, indolent, serene as a cat... He sleeps outdoors, on his rags. He eats the crumbs that he can find in the garbage. And he lives happily, feeding his soul with the pleasure of a unique love. The love of his dogs. He loves his dogs with feminine passion. Listen. He is talking to us:  
-See, sir. I dearly love my dogs because they have offered me the tenderness that not even my mother had... Do you even know who

my mother was? No? It's funny, but neither do I... But who cares. I know many other things (Soiza Reilly 2008, 143-44).<sup>116</sup>

This duality appears again in "Un pueblo misterioso" ("A mysterious town"), this time much less idealized. Published by *Caras y Caretas* on November 4, 1905, the article described the precarious conditions in the town of Las Ranas (the frogs) and the routines of some 300 people living behind the former cattle corrals of the Abasto market, in a place that had become the municipal dumpster.<sup>117</sup>

It would be more appropriate to call it the city of swine... Emplaced where garbage is incinerated, behind the corrals of the Abasto, far from the vibrant streets and their luminous signs, this town, full of mystery, shows the saddened face of any town that sleeps in the arms of death [...] behind the warm garbage smoke, there's the buzzing lives of a beehive of people. Very bad people who carry in their blood the instinct of crime, and in their muscles the sweet fatigue of sluggishness (Soiza Reilly 2008, 233).<sup>118</sup>

Although Soiza's take on social disparities was constantly present in his early articles, he did not frame them as political or class asymmetries. What actually seems to be always present in Soiza's journalism is the naturalized notion that, in a vibrant city like Buenos Aires, both extremes exist as the consequence of purely personal, individual choices. And surely enough, it was this point of view that helped Soiza establish a direct connection with his ascending, immigrant, middle class readers.

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<sup>116</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

<sup>117</sup> Gayol 2004, 224 and Soiza Reilly 2008, 233-236.

<sup>118</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

Soiza Reilly was one of the first mass journalists in Latin America. But in a time when living off of one's writing was not well-regarded by the Latin American elites, and literature was perceived as a prerogative for the leisurely upper classes, writers, journalists and the market didn't coexist peacefully. Soiza's solution to this conundrum was simple: he turned his back on the idea that literature was for the few, and embraced the mass public, professionalizing his journalistic and literary activities to the extreme. By the early 1910s, after having published several of his novels in cheap editions that were sold in newsstands for sometimes much less than a peso, Soiza had been able to successfully monetize his work. *El alma de los perros* had at least 24 editions, and as a journalist and a writer Soiza lived comfortably, his journalism and fiction books in constant demand.

Soiza's ubiquitous presence in popular mass magazines such as *Caras y Caretas*, *Fray Mocho*, *P.B.T.*, *Revista Popular*, *Nosotros*, *La novela Semanal*, *La novela universitaria*, *La novela de hoy*, *La mejor novela*, and penny papers like *La Razón*, *La Nación* and *Crítica* undoubtedly helped him become a coveted commodity in an industry geared to satisfy a constantly growing mass public. This position, antagonistic to the Argentine literary avant-garde, turned him not only into one of the first heroes of the mass media, but also earned him the antipathy of writers like Jorge Luis Borges. In *Martín Fierro*, the literary magazine founded in the mid 1920s by Evar Méndez, Borges wrote that Soiza only produced "nonsense" ("ñoñerías") and suffered of "literary diarrhea" (Escalés 2008, 12-13 and Mizraje 2007, 35-36).

To give an idea of how antagonistic the avant-garde of *Martín Fierro* was towards Soiza Reilly's commercial success, it suffices to note that Borges took pride on

having to pay out of his own pocket for the publication of his first book of poetry. Borges used to quote a conversation with writer and friend Arturo Cancela, who denied that his books sold much “because if other writers thought that, they would also think that they were written for the populace and held little [literary] value.”<sup>119</sup>

Market failure was, for the Argentine avant-garde, a sign of literary success. In those early years of the mass media, consecrated writers like Borges and Cancela still looked at the masses with contempt and mistrust. Any kind of literature –fiction, nonfiction, poetry— geared towards the populace was not to be taken seriously. *Martín Fierro*, for instance, constantly referred to Soiza Reilly’s books as a “sub-class of [...] Journalistic Literature” (Mizraje 2008, 36). Their attacks reached a point where, in 1924 some of those same writers –hidden behind pseudonyms— wrote Soiza Reilly’s “literary epitaph.”

Soiza, however, largely ignored the attacks. He had already chosen sides. In 1906 he had co-founded the Writers’ Society with Roberto Payró and Alberto Gerchunoff; by 1910 his *Cerebros de París* (*Parisian brains*) came out, and in the same year he was awarded the Gold Medal at the San Francisco Exhibit for *El Alma de los Perros*. Soiza also received several distinctions for his work, such as the title of “Commendatore de la corona de Italia,” one of the highest honors conferred by the Italian government, while his fame and popularity keep growing relentlessly.

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<sup>119</sup> Carrizo, Antonio. 1982. *Borges el memorioso*. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

“My books, my travels, and my friendship with some celebrities in Europe have given my name a sonorous prestige,” he acknowledged in his prologue to *Cerebros de París*. “It was due to that, that I was called imbecile, dunce, jerk, lunatic, liar, hypertrophied, insolent, pedantic, slanderer, anarchist, catholic, weeping willow, oriental, bohemian, Brazilian, numbskull, and other adjectives equally flattering” (Escalés 2008, 12-13).<sup>120</sup>

During the years between 1905 and 1914, Soiza Reilly consolidated his position in the Argentine journalistic Parnassus. In 1907 he became *Caras y Caretas*' star reporter from Europe where he interviewed some of the most relevant personalities in the world of politics, science, and culture. And traveling back and forth between France and Argentina, he progressively started to focus on the developing conflicts that would end in the First World War (Ludmer 1999, 308).

### **Dispatches**

By 1914 a long list of books had cemented Soiza Reilly's ever-expanding notoriety. *El alma de los perros* (*The soul of dogs*), which turned him into a favorite of the mass public, first appeared in Spain in 1907 edited by famous novelist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez. Published by Casa Sempere, in Valencia, with a prologue by Argentine diplomat, Latin American activist and writer Manuel Ugarte, the book sold out its first three consecutive editions of 50,000 units each. After receiving the gold medal at the California World's Fair in 1910, *El alma de los perros*, translated into French,

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<sup>120</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

Italian, Czech, Yiddish, and several other languages, was then published in Argentina in 1917 and constantly re-edited until the early 1950s (Ludmer 1999, 308-309; Mizraje 2004, 173-178). His *Cien hombres célebres. Confesiones literarias* (*One hundred famous men. Literary confessions*) published in Buenos Aires in 1908 became the second best seller in the history of Latin American literature. A compilation of 533 interviews and portraits, with illustrations by Paola Lombroso-Carrara – daughter Cesare Lombroso, famous founder of the Italian School of Positivist Criminology—its first edition sold 20,000 copies and rewarded Soiza with 5,000 pesos in sales (Ludmer 1999, 189). In 1911 Soiza published again, this time back in Barcelona, his *Crónicas de amor de belleza y de sangre* (*Chronicles of love, beauty and blood*) a title that may have very well inspired Horacio Quiroga's 1917 *Cuentos de amor de locura y de muerte* (*Stories of love, madness and death*). The book was followed in 1914 by *La ciudad de los locos; aventuras de Tartarín Moreira* (*The city of the insane; the adventures of Tartarin Moreira*) a novel and five essays on Europe and America, with illustrations by José Friedrich and dedicated to Soiza's colleagues at *Fray Mocho* magazine. In the prologue that Zeda —Francisco Fernández Villegas Ph.D.— wrote to Soiza's *Cerebros de París* (1912), the famous literary critic elevated Soiza to the status of a virtuoso of the *crónica* (Escala 2008, 20).

Soiza, however, not only published fiction, but also compilations of his chronicles and interviews for magazines and newspapers. In *Cuentos de amor de belleza y de sangre*, which Soiza dedicated to his colleagues in *Caras y Caretas*, the author explained his motivation:

I've been living among famous men and women for quite some time now. Currently, I am the writer who has seen up close the most illustrious personalities of these times... My books *One hundred famous men*, *Literary confessions*, *Men and women from Italy*, *The soul of dogs* and *Parisian brains* include details of a thousand and one visits that I paid to some of the biggest geniuses, but also some of the most insignificant popular men around the world... I was the first literate in South America to talk about some of the big European names [in the press]. With my books I have contributed to spread the word about many talents that, despite being already popular in the Old World, were unknown in America. Creating an audience for yet another book is equivalent to enlighten another man. I have enlightened many of them... (Ludmer 1999, 190).<sup>121</sup>

Some of these interviews included conversations with writers Edmundo D'Amicis, Spanish literary critic Menéndez Pelayo, and several performers, poets and authors, including Gabriele D'Annunzio, Florencio Parravicini, Max Nordau and Julio Herrera Reisig, who was portrayed shooting heroine by *Caras y Caretas'* photographer (Ludmer 1999, 193).

Life in Paris was good. In *La juventud intelectual de América hispana* –with a prologue by Rubén Darío—poet Alejandro Sux described Soiza Reilly's Parisian apartment on Rue Clichy, with its overwhelming photographic gallery, the irreverent statues and his collection of rare books:

On his desk a few skulls grinned and Japanese monsters performed homely duties, and behind a mountain of papers you could see his impertinent eyeglasses and his Voltairean smile [...] I am sure that in Latin America there's no one so well suited for this genre of long reportage. If we were nephews of Uncle Sam, we would definitely say that [Soiza Reilly] is the king of *reporters* (Ludmer 1999, 285).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

<sup>122</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

His articles and interviews for *Caras y Caretas* –usually shifting between first and second narrative person, in a colloquial yet insightful tone that combined high Buenos Aires culture and lowbrow, street references, made him so immensely popular that magazines like *El Hogar*, *Fray Mocho*, and mass newspapers such as *La Nación*, *Crítica* and *La Razón* paid handsomely for his writings.<sup>123</sup> So when the war broke out in Europe, there was little doubt he would become the first Latin American international correspondent to cover it.

On August 18, 1914 after a short trip back to Argentina, Soiza embarked to Europe, this time commissioned by *La Nación*. With his passport he carried a document issued by the newspaper administration that stated:

D. Juan José de Soiza Reilly is invested with the powers of special envoy for *La Nación* to Europe, with the purpose of informing this newspaper about the development of current events. He is here by authorized to invoke its name as an authorized representative in every circumstance that so required, in order to better perform his mission. *La Nación* will thank in advance to all people, colleagues, individuals, journalistic outlets or public employees, the assistance provided to Mr. de Soiza Reilly for the success of his undertaking (Mizraje 2006, 32).<sup>124</sup>

The contract with *La Nación* was not exclusive, which allowed Soiza to also send dispatches to *Caras y Caretas* and *Fray Mocho*. In those articles, Soiza generally avoided discussing the geo-political aspects of the war in order to focus on his

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<sup>123</sup> Soiza's use of *lunfardo*, an argot originated in Buenos Aires and Montevideo at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prefigure the style that journalist, writer and novelist Roberto Arlt, a confessed admirer of Soiza Reilly's, would adopt and turn into his signature style during the 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>124</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

area of expertise: the human-interest story and the local color. This is particularly evident in the following excerpts of two articles published in *Fray Mocho*. The first one, titled “Cómo se divierten los ingleses” (“How the English Amuse Themselves”) dated in France, on October 14, 1914, explores a Babelic gathering of soldiers from all colors, languages and religions:

Every step of the way you find uniforms of the most fantastic colors and the most extravagant shapes. This war has turned out so fantastic, so impossible, that it has gathered soldiers of all races and languages. All in all, they fight for the same cause. The spirit that reunites them is one. Only thanks to their uniforms you know where they come from. Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, incredulous.

Side by side with the Belgian who—except for his rubber-lined cap—looks almost identical to the French soldier, we see the Sikh from India, with his white turban, and by his side, with blue or red jackets and multi-colored pants, the skilled Algerian snipers, who compete in blackness with those dexterous ones from Senegal. Every type of weapon has also its corresponding uniform. And, the more African the soldier, the more colorful his attire... The only ones that have a real “war uniform” are the English. Theirs is khaki-colored, like the soil, which makes them pass unnoticed in the trenches. They don’t even have badges. Officers are indistinguishable from their troops. Those golden laurels that both in France and Spain are used even by chiefs of train stations, the English have given up for modest black cords. And in the battlefield they are almost invisible... (Soiza Reilly, 1914).<sup>125</sup>

Soiza’s reporting from the front lines was oftentimes based on second hand sources, observations and even rumors, and its goal was mostly to entertain rather than to inform. By humanizing the conflict, Soiza made the war more understandable to mass audiences in Argentina, who perceived the conflict as distant and rather incomprehensible.

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<sup>125</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

-Figure—said Lieutenant Helene yesterday to both Gómez Carrillo and I—that these English devils, when they are holding a position, the enemy fire is strong, and the bodies pile up at our feet, they pinch each other's legs to crack a laugh... During truces, instead of lying down to rest, they play football, tennis, or they do Roman wrestling...

Undoubtedly, the English take war as a joke. I have also seen them, at Soissons, pounding at each other. I have witnessed the comfort with which they furnish their trenches. They are not satisfied with just digging a ditch in the ground. They are not just happy with a shelter good enough to shoot at their enemy. No! They don't believe that men go to war to die like heroes, but also to have fun like Englishmen. Once they have built their trench, they keep on working, so they dig out entire caves where they live. If the cave gets flooded, they develop a drain system to dry it out. They carpet the ground with hay, they build their bunks with four sticks of wood and interlaced string. They cover themselves with newspaper. They brew their own whisky with water-soluble pills. Each pill is equivalent to a quart of whisky. The pills are condensed whisky.

-A curious thing—the young Lieutenant carried on—is that they never look giddy... It's amazing to see how sharp their aim is, and above that, the moral and physical strength that drives them. I haven't heard a single English soldier complaining of fatigue... Plus, they don't suffer from an ailment that makes French soldiers particularly miserable: nostalgia (Soiza Reilly, 1914).<sup>126</sup>

Through the use of the first narrative person Soiza appropriated the experiences of his subjects. As a narrator, his voice became entangled with and was often indistinguishable from the voices of his characters. And by focusing on people, and on long series of bizarre situations, he grabbed the attention of an Argentine public far removed from the realities of the war. The human aspect of the conflict thus prevailed in his articles above military and strategic details.

Soiza stayed in Europe until 1916 while his reportorial technique evolved into a complex mix of direct observation and interviews complemented with information obtained in local newspapers and second or third hand sources. His most usual

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<sup>126</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

topics were love, (“French women are falling in love with the [English] allies with delirious enthusiasm”), class and social differences in the battlefield. But he also focused on other narratives he was sure would interest a growing middle class readership in Argentina whose interest in the purely political conflict was limited.

The organization [of English companies] is also quite strange. Men enrolled in the same province, or in the same city, stay in the same unit, so camaraderie bonds them very closely. Battalions are made of people of the same social condition, who belong to the same guild or profession. So, there’s a battalion of rich noblemen, another one of bank clerks, another one of undergraduate students, another one of chauffeurs and butchers. The teachers at the “London County Council” also have their own battalion too (Soiza Reilly, 1914).<sup>127</sup>

On the German side, Soiza Reilly visited the Polish front in Kowal and Gostynin where, under rain and snow, he witnessed the dismal life of the troops. In “La Estrategia de los Ratonés” (“The Strategy of Mice”) an article published in *Fray Mocho* on April 23, 1915, he described the experience:

Polish snow isn’t the white snow of the Russian steppes, or the snow of the Carpathians in Hungary. It is a snow that, when falling from clouds it surely presents the milky whiteness of all snow. But, as soon as it touches the ground it switches from that whiteness into a dirty grey, ashy and melancholic. Realizing that it unfortunately fell on the motherland of poor persecuted Polish, maybe it bemoans facing a scene of total desolation. And unable to lift back to the clouds, it ages in sorrow and grays (Soiza Reilly 1915).<sup>128</sup>

After describing the setting, Soiza Reilly goes on to recount how the two German military encampments in Poland, sitting in front of a frozen Vistula, were the daily

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<sup>127</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

<sup>128</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

scene of a human tragedy: desperate, hungry and cold, some German soldiers walked on the thin ice to escape the torments of war by drowning into the frozen waters. Soiza presented the scene as if he had witnessed it himself:

In fact, that afternoon we witnessed a deadly scene that looked like a suicide.

A Red Cross soldier, a 20-year-old young man bored with inaction, made a bet to amuse himself. He ventured he would walk across the Vistula, in the region of Gostynin, where that deep river is 40-meters wide. It was 4 in the afternoon. It was getting dark.

The young man started to walk on the vitrified surface, open-armed, mocking Jesus' walk on the water... He laughed. He took slow steps... However, when he had ventured some 15 meters away from the ground he felt, undoubtedly, that the ice layer was solid enough. Emboldened by the accomplishment, he did a pirouette and started walking faster with a triumphal grin on his face, marking each step with the fierce emphasis of the Prussian style.

-He will win his bet! -his comrades voiced—The ice is hard today! That was what I thought too. But when he reached the middle of the river, we saw him stop. His right foot plunged. He jolted violently to liberate it. He couldn't. The ice cracked and the young man began to sink while swinging his arms trying to reach the small ice blocks that slipped from his hands as if they were bars of soap. Without yelling, or theatricalities, three friends went downhill and started to walk on the frozen river to assist their colleague. It was in vain. The young man sunk, disappeared from the surface. And while sinking, the crack closed back on top of him, like the solid slab of a cold grave... (Soiza Reilly 1915).<sup>129</sup>

As most reporters in his time, Soiza Reilly was also fascinated with the technological advances of modern warfare. And being technology a topic of interest to the new mass public, the use of devices such as telephones, gas masks and periscopes was also profusely covered in his stories. But Soiza also left room in his articles to describe other, more obscure, aspects of the war, such as spiritualism sessions,

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<sup>129</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

ancient war history, and the physical and psychological consequences of sustained combat and life in the trenches.

Back in Buenos Aires in October 1916, Soiza received a hero's welcome. His dispatches had been so broadly read that his three conferences at the Teatro Coliseo to talk about the general aspects of war, the battles in France and the German people were completely sold out. Soiza had become so popular that even his comeback was news worthy. On Oct. 2, 1916, *P.B.T.* magazine welcomed the correspondent in an exalted editorial:

Famous writer and brilliant journalist J. J. de Soiza Reilly has returned to Buenos Aires after a two-year-long tour around the European battlefields. Soiza, as the public is well aware of, has been publishing in his columns in our peer company *La Nación* his ideas, developed in the very same place of such enormous and painful tragedy [...] Soiza, has a bag full of notes, and will take advantage of them during his conferences at the Coliseo theater [...] It is our pleasant duty to salute Soiza Reilly and wish him the success that both his talent and heart deserve, and we also wish to point out that he has gained his laurels not only thanks to his brain, but also to his soul.<sup>130</sup>

It was clear by then that Soiza had succeeded at understanding and positioning himself in this new niche between journalism and mass literature, one generally frowned upon by the elites that had until then dominated both the Latin American and the Argentine literary canon.

### **Buenos Aires, Bohemia and the Mass Public**

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<sup>130</sup> *P.B.T.* n. 623, October 2, 1916. Quoted by Mizraje, 2006.

By catering to the new mass public –first generation Argentines, immigrants and newcomers to the reading world—Soiza Reilly was unknowingly following famous American journalists such as Stephen Crane, who had courted the same kind of audiences in the United States, more than a decade before. Although many of Soiza’s topics and ideas were akin to those that had interested avant-garde literary movements like the *modernistas* (technology, the new metropolitan life, spiritualism, science fiction, internationalism and science) unlike the *modernistas*, Soiza did not write poetry or resort to publishing obscure editions just to be accepted by his peers. He, in fact, disregarded what the mouthpieces of the literary elites had to say about him and his work, and focused on perfecting a popular genre that many of the *modernistas* had despised, and only considered a necessary evil: the *crónica*.

“Despite the fact that he doesn’t want to be anybody’s disciple and wishes to walk without a cane, a guide, or a professor –analyzed with poignancy Zeda in his prologue to Soiza’s *Los cerebros de París*—it is apparent that [Soiza Reilly] follows the steps of the French, masters, in reality, of the powerful literary genre we call ‘cronica.’”<sup>131</sup> In fact, one of Soiza’s short stories from 1909, “Psicología de una nota policial” (“Psychology of a Crime Story”) constitutes almost a writing manifesto, a theorization about the connections that *crónicas* established between the world of literature and the world of journalism (Terranova, 2006).

In the story, a young writer explains to his girlfriend how to read a newspaper crime story:

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<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Escales 2008, 20.

Since in order to nurture your nerves with enjoyment you need to learn about cruel, savage, horrible events, don't wait for newspapers to offer complete news, with explicit details about burglaries, suicides and murders. If you do, you will suffer infinite disappointments.

And then he adds:

Tragedy isn't always in the grand, the noisy or the bloody. Sometimes it lays in the insignificances... In every line of a crime *crónica* there is drama. You only have to guess it. And feel it... (Soiza Reilly 2008, 220).

This approach was the one that Soiza followed between 1916 and 1920. In those years, Soiza also became interested in the emerging world of radio. The oral quality of his writing blended seamlessly with the new medium, and with journalists Josué Quesada and Clemente Onelli, he started a show in LOX Radio Cultura, a private station owned by Francisco del Ponte (Mizraje 2006, 38). Soon Soiza's voice could also be heard on Radio Stentor, Radio del Pueblo, Radio Belgrano and Splendid.

Although his journalism was never partisan or militant, it would be accurate to say that Soiza Reilly did have a political stance. In his early works he appeared to sympathize with socialist or anarchist causes, and his articles showed compassionate support for the workers and the dispossessed. In 1919, during what was known as the Tragic Week of January 7, a series of popular strikes, marches and protests started at the British-owned Vasena metal works plant, that were violently confronted by an anti-Semitic paramilitary group known as the Liga Patriótica, and ended in 700 deaths and more than 3,000 wounded, Soiza voiced his disgust in an article titled "The Martyrdom of the Innocent":

I saw innocent old men whose beards were uprooted [...] an old man lifted his undershirt to show us two ribs. They came out of his skin like two needles, bleeding ...A woman was forced to eat her own

excrement... Poor girls of fourteen or fifteen . . . [were] raped. I saw Jewish workers with both legs broken, broken in splinters on the sidewalk. And all this executed by gunslingers carrying the Argentine flag" (Escales 2008, 15; Mirelman 1975, 63).<sup>132</sup>

Although Soiza did prefer popular causes to the ones of the elites, and the voices of the street to the ones cultivated in the ivory tower of the Argentine literary canon, after the war his range of interests broadened. His articles, written with modernistic flair and vivid imagery, in a style somewhat close to American hard-boiled fiction, started to pay special attention to the other side of the coin of Buenos Aires' modernity: the upper classes and the rich.<sup>133</sup> Soiza would seldom reveal the names of the protagonists of these upper class chronicles, but thanks to these articles, for the first time in its short history, Argentine journalism was able to take a peek into the lives, vices and eccentricities of the new urban rich. Soiza's stories of those years featured the "vices (gambling, drugs and so on) that are made possible by an overabundance of money" (Mizraje 2004, 175).

*La Muerte Blanca. Amor y Cocaína (White death. Love and cocaine)* from 1926 and *Las Timberas (Female gamblers)* from 1927 were both byproducts of Soiza's magazine

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<sup>132</sup> Juan Jose de Soiza Reilly, "El Martirio de los Inocentes," *Revista Popular*, 2, no. 42 (February 1919), 1-4. Soiza would insist on his stance against anti-Semitism continuously. In a column he wrote for his radio show on January 25, 1938, he noted that "...There are no laws that persecute [the Jews]... I know! But we can't deny that there's a concealed persecution, sly, constant, secret, that insists in denying the Jews their right to eat... Why? [...] To wish that the Argentines persecute the Jews like some European countries do, is not only an attitude that sickens our Argentinity, it is also dangerous and counterproductive" (Ludmer 1999, 455-456), translation from Spanish is mine.

<sup>133</sup> As Garbiela Mizraje intelligently points out, Soiza's concern goes beyond the immediacy of the story, to the underlying social conditions that appear as its causes (Mizraje 2004, 174).

reporting. Published as novels, they compiled series of journalistic chronicles turned into moral fables that read like detective stories.

One of those chronicles “Paraisos artificiales,” (“Artificial paradises”) showed Soiza Reilly on the prowl for a story at a night party in the beach town of Mar del Plata, where socialites and powerful members of the Argentine aristocracy indulged in the luscious consumption of “the three paradises of an artificial heaven”: morphine, cocaine and opium (Soiza Reilly 2008, 263):

Today nobody reads Baudelaire. However, smoke paradises are in their apogee. Junkies don't just silently shoot their mysterious injections at home, or in the restrooms of luxury department stores. Now there are nests for the aristocracy where devotees of both sexes get together around fatal drugs like bees around gardens. They shoot morphine with Pravaz needles set in gold. They snort cocaine as if it were the Archbishop's snuff. They smoke opium in Venice crystal hookahs (Soiza Reilly 2008, 262).<sup>134</sup>

Soiza populated the scene with somber characters, in just a few masterful strokes.

In the harmony of the place, a woman's silhouette –long, gracious, slim, grey—moves across the room with a tray covered with small plates. On each plate there's a Pravaz' syringe and a glass vial with morphine... Behind her comes another woman, thinner and more delicate looking, all dressed in white like a nurse... She is in charge of administering the shots. Not everyone accepts the morphine.

I can see a lady whose hands, a constellation of shiny rocks, nods nonstop to conceal her cough in a handkerchief. She promptly accepts the tray. A slight smile illuminates her eyes... The woman dressed in white approaches her and is ready to shoot her in one arm. But the lady stops her.

-No!

Then, the hierophant kneels at her feet. She lifts the woman's skirt an inch. She unties her pink stockings... The lady reclines her head on

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<sup>134</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

the headrest, as if she were about to sleep... The injection paints in her lips a smile of happiness (Soiza Reilly 2008, 266).<sup>135</sup>

Soiza never revealed the names of his real life characters when they happened to be socialites (something he nonchalantly did when he reported about the poor). But his stories were accurate enough to earn him a terrible reputation among the Argentine elites. So much so that his 1925 book *Pecadoras (Female sinners)* was banished by newspapers like *La Prensa* and *Sociedad* because some of the characters “resembled too closely many of the figures of Buenos Aires’ aristocracy” (Mizraje 2006, 46). The attacks on the book reached the Commission of Morality, which finally censored it in 1925. *Criminales. Almas sucias de mujeres y hombres limpios (Criminals. Dirty souls of clean men and women)* from 1926, also based on his journalistic chronicles, claimed in the foreword that, after its publication, Soiza Reilly was at the brink of excommunication from the Catholic Church. And, again according to the prologue, several attempts were made to ban the book, and even to steal the manuscript (Mizraje 2008, 37).

Confronted by the elites, Soiza raised the bet, and in 1927 he published *Las timberas. Bajos-fondos de la aristocracia (Female gamblers. The underbelly of aristocracy)*. And his take on censorship and morality was made even more explicit in the prologue to his 1927 *No leas este libro (Don’t read this book)*.

I know what happens. In my book I have portrayed, with an excess of truth –and truth is always excessive for the timorous—characters well known in Mar del Plata, in Quintana Avenue, in Florida Street, and the “Vogue” Club... Those characters belong to the *haute*, to high society,

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<sup>135</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

where there may be many decent women and many decent men, but...My God! How about those little women I saw drunk with morphine, cocaine and champagne?

The rich always find protectors. The poor, the police... And, if the police and the newspapers are so focused on revealing the places where cheap cabaret women and men gather to snort cocaine, why on earth would I be banned from revealing the aristocratic places, and the private apartments where milady Cocó and milord Fifi, or Madame Pola gather with their friends celebrate their Sapphic masses and their ardent follies? What for the poor is vice, for the rich is *chic* culture (Soiza Reilly 2008, 243-244).<sup>136</sup>

Isolated from Buenos Aires powerbrokers, as a professional writer Soiza Reilly clearly wouldn't be associated with what Ángel Rama called the *lettered city*, that stratus of Latin American intellectuals intimately associated with the political power and the social elites. In the mass public Soiza Reilly found his primary audience and interlocutor. And the ubiquitous growth of these audiences over the following years, paved the way for Soiza's relative independence from the old models of both journalism and literature.

### **Exit Through the Radio**

In the thirties, Soiza was already one of the main characters of Buenos Aires' bohemia, and had become an influential figure in the emerging world of the mass media, with friendships that can be traced back to the many prologues he wrote for writers such as Alejandro Sux, Nicolás Granada, and for tango singer and composer Enrique Cadícamo. Soiza's career as a writer was stable and blooming. His *crónicas* and interviews, the two genres he mastered, were among the most read

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<sup>136</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

and commented in the Argentine press, and through popular editions and compilations he had also released a long list of books, more than a dozen, between fiction and nonfiction, sold in cheap 30c copies.

Many of those books, and most of his journalism could be characterized as literary journalism, particularly because it was in fact Soiza Reilly who coined that notion to define his own work. Like Soiza himself, literary journalism stood in between two traditions: the leisurely writing activity that, for several years, had been a prerogative of the high bourgeoisie, and journalism, which in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had started to consolidate as a professional activity.

In an interview with Italian “millionaire journalist,” writer, and entrepreneur Eduardo Scarfoglio, published on March 23, 1909 in *Caras y Caretas*, Soiza Reilly not only explored the idea of journalism as a lucrative profession, one that, just like many other liberal activities, was now regulated by the laws of the market. He also insisted in mentioning that “any journalist –that is, any journalist with writing talent—can write a good novel. But not every novelist –no matter how talented—can write a good news article...” (Cilento 2009, 81).“...[T]oday’s journalism is not the barren profession of years past. It is no longer a profession. It is not a craft. It’s an art. A delicate and profound one. An art of goldsmiths. Of poets. Of philosophers. An art that has its heroes and victims. I imagine that you don’t believe in what I say, but I am talking –with utmost devotion—about literary journalism...” (Cilento 2009, 81).<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

By the mid 1930s Soiza's presence in mainstream written media started to wane, perhaps as a consequence of the coup of 1930. However, two of his books, one commissioned by Standard Oil and a second one by Firestone, rightfully cast a shadow of suspicion over his name, while eliciting some questions about the connections between journalism and powerful corporations, and the relationship between mainstream media and the market.

Written in 1934, *La República Argentina vista con ojos argentinos. El problema del petróleo* (*The Argentine Republic Seen With Argentine Eyes. The Problem of Petroleum*) welcomed the Standard Oil Corporation to Argentina after the Argentine government had privatized the national oil reserves. Both the reserves, and the Argentine national oil company, YPF, had until then belonged –by law—to the Argentine State. But after the coup of September 6, 1930, the de facto government overruled the democratic law and moved ahead with an unconstitutional privatization.

*Desde la lágrima del caucho hasta el ala en que volamos por los caminos* (*From the Tear of the Rubber Tree to the Wing that Drives us down the Roads*) published in 1935 and commissioned by Firestone, was also an open welcome to an American corporation entangled in shady businesses with de facto government officials.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> According to Néstor Aparicio's *Los Prisioneros del Chaco y la evasión de Tierra del Fuego*, Buenos Aires, M. Gleizer Ed., 1932, the head of the military coup that ousted democratically elected Hipólito Yrigoyen, José Félix Uriburu, was the owner of an oil field. Colonel Emilio Kinkelín, also a member of the de facto government, was the owner of another oil field and concession, and many of their associates were in direct contact, or sometimes in the payroll of companies such as Astra, Petrolera Andina and Standard Oil (Escalés 2008, 17).

Curiously, after these two books Soiza practically quit writing to become a full time radio personality. Fascinated with the power of the medium, he embraced his new role and became the host of one of the most popular shows of Radio *El Mundo*: "Arriba los Corazones." Years later, in 1954, during a short appearance in Rosenberg's LR4 Radio Splendid show, he would describe his lifelong passion for journalism:

My beginnings in journalism can be traced back to the day I was born. I came out of the womb yelling the news of my birth. What is journalism? An eternal announcing yell of what's new.

I have sailed through all the fatigues in the world, but I never stopped being a journalist. What did I do in my youthful years when I started as a paperboy in the University of the Streets? Journalism. What did I do during my forty years of chair as a certified normal school professor? Journalism. What did I do in forty-two published books? Journalism. What have I been doing on radio for twenty-three years? Journalism. When God wants to find out my profession, it will be enough for him to ask me:

-Show me your hands.

He will see the callus that the pen left on my fingers after sixty years of writing. And God will say with his merciful tenderness:

-Journalist!

And will send me to hell to teach the devil about the most delicious suffering on earth: journalism (Soiza Reilly 2006, 515-516).<sup>139</sup>

Soiza Reilly's literary journalism served as a bridge between immigrants, middle classes in formation, and the established aristocracies of Buenos Aires; between literature as a prerogative of the patrician bourgeoisie and journalism as a rented and lucrative profession; between the lowlifes, the marginals, and the vices of the upper urban classes. An outsider to all these groups, and also to the Latin American literary canon, Soiza was not only an extraordinary chronicler and writer: he

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<sup>139</sup> All translations from Spanish are mine.

personified the emergence of mass mediated journalism in Latin America during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **Part IV. The Mass Press**

The life of a tabloid crime reporter in the 1920s and 1930s was no bed of roses. To hobnob with Buenos Aires' pimps, to schmooze with the police, and to daily produce a readable, sensational drama out of abhorrent murders, petty crimes, arsons and garden variety accidents, was only the first part of the job description. Reporters in *Crítica*, *La Prensa* and *El Mundo*, also had an acquired obligation that stemmed from the implicit reading contract their newspapers had with the mass audiences. In a way, to be a reporter for a mass newspaper in those years was to enter the public service, to become a guide and an aide to the readers, to tend to their multiple needs and wants --many times even on a personal basis—while at the same time convincing them to become visible and active players in the new experiences of democracy and the mass media.

Argentine writer and journalist Roberto Arlt was by 1927 a staff reporter with evening newspaper *Crítica*. Although he had already published a very successful novel, *El Juguete Rabioso (Mad Toy)*, winner in 1926 of the *Editorial Latina* award with almost unanimously glowing reviews, Arlt couldn't make a living only from his literature. In his first full time job as a journalist, however, he found the means for sustenance, a source of inspiration and sometimes even more:

Today one of our news writers, Roberto Arlt, and photographer José Chiapetti, called in by a pre-suicidal woman to her apartment on Uruguay street, prevented her death, by disarming her while she tried to shoot herself in the temple. Given the extraordinary development of the adventure, we present this illustrated chronicle to our readers,

who will see that the profession of a journalist isn't a bed of roses (Saítta 1998, 207).<sup>140</sup>

The article was accompanied by photos of Arlt struggling with the woman for the gun, and described how at the beginning of their "salvage," both writer and photographer were held at gunpoint and threatened by the lady, who had in fact called *Crítica* herself to announce what she was about to do.<sup>141</sup>

Although somewhat atypical, the story illustrates a type of conversation established between audiences and mass papers that, inaugurated by *Caras y Caretas* a few decades before, was now at its peak. Readers were not passive recipients, pure consumers of a commercial product anymore, but clients, direct participants in a mediation in which, many times, relative positions changed. During the information ban that the Buenos Aires police held on *Crítica* in late 1926, after accusing the newspaper for fueling with their relentless coverage a wave of suicides committed with cyanide, the newspaper appealed to the public directly, asking them to become the source of information on events, suicides or any matters of private interest that could also be of publishing interest:

Our public will inform us better than the police. *Crítica's* public, which has always informed us about resonant events earlier than the police, will keep on communicating with us about any occurrence in the city

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<sup>140</sup> The citations for this article differ from Saítta 1998 ("*Crítica*: me voy a suicidar; vivo en Uruguay 694" in *Crítica*, April 5, 1927) and Saítta 2000 ("*Crítica*: me voy a suicidar; vivo en Uruguay 694" in *Crítica*, April 5, 1928). Translation from Spanish is mine.

<sup>141</sup> The headline read "*Crítica*: me voy a suicidar; vivo en Uruguay 694" ("*Crítica*: I am going to commit suicide. I live in Uruguay 694").

and anywhere else. The public will be our collaborator, always the effective and disinterested collaborator. The police will see how, invariably, we will know even more, and much sooner.<sup>142</sup>

The relationship between *Crítica* and its public went much further than the contests, a mass media genre initiated in Latin America by *Caras y Caretas* that *Crítica* had certainly taken to a new level. On occasion, as during the coverage of the assassination of millionaire Alberto de Álzaga, found dead, throat slit, in his residence on Charcas Street, *Crítica* asked readers to contribute directly to the investigation. For that particular case, *Crítica's* editors asked the readers to send their hypotheses on the motivations and possible material authors of a crime that "seemed [pulled out from] a Conan Doyle novel" (Saítta 1998, 208). A number of questions ensued:

Who was the author? What were the motives that induced the crime? *Crítica* has offered a substantial amount of information about this mysterious issue. Now it offers the readers an opportunity to test their opinions and hypotheses with regard to the questions we are asking. Send us your hypotheses, and we will publish them tomorrow, in order to contribute [to the police investigation] and shed some light on the mystery that surrounds this crime. The personality of the victim, his lifestyle, his economic situation, have given a sensational twist to the death of millionaire Álzaga. We hope that our readers collaborate as they have done in the past, helping the police authorities who are actively pursuing all the possible traces to find out what happened.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> "Nuestra policía quiere ejercer la censura previa, lo cual constituye una verdadera enormidad," *Crítica* Dec. 13, 1926. In Saítta 1998, 206.

<sup>143</sup> "Lector, ¿cuál es su hipótesis? ¿Quién mató al millonario Álzaga? ¿Qué móviles indujeron su crimen? Mande Ud. su opinión a *Crítica*" *Crítica*, August 4, 1933. In Saítta, 1998, 208.

The hypotheses submitted by the public were published, as announced, on August 5, 1933. As a follow up, on August 9 the newspaper also featured a photographic reconstruction of the hypothetical sequence of events, as reenacted by professional thespians José Gómez as Alberto de Álzaga, Enrique Roldán as Nicolussi and José Guisone as the murderer (Saítta 1998, 208-209).

Reenactments, reconstructions, writing contests, speculative resolutions of real crimes and a close rapport with the public were only some of the strategies used by *Crítica* to consolidate its dominant position in the Argentine media market of the 1930s. It is unclear whether Natalio Botana, *Crítica's* famous founder and editor, was directly influenced by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century sensational and participatory journalism of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. However, it is well known that in 1928 and 1929, after the death of his adopted son, Carlos Natalio, Botana traveled with his family to Europe and New York. There, "he was able to observe the operations of some of New York's largest dailies and adopt [...] some practices he considered convenient to implement among us [in *Crítica*.]"<sup>144</sup> In the late 1920s, however, the gilded age of sensationalism and yellow journalism was long gone in New York, and the new paradigm of objectivity as "consensually validated statements about the world," associated with specialization and interpretive journalism, was now in fashion (Schudson 1978, 122; 144-159).

In fact, it would be difficult to pigeonhole *Crítica* during the early 1920s by using the templates of traditional American journalism of that time. The newspaper was a

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<sup>144</sup> In *Crítica*. 1929. "Ayer desembarcó el director de *Crítica*." March 15, 1929. Cited by Saítta 1998, 287.

strange amalgam of solid factual reporting and writing, narrativization and sometimes fictionalization of news, manufacturing of pseudo-events and participatory journalism, all primarily focused on human-interest stories but with a tremendous resonance in the political world.

In those days, the newspaper started to develop a style of crime story that molded the information provided by the police, or gathered by the reporter, into the frameworks of classic crime fiction writing (Saitta 1998, 198). The reporter, usually young and energetic, asked the right questions, dug deeper, outsmarted the police and ended up solving the mystery. The structure was very similar to the one popularized by Hearst's *New York Journal* with the Guldensuppe murder in 1897. In the 1930s, when detective novels had consolidated their narrative formats and established a new narrative genre, *Crítica's* reporters kept on skillfully exploiting some of those same strategies many times bordering on fiction writing.

In the dramatization of crime stories *Crítica* reigned unsurpassed. In April 1923, the newspaper covered a crime wave in Buenos Aires. *Crítica's* journalists were convinced that, due to its neglect and non-responsiveness, the police department was to be blamed for the situation. To substantiate this claim, a group of reporters and collaborators went out to the streets to "act" crime scenes in different parts of town, using bystanders as their innocent victims. The group first stopped in Plaza Once, where they learned that a burglar had just mugged a woman by knocking her out with a handkerchief soaked in chloroform pressed to her nose. Without hesitation they re-enacted the scene.

All six people in the group cross the street and reach the square. In the middle of the block, on Rivadavia, we see a nice old lady walking slowly.

-Here's the main character...

-Let's get her!

The photographers get their apparels and their magnesium ready. The designated guy moves forward and puts a handkerchief violently on her face. She shivers, screams and falls on her back... The magnesium flash goes off and the scene is captured. We explain to the good lady our motivation for using her as the main character in our article. We convince her that this is geared to improve public safety, and a few curious bystanders appear.

-And the police?

We look around in every direction. A block away we see two agents chatting in the middle of the street. In plain Plaza Once, last night at 20:30 we reenacted a robbery, including every gritty detail, without having been bothered in the least by the authorities.<sup>145</sup>

*Crítica* was as open to literary avant-garde movements as it was to journalistic experimentation and re-enactments. It welcomed in 1922 the first issues of *Proa*, and in 1924 saluted the creation of *Martín Fierro*, both literary magazines co-founded by Jorge Luis Borges, Leopoldo Marechal and some of the most innovative Argentine writers of the period (Saítta 1988, 160). But *Crítica* not only welcomed these movements. It also strived to make their representatives part of its newsroom, adding their techniques, styles and areas of interest to its repertoire of journalistic devices.

Between 1925 and 1933 a large number of writers and artists associated with *Martín Fierro* became part of *Crítica's* staff. Roberto Arlt, Raúl and Enrique González Tuñón, poet Conrado Nalé Roxlo, Edmundo Guibourg, painter Enrique Pettorutti, Ulyses Petit de Murat and Jorge Luis Borges, were all invited to work with *Crítica* in order

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<sup>145</sup> "Está demostrado que en Buenos Aires se puede asaltar impunemente" *Crítica*, April 25, 1923. In Saítta 1998, 200.

to consolidate an aesthetic renovation in which not only literature, poetry and the arts, but also journalism would have a central role.

*Crítica* consolidated this renovation, and its ties to the avant-garde movements, in two special supplements. Starting on November 15, 1926 and appearing every Monday until May 30, 1927, the newspaper published 29 consecutive issues of *Crítica Magazine*, a cultural pullout geared to connect *Crítica* with a more sophisticated public, while establishing its role as an innovator in the news-entertainment business. A second insert, *Revista Multicolor de los Sábados*, directed first by Raúl González Tuñón and later on by Jorge Luis Borges and Ulysses Petit de Murat, appeared from March 14 1931 to February 13, 1932 (Saítta 1998, 173). The *Revista Multicolor* had a central role in the consolidation of an Argentine literary avant-garde that would gain international acclaim in the 1940s and 1950s.

It was in the *Revista Multicolor de los Sábados* where Borges published his first narrative work, compiled in 1936 in his *Historia Universal de la Infamia* (*A Universal History of Infamy*). This collection of 16 short stories, some nonfiction, and some –as he called them—pure “literary forgeries” were Borges’ first approach to the narrative genre that would consecrate him as one of the most innovative writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the context of a popular, daily newspaper, deeply committed to innovation and the renovation of arts, literature and journalism, Borges’ groundbreaking non-fictional work found its first natural habitat and was introduced to the mass public.

### **A purveyor of iniquities**

If there's one story in *Universal History of Infamy* that could be considered pivotal in the development of Latin American nonfiction as a genre, that story is *Monk Eastman Purveyor of Iniquities*.<sup>146</sup>

Borges' tale is based on *The Gangs of New York*, a book published in 1928 and written by American journalist Herbert Asbury. As a journalist, Asbury had worked for the *New York Sun*, the *New York Herald* and the *New York Tribune* and had acquired enough knowledge of the criminal life in urban United States between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to consider himself a self taught historian.

Borges read Asbury's book carefully and used it not only for his story on Eastman, but also for some central details in his short narrative on Billy the Kid, *El asesino desinteresado Bill Harrigan (The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrigan)*, also part of the *Universal History of Infamy* (Balderston 2003, 27-28).

*Monk Eastman Purveyor of Iniquities* is only eight pages long and is divided in eight sub-sections or micro chapters that operate as autonomous scenes. In each scene Borges displays a number of visual, cinematic details that help the reader "evoke a

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<sup>146</sup> A lot has been written about Borges' collaborations with *Revista Multicolor* and much more about each one of his short stories, poems and essays. I would like, however, to stop for a minute to analyze "Monk Eastman Purveyor of Iniquities," as it condenses some of the most salient aspects of Latin American literary journalism as a genre.

more complex idea of the character than can be described economically in psychological terms" (Balderston 2003, 28).

The story, published on August 19, 1933, is basically a biographical account of the life of Williamsburg-born Eduard Osterman, alias William Delaney, alias Joseph Marvin, alias Joseph Morris, alias Monk Eastman, a "colossal man," son of the owner of a kosher New York restaurant, who became New York's underworld's "most famous hero," the leader of a gang of twelve hundred men, and died of five bullets in December 1920 (Borges 1954, 53; 1995, 225).

Borges' narration is cinematic and succinct, a dramatic contrast to the "solid volume of four-hundred octavo pages" that was Asbury's original (Borges 1954, 51).

At the age of nineteen, about 1892, his father set him up in business with a bird store. A fascination for animals, an interest in their small decisions and inscrutable innocence, turned into a lifelong hobby. Years afterward, in a period of opulence, when he scornfully refused the Havana cigars of freckle-faced Tammany sachems or when he paid visits to the best houses of prostitution in that new invention, the automobile (which seemed the bastard offspring of a gondola), he started a second business, a front, that accommodated a hundred cats and more than four hundred pigeons –none of which were for sale to anyone. He loved each one, and often he strolled though his neighborhood with a happy cat under an arm, while several others trailed eagerly behind.

He was a battered, colossal man. He had a short, bull neck; a barrel chest; long, scrappy arms; a broken nose; a face, although plentiful scarred, less striking than his frame; and legs bowed like a cowboy's or a sailor's. He could usually be found without a shirt or a coat, but not without a derby hat several sizes too small perched on his bullet-shaped head. Mankind has conserved his memory. Physically, the conventional moving-picture gunman is a copy of him, not of the pudgy, epicene Capone. It is said of Louis Wolheim that Hollywood employed him because his features suggested those of the lamented Monk Eastman. Eastman used to strut about his underworld

kingdom with a great blue pigeon on his shoulder, just like a bull with a cowbird on its rump (Borges 1954, 53-54).

Borges uses several innovative narrative mechanisms in this story. He mentions some of them in the preface to the first edition of *Universal History*, and we could consider them a novel contribution to Latin American nonfiction. He calls them *tricks*: “random enumerations, sudden shifts of continuity, and the paring down of a man’s whole life to two or three scenes [...] They are not, they do not try to be psychological” (Borges 1954, 13).

These “tricks” help build up easily memorable scenes and are especially well suited for newspaper readers to engage with the story. In part, as Balderston explained, the “circumstantial details,” those minor strokes of color that Borges adds to the narration here and there to develop characters and situations, show Borges’ fascination with the movies (Balderston 2003, 29). But since many of them are exaggerations, extrapolations and, sometimes, plain inventions, they also show Borges’ lineage in a type of storytelling that goes back to Domingo Sarmiento and José Martí.

In the cases of Sarmiento and Martí, factual enhancement and embellishment, exaggeration and invention had the intention of politically and morally framing the stories, turning men into myths, martyrs or devils. Both Sarmiento and Martí were also keen on transforming into hagiographies –a genre with a long tradition in the Catholic world— the stories of men they considered lowlifes, thieves, and corrupt politicians. Martí produced for *La Nación* more than 25 biographies of American men –including Jesse James and other outlaws— which seem to have

more than a few elements in common with Borges' infamous men. Sarmiento's *Facundo* is –as we have previously argued in this dissertation—the first link in the long tradition of Latin American literary journalism. Sarmiento considered Facundo Quiroga, the main character in his eponymous book, one of those responsible for the “inner convulsions that tear at the bowels of a noble people!” (Sarmiento 2003, 31). In Borges' case, however, exaggeration, enhancement and creation appear to operate –in principle— on a purely narrative level. Two examples are noteworthy: the body count after the “battle of Rivington” and the date of Eastman's death.<sup>147</sup>

Asbury gives, in a passage a few lines long, the death toll after the battle of Rivington:

It was not until the reserves from several stations charged down Rivington street with roaring revolvers that the thugs left their dens. They left three dead and seven wounded upon the field, and a score were arrested before they could get away.<sup>148</sup>

Using the same information, Borges gave his personal touch to the scene adding one extra corpse.

Under the great arches of the elevated were left seven critically wounded men, four corpses, and one dead pigeon (Borges 1954, 56).

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<sup>147</sup> For this comparison we will follow Balderston 2003, 29-30.

<sup>148</sup> In Balderston 2003, 29.

The presence in the scene of a dead pigeon, unmentioned in Asbury's original, metonymically connects Eastman to the battle scene, adding a powerfully cinematic element to the visual construction of the body count.

Eastman's love for pigeons and cats, factually true and well documented by Asbury, allowed Borges to introduce in his short story powerfully visual scenes, with Eastman walking around downtown Manhattan with a cat under his arm, or a "great blue pigeon on his shoulder, just like a bull with a cowbird on its rump" (Borges 1954, 53-54).

The second example of Borges' manipulation of factual details is the date of Eastman's death in the final paragraph of the final chapter:

On Christmas day, 1920, Monk Eastman's body was found at dawn on one of the downtown streets of New York. It had five bullet wounds in it. Happily unaware of death, an alley cat hovered around the corpse with a certain puzzlement (Borges 1954, 58).

Borges' source, Asbury's book, not only omits mention of the hovering cat, but dates Eastman's death one day after Borges, on December 26<sup>th</sup>.

On May 3, 1919, Governor Smith signed an executive order restoring Monk Eastman to full citizenship, and the former king of the gangsters said that he would go straight. The police obtained a job for him, and he did not again come to their attention until the morning of December 26, 1920, when his body was found lying on the sidewalk in front of the Blue Bird Café at No. 62 East Fourteenth street, near Fourth avenue. He had been shot five times and was dead. A few days later Eastman was buried with full military honors, and in December 1921, Jerry Bohan, a Prohibition Enforcement Agent, pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the first degree and was sentenced to prison for from three to ten years. He was paroled late

in 1923. Bohan said that he had quarreled with Eastman over tipping a waiter, but when detectives began to investigate they found that Monk had been bootlegging and selling dope (Asbury, 275-76).<sup>149</sup>

By moving Eastman's death back one day to Christmas, Borges violated the factuality agreement, probably in search of a more symbolic, memorable and significant ending to his story. A death on Christmas day projects a new level of potential connotations to the story.

Aside from narrative enhancement and inventions, several other aspects in this narration connect Borges' style of storytelling with that of Sarmiento and Martí. One of these aspects is the use of comparisons to project local references to a universal level. This is a "trick" that Borges probably learned from the *modernistas*. By comparing automobiles with gondolas, for instance, Borges triggered a series of inter-cultural, trans-historical references that projected what was local and particular to universal, cultural and essential levels. This narrative strategy was frequently used in the new Argentine mass press –Soiza Reilly resorted to it very often— since it helped readers connect city occurrences with the larger frame of universal culture. And, of course, it was a means to symbolically integrate faraway Buenos Aires to the *modern, civilized* world.

Borges also works a personal narrator's point of view, which at times becomes explicit in the first narrative person: "what did the protagonists of this battle feel? First (*I believe*), the brutal conviction that the senseless din of a hundred revolvers was going to cut them down at any moment; second (*I believe*), no less mistaken

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<sup>149</sup> As quoted in Balderston 2003, 30.

certainty that if the first shots did not hit them they were invulnerable" (Borges 1954, 56).<sup>150</sup>

There is also another "trick" that goes unmentioned in the preface to the first edition of *Universal History*, and is key to understanding how *Monk Eastman Purveyor of Iniquities*, a short story published in a mass newspaper, can be framed within the tradition of Latin American literary journalism.

The first two sections, which provide the context and justify the publication of Borges' story in *Crítica*, establish a grand scale comparison between "Those of This America" and "Those of the Other." The correspondence is undoubtedly rooted in a topic developed by José Martí: the notion of *Our America* as a cultural entity separate from and opposed to the United States. But when Martí's construction referred to a trans-national entity based on culture and language—*Our America* was for him Latin America—for Borges the construction is confined to the borders of Buenos Aires. In this last case, "our America" is just Buenos Aires and its suburbs.

By comparison, Borges describes the Argentine underworld as stylized, *sober*, honorable, elegant, and *clean*, while the American underworld is *dizzying*, *clumsy*, *barbarian* and *inept*:

Those of This America

Standing out sharply against a background of blue walls or open sky,  
two hoodlums dressed in close-fitting suits of *sober* black and

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<sup>150</sup> Italics are mine.

wearing thick-heeled shoes *dance* a deadly dance –a *ballet* of matching knives—until a carnation starts from the ear of one of them as a knife finds its mark in him, and he brings the unaccompanied dance to a close on the ground with his death. Satisfied, the other adjusts his high-crowned hat and spends his final years recounting the story of this *clean* duel. That, in sum and substance, is the history of our old-time Argentine underworld. The history of New York’s old underworld is both more *dizzying* and more *clumsy*.

### Those of the Other

The history of the gangs of New York (revealed in 1928 by Herbert Asbury in a solid volume of four-hundred octavo pages) contains all the *confusion* and *cruelty* of the *barbarian* cosmogonies, and much of their *giant-scale ineptitude* –cellars of old breweries honeycombed into Negro tenements; a *ramshackle* New York of three-storey structures; criminal gangs like the Swamp Angels, who rendezvoused in a labyrinth of sewers; criminal gangs like the Daybreak Boys, who recruited precocious murderers of ten and eleven; loners, like the bold and gigantic Plug Uglies, who earned the smirks of passerby with their enormous plug hats, stuffed with wool and worn pulled down over their ears as helmets, and their long shirttails, worn outside the trousers, that flapped in the Bowery breeze (but with a huge bludgeon in one hand and a pistol peeping out of a pocket); criminal gangs like the Dead Rabbits, who entered into battle under the emblem of a dead rabbit impaled on a pike; men like Dandy Johnny Dolan, famous for the oiled forelock he wore curled and plastered against his forehead, for his cane whose handle was carved in the likeness of a monkey, and for the copper device he invented and used on the thumb for gouging out an adversary’s eyes; men like Kit Burns, who for twenty-five cents would decapitate a live rat with a single bite; men like Blind Danny Lyons, young and blond and with immense dead eyes, who pimped for three girls, all of whom proudly walked the streets for him; rows of houses showing red lanterns in the windows, like those run by seven sisters from a small New England village, who always turned their Christmas Eve proceeds over to charity; rat pits, where wharf rats were starved and sent against terriers; Chinese gambling dives; women like the repeatedly widowed Red Norah, the vaunted sweetheart of practically the entire Gopher gang; women like Lizzie the Dove, who donned widow’s weeds when Danny Lyons was executed for murder, and who was stabbed in the throat by Gentle Maggie during an argument over whose sorrow for the departed blind man was the greater; mob uprisings like the savage week of draft riots in 1863, when a hundred buildings were burned to the ground and the city was nearly taken over; teeming street fights in which a man went down as at sea, trampled to death; a thief and a horse poisoner like Yoske Nigger. All these go to weave underworld New York’s chaotic

history. And its most famous hero is Edward Delaney, alias William Delaney, alias Joseph Marvin, alias Joseph Morris, alias Monk Eastman—boss of twelve hundred men (Borges 1954, 51-53).<sup>151</sup>

Borges' framing follows closely Martí's portrayal of the central differences between Latin American and the United States' cultures. Martí's emblematic passages in his chronicle on Coney Island also resonate in Borges: "These people eat quantity; we, class" (Martí 2002, 93). In *Monk Eastman*, however, that same idea helps frame another type narrative, one in which a new "otherness" will be confronted to a different kind of "Us:" for Borges it is not Latin America vs. the U.S. anymore because it is a time of cities. A new rivalry is born between New York and Buenos Aires.

When Borges' story came out, more than 35 years had passed since Martí's death. *Crítica's* readers, many of them also magazine readers, had been abundantly exposed to all kinds of horrendous murders, crimes and injustices in its pages. Many, if not all, were familiar with the *Semana Trágica*, a series of popular strikes that started on January 7, 1919, and were violently confronted by the anti-Semitic paramilitary group known as the Liga Patriótica causing some 700 deaths and more than 3,000 wounded.

For these mass readers, followers of Fray Mocho, Juan José de Soiza Reilly and Roberto Arlt, journalists who had filled the pages of mass dailies with the lives of a myriad of pimps, thieves, burglars, assassins, drug dealers, and lowlifes of the most diverse origin and lineage, portraying the basest miseries in the Argentine society,

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<sup>151</sup> Italics are mine.

New York's "weeks of riots" and "buildings burnt down," its pimps and crooks, were probably not totally outlandish or unconceivable. In fact, they were perhaps too familiar.

In that vein, Monk Eastman's activities "during elections [as the] captain of an important ward" hired by "Tammany politicians" to "stir up some trouble" were, again, not totally unfamiliar to Borges' readers (Borges 1959, 55). Especially when considering that, by the early 1930s Argentina had already suffered decades of electoral fraud supported and practiced by local political caudillos.<sup>152</sup>

It is in this light that we can understand how Borges tapped into Martí's *topos* of *both Americas* only to resignify it. Borges' *factual* story about New York, published in the pages of an Argentine popular mass newspaper, can almost be read as an internal joke between writer and readers about Argentine politics, one that makes sense in terms of *Crítica's* reading contract. The comparison between *this America* and the *other America* gains in this sense an antiphrastic quality, since when Borges denotatively tries to establish a distance between Buenos Aires' and New York's underworld, it is only to show the readers how close those underworlds and those cities, really are.

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<sup>152</sup> See Natalio Botana, "El Marco Histórico Institucional: Leyes Electorales, Alternancia y Competencia entre Partidos," in Natalio Botana, et al., *La Argentina electoral* (Buenos Aires, 1985), 17; and a number of documents compiled in Ezequiel Gallo and Natalio Botana, *De la república posible a la república verdadera* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007), esp. 599-634.

Read in the context of *Crítica* of the early 1930s, Borges' *Universal History of Infamy* regains a political edge that follows the editorial line of Botana's newspaper. An edge that Borges himself, cautiously and meticulously, tried to polish off throughout several prefaces.

In the most interesting one of these prefaces, the one to his 1954 edition, Borges defined these factual stories as the "game of a shy man who dared not to write stories and so amused himself by falsifying and distorting (without any aesthetic justification whatever) the tales of others" (Borges 1954, 12). In what has oftentimes been read as a *captatio benevolentiae*, by disqualifying the narrator as unreliable Borges separated the stories in the book from their original historical context and the political aspects to which they could have easily been linked.

"[T]he word 'infamy' in the title is thunderous, but behind the sound and the fury there is nothing," is another one of Borges' pronouncements in that foreword (Borges 1954, 12). One that, by pointing at Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, tries again to obliterate the possible connections between the heavily politically loaded word "infamy" in the title of this 1935 book, and the decade in which it was written, which has been labeled by Argentine historians as the "Infamous Decade." A period of political fraud, extreme corruption, terrorism of State and a succession of de facto governments, the "Infamous Decade" followed the 1930 coup d'état against President Hipólito Yrigoyen by General José Félix Uriburu.

### **New Contracts for a New Public**

*Crítica's* reading contract conceived a much more sophisticated public than the Argentine political press of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. And the level of engagement and participation it proposed to its readers went above and beyond what had been the norm even for innovative turn of the century magazines like *Caras y Caretas* and *P.B.T.* The readers of this new mass press were required to navigate through the nuances of a short story like Borges' *Monk Eastman Purveyor of Iniquities* separating speculation from fiction, exaggeration and fact, while discerning some deep political subtext; they were also expected to participate in writing, dance contests and philanthropic raids; send articulate opinions about political leaders, report and contribute to the process of information gathering, and become active members of charity campaigns and public fund-raising rallies.

These new demands blurred the lines that separated citizens from consumers, and political actors from the mass public. By purchasing a newspaper, the new reader not only entered an imagined community of peers. S/he also acquired a number of social responsibilities *vis-à-vis* his/her community. And by holding up their end of the contract, as mediators between individual readers and the civil society, charity and philanthropic institutions and the State, the new mass newspapers became central players in the emerging mass-mediated democracy.

Argentine evening papers started to develop these strategies around 1913 mainly in pursuit of a larger readership. Many of these techniques were reminiscent of premises that the new American journalism had seen consolidate with the ascent of *The New York Times* after 1896 (independence, fairness and the pursuit of

“objectivity”) while others were comparable with the techniques adopted by the sensational press (the incorporation of graphic elements such as headlines in huge point, illustrations and cartoons) a model that had reigned unchallenged with Hearst and Pulitzer until Alfred Ochs’ paper set a new, coexisting standard (Schudson 1978, 88-120).<sup>153</sup> The fusion of both models in *Crítica* and other Argentine and Latin American broadsheets and tabloids, does not speak to the blind adoption of foreign press models in Latin America, but most likely to how easy it was to amalgamate both commercial strategies into a tradition that had always considered journalism as an instrument of political and social action, as we have discussed in previous chapters.

The commercial success of these strategies was such that, soon after the evening papers, the morning papers started to apply them too. With renewed reading contracts, *Crítica*, the leading afternoon paper, and its main competitor *La Prensa*, which came out in the morning, offered an array of services to their public. These services radically changed the functions of journalism in Argentina and Latin America, while enhancing its perceived social and political role. This “social task imposed to journalism” fostered an even more personable type of connection between journalists, news organizations and their public (Saitta 1998, 138).

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<sup>153</sup> Discussing the journalism of Mark Twain, Shelley Fisher Fishkin argues that, perhaps due to the natural delay experienced in a still developing West Coast in the adoption of journalistic techniques developed in the East Coast, during the 1860 Twain simultaneously tapped into two the opposing trends of journalism that defined his career: “the push toward greater accuracy and the push toward greater extravagance and fabrication” (Fisher Fishkin 1985, 56). Almost seventy years later, the different pace of Latin America’s access to modernity and the modern press, most likely crystallized in *Crítica* in a similar way. Except for the fact that both “accuracy” and “extravagance” were combined and mixtured—due to a radically different journalistic tradition—with an interest in large social issues and a quest for political influence.

By 1924 the leading Argentine newspaper *La Prensa* –with a circulation of 230,000— had not only opened a public library with more than 25,000 volumes, but also ran a free medical clinic, a bureau for free legal assistance, a bureau for chemistry and agro-related consultations, and a public music school. This service model peaked between the mid 1920s and the 1930s after fifteen years in the making. In fact, after a visit to Argentina in 1916, Spanish writer Vicente Blasco Ibáñez described *La Prensa's* headquarters in awe:

[La Prensa's newsroom is in] a popular building where thousands of people enter every day [...] Few are the citizens of Buenos Aires who haven't visited that royal building of marble skirting boards and luxurious domestic workers, entering it as if it were everyone's home. They popularly call it *the house of the town*. [La Prensa] is the widest read newspaper in the republic, because it is favored by different social classes, and it equally accesses the most unreachable mansions and the homes of the working masses.<sup>154</sup>

In November 1909, *Ultima Hora*, an important evening paper, probably the first one to adopt the canons of professional journalism as enforced by the *New York Times*, had also veered to the public service, opening the first journalism school in Argentina (Saítta 1998, 36).

Beginning today, a free registration form will be available today in the newsroom of this newspaper for students who want to become reporters. In order to be admitted, a superficial exam will suffice. The exam will be administered by an *ad hoc* tribunal named by the direction of *Ultima Hora*. The main courses in the program will be the following, and the teachings will be preeminently practical: Topography of Buenos Aires, current political situation, Argentine

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<sup>154</sup> Blasco Ibáñez, Vicente. 1920. *Argentina y sus grandezas*, Madrid: Editorial Española Americana. In Saítta 1998, 31. Translation from Spanish is mine.

geography, national contemporary history, Spanish grammar. [After admission] there won't be any further exams, since the only purpose [of the school] will be to instruct those who show reporting talents and to prepare them for a brilliant career. The same tribunal designated by *Ultima Hora* for the initial exam will formulate the plan of studies that will be pursued in the newsroom starting on December 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>155</sup>

As early as 1916, *Crítica* also started offering free medical consultations and assistance to its readers. But on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1927, after moving to its new building on Avenida de Mayo, the newspaper expanded the medical practice incorporating three specialties: ear nose and throat, pulmonary and respiratory diseases, and internal diseases.

In 1923 Botana's paper started to pursue an aggressive consolidation of its public image, by presenting itself as "the voice of the people." On April 18, celebrating the first anniversary of its 5<sup>th</sup> afternoon edition, the newspaper introduced for the first time to its readers "the young crew of writers" who made *Crítica* (Saítta 1998, 60-64). Portraying them in all their youth and accessibility, a lengthy article incorporated biographical notes about *Crítica's* writers in a slightly ironical tone (Silverio Manco "gets a cold every now and then;" Manuel Silva "becomes a revolutionary on humid days"). In that same issue *Crítica* discussed its new mission: to become a mediator between the popular sectors and the civil society (Saítta 1998, 61).

In the amazing success of *Crítica's* 5<sup>th</sup> edition [...] we see the love and the striking sympathy of the people towards our paper. [We] think with the people's mind, and we vividly voice their ideas, we speak

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<sup>155</sup> "Escuela de Reporteros," *Ultima Hora*, Nov. 3, 1909. In Saítta 1998, 37. Translation from Spanish is mine.

with the voice of the people, and it is its soul, grand and noble, which gives eloquence to our voice.<sup>156</sup>

In the years after 1923, *Crítica* introduced itself as a social actor that could satisfy its readers' increasing social and political demands (Saítta 1998, 129-130). It had a circulation of 166,385 in its three afternoon editions, which turned the newspaper into the third largest in Argentina after *La Prensa* and *La Nación* –the latter with a circulation of 188,835. In that spirit, by 1927 *Crítica* incorporated to its newsroom a section called “Atención al público” (customer service) which was assigned to a rotating reporter as a “slight form of punishment” (Saítta 1998, 130-131). The journalist in charge would tend to a “caravan of supplicants who came to the newsroom on a daily basis to present their conflicts and wants, to complain and ask for protection. [It was] a ‘Wailing Wall’ where the writer had to demonstrate the patience of Job and his stoic resignation to listen to pleas and lamentations, ignominies and disgraces.”<sup>157</sup> The section, informally called “the misery section” had a cash fund of up to 10 pesos, to be disbursed discretionally by reporters tending to the most pressing needs of some of *Crítica's* readers (Saítta 1998, 131).

Hundreds of letters from the public were channeled to this section, and *Crítica's* reporters harvested the most succulent ones to produce high-impact, human interest, sensational stories: an eleven-year-old girl, the youngest child of an impoverished family, wrote to the newsroom asking for a pair of shoes to go to

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<sup>156</sup> “Hoy hace un año que apareció la 5ta edición,” *Crítica*, April 18, 1923. In Saítta 1998, 61.

<sup>157</sup> Talice, Roberto. 1989. *100.000 ejemplares por hora. Memorias de un redactor de Crítica, el diario de Botana*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Corregidor.

school; an old “abandoned lady” who had no money to pay her taxes –*Crítica* came up with the funds to clear the lady’s debt—and even abandoned children, who were offered to foster families directly by *Crítica’s* journalists:

Today we’ve come across a case of utmost interest, one which could be taken advantage of by those people who write to the newsroom on a daily basis asking if *Crítica* has received any children and can give them away [...] This is the case: a young woman named Angela Paso, who has no family or home, is giving away a young daughter of hers of only 15 days of age. The woman was in our newsroom and spoke with determination, telling us that with her daughter she can’t find a job anywhere. Naturally, children are a nuisance and one has to get rid of them. This mother, who despite her good will and modesty parts from her daughter, God only knows the bitter days that await her without a home or a shelter. But everything has an end, and hopefully tomorrow her luck will change. Let’s see who is the lucky woman who brings Angela Paso’s daughter home. She is a bundle of joy, and it would be a shame to reject her.<sup>158</sup>

This privileged position as a mediator between “the people” and the authorities, the government, philanthropic institutions and society at large, allowed *Crítica* – and many other mass newspapers that soon started to dispute this role—to claim legitimacy as a political voice based on its market success. In the minds of *Crítica’s* editors 800,000 in circulation during the newspaper’s peak in popularity, were equivalent to 800,000 votes.

One caveat in this role was that, although *Crítica* usually took sides with the poor and the humble, most of its articles naturalized the divide between rich and poor, the powerful and the dispossessed, thus leaving unquestioned the social structure upon which those differences were built, and the state policies that had fostered

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<sup>158</sup> “Mañana de 16 a 18 horas en *Crítica* se regalará una niña de 15 días,” *Crítica*, March 17, 1924. In Saítta 1998, 133. Translation from Spanish is mine.

them (Saítta 1998, 136). This, however, was not the case with mass newspapers such as *El Mundo* or *La Vanguardia* (house organ of the Socialist party), which articulated their discourse around Marxist, anarchist and unionist *topoi* frequently used in certain intellectual circles in Argentina in the 1920s and 1930s.

### **The Political Stance**

Although *Crítica* took pride in its independence from the political powers (when it first came out, its motto was “Illustrated evening newspaper, impersonal and independent”)<sup>159</sup> while promoting its objectivity and impartiality, its style was far removed from the *objective stance* proclaimed by the American mass press between 1896 and the 1920s.<sup>160</sup>

In an article that celebrated *Crítica’s* 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in September 1924, the editorial position was clear:

Before our time, newspapers here were one of two things: either combat papers, more or less scandalous and militant, or instruments of pure information. *Crítica* came to life both as information and as a combat newspaper. Before us, every activity had, maybe, their paper: political parties, commercial entities, the industry; [but] the people, the modest classes, didn’t have a one. *Crítica* is the first great Argentine newspaper dedicated to the people. Before us, journalistic organs of liberal tendencies, whenever they existed, lacked any journalistic relevance. The man of new ideas was forced to yield to

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<sup>159</sup> Saítta 1998, 38-39.

<sup>160</sup> For the debate around the origins of objective journalism see: Mindich 1998, Tucher 1994, Schiller 1981, Schudson 1978 among others.

old-ideas-newspapers because these were the only ones that would offer the sum of all relevant information to every reader. *Crítica* is the first liberal newspaper in our country and perhaps one of the most important ones worldwide [...] *Crítica's* journalism is absolutely different from the journalism of other newspapers. It's a new form that has, of course, an inevitable array of imitators. Even to the most distinct newspapers, something about this new journalistic modality has transcended, and some sort of influence *Crítica's* success has exerted on its daily competitors.<sup>161</sup>

This dual position, as an informer and a mediator between the public and the State, granted by its leading position in the information market, allowed *Crítica* to operate on a political level.

*Crítica*, however, was not the first mass medium to assume the role of political arbiter. Other newspapers and popular magazines like *Caras y Caretas* and *P.B.T.* had already claimed that position decades earlier, with very distinct results. *Caras y Caretas* had started to successfully implement in the early 1900s the information model of detachment and objectivity imported from the American press. But after the "Tragic Week" of January 1919, the magazine directly asked for the heads of several ministers, and the imprisonment of anarchist immigrants deemed responsible for the incident:

[T]he right to petition is fair; but the imposition [of the ideas] that those anarchists are instigating cannot be tolerated [...] Maybe it's everybody's fault, since with our apathy we have held open our doors to the wrongdoers of the entire world [... But] we haven't been shaping our nationality for years to see it destroyed by men to whom we owe nothing, and are neither useful nor memorable.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> "Crítica cumple hoy once años," *Crítica* Sept 15, 1924. In Saítta 1998, 72.

<sup>162</sup> *Caras y Caretas*, No. 1059, January 18, 1919. In Pignatelli 1997, 304.

Years later, *Caras y Caretas* would embrace the 1930 coup d'état against Hipólito Yrigoyen, the first one in a large series of coups against popular, democratically elected governments in the history of Argentina: "the *revolution* of September 6 will enter History as one of the most significant accomplishments that have taken place in the Argentine scene [...] The *revolution* had the virtue of rising people's patriotism to unprecedented levels," proclaimed the magazine, right after Yrigoyen was ousted (Pignatelli 1997, 309).

But the difference between *Crítica* and *Caras y Caretas* and the many other publications that strived to become political power brokers in the 1920s was the fact that, for the first time in the history of the Argentine media, a newspaper claimed its place at the top of the political ladder based on the breadth of its readership and its market penetration.

With circulation peaks of 800,000 daily copies, an ever-growing following, a direct rapport with its readers, and a popular news agenda, the newspaper founded by Uruguayan journalist Natalio Botana openly campaigned for candidates close to its preferences, political inclinations and circumstantial needs. During the elections of 1922, for instance, *Crítica* used its close rapport with the readers in order to support the Socialist party of Lisandro de la Torre, opposing the ascent of the Unión Cívica Radical of Yrigoyen.

To you, dear elector:

Decent people must vote against the riffraff. To vote in Capital Federal [Buenos Aires City] for the Socialist Party is to move towards the defeat of the Armadillo [Yrigoyen's moniker]. Leave aside your party preferences and think about this: if the Socialists win in Buenos

Aires, the Yrigoyenist presidential formula of Alvear-González will be jeopardized. Are you blind enough not to vote Socialist? This is the only way to make a good use of your vote. Everybody who is not a slave of the Armadillo should vote Socialist tomorrow. It doesn't matter if you are anti-socialist. This is all about contributing to the collapse of the personalists [so were known Yrigoyen's supporters] symbolized by the Armadillo. The Armadillo: this is the enemy. It doesn't matter that you aren't a Socialist. Remember Barbey de Aurevilley's phrase: "We have to place our passions above our convictions."<sup>163</sup>

Although *Crítica's* support wasn't always enough to sway an election (on March 1926, its pro-Socialism campaign couldn't avoid the Yrigoyenistas victory by a landslide) its importance as a political actor made editor Natalio Botana feared and respected among Argentine politicians of all parties and trends. Socialist leader Nicolás Repetto, for instance, acknowledged *Crítica's* role in the Socialist defeat during the municipal elections of November 1926:

Among the factors that could have influenced the results of the past elections, we must discuss one that has been, in our opinion, decisive: we are referring to the attitude of an afternoon paper with large circulation among popular sectors, a paper that in past elections always supported Socialist candidates, whereas in the last one fought us to take sides resolutely and unapologetically with the Yrigoyenistas candidates (Saítta 1998, 229).<sup>164</sup>

After changing its allegiances several times, *Crítica* ended up backing Yrigoyen's presidential candidacy for the elections of 1928 –Yrigoyen was branded by Botana as "the people's candidate"—and the Independent Socialists for the first

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<sup>163</sup> "Vísperas sangrientas de la derrota peludista," *Crítica*, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1922. In Saítta 1998, 222.

<sup>164</sup> Botana had changed sides and started supporting the UCR of Yrigoyen when a strike in his printings, led by the Socialists, threatened *Crítica's* publication (Saítta 1998, 225-233).

representative minority in Buenos Aires –because “they have the best list” (Saítta 1998, 234). Botana simply validated these choices by naturalizing them, while denying *Crítica’s* political engagement or its militancy: Yrigoyen, read one of the many articles in support of the candidate, “reigns in the spirit of our nation, and what the country gave him, we are not going to take away with lies” (Saítta 1998, 235).

Two years later, however, the newspaper was instrumental in the orchestration of the coup that overthrew the radical leader and his vice president Enrique Martínez, projecting general José Félix Uriburu to the first office. On September 6, 1930, the day of what *Crítica* called “a civic-military coup,” its 483,811 copies appeared in newsstands featuring the scare headline “Revolución” written in huge print across the front page. An epigraph, also on the front page, read: “This morning at 8.5 the National Army commanded by Gen. Uriburu, rose against the unconstitutional government of Mr. Irigoyen [sic].” A few days later, still amidst the celebrations after the ousting of Yrigoyen, an article commemorating *Crítica’s* 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary presented a few self-aggrandizing details about the role the newspaper had played in the coup:

On September 6 it was given to us to show that *Crítica* is the people itself: that in no country anywhere in the world a newspaper has coalesced so deeply with the popular essence. *Crítica* centralized the civil direction of the revolution; from *Crítica’s* offices contingents of civilians were deployed to the barracks; from *Crítica’s* headquarters the triumphant revolutionary scream was propelled across the whole country.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> “*Crítica* cumple diecisiete años al celebrar un gran triunfo,” *Crítica* Sept 15, 1930. In Saítta 1998, 246.

*Crítica's* offices had been, in fact, the epicenter of the civil plotting and the upheaval. In the building on Avenida de Mayo, the civilian strategy was planned. From *Crítica's* offices, on the day of the coup, a group of journalists led by Federico Pinedo and Augusto Bunge left to join Manuel Fresco to then walk together to the military headquarters of Campo de Mayo, in order to persuade higher military ranks, many still adept to Yrigoyen, to join the revolt. From *Crítica's* offices another mission led by Antonio de Tomaso –leader of the Independent Socialism—Botana himself, and politician Héctor González Iramain, left at two in the morning for San Martín Military College, where they interviewed Col. Reynolds, and then Gen. Uriburu, convincing the latter to front the coup (Saítta 1998, 244).

*Crítica's* role in the revolt was saluted by readers, politicians and public figures alike, and rewarded with a circulation of over 10 million during September (Saítta 1998, 246). But soon after Uriburu's ascent to power, the alliance between the military-conservative block and the Independent Socialism collapsed, and on May 6, 1931 *Crítica* was closed and Botana and his wife, anarchist writer Salvadora Medina Onrubia, thrown into jail.

A few months later, after a change of name and Uriburu's fall, *Crítica* reappeared in newsstands, proposing a totally renewed reading contract. As Saítta has noted, in its third incarnation *Crítica* applied the same pioneering strategies it had developed for its human-interest stories, but this time toward its political coverage (Saítta 1998, 257). A brand new "political sensationalism" not only fostered a new kind of interacción between *Crítica* and its readers, but it also established a totally

new type of connection between the paper and the political elites, turning *Crítica* into an even more efficient power broker during the 1930s.

Instead of separating the sphere of information and the sphere of politics, the quick transition from a political press to a market-supported publishing industry meant for *Crítica* both legitimacy and independence, and for its editors, representativity; they, much more so than democratically elected representatives, considered themselves “the voice of the people.” As an extraordinary market success granted *Crítica* its economic independence from the political power and its freedom from both the party system and the government, this same success also helped the newspaper revert the equation between the political power and the press, granting this evening paper direct influence on Argentine politics until well into the 1940s.

### **A Different Kind of Popular Press**

Although *Crítica* set the trend that many newspapers would follow in Latin America during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, other mass newspapers such as *El Mundo*, a daily funded in 1928 by Editorial Haynes, property of Alberto M. Haynes, appealed to their public with a much different strategy and a less sensational approach.

*El Mundo* was the first tabloid in Argentina, a friendly format for commuters. Like *Crítica*, *El Mundo's* layout resorted to headlines in huge point and photos on the cover. But unlike Botana's paper, the morning tabloid was extremely well

organized, with fixed national and international *panorama* sections on the cover, and social events and comics on the back. Its tone was more restrained than *Crítica's*, as it was geared towards “family-type” readers. In fact, although *El Mundo* was a tabloid, it wasn't anything like its American counterparts, since it was created to compete with the two most traditional Argentine morning newspapers, *La Prensa*, the largest, and *La Nación*.

Conceived as an alternative to the more solemn morning broadsheets, *El Mundo* based its strategy on slashing its cover price to five cents –half the price of its competitors—, distancing itself from politics, resorting to the informative paradigm rather than to entertainment, and employing a number of young writers with little experience in journalism –thus less familiar with the clichés of news writing—in order to raise the standards of its prose. *El Mundo* crusaded for morality in a city it described as threatened by vices and corruption (Saítta 1998, 20-21).<sup>166</sup>

When Roberto Arlt left *Crítica*, where he was “one of the four persons in charge of the bloody, truculent article” of the day, to start as a general assignment journalist at *El Mundo*, he was excited to join in this new project a group of respected young writers like Leopoldo Marechal, Francisco Luis Bernárdez, Amado Villar, and his longtime friend and confidant, poet Conrado Nalé Roxlo. *El Mundo* soon gave Arlt fame and renown, and a fresh start as a star journalist in one of Argentina's most well respected newspapers.

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<sup>166</sup> “We don't like to follow too closely the rhythm of politics” read an article on *El Mundo's* issue of January 10, 1929.

Although Arlt had already published his first, consecratory novel in 1926 *El Juguete Rabioso* (*Mad Toy*), his experience in journalism was scarce. He had started working for the mass media in February 1926, as a collaborator with *Don Goyo*, a Tuesday general magazine directed by Nalé Roxlo. The magazine was a flagship publication at Editorial Haynes, and other collaborators were writers Eduardo Mallea, Luis Cané, Manuel Ugarte, Leopoldo Marechal and poet Alfonsina Storni, some of the names that in 1928 would also join *El Mundo* (Saítta 2000, 37).

In the year of his journalistic baptism, Arlt wrote 22 articles, almost one every two weeks, in a personable, autobiographical tone. Always using the first narrative person, tapping into highly codified genres like the sermon, the open letter, and the apology, Arlt produced for *Don Goyo* semi-fictional stories that several times became a headache for the magazine's administration.

When I was the director of *Don Goyo* I published one of Arlt's *short stories* that talked about the grotesque love encounters of a couple of prosperous bakers in Flores, whose obesity was the living proof of how succulent their pasta was. A lawyer asked me for an appointment; they wanted to sue the magazine for defamation.<sup>167</sup>

These pieces, read as factual narratives by *Don Goyo's* audience but still considered *short stories* by Roxlo, evolved in tone and character and were the prequel to Arlt's *Aguafuertes* (*Etchings*), the short human-interest color features he would present on a daily basis in his column at *El Mundo*. Since 1928, and in a very short period of time, the *Etchings* turned Arlt into the most famous journalist of his generation.

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<sup>167</sup> Conrado Nalé Roxlo. 1978. *Borrador de Memorias*. Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 37; also María Esther Vázquez, "Los cien años de Conrado Nalé Roxlo," *La Nación*, April 1, 1998. Italics are mine.

### **The Secret of Success**

Arlt was first and foremost a fiction writer, novelist and playwright, and only in a distant fourth place, a journalist. Roxlo, longtime friend and youth neighbor during Arlt's formative years in Flores, described his friend's original passion for and dedication to writing:

[I am referring] to the years before *Mad Toy*, the formative years, his literary prehistory. His life, for him, had only one meaning: to become a great writer. I never witnessed such strong will, persistent, obtuse. It was a violent and conclusive passion, as are those of the young passionate men.<sup>168</sup>

That passion was in part driven by Arlt's need for transcendence and his desire to put his origins behind him (Masotta 1982, 9). In that quest for uniqueness that would accompany him his whole life, the son of Carlos Arlt, a Prussian immigrant from Posen and an army deserter, and Ekatherine Iobstraibitzer, a peasant from the Italian Tyrol, pledged allegiance to two kinds of writers: the talented and the economically successful.

On the side of the talented, a short autobiography published in *Crítica Magazine* after the success of *Mad Toy*, showed Arlt's synthetic preferences for Gustave Flaubert and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. His choice for these two emblematic writers among the many he claimed to have followed throughout his life was not totally

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<sup>168</sup> Conrado Nalé Roxlo. 1978. *Borrador de Memorias*. Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 86.

casual. Part true, part a provocation, by expressing equal admiration for the Russian father of psychological existentialism and the greatest among the French romantic realists, Arlt positioned himself in a neutral zone between the two main writing schools in Buenos Aires at the time: the socialist realists of Boedo (writers like Leónidas Barletta, Nicolás Olivari, Elías Castelnuovo, Álvaro Yunque and César Tiempo) and the avant-gardists of Florida (with writers like Jorge Luis Borges, Oliverio Girondo, Conrado Nalé Roxlo, Leopoldo Marechal, Raúl González Tuñón, Eduardo González Lanuza, and Arlt's own mentor Ricardo Güiraldes).

In his "Letter to the Geniuses of Buenos Aires," published in *Don Goyo* a few months before the publication of *Mad Toy*, Arlt explained this double allegiance:

If you wander around Florida, you will communicate with frightening detail the reasons for which Dostoievsky [sic] was a degenerate and Tolstoy a whiner; if you socialize around Boedo, you will badmouth Flaubert, that "bourgeois," and that other aristocrat of D'Annunzio. You, in Florida [...] will tear apart Dostoievsky and reduce Tolstoy to the size of a lentil, while you, in Boedo, will explain how Flaubert wrote his novels and how easy would it be for you, naturally if you wanted, to become a writer as great as Flaubert.<sup>169</sup>

On the side of the economically successful, Arlt's devotion sided with French feuilleton writer Ponson du Terrail. But he also had another allegiance. Arlt deeply admired an old neighbor from Flores who was instrumental in his becoming a full time working journalist. He was probably Arlt's only local journalistic hero and media mentor: Juan José de Soiza Reilly.

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<sup>169</sup> Arlt, Roberto. 1926. "Epístola a los genios porteños." *Don Goyo*, 23, February 1926.

In Ponson du Terrail, Arlt found the image of a successful, prolific writer. Someone who could, through sheer willpower, reap the fruits of multiple bestsellers and the acclaim of the mass public.

Let's not try to find novelistic technique [in his work]. [Ponson du Terrail], mathematically, solves the trials and tribulations of his dramas through the most outrageous procedures, and despite the truculence of his resolutions, despite how laughable Rocambole feels to us [...] he simply nails our interest to the burning grill of curiosity. The novel finished, the characters start to fade away before our own eyes, because the French Vice Count is rabidly a novelist, a novelist with the power of a sledge hammer, meaning, an expert in the arts of playing with the easiest human frailties (...) Rocambole is alive... and to be alive is the first among the qualities needed in order to aspire to immortality. As soon as a character becomes alive, although his father has created him with mutilated pieces, lame or stupid, he has reached what a classicist would call the doors of eternity.<sup>170</sup>

Arlt also sought for local inspiration, and close to Ponson du Terrail's model was Argentine Juan José de Soiza Reilly's. In "Éste es Soiza Reilly" ("This is Soiza Reilly") an etching he wrote in Río de Janeiro, and *El Mundo* published on May 31, 1930, Arlt narrated in the third person the story of his first encounter with Soiza. It was a winter morning of "1916 or 1917" when he, still a teenager, showed up at Soiza's house in Flores, on the corner of Membrillar and Ramón Falcón. Young Arlt recalled he was welcomed by a housekeeper, who let "the poorly dressed boy in" to "read one of his pieces to the great Soiza Reilly."<sup>171</sup>

Arlt was elated.

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<sup>170</sup> Arlt, Roberto. 1940. "Vidas paralelas de Ponson du Terrail y Edgard Wallace." *El Mundo*, August 20, 1940. In Saítta 2000, 39.

<sup>171</sup> Arlt, Roberto. 1960. "Este es Soiza Reilly." In *Nuevas Aguafuertes Porteñas*, Buenos Aires: Hachette, 221-224.

He was going to talk to the author of "The soul of dogs," "Men and women from Italy and France." Soiza Reilly was, at the time, famous among young writers. His chronicles about Paris [...] about Verlaine, have shaken the souls of those poets in shorts and of those redeemers of the world who still don't have a driving license (Arlt 1960, 221-224).<sup>172</sup>

The young writer was escorted to a room upstairs, and marveled at what he saw:

Through the window he looks at the street, then the bookshelves and thinks: "Like this it's a pleasure to be a writer. With a room like this, books, a maid. Will he read what I brought? Maybe... because in his chronicles you can see he is a good man..." (Arlt 1960, 221-224).

When Soiza showed up, wearing "a furry coat while he cleaned his glasses with a handkerchief" Arlt, in awe, introduced himself as a "writing aficionado," recited by heart the beginning of Soiza's *The soul of dogs*, which the writer acknowledged as something he had produced as a young man. Arlt, then, asked Soiza if he could read for him one of his pieces. Soiza asked the young writer to leave the manuscript and, if he liked it, he would publish it in *Revista Popular*, a magazine he directed at the time. A month later, the piece appeared as a short story titled "Jehova" in a section Soiza Reilly named half-jokingly "Prosas modernas y ultramodernas" ("Modern and ultramodern prose").

I believe that men and women are two naturally ungrateful creatures, jovial and ferocious... But I also believe that these animals never forget whatever seals them with terrible pain first, or with identical happiness. That's why I have never forgotten Soiza Reilly. He was the first generous hand that offered me the most extraordinary joy of my adolescence.

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<sup>172</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

Two months later, the magazine that Soiza directed went bankrupt. But I know that, if I kept on writing it was because in that article posted with four nails on my bedroom wall I saw the invisible promise of success in that grandiose title "Modern and ultramodern prose." A title that a mature author had put there as an admonition for the young one who believed that, the more "difficult" the words he used in prose, the more artistic that prose would become... (Arlt 1960, 221-224).

A few years later, Soiza Reilly wrote the prologue to Arlt's first book, *Diario de un morfinómano* (*The Diary of a Morphinomaniac*) published in the city of Córdoba in 1920, and continued to cross paths with Arlt in newsrooms and publishing houses. Soiza remained one of Arlt's greatest inspirations throughout most of his life. This was not only because he represented the honorable, good spirited writer who sided with the dispossessed and the voiceless, but also because Soiza embodied a successful model of journalism, a new type of writing professional devoted to facts. Soiza was also someone whose productivity and personal sacrifice had been rewarded by the masses and the markets with a comfortable financial position. That position of comfort and success would be one that Arlt would aspire to throughout his entire career.

### **Productivity, Mass Production and the Rhetoric of Numbers**

Arlt, like no other writer of his generation, took pride in his productivity and the volume of his production. As if amidst a perpetual race against time to prove his worth, knowledge and relevance before his peers and the mass public, he also

strived to quantify and measure his cultural intake and output, identifying productivity (hard work) as one of the keys for success in the modern mass market.

I have read many novels. I started reading them when I was 12 years old, and I am 28. So, for sixteen years I've been reading an average of fifty books a year, which means six hundred novels. I have read many more, but that is the minimum.<sup>173</sup>

Saítta identified Arlt's need to "exhibit" his acquired competences as part of some writer's inferiority complex. Unlike many of his peers, who came from a long tradition of patrician literature, Arlt felt that behind his name, there was nothing, no ancestors who fought in the war of independence, no illustrious writers. There was not much more than an immigrant past which origins were not even clear (Saítta 2000, 62).<sup>174</sup>

However, it is no less true that the topos of *quantity* in Arlt has also other roots that should be explored, specially in the light of Arlt's communist sympathies, and the fact that he collaborated with publications like *Bandera Roja*, house organ of the Argentine Communist Party. In fact, after 1930 Arlt was systematically associated with Argentine Socialism and Communism.

Sometimes I have begun to think of the meters that I have written. One hundred and thirty three meters of prose to date. One hundred and thirty three! When I die, how many kilometers of prose would I have written?<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Arlt, Roberto. "El cementerio del estómago." *El Mundo*, Jan 29, 1929.

<sup>174</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

<sup>175</sup> Arlt, Roberto. "El buscamuertos." *El Mundo*, March 9, 1929. In Arlt 1993.

Arlt, it is true, had a flair for “measuring” his oeuvre. But the quantification of his production was no different than what, for instance, magazine *Caras y Caretas* had done in the past. In an editorial for its special May 1910 number, *Caras y Caretas*’ publishers boasted about the 3,017 meters of altitude that all the copies of that special issue would have reached, had they been piled on each other. Had they been aligned next to each other, they also showed off, the copies would have stretched 20,910,000 meters, the distance between the North Pole and the South Pole (Eujanian 1999, 29).

The topos of quantity was also frequently used by *Crítica*’s editor, Natalio Botana. Exactly like Arlt, who saw himself as a writer without a tradition, *Crítica* presented itself as a newspaper without one. It deemed itself to be absolutely new, a unique occurrence in the history of Latin American journalism:

*Crítica* is *Crítica*. It has no grandparents. It was born by spontaneous generation in a moment of the century when communications have torn down so many old walls and have unveiled new fresh sources. It is a worthy child of this century.<sup>176</sup>

Thus, *Crítica* had to legitimize its participation in the public discourse by constantly *measuring* its importance. Botana quantified *Crítica*’s interaction with the public as a way to legitimize his newspaper. In that, he paid special attention to charity actions (*Crítica* donated “One hundred thousand toys to children in need;” “*Crítica* will grant a Merry Christmas to the unemployed. We have collected a donation of 400

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<sup>176</sup> “*Crítica* juzgada por la revista *Nosotros*.” *Crítica*, October 12, 1925. In Saítta 1998, 158.

kilos of Pan Dulce for them" Saítta 1998, 138-154) and the sustained increase in its distribution and readership. Constantly growing circulation numbers legitimized *Crítica's* claims to political relevance, and validated Botana's intentions to present the paper as "the voice of the people."

Numbers –of readers, editions, participants in a tango competition, of stories submitted to a writing contest, of published articles and books read and written—granted both *Crítica* and Arlt the means to bypass tradition as an instance of legitimization. Modernity was, first and foremost, commensurable. Prestige, relevance, talent, legitimacy and social worth could all be quantified, numbered, charted, added up, divided and multiplied.

In that spirit, Arlt, who was particularly prone to the rhetoric of numbers, was indirectly questioning José Martí's notion about quantity. "These people eat quantity; we, class," wasn't for Arlt a valid statement anymore, in part because in *quantity* Arlt also saw *class* (Martí 2002, 93).

Arlt's take on quantity, however, was not purely based on the virtues of sheer accumulation of knowledge, mass production or untamed development. Permeated by some Marxist notions, the author of the *Etchings* equated volume of product with labor:

One year. Three hundred and sixty five articles, meaning one hundred and fifty six meters in newspaper column, which is

equivalent to 255,500 words. *If these one hundred and fifty six meters were of cashmere, I would have suits for the rest of my life.*<sup>177</sup>

The mental operation of converting prose into cashmere required that both products (may we call them commodities) be expressed in quantities of the same magnitude. And for Arlt—likely via Marx—that magnitude was *abstract man labor*, the productive expenditure of human brains, nerves and muscles (Marx 2000, 432). Any increase in quantity was, therefore, the byproduct of an increase in human labor. Being hard work (or human labor) an Arltian precondition for accessing culture, accumulation—of any kind—was consistently viewed by Arlt in a positive light. Knowledge accumulation, but also the accumulation of words, or any other type of material stock, were the result of man’s work, therefore the result of a positive human quality.

Arlt, however, was not strictly a Marxist, and his approach naturalized historical-social constructs such as property and culture, while overestimating the power of self-sacrifice and drive. Arlt’s take on Marxism was, in fact, severely criticized by the higher echelons of the Argentine Communist Party during the writer’s brief collaboration with *Bandera Roja* (Saitta 2000, 105-133).

But, in fact, this quasi-Marxist approach to journalism and literature was for Arlt more classificatory than revolutionary. Marxism served him primarily as a taxonomical instrument, much more so than as a revolutionary weapon. Arlt didn’t strive for social transformation, but simply to make sense of modernity. Through

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<sup>177</sup> Arlt, Roberto. “¡Con ésta van 365!” *El Mundo*, May 14, 1929. Translation and italics are mine.

the lens of certain Marxist constructs Arlt developed a classificatory system, which he displayed with eloquence and literary brilliance in his “Etchings” for *El Mundo*.

So while from the pages of *Crítica* Borges aimed at multiplying possible references and connections between modern Buenos Aires and the world, expanding as much as he could the series of associations between local modernity, ancient cultures of China, Carthage, and the distant developments in early 1900s New York, Arlt strove to understand Buenos Aires as an enclosed city. By tapping into certain classificatory tools –Marxist categories amongst those—Arlt documented, described, classified and quantified Buenos Aires types in –more or less—their own terms. Arlt’s effort was that of a taxonomist, and through literary journalism he succeeded in painting modern Buenos Aires in its own, unique and strange colors.

### **Arlt’s Etchings and the Presentation of the Argentine Character**

Mass papers like *Crítica*, *El Mundo* and *Noticias Gráficas* positioned themselves as the interpreters of progress and change in the new city. From their pages, professional journalists addressed their audiences by classifying, describing and enumerating a new cast of social types in an array of innovative writing formats, genres and styles. Among these new formats were Arlt’s “Etchings” for *El Mundo*. These daily, literary journalistic columns, where Arlt masterfully described, analyzed and typified new urban professions, activities and trends, were also instrumental in the legitimization of a new language: a modern “Castilian” from a Buenos Aires in

constant transformation: the language of a city wide open to immigration, and in constant expansion.

Arlt's *Etchings* were part of a strategy developed by *El Mundo's* editor, Carlos Muzio, to appeal to new audiences and increase advertising revenue. Muzio slashed *El Mundo's* cover price to only 5 cents, half the price of most morning papers. He added comic strips on the back featuring Otto Messmer's *Felix the Cat*, and on August 5, 1928 he incorporated a section called "Aguafuertes Porteñas" ("Buenos Aires Etchings"), written by Roberto Arlt (Saítta 2000, 55). The strategy soon paid off, and *El Mundo* rapidly became the third morning paper in circulation after *La Prensa* and *La Nación*, and the tabloid with the largest morning circulation, growing from 40,000 copies in October 1928 to 127,000 only a year after (Saítta 2000, 71).

At first, Arlt's columns appeared unsigned. But already on August 14 his initials glinted at the bottom of the page, and by the 15th his full name was featured for the first time. The byline affected not only Arlt's popularity, which skyrocketed in a question of days, but also the tone and content of the columns. With his byline on the page, Arlt started to shift from the impersonal and the third narrative person to the first.

For fourteen years, until the day of his death, Arlt would write his daily column for *El Mundo*. His topics were varied, but they could easily be grouped in a few general categories: the *Argentine/Buenos Aires types*, which included profiles of professionals and craftsmen of all kinds, but also of social and criminal types; *Buenos Aires' places and traditions*; *the language of Buenos Aires*, a quasi philological approach to the

changing language in an increasingly cosmopolitan city; *civility* since Arlt, considered a communist writer, was explicitly banned from writing about party politics at *El Mundo*—"I've been ordered not to get into politics." The etchings also dealt with *relationships* and every now and then introduced *autobiographical notes*.<sup>178</sup> These categories converged many times in one single story, creating multiple, juxtaposed layers of analysis and classification.

Argentine writer and critic Pedro Orgambide described Arlt *types* as an intermediate point between the men and women Arlt the journalist observed in the streets, and the characters Arlt the writer created in his literature: "[Arlt] imported the intensity with which these *people-characters* lived using the devices of a professional who had already written some of his best pages as a novelist" (Orgambide 1960, 12).<sup>179</sup>

The cross-pollination between journalism and literature in Arlt's work was best revealed in characters like "Haffner, the Melancholic Pimp," or "The Maid," main character in Arlt's play *300 millones*. "The Melancholic Pimp," one of the protagonists of *Los Siete Locos (Seven Madmen)*, was in fact Polish anarchist immigrant Noé Trauman. Arlt had met him while covering the crime beat for *Crítica*, and held a long series of interviews with him at Las Violetas, a fancy teahouse in Almagro neighborhood. Trauman, had arrived in Buenos Aires in 1906, and was the founder of the Israeli Society of Mutual Assistance, "Varsovia," soon renamed "Zwi Migdal."

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<sup>178</sup> Arlt also traveled to Brazil and Spain and Africa, from where he submitted some of his etchings. Those columns, which were generally written to provoke estrangement in the readers by presenting before them foreign passages, names and characters, exceed the scope of the present work.

<sup>179</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

The association was, in fact, a front for a powerful prostitution network managing thousands of brothels in Argentina, with branch offices in Brazil, New York City, Warsaw, South Africa, India, and China (Saftta 2000, 53; Ragendorfer 1997).

“The Maid” of *300 millones* was also based on a real person pulled out from one of the many crime stories Arlt wrote for *Crítica*. Later on, she also became the main character in one of Arlt’s “Etchings:”

As a crime reporter working for *Crítica* in the year of 1927, I had to write, one September morning, a chronicle on the suicide of a Spanish maid, single, 20 years of age, who had killed herself by jumping in front of a tramway that passed right in front of the house where she worked, one morning at five A.M.

When I arrived, the dismembered body had already been removed. I would have attributed no importance to the event whatsoever (during those years I saw dead bodies on a daily basis) hadn’t it been for the fact that some investigations I did in the house confronted me with a number of singular details.

The lady who owned the house told me that the night before the suicide, the maid did not sleep. A visual examination of the maid’s bed allowed me to establish that she hadn’t even laid down, which also made me think, with clear evidence, that she had actually spent the night sitting on her immigrant’s trunk (she had arrived from Spain a year before). When she walked out of the house to jump in front of the tramway, the maid also forgot to turn the light off. And all these details together made a deep impression on me. For months on end I walked around seeing before of my eyes the spectacle of a sad young woman, sitting on the edge of a trunk, in a room of whitewashed walls, thinking of her destiny without hope, under the yellow incandescent glow of a 25 watt light bulb (Arlt 1960, 13).

In the “Etchings” about Argentine places and traditions, Arlt described innumerable either very well known or totally hidden hangouts in Buenos Aires: shady pensions; glamorous coffee houses, dirty brothels, suburban plazas, loud soccer stadiums and kitsch German bars:

[B]ut not those types of German bars where you go during the winter, with whitewashed interiors, deer heads and grotesque Tyrolese landscapes hanging on the walls: a carrot-colored-hair guy, exposed knees, wearing green socks, courting a grocer in a Theodiscus market, she wearing a hat that looks like a basket, with a nose like a trumpet. No, I'm not talking about that, nor about this other German bar mainly visited by Spanish chauffeurs and literates who tell each other that they are either ignored or predestined geniuses. No, no! Now I want to talk about another bar, one that deserves to be called a place of solace, one that blooms with unusual exuberance in the neighborhood of Belgrano; a bar decorated with little lights hanging between the branches of cypresses, and a Germanic orchestra scratching in their violins a few of Strauss' Viennese waltzes (Arlt 1992, 25-26).

In many regards, those narrations tapped into –and sometimes chiseled in a few strokes—the identity of certain Buenos Aires places, and the habits of some of its characters, such as the old retired ladies hanging out in sunny suburban streets:

The suburban dweller, particularly the one who wonders around at one in the afternoon, can, if he makes an effort, discover neighborhoods where “old ladies” spend hours on the streets, their backs covered with a foulard, their arms crossed while sipping on a mate (Arlt 1992, 42).

...or the old drunkard at a downtown bar:

I know you old drunkard.  
Like many other unfortunates you have had a wonderful life. Like every sad person, you too could recite an Iliad of misfortunes and an Odyssey of sorrows. You have crossed the world, you have gotten drunk in every tavern, you know the parlance to ask for “a pint” in every bodega of the world, in every saloon in the universe, in every cantina in the planet. And without a drinking buddy, you choose to tell the story of your life to the waiter who looks at you with contempt, and your philosophy to the owner who, had he not needed your coins, would have already had you kicked out of the premises (Arlt 1992, 45).

Other times, Arlt turned his literary approach to types and situations into a formidable tool for journalistic investigations. In December 1932, after receiving several letters denouncing the catastrophic state of public hospitals, Arlt single-handedly started a crusade to denounce the municipal government for its incompetence and inaction with regard to public health. Working undercover as a medical student, he spent 45 days infiltrating several municipal hospitals and investigating their practices, and when the investigation was completed *El Mundo* published an impeccably documented series of articles titled “Hospitales en la miseria” (“Hospitals in Shambles”). The series combined meticulous data on understaffing, below par bed to patient ratio, the scarcity or unavailability of certain drugs, and presented the investigation in a vivid, narrative, realistic-naturalistic style (Saítta 2000, 65).

The lepers’ pavilion is hell. If one ever had the courage to enter it, he should also make extreme efforts not to faint. There are certain instances when it feels like you are going to fall on the ground... But the fear of rolling on these leper-infested floors is such that it keeps you on your feet. You don’t even dare breathe. There’s dirt everywhere. Dirt on the floors, on the walls, on the stairs. There are beds in the corridors. Lepers fry eggs or an omelet in a Primus placed on top of a bed... Pieces of human beings decomposing turn purple [...] Human cadavers, living, rotting in different degrees, showing the entire color spectrum of organic putrescence, pile up at God’s will, simply waiting to die in one way or another.<sup>180</sup>

Arlt, of course, couldn’t channel all his discoveries, ideas and thoughts through *El Mundo*, a popular, family-friendly mass newspaper that crusaded against immorality and vice in the big city. Thus, many of his ideas and stories, superficially presented

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<sup>180</sup> Arlt, Roberto. “Hablan los leprosos.” *El Mundo*, January 15, 1933. In Saítta 2000, 65.

and discussed in the “Etchings” were promptly reconverted into literature and theatre for an expanded audience.

*El Mundo*, in fact, catered to an audience much less involved in politics than *Crítica’s*. An audience with a much more subdued desire for truculence and crime, and perhaps with a greater need for stability and order.

Despite the many differences between the two newspapers, both strategically resorted to innovative genres and styles, vivid, realistic and sometimes even cinematic narrations, and solidly crafted stories, to engage their readers, the emerging mass public, into a new type of collaboration.

In the seedbed of the mass media in Latin America, literary journalism became a central aspect of the emerging popular press. It was one of its most efficient strategies to attract the new mass public, and interact with it on a new level, shaping and consolidating national and local identities, but also mediating between readers and governments, while renewing and perfecting its traditional role as a political actor.

## **Part V. Latin American Narrative Journalism and the Cuban Revolution**

On April 16, 1961, the day of the Bay of Pigs invasion, Rodolfo Walsh was where most journalists in the world would have wanted to be.

Following his colleague and friend Jorge Ricardo Masetti, the 33-year-old, balding, shortsighted, slim and jovial Walsh had arrived in Havana in 1959 with his partner, Stella "Poupée" Blanchard. He was there to join a project that was about to gain historical significance.

In 1958, from the depths of the Cuban jungle in Sierra Maestra, Masetti had broadcasted for the Argentine Radio El Mundo the first interview with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, and had remained in Cuba at the request of Che to create the first Latin American news service: Prensa Latina.

In Walsh's own words Masetti was an "integral rebel" and a socialist militant of "admirable coherence" (Walsh 1996, 103). After Cuba, which he left in 1964, Masetti fought in Algeria and then went back to Argentina to die in combat in the woods of Salta, fighting against the Argentine army that had overthrown the democratically elected government of Juan Domingo Perón (Walsh 1996, 110-112).

In the early years of the 1960s, however, Prensa Latina was still Masetti's main commitment and obsession. Its goal: to counterbalance the "deformation of the news about Cuba spread by the international press" (Walsh 1996, 105).

On two occasions in 1957, UPI had announced –seasoned with details and an array of apocryphal testimonies—the death of Fidel Castro. This had a tremendously demoralizing effect on the revolutionary forces and Castro perceived it as a defamation campaign set in motion by the United Press International (UPI) and the Associated Press (AP). The cables were later proved wrong by Herbert Matthews in a long feature published complete with photos of Castro and Che in the *New York Times* on February 24, 1957. But from that point on, information balance became key for the Cuban revolutionary government. At the time, there was little doubt in Che’s and Castro’s minds that the U.S. State Department was behind these rogue stories, although these assumption were never substantiated.<sup>181</sup>

“[The news] agencies that monopolize the global news market, have initiated an escalade of informative garbage that still lasts today, and prepared the field for a chain of aggressions that led to Playa Girón [the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961]” Walsh wrote years later (Walsh 1996, 105-106). Such challenge asked for a prompt reaction. Thus Prensa Latina was set in motion.

To create the news service Masetti put together a superb team of Latin American journalists and writers: Plinio Mendoza and Gabriel García Márquez in Colombia,

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<sup>181</sup> In a phone interview I conducted on March 12, 2011 with Rogelio García Lupo, an Argentine journalist, friend of Walsh and former editor at Prensa Latina, the journalist noted that Che Guevara’s main focus in creating Prensa Latina was to counterbalance the United Press International. The announcement of Fidel Castro’s death had a “tremendously demoralizing effect on the revolutionary forces. At the time –García Lupo added—there was little doubt in Che’s and Castro’s minds that the State Department was behind the UPI.” That assumption, as said above, was never substantiated according to García Lupo.

Mario Gil in Mexico, Eleazar Díaz Rangel in Venezuela, Teddy Córdova in Bolivia, Aroldo Wall in Brazil, Rogelio García Lupo in Ecuador and Chile, Juan Carlos Onetti in Uruguay, Triveri in the United States, and Angel Boan as a floating correspondent (Walsh 1996, 106).

Prensa Latina soon signed agreements with Tass, CTK, Tanjug, Hsin Hua, and the Egyptian, Japanese and Indonesian news agencies. In less than three years, it opened 10 bureaus across Latin America, and offices in New York, Washington, Paris, Geneva, Prague and London (Walsh 1996, 107). By 1961, the headquarters at the Edificio del Seguro Médico in Havana had also incorporated a groundbreaking room with eight teletype machines, all connected to an antenna on the roof that captured several frequencies, including the Associated Press, Agence France Press, United Press International and International News Service. "It was a matter of life and death," journalist Rogelio García Lupo, who was in Havana in 1961, revealed during a phone conversation we held on March 12, 2011. Prensa Latina didn't have the means to pay for those services but it needed them to keep up with the news cycle.

By 1961, Prensa Latina was producing information for many newspapers in the region, but also for *L'Express* in Paris, *The New Statesman* in London, *The Nation* and *The New Republic* in the United States. American sociologist Charles Wright Mills, writer and journalist Waldo Frank and French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre were part of a stellar army of international contributors, which added a second and third layer of analysis to the news. Opinions, with emphasis on Cuba and Latin America, had already engaged many other intellectuals, writers and journalists from all over

the region, Europe and, to a lesser degree, also the United States. Some of those conversations initiated at Prensa Latina would contribute to shape the scope and direction of Latin American journalism, literature and politics in the next fifty years.

To give an idea of how deeply Prensa Latina influenced Latin American literature, journalism, politics and culture it suffices to offer a brief resume of three of its staff writers and the feats they would accomplish in the years that followed:

Gabriel García Márquez, who in 1982 would earn the Nobel Prize for Literature, was then a 34-year-old journalist who had just published his first novella, *La Hojarasca* (*Leaf Storm*) and a groundbreaking literary journalistic series for the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador: The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*. Juan Carlos Onetti, a Uruguayan writer author of *El pozo* (1939), *La vida breve* (1950) and *El astillero* (1961) had been chief editor of the Uruguayan weekly *Marcha* between 1939 and 1941, had worked for Reuters between 1941 and 1955, and in those years had also directed *Vea y Lea* magazine in Buenos Aires. In 1980 he would be awarded the Premio Cervantes of literature, the most important literary prize in the Spanish language. Finally, Rodolfo Walsh—still not yet the full-fledged revolutionary he would eventually become—was a 34-year-old writer who had gained enormous notoriety after *Variaciones en rojo* (1953). This book of crime short stories was awarded the Municipal Prize of Literature of Buenos Aires, a distinction reserved to authors of the caliber of Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar. Walsh had also published journalism in the weeklies *Vea y Lea* and *Leoplán*, and an investigative literary journalism book *Operación Masacre* (1957), followed a year later by a groundbreaking investigation, *El Caso Satanowsky*, appeared in *Mayoría* magazine

between June and December 1958. Journalism had granted Walsh the status of a star, with his investigations avidly read in the entire region.

In an article published in 1974, Gabriel García Márquez described the excitement he felt during the early days of *Prensa Latina*, and the impact that Walsh's journalism had on his writing:

For readers during the 50s, when the world was young and less urgent, Rodolfo Walsh was the author of overwhelmingly good crime novels that I used to read during slow hangover Sundays in a pension for students in Cartagena. Later, he became the author of tremendous, implacable reportages that denounced the nocturnal massacres, the corruption and scandals in the Argentine Armed Forces. In his entire work, even in those parts that seemed to be simply fictional, he constantly showed a distinct compromise with reality, excelling due to his almost unbelievable analytical talent, his personal courage, and his relentless militancy. For me, aside from that, he was also a joyful friend whose peaceful nature little resembled his warrior-like determination. But, above all, Walsh for me will always be the man who beat the CIA (García Márquez, 1974).

It is interesting –and necessary—to quote a second paragraph of this article. In it García Márquez describes how it was that Walsh “beat” the CIA, and what was Walsh's role on that day of April 16, 1961.

Contrary to what the CIA suspected back then, it was in fact Walsh himself, and not a team of soviet cryptographers, who decoded the encrypted messages between the CIA officials stationed in Guatemala and their headquarters in Washington, a feat that would have a tremendous impact on the outcome of the frustrated invasion of April 16, 1961.

In truth it was Rodolfo Walsh who discovered, many months before, that the United States was training Cuban exiles in Guatemala to invade Cuba in Playa Girón [the Bay of Pigs] in April 1961. Walsh was at the time chief of Special Services for Prensa Latina, in the headquarters in Havana. His compatriot Jorge Ricardo Masetti, who was the founder and director of the agency, had installed a special room for teletypes to receive and analyze, in our editorial meetings, the information published by rival news agencies. One evening, due to a mechanical accident, Masetti found in his office a teletype roll with no news but a long message written in an intricate code. It was a commercial traffic dispatch from “la Tropical Cable” sent from Guatemala. Rodolfo Walsh, who secretly loathed the crime short stories he had published, was determined to crack the messages, only assisted by few amateur cryptography manuals he had bought in a used bookstore in Havana. He cracked the code after many sleepless hours, without having done this ever before in his life, and without any training. And what he found was not only an amazing piece of news for a militant journalist, but also providential information for the revolutionary government in Cuba. The cable was addressed to Washington by the chief of the CIA in Guatemala, who was attached to the personnel of the American embassy in that country, and it was a minute report on the preparations for a landing in Cuba, as planned by the American government. It even revealed the place where the training had started, the Retalbuleu hacienda, an old coffee plantation in the North of Guatemala (García Márquez, 1974).<sup>182</sup>

This undertaking, which was among the causes of the tremendous defeat suffered by the counter-insurgent Cuban movement, was confirmed by García Lupo in a brief article published in 2000 and during our phone conversation in March 2011. As the good journalist he still is, though, García Lupo also added a few nuances

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<sup>182</sup> In an article published in 2000 by the *Washington Post*, journalist Vernon Loeb argued that the CIA still had no certainty as to how the Cubans had learned with such detail about the American plans and the day of the landing. “How the leak occurred is still a mystery,” he argued. There was, however, a strong suspicion of Soviet intervention, a team that might have intercepted American communications. The “mechanical accident” that García Márquez describes as the cause for this mysterious teletype roll to be found by Masetti, could be linked to that communications interception. However, Loeb’s version does not invalidate the role that Walsh played in the decryption of the coded message, a version that is not only supported by García Márquez, but also by Rogelio García Lupo and other colleagues of Walsh’s at Prensa Latina. Loeb’s article appeared in *The Washington Post*, on Saturday, April 29, 2000, Page A04. For Rogelio García Lupo’s account see Lupo 2000, 23. For García Márquez’ see Márquez 1974 (translation from Spanish of the above quoted passage is mine).

and made a few amendments to García Márquez' story (García Lupo 1996, 23): the teletype machines worked 24 hours a day, and the logs were stored in eight separate bins arranged by source. García Lupo, Masetti and Walsh searched the bins for relevant information almost every hour, to keep up with competing news services and stay atop of the news cycle. "That [encrypted] information came out from one of those bins," Lupo remembered. "But García Márquez was wrong in his account, because Walsh didn't need to use cryptography books to decode it; he had been interested in cryptography for a while, he was a fairly experienced cryptographer himself, and had already used some of those techniques in his literature."

In his notes, written many years after 1961, Walsh would discuss his role as a cryptographer in Cuba. He would also argue that Prensa Latina had sometimes exceeded the limits of conventional journalism, publishing months before it was known by other news organizations "the exact location in Guatemala –the Retalhuleu hacienda—where the CIA was preparing the invasion of Cuba, and the little island of Swan where the Americans had concentrated their radio propaganda activities in the hands of the [Cuban] exiles" (Walsh 1996, 108).

These and many other activities related to Prensa Latina and the multiple literary and journalistic institutions created by the Cuban revolutionary government in those years—one of them Casa de las Américas, which we will discuss later in this section— have to be also considered as part of a broader movement anchored in a long Latin American tradition of literary journalism. This tradition, as we have discussed in previous sections, combined journalism, politics and literature almost

in equal parts. This was the tradition in which Rodolfo Walsh and Gabriel García Márquez were, during those early years of the 1960s, centrally positioned.

### **At the Origins of Testimonio (an Interlude)**

In the 1950s, Rodolfo Walsh and Gabriel García Márquez authored two of the most revolutionary books in literary journalism in 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin America. Walsh wrote *Operación Masacre* in 1957 as his first long-form journalistic piece, an investigative work that, using Tom Wolfe's words, "read like a novel." More importantly, the book proved with obsessive precision the illegality of the detention and summary execution of a group of Peronist dissidents in the aftermath of the Revolución Libertadora, a military coup that ousted Argentine democratically elected president Juan Perón. A few years before, in 1955, Colombian Gabriel García Márquez had authored a journalistic investigation that, written in the style of a nouvelle, was published by the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador*, and was first edited as a book in 1970. *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* was also a vivid exposé of a contraband operation conducted by the Colombian Navy, which had cost the lives of seven Colombian sailors.

Both narratives, described by García Márquez as "journalistic reconstructions," are the most direct predecessors of testimonio. Walsh's and Márquez' stories not only prefigure the topics, most of the techniques and some of the ideas at the core of this narrative genre, which consolidated only a few years later typified by Casa de las Américas, and has crystallized in works such as Miguel Barnet's *Cimarrón* (1966).

These two books are also strong links between testimonio, political militancy and the broader series of Latin American literary journalism on the one hand, and the large series of Anglo American literary and investigative journalism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the other.

As participants in the experience of Prensa Latina and actors during the early years of the Cuban Revolution, both authors had an active role in the discussions on and around testimonio. Walsh was perhaps more of a central figure in the consolidation of the genre than Márquez in so far as he was member of the Premio Casa de las Américas jury in 1968 for the short story category, in 1970 for the testimonio category, which was inaugurated that year, and in 1974 again for the short story award. Walsh also produced two books, *Quién Mató a Rosendo*, from 1969, and *El Caso Satanowsky*, published in 1973, which helped consolidate both literary journalism and testimonio as narrative genres.

The following sections will explore some of the main aspects of *Operación Masacre* but also some relevant features about *Relato de un Náufrago* in their prefigurative role to the tradition of testimonio. They will later on dwell on a few aspects of Miguel Barnet's *Cimarrón*, as the quintessential example of the early days of this genre.

Testimonio is a broad and intricate socioliterary genre that evolved and spread in influence and range in the years that followed the Cuban revolution, a genre that even today is active, vibrant and changing. Casa de las Américas has awarded its testimonio prize 23 times since its first winner in 1970, *La Guerra Tupamara*, a series

of reportages compiled by María Esther Giglio. Since then, testimonios have greatly varied in form, style and content: from series of isolated reportages, to first or third person narratives; from accounts narrated from the point of view of a neutral observer, to groundbreaking literary experiments such as Diamela Eltit's *El Padre Mío* (1989) which tried to replicate in writing the discourse of a psychotic patient in a Chilean mental institution.

Testimonio has also found a large international audience. Many correlates can be found in other continents, in the context of what critic Frederic Jameson has described as a common literary dynamic during the decolonization years.<sup>183</sup> But when we focus on Latin America it would be safe to assume that, for the most part, these testimonial narratives have been linked to social militancy and political – sometimes armed—action (Nance 2006, 23-47).

Although it is possible to find some of the mechanisms of testimonial literature in narratives distanced from that original matrix, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to undertake that study. The goal of this section is to explore the connections between literary journalism and testimonio and to establish the links between testimonio and the tradition of Latin American literary journalism explored in previous sections. In so doing, an underlying assumption of this chapter is that testimonial literature, especially via Walsh but also García Márquez, is directly related not only to the long tradition of Latin American literary

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<sup>183</sup> An interesting study in this direction is Frederic Jameson's 1986 "Literary Import-Substitution in the Third World. The Case of the Testimonio," which considers the process of decolonization as one –among other relevant—conditions for the development of testimonio as a genre.

journalism, but also to the lineage of investigative and literary journalism that blossomed in the United States between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the post World War II.

It is with that in mind that this work will now start exploring the context in which these narratives were grounded, to then take a closer look into the literary journalism of Rodolfo Walsh.

### **Years of Hope**

Political testimonio, a factual genre consolidated between the late 1950s and the late 1970s, the key to understanding the evolution of literary journalism in Latin America, didn't happen overnight. It was the product of a cultural, social, and political tradition combined with a series of intense changes that took place during those two decades, both in Latin America and the United States.

In the 1960s consumerism thrived in the United States, but in less than ten years fell under severe scrutiny and started to be questioned by the American youth, its intellectuals and a strong counter-cultural movement (Cross 2000, viii). The 1960s in the United States were alternatively the suburban years, the civil rights movement years, and the Vietnam years; the years of counter-culture and the era of Aquarius.

And, inside many newsrooms in the States, they were also the time for a “new journalism.”<sup>184</sup>

In the 1960s there was a boom in college enrollment. When Daniel Bell first wrote about the “knowledge revolution,” there were 3.5 million students in American universities. That number had doubled by the end of the decade. The new books published each year increased 65% between 1950 and 1960, and then doubled again by the mid-1960s (Abrahamson 1996, 11-17). “In 1950, 9 percent of American homes had a TV, but by 1960, nearly 90 percent of households had the tube and it was watched an average of five hours per day,” (Cross 2000, 100-3). The 1960s in the US were a decade of fast changes that also had to be tracked at a fast pace.

The growth of radio networks and the boom of commercial television after the unprecedented economic expansion following World War II led to the development of new journalistic forms, specially adapted to the electronic revolution during a time when information started to circulate at the highest speed. Faster, more energetic, and more vivid than newspapers, radio and TV became the media of choice to satisfy the increasing demand for breaking news in an information-driven culture.

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<sup>184</sup> “As I saw it –wrote Tom Wolfe in his 1972 manifesto for *New York Magazine*—if a new literary style could originate in journalism, then it stood to reason that journalism could aspire to more than mere emulation of those aging giants, the novelists [...] In any case, a . . . New Journalism . . . was in the air. ‘In the air,’ as I say it; it was not something that anyone took note of in print at the time, so far as I can remember” (Wolfe 1972).

The increase in college enrollment, paired with the expansion of the editorial market and the news market also fostered a new, more knowledgeable public, eager to gain access to more sophisticated forms of written journalism. This demand soon met its supply amidst the magazine boom that since the mid-1940s had started to feature longer pieces written with literary craftsmanship, techniques, structures, mechanisms, and topics. Narrative journalism undoubtedly made its way to the core of the magazine boom during the sixties.<sup>185</sup>

In a 1972 article published in *New York Magazine* and later reproduced in his 1973 *Anthology of New Journalism*, Tom Wolfe explained some aspects of the narrative boom as seen from the point of view of a journalist: the development of a personal voice, a personal style, and the incorporation of several techniques used primarily in fiction writing were a reaction to the old-styled, formulaic journalism that had dominated the American print media between the 1930s and the early 1960s:

The Herald Tribune hired [Jimmy] Breslin to do a "bright" local column to help offset some of the heavy lumber on the editorial page, paralyzing snoremongers like Walter Lippmann and Joseph Alsop [...] At that time, 1963 and 1964, Sunday supplements were close to being the lowest form of periodical. Their status was well below that of the ordinary daily newspaper, and only slightly above that of the morbidity press, sheets like the *National Enquirer* in its "I

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<sup>185</sup> Following multiple authors who have attempted to define narrative nonfiction and literary journalism and differentiate it from other forms of nonfiction such as memoirs, ethnographies, history and certain forms of essay –Tom Wolfe’s “The Birth of New Journalism” (1972), Mas’ud Zavarzadeh’s *The Mythopoetic Reality* (1976), John Hollowell’s *Fact and Fiction* (1977), Ronald Weber’s *The Literature of Fact* (1980), Norman Sims *True Stories. A Century of Literary Journalism* (2007)-- we will consider literary journalism a type of referential narrative prose whose protagonists, characters and situations have documented existence in the real world, its focus is generally a current event, its style is novelesque and its main purpose is both literary and referential. Of course, this is only a preliminary “working definition” we will use to approach American narrative nonfiction and testimonio.

Left My Babies in the Deep Freeze" period. As a result, Sunday supplements had no traditions, no pretensions, no promises to live up to, not even any rules to speak of. They were brain candy, that was all. Readers felt no guilt whatsoever about laying them aside, throwing them away or not looking at them at all. I never felt the slightest hesitation about trying any device that might conceivably grab the reader a few seconds longer. I tried to yell right in his ear: Stick around! . . . Sunday supplements were no place for diffident souls. That was how I started playing around with the device of point-of-view (Wolfe 1973).

Young reporters like Wolfe, Jimmy Breslin and Gay Talese were not only critical of the forms, but also of the substance of American journalism. In that vein, the new journalists were also reacting to the "abuse" of the notion of objectivity and the government management of news (Schudson 1978, 160). They were also much more open than their predecessors to an "adversarial culture" that promoted what was called "interpretive journalism" (Schudson 1978, 160-163).

The development of these new narrative forms in the United States was also a consequence of some important changes at the reading public level. On the one hand, audiences developed a need for narratives more closely attuned to the "altered nature of reality in America than the conventional realistic novel" (Hollowell 1977, 14-15). On the other hand, the blunt journalistic approach to "just the facts," the Cronkite-esque assurance that "that's the way it is," was becoming harder and harder to swallow for audiences that, after Vietnam, had become more aware of the multiple points of view involved in a story, the political interests behind the sources, and the inherent limits of "objective" journalism. Thus, literary and muckracking journalism, two "submerged traditions" in journalism, came back in full force during those years (Schudson 1976, 160-161).

In the thirties, there had also been a nascent sense that the activity of reporting itself was problematic and that the experience of reporting should be included in the report –James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is the chief example. But in the sixties this sensibility was more richly elaborated and more widely endorsed. *It responded to, and helped create, the audience of the critical culture* (Schudson 1978, 187-188).<sup>186</sup>

In a time of radical changes, when questions were raised about the death of the novel and the decay of journalism, investigative and literary journalism reappeared to give a more vivid, more profound account of new social realities in the United States.

### **The Context for a New Journalism: Testimonio and the Revolutionary 1960s in Latin America**

The 1960s in Latin America were also years of change. Perhaps on a smaller scale, many of the social advances witnessed in the United States were also taking place in the region.

In 1961, UNESCO reported that for every 100 Latin Americans there were 7.4 copies of daily newspapers, 9.8 radio receivers, 3.5 cinema seats and 1.5 TV sets (UNESCO, 1961). By the end of the decade, these numbers tripled.

In those years, the theoretical and political interest of left-leaning Latin American governments in “building and improving the mass media” grew exponentially, as

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<sup>186</sup> Italics are mine.

these knowledge networks were considered an efficient means to foster literacy and economic development (McNelly 1966, 346-57).

In part as a result of this technological push, but also as the consequence of strong literacy campaigns promoted by Latin American governments, in the years between 1960 and 1970, illiteracy rates in the population between 15 and 19 years dropped in the region from 25% to 16.6%, although averages show a homogeneity that is far from real (Rama and Tedesco 1975, 191-203).

College enrollment also grew exponentially. “[Enrollment] has been so large that a crisis developed in the functions traditionally assigned to the university by the social system,” pedagogues Rama and Tedesco noted with surprise in a 1975 paper. Between 1960 and 1975, according to UNESCO, higher education enrollment in Argentina grew from 11.3% to 28%; in Cuba from 3% to 9%; in Colombia from 1.7% to 8.4%; in Perú from 3.6% to 22.8% (Rama and Tedesco 1975, 191-203).

The expansion in college enrollment, literacy levels, and media exposure was accompanied with the development of a critical mass of avid new readers, who would become the main targets of the Latin American literary boom and other new literary and journalistic forms (Ferro 1999, 129-30).

But these changes, equivalent to those happening in the United States, were part of a very particular social, political, and cultural context; a context that shaped Latin America’s narrative journalism in a very unique way.

### **Casa de las Américas: a Programmatic Attempt to Develop a New Social Literature**

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 was key in the development and institutionalization of an already existing tradition of Latin American literary journalism that –as we have argued in Part I of this work—can be traced back to Domingo Sarmiento’s *Facundo*. Casa de las Américas, an organization set up by Che Guevara and Haidee Santamaría in 1959 to foster the cultural dialogue between Latin American countries, Europe and the United States, helped formalize and revitalize the interest in literary journalism and other types of documentary narratives, both in the region and worldwide.

Only a few months after the ousting of Batista in Cuba, Casa de las Américas had projected itself as a central node of intercommunication between European and Hispano-American intellectuals:

Through the bimonthly *Revista Casa de las Américas* (1960), congresses, literary prizes, printings of the works of the younger novelists less known internationally and printings of critical collections, valuable continental, ideological coherence and revolutionary literary expectations evolved. Furthermore, this example of cultural openness influenced other magazines (*Marcha* in Montevideo, *Primera Plana* in Buenos Aires, *Siempre* in Mexico, *El Nacional* in Caracas) and publishing houses all over the continent, which adopted the same systems of interrelation and information (Montero 1977, 6-7).

The forced-march pace of the Cuban modernization process after the 1959 revolution, rapidly renovated Cuba’s cultural landscape. This renovation, in turn, generated hope all over the region. Latin American, European and American

Intellectuals engaged in a spontaneous conversation about the role of intellectuals in a revolutionary context, but also about the role of the State, science and literature as agents of social change. Writers, scientists and scholars from all over the world flew to Cuba to share their thoughts and ideas in conferences and cultural congresses.

Since 1960, Casa de las Américas' literary prize, the Premio Casa de las Américas, started to reward different artistic expressions no matter how experimental, in so far as they "depicted Latin American problems" (Diccionario de la Literatura Cubana 1984, 1904-05).

In those days of hope and profound political change, many of the more impoverished nations in the region started to see in Cuba a model for cultural and economic development. A country that, in a question of three years, between 1959 and 1961, had transitioned from a semi-rural economy into an international cultural hub, was also likely to become a beacon for an underdeveloped region striving to enter modernity. Walsh noted this in the introduction to his 1969 compilation, *Crónicas de Cuba*:

The revolution created in Cuba a printing industry, a public, an exchange with intellectuals from all over the world, scholarships and prizes, the best literary magazine that is published in the Castilian language [*Revista Casa de las Américas*.] Certain events, such as the annual prize of Casa de las Américas or the recent Cultural Congress [of 1968] attended by intellectuals from seventy countries, received coverage almost comparable to what our newspapers allot to car races and football. After having to endure history, writers and artists, more than enjoying it, are part of its making (Walsh 1996, 76).

The role of intellectuals and the repositioning of journalism and literature as the center of culture, politics and history, was a key aspect of the debate opened by the Cuban revolution. A debate that was continued through Casa de las Américas and other institutions created by the Cuban government, all operating under its scope of influence. Thus, the tensions between literature, political action and modern journalism soon crystallized in the works of numerous young Latin American writers, journalists and intellectuals. But it was in Rodolfo Walsh's work that all these forces converged with the purest sense of urgency.

As a writer and a journalist Walsh was deeply rooted in the intellectual tradition of Sarmiento, Martí, Borges and Arlt, all constantly present in his writings. Thanks to his multilingual and multicultural background –of Irish descent Walsh had been raised bilingual— his influences also reached farther beyond Latin America: Stephen Crane, Oliver Wendell Holmes (father and son), Erskine Caldwell, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck and James T. Farrell were all part of his vast library (Romano 2000, 87-88). After his Cuban experience, however, Walsh started to re-read these American authors in the context of a humanistic tradition profoundly critical of the democratic functioning in the United States:

Caldwell's ferociousness, however, is not gratuitous, and does not resort to oratorical techniques. When he talks about the oppressed blacks, the poor people in which he appears to deposit an inexhaustible compassion, when he speaks about those who exhaust and humiliate them, one could say that he deliberately restrains himself, he punishes his own indignation, he purifies his contempt, and then the narrative flows apparently serene, without grandiloquence, almost photographic, but loaded with something muttered, terrible. Many of Caldwell's stories are real time bombs in a

society from which slavery hasn't yet been extirpated (Walsh, Rodolfo. *Leoplán* No. 519, I-II-1956, pp. 64.)<sup>187</sup>

In Walsh's reading operation there was also a critique of the American journalism he had deeply admired in his youth. This journalistic tradition and his interest in *Time Magazine* and *Esquire*, were also influential enough to appear mentioned once and again throughout his entire work:

I am reading in the great *Time Magazine* –began Walsh's tribute to journalist Jean Pasel—the vivid, colorful, almost enthusiastic story about the extermination of the invaders of Haiti. I fancy how great it would be to be able to write like that, with such precise adjectives. Maybe in order to train myself, to assimilate some of that mastery, I go back to my days as a translator:

"Last week one of Duvalier's tactical companies crept up on the 30-man invasion force that slipped in from Cuba a fortnight ago."<sup>188</sup>

"Fed up, satiated, choked" –the magazine uses only one word, *gorged*, but I am a bad translator and I need three to convey its integral meaning—"gorged with a feast of barbecued lamb in which they had indulged, most of the invaders died on the field under the striking fire of automatic guns."

Here I stop and wonder whether it is the poverty of the Castilian language, that has no words like *gorged* (which in six letters conveys as many ideas as gluttony, greed, and general satiety) that prevents us from writing as brilliantly as *Time Magazine* (Walsh 1996, 15-16).

Unlike many of his colleagues in *Prensa Latina*, Walsh did feel part of the larger tradition of modern North American literary journalism. And that dual allegiance, to both Latin American and Anglo-American culture, added yet another layer of tension between literature, politics and journalism, all of which would manifest in his masterpiece, *Operación Masacre*, in 1957.

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<sup>187</sup> Walsh, Rodolfo. *Leoplán* No.519, I-II-1956, pp. 64. In Romano 2000, 87.

<sup>188</sup> Walsh is quoting in Spanish an article appeared in *Time* on Monday, Aug. 31, 1959. "Haiti: Beset President." I here use the original in English, but Walsh's observations in Spanish are my translation.

### **Casa de las Américas and the Rise of Testimonio**

From a curatorial point of view Casa de las Américas' mission was to promote and give cohesiveness to a series of until then uncoordinated efforts towards the development of a purely Latin American art form: a type of art mainly anchored in reality, popular and accessible. In the realm of literature, this meant to promote cheap editions, but also the incorporation of literature to newspapers and magazines, and the development of narratives referred to, written by, or directly related to the dispossessed and the humble. This programmatic effort supported in many cases by liberal and progressive movements in the region, was sealed in the definition of testimonial Literature produced by the Instituto Cubano de Literatura y Lingüística (the Cuban Institute of Literature and Linguistics):

Testimonial literature must document some aspect of Latin American or Caribbean reality from a direct source. A direct source is understood as knowledge of the facts by their author and his or her compilation of narratives or evidence obtained from the individuals involved or qualified witnesses. In both cases reliable documentation, written or graphic, is indispensable. The form is left to the author's discretion. But literary quality is also indispensable [...] In testimonial literature the biography of one or many subjects of research must be placed within a social context, be tightly connected to it, typify a collective phenomenon, a class phenomenon, an epoch, a process (a dynamic) or a non-process (a stagnation, an arrest) of the society as a whole, or of a characteristic group or stratum, inasmuch as this phenomenon is current, actual, in the Latin American agenda (Diccionario de la Literatura Cubana 1984, 1904-05).

In her 2006 study *Can Literature Promote Social Justice?* Kimberly Nance described testimonio not only as a type of text, but also as a project of social justice in which

the text was merely an instrument. In that vein, the goal of testimonio was not strictly pedagogic (to show the social conditions of Latin America through a story in which the narrators, who are in turn real life men and women, are also the main characters) but also rhetorical, in as much as it tried to persuade its readers to take action (Nance 2006, 19). Going a little beyond the purely rhetorical aspect of this form, though, it could also be argued that testimonio developed –exactly like the literary journalism that preceded it—as a political instrument. Its goal was not just to motivate actions of different kinds, but strictly political actions aimed against the social and political injustices that had fueled its narratives.

The word *testimonio* in Spanish means to bear truthful witness, as John Beverley has explained in *Testimonio On the Politics of Truth* (Beverley 2004, 3). And although the unofficial slogan of this narrative form, “to give a voice to the voiceless,” is still sometimes used to define the genre in the United States, this idea is more metaphorical than literal. The narrators or main characters of testimonio are not, by definition, illiterates who require the intervention of a scribe to put their words in paper. As Beverley has also explained, testimonial narratives are geared to “adequately represent” different types of “altern social subjects.” Of course, the question of alterity (who *is* alternative and belongs to an outside of the norm, versus who *isn't* alternative and belongs the cultural norm) is profoundly political.

Testimonial literature is occasionally considered the Latin American equivalent to what some scholars in the United States have pejoratively called tape-recorded books: “Usually intended to give a voice to the voiceless, [tape recorded books] have rarely sought a literary level, but the pioneering studies of Oscar Lewis were

conceived in self-conscious rivalry with fiction and merit study within the context of literary nonfiction" (Zavarzadeh 1976, 208-21).

Of course, to grant or deny "literary level" to Oscar Lewis' 1961 *The Children of Sánchez*—an ethnographic account of the life of a family submerged in poverty in a slum of Mexico City—or to do so with so many other testimonios, is also outside the scope of this dissertation. What, in turn, becomes immediately relevant is that, at a time when many governments in Latin America undertook efforts to foster scientific and artistic depiction, description, and analysis of their national realities as a priority in order to assess the region's potential for development and its challenges, testimonial narratives were key to undertake these efforts. And this direction, undoubtedly re-politicized the literary practice. In other words, to go back to Oscar Lewis, understanding how a "culture of poverty" was originated and reproduced was the first reasonable step in the path of its eradication.

During those early years of the Cuban Revolution, the list of intellectuals interested in joining the debate was long. Latin American writers, journalists, and intellectuals such as Argentines Julio Cortázar, Rodolfo Walsh, and Juan Gelman; Uruguayan Mario Benedetti; Colombian Gabriel García Márquez; Mexican Carlos Fuentes; Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa; Cubans Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Barnet and Guillermo Cabrera Infante; but also many Europeans such as French Régis Debray, Roger Callois, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir; German Günter Grass; and Italian Italo Calvino; among many others, all expressed their opinions about the role of literature, intellectuals, testimonial narratives and politics through Casa de las Américas (Montaner 1994, 73-79). Although a good number of them parted ways

with the forum sometime in the early seventies, after the radicalization of the Castro regime –in particular after the jailing of poet Heberto Padilla in 1971 (Larsen 1992, 776-77)—the institute and the award have remained a beacon for Latin American writers until today.<sup>189</sup>

After the Premio Casa de las Américas was awarded for the first time in 1960, the relevance of Casa de las Américas for Latin American intellectuals became undeniable. “For the young back then, and this is still current nowadays, such distinction operated as a springboard to public and supra-regional life,” noted Chilean author Antonio Skármeta (Ramb 2009, 1-5).

By 1970, the Prize of Casa de las Américas incorporated the category of testimonio. And the genre, which was already Latin America’s primary form of literary nonfiction, became institutionalized. That year too, Guatemalan writer Manuel Galich proposed Rodolfo Walsh as the head of the nonfiction jury. Walsh, who had been back in Buenos Aires since the Fall 1961, immediately accepted the proposal, and continued to work with Casa de las Américas until his death in 1977. “This is the first legitimation act for an extremely effective means for popular communication,” Walsh wrote in his acceptance letter in 1970 (Ramb 2009, 1-5).

The incorporation of testimonio as an award category provided a Latin American

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<sup>189</sup> The similarities between testimonial literature and the reportage tradition of the international proletarian writer's movement are striking, and it could be speculated that, at some point during the Cold War, this European tradition of reportage and testimonial Latin American literature may have cross-pollinated (Hartsock 2009). However, although the possibilities are suggestive this aspect remains outside the scope of this investigation.

answer to the controversial question about the role of intellectuals in politically loaded times, a question that had been raised in *Les Temps Modernes* by Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus almost twenty years before (Vargas Llosa, 1981).<sup>190</sup>

### **Literary Journalism as an Institution in the USA**

Literary journalism, an extremely popular genre in the United States by the mid 1960s, had been widely ignored both by the public, the industry and the critics until then. Between the 1940s and the 1960s it was the novel that conjured up the dreams and hopes of young writers:

At this late date—partly due to the New Journalism itself—it is hard to explain what an American dream the idea of writing a novel was in the 1940s, the 1950s, and right into the early 1960s. The Novel was no mere literary form. It was a psychological phenomenon. It was a cortical fever. It belonged in the glossary to A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, somewhere between Narcissism and Obsessional Neuroses (Tom Wolfe 1972).

James Agee's *Let us Now Praise Famous Men*, the account of the daily lives of three families of white sharecroppers submerged in desperate poverty was –as noted by Michael Schudson— among the most direct predecessors of those works of literary journalism in the 1960s. But a certain lack of interest on more “subjective forms of

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<sup>190</sup> The Cultural Congress in 1968, which incidentally took place one year after the death of Che Guevara, “would devote many sessions to the role of the intellectual, stressing the need to heal the breach between the cultural avant-garde and the revolutionary vanguard.” Jean Franco, “From Modernization to Resistance: Latin American Literature 1959-1976,” *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Culture in the Age of Mass Media (Winter, 1978): 77-97.

journalism” kept the genre away from the American literary canon until well entered the 1960s (Schudson 1978, 187-188). In fact, published in 1941, Agee’s book sold less than seven hundred copies until it was reissued twenty years later. Recounted by Agee himself and photographed by Walker Evans, no other journalistic work before had offered such deep, detailed self-reflection on its own methods and productive processes. In order to find these same levels of self-examination in journalism it would be necessary to wait until Norman Mailer’s 1968 *The Armies of the Night*.<sup>191</sup>

In 1962, as an indication of the new momentum of literary journalism, the Columbia University Pulitzer Prize committee included the General Nonfiction category for book. And in 1969 the prize, which has been equally awarded to essays, literary journalistic pieces, political, scientific and historical-philosophical narratives ever since, went to Mailer’s masterpiece.

The National Book Award, a prize “by writers to writers,” which is also sponsored by members of the publishing industry, was inaugurated in 1950, but its nonfiction category wasn’t incorporated until 1984.<sup>192</sup>

Possibly one of the most significant differences between American and Latin

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<sup>191</sup> Agee’s breakthrough in the field of American literary journalism is only comparable with the renovation in the French novel that happened after the publication of Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Auto-referentiality—a key mechanism in both Agee’s and Proust’s works—has been defined as one of the central features of postmodernism (Jameson 1991, chapter 1).

<sup>192</sup> National Book Award official web page. [http://www.nationalbook.org/aboutus\\_history.html](http://www.nationalbook.org/aboutus_history.html)

American nonfiction was, in fact, that in the United States no single entity developed the institutional authority to delimit the boundaries of narrative nonfiction, or had the clout to set general guidelines for the genre. Not even during its peaks in popularity in the early 1970s, when Tom Wolfe published his 1973 *The New Journalism* anthology, there was consensus about the main principles, styles or techniques of this literary form. This lack of “cultural consensus” or “pre-existing criteria” about what exactly constituted a “nonfiction novel” (as described by authors like Nick Nuttall, John Hollowell, or John Russell) differed completely from the situation in Latin America, where Casa de las Américas, almost univocally dictated the norms that defined testimonio. Aside from a few scholarly attempts to define the genre in the mid 1980s, the lack of consensus about literary journalism still appears to be a constant in the United States.<sup>193</sup>

This “taxonomical uncertainty” (Nuttall 2008, 131-2) in the Anglo-American tradition, which has led to a substantial number of exegetical efforts to disentangle the nature of the genre, has at the same time nurtured a certain plurality of forms and efforts in the context of this narrative. In contrast, Latin America’s testimonial tradition, especially after the programmatic definition offered by the Cuban Institute of Literature and Linguistics in 1970 and at least until the early 1980s with the return of democracy to the region, has accepted almost unanimously Casa de

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<sup>193</sup> “When Truman Capote first considered eliding these genres by writing a non-fiction novel, there was no ‘cultural consensus’ he could call on and, therefore, no pre-existing criteria to guide him in relation to form, style or subject matter. To that extent, as noted by Tom Wolfe Capote was a pioneer.” Nick Nuttall. “Cold-blooded Journalism,” in *The Journalistic Imagination: Literary Journalists from Defoe to Capote and Carter*, ed. Keeble, Richard and Sharon (London: Routledge), 131-43. Also see Hollowell: “Although Wolfe dates the beginnings of the new journalism in the sixties, fictional techniques are apparent in the magazine articles of the forties and fifties” in *Fact and Fiction*, pag. 36-37.

las Américas' award as its Holy Grail, arguably not enjoying the same levels of openness and experimental freedom.

### **The Authorial Stance**

In the American “new journalism” of the 1960s, authors, protagonists, narrators and observers tended to converge in one central figure. And although some preferred the third-person narrative as a way to avoid questions with regard to the factuality of their reportages, these accounts also displayed clear signs of their narrator-author.

Truman Capote, whose *In Cold Blood* was written in the third-person, was one of the many new journalists who gave credit to the first-person approach explaining why he hadn't used it in his masterpiece:

Ordinarily, the reporter has to use himself as a character, an eye-witness observer to retain credibility. But I felt that it was essential to the seemingly detached tone of that book [*In Cold Blood*] that the author should be absent. (Capote 1980, xv-xvi)

The use of the third person in *In Cold Blood* could also be attributed to the fact that Capote's book was written in the early stages of the *new journalism* boom. In that vein, perhaps an inflection point before first-person-centered narratives prevailed was Norman Mailer's “strictly personal approach” –as he defined it—to the 1967's protest march at the Pentagon. *The Armies of the Night*, a tribute to Capote's nonfiction, has a suggestive subtitle: *History as a Novel. The Novel as History*.

In his narrative, Mailer did not directly resort to the first person either, opting for a mixed approach. "He used the unusual device of becoming a character in the story but not the 'I' character. Mailer is the protagonist produced by Mailer the omniscient narrator" (Nuttall 2006, 138-9). Through direct observation and personal narrative methods, both Mailer and Capote seemed to fuse, at the highest level, the roles of observer and maker (Weber 1980, 43-58). The absence of the "I" in their works was, as Weber pointed out, "a matter of appearance," since the presence of the writer was distinctly felt in the recreation of events and in the selection and arrangement of the material.<sup>194</sup>

Although Mailer opted for the third-person, he also acknowledged that a novelistic first-person approach was in order when some level of intimacy was required; or, to put it in his own words, when the writer needed to *correct* some of the inaccuracies generated by the imperfect tools used to record and write History (Mailer 1968, 284).<sup>195</sup> The focus on the self was not, in that sense, just a way to show Mailer's involvement and participation in the protest against the Vietnam war, but also and especially, a way to help the readers learn about the march through the author's own eyes, feelings, and particularly through his own bias. By getting a VIP pass into

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<sup>194</sup> The absence of an "I" created what Weber defined as the "recording angel" effect. Ronald Weber, *The Literature of Fact* (Athens Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1980), 73-88.

<sup>195</sup> "More than one historian has found a way through chains of false fact. No, the difficulty is that the history is interior—no documents can give sufficient intimation: the novel must replace history at precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential, or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcated limits of historic inquiry" (Mailer 1968, 284).

Mailer's point of view, the readers of his narrative nonfiction gained access to a vantage point to feel the real experience of the march. After Mailer, the nonfiction novel systematically shifted its main focus from the objects of the author's perception to the author's perception itself.

An extreme case of subjective reporting is, without a doubt, Tom Wolfe's 1968 *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, which trails the activities of novelist Ken Kesey and a group of followers known as the Merry Pranksters through their psychedelic journey across the United States. Wolfe uses the first person throughout a substantial part of his book, but he opts for the third person in some instances during the central part of the account, in which he did not directly take part of the Pranksters activities.

One of the most distinctive devices that Wolfe used to convey a sense of reportorial authenticity was "a kind of stream of consciousness that attempts to recreate from within the mental atmosphere of people and events" (Weber 1980, 99). Although at times very effective, this device has made critics question Wolfe's reportorial factuality. The device, intended to expand on, and reveal the characters' psyche and emotions, ended up creating a centripetal force around the narrative "I." "It is Wolfe's frantic imagination as affected by Kesey and Pranksters that is the book's most attractive feature" (Weber 1980, 100-2).<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Others, like Dwight Macdonald, find it a tendentious and juvenile feature. Wolfe explained the accuracy of his stream of consciousness in his 1972 *New York Magazine* article: "Writing about Phil Spector ('The First Tycoon of Teen'), I began the article not only inside his mind but with a virtual stream of consciousness. One of the news magazines apparently regarded my Spector story as an improbable feat, because they interviewed him and asked him if he didn't think this passage was merely a fiction that

In that sense, and although some of the best American new journalists followed Capote's lead using the third person viewpoint, most tended to shift the focus of the objects of perception to the narrative "I" in emphasizing the authorial stance on the account of an actual event.

This point could be easily connected to one of the most curious peripheral effects of these narratives on the American culture during the 1960s. While focusing on the personality of the narrator-character, nonfiction novels turned their authors into immediate media stars. Through their participant-observatory role, new journalists also became the spokespersons for the peculiar events they had witnessed and written about (Hollowell 1977, 49-62). The "star reporter" status turned these journalists into the avant-garde, the guides and gurus of a generation "through regions of contemporary hell" (Hollowell 1977, 3-20).

None of this could have happened to Latin American literary journalists for at least two reasons: the first, contextual, the second, ideological.

Firstly, the United States enjoyed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century a democratic stability that Latin America lacked. At the time of the nonfiction boom, the growth in literacy and college enrollment, the conformation of a new public eager to get exposure to more meaningful and sophisticated forms of journalism, and the

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appropriated his name. Spector said that, in fact, he found it quite accurate. This should have come as no surprise, since every detail in the passage was taken from a long interview with Spector about exactly how he had felt at the time" (Wolfe 1972).

expansion of the middle classes and consumerism were, at different levels, occurring both north and south of the Río Grande. But while in the United States democracy was never under question, Latin America went through a series of violent disruptions of its fragile democratic order.

Citing David Scott Palmer, Arturo Valenzuela noted: "between 1930 and 1980, the 37 countries that make up Latin America underwent 277 changes of government, 104 of which (or 37.5 percent) took place via military coup" (Valenzuela 2004, 5-19). Under the authoritarian rule most of these countries underwent either severe censorship, or a substantial restriction of their freedom of speech.<sup>197</sup> If these changes had an impact on the region's fictional narratives (as authors like Rama, Sarlo, Larsen and Masiello have noted) they clearly had an even larger impact on documentary and political forms such as literary journalism and testimonio.<sup>198</sup>

Secondly, since the Cuban Revolution and the consolidation of testimonio as a literary genre, Latin American documentary forms were incorporated to a political

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<sup>197</sup> Although there are not definite numbers about the books that were censored during the period in Latin America, there are some striking hints of how censorship operated in different countries along the region. According to Francine Masiello, only in Argentina, there were at least 242 rock songs that were banned from the airwaves. "In consequence, musicians had to exert a tight control over the metaphoric shiftings in their lyrics." Francine Masiello. "La Argentina durante el Proceso: las Múltiples Resistencias de la Cultura," in *Ficción y Política. La Narrativa Argentina durante el Proceso Militar*, (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 1987), 11-29.

<sup>198</sup> "Confronted with a reality that was difficult to grasp, because many of its meanings remained hidden, there was an oblique attempt (and not only because of censorship) of the literary field to place itself in a meaningful connection with the present, and to start trying to make sense of a chaotic mass of experiences separated from their collective meaning." Beatriz Sarlo, "Política, Ideología y Figuración Literaria," in *Ficción y Política. La Narrativa Argentina durante el Proceso Militar* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 1987), 30-59, translation from Spanish is mine.

program under a progressive teleology. It was a central mandate of these genres to focus on the objects of reportage and not on the reporters, in order to contribute to social advancement on different fronts. Authors, and even sometimes the protagonists of these narratives, assumed a secondary role, dependent on class and national interests. In that vein, the main characters of these Latin American narratives tended to fulfill a symbolic function and their narratives an allegorical one. In the case of *testimonio*, the dual nature of its authorial system, which fluctuates between the “subject” of the *testimonio* and the “lettered scribe” that puts the story in writing, also assumed a completely different dimension.

In her 2006 study Kimberly Nance described some of the complexities of *testimonio* through an Aristotelian analysis of its rhetorical strategies. She noted that the three main forms that characterize *testimonio* as a discourse are the *forensic* approach, which takes place when a text asks decision-makers to “characterize past actions as just or unjust;” the *epideictic*, which is a way to engage spectators by asking them “to categorize present actions as noble or shameful;” and the *deliberative*, which “asks decision-makers to determine whether or not to undertake a future action; it means persuasion and dissuasion” (Nance 2006, 23). Of these three strategies, the *deliberative* is the most clearly political, and one that is easily recognizable in Rodolfo Walsh’s 1957 *Operación Masacre* and Gabriel García Márquez’ 1955 *Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*. Both narratives require direct intervention from the authorities, and are directly addressed to them in more than one way.

A clear example of the social-political role that literary journalism has had since the 1950s in Latin America was García Márquez’ publicized decision in 1974 not to write

any more fiction so long as general Augusto Pinochet ruled Chile (Martin 1982, 217). Through this promise –that García Márquez did not keep—the author expressed a connection between narrative nonfiction and political compromise that had been long time common understanding for Latin American writers.

In terms of the authorial stance of literary journalism, which as we have mentioned preceded and anticipated testimonio, neither García Márquez, nor Rodolfo Walsh, were characters in their stories—much less the central figures. When they did play a role, their intervention was generally limited to a few marginal, para-textual references, incorporated sometimes decades after publication.

Finally, much of Latin American literary journalism during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was written in concealment or under serious political pressure. At time of either reporting or publication, Latin American authors were prosecuted, silenced, ostracized, exiled and even abducted and killed by the military governments in the region.<sup>199</sup> One could reasonably speculate that this impending threat to their lives and activities was a valid reason for the lack of explicit authorial stance in their work.

In fact, most of Latin American narrative nonfiction authors during those years pursued different strategies to distance themselves from the subjects of their stories. This buffer (safety?) zone between the narrator and the author on one

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<sup>199</sup> It is not by chance that the text with which we have inaugurated the series of Latin American literary journalism in the first part of this work, *Facundo*, was also written in exile and under serious political pressure.

hand, and between the author and the object of his/her narration on the other – topped with the para-textual concealment of the authorial figure—was one among many significant structural differences between Latin American and Anglo-American literary journalism in the 1950s and 1960s.

### **Walsh and the Politics of Truth**

Argentine journalist and writer Rodolfo Jorge Walsh was born on January 9, 1927 in Choele-Choel, Río Negro. His parents were Dora Gill and Miguel Esteban Walsh, both of Irish descent and native English speakers.

Walsh the father worked as a butler in a hacienda in Río Negro, which meant a rather comfortable middle class income for the family of seven: his wife, Rodolfo, his three older brothers and a younger sister. In 1932, Walsh the father rented a farm in the vicinity of Benito Juárez, a town 400 kilometers south of Buenos Aires, for his children to have access to a good education in the big city. But his financial situation deteriorated rapidly and when in 1937 the family went bankrupt, Rodolfo was sent to the Instituto Faghi, a boarding school in Moreno run by Irish priests. The institute would have a lifelong impact on Walsh's literature, and was portrayed in a series of short stories part of Walsh's "Irish saga" (Lafforgue 2000, 285-328).<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Although there is no official biography of Rodolfo Walsh, most of the biographical material contained in this dissertation has been obtained either from Jorge Lafforgue 2000, Walsh 1957, 1964 and 1981, Vinelli 2000, Link 1996, Domínguez 1999, Arrosagaray 2006, Bochino et. al. 2004 and Domínguez 1999.

Rodolfo applied to the Naval Lyceum in 1944 but was rejected due to his poor performance in technical drawing. A year later, when his father was killed in a horse riding accident, Rodolfo had to secure a job and an income, and he found both as a copy editor with Hachette publishers in Buenos Aires. But it didn't take long for the young writer to be offered translation work: Cornell Woolrich's masterpiece *After Dinner Story* (a novel signed under one of Woolrich's pseudonyms, William Irish) was Walsh's first paid translation to Spanish at the age of 21.

Woolrich opened Walsh's eyes to crime fiction, and the genre soon became his favorite. In those early years Walsh also worked on translations of Victor Canning, Ellery Queen and other authors that would become part of Hachette's "Orange Series." As he grew familiar with the genre, Walsh also began to work on his own anthologies, and by 1953 he put together *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*, the first collection of Argentine crime fiction. *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos* included short stories by Walsh himself, but also by Jorge Luis Borges who would be a constant reference for Walsh.

In those years Walsh also took a few literature and philosophy courses in college, but he dropped out and by 1950 he got married to Elina Tejerina. That same year the couple moved to La Plata where their daughters María Victoria and Patricia were born in 1950 and 1952. Those formative years in La Plata are key to understand Walsh's interest in literary journalism.

A small mimeographed fanzine distributed by hand by a group of literature students at the Universidad de La Plata saw Walsh's first pieces of investigative

journalism. These first collaborations encouraged him to present his work in a writing contest organized by publishing house Emecé in collaboration with *Veay Lea* magazine, a biweekly publication whose self aggrandizing subtitle was "La gran revista de América" ("The great magazine in America").

*Veay Lea*, published since 1946 by Emilio Ramírez, came out with 60 pages in 24,5 cm x 32,5 cm format, and its main focus was "high culture" literature, arts and events (Romano 2000, 80). It also destined a six-page section to talk about the life of traditional Argentine families, something that was usually questioned by the Peronist government as "oligarchic" (Romano 2000, 73-74).

The jury of *Leay Vea's* prize was composed by famous playwright Leónidas Barletta, and internationally famed Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, who awarded Walsh's short story "Las tres noches de Isaías Bloom" ("The three nights of Isaías Bloom") with a mention and 250 pesos in cash. The story appeared in *Veay Lea* No. 97, 17-VIII, in 1950. The magazine only published one short story per issue, and their quality was usually endorsed in prologues by stellar names such as Borges or Bioy Casares themselves. This was the first of many consecratory steps in Walsh's early literary career (Romano 2000, 80).

In the years that followed, Walsh published more than ten short stories and his first journalistic pieces in *Veay Lea*, while starting to correspond with another weekly, *Leoplán*.

*Leoplán* was a popular magazine published by Editorial Sopena. It came out with 180 pages on heavy, economic paper, and sold at the inexpensive cover price of 1.5 pesos. *Leoplán* also “helped” its audience to manage their reading experience with para-textual references such as reading time (“Story to be read in ten minutes”), genre (“crime” or “romantic”) and multiple sections (“sciences” or “current affairs”). In the 1940s *Leoplán* also started publishing an entire short novel with every issue, usually crime or detective fiction by a European or an American author. This was complemented by three or four short stories and some news articles on science, geography, politics and arts (Romano 2000, 77). *Leoplán's* target public was the urban, middle class male, with desires to broaden his cultural horizons and move up the social ladder (Romano 2000, 77).

As a part of its strategy *Leoplán* also encouraged its readers to contribute with articles and short stories. In early 1951, for instance, the magazine featured a section in which readers were asked to send their “short stories, tales or legends, or real things that happened in the countryside [which was a way to expand its readership to the provinces]. If any of this has happened to you, please send us your story, and if it’s interesting we will publish it, paying you back 15 pesos. Don’t worry about molding [your contribution] into literary form or style. Just send us the event –with your name and address—and we will turn it into journalism” (Romano 2000, 78).

By 1953 Walsh had already published in *Leoplán* a series of articles about Ambrose Bierce and Arthur Conan Doyle. And, while still working for Hachette, he had gained renown as one of the best crime fiction experts in Argentina. Some of his

English translations, and a few from the French, were also featured in *Leoplán*, *Veay Lea* and *Panorama* magazine (Braceras et al 2000, 99).

### **After the Coup of 1955**

By all accounts, including his own in the prologue to *Operación Masacre's* third edition, Walsh remained fairly apolitical and rabidly anti-peronist until the aftermath of the coup of 1955. In those years, and until the mid 1960s, the "New Left" in Argentina began to review and reassess the role of Peronism in the development of the Argentine political culture (Ferro 2000, 140).

This revision began when the de facto government, led by a civic-corporate-military group, started to test a series of deregulatory policies known as the Prebisch Plan. Named after economist Raúl Prebisch, this strategy contemplated the dismantling of labor unions, the incorporation of Argentina to the International Monetary Fund and the gradual privatization of services and industries that, until then, had been controlled by institutes and organizations subordinated to the national government. These institutes, which sometimes ran entire economic sectors such as energy, telecommunications, health, education and transportation, had been created and put in place during the Perón regimes between 1945 and 1955 (Halperin Donghi, 1994).

Although partially rejected, the Prebisch Plan set the basis for a long, gradual process of liberalization of the Argentine economy that would peak during the military coup of 1976-1983 (Halperin Donghi, 1994).

The economic and political changes brought about by the coup sufficed for the Argentine anti-Peronist left –which had backed the ousting of Perón—to start questioning its allegiance to the de facto regime of General Eduardo Lonardi and Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (Ferro 2000, 140).

It wasn't until 1956, however, that Walsh started to change his opinion about the coup. An article published in December 1955 in *Leoplán* titled "2-0-12- no vuelve" (2-0-12 [Perón] won't return") shows that until then the journalist was still partial to anti-Peronism. The piece was a "tribute" to the Argentine Naval Air Force, which had taken part in the ousting of Perón on September 16, 1955. The force bombed Plaza de Mayo on June 16, 1955, killing 308 and wounding some 700, mostly civilians and unaware pedestrians (Romano 2000, 87). The episode was known as the "Masacre de Plaza de Mayo." In that article, however, Walsh felt compelled to pay homage "to most of the men who forged the triumph and to some acts of individual heroism that would make proud any armed force in the world" (Romano 2000, 87).

In the years that followed the coup, amidst constant persecution and continuous restrictions on individual rights and freedoms, the Argentine left rekindled its contacts with Peronism through a gradual approach to the leader in exile (Ferro 2000, 140). It was also during those years that Walsh translated Erskine Caldwell's "Kneel to the Rising Sun," and his readings of Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner,

John Steinbeck and James T. Farrel, started to gain a new meaning. Those were also his formative years in journalism, the ones that would prepare him for *Operación Masacre*.

### **“I wanted to win the Pulitzer”**

When in 1973 literary critic and professor Aníbal Ford invited Rodolfo Walsh to share his writing experiences in class, the first question came from a female student: “Tell us, Walsh, what ideals took you to write *Operación Masacre*?” According to Ford, Walsh didn’t hesitate: “...Ideals? I just wanted to be famous...I wanted to win the Pulitzer... to make money” (Ford 2000, 11).

It was true. Until late 1956 Walsh was not involved in militant politics, and remained focused on his work as a translator, his readings and writing, and his long evenings playing chess. And that was exactly what he was doing when the counter-revolution of Generals Raúl Tanco and Juan José Valle broke out one Fall night of 1956.

The evening of June 9<sup>th</sup> was a cold one in La Plata. Walsh had walked the few blocks that separated his home from the Capablanca chess club near Plaza San Martín. There, he chose a table by the wall, he wrapped his head up in a scarf to stay warm and focused, and leaning over the board he lit a cigarette and poured himself a full glass of ginebra (Ferro 2000, 144).

Close to midnight the sound of a shooting broke in from the street. It was the attempt by an army faction loyal to ousted president Perón to take over barracks and military headquarters in strategic points all over the country. The rebels' goal was to overthrow the de-facto regime of General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu and call for open presidential elections in a 180 days time. In La Plata, a few companies were attacking the Second Division Command and the police department, but the revolt was rapidly outnumbered by the loyal forces and easily suffocated in less than 12 hours (Walsh 1957, 66). Walsh would minutely reconstruct the historical sequence in *Operación Masacre*.

Around one hundred thousand bullets were shot, according to official estimates. There were half a dozen deaths and some twenty people wounded. But the rebel forces, whose material superiority is at first sight overwhelming, would not achieve the least ephemeral bit of success.

Ninety nine out of one hundred citizens ignore what's happening. In the very same city of La Plata, where the fight goes on incessantly throughout the night, many are asleep and only in the next morning they will know.

At 23.56 Radio del Estado, the official voice of the Nation, stops playing Stravinsky and airs the marching song that usually ends their transmission. The "speaker's" voice bade good night and at 24 the transmission was interrupted. All that is registered in Radio del Estado's official transcript, on page 51, signed by speaker Gutenberg Pérez.

Not a single word has been uttered about the subversive events. The Martial Law has not been mentioned either, not even marginally. Just like any other law, the Martial Law has to be passed and publicly announced before it can take effect.

*At 24 hours of June 9 1956, thus, the Martial Law does not take force anywhere in the National territory.*

Yet it has been applied. And it will be exerted on men captured before it takes effect, and without the excuse—one of those was used in Avellaneda—that these men were bearing arms (Walsh 1957, 68-68).

Dodging ongoing shootings and the ubiquitous barricades it took Walsh hours to walk back the few blocks that separated the chess club from his place. But already in the bedroom, as he recalled in the prologue to the third edition of *Operación Masacre*, the sound of isolated clashes kept him awake all night. At some point, a man yelled outside his window before the fire of machine guns mowed him down. Hours later Walsh would learn that the man was a young rebel recruit. But what puzzled him the most was that the soldier didn't die swearing love and loyalty to his country, but cursing at his colleagues for leaving him behind (Walsh 1957, 10-11).

After that night Walsh tried to go back to the "many things [he did] to earn a living," despite the fact that violence had crept into his life and was "splattered all over the walls." The memories of that night and the indirect quote from T.S. Elliot ("*A rain of blood has blinded my eyes*") led him almost directly into literary journalism (Walsh 1957, 11).

Six months later, during the suffocating summer night of December 18, sitting at a bar and sipping cold beer, longtime friend Enrique Dillon would spark Walsh's journalistic curiosity once again with a phrase that resonated throughout the entire investigation that led to *Operación Masacre*: "Hay un fusilado que vive" ("one of the executed rebels is still alive").

The night of the upheaval, back in June, a group of civilians had been arrested, transported to a nearby field in José León Suárez, 50 kilometers south of Buenos Aires, and summarily executed. One of those men, Juan Carlos Livraga, had survived

the volley of shots and was willing to talk. Walsh met Livraga on December 21, 1956. "I found the man who bit the dog!" he wrote years later (Ferro 2000, 144).

*Operación Masacre* was the fruit of Walsh's investigation around that episode, and the literary-journalistic proof of the corruption and violence of the military government of General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu. The process of identifying and locating the survivors, added to the imminent threat created by an increasingly inquisitive and violent sequel of military dictatorships, had a tremendous impact on the completion of Walsh's project. The account was first published between January and June 1957 as a series of articles in the magazine *Revolución Nacional* (according to Walsh, a "trembling bunch of yellow sheets of paper") and later, in full, in *Mayoría* magazine. The project first appeared as a book in 1957, with subsequent editions in 1964 and 1969, until its fourth and final one in 1972. *Operación Masacre* soon became the archetypal example of Latin American "documentary narrative." It was broadly read by journalists and critics all over the region and, in the words of the renowned Uruguayan critic Ángel Rama, it was "the first political testimonio in Latin America (Foster 1984, 42-43)." <sup>201</sup>

In order to write and publish *Operación Masacre*, Walsh had to completely devote himself to the book for several years, without receiving advances or compensation of any kind, while he circumvented the tight limits and restrictions imposed by

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<sup>201</sup> "Published almost ten years before Truman Capote's much touted 'nonfictional novel' *In Cold Blood*, *Operación Masacre* anticipates the techniques credited to Capote." David William Foster, "Latin American Documentary Narrative," PMLA, Vol. 99, No. 1 (New York: Modern Language Association, Jan., 1984), 42-43.

successive military governments. In the 1972 prologue, the author recalled what his life was like during the investigation that led to his masterpiece.

The long night of June 9<sup>th</sup> comes back to me, for the second time it takes me away from the 'supple, tranquil seasons.' Now, for almost a year I won't think of anything else, I will abandon my house and my job, I will be called Francisco Freyre, I will carry a false ID under that name, a friend will lend me a house in Tigre, during two months I will live in a freezing shack in Merlo, I will carry a gun, and at every moment the figures in that drama will come back to me obsessively: Livraga, covered in blood, walking along that unending alley through which he escaped death, and the other guy who saved himself by running across the fields, dodging the bullets, and the others who saved themselves without him knowing, and those who did not make it at all (Walsh 1972, 11-12).<sup>202</sup>

*Revolución Nacional* was a small magazine published by the Organo del Instituto de Cultura Obrera (the Organ of the Institute of Working Class Culture) with headquarters in a basement on Leandro Alem 282. Mostly union workers read the publication, thus its circulation was rather small, around 3,000. During the publication of *Operación Masacre*, however, it reached peaks of 6,000. *Revolución Nacional* was nationalistic in tone and deeply militant in its approach to the news. (Ferro 2000, 158).

"[The story] comes out unsigned, with a terrible layout, with the titles changed, but it finally comes out," Walsh recalled in the prologue to the 1972 edition (Walsh 1972, 13-14). But the lack of a byline in *Revolución Nacional* was mostly due to Walsh's need to remain under the radar of the military regime that was after him. At some point, however, Walsh started to add his initials –R.J.W.—at the bottom of the

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<sup>202</sup> Translations from *Operación Masacre* are mine.

page. But in the last week of February 1957, Wilfredo Rossi, a contributor with the same weekly, was arrested due to a confusion between his own initials –W. R.— and Walsh’s. After the incident Walsh started signing with his full name (Ferro 2000, 159-160).

In the 1972 prologue to the book, Walsh paid tribute –without naming him—to the editor who helped him publish the investigation: Luis Benito Cerrutti Costa (Ferro 1999, 130-31). He was, according to the writer, the only person who agreed to publish the piece, and he did it under a suggestive headline: “I was summarily executed as well.”<sup>203</sup> About him, Walsh wrote: “[...] I find a man who will dare publish it. Trembling and sweating, because he is no movie hero, but simply a man who dares, and that is much more than a movie hero” (Walsh 1972, 13). In that account Walsh also recalled the passivity and indifference with which the story was received by the mainstream media, and the sense of journalistic urgency that, despite all that indifference, made him carry along with the research and publication of the book.

I thought I was running a race against time. That any minute a newspaper was going to send a dozen reporters and photographers [to scoop me] just like in the movies [...] After twelve years you can check out the newspapers of that time and this story did not exist for them at all (Walsh 1972, 12-13).

After the investigation was published in full in *Revolución Nacional* Walsh started to work on the book. He shared some initial chapters with Noé Jitrik, a prestigious literary critic, who agreed to circulate them among opinion leaders and politicians

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<sup>203</sup> From the Spanish “Yo también fui fusilado.” Translation is mine.

of different parties in order to get some funding and support. Walsh and Jitrik estimated that the publication would cost around 45,000 pesos, but when it became clear that the needed contributions would never materialize, Walsh got in touch with Tulio and Bruno Jacovella, publishers of *Mayoría*, a weekly illustrated political magazine of Peronist background (Ferro 2000, 163).

On May 22, 1957, Walsh received an advance of 1,000 for the book, the first payment since he had started working on the story in 1956. And between May 27 and July 29, 1957 *Operación Masacre* appeared in *Mayoría*, for the first time under its current title, as a series of nine articles in a literary journalistic format (Ferro 2000, 163). The book came out in December, and was constantly modified by Walsh until 1972 (Ferro 2000, 164-5).

Talking about *Operación Masacre* that same year, Walsh described it as both an ideological tool and a journalistic investigation, incorporating it into the long series of Latin American literary nonfiction initiated by Sarmiento's *Facundo*:

I wrote this book for it to be published, for it to act... I researched and revealed these tremendous facts to publicize them as broadly as possible, for them to be considered thoughtfully, for them to never happen again (Walsh 1957, 9).

When I wrote this story I was 30 years old. I had already been a journalist for ten. Suddenly, I thought I had understood that all I had done before had nothing to do with what I had learned about journalism, but this last one investigation did –the quest, at risk of losing everything, of the deepest, most hidden and most painful testimony. This one book did match my idea [of what journalism had to be.] Following those same guidelines I immediately wrote a

second story, the *Satanowsky case*. It gained more notoriety but the results were the same; the crime was proven, the culprits at large.<sup>204</sup>

As David Foster has argued, reporting in repressive societies creates a number of hurdles not only in terms of the investigative process that nonfiction requires, but also and especially in terms of the “authorial stance towards one’s material” (Foster 1984, 42-43). Walsh’s book is a good example of the extent to which a politically repressive environment can condition not only the making but also the fabric of narrative nonfiction. Some of those structural qualities would become part of the definition on which the Instituto Cubano de Literatura y Lingüística would base, some years later, its definition of *testimonio* as a narrative genre.

### ***Operación Masacre* and the Morals of Death**

Death, in its imminence and its materiality, was an important aspect of *Operación Masacre*. Immediately after Walsh started working on the book in December 1956, he shared a draft of the preliminary report with San Sumerling, a correspondent working with the Associated Press. The American was expected to publish it in full in the U.S. in the event that Walsh was apprehended, tortured or killed (Ferro 2000, 145).

In the prologue to *Operación Masacre*’s second edition Walsh explained that he couldn’t figure out what was so appealing about the story of the massacre until he

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<sup>204</sup> Walsh. 1969. *Operación Masacre*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Buenos Aires: Jorge Álvarez. Cited by Ferro 2000, 165.

finally met Livraga. Seeing those marks on Livraga's face, the death that was indelibly inscribed in Livraga's skin, Walsh felt morally obliged to investigate the events of that night in José León Suárez.

I don't know what is so appealing about this story, so diffuse, so foreign to me, so studded with improbabilities. I don't know why I ask to speak to that man, why am I talking to Juan Carlos Livraga. But after talking to him I know. I look at that face, the hole in his cheek, the larger hole in his throat, his broken lips and the opaque eyes where remains, still floating, the shadow of death. I feel insulted in the same way I felt insulted when I heard that recruit yelling outside my window (Walsh 1957, 11).

Death, the one Livraga narrowly escaped but still marked his flesh, and the deaths of those who were killed that night, death in all its arbitrariness and complexity, is one of the recurring themes in Walsh's literary journalism. Death and the narrative of a "dead man talking" are for Walsh not only morally interesting, but also news worthy:

One ends up believing in the crime novels that has read or written and thinks that newsrooms are going to fight over a story like that, with a *dead man talking* (Walsh 1957, 11).<sup>205</sup>

Death in *Operación Masacre* is, on the one hand, a topic of journalistic interest and and political denunciation. But it is also a complex mechanism that provides a catalyst for Walsh's moral system. Through the narrative imposition of a death sentence or the execution of an arbitrary assassination, the two moral sides of Walsh's universe are revealed: the pole of justice and the pole of injustice. In other words, if a "legal death" can be the vehicle for justice and order, an "arbitrary death"

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<sup>205</sup> Translation of *Operación Masacre* is mine as well as the italics.

or an “unjust death” can have the exact opposite effect: it can create unrest and chaos. The unjust death also redeems the victim and turns him or her into a martyr or a saint. The death of Mario Brión in *Operación Masacre* is a good example of this mechanism. Brión, an innocent casualty of the executions of June 1956, with no political or militant background, is portrayed as a saint on chapter 27:

The night guard at the morgue was accustomed to seeing dead bodies. When he arrived that afternoon, however, there was something that had quite a vivid impact on him. The body of one of the men executed [in José León Suárez] had the arms open to the sides, the face lying on the shoulder. It was an oval face, with blond hair and a growing beard, a melancholic grin and a string of blood coming from the mouth.

He had a white jersey on, his name was Mario Brión and he looked like a Christ (Walsh 1957, 114).

A religious symbology dominates that visit to the morgue, which Walsh turns into a holy sepulcher with a Christ –Brión—buried in it and glowing inside. In fact, while Brión’s strictly journalistic story ends with his life and the legal confirmation of his death, Walsh “resurrects” Brión literarily. On chapter 29, when Brión’s father visits San Martín’s clinic to identify the corpse of his son, the authorities only let the old man see the body for a few seconds: “All of a sudden they uncovered the corpse and as suddenly as before they covered it back again” (Walsh 1957, 125). That quick, uncertain glimpse, opens a chain reaction of doubt in the mind of Mr. Brión’s, who a few days later starts receiving phone calls and messages telling him that his son is still alive (Walsh 1957, 124-126). Mario Brión, the purest, the least political of all victims according to Walsh’s account, is turned into a ghost, a spirit. He becomes one of the first saints in Walsh’s hagiography.

One of the ideas that prevail in many of Walsh's stories in which victims are portrayed as Christ-like, Virgin-Mary-like, maybe-resurrected figures, or even as dead men talking, is that death is not an absolute category. Both in his non-fiction literature and in his journalistic writings Walsh describes death as an ambiguous zone, a permeable territory, one from which characters –both real and fictional— can be redeemed.

### **The Vertical Death**

In Walsh's narratives there is also a graphic, almost conventional way to represent the moral quality of a dying –dead— character. Those characters that die standing on their feet are generally good, positive, brave and just. Those who die lying are bad, mean, cowardly and unjust. The degree of *verticality* at the moment of death maps in Walsh's narratives a spatial-moral canon, one in which heroes, villains and martyrs take the place they morally deserve.

The multiple deaths occurred during the summary executions narrated in *Operación Masacre* are represented by Walsh in various forms. Some of the victims die standing, others on their knees, others begging for mercy. Some of them, of course, escape.

The most paradigmatic among these executions and deaths are Brión's and Livraga's. Brión dies standing, in the middle of the garbage dumpster, dressed in white, bathed in a white halo of light: "Brión's sweater shines so white it's almost

incandescent" (Walsh 1957, 95). As we've seen above, Walsh resorts to this image several times, turning Brión's character into a resurrecting Christ.

Livraga, who was all dressed in black the night of the massacre, was however one of the victims who escaped the execution. And although Walsh describes him as factually alive in the journalistic account, the author surreptitiously displaces Livraga to an uncharted, intermediate territory between life and death, a place where he remains suspended:

Livraga cautiously starts cutting to the left. Step by step. He is dressed in black. All of a sudden, what seems like a miracle: the lights stop bothering him. He is out of the luminescent field. He is alone and he is almost invisible in the dark. Ten meters ahead there appears to be a ditch. If only he could reach it... (Walsh 1957, 95).

Livraga lies in the ditch, thus escaping the volley of shots.

Between Livraga and Brión Walsh builds a symbolic wall that develops into two different moral orders. Livraga, the "dead man talking," one of the survivors, carries the marks of death in his face. He is alive because he can still breathe, but he is also indelibly marked by a shameful shadow of death and cowardice –which in Walsh's system is another form of death. These marks will stick to Livraga throughout the entire book. Brión, on the other hand, faced his destiny standing on his feet, and is narratively turned into a martyr. Walsh invests in Brión all the external qualities of a saint.

On the literal level, the factual account, Walsh does describe Brión's death at the dumpster: "Brión has few possibilities to run away with his white sweater that shines in the night. We don't even know if he even tried" (Walsh 1957, 98). But after the massacre, Brión's character raises morally above all the rest. In Walsh's system Brión represents the innocent victim, immolating himself for some greater good, confronting his destiny with eyes wide open. The reward for his heroism merits, in Walsh's spatial-moral system, a type of literary canonization.

In his later work, Walsh applied this mechanism even more directly to two of his most important non-fictional characters: Eva Perón and Vicky Walsh, the writer's own daughter, who was killed in combat by a paramilitary task force in 1976.

"Esa mujer" ("That woman") is a 1963 short story in which Walsh—narrator and main character—appears looking for the secret burial place of Eva Perón's embalmed corpse.<sup>206</sup> The story is based on the dialogue "essentially real" between a "writer" (Walsh) and a "colonel" (probably Carlos Eugenio de Moorikoenig) who was the custodian of the body of "that woman" (Eva Perón), and had been in charge of protecting it from attempts by the CGT (the National Workers Union) to recover it, and from military groups who were trying to destroy it.<sup>207</sup> Many of the topics in this story go back to the origins of Latin American literary journalism, and the

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<sup>206</sup> Many de facto regimes after the ousting of Perón had banned the naming of both Perón and his deceased wife Eva. "That woman" becomes, in that sense, a direct reference to Eva Perón, not only within the context of the short story, but also on a historical plane.

<sup>207</sup> The body of Eva Perón was, in fact, embalmed and is still preserved in that state. And the political disputes around the body are essentially accurate, as are the movements to which the corpse was subject between the fall of Perón and the return of democracy to Argentina.

separation between civilization and barbarism installed as a literary leitmotif by Sarmiento's *Facundo*.

Discussing "Esa mujer," Argentine Critic Gonzalo Aguilar argued that Walsh wrote fiction when he couldn't fully unveil the journalistic truth (Aguilar 2000, 65). When he was able to solve the mystery, however, his narratives immediately became testimonial. "Esa mujer" was, for Aguilar, a good example of this logic: when, in the story, the Colonel decides not to reveal the final destination of Eva Peron's body, Walsh's fiction mechanisms are immediately released to reign free (Aguilar 2000, 65-66).

Although Eva Peron's death has already occurred at the time Walsh's narration begins, her body is still subject to an intense process of moral transfiguration, one that has no effect on the living characters in the story, Walsh and the Colonel.

The moral transfiguration of Evita's body starts when the colonel describes how shocking it was for him to see the naked corpse in the coffin: "she looked like a virgin."

The story pivots on the Colonel's account on how the body of "that woman" had to be transported to a series of different locations in order to keep it hidden. Along with the multiple changes in destination, the corpse suffers physical modifications, fractures, lacerations and blows that alter its exterior virginal look. But there are also processes that alter the corpse's virginal status on a moral level: at some point, for instance, the Colonel recalls that he found the embalmer "raping" the body. The

account of the eventful journey of “that woman’s” body ends up reading like a surreal Via Crucis. At the end of its pilgrimage, however, Eva’s body has mutated from its original virginal status into the masculinity and the strength of a warrior:

-She is standing! – the colonel shouts. I buried her standing on her feet, just like Facundo, because she was a macho!<sup>208</sup>

The reference to Facundo and the myth of Facundo Quiroga buried standing is not casual. The caudillo from La Rioja was, according to Sarmiento, “buried standing” like a warrior. And the connections between Eva Perón and Quiroga, Sarmiento’s quintessential model of barbarism, both displayed in all their verticality and masculinity, elevates Eva Perón to the stature of an ambivalent historical hero. Through this narrative device, Eva enters a mythical zone in Walsh’s literature. A zone in which the body, detached from its physicality, is also separated from its earthly limitations. After Eva’s masculinization, Walsh’s short story can finally operate its last transformation on her, canonizing her and turning the character into a saint.

Walsh also used this narrative device I will refer to as “literary canonization” in two other of his most memorable non-fictional texts: the two open letters he wrote to the military Juntas after the assassination of his daughter Vicky.

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<sup>208</sup> Walsh, Rodolfo. 1981. *Obra literaria completa*. Siglo XXI: México.

Throughout the letters, Vicky's character –just like Eva in “Esa mujer”—transitions from her original state of pure, delicate femininity into one of strong warrior-like masculinity, and finally from mortality to sanctity.

After working as a journalist for a short while, Walsh tells us three months after Vicky's death in “Letter to my friends,” Vicky became disenchanted with the profession and started to volunteer as a teacher and a social worker in the slums of Buenos Aires. “She came out of that experience converted to an impressive asceticism” (Link 1996, 244). This “ascetic conversion” had also the narrative power to start gradually blurring Vicky's female traits: “Vicky, just like so many other *boys* that suddenly became adults, had to jump from here to there, running away from one home to the next.” This is the first step in the process of Vicky's narrative canonization. “The sin was not to talk, but to turn yourself in,” Walsh adds later in the letter (Link 1996, 245). Of course, Vicky never turned herself in to the dictatorship, thus staying clear of sin.

A second step in Vicky's transformation lies in the account of her suicide. In a key passage of his letter, Walsh describes his daughter running out of ammo, standing on her feet, opening her arms in the shape of a cross, addressing her final words to the military patrol that had ambushed her and some other rebel friends at the door of their hideout. Walsh reconstructs the scene based on the “testimony of a conscript” that mysteriously reached him (Link 1996, 245).

The combat lasted more than an hour and a half. A man and a girl shot at us from the roof. We noticed the girl because, every time she shot a round at us and we dodged, we heard her laugh.

Suddenly there was silence –the soldier said. The girl dropped her machine gun, stepped up on the parapet and opened her arms. She was skinny, had short hair and was wearing nightgown. She started talking to us loudly but in a very calm voice. I don't remember exactly what she said. But I do remember the last phrase; in fact that phrase keeps me awake at night: 'You are not killing us –she said—we choose to die.' And then she and the man put their guns on their temples and killed themselves in front of us (Link 1996, 245-246).

Many are the possible references to religious narratives and iconography in this passage, which as a scene works like a pagan Sermon on the Mount. Vicky's nightgown and her thinness, her open arms and the speech to the crowd, and her self-immolation are only a few of the most salient connections between Walsh's account and the mythical religious scene in the New Testament.<sup>209</sup> But, in case there were any doubts, in the second to last paragraph of his letter Walsh interprets Vicky's act almost religiously: "Her death yes, her death was gloriously hers, and to this pride I commend myself, and it is me who is reborn from her" (Link 1996, 246).

Redemption through the death of a martyr –a political one in this case—is one of the directions in which much of Walsh's literary journalism can be read. Like a Christ who willingly submitted to death, Vicky sacrificed herself not only to save her peers, but also her father, her mother and a whole nation oppressed under the yoke of a violent dictatorship. As a character in Walsh's letter, Vicky also glorified herself and her cause in a supreme act of martyrdom. And, exactly like Eva Perón, or Mario Brión, she died and was immortalized by Walsh standing on her feet.

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<sup>209</sup> "The Sermon on the Mount" is in Matthew 5: 1-2 to 7: 7-29 in the *New Testament*.

### **Canon and Death, the Story and the History**

Walsh's narrative device of "literary canonization" and the efficacious use he made of a series of extremely powerful religious stereotypes in his literary journalism, his fiction and his letters have had a profound impact on how Argentines and Latin Americans in general have approached journalism, politics, literature and history after the return of democracy in the early 1980s.

The historical reports of Walsh's own death, for instance, tend to work in parallel with the author's testimonial accounts in *Operación Masacre*, "Esa mujer," and Vicky's death in the letters we've discussed above. The multiple stories and the historical truth of Walsh's assassination have been profusely contaminated with the myth of divine heroism that Walsh himself manufactured in his literary and journalistic work. During the Latin American democratic transition in the early eighties, this myth was also instrumental in the incorporation of Walsh's work to the Argentine and Latin American literary, political and journalistic canons.

An example of the extrapolation of these literary narratives into history (an operation that from Sarmiento's *Facundo* on has defined the amphibious nature of literary journalism in Latin America) are the collective efforts of some of the survivors of the clandestine detention and torture centers at the Navy Mechanics School, ESMA, to reconstruct Walsh's last hours. Not by chance, many of these

reconstructions follow Walsh's own narrative topoi and overlap with the spatial-moral canon the author developed throughout his literary journalistic work.<sup>210</sup>

According to some of those testimonies, a task force at the ESMA was commanded to capture Walsh alive in March 1977, to take him to the detention center and to extract from him as much information as possible before killing him. The writer, who had already spent a year hiding from the de facto government, was marked for torture and death. Caught by surprise at the entry of his hideout on the corner of San Juan and Entre Ríos, Walsh tried to resist and opened fire with a small caliber gun, a Walther PPK 22, but was gunned down by his aggressors (Verbitsky 2000, 25).

In 2006, the former ESMA detainee Ricardo Croquet added some relevant details to the narrative. According to Croquet the plan orchestrated by the task group was, in fact, to capture Walsh alive. Several undercover agents waited outside of Walsh's hideout and when he showed up, infamous torturer, Navy captain and rugby player Alfredo Astiz tried to tackle him down. Walsh –who had also played rugby— dodged the tackle and, still standing, managed to pull out the small gun from his pocket, opening fire and wounding one of his aggressors before being finally gunned down by them. Croquet, whose account came second hand from a supposed member of that task force, quoted his source directly:

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<sup>210</sup> These testimonies and many others were compiled in *Nunca Más (Never Again)* in which the Argentine CONADEP (National Commission for the Disappearance of People) recollected almost 500 direct accounts of survivors from abductions and torture between 1976 and 1983.

We took Walsh down. The motherfucker stood behind a tree and he shot back with a 22. We peppered him well, but he would never fall down the motherfucker.<sup>211</sup>

This was the version of Walsh's death that became the most widespread among family, colleagues, friends and the press.<sup>212</sup> It not only survived many other competing narratives, but also became the official story and is today an integral part of judicial testimonies, legal and official records. It is not by chance that it also works in parallel with Walsh's accounts of the deaths of many of his non-fictional characters, including his own daughter. Just like Vicky, Eva Perón and Mario Brión, Walsh met his destiny head on. And after dodging the treacherous tackle of an infamous torturer, he faced his death standing on his two feet.

In another open letter, the one Argentine writer Julio Cortázar dedicated to Walsh after his death, the writer imagined how vehemently Walsh would have opposed any form of posthumous tribute. "Here what counts is that the disappearance, the torture and the deaths transmutate into something different at this end of the thread..." Cortázar wrote.<sup>213</sup> That transmutation, that moral alchemy, was in fact started on paper by Walsh himself, but has ended up projecting him into history, legal documents and testimonies before judges, journalists and the public. Walsh's literary and historical canonization is a symbolic operation that, beginning in

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<sup>211</sup> Pagina 12. "Jaque a los asesinos de Walsh," July 21 2006.

<sup>212</sup> In 2010 a different version of Walsh's death was offered by a witness Miguel Angel Laurretta. This version denies the fire exchange between Walsh and the task group. This version is available at: <http://www.diasdehistoria.com.ar/content/veo-que-le-tira-un-cuerpo-en-la-vereda>.

<sup>213</sup> Cortázar, Julio: *La voz que no se apaga*, en Baschetti, Roberto, comp. Rodolfo Walsh Vivo, Buenos Aires, 1994.

Walsh's own writing, has incorporated his myth into the Latin American canon of literary journalism. This was a transmutation that, paradoxically, Walsh had already operated both on his fictional characters and, more efficiently, on his literary journalistic ones.

### **Latin American Narrative Nonfiction and the Concealed Narrator**

We have mentioned above that, due to persecution and threats, Walsh was forced to conceal the authorship of some of his journalistic work at time of publication, and at least for some time after that. We have also discussed how this concealment affected his journalistic narratives on a structural level.

When in 1955 Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez wrote *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*, originally a 14 consecutive day series of installments in *El Espectador*, the Colombian went through a similar predicament: his life was immediately put under threat by the military government of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. The threat "would almost cost my life," wrote García Márquez in a prologue added to the story when it was first published as a book in 1970.

*The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* was written in the first-person from the point of view of 20 year-old-sailor Luis Alejandro Velasco. It was originally signed by Velasco as its author, and told the story of how the young man, working for the Colombian Navy, survived 10 days adrift in the Caribbean Sea. The government had originally blamed a tropical storm for the incident that set Velasco adrift and cost

the lives of seven of his colleagues, but García Márquez' piece unveiled an official cover-up of the events surrounding the wreckage, putting the government in the spotlight. The deaths and Velasco's ten days adrift had, in fact, been caused by overweight contraband poorly distributed and inadequately lashed down on the deck, plus a number of other questionable practices customary for the Colombian navy of the day.

As García Márquez wrote in the 1987 prologue to his book, "the dictatorship took heat and orchestrated a series of drastic retaliations which would end a few months later with the closing of the newspaper" (García Márquez 1987, 7-13) And, a few months after that, with the author's exile in Paris.<sup>214</sup>

García Márquez' signature was first associated with the narrative when *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* was published as a book in 1970, which brings us back to the problem of authorship.

As Gisela Norat has intelligently pointed out, the question of "authorship" in testimonial literatures can be controversial "since the first stage of bearing witness in a 'testimonio' generally involves a recording of the subject's story by a professional (often a social scientist, journalist or writer) for later transcription because in many cases the informant lacks the skills to write the personal account" (Norat 2002, 64). But perhaps more interesting still, is the fact that this problem, that has been considered a structural conundrum inherent to testimonio, has actually

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<sup>214</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

preceded the consolidation of testimonio as a genre and was already present –for the multiple political reasons described above—in the works of literary journalism that anticipated it, notably Walsh’s and García Márquez’.

The concealed narrator, one of the defining features of testimonial literature, one that has been part of a long debate, was not originated in testimonio but in a factual narrative form that has historically predated it: literary journalism.

### **The intrinsically Aesthetic Purposes**

Although it is clear that both *Operación Masacre* and *Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* belong to the realm of long-form prose, in terms of their motivation, it would be hard to prove that these narratives were written for intrinsically aesthetic purposes. Both García Márquez’ and Walsh’s stories have a politically dominant undertone. They both transpire a sense of journalistic urgency, and humane disgust for the aberrations committed by the authoritarian regimes in their countries. In that sense, they both express deep concern for the dilemmas rooted in Latin America’s political instability, and they both –more or less clearly—display a moral vision that aims towards the democratic restoration in the region.

This anti-authoritarian undertone not only gives their stories an ethical imprint, but also makes them politically motivated, much more so than purely aesthetic. “[E]vidently, political denouncement translated into the art of novel becomes innocuous. It doesn’t bother anyone at all, meaning that it becomes sacralized as

art,” said Walsh during an interview with Argentine novelist Ricardo Piglia in January 1973 (Piglia 1998, 399). During the exchange, Walsh also argued against the novel –which he defined as an obsolete bourgeois form—in favor of more politically compromised narratives such as testimonio, which he thought were more in tune with Latin American reality.

In Buenos Aires in 1963 Walsh had joined the staff of editor Jorge Alvarez. This move proved central for his understanding of the bigger picture in Latin American narrative of the 1960s and 1970s. In those years Walsh read and edited some of the books that would make the revolutionary Latin American boom of magic realism. Walsh, Susana “Piri” Lugones, Julia “Chiquita” Constela, Rogelio “Pajarito” García Lupo, Joaquin “Quino” Salvador Lavado and Ricardo Piglia, were all part of that stellar team of readers and editors that helped popularize authors such as Mario Vargas Llosa (*Los Jefes*, was first published in Argentina by Jorge Alvarez in 1963), Manuel Puig, Abelardo Castillo, Juan José Saer, Oscar Masotta, David Viñas and, surely enough, Walsh himself, whose *Los oficios terrestres* was also published by Alvarez.

“We were all employees and we had huge hits, but we couldn’t keep the authors we discovered for ourselves [because] bigger publishers would lure them in with better [publishing] rights,” noted in a recent interview Jacobo Capelluto, Jorge Alvarez’ accountant. “We lacked the experience to deal with the cost of paper, the

lack of credit and the delays in payments [...] We never harvested what we sowed.”<sup>215</sup>

In those years Walsh would isolate himself in an island in Tigre to write, translate and work on a theory for a new Latin American literature, more popular and militant and less influenced by the representational canon of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thanks to Jorge Alvarez his work in short stories and long narrative literary journalism began to gain exposure, and was soon noticed by critics such as Uruguayan powerhouse Angel Rama, who praised *Operación Masacre* noting that what Walsh had “construed as a novel [had] autonomous literary value [but] at the same time [was] great, powerful journalism, some of the best [that had ever been written]” (Lafforgue 2000, 230).

The question of literary autonomy was one that preoccupied Walsh until the day he died. For him, literature, journalism and political action had to work in parallel. With that in mind, he returned to Cuba for the Congreso Cultural de la Habana of January 1968 and participated in the ninth edition of the Premio Casa de las Américas. In 1970, back in Havana, Walsh was finally elected as a jury for the Testimonio category of the award, which he helped to establish and was awarded that year for the first time. One of the books that Walsh had in mind while establishing the prize for testimonio was Miguel Barnet’s *Cimarrón. Cimarrón (The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave)* aimed exactly in the direction that Walsh had envisioned for a new Latin American literature.

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<sup>215</sup> *Clarín*, 2005. “Los libros del editor Jorge Alvarez, codiciados por los coleccionistas.” April 2, 2005.

Published in 1966 by the *Instituto de Etnología y Folklore* (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore) in Havana, *Cimarrón* was a documentary text with a clearly political subtext: “the documentation of both the authentic folk culture of Cuba that the revolution sought to recover, and the deplorable human conditions that justify the revolution and its subsequent programs” (Foster 1984, 51). Written in the first person in the voice of 104-year-old Esteban Montejo, a slave who hurled a stone at a slave driver in Spanish-controlled Cuba, and then fled into the mountains to live in solitude, the narrative tells the story of how Montejo came back to civilization to become a wage-earning peon, and finally, due to the dismal life under capitalism, joined the Cuban revolution of which –mainly thanks to Barnet—he became a symbol.

Barnet was aware of the impact that Montejo’s story would have on the imagery of the Cuban revolution. In a preface to the book, included in its 1987 edition, the writer quoted American anthropologist Oscar Lewis, author of the groundbreaking testimonial book *The Children of Sánchez*: “I think that I have proven that the lives of those men who belong to what Oscar Lewis called the culture of poverty, don’t always lack of the will of being, or of a historical conscience. And when they are anchored in the feelings of marginality, the flames of those lives show us the path to the future” (Barnet 1980, 214-15).<sup>216</sup> Through the reconstruction of Montejo’s troubles and tribulations, Barnet presented what he defined as “the portrayal of a

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<sup>216</sup> Translation from Spanish is mine.

whole class” and, eventually, of a whole nation, as well as the path for its liberation through the communist revolution.

In the context of the Castro regime, Montejo’s narrative became a literary benchmark. After its publication, Barnet entered the literary canon of the Cuban revolution and in the years that followed, in part thanks to Walsh, the Cuban gained acclaim as a cornerstone for Latin American testimonio. The framing of Montejo’s story as an autobiography put in parallel the lives of the slaves in the Spanish colony and the lives of the working classes under capitalism. Also, and by contrast, projected into the future the qualities and possibilities of a life under the new communist regime.<sup>217</sup> The dual political-artistic nature of the work was also noted by English writer Graham Greene in the prologue to the book’s first edition: “There wasn’t a book like this before, and it is quite improbable it will be repeated.” What Greene noticed, however, was the crystallization of an already established literary trend that had started in Latin America almost ten years before with political testimonio and the new literary journalism of Walsh and García Márquez.

In order to develop the twofold nature of his nonfiction, Barnet resorted to a particular strategy: he positioned himself as a mere scribe of Montejo’s story, giving “voice to the voiceless” slave. The absence of Barnet as a narrator in *Cimarrón* also created a rather seamless interplay between autobiographical documentary and

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<sup>217</sup> The book was first published under the name “Biografía de un Cimarrón” or “Biography of a Runaway Slave” in 1966. Its title later mutated into “Autobiografía de un Cimarrón” (the Autobiography of a Runaway Slave) and finally “Cimarrón.” These mutations speak in part of the evolution in the perception of testimonial narratives in Cuba and Latin America, and were the consequence of the broader debate about the documental possibilities open to nonfiction.

social narrative, adding yet a new dimension to an already problematic authorial category.

Montejo's symbolic status as a rebel against the institution of slavery, his participation in the struggle for Cuban independence, his membership of the Cuban Socialist Party, and, above all, his representations of the solidarity first of the black ethnic minority all attests to values promoted by the official mythopoesis of the Castro government (Foster 1984, 51-2).

Like Walsh and García Márquez, Barnet chose his subject not only for its particularities but mainly for its emblematic qualities. *Cimarrón* aimed at describing a common Cuban experience or, in Barnet's own words, it aimed at becoming a "sounding board for the collective memory of my country" (Barnet 1987, 212-5). In the same vein, many Latin American literary journalists were already aiming at describing those communal experiences, delineating and projecting through allegorical resonances the historical-dialectical development of the Latin American State. This narrative direction, in part a by-product of the intellectual debate conducted through *Casa de las Américas* and heavily influenced by Georg Lukács' *Theory of the Novel*, greatly differed from the "atypicality" of the characters and stories portrayed by the American narrative journalism, which in the end assumed neither a shared reality nor a self-evident, sui generis existence within a shared reality.

The political context in the region also created a common setting for Latin American literary nonfiction. It was the backdrop for a collective experience that had to be rebuilt, restored, and reincorporated into the official records. Literary journalism in Latin America emerged precisely as the means to recreate a political

memory that had been challenged, silenced, annulled, and often times deleted from the official records by long series of authoritarian, anti-democratic governments. By hijacking democracy and the market, an action both political and economic, by restraining the freedom of speech and the potential for realization in a free exchange of ideas –and products—the military governments in the region indirectly reverted the division of intellectual labor to a pre-modern situation.

The task of recreating a political memory, one that Walsh, García Márquez and Barnet –among many others—undertook, couldn't then possibly stay separated from politics, one of the main reasons for which literature, journalism and political action, following the tradition of Sarmiento and Martí, regained their profound interconnectedness in those years of political turmoil.

However strong, though, this connection between literature, journalism and politics still had its limits. As Barnet wrote in his 1987 prologue to *Cimarrón*, testimonial narratives couldn't generally offer much more than a synthesis of some of the aspects of the Latin American problem. "Social solutions –he added—are the mandatory duty of politicians" (Barnet 1987, 214).

### **Reporting and Narrative Distance. The Matrix of Proximity**

As we discussed above, during the 1960s and 1970s American literary journalism authors showed their authority and command over their subjects through the display of their personal connection with their topics. This personal investment was

usually displayed through the first person narrative, which clearly was not even remotely a new device. Stephen Crane had used his personal experience as the main source of his nonfiction. Mark Twain, particularly during his time as a traveling correspondent for the *San Francisco Alta California* also focused on revealing the true nature of the places he visited and the people he met using the first person narrative. “Like Whitman –writes Shelley Fisher Fishkin—Twain was disturbed by people’s willingness, as Whitman had put it, ‘to take things at second or third hand,’ ‘to look through the eyes of the dead... [and] feed on the spectres in books” (Fisher Fishkin 1985, 66-67).

The figure of the narrator-protagonist is geared towards reducing the distance between the implied author and the text. The physical, temporal and personal proximity between the author and the events he narrates, between the author, his subjects and their stories, also creates a *metonymical* narrative axis.<sup>218</sup> By proximity, the Anglo-American narrative journalism author gains authority, knowledge and command over topics and subjects. S/He can say: *I see this, I am here, I know this*. In that same direction, the Anglo-American literary nonfiction tradition has become

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<sup>218</sup> A metonymy, just like a metaphor, is a displacement of meaning. But it’s a very particular one. In a metonymy the object receives its attributes from the referent by contiguity, by proximity. In the phrase “the lands belong to the *crown*” the *crown* is a metonymy of *the king*, which is usually in physical contact with his *crown*. The *crown* is also a metaphor of power, or ownership, but its metaphoric (purely symbolic) nature is arbitrary. There is nothing in the crown itself that intrinsically gives any right of ownership above anything to its possessor, unless he is, in fact, the king. A metaphor doesn’t require any type of physical proximity between the object and its referent, and associates them arbitrarily or, in other words, by convention. For a detailed explanation of the different semiotic displacements involved in a metaphor and a metonymy see Eliseo Verón, *La sémiotique sociale. Fragments d’une théorie de la discursivité*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1988. In his book Verón compares with succinct clarity Saussure’s, Peirce’s and Frege’s theories of sign, and their notions of metaphorical and metonymical constructions.

an experiential record of a time as seen, suffered, and enjoyed by its direct witnesses.

In the Latin American tradition of literary journalism, although some components remain the same, the narrative matrix is substantially different. As marginal counterbalances of an official, hegemonic narrative, these texts strive to show themselves free from subjectivity as much as possible. The clearest example, once again, is Walsh's *Operación Masacre*, where the impersonal dominance the narrator exerts over the different points of view makes them all converge into one conclusion: the government has committed a crime against its citizens.

In this type of Latin American narrative nonfiction, the authors operate under the premise of distancing themselves from the events they talk about. Even when some of these stories resort to the first person narrative, they still usually gravitate around a *metaphorical axis*, using factuality on an allegorical level. It's as if they were saying: *this story actually happened, and this is its meaning in the present context*. Latin American literary journalism works as an allegorical account of the present, through the narration of past events, which can either be fully loaded with political undertones or plainly interpreted as a novelized historical record. This is what we found from Sarmiento to Walsh.<sup>219</sup>

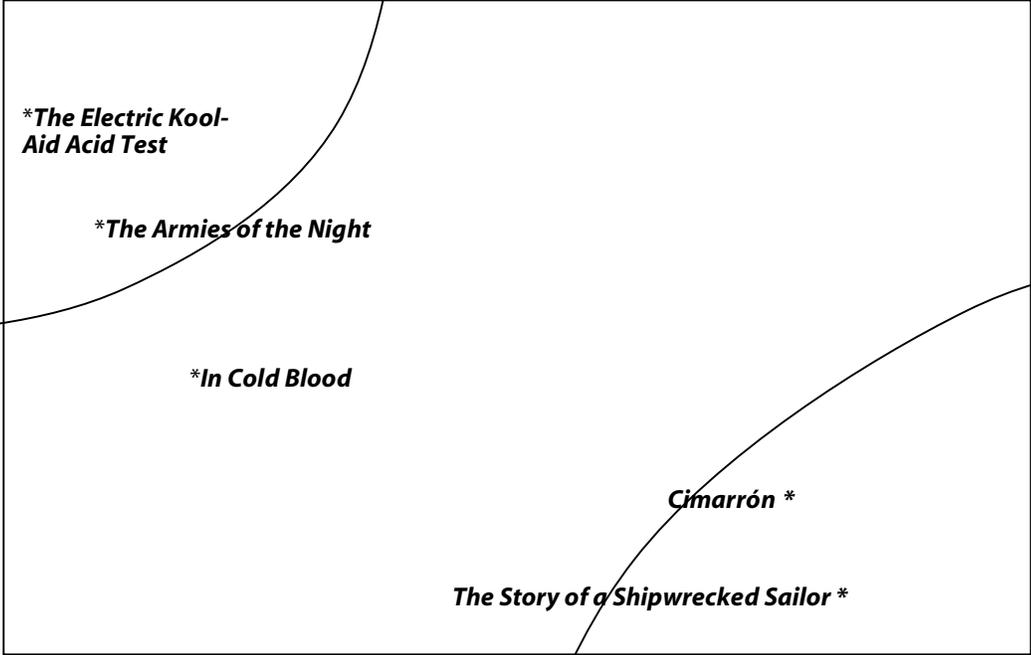
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<sup>219</sup> Of course, the fact that the construction of narrative journalism in the Anglo-American tradition gravitates around a metonymical axis does not prevent metaphorical occurrences at the narrative level. This is also clear from Mark Twain to Gay Talese. And the same is valid for Latin American literary journalism narratives, which although tend to gravitate discursively around a metaphorical axis, can still resort to metonymy – why not—on the narrative level.

**Matrix of proximity**

**-I-Here-Now.  
-Author-Witness.  
-Sociological-  
ethnographic record.**

**METONYMYCAL AXIS**



**\*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test**

**\*The Armies of the Night**

**\*In Cold Blood**

**Cimarrón \***

**The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor \***

**Operación Masacre \***

**METAPHORICAL AXIS**

**-They-There-Sometime ago.  
-Author-Moralist.  
-Ethnographic-political  
teleology.**

**The Official Story?**

As we have discussed in the past few sections of this work, many of the structural features of Latin American literary journalism can be traced back to a political-historical-communicational origin, but they also need to be connected to a literary tradition. Both Latin American and Anglo-American nonfiction resort to similar techniques, of which scenic construction and full dialogue transcription are the most evident. However, there is a general contextual and ideological substrate –a central part of that tradition—that enhances the structural disparities.

These disparities, which receded between the 1910s and the 1930s, grew stronger in the years that followed due to the politically oppressive climate in Latin America first, and as a direct consequence Cuban revolution and the programmatic approach to literature fostered by Casa de las Américas later. These events ended up confirming that in Latin America the sphere of culture and the sphere of politics did not (could not?) function with total autonomy.

Institutionalized and legitimized by Casa de las Américas, testimonial literature was conceived and fostered –following literary journalism—with a political finality, and could not be analyzed in merely artistic terms. In that vein, it could also be argued that, historically, most Latin American documental narratives were also born in contexts of a strong push towards modernization (from Sarmiento to Walsh, the desire for progress, modernization and democracy have been constant preoccupations). Since its inception Latin American literary journalism grew subordinated to politics. As authoritarianism spread across the subcontinent, the efforts to develop this form of nonfiction were usually hindered, banished, prosecuted and silenced. And it was, as noticed above, certainly due to the

authoritarian advent that testimonial narratives turned into an even more metaphorical direction.

Unlike, for instance, the acts of violence in *In Cold Blood*, which most critics –and Capote himself—have considered inexplicable, the ones Walsh describes in *Operación Masacre* have a direct explanation in Argentine contemporary politics (Foster, 1984). The political backdrop and the violence of the authoritarian regime, work as context and, ultimately, as the final explanation for the crimes described in these narratives.

Latin American narrative journalism, therefore, oscillates between the “official story,” which is a false account produced by the government, a masking of the violence that emanates from the authoritarian state, and the “fictionalized account” of the real story, which contradicts the official statements and unveils the truth. As long as they remain marginal, Latin American narrative nonfiction accounts are tolerated by the authoritarian power. When these stories gain popularity, and their power to negate the official narrative increases, the stories and their authors start suffering prosecution, banishment and censorship.

In part due to this politicization, the role of the author-protagonist in Latin American nonfiction has become much more problematic and intricate than it is in the Anglo-American tradition.

Latin American nonfiction, which was equally prepared to record and track social changes during the 1960s and 1970s, had from its inception a much more political

nature. Its political pro-activity made the genre more prone to an external political finality. In that vein, testimonial literature, an offspring of literary journalism, remained for the most part outside of the realm of pure art, and was continually judged, evaluated and characterized through a moral-political lens. Both literary journalism and testimonio, though, have been from their inception moral-political and literary forms inscribed within a limited teleology: just like the contraband that caused the wreckage in García Márquez' story, the central goal of these narrative types in Latin America, these journalistic "contraband truths" in the words of David William Foster, was to contribute to the wreckage of the authoritarian state in the subcontinent. A goal that wouldn't be realized until the first years of the 1980s.

## **Conclusions**

If journalism develops concomitantly with democracy and the markets, an idea that has proven its productivity in American journalism studies, it could follow that journalism adopts its own particular identity, and perhaps even a different set of core values, when it emerges in pre-democratic societies, if it develops during periods in time when democracy and the markets are not fully integrated, or when that integration is being put into question, fractured or simply arrested.

But there is a problem in that materialistic argument that can only be fully appreciated after the multiple observations we've made throughout this work, and are at the core of this dissertation. We've seen throughout this dissertation that despite the multiple discontinuities and transitions in the democratic-market continuum in Latin America, a region constantly riddled with political instability, literary journalism has maintained a core of guiding principles not too distant from the ones dominant in the United States. Yes: in Latin America, journalistic forms, practices and genres have changed, developed and matured accommodating to political and economic shifts, while democracies were hijacked by dictatorial powers, or the markets seized over by the public sector. Still, literary journalism –or at least a significant part of it—kept alive its alliance with democratic values, freedom of expression, the public good, justice and truth. As a genre, it was true to its foundational values, which aimed for the establishment and consolidation of democratic regimes in the former colonies.

It was argued throughout this dissertation that social and political circumstances could shape the tone and the fabric of literary journalistic narratives. Thus for many of the authors we have introduced in this work, producing literary journalism under oppressive political regimes required a strategic combination of both enunciative distance between themselves and the events they wrote about, and research proximity with the subjects of their investigation. Curiously enough, however, even when resorting to the first narrative person in times of relative freedom and social stability, these same authors produced journalistic accounts that tended to gravitate around a metaphorical axis, presenting factual stories under a heavy allegorical imprint.

This is where the materialistic approach should perhaps give way to a more complex conceptualization of the development of journalism and other narrative forms.

In a study written in 1898, French sociologist Émile Durkheim asked himself a similar question about another type of social institution: religion. In “*Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives*,” a text that anticipated his later approach to social institutions, Durkheim wondered why, although originated in certain aspects of material life, second order representations – complex social norms, rules, genres and ideas—eventually gained autonomy from it. He proposed that, once established and constituted, these forms usually evolved following their own direction, sometimes influenced by structural conditions, but most other times as a result of their autonomous life as representations (Durkheim 1898, 20).

Literary journalism as a genre –a second order representation using Durkheim’s terminology—has followed a distinct path of development, certainly connected to the historical reality of Latin America but no less autonomous than its counterpart in the United States. Due to institutional instability, on the one hand, but also to a literary tradition and a literary history of its own, on the other, literary journalism in Latin America has evolved as an allegorical account of the present; a narrative form that could either be read as richly riddled with political undertones or plainly interpreted as a novelized historical record, dispossessed from any political anchorage in the present.

This tension between tradition and the present, but also between the *story* (what is actually *narrated*) and the *History* (what the story *means to discuss*) has been at the center of this genre since its earliest manifestations. Despite many variations and changes, a compromise with democratic values has also remained at its core. Justice, truth, freedom and the public good, we have seen in this study, have been some of the leading forces of literary journalism in Latin America, either floating on the narrative surface of its texts, or palpitating underneath the heavy waves of rhetoric and a more or less oblique approach to facts.

These observations, however, don’t shatter the main premise upon which this dissertation was based: the fact that democracy and market capitalism are central elements in the consolidation of a strong modern journalism. But the revision of how literary journalism as a genre has evolved throughout different historical periods in Latin America, under governments that were at times open and

democratic, and at times severely repressive, definitely speaks to a less restrictive, perhaps even liberating idea of how the processes of communication are shaped in our societies, and to the relative independence that certain values and notions – democracy, the common good—have from the material political and economic historical structure; an independence that has appeared once and again when Latin American literary journalism was confronted with the constraints and limitations of long-lasting coercive political and economic structures.

**-But, is it Journalism?**

**-Well... define journalism!**

The expansion and interconnectedness of our world today are confronting us directly with different, new and vibrant journalistic models. Unfortunately, some scholars have taken the easy road of dismissing and disqualifying as journalism narratives, traditions and genres that, although not resembling the ones they've grown accustomed to in the West, have long been considered journalism in their societies of origin. Narratives that were undoubtedly read as journalism by those who lived and worked in those places under those traditions, political and social regimes.

This form of intellectual chauvinism, which also dismisses narrative forms that, despite not being part of the dominant traditions, are also at the historical core of international journalism, is a shortcoming in which 21<sup>st</sup> century communications scholars can't afford to indulge any longer. In their own particular way, many of

these narratives still respond to what we consider journalism today, a discursive form that is geared to both creating the conditions of justice and finding the truth. A truth that sometimes is called "objective," and some other times is called "the voice of the people." A quest that honorable, committed men and women have made their own despite challenges and risks, in pursuit of the greater good of their communities and societies.

Journalism is not an abstraction. It is a practice that takes place in societies, within a historical context, under particular political settings. Like any other human pursuit, journalism is not a self-defined and self-contained entelechy that moves across space and time without changes or contradictions. It is an activity of men, deeply connected with their historical circumstances. It is an activity permeated by political, social and technological processes, which like tectonic plaques, are in constant shift and movement. This state of perpetual change makes journalism rich and dynamic, full of inconsistencies, tension and chaos. Journalism is a human undertaking in constant redefinition, crossed by personal and collective interests; an activity through which we not only express our ideas about the present, but also our deepest fears and our most visionary dreams. As such, journalism has also the potential to define who we are as a people, and to have a profound imprint on the societies we live in.

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