

# THE LINEAGE OF ARGENTINIAN LITERATURE

## I. SCENE AND DRAMATIS PERSONAE

"But in the history of cross-breeding, the union effected outside marriage was of infinitely greater importance. The tales of the chroniclers and missionaries often paint a dark picture of the relations between conqueror and Indian woman—rape, kidnapping, sale and exchange of women, a system of concubinage and harems etc." (Angel Rosenblatt, *La Población indígena de América*)

"There is racial conflict in Latin America and racial harmony which can be seen only by those who have eyes. The governments and the people themselves see them only very late." (Sarmiento, *Conflicto y Armonías de las razas en América*)

The colonial period left no fertile seeds for a culture in the soil of South America. As Ricardo Rojas assures us, "We do not find a single imaginative work in prose in these three hundred years."

Translated by Hans Haal.

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"All of our colonial literature is confined within the limits of the historical genre...everything in it is the unfolding of a chronicle. To fix the memory of social facts, memorials were written to military conquests and hagiographies of spiritual ones, poems on the English invasions and the emancipation of America. Even the brief erotic and religious poems are only monuments in verse, and so are Tejeda's works whose autobiographical character cannot be denied." (*La Literatura Argentina*)

The introduction of imaginative or explanatory works and, in general, of works in Castilian was expressly forbidden.<sup>1</sup> The impoverishment of spiritual life in the Viceroyalty of the Plate River was systematically effected by the Indian Laws and by the concomitant regulations of the local political and ecclesiastical authorities. It was therefore not just due to lack of supplies from the country where the language and the conquerors came from. All communication was cut off with the sources of traditional and spiritual life, or limited to the personal influx of the conquerors and the oral contributions of the colonists who also brought with them folklore material from the Iberian peninsula.<sup>2</sup>

Literature and life came to be separated very early. The knights did not believe that their life was worth the labor of putting it in writing or that this was the proper thing to do.

<sup>1</sup> "If today one of those human beehives that are called colonies came to be located in these independent territories on the usual condition that they be worked and populated, it is natural that Spain, the mother country, would not look kindly at her sons diverting themselves in the new world with the reading of songs and books of chivalry which, before dying under the pen of your namesake Cervantes, had already been forbidden in America so that their importation would not foster the quixotic spirit of chivalry. In spite of those prohibitions, we have not been free from books for the guitar or from romances in which the deeds of evildoers are sung as if they were feats of prowess by Christian heroes." Letter of Juan María Gutiérrez to Dr. Alejandro Magariños Cervantes, Oct. 28, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> "These novels which sought to entertain by exalting fraud, theft and bluff as national prototypes were the most vigorous manifestation of the Spanish genius and at the same time the most original, as witnessed by the influence they enjoyed for two centuries over European literature, both through the large number of translations and the imitations they inspired. The Spanish picaresque novel became an international genre and owed its success as much to its contrasting effect with the champions of chivalresque fiction as to the realistic elements of which it was composed." (Leopoldo Lugones, *El Imperio Jesuítico*)

The chroniclers would deal with it—though very few did, and in passing as transient observers and travelers. The witness who could tell the truth and relate it in an attractive and original form did not know how to write. When letters and life tried to meet and unite, each continued to preserve its privileges. The knights had to wait for the English, whom they drove back, to tell of their life in a foreign language. Since then, life and writing did not fraternize, though they met occasionally and tried to get along with each other. There may have been cultured men—a mere hypothesis—but there cannot have been a culture.

If the late stage in the flowering, in literature, of the spiritual life of the Plate River coincided with the first contact with the life of the people during the invasions and the war of independence, we must also place there at the same time the nefarious influence of Spanish literary forms, for emancipation brought us at the same time the new yoke of a rhetoric which must have had the dazzle of novelty. The conquerors were Quintana, Cienfuegos and Gallego. That heterogeneous people of whites and Indians, Negroes, mulattoes and half-breeds did not have any social traditions either, or any rules of life other than those generated outdoors.

In this order of spiritual phenomena, the themes underlie all the plastic and emotive elements which form a language. The themes enter into the language, and the speaker is a passively receiving subject who neither creates nor assimilates but learns. During the English invasions, Spanish poetic forms—exemplified most effectively by the poets I have mentioned—flourished in the intellectual life of Argentina. Juan Nicasio Gallego sang, from Spain, of the heroic resistance of the city of Buenos Aires. The reconquest and the revolution were versified in these routine forms, but with a cold mind and in cold language, and the praises of the men who led the people were sung in the mechanical phraseology of hack writers and pettifoggers. Love, faith and sincerity continued to be absent. Other compositions—not within the courtly tradition—celebrated both events in the same spirit and in the same form—the spirit and form they also had to endure when the new theme of independence replaced that of liberation, or when reorganization replaced

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the tyranny of Rosas as a theme. Finally, the themes also entailed a rhetoric, even though they were taken from the ordinary facts of everyday life if they did not respond to a new human condition in society.<sup>3</sup>

What is important for a culture is the psychological contents that are closely tied to the temper of the language and to the ways of speaking with which they are employed in literary work and which are the themes themselves. An evident proof is that poetry, as shaped by Quintana, Cienfuegos, Meléndez Valdés, Gallego and, subsequently, Espronceda and Zorrilla, did not only survive the disappearance of the previous political order and the corresponding "ideology," but swept away with it, in the crystallized formulas of versification, the Spanish sensibility inside the themes of revolution and exile. This is what I call, in Lord Bacon's words, the *idola fori*—those dies for coining phrases.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "There could be no American literature while Spanish rule lasted; no colony can have its own literature, for the existence it enjoys is not its own and literature is no more than the expression of the conditions and elements of social existence. The colonial mind, like colonial arms and the colonial soil, produce only for the mother country and receive from her their customs and laws, preoccupations and beliefs. If some intellectual light illuminates it, it is only a reflection—pallid, however brilliant it may be—of the great luminary of which it is a satellite. What did we hear, on the banks of our Plate River prior to 1810? Faint echoes of the songs rising from the shores of the Manzanares." (Florencio Varela, *Informe de la comisión clasificadora del certamen de Mayo, 1841*, Montevideo)

<sup>4</sup> I cannot take the time in this work to develop the theme, which is here adumbrated, of the fixation of an ideology constituted by "idols," the very idols of the great English philosopher—*idola tribus* (of the species and the race), *idola fori* (of language and its myths), *idola theatri* (of philosophy, dogmas and beliefs) and *idola specus* (formed by the individual by himself). But I must warn the reader about the terminology to be employed in what follows—that of psychoanalytic complexes which in other aspects are correlated with prejudices, as they are with the conditioned reflexes of Pavlov. After studying the historical processes and the strange phenomena of life in Argentina, I have deduced, from the existence in our social life of such a powerful ideology (as already noted in my *Radiografía de la Pampa, 1933*) certain essential characteristics which manifest themselves in the long lines of our cultural, and especially our literary, evolution and among which are to be found fear, domestic reserve, vanity, haughty behavior, uprootedness, disenchantment, etc. I will reexamine them presently in a summary fashion and strictly with reference to literature alone.

The brave assault of the English travelers and the Gaucho poets was shattered before these ramparts.

But there is not only a written literature, but folklore and the ephemeral forms which become more or less popular and disappear without leaving a trace—forms which the people invent and which vanish among them. We had no folklore either; we neither read nor sang. The lack of literary documents could serve as indisputable evidence that there is no barely rudimentary literary culture and that literature does not penetrate to the bottom of popular sensibility or can, for that matter, survive the disappearance of the writer. To me, folklore is the most powerful root that fastens mankind to the earth, for it is precisely the expression of that root. Although the folklore of primitive peoples shows it to be the supremely stable and universal element, we would seek in vain for it in our prehistory. That lethargic, embryonic, state of “folk literature” when it has not yet been fixed in writing is a positive, normative state in the absence of a solidly established—a “formed”—culture, as in Mexico, Peru and Guatemala. Ethnic unity is indispensable for it, no matter what the type or development of the culture may be, for the people are the subject and culture the predicate.

The poverty, not to say misery, of our folk literature increases our penury caused by the lack of works of merit written in the country or about it—works that would capture its communal life, as in the other viceroalties or even in the captaincies of Chile and Caracas. To conclude then, the mothers of literature are the illiterate.

But we would be deceiving ourselves if we were to believe that the colonial period had left no traces in our culture (and

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To show that this is not something arbitrary on my part or a collective mental state proper and peculiar to my country, I will only cite Hans Barth's explanation, in his book *Truth and Ideology*: “In the eyes of the men of the French Enlightenment, *prejudice* had a twofold effect. In the first place, it kept the *subject* from knowing the state and society since he saw himself obliged beforehand to select, interpret and evaluate the fact in a certain way, in accordance with the preconceived opinions of his estate and profession. In the second place, prejudice also impeded knowledge on the side of the *object*; for society and the state have an interest in the ways and means of presenting themselves. Finally, both functions unite in concealing the true rational order of human existence.”

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therefore, in our literature), though they are no easier to discern today than in our politics, economics, laws or customs. Nor can a foreign reader embrace this opinion. While no written work has remained to influence subsequent writers, a mentality, a taste, a Spanish complex of acceptance and rejection which fits in with our peculiarity as a nation have remained.

The persistence of Spanish themes and, much more important, of external Spanish ways of thinking, feeling and saying in our poetry can logically be attributed to two main causes: The first is the lack of native or autochthonous literary elements of any value, together with the fact that there is little interest in the enterprise of occupying territories without natural resources or without their own forms of civilization and social life (hence partly the permanent mobility of all the inhabitants). The second is the adoption, with the Spanish language, of external and internal forms of the sparse Spanish literary culture and its harsh folklore, but without awareness of the American conditions that sift them, and with the difference that folklore there is very rich, but lacks here the important agent of feminine transmission.

The mixed population of the remote cities and the countryside contributed to the sterility of mind for literature and constituted a native factor refractory to the quest for knowledge or frank communication. The half-breeds grew up with a superiority complex which made them cautious and sparing in word and deed, provided it fell outside the range of their daily vital needs. They only sang in making *pulque*, with a guitar or after drinking. The lives of the peasant and the villager had no past prior to the fathers and never found in themselves the elements of beauty and satisfaction that would at least allow them to enjoy the spectacle of landscapes, things and creatures. This is why our William Henry Hudson is an incredible and almost miraculous exception. The individual lived without surroundings and without before or after. At best he remembered a few proverbs (America is the continent where the proverb is ignored and never embodied in speech) and elaborated a few sayings in a story into which he poured all his ingenuity and experience. Martín Fierro derived pure pleasure from proverbs.

This is the natural resistance of the popular soul, an armor

of satisfied ignorance, which no one has yet been able to overcome. It is a lack of education in sensibility which the schools cannot supply, an impermeability of the ethnic character, the ethos, the national soul, which in the best of cases makes culture a personal possession.

This hypothesis is suggested by Gaucho poetry which, because of its mechanical nature, seems to come from the Spanish tradition, but also, because of its spirit, from the good tradition, the picaresque. Both forms of poverty in literature, whether folk or art, transcend sterility on the spiritual level, but lack organs because they lack a necessary function. It can thus be said that the Plate River not only lacked the chronicles and written works common or even abundant in other parts of the colonies, but it did not even have the indispensable human basis to sustain them after they had been created. Does this mean that the people were lacking?<sup>5</sup>

## II. THE INTENT TO FORM A COUNTRY WITHOUT PEOPLE

The revolution was therefore unable to create a political and legal awareness of emancipation, or the consequent forms of a substantial culture based on the people and inspired by the new republican status. Many struggled and perished in their efforts to plant or transplant in untilled soil, in an inhospitable climate, the branches they knew not how to graft. As Juan Agustín García has said (in *Sobre nuestra incultura*), "... hothouse plants, born and raised in an artificial environment by some lucky chance—Alberdi, López, Gutiérrez, Echeverría."<sup>6</sup>

The literature of independence, being derived from Iberian

<sup>5</sup> "During the whole colonial period, the aristocrats, or as they were then called, *the men of figure and soil* drifted off into a soft slumber and could not be roused. They lived in brutish static repose while the lower classes stirred and led a stubborn fight for the most elementary necessities of life. They fought against Indians, half-wild animals, against the same lord of the village who persecuted them and took three quarters of the fruits of their labor." (José María Ramos Mejía, *Las multitudes argentinas*)

<sup>6</sup> It may be added that Sarmiento, Avellaneda, Mansilla, Estrada, Groussac, Larreta, Lugones, Banchs, Borges and many more, possibly the best, were exotic in another sense.

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poetry, was neither republican nor American and represented for the uncultured masses, for the entire population with the numerically insignificant exception of the leading figures in government, business and the church, an imported product, strange and unsuspected, that entered by puncture and not by absorption. The people of the interior, of the whole viceroyalty except the capital cities, had received the revolutionary thought and feeling as something violent and contrary to their nature. If the English invasions had not been driven back three years earlier, and if this event had not been celebrated with a great many festivities and with songs that traveled as far as the borders of the territory, the people would quite possibly not have supported the cause of liberty with so much enthusiasm and self-denial when the armed citizens took the cause to the countryside. The *Dialogues* of Hidalgo are the most precious and valuable testimony in this respect. Moreover, while all this was extremely important in that it created a climate and defined a country in which all could live together in peace, it was an affair of the crown, of Spain, of the king. With the leaders and with Rosas, this mixture of equivocal sentiments was polarized in two sectors—the Argentine-American and the Argentine-European. And this happened precisely without literature and even against it and its representatives. At this point, the symbiosis of the Spanish and the Argentinian becomes even incomprehensible, for they are not so much two conjugated terms as a new formula. The resident members of the literary salon of Marcos Sastre and the corresponding members, especially Sarmiento, inculcated the erroneous view that the colonies had been Spain in America without noting that they had been, rather, America remodeled after Spain. The colonies are not descended from the same stock as Spain *more hispanico*. The resident members were in general renegades, except for the officials who continued to be loyal; but this is not what the people were. Hence Rosas was more American than the revolutionaries and more Argentinian than the patriots. His was a no man's land, fallow and untilled, almost wholly undiscovered and unpopulated, condemned to cultural brutishness and destined by fate to rouse the fury of the Indians.

To pass into the new state of mind, the republican, immense



difficulties had to be overcome, many of which are still unsettled in spite of many painful crises. It cannot be said that literature has helped to form our consciousness of what we are rather than of what we think we are. The colonial mind persisted for a very long time, and as those of us who know ourselves well think, it may still subsist. We continue to inhabit a territory whose greater extent is unexplored; we are ignorant of its choreography, we fix our gaze on the coast, the frontier of the immigrants, and use Buenos Aires as a super-patron of culture and wealth; we live but take no roots and are guests, not citizens. We are an immense floating island of uprooted plants, drifting.

A world inhabited by men who have not even been discovered yet in their spiritual values beyond the elemental human need to live in society may be invested with a spiritual meaning but does not have this meaning in the experience of its inhabitants. This world of ours lacked beauty till the English travelers came in search of minerals and discovered it—not, of course, in a literary frame of mind—and it still continues to be covered up by the conventional forms which are supposed to give it a greater value. In literature and the arts, we are engaged in the “search for our expression” (Henríquez Ureña). The first eyes to contemplate it, those of the chroniclers, were fixed for centuries on its ugliness—so deeply that when its beauty came to be discovered—for it had great beauty, even if not that of the Sunday painters—it had to be embellished. No Argentinian writer, with the exception of William Henry Hudson, the greatest and purest of them all, has conformed to the truth, for the truth was conditioned by the way the disillusioned chroniclers saw it or by one’s eagerness to dominate it in accordance with one’s personal taste or one’s conception of the good and the beautiful. Better put, those who did not accept the vision of the chroniclers but could not accept reality either—the historians and the profusion of disenchanted poets—did not use a personal sense of value but a conventional canon. Equally guilty for this unforgivable *trahison des clercs* were the intellectuals—the writers and teachers who allowed such easy tricks to be played and thereby encouraged the politicians at it; for we do not know who or where we are, what belongs to us or what is alien. The betrayal of the intellectuals promoted, and continues to promote,

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that delusive vision that makes one overrate escapist works, those encomia and apologies that turn their back on the lives of humble folk while telling their story in the form of a novel. In creating their taboos under the power of their ideology of values, they have consecrated as holy whatever fitted in with the exploitation of earth, man or cattle, and they have confirmed as taboo whatever has been considered contemptible and barbarous since the conquest. The sense of "barbarous" which Sarmiento coined for everything popular and accepted without reservation is, in spite of the change in terminology, of Spanish origin. There is not a single literary work that reproduces the features of rural life, even the picturesque ones, as the Gaucho poets sketch them and as Ramos Mejía confirms it in the above-cited work: "The people who dwell in the straw huts of prehistoric construction that are bunched together in those villages lead a vegetative and savage life, like the rest of their species isolated in the uncultivated desert of the three coastal regions." (cf. López, *Historia Argentina*) "Neglect and poverty held the whole country subject to fear and humiliation, and in this depressing atmosphere, with the customs degraded, property insecure, the family uncertain and trembling—if that irregular system of polygamy on the Pampas could be called a family—every spark of civilization and order had gradually become extinguished." (*Ibidem*)

The betrayal of our own selves is the central radical problem of our life in all the manifestations of real existence—the problem of the historical existence of a people, a great nation, misruled and exploited, but without awareness of the world in which they live or of the people who coexist within the nation, or even of reality to which they are not yet finally resigned and adapted. (For this too, they lack the foundation, the root, the amalgam—the Indian.) While they are without awareness of themselves or of the world in which they live, they are not without an ideological awareness which shuns all contact with the truth and reality that surround and penetrate them. In these sad days, the country reveals itself to many "as they could not have imagined it."

That false awareness was created, not so much by the patriotic poets who founded our literature by exalting the military

campaigns of independence, but by way of reaction by the first chroniclers of the Plate River. They made us take our eyes off this earth and raise them to heaven, to dream of the city of God in the desert—Jerusalem, Sparta, Athens—not of Santa Maria del Buen Ayre. Then came, from very far, the over-valuation of the savage, poor and distressed. And it is to wipe out the impression of the malicious truths of the panegyrist and to forget the past, that we have created the tension towards the future, the mass escape, that vibrates through our literature. So as not to believe in the beauty of truth, we have created the truth of fiction. And it is not that the conquest created *ídola* in this land but in no others; they are also to be found in Mexico, Peru, Colombia and Guatemala where they were created by Cortés and Pizarro through their chroniclers; and there are others of a different kind.<sup>7</sup>

Nothing has frightened us more than the exploration of our land and our people. The first to do it were the travelers who came to prospect for ore, and now it is the technicians who come to extract oil. In this way we are gaining knowledge. We had been frightened by the land and its people because of the descriptions of the first chroniclers, Schmidl at their head, without thoroughly investigating the degree of veracity in their hair-raising tales or the degree of presumption, given the magnitude and the conditions of their adventure. However, the gravest matter of all is that we have resigned ourselves to the view that whatever is not contained in their works, be it good or bad, did not really exist.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Our prehistory, that of the three hundred years as a colony, should be studied not so much in its agricultural and commercial aspects (the influence of the missionary chroniclers of Paraguay) as in its ethnological and anthropological aspects, for this is the period of cross-breeding which fixed the "basic personality" of all of America in a greater or lesser degree and led in our country to very complex and delicate variations. To quote Ramos Mejía: "The masses from which Artigas, Ramírez, Rosas, Quiroga and all the other leaders came differed anthropologically from those that were being formed in the cities and the neighboring countryside. I am saying this to distinguish the latter from the former, much more remote from the centers of population, and consequently, more barbarous and primitive." (*Op. cit.*)

<sup>8</sup> The most important works are the following: Brother Reginaldo de Lizárraga, *Descripción breve del reino des Perú, Tucumán, Rio de la Plata y*

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In vain did the new chroniclers and explorers, the English travelers, try to reveal to us a georgic world, patriarchal in its relationships. We had already taken fright at those "horror stories" told by the others, of burning, throat-cutting and man-eating. For the fact is that we are a happy people tormented by fear and that Rosas, the creator of the fear complex, was himself a frightened man. The sedentary life, which shows itself very little in our literature, would lead the reader to form a different judgment which would have little authority over his sensibility.

### III. LIFE AND LITERATURE

"As soon as a hallucination becomes effective, popular and social, it ceases to be a hallucination and transforms itself into something real, something outside every one of those who share it." (Miguel de Unamuno, *Vida de don Quijote y Sancho*)

We have no historical, ethnological, literary or even less, an ethological work about our past which would have captured the living historical forms, apart from the military, political or diplomatic facts. We are now beginning to investigate the economic facet. The rhymed chronicle of Martín del Barco Centenera, a talkative clerk, reflects, like the earlier Travels of Schmidl, a world without greatness, disheartened by the fruitlessness of the conquest which had left all minds prostrate, without any kind of incentive, a poor, savage, desolate world, a hotbed of grudges and ill will, of rebellion and crime. The chroniclers and the Gaucho poets show that, according to the

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*Chile* (1605), which paints an interesting picture of Argentinian society in its infancy (chs. 62 to 72), on a trip on foot from Lima to Chile and from Santiago to Cordoba and thence by cart to Buenos Aires, on which he observes everything. This is the most meritorious work after Ulrico Schmidl, *Derrotero y Viaje a España y las Indias*. The now classical accounts of Centenera and Díaz de Guzmán might be included, along with other chronicles. But the best observer and the most agreeable one is unquestionably Concolorcorvo, in his *Lazarillo de ciegos caminantes* (from the end of the eighteenth century), on a trip from Buenos Aires to Lima.

elements of reality they pick out, the conquest was the work of civilizing missionaries, martyrs and evangelizers, or else of outlaws. To write history from this point of view, and to present the qualifications of the literature that fits this type of selected material, I have chosen for the record what the scholars are writing. It can then be said, with Joaquín V. González, that "the national tradition is saturated with the influence of that institution (the Jesuit missions), and the works their chroniclers and scholars have left us are the most precious material that a sociologist could profit from in his investigations into the evolution of our contemporary culture." (*La Tradición Nacional*) Or with Ricardo Rojas: "It is lamentable that we had no culture worthy of eulogy; but our duty as critics is to show that we were lacking in it and to teach the means of attaining it. In this way, I can satisfy the new patriotism, pragmatic and progressive, and likewise save my aesthetic feelings and my literary integrity." (*La Literatura Argentina*)

It is not a form of literature to tell or testify about things that one avoids afterwards, but about the life that leaves no evidence of itself—much less, to be celebrated by it. The country in which the colonists lived—who belonged to the victorious, the civilized, race—and the people with whom they lived are being repudiated, and the repudiation extends to the lowest biological level, the proletariat. It is the orphans (*guachos*), those sons without fathers, the Gauchos, who are not accepted by the Argentinian literary family except at the price of losing their personality and of putting on a respectable mask—in other words, except as characters in those "pleasant comedies for puritans." Lucía Miranda, Siripo and La Maldonada have become literary and legendary themes. One of them was undoubtedly invented by the half-breed Díaz de Guzmán in the interest of giving an honest appearance to those illicit unions of which he had been one of the issues. The case of the Inca Garcilaso was certainly very different. Here the "family complex" comes into desolate relief. Neither the relationship between father and son, nor the complications arising out of kinship, discord, conflict, the comportment of one person towards another, are fit subjects for literature. Finally, family life is exiled and constitutes a taboo of the order of the *idola tribus* (except for Florencio Sánchez, in

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*En Familia* in particular, but also in all of his plays).<sup>9</sup> The theater, even more than the novel, cannot subsist without these eminently dramatic affairs, and the Argentinian theater can therefore be said to be non-existent. Its inclusion in the histories of literature serves a purely ritual and didactic function. Of the forty important works we possess, only those of Hudson have a domestic setting. The rest, almost in their entirety, are political, referring to public life which is equivalent to life outdoors. Private life occupies ten pages in the biography of Sarmiento who, of all the great writers, was most concerned with himself. Apart from a few domestic anecdotes, the home, does not exist. The autobiographies of our great men are not biographical but historical, a peculiarity which stands out very clearly if we compare them with Rousseau, Chateaubriand and Tolstoy. Hudson did introduce us to his parents and brothers and sisters, such as they were, without being ashamed. Sincerity is not one of our qualities either.

Juan B. Terán has written (in *El nacimiento de la América Española*) that "The important thing was not just the violence in the union of white man and Indian woman as procreators, but also in their human relations, as man and woman, as rational beings. This stigma was then perpetuated like the physical one. The lack of intellectual communication between the men and women of the early period has been extending into our own days." This dramatic theme is absolutely suppressed in our literature.<sup>10</sup> And does not this fact alone indicate that our li-

<sup>9</sup> "In the history of Argentina from its origins to Rosas, there are two elements which constitute the axis of the evolutionary process. It is the family which, together with the economic factor, provide, as the main influences, the key to its results. In the old Argentinian society, on the coast as well as in the interior of the country, the individual did not exist in the full sense in which we now conceive of him."

"The May Revolution and the wars reacted on the family. The men went off to fight and left the women with all duties and responsibilities, and since the women performed their new functions well, they in fact acquired the privileges of their position. The mother occupied an eminent place in the home, and this change was translated into laws appointing her the heiress of her husband, to the exclusion of his brothers and other collateral relatives." (J. A. García, *La Ciudad Indiana*)

<sup>10</sup> One of the taboos is the ecclesiastical one, no less protected than the epic and the racial ones—our Mother the Country and the Holy Mother Church,

terature continues to be inspired by guide lines concerned only with historical facts? The human feelings of the conquest are not dulled because they are held in contempt, which is the ultimate origin of all those tricks derived from a lack of feeling for the truth and from the need to create a superstructure of heroism and honor totally divorced from the land and the people. Such are the history and literature of Argentina. The Mayas, Nahuatls, Incas, Chibchas and Mapuches saw to it, through their resistance, that the work of conquest would not remain unpunished in the eyes of future judges and that it would not be despised as a shameful chapter in the history of Spain. From the beginning, the plains Indians of the Plate River were scorned and subjected more to taunts than to slavery. The chapter on their vicissitudes has been erased from the history of literature but already incorporated in the rebellious phase of the savage, after two centuries of patient submission. It can be ascertained that the republic was more cruel to the Indian than the colony (cf. *La Cautiva*, Santos Vega, *Martín Fierro*). When an attempt was made to recover, in its incalculable brood, the seed of cattle wealth which was within the power of the Indian, the aspect of plunder which the enterprise assumed made it impossible for the indecent, treacherous and bloody disputes among the new lords of misery to be recorded in works of any kind. The Conquest of the Desert was celebrated in prose—and it was again the same conquest that had already been sung in verse—the looting and the smuggling which, three

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a coalition of religion and politics. These are themes that preoccupied Sarmiento in his old age (*Conflicto y Armonías*). I pointed out that it would be necessary to complement history with ethnology and with prehistory and its aberrations: "The lack of intellectual communication between the men and women of the early period has been extending into our own days." (J. B. Terán, *El nacimiento de la América Española*) "One need only look over the trials of the inquisition to see with what acts of lewdness the commissioners of the Holy Office accused bishops like Vitoria, Cádenas or Mercado, and with what horrendous sins the Jesuit brothers and fathers were charged. Continuous sacrilege, adulteries, witchcraft, concubinage, polygamy, all this entered, if not into the customs, then at least into the private lives of those times which *we like to think of as so different from the present*." (Ricardo Rojas, *La Literatura Argentina*) The italics are mine.

centuries later, put the finishing touch to the enterprise of conquest. We conquered ourselves, and the enterprise in which we were all accomplices, from the viceroy to the lowest official, required that the same secrecy suffocate all literary effort. Other Gaucho poets of the future may perhaps resuscitate it, but for the moment this is still forbidden. As for the fighting, which might be induced to give some glow of heroism to the robbery, it sank to the level of assault and battery by cattle thieves, and whites and Indians used the same tactics in it. The wars of conquest had to be waged and won in minds, rather than with arms. The colonists weighed the characteristics of violence or peace, in proportion as their interests were compatible with the living standards of the tribes that occupied the most fertile lands and owned stray cattle and salt mines. Nor have the chronicles recorded the characteristics of the struggle for the possession of cattle and land. And the lack of imaginative and informative works should be a warning to us that these relations cannot have been peaceful ones or honorable for the immigrants. The lack of documents must at least be understood as a symptom. It is proof by omission.

Except for some accounts and recorded statements whose value must be judged by what can be gathered from them—and they cover up more than they reveal—this story remains unpublished. But to repeat, it is, like colonial history, alive in the consciousness of the people and their descendants. The Indians and Creoles and especially the half-breeds could tell nothing of what they knew. The Indian of the colony and the Indian of the desert constitute taboos in the galaxy of *idola tribus* which still repress the expression of disagreeable truths concerning ancestry, race and family. Other writers have rid themselves of these taboos—Ecuadorians, Mexicans, Peruvians, Chileans, Bolivians, Brazilians, Guatemalans, all those who march in the forefront of Latin American narrative. Up to what point this repression has deformed the consciousness of reality can be clearly seen in the indifference with which writers and historians have regarded the desert campaigns of 1832 and 1879. They have proceeded like recruiting officers for the armies of Rosas and Roca, with Lugones out in front. Nobody can even raise the question whether these armies were civilizing influences; but the



question is not whether they civilized with a Remington, as our poet of the Gaucho war celebrated them (in *Roca*).<sup>11</sup>

"If the prehistory of Argentina, the colonial period, was lacking in literary records, as indeed it was, it can only be reconstructed from archeological and ethnographic documents. Its spirit must be deduced from them in a conjectural manner, but they are of no value for literary studies, though they may have some value for other parts of the history of civilization.

"The systematic elimination of Indians and Negroes from all of the literature of the republic indicates that citizenship belonged exclusively to the whites. That is to say, it was the privilege of the invading race. The Indians had no country and no nationality; they were foreigners or prisoners of war, in a similar situation as the Negro, whether they were slaves of the *mita* or *encomienda* or else free and savage. They did not count as people and hardly as population or inhabitants. Thus, without a native land and a native people, nationality came to be a political and not an ethnic fact—a contradiction which has persisted till today and according to which the foreigner would be the native and the legitimate citizen.

"Most important, the loss or the lack of records or their plain and simple absence is an irreparable loss. The life shared by conquerors and settlers, their adventures in feeding, housing and reproducing themselves, were not regarded as worthy of memory. The result is that in evaluating works representing the lives of the people as such, like the chronicles of the travelers and the Gaucho poems, we cannot place them in a historical or sociological context in which they would come into relief and

<sup>11</sup> "Argentinian patriots can, nevertheless, bless the original forsaken state of this region, for though it fell to the conquerors poor and denuded, it was clear of that permanent mortgage, the Indian race, which always had to gravitate towards the historical fortunes of other, apparently more favored, races. On this immense *tabula rasa*—which coincidentally resembled and anticipated that of the United States where the scarce native population was as dispensable as the fauna—began in obscurity and under the dual action, both of shaping and of being shaped, between the environment and the colonists the greatest and most prolonged experiment in naturalization ever instituted among the Latin races—an experiment which, after the hazardous test of independence, has finally reached a decisive and triumphant conclusion." (Groussac in the Preface to *Mendoza y Garay*)

## *The Lineage of Argentinian Literature*

take on color. The lack of literary, historical or simply informative works on centuries of colonial rule deprives us of all the ethnological and anthropological data necessary for the corroboration of conjectures about domestic and social life in the colonial period. This continues to be a virtual gap in our literature from the nineteenth century to the first third of the present one. Of particular value for a scientific documentation of the basic national character would have been data concerning marital and sexual relations, especially in the formation of the mixed race and their class psyche. Sarmiento struggled in his old age with a reconstruction of this non-existent chapter.

"I dare not postulate as a premise, but as a working hypothesis, that the literatures of Argentina and Uruguay (which are in many respects one—the literature of the Plate River) are the least authentic and strong in all of Latin America, for they lack the essential ingredient—the Indian character. They present him in a disfigured form so that he is not himself—now as a wild Indian and now as a model of purity from an untamed race. What national substance could Spanish American literature have without Indians and without Negroes and without immigrants as well? This is known to writers from countries densely populated with aboriginal races, and we should be at least aware of the amputation of the ethnic personality. It can be immediately asserted that no Latin American country has attained the same independence, spiritual sovereignty, true physiognomy, idiosyncrasy and American essence as the United States under the same conditions as Argentina and Uruguay—the same as far as the Indian substratum is concerned. If it were not for this irrefutable example, it could be said that Latin American literature is the less authentic the more it has banished the native and the African elements from its presence. The assumption is that folk literature is the true literature.

"Since the Indian and the half-breed are the main characters in this authentic literature, and no doubt also in our country, to fail to point out that, in this dialectical union of civilization and barbarity (to use Sarmiento's formula), we know them only in a disfigured form would be an error, or worse, a treachery harmful for the attainment of full national awareness, which is what the arts and letters reflect. Without those antecedents,

the Gaucho is truly in the position of a *guacho* (orphan), and when he rises to the ruling class, whether as a political boss, popular leader or military chief, he is a walking enigma, even though many of his actions, apparently incomprehensible or attributable to contradictory circumstances, would be explicable after an investigation of his genealogy." (*Muerte y Transfiguración de Martín Fierro*)

We know not what to think of the Indian because we know not how to feel about him except what the knights, their infected sons and the premature immigrants felt. And not knowing what to think of the Indian, we know not what to think of the Gaucho either, because we do not feel it. And as for the transformation he suffers in the immigrant, where did the immigrant take account of him except in the demographic and economic statistics? The immigrant is then his correlate in many aspects—ethnic, economic and psychological—inasmuch as the immigrant inhabits the same area as the Gaucho or peasant—the "frontier." Neither do the adventurers, who deceive us so as to defeat us, understand us; nor do they love us. We are in the position of the middle of the eighteenth century.

Having thus presented the problem of the half-breed and the immigrant, we can also see how the *idola tribus* fit into the system of our national ideology together with the "complex of history" as past and as censored truth. With it we arrive at the "complex of literature." And with all this together raised to the highest degree—to the theme and complex of "rootlessness"—we place ourselves in the center of the psychological problems of our national life.