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# The Gaucho: Contradictions and the Construction of a National Symbol

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THE GAUCHO:  
CONTRADICTIONS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NATIONAL  
SYMBOL

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For many Americans, Grant Woods' iconic painting "American Gothic" represents the heart of the United States—a hardworking farm family breaking the rough soil of the Midwest. In Argentina, a different national symbol prevails. Like Woods' Iowa couple, it portrays a rural laborer surrounded by flat, open countryside. However, rather than being a farmer, this individual is a cattle-herder—the free-roaming *gaucho* of the Pampa. Because the gauchos formed a distinctly creole class rather than a European one, they have been important to Argentine identity since the colonial period, as early as the late sixteenth century. But in the first five decades of the twentieth century, writers, musicians, and playwrights revived interest in the gaucho, portraying him in a distinctly nationalistic light. This paper examines the use of the gaucho as a symbol of national identity in the works of four early twentieth-century Argentine intellectuals—Ricardo Güiraldes, Luis Bayón Herrera, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, and Alberto Ginastera—arguing that contradictions were inherent in their representations of the gaucho. These contradictions include presenting a picture of the gaucho which conflicts with history, differing interpretations of the gauchos' role in the moral life of the nation, and diverging visions of the role of European influence and modernization in Argentine society. While these inconsistencies dispel the idea that national identity is concrete—something that can be encapsulated in a single character like the gaucho—such contradictions are at the heart of the construction of national identity itself.

Three types of historical scholarship lay the foundation for a study of the gaucho as a national symbol in the early twentieth century. First there are scholars who seek to recreate the actual existence of the gauchos using historical accounts, government documents, and other primary sources. Second are those who analyze the evolution of the *gauchesco*<sup>1</sup> style of literature or music. Finally, the general theories of nationalism given by Benedict Anderson and Eric

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<sup>1</sup> Pertaining to gauchos.

Hobsbawm provide a way of reconciling the discrepancies between the history of the gaucho from 1600 to 1800 and the development of the *gauchesco* genre in the early twentieth century.

Many historians, including S. Samuel Trifilo, Madaline Wallis Nichols, Emilio A. Coni, and Richard Slatta, have sought to create a historically accurate picture of the gaucho in their works. The focus of each of these historians is different, but they all rely on similar primary sources: accounts by travelers, government papers, and, occasionally, literature. These historians give insight into the way the gauchos actually lived and how they interacted with the rest of Argentine society.

While the primary focus of Trifilo's "The Gaucho: His Changing Image" is the changing reputation of the gauchos through history, this short article presents the reader with a basic outline of the historical development of the gauchos. Trifilo traces the gaucho from the early colonial period to his transformation into a cowhand on an *estancia*<sup>2</sup> in the late nineteenth century. According to Trifilo, the gaucho was originally a Spaniard of the Rio de la Plata region who lived off the land by relying primarily on cattle for food and other necessities.<sup>3</sup> Later, at the beginning of the seventeenth-century Trifilo writes, the gaucho took on the role of a contraband trader who slaughtered cattle without a royal license and sold them to foreigners for consumer goods.<sup>4</sup> Trifilo states that after 1810 many gauchos became soldiers, forming the cavalry corps first during the Independence movement under the leadership of generals like Martín Güemes and latter during the Civil Wars in support of various *caudillos*<sup>5</sup>, particularly Juan Manuel Rosas.<sup>6</sup> Finally, after Rosa's defeat in 1852 and the advent of modern innovations like railroads

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<sup>2</sup> A ranch.

<sup>3</sup> S. Samuel Trifilo, "The Gaucho: His Changing Image," *Pacific Historical Review* 33, no. 4 (November, 1964): 396, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3636040> (accessed May 1, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>5</sup> The caudillos were military leaders who struggled against each other to dominate politics in Argentina during the Civil Wars.

<sup>6</sup> Trifilo, 399-400.

and barbed wire in the second half of the nineteenth century, the free-roaming gauchos all but disappeared, becoming instead wage-earning cowhands on large *estancias*.<sup>7</sup>

While Trifilo's historical background of the gaucho is cursory, Nichols provides a much more extensive account of the gauchos in her book *The Gaucho: Cattle Hunter, Cavalryman, Ideal of Romance*.<sup>8</sup> Nichols gives detailed descriptions of the gauchos' origins, lifestyle, social interactions, and involvement in *vaquerías*<sup>9</sup>, military exploits, and defense of the frontier against indigenous peoples. The extent of Nichols' research is impressive—while the book is not long (only sixty pages), her bibliography, longer in fact than the text itself, gives over one thousand four hundred entries, including manuscripts, various sorts of documents, atlases, folklore, even music. Not surprisingly, many historians, Slatta among others, refer back to Nichols' book as an authoritative source of historical background on the gaucho.

Both Coni in *El Gaucho* and Slatta in *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier* have also written full length books about the gauchos, attempting to dispel the popularized portrayal of the gaucho and replace it with a historically accurate and less romanticized image. However, there are several key differences in the way these two authors portray the gaucho. Coni has a negative perspective of the gaucho whereas Slatta tends to depict the gaucho as the victim of an oppressive social hierarchy. In addition, Coni's research is organized in a rough chronological fashion while Slatta studies a different aspect of gaucho society in each chapter of his book. Finally, Coni's main purpose in *El Gaucho* is to argue that the true gaucho of the past is not a good model for Argentine identity. Slatta, on the other hand, is more concerned with reconstructing the social environment in which the gauchos lived.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 402-403.

<sup>8</sup> Madaline Wallis Nichols, *The Gaucho: Cattle Hunter, Cavalryman, Ideal of Romance* (New York: Gordian Press, 1968.)

<sup>9</sup> Cattle hunting expeditions.

Coni's view of the gaucho is decidedly negative. For Coni, both *paisanos*<sup>10</sup> and *gingos*<sup>11</sup> contributed positively to the building of Argentina while the gauchos were renegade, lawless desperados. Despite this bias against gauchos, Coni supports his argument with extensive primary sources. He also clears up many common misunderstandings of the term gaucho—for example, the misuse of the word to describe any *paisano*.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Coni accurately emphasizes the fact that much of the nation's folklore has been perpetrated by *porteños*<sup>13</sup> who have an unfounded obsession with gauchos.<sup>14</sup> Thus, although Coni may not be entirely objective in his approach to the gaucho, his book is valuable both for its well-research historical information and for its insight in the misrepresentation of the gauchos.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier* is its emphasis on the social history of the gaucho. Focusing on class conflict, Slatta is particularly interested in the relationship between the gauchos and various elements of mainstream society—rancher owners, military leaders, politicians, and *gringos*. In doing so, he examines all aspects of gaucho life—cattle herding and ranch work, family life, and military service. While Slatta does not offer a chronological record of gaucho history the way Coni does, his exploration of the social role of the gauchos provides a balanced approach to the historical figure of the gaucho.

The main focus of Trifilo, Nichols, Coni, and Slatta is to present the gaucho as he existed in history. Other historians are more interested in the representation of the gaucho in a variety of media. George W. Umphrey and Jeane Delaney offer their perspectives on *gauchesco* literature, Richard Pinnell, Gilbert Chase, and Deborah Schwartz-Kates on music, and C. K. Jones on drama. These writers examine both the artistic expression of the gauchos themselves as well as

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<sup>10</sup> Ordinary country-folk who are not gauchos.

<sup>11</sup> European immigrants.

<sup>12</sup> Emilio A. Coni, *El Gaucho* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Solar, 1969), 268.

<sup>13</sup> Inhabitants of Buenos Aires.

<sup>14</sup> Coni, 303.

later works written by professional writers, playwrights, and musicians in *gauchesco* style.

In his article “The *Gaicho* Poetry of Argentina”, Umphrey is concerned with the poetic evolution of the gaucho from the songs of the *payadores*<sup>15</sup> to the early twentieth century with Rafael Obligado. Because of this emphasis, Umphrey organizes his ideas into phases of *gauchesco* literary development, analyzing one author he considers indicative of each generation. Thus he only examines works by Bartolomé Hidalgo (“Relación que hace Ramón Contreras...”) <sup>16</sup>, Estanislao Del Campo (*Fausto*), José Hernández (*Martín Fierro*), and Rafael Obligado (“Santos Vega”), but these constitute some of the most well-known works in *gauchesco* poetry. One caveat to Umphrey’s article is that it was published in 1918—before some important pieces of *gauchesco* literature were written.

Umphrey opens his article by stating “The most picturesque figure in the social life of Argentina about fifty years ago...is that of the *gaucho*, the cowboy of the boundless pampas; and in the development of the country no one played a more important part.”<sup>17</sup> This quote shows that Umphrey considers the gaucho a centrally important national figure. The brief summary of the history of the gauchos that follows this statement is of limited value due to its superficiality and its tendency to romanticize the past. Despite these shortcomings, Umphrey’s assessment of the origins of the gaucho in literature is insightful. He traces the literary progression of the *gauchesco* genre from the comparatively primitive *payadores* to “Argentine poets of high literary ability.”<sup>18</sup> Umphrey notes that Argentinean writers never made a concerted effort to collect the actual songs of the gauchos—“the *vidalitas, cielitos, tristes, payadas*, etc.”<sup>19</sup> Instead, they

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<sup>15</sup> Gaucho minstrels.

<sup>16</sup> The full title of this poem is “Relación que hace Ramón Contreras a Jacinto Chano de todo lo que vió en las fiestas mayas en Buenos Aires en el año 1822.” George W. Umphrey, “The *Gaicho* Poetry of Argentina,” *Hispania* 1, no. 3 (1918), 149, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/331597> (accessed May 1, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

attempted to write original poetry mimicking the language, cadence, and style of the gauchos. One potential drawback to Umphrey's treatment of the *payadores* is that he relies on Domingo F. Sarmiento's description for historical background—a source with a definite bias.

Delaney's study of the gaucho in literature, entitled "Making Sense of Modernity: Changing Attitudes toward the Immigrant and the Gaucho in Turn-of-the-Century Argentina," has a more specific focus than that of Umphrey. Instead of giving an overview of the *gauchesco* genre, Delaney focuses on one particular generation of writers at the turn of the twentieth century who adopted the gaucho as a symbol of national identity. She argues that antimodernist intellectuals, reacting against what they saw as the corrupting influence of modernization and immigration on Argentinean society, envisioned the gaucho as the genuine, pure spirit of Argentina. In addition, Umphrey and Delaney are also separated by a large time span. Most of the sources Delaney uses come from between 1900 and 1920—a time period only briefly discussed in Umphrey's work. Because *gauchesco* literature written after the turn of the century tends to be quite different from earlier works, both Umphrey and Delaney's perspectives are important to understanding *gauchesco* literature.

One of the most valuable aspects of Delaney's article is its explanation of antimodernism. Delaney explains how intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century saw the Argentina of their time as morally bankrupt, concerned only with making a profit and consuming imported commodities, a phenomenon they blamed on the growing immigrant population. Responding to this supposed corruption of modern Argentina, these writers embraced the rural way of life as the definition of the true Argentina. The gaucho therefore became an important literary and cultural symbol. To support her assessment of the gaucho as a national symbol, Delaney draws a theoretical base from well-known scholars on nationalism like Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest



Gellner. Delaney's article is valuable for its in-depth analysis of why Argentineans adopted the gaucho as a national symbol in the first decades of the twentieth century—a decided shift from perspective of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries which tended to view the gauchos as a detriment to the development of the Argentine nation.

Besides the obvious relevance of Delaney's research to a study of the importance of the gaucho as a national symbol, her article is also valuable for the wide range of literary sources it discusses—novels, drama, and poems. While some of these works like *Don Segundo Sombra* are well-known, others are more obscure. One example is her analysis of Louis María Jordán's short drama *Una visita de ultratumba* (*A Visit from Beyond the Grave*), in which the ghost of a gaucho and an Italian businessman debate the true nature of Argentina.<sup>20</sup> Delaney's familiarity with *gauchesco* literature from this time period allows her to draw from sources like *Una visita de ultratumba* which, while less commonly discussed, still reveal important aspects of the way writers used the gaucho as a symbol of national identity.

Besides the literary representations that Umphrey and Delaney examine, the gaucho also appears as a national symbol in music—the focus of Richard Pinnell, Gilbert Chase, and Deborah Schwartz-Kates' research. In "The Guitarist-Singer of Pre-1900 Gaucho Literature", Pinnell studies the history of the *gauchesco* genre of music focusing the actual songs of the gauchos. His article is replete with specific background on gaucho music, including the reliance on the guitar for accompaniment<sup>21</sup>, the central role of improvisation<sup>22</sup>, characteristics of gaucho song and verse<sup>23</sup>, and the role of the archetypical *gaucho malo*<sup>24</sup> in the creation of ballads.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jeane Delaney, "Making Sense of Modernity: Changing Attitudes toward the Immigrant and the Gaucho in Turn-of-the-Century Argentina," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38, no. 3 (July, 1996): 435-436, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/179228> (accessed May 1, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Richard Pinnell, "The Guitarist-Singer of Pre-1900 Gaucho Literature," *Latin American Music Review* 5, no. 2 (1984): 245-246, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/780074> (accessed May 1, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 246-248.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

Pinnell's article lays an essential foundation for understanding later musical interpretations of the gaucho.

Unlike Pinnell, Chase and Schwartz-Kates focus on only one composer, Alberto Ginastera, a twentieth-century classical composer who lived from 1916 to 1983. Both Chase and Schwartz-Kates explain how Ginastera used the gaucho as a national symbol in his music. The main focus of Chase's article "Alberto Ginastera: Argentine Composer" is to highlight Ginastera as an accomplished Latin American composer who created innovative, technically sophisticated music that was distinctly Argentine in character. He emphasizes the subjectivity of Ginastera's nationalist compositions—instead of relying on folkloric imitation, Ginastera was able to fuse elements of gaucho music with classical technique.<sup>26</sup>

Schwartz-Kates opens "Alberto Ginastera, Argentine Cultural Construction, and the *Gauchosco* Tradition" by stating that Chase's scholarship, while revolutionary in many ways, did not give proper attention to the musical context of Ginastera's composition.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, Schwartz-Kates gives a detailed analysis of key issues in the development of nationalism in Argentina, for example the rural-urban divide<sup>28</sup> and the controversial issues of immigration and Europeanization.<sup>29</sup> The article is particularly valuable for her use of specific examples of musical constructions as well as her firm grasp on the musical relationship between Ginastera and older Argentine composers, particularly Julián Aguirre, Carlos López Burchardo, and Juan José Castro. Her discussion of individual musicians' incorporation of *gauchosco* elements

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<sup>24</sup> The gaucho outlaw.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-254.

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert Chase, "Alberto Ginastera: Argentine Composer," *The Musical Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (October, 1957): 446, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/740763> (accessed May 1, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Deborah Schwartz-Kates, "Alberto Ginastera, Argentine Cultural Construction, and the *Gauchosco* Tradition," *The Musical Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 248, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3600953> (accessed May 1, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-250.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-252.

demonstrates that far from being the only Argentine to fuse folk and classical genres, Ginastera built off of a long tradition of this sort of musical synthesis.

Besides literature and music, drama is an additional dimension of the *gauchesco* genre and the subject of C. K. Jones' article "The National Drama of Argentina." Jones provides interesting background on the *dramas gauchos*—the theatrical performance by circus troops that travelled around rural Argentina. He also describes the way these the *dramas gauchos* "attracted the attention of men of letters interested in producing a drama expressive of national life but cast in cultural molds..."<sup>30</sup> Jones argues that urban theatrical directors adopted the *gauchesco* genre of drama because of its "universal values"<sup>31</sup> and "native themes,"<sup>32</sup> which made them good representations of the heart and soul of Argentina. Besides the historical information Jones presents about the origin of *dramas gauchos*, his article demonstrates the transformation of this form of theatrical work from a rural setting to the urban center of Buenos Aires.

Jones accepts the legitimacy of *gauchesco* drama as a national element without questioning the validity of this perspective. However Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm contend that nationalism is anything but concrete. Instead they argue that it is something developed in order to give a sense of identity—an identity which is often carefully defined by a particular group of idealists. Neither Anderson nor Hobsbawm specifically address Argentine nationalism, but their theories prove applicable to the situation in Argentina.

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson focuses on how nationalism—something so often assumed to be absolute—has developed in different geographical regions at different times. He defines the nation as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently

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<sup>30</sup> C. K. Jones, "The National Drama of Argentina," *World Affairs* 97, no. 3 (September, 1934): 165, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20662474> (accessed May 1, 2011).

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

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

limited and sovereign.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the nation is something that must be created or formulated. Anderson traces the growth of nationalism in communities around the world—the Americas, Europe, and post-Colonial Africa and Asia. Of particular value is his chapter “Creole Pioneers,” which argues that nationalism developed in the New World before it did in Europe. This has important implications for the struggle between European and *criollo*<sup>34</sup> influences in Argentina.

*The Invention of Tradition* takes a case study approach to viewing nationalism, describing how various British “traditions” came about. Hobsbawm states that “‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”<sup>35</sup> Symbols are essential to these “invented traditions.” For example, “The Highland Tradition of Scotland” (written by Hugh Trevor-Roper) dispels the myth that the kilt has always been the timeless garb of the Scots. Trevor-Roper states, “...when the great rebellion of 1745 broke out, the kilt, as we know it, was a recent English invention and ‘clan’ tartans did not exist.”<sup>36</sup> The imagined gaucho of literature closely matches their definition of an invented tradition. While the traditions of the British Isles may seem to have little connection to Argentina, the methods Hobsbawm and the other authors use are helpful in understanding how the national symbol of the gaucho acquired its significance for the Argentine people.

Historians have viewed the gaucho from a variety of perspectives. Some seek to rediscover the characteristics and lifestyle of the actual gauchos who roamed the Pampa. Others have focused on the representation of the gaucho in literature, music, and theater. In addition,

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<sup>33</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

<sup>34</sup> Creole.

<sup>35</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Hobsbawm, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland,” in *Ibid.*, 23.

while they do not specifically address Argentina, both Anderson and Hobsbawm's perspectives prove important for laying a theoretical understanding of nationalism. These sources combine to give a historical basis for which to analyze the gaucho as a national symbol in the early twentieth century.

Two literary works are so central to the portrayal of the gaucho that any evaluation of the *gauchesco* genre would be incomplete without a discussion of them: Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's book *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants; or Civilization and Barbarism* (1845) and José Hernández' poem *Martín Fierro* (1872). These authors also present the two most common perceptions of the gaucho: that of a barbarous ruffian (Sarmiento) and that of an oppressed rural peon (Hernández). These contrasting perspectives argue either for the rejection or acceptance of the gauchos' role in national life.

In *Civilization and Barbarism*, Sarmiento advances his vision of creating a certain type of Argentina—one that would be defined by European influence. For Sarmiento, the gauchos were a drain on society that kept Argentina from realizing its potential as a nation. In addition, during the Argentine Civil Wars they supported *caudillos* like Juan Manuel de Rosas who were not only brutal dictators, but who also contaminated Argentine politics with federalist sentiment. In Sarmiento's view, centralization was the key to building a successful Argentina. The gauchos' nomadic way of life defied such a system. While *Civilization and Barbarism* is undoubtedly a one-sided perspective, it is an important voice in the greater conversation of what should define the Argentine nation.

Much of the content of *Martín Fierro* is similar to Slatta's vision of the gauchos as an oppressed minority. The protagonist, a gaucho named Martín Fierro, is forced into military service on the frontier—a common experience for the gauchos of history. Hernández' gaucho

lives on the margins of society. One stanza of *Martín Fierro* reads: “I mounted, and trusting to God, I made for another district—because a gaucho they call a vagrant can have no place of his own, and so he lives from one trouble to the next.”<sup>37</sup> The character of Martín Fierro is in many ways true to the image of the gaucho given by historians and yet is idealized and celebrated as a hero. Martín Fierro is at once historical and literary, real and imagined.

The music and poetry of the gauchos themselves dates from the early colonial period. Juan Baltasar Maciel’s poem “A Gaucho Sings in Rural Style the Victories of the Honorable Pedro de Cervallos”, written in 1776, represents one of the first attempts of educated writers to produce literature that imitated gaucho poetry.<sup>38</sup> Literature about gauchos from the sixteenth century the end of the nineteenth century, whether written by the gauchos themselves or by professional writers, was contemporary with the gauchos. However, the era from the 1910s through the 1940s saw a new generation of literature, drama, and music about the gaucho. Time separated these intellectuals from their chosen subject. As a result, the presentation of the gaucho in this time period contained many contradictions. In spite of these discrepancies, the *gauchesco* works of the early twentieth century characteristically presented the gaucho as a national symbol.

Key examples of the adoption of the gaucho as a symbol of the Argentine nation from the 1910s to the 1940s include Ricardo Güiraldes’ novel *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), Ezequiel Martínez Estradas’s essay *X-Ray of the Pampa* (1933), Alberto Ginastera’s musical compositions, including *Danzas Argentinas* (1937), and Luis Bayón Herrera’s play *Santos Vega*

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<sup>37</sup> José Hernández, *Martín Fierro* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1967), 101.

<sup>38</sup> Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, eds., introduction to “A Gaucho Sings in Rural Style the Victories of the Honorable Pedro de Cervallos” in *The Argentina Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 38.

(first performed on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1913.)<sup>39</sup> *Don Segundo Sombra* has been beloved by generations of Argentine readers since its huge success in the 1920's (it won the National Prize for Literature in 1927.)<sup>40</sup> Martínez Estrada is among the most famous of Argentine essayists—according to Thomas F. McGann “one of the three or four most important authors of twentieth-century Argentina.”<sup>41</sup> Although less well-known, Luis Bayón Herrera's theatrical rendition of *Santos Vega* shows the influence of gaucho style on Argentine drama and reveals the impact of literary works from earlier generations on the twentieth-century *gauchescho* genre. Finally, Ginastera is a world-renown classical composer many of whose works reflect definite *gauchescho* influence.

These four works represent a variety of media—literature, music, and drama—which demonstrates the wide-spread interest in the gauchos in the first decades of the 1900's. All these writers and musicians saw the gaucho as important to Argentine nationalism, but their images of the gaucho often conflicted with historical accounts of the gauchos. They also differed on whether the gaucho provided a moral example to Argentines. But perhaps the greatest contradiction was the contested relationship between the gaucho (and the rural landscape he represented) and the European influences so important to Buenos Aires.

*Don Segundo Sombra* tells the tale of the coming of age of a displaced young Argentine Fabio Cáceres. The book opens with Fabio being raised by his old-fashioned and uninteresting aunts in a small town in the countryside. His hitherto superficial and meaningless life changes suddenly when he meets a mysterious gaucho, Don Segundo Sombra, and joins a group of gauchos on their ranch work and cattle drives. Here through the rugged gaucho lifestyle and

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<sup>39</sup> Edward Hale Bierstadt, introduction to *Three Plays of the Argentine: Juan Moreira, Santos Vega, The Witches' Mountain*, trans. Jacob S. Fassett, Jr. (New York: Duffield and Company, 1920), xxxvii.

<sup>40</sup> Patricia Owen Steiner, “*Don Segundo Sombra: The Life of a Novel*,” in *Don Segundo Sombra* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 284.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas F. McGann, introduction to *X-Ray of the Pampa*, by Ezequiel Matínez Estrada, trans. Alain Swietlicki (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 108.

under the guidance of Don Segundo he grows to adulthood—only to discover that his guardian, Don Fabio Cáceres, who is in fact his father, has left him a huge estate. Don Segundo rides off into the horizon and disappears (quite literally.) Fabio takes charge of the ranch, but he never forgets what he has learned from the gauchos.

For Güiraldes, the gaucho, epitomized in the person of Don Segundo, is a symbol of strength and character. While Fabio has his share of unwise decisions and even Don Segundo is not above lying to a corporal of the police,<sup>42</sup> Güiraldes emphasizes the mental and physical endurance the gaucho lifestyle builds. Besides teaching Fabio all nature of work involved in being a gaucho—breaking colts, using *bolas*<sup>43</sup>, making leather straps, and rounding cattle<sup>44</sup>—Don Segundo teaches Fabio about life, “about endurance and integrity under duress, fatalism in accepting whatever came along without grumbling, moral strength in matters of love, distrust of women and liquor, reserve with strangers, and faith in friends.”<sup>45</sup> According to Güiraldes, the essence of the gaucho lies not in his physical work of rounding up cattle but rather in the strength of character acquired by hard work and a simple lifestyle. This abstract definition of a gaucho allowed any one, no matter their social class or geographical location, to be a gaucho. Don Segundo sums this up in his advice to Fabio: “if you’re really a gaucho, you don’t have to change, because wherever you go, you’ll go with your soul leading the way, like the lead mare of the herd.”<sup>46</sup> All Argentines could acquire the strength of character necessary to be a gaucho.

The story of Fabio can be understood as a metaphor for Argentina’s own national story. The young Fabio starts out with a decided lack of identity—he does not know who his parents

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<sup>42</sup> Ricardo Güiraldes, *Don Segundo Sombra*, trans. Patricia Owen Steiner (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 94.

<sup>43</sup> A gaucho weapon consisting of balls on string that were swung over the head like a lasso.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.



are, he wanders through the town with no friends, making fun of boys his own age.<sup>47</sup> This connects to the confusion surrounding national identity in early twentieth century Argentina. According to Jeane Delaney, the influx of immigrants coupled with an economic system based on speculation led many intellectuals to believe that Argentina had somehow lost its traditional soul.<sup>48</sup> According to Delaney, “intellectuals attributed to the immigrant... a new blurring of class lines or what might be described as status confusion.”<sup>49</sup>

In Güiraldes’ novel, it is the gauchos, particularly Don Segundo, that eventually impart an identity to Fabio by accepting him into their way of life and teaching him the values of hard work, physical stamina, and moral strength. In the same way, Delaney argues that early twentieth-century intellectuals, dissatisfied with the modern way of life in Argentina which they saw as corrupt and artificial, sought to “promote the gaucho as the symbol of traditional Argentina.”<sup>50</sup> According to Delaney, “for those individuals who feared that the nation had lost its vigor and had become bland and passionless, the gaucho combined many of the heroic qualities which they believed the nation had lost.”<sup>51</sup>

The conclusion of *Don Segundo Sombra* is perhaps the most relevant to understanding Güiraldes’ perspective on Argentine nationalism. Güiraldes implies that Argentina cannot roll back the tide of modernism—it is an inheritance just like Fabio’s estate—nor can it regain the old days of the gauchos. But the qualities learned from the gauchos—meaningful work and virtue—are still valuable as the lasting legacy of the gauchos. Delaney sums up the message of *Don Segundo Sombra* as follows: “The analogy between young Fabio and the Argentine nation itself is obvious. Although both are destined for greater things than the life of the gaucho (or, in

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>48</sup> Delaney, 448, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/179228> (accessed May 1, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 453.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 458.

the case of Argentina, the level of development associated with the gaucho), it is from the gaucho and the way of life which he represented that Argentina must draw its values and traditions.”<sup>52</sup>

Unlike Güiraldes’ novel, Martínez Estrada’s treatise on the national identity of Argentina, *X-Ray of the Pampa*, published in 1937, does not focus on the gaucho in particular. However, Martínez Estrada’s belief that the interior, rather than Buenos Aires, holds the key to understanding Argentina imparts a centrally important role to the gaucho. According to Martínez Estrada, Argentina’s attempts to imitate European culture—epitomized in the city of Buenos Aires—always results in artificiality while the countryside continues in its own backward but genuine life.<sup>53</sup> The gauchos, whose lives were rooted in the Pampa, represented the type of people who could truly create a national identity for Argentina.

For Martínez Estrada, only conflict, “dynamic chaos”<sup>54</sup>, represented by the *caudillo* Rosas, could forge a true national consciousness. The gauchos were, according to Martínez Estrada’s view, at the frontlines not only of the actual battles of the Civil Wars of the nineteenth-century but also of the very creation of the Nation. He claims that “It was the gaucho who precipitated a state of consciousness of the totality, the unity, and the internal functions of the country.”<sup>55</sup> The triumph of the Federalists’ vision of modernization and immigration (the political viewpoint supported by Domingo F. Sarmiento) arrested this development of national consciousness, resulting in a national stagnation. He argues that the “State, which was the coveted dream of order and harmony infeasible in reality, entrenched itself in the metropolis and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 457.

<sup>53</sup> Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, *X-Ray of the Pampa*, trans. Alain Swietlicki (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 108.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 43.

closed its eyes to the truth of the countryside.”<sup>56</sup> The interior, with its struggles and even backwardness, was the only place where true nationalism could develop. But the government, created according to the vision of Sarmiento, had rejected the countryside in favor of European immigration and modernization. The outcome was a State, a bureaucratic organization, but not a Nation—“a machine that manufactures death and nothing more.”<sup>57</sup>

Martínez Estrada sees the gaucho as in conflict with Spanish interests, suggesting that the gaucho was developing a distinct and independent identity—one formed by the isolated and vast landscape of the Pampa. He argues that the gaucho’s mastery of the natural environment of the Pampa gave him a right to the land that no imperial power could claim:

Riding on horseback through the prairies with no clothes on his back, homeless and wandering, he was lord of that measureless nothingness where legal title belonged to the king of Spain...He swelled up in his pride and preferred to rebel against a law that denied him the title of ownership but not the enjoyment of what could well be his according to the laws of nature, well known to the medicine man, the range rider, and the chieftain. Like a knight, he enlisted the rabble of the plains under his banner and was a prince in his hut. He raised an army from the cattle and confronted the landowner, the unknown man from the city. So the spirit of the countryside (federalist and barbarous) was dissociated from the spirit of the city (centralist and monarchist), each of them attracting into its magnet the iron shaving of many disparate interests. The first chose to live in the vastness of its untamed dominions, refusing to bow to the will of the intruder from the city. Its consciousness was molded by the landscape and it rejected all traditions. The result was the gaucho, the covetous lord, the man of the ignorant multitude following close on the footsteps of a thwarted dream.<sup>58</sup>

In the spirit of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Martínez Estrada sees conflict to be the only way to effect the creation of a national consciousness. The rebellious gaucho, with his barbarous nature and his rejection of imperial law, embodied this necessary conflict. Martínez Estrada does not ignore the cruelty and lawlessness of the gauchos (as so many other writers did), but he sees this barbarism as integral to the forging of the nation. Describing the Civil Wars, he states that “only by the spilling of blood and the plundering of homes could the

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 179.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 179.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 47-48.

national conscience be achieved...”<sup>59</sup> He follows this statement with a description of the *caudillo*’s troops—rugged military forces composed of gauchos and workers.<sup>60</sup> In Martínez Estrada’s view the gauchos were part of the mechanism—conflict and chaos—that would bring forth national identity in Argentina.

While both Güiraldes and Martínez Estrada are among the best known writers of twentieth-century Argentina, Luis Herrera Bayón does not enjoy the same reputation. However, his 1913 play *Santos Vega* is representative of the use of the gaucho as a national symbol because it constitutes a final phase in the evolution of a beloved Argentine folk tale. According to legend, the gaucho Santos Vega was the foremost *payador* of the Pampa, entrancing all with his marvelous musical ability, until the appearance of the mysterious Juan Sin Ropa, who defeated Santos Vega in a *payada de contrapunto*, a sort of musical duel. Unable to bear his defeat, Santos Vega vanished without a trace.<sup>61</sup> In *Argentina: Legend and History*, C. O. Bunge states that “among the legends of the pampas, and it could be said among all Argentine legends, none [is] so expressive and popular as that of Santos Vega. Santos Vega is the purest and highest personification of the gaucho.”<sup>62</sup>

Several writers before Bayón Herrera retold the story of Santos Vega. While the first to do so was Bartolomé Mitre in 1838, perhaps the most famous retelling of the legend is Rafael Obligado’s poem written in 1877, which R. Lehmann-Nitsche describes as a “jewel worthy of

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>61</sup> C. O. Bunge in *Argentina: Legend and History*, ed. Garibaldi G. B. Laguardia and Cincinato G. B. Laguardia (Chicago: Benj. H. Sanborn & Co., 1919), 86-90. <http://books.google.com> (accessed May 18, 2011).

<sup>62</sup> “Entre las leyendas pampeanas, y puede decirse que entre todas las leyendas argentinas, ninguna tan expresiva y popular como la de Santos Vega. Santos Vega es la más pura y elevada personificación del gaucho.” C. O. Bunge, 86.

figuring in the best Hispanic-American literature.”<sup>63</sup> Bayón Herrera took literature about Santos Vega to a new level by adapting the poetic interpretations of the legend to the stage. According to Edward Hale Bierstadt, Bayón Herrera’s play met considerable popular acclaim in its day.<sup>64</sup> Thus the drama, while not of the enduring literary quality of *Don Segundo Sombra* and *X-ray of the Pampa*, is still a good reflection of the early twentieth-century use of the gaucho as a national symbol, for it followed a long tradition of representing the legend of Santos Vega in literature and resonated with the people of its time.

The opening prologue to Bayón Herrera’s play begins with an almost skeptical questioning of legend: “Is Santos Vega a myth? Did he ever live?”<sup>65</sup> Bayón Herrera’s response is insightful—rather than trying to prove or disprove the historical existence of Santos Vega, he justifies the myth, whether true or not, by citing its importance to Argentine national spirit: “What matters it as long as the poet dwelt in the hearts of that proud race who created him for the purpose of adoring him so devotedly afterward?”<sup>66</sup> The prologue presents the gaucho as the heart and soul of Argentina, “a poet who came out of the solitudes to join his grief to that of his brothers.”<sup>67</sup> Bayón Herrera suggests that although Santos Vega and the gauchos have largely disappeared as a distinct social group, their independent, roaming spirit has survived in the Argentine people. He claims that “he of the great fame, our beloved singer, is not dead: he lives in our hearts, a sorrowful and proud emblem of the past, a lyric flower of our glorious tradition.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> “. . . joya digna de figurar en la major literatura hispanoamericana.” R Lehmann-Nitsche, “Santos Vega” in “Folk-Lore Argentino,” *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 48, no. 188 (1935): 181. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/535422> (accessed May 19, 2011).

<sup>64</sup> Edward Hale Beirstadt, introduction to *Three Plays of the Argentine: Juan Moreira, Santos Vega, The Witches’ Mountain*, trans. Jacob S. Fassett, Jr. (New York: Duffield and Company, 1920), xxxvii.

<sup>65</sup> Luis Bayón Herrera, *Santos Vega*, in *Three Plays of the Argentine: Juan Moreira, Santos Vega, The Witches’ Mountain*, trans. Jacob S. Fassett, Jr. (New York: Duffield and Company, 1920) 23.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

For Bayón Herrera, the gaucho was the best expression of Argentina's soul—an enduring symbol of national identity. Mirroring this relationship between the gaucho and the nation, in Bayón Herrera's play, Santos Vega has a remarkable ability to express the emotions of the other characters. When Santos Vega first appears, the mournful song he sings corresponds to the ranch owner's wife Elvira's grief at losing her daughter in an Indian raid. The stage directions in this passage read “[*And as if to interpret the anguish of the moment, the voice of SANTOS VEGA is heard in the distance...*]”<sup>69</sup> Santos' Vega appearance also fulfills a premonition of the character Argentina, a girl living on the ranch who had dreamed the previous night of a singer's arrival.<sup>70</sup> (Is it perhaps symbolic that this girl who becomes Santos Vega's sweetheart is named Argentina?) Just as Santos Vega gives poetic and musical expression to the thoughts and emotions of those around him, the gaucho, in Bayón Herrera's opinion, is the embodiment of the Argentine people. One of the characters in *Santos Vega* summarizes this relationship: “Santos Vega is the song on the pampa that awakens it before dawn; in his soul are all the desires, all the grief and anxiety, the nobility, the joy, and the sorrow of our race...Of what use are we without the emotion of his music and the love of his soul?”<sup>71</sup>

One interesting element of Bayón Herrera's play is his interpretation of Santos Vega's death. Santos Vega dies when he is finally outdone by the *payador* Juan Sin Ropa, who is in fact the devil in disguise. For Bayón Herrera, Santos Vega's defeat by Juan Sin Ropa is an analogy for the modernity and immigrant population that had supplanted the gauchos' traditional role as nomadic cattle herders. Juan Sin Ropa boasts that he will conquer the pampas and subdue the people, claiming that “I am a new breath that reaches you with the wild fury of a mighty

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 67.

hurricane. The fleetest and most spirited of your horses runs not so swiftly as mine. His tracks scar the earth like fire...”<sup>72</sup> Santos Vega retorts “No one can do that—least of all a foreigner.”<sup>73</sup>

Juan Sin Ropa’s defeat of Santos Vega implies that a wave of modernity and foreign influence have overwhelmed Argentina, destroying traditional Argentine life. Despite the death of Santos Vega, Bayón Herrera claims that the gaucho spirit is eternal, always alive in the hearts of Argentines. Just before the appearance of Juan Sin Ropa, Argentina promises Santos Vega that “the soul of the singer will never pass away, the winds will vibrate to the echoes of his songs, and in the hearts of all his race the indomitable payador will leave an everlasting memory to prove a menace to the conqueror!”<sup>74</sup> Bayón Herrera’s perspective on Santos Vega’s death demonstrates his interpretation of Argentinean nationalism: while the gauchos had largely disappeared due to modernization and immigration, their place as a national symbol was undying.

Although they represent various literary forms (novels, nonfiction, and drama), Güiraldes, Martínez Estrada, and Bayón Herrera all contributed to the image of the gaucho in writing. But interest in gauchos in the early-twentieth century was not limited to the literary realm. As a classically trained composer, Ginastera’s music demonstrates the broad appeal of the gaucho as a national symbol. Some initial observations about Ginastera’s work are useful in assessing his use of the *gauchesco* genre, while the musicologists Gilbert Chase and Deborah Schwartz-Kates give a more technical analysis of his use of nationalist symbolism. The names themselves of many of his works reveals Ginastera’s interest in Argentine folk music: *Danza del gaucho matrero* (1937), *Malambo* (1940), *Estancia* (1941), *Overture for the Creole “Faust”* (1944), and *Pampeana No. 1* (1947). The titles of all these works are allusions either to the gauchos themselves, to their way of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 72.

life, or to famous literary works of the *gauchesco* genre. The gaucho in particular played an important symbolic role in Ginastera's use of folk music. *Danza del gaucho matrero* (*The Dance of the Cunning Gaucho*) is an explosive piano solo which evokes the vigor and spontaneity of gaucho dances. According to Chase, the *malambo* was the "achetypical dance of the gauchos"<sup>75</sup> He cites Venture R. Lynch's first-hand description of this dance:

In the matter of dances, none is comparable to the *malambo*. It is the gaucho's "tournament" when he feels the urge to display his skill as a dancer. Two men place themselves opposite each other. The guitars flood the *ranchito* with their chords, one of the gauchos begins to dance; then he stops and his opponent continues; and so it goes on. Many times the *justa* lasts from six to seven hours.<sup>76</sup>

Ginastera also displays a familiarity with major *gauchesco* literary works: *Overture for the Creole "Fausto"* was inspired by the famous poem by Estanislao del Campo<sup>77</sup> and the one-act ballet *Estancia* was based off of *Martín Fierro*.<sup>78</sup> In his program notes for *Pampeana No. 3*, Ginastera refers to both *Martín Fierro* and *Don Segundo Sombra*.<sup>79</sup> Down to the very names of his works, Ginastera endeavors to create a close connection between his own music and that of the gauchos of the past.

Besides his references to the dances of the gauchos and *gauchesco* literature, the technical construction of Ginastera's music shares many common elements to traditional *gauchesco* music. Schwartz-Kates' analysis of one of Ginastera's early works, "Canción a la luna lunanca" for voice and piano, discusses many of these elements: the "figural patterns of the guitar" in the opening piano lines, the "two-bar subphrases characteristic of Argentine folk song" in the vocal part, the rhythmic relationship between the voice and the piano which emulates the traditional Argentine folk style the *gato*, and "the composer's harmonic lexicon" closely

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<sup>75</sup> Chase, 454.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Chase, 454.

<sup>77</sup> Chase, 446.

<sup>78</sup> Lynn Garafola, "Lincoln Kirstein, Modern Dance, and the Left: The Genesis of American Ballet," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 23, no. 1 (Summer, 2005): 29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40004077> (accessed May 1, 2011).

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Chase, 445.



associated with criollo music.<sup>80</sup> Gilbert Chase argues that “The *Pampeana No. 3* marks the culmination of the *gauchesco* tradition in Ginastera’s music along strictly formal lines”. He notes the harmonic and rhythmic traits of the piece, particularly the use of polytonal chords characteristic of guitar music and “the typical 6/8 rhythm of an Argentine dance” in the second movement.<sup>81</sup> Chase states that “The *Pampeana No. 3* is by no means the only work of Ginastera’s that alludes to the natural chord of the guitar, the characteristic instrument of the gauchos and of the folk music of the pampas.”<sup>82</sup> He points to “Danza del Viejo Boyero” (“The Old Ox-Driver’s Dance” from *Tres Danzas Argentinas*) and *Malambo*. As Schwartz-Kates and Chase demonstrate, Ginastera’s association with the gaucho tradition goes beyond verbal allusions to *gauchesco* dances and literature—it is built into the compositional structure of his works.

*Don Segundo Sombra*, *The X-Ray of the Pampa*, *Santos Vega*, and Ginastera’s musical composition demonstrate the widespread appeal of the gaucho as a national symbol for Argentina from around 1900 to the 1940s. The gauchos of the past had faded from Argentinean life, but at the same time they had been reincarnated in literature, music, and theater. However, these works reveal contain several underlying contradictions. First is the disconnect between portrayal of the gaucho by these intellectuals and the description of the gauchos given by historians. The second contradiction is the disagreement among Güiraldes, Bayón Herrera, Martínez Estrada, and Ginastera about the certain elements of the gauchos’ identity. Was he a noble, virtuous individual to be emulated by all Argentines or a heartless ruffian? What was his relationship to impending European forces, in particular the immigrant population? The third discrepancy (linked to the

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<sup>80</sup> Schwartz-Kates, 269.

<sup>81</sup> Chase, 448.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

second) is the strong European influences these intellectuals had in spite of their claim creating distinctly Argentine works.

The first discrepancy, that of historical inaccuracy, takes on different shapes in each work. For Güiraldes, the gauchos, represented by Don Segundo Sombra, exhibited the type of character an Argentine should have—hardworking, strong, and fearless but still rational and reliable. In Güiraldes’ novel, Don Segundo earns his living by hiring himself out to local ranchers, who pay him to break horses, drive cattle, and do other work on the *estancia*. In the second chapter, Güiraldes writes, “Don Segundo was looking for work and the barkeeper was giving him some good tips, since his continual dealings with the country people kept him informed about everything that was happening on the ranches.”<sup>83</sup> Many descriptions of the gauchos made by their contemporaries make Güiraldes’ regard for their moral quality seem laughable.

Historically, the work of the gauchos was anything but legitimate. Madaline Wallis Nichols explains that under the mercantilist policies of the Spanish empire, colonists could only legally acquire imports or export goods (notably cattle hides) via authorized Spanish ships in designated customs houses.<sup>84</sup> Beginning in the early seventeenth-century, the gauchos contributed to the complex network of contraband trade in the Spanish colonies by rounding up and killing cattle without the required permits.<sup>85</sup> Nichols notes that in his journal recounting his travels to Uruguay in 1783, Juan Francisco Aguirre stated, “Gauchos or gauderios...are people who, taking advantage of the solitude of this land, have, among other skills, that of slaughtering cattle for their hides. It is said that the number of men who are engaged in this business mounts

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<sup>83</sup> Güiraldes, 14.

<sup>84</sup> Madaline Wallis Nichols, *The Gaucho: Cattle Hunter, Cavalryman, Ideal of Romance* (New York: Gordian Press, 1968), 26-27.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

into the thousands. Changadores...are gauderios who kill cattle without any government permit to do so.”<sup>86</sup> Nichols states that the gauchos emerged as a unique social group as a direct result of contraband trade.<sup>87</sup> By contrast, Don Segundo of Güiraldes’ novel is more of an itinerant cowhand than a true gaucho.

In addition, Güiraldes’ Don Segundo conflicts with the historical reputation of the gauchos as criminals and ruffians. Even his vices contributed to his image of manliness: he drinks, but is rarely drunk; he gambles, but does not often borrow money; he is able to fight, but acts in self-defense. Don Segundo is generally treated with respect by those he encounters. Describing the gaucho’s knack for winning admiration, Fabio says, “He knew how to be disconcerting by remaining impassive, and the uncertainty he aroused with his apparent innocence or profound guile led to feelings of respect and expectation.”<sup>88</sup> Even when Don Segundo is insulted, as in the scene in which Fabio meets him for the first time, he maintains a calm, dignified manner.<sup>89</sup>

In their own time, the gauchos were notorious for being cruel, barbarous, immoral, dishonest, and even lazy. According to Nichols, in 1784, Félix de Azara characterized the gaucho as follows:

Besides the said people, there is in that land, and particularly around Montevideo and Maldonado, another class of people, most appropriately called gauchos or gauderios. Commonly all are criminals escaped from the jails of Spain and Brazil, or they belong to the number of those who, because of their atrocities, have had to flee to the wilderness. Their nakedness, their long beards, their ever uncombed hair, and the uncleanness and brutishness of their appearance, make them horrible to see. For no motive or interest will they work for anyone, and besides being thieves, they also make off with women. These they take to the woods, and they live with them in huts, catching wild cattle for their food. When the gaucho has some necessity or caprice to satisfy, he steals a few horses or cows, takes them to Brazil where he sells them and where he gets whatever it is he needs.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>88</sup> Güiraldes, 110.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>90</sup> Nichols, 9

Azara is not alone in his disdain for the gauchos. Nichols also cites Felipe de Haedo, writing in 1778, who echoes his description, stating that the gauchos “are wandering from province to province, occupied in gambling and many other vices, committing robberies on the highways stealing cattle, living in the woods. They cannot be subdued because of the general insecurity of the jails...”<sup>91</sup> Nichols describes the gauchos’ lifestyle as barbarous, impoverished, and uneducated and identifies indolence, independence, wanderlust, and a combative tendency to be the key character traits of the gauchos.<sup>92</sup> Although Güiraldes portrayed the gaucho as a virtuous, if fiercely independent, character, this image has little basis in history.

Martínez Estrada’s vision of the gauchos is in some ways more historically accurate than that of Güiraldes. He has no notions of the gauchos as upstanding individuals—in fact he values them for their chaotic, independent nature. In Martínez Estrada’s case, the divide between *The X-Ray of the Pampa* and the gauchos of history is a philosophical distance rather than a moral one. *Martín Fierro*, while not actually written by a gaucho, is a good reflection of the gaucho mindset. (Umphrey states that the poem was popular among rural folk in Argentina, demonstrating Hernández’ mastery of gaucho dialect as well as his ability to capture “the very spirit of the gaucho type.”<sup>93</sup>) A comparison of these two works reveals some of the divergence between Martínez Estrada’s vision of the Pampa and the lives of the gauchos of the past.

Hernández’ style is simple and straightforward both in language and content. While *Martín Fierro* is contemplative, he is not particularly philosophical. Hernández’ gaucho has little respect for complex theories: “Your professors are no good here, experience is all that counts; here, those people who know everything would see how little they know—because this has

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 12-17.

<sup>93</sup> Umphrey, 152.

another key and a gaucho knows what it is.”<sup>94</sup> Hernández presents Martín Fierro as a humble man whose main concerns are essentially practical—his wife and sons, his horse, and the basic necessities of life. Martín Fierro, lamenting the loss of his two sons, cries “Poor little things, maybe they’ve got no place to shelter in, nor a roof to stand under, nor a corner to creep into, nor a shirt to put on them, nor a poncho to cover themselves.”<sup>95</sup> Martín Fierro is not innately drawn to conflict (especially in the military sense)—he is literally forced into it. He values his freedom, complaining bitterly of his mistreatment at the hands of the government, craving the liberty to live his life in peace and quiet, released from the conflict around him. Martín Fierro’s friend the gaucho named Cruz bewails the conflict around him: “I can tell you that in my part of the land there’s hardly a real *criollo* left—they’ve been swallowed by the grave, or run off, or been killed in the war—because in this country, friend, there’s no end to the struggle.”<sup>96</sup>

Two major differences emerge between Martínez Estrada’s understanding of the gaucho and that of Hernández. First, Martínez Estrada’s prose is extremely philosophical—a world away from the gaucho dialect of Hernández. Thomas F. McGann describes his style as “dense, epigrammatic, laden with inverted constructions and overly complex syntax and neologisms—a difficult, irritating, powerful style.”<sup>97</sup> While Martínez Estrada was certainly not seeking to imitate the gauchos in his language, he is applying a philosophy entirely out of reach of gauchos like Hernández’ Martín Fierro. In addition, Martínez Estrada considers the conflict, epitomized in the gauchos’ fighting spirit, to be the fundamental element of national formation. This contrasts sharply with Martín Fierro’s desire to be left alone in peace. Admittedly, Hernández presents a positive picture of the gaucho, but even if the gauchos were ruffians constantly

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<sup>94</sup> Hernández, 111.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>97</sup>Thomas F. McGann, introduction to *X-Ray of the Pampa*, trans. Alain Swietlicki (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), xiii.

seeking a fight, they did so for personal motives. Can such violence truly produce collective identity as Martínez Estrada describes? Whether or not one accepts Martínez Estrada's philosophy of conflict being the seed for creation of national identity, his book indisputably interprets the gaucho far beyond his own limited scope of existence. Martínez Estrada imparts to the gaucho a larger-than-life role—instead of being a lowly cattle driver, he is the instrument of Fate.

If Güiraldes and Martínez Estrada diverged from a historically accurate portrayal of the gauchos in their moralistic and philosophical interpretations of the gaucho, Bayón Herrera and Ginastera's artistic compositions of *gauchesco* works have significant differences from the artistic expression of the gauchos themselves. Bayón Herrera's play *Santos Vega* attempts to stylize a genre of drama unique to Argentina, the *dramas gauchos*. In the introduction to *Three Plays of the Argentine*, Edward Hale Bierstadt describes the *dramas gauchos* as “frank melodramas which were all written about the national figure, the gaucho.”<sup>98</sup> While Bayón Herrera successfully incorporated many elements of the *dramas gauchos*, *Santos Vega* is far more sophisticated than traditional performances.

Certain elements distinguished traditional *dramas gauchos* from European productions. First was its rural origin. Not only did the audience consist of rural peons and their families, the setting of the plays themselves revolved around rural life. Jones states that “familiar scenes in gaucho life were presented, the *pulpería*<sup>99</sup>, the camp fire with the skulls of cattle as seat, and the utensils for preparing mate, the attack by a police detachment, etc.”<sup>100</sup> Bierstadt even mentions the use of live horses on the stage as a common occurrence.<sup>101</sup> A second element was the

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<sup>98</sup> Bierstadt, xvii.

<sup>99</sup> Country store.

<sup>100</sup> Jones, 164.

<sup>101</sup> Bierstadt, xx.

itinerant nature of the drama troops that preformed the *dramas gauchos*. This was evident from the performance space, which originally consisted of the circus ring and later a portable theater made of wood and corrugated metal.<sup>102</sup> A third element was the heroization of the gaucho. According to Jones, the dramatic conflict in *dramas gauchos* usually pitted the independent-spirited, straight-thinking gaucho against civil authorities (notorious for impressing the gauchos into military service) or “the industrious and thrifty gringo, usually the Italian.”<sup>103</sup> (Jones does note that later on more diversity of plot developed, keeping the genre from becoming stagnant.)<sup>104</sup> Finally, Bierstadt states that since the plays themselves were not written, the actors acquired the script and stage directions orally, “the lines and business being so well known to the native audiences that a howl of fury would greet any deviation, however slight, from the traditional form.”<sup>105</sup>

Elements of Bayón Herrera’s *Santos Vega* closely resemble the *dramas gauchos*. For example, he employs a familiar character, the gaucho Santos Vega, placing him in conflict both with the police and with the foreigner Juan Sin Ropa (who is in fact the devi), and also incorporates common settings like the *estancia* and the *pulpería*. However, there are key points of difference between Bayón Herrera’s drama and more traditional dramas. The play was preformed not in the countryside, but at El Teatro Nuevo in Buenos Aires.<sup>106</sup> Surprisingly, Bayón Herrera was in fact Spanish, not Argentine.<sup>107</sup> Briedstadt states that Bayón Herrera’s use of gaucho dialect was unconvincing in the opinion of the Argentinean critic Jean Paul.<sup>108</sup> This

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, xix.

<sup>103</sup> Jones, 164.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>105</sup> Bierstadt, xix.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., xxxvii.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., xxxvi.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., xxxvi.

demonstrates a shift from earlier times when the actors would have been native Argentines who were naturally familiar with the gaucho dialect of Spanish.

Jones offers further insight on the dialectal question: “A curious fact conditioned the artistic development of the national theater in its early days and theater was the lack of actors. Those in the Spanish companies were unable to interpret gaucho parts, nor did the gaucho actors possess sufficient culture to equip them to render the more artistic and refined parts.”<sup>109</sup>

Breisadt admires the literary quality of Bayón Herrera’s script, arguing that it is “more artistically worthy” than the older *dramas gauchos*.<sup>110</sup> However, this level of sophistication, plausible from an artistic standpoint, represents a significant shift from the humble origins of these plays in circuses and traveling drama troops.

Alberto Ginastera’s music, like Bayón Herrera’s play, is far more refined than the music of the gauchos. His purpose in his musical compositions was not to replicate the songs of the *payadores* but rather to produce music evocative of the rural Argentina and its inhabitants, in particular the gauchos. Ginastera’s music, even with its strong nationalist tendencies, is unquestionably part of the classical genre. This is evident from Ginastera’s musical training, the influence of other classical musicians on his stylistic development, and his choice of musical structure and instrumentation. Chase gives a brief summary of the musical instruction Ginastera received—one typical of many classical composers. His parents, both second-generation Argentines, enrolled him in piano lessons when he was seven years old. According to Chase, seven years later Ginastera entered a music conservatory in Buenos Aires, where the works of European composers like Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky strongly impacted him.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Jones, 165.

<sup>110</sup> Briedstad, xxxvi.

<sup>111</sup> Chase, 440.



Ginastera's refined musical training could not have been more different from the way the gauchos learned to play and compose music. Richard Pinnell emphasizes the importance in gaucho music, describing the *payada de contrapunto*—a musical competition in which gauchos played guitar and invented verses of an impromptu ballad.<sup>112</sup> Pinnell refers to the Concolorcorvo's 1773 account of South American life entitled *El Lazarillo—A Guide for Inexperienced Travelers between Buenos Aires and Lima*, which gives the following derogatory description of gaucho music: "To the accompaniment of a guitar, which they learn to play very badly, they sing, out of tune, many ballads which they ruin, and many which they get out of their own heads, usually treating of love."<sup>113</sup> Despite his obviously negative opinion of the gaucho's song, Concolorcorvo concedes that "The beginnings of their songs are usually of good harmony, considering their gross and barbaric manner."<sup>114</sup> Regardless of the perceived quality of their music, the gauchos had nothing comparable to the professional training Ginastera received. Improvisation—a sort of quick-thinking musical wit—was more important than technical proficiency.

As Ginastera drew from a legacy of classical music in his compositions, his choice of instrumentation was also different from that of the gauchos of the past. Ginastera consistently wrote music for instruments and ensembles typical of classical works: solo piano works like *Tres Danzas Argentinas* and *Malambo*, orchestral works such as *Estancia* and *Overture for the Creole "Faust"*, and the violin and piano rhapsody *Pampeana No. 1*.<sup>115</sup> For the gauchos, however, nothing could replace the guitar for importance. Pinnell claims that it was "the gaucho's only

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<sup>112</sup> Pinnell, 249.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>115</sup> Chase, 458-459.

instrument”<sup>116</sup> and comments on the fact that all early European influences in South America—the “conquistadores, Jesuit missionaries, and the first colonists”—all relied on the guitar, also known as the “vihuela”.<sup>117</sup> Richard W. Slatta notes that “by the late nineteenth century, the once-obligatory guitar-strumming gaucho had yielded to a small Italian orchestra as the preferred entertainment for a wake.”<sup>118</sup> The orchestra, the backbone of classical music for musicians like Ginastera, was something literally foreign to the gauchos, introduced by immigrants who had moved to the pampa.

In addition to the conflict between the portrayal of the gauchos given by historians and the vision of the gauchos in the works of Güiraldes, Bayón Herrera, Martínez Estrada, and Ginastera, a second contradiction emerges in *gauchesco* works of the first decades of the twentieth century: these intellectuals all saw the gaucho as a national symbol, yet they differed as to what exactly he represented. One point of divergence was the question of whether or not the gauchos served as a moral guide for Argentineans. Perhaps a more significant question was whether European influence, especially immigration, was incompatible with the gaucho. Further complicating this issue was the fact that all these intellectuals were closely aligned with Europe in some capacity.

Jeane Delaney argues that some intellectuals reacted against the forces of modernism and immigration (and the evils that sometimes accompanied these changes) by embracing the gaucho as the symbol of a better, simpler, and more virtuous time.<sup>119</sup> Don Segundo’s mentorship of Fabio demonstrates Güiraldes’ belief that the gauchos could provide a moral compass for Argentina. Bayón Herrera’s Santos Vega also is a model of restraint and virtue, claiming “[My

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<sup>116</sup> Pinnell, 245.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>118</sup> Richard Slatta, *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 81.

<sup>119</sup> Delaney, 456.

knife] never wounds unlawfully, And never kills in treachery.”<sup>120</sup> Later he refuses to fight with Jacinto over Argentina, claiming that he wields his knife only in self-defense.<sup>121</sup>

Both Güiraldes’ *Don Segundo Sombra* and Bayón Herrera’s *Santos Vega* both convey the vision of the gauchos as models of virtue. Martínez Estrada, on the other hand, emphasizes the gaucho’s barbarism and even cruelty.<sup>122</sup> He argues that it was the chaotic nature of the gaucho that made him an important factor in the development of national identity. Martínez Estrada claims that the caudillo, whom he sees as an extension of the gaucho, “represented the triumph of power, the leadership of the mob, but at the same time was the personification of something superior and harmonious... In a confused ferment he embodied the ideas of stability, direction, sense, form.”<sup>123</sup> The virtuous character that with which both Güiraldes and Bayón Herrera endowed their characters contrasts sharply with Martínez Estrada’s interpretation of the gaucho as a heartless, violent ruffian who nonetheless proved an effective source of national identity.

A more significant difference in these sources’ approach to the gaucho is their perspective on foreign influence, especially immigration. Both Bayón Herrera and Martínez Estrada present European influences as in direct conflict with traditional Argentine life, personified in the gaucho. It is a foreigner that kills Santos Vega in Herrera’s play. Herrera pictures clash between the *criollos* and the European newcomers as a musical duel between two *payadors*: the beloved Santos Vega and a demonic invader Juan Sin Ropa. Describing a dream he has just before the appearance of Juan Sin Ropa, Santos Vega says, “My voice chocked, and I felt a cold chill in my heart; for friends, I saw before me a payador from a strange land! But the

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<sup>120</sup> Bayón Herrera, 36.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>122</sup> Martínez Estrada, 51.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

devil was concealed beneath his clothing.”<sup>124</sup> When Juan Sin Ropa seeks to persuade the bystanders of the beauty of his new songs, Argentina defensively replies, “We have the songs of our payadors. What do you want with us?”<sup>125</sup> For Bayón Herrera, the native *criollo* and the immigrant are locked in a desperate struggle—no compromise or fusion is possible. The ultimate result of the encounter is the death of genuine Argentine culture. Bierstadt in his introduction to *Three Plays of the Argentine* in which *Santos Vega* appears summarizes the closing scene: “*Juan Sin Ropa*, dressed in the guise of a foreigner, has given him his death-blow, and over his fallen body *Argentina* is bowed in grief.”<sup>126</sup> Bayón Herrera’s view of the gaucho suffers no place for the inclusion of immigrants.

For Martínez Estrada, European influence had overpowered the national consciousness that the conflict of the Civil Wars had slowly been forging. Referring to the fact that foreigners owned the vast majority of the railways in Argentina, he states that “The embankments of the railroad created a frontier: Europe was the railroad track—America was the rest.”<sup>127</sup> Rather than benefiting the local people of the pampas, the trains were a hindrance to advancement: they existed primarily for tourist purposes, they increased rent, they modernized only the narrow stretch of land they covered, and, worst of all, they converged to the center of Buenos Aires like a spider’s web.<sup>128</sup> Martínez Estrada’s description of the railways symbolizes his perception of the relationship between Argentina and Europe—whatever benefits Argentineans received from foreign investment, both cultural and economic, were marginal. The heartland of Argentina, the small communities of the Pampa, only suffered from this exchange with Europe. Martínez

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<sup>124</sup> Bayón Herrera, 73.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>126</sup> Bierstadt, xli.

<sup>127</sup> Martínez Estrada, 75.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-78.

Estrada identifies the gaucho as the symbol of the countryside—a man formed entirely by the landscape around him and free from the oppressive influence of the cities.

Güiraldes' view of the relationship between the gaucho and the immigrant is more complex than that of Bayón Herrera or Martínez Estrada. Many of his remarks about foreigners are at best condescending (he describes an Irish woman as having “freckles all over her hands and face, like a *tero* egg”<sup>129</sup>). At the same time, he considers the changes of modernization and immigration to be inevitable—as inevitable as the protagonist Fabio's unwanted inheritance. Argentineans should not ignore this reality, but instead strive to preserve their heart and soul, symbolized by the gaucho, in spite of the transformations coming to the nation. Fabio admires the boss's son Raucho for his ability to read French, Italian, and English fluently.<sup>130</sup> He reflects on the transformation his new position as ranch owner has brought him: “...the education Don Leandro was giving me, the books, and some trips to Buenos Aires with Raucho were transforming me outwardly into what is called a cultured man. Nothing, however, gave me the powerful sense of contentment that I had found in my gaucho existence.”<sup>131</sup> According to Güiraldes, European culture was not innately bad, but modernization and foreign influences should always be tempered by acceptance of the virtuous, down-to-earth lifestyle of the gauchos.

Martínez Estrada and Bayón Herrera deliberately opposed immigration in their works. Güiraldes too often presents a negative impression of the immigrant, but at the same time he recognizes a place for European influence, especially in literature and education. However, a dichotomy exists between these perceptions of European influence and their own background. Ironically, Bayón Herrera was himself not an Argentine, but rather a Spaniard.<sup>132</sup> While born in

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<sup>129</sup> Güiraldes, 86.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>132</sup> Bierstadt, xxxvi.

Argentina, Güiraldes too was heavily influenced by European culture. According to Patricia Owen Steiner, because he lived with his parents in Paris between the ages of one and five, he spoke French and German before learning Spanish.<sup>133</sup> Steiner states that Güiraldes passed a good portion of his childhood on his father's ranch in the interior of Argentina where he acquired the familiarity of gaucho life so central to *Don Segundo Sombra*, but as an adult he spent much of his time abroad.<sup>134</sup>

Unlike Bayón Herrera and Güiraldes, Martínez Estrada lived in Argentina almost his entire life, moving to Mexico then Cuba when he was sixty-four years old. However, in his book *Prophet in the Wilderness: The Works of Ezequiel Martínez Estrada* Peter G. Earle emphasizes the important influence of European philosophers, especially Germans like Arthur Schopenhauer, Freidrich Nietzsche, and Thomas Mann, in his works.<sup>135</sup> According to Earle, "His own land, especially the part of it her recollected from childhood—its pampas, its wildlife, its lonely villages—was his basic habitat and the symbolic substance of his writing. Europe and the United States, on the other hand, were his school, in which he formed very early the definitive pattern of his thought..."<sup>136</sup> While Martínez Estrada was more personally connected with Argentina and the Pampa than either Bayón Herrera or Güiraldes, he too had a significant tie to Europe—the philosophical thought of Europeans that so shaped his own ideology.

Bayón Herrera condemned the foreigner although he himself was Spanish and Güiraldes almost grudgingly accepted the necessity of foreign influence while spending much of his time outside of Argentina. Ginastera, however, saw no contradiction between European ancestry and Argentine identity. Schwartz-Kates quotes Ginastera as saying:

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<sup>133</sup> Steiner, 275.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 276-277.

<sup>135</sup> Peter G. Earle, *Prophet in the Wilderness: The Works of Ezequiel Martínez Estrada* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 6.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 24.

I believe the artist should be a spokesman of a society, a spokesman of a people, and a spokesman of a given culture...I feel very Argentine even though...my paternal grandparents were from Catalonia and my maternal grandparents...from Italy. However, I am now a second-generation Argentine who feels a deep bond with his nation.<sup>137</sup>

For Ginastera, immigrants and their children could truly become part of their adopted country.

He conceived national identity as something to be sensed rather than understood.

Ginastera's subjectivity in defining national identity is evident in the way he drew inspiration from landscape for his *gauchesco* music—pieces that reflected his own conception of nationalism. Chase quotes a program note for the ballet *Estancia* which explains Ginastera's impressions of the pampas:

Whenever I have crossed the Pampa or have lived in it for a time, my spirit felt itself inundated by changing impressions, now joyful, now melancholy...From my first contact with the Pampa, there awakened in me the desire to write a work that would reflect these states of my spirit...my wish was to write a purely symphonic work...whose essence would partake of my subjective feeling.<sup>138</sup>

Ginastera's nationalistic music is based on an emotional experience of subjective connectedness with the landscape. All Argentineans could share this kind of emotional experience regardless of cultural background. In this sense Argentina, with all its vast landscape and history including the gauchos, belonged to *gringos* as much as to *criollos*.

The emotional subjectivity so evident in Ginastera's impressions and compositions precipitates a question at the heart of a study of nationalism: if national identity and its symbols are fraught with discrepancies, how do they command such emotive power over writers (and composers) and their audience? *Gauchesco* works from the early twentieth century claim a connection with the past, yet they contain many elements that conflict with the historical depiction of the gauchos. Güiraldes, Martínez Estrada, Bayón Herrera, and Ginastera all adopt the gaucho as a national symbol, but they diverge in their understanding of the gaucho as moral example for the nation as well as their perception of his relationship with immigrants and the

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<sup>137</sup> Schwartz-Kates, 274.

<sup>138</sup> Chase, 445.

European world. The gaucho is a symbol ridden with inconsistency: while intellectuals—writers, essayists, and musicians—saw the gaucho’s role in Argentina’s as an important element of national identity, their understanding of the gaucho often conflicted with the way historians have described the gaucho and with others’ interpretations. Despite these paradoxes, the gaucho remained an emotive national symbol in the era from the 1910s to the 1940s. An analysis of two scholar’s theories of nationalism (*The Invention of Tradition* edited by Eric Hobsbawm and *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson) helps explain why such symbols, replete with the contradictions inherent in the construction of national identity, continue to command emotional appeal.

Eric Hobsbawm’s introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, a collection of essays written by various historians tracing the origins of traditions particularly in Great Britain, helps to explain the phenomenon of using symbols to construct national identity. According to Hobsbawm, those who create national symbols do so in two ways: they may consciously manufacture entirely new traditions (he gives the example of Robert Baden-Powell’s creation of the ritualized organization of the Boy Scouts), or they may draw a custom from history and revise it to suit their purposes.<sup>139</sup> He notes that such a revival of such a “tradition” often occurs after it has already experienced a break with the past. Hobsbawm points to the way the English middle-class started singing Christmas carols in church and in the cities, although these carols were not historically sung in these settings.<sup>140</sup>

Hobsbawm’s observation of this disconnect between so-called traditions and documented history is evident in the *gauchesco* works of the early twentieth century. Güiraldes casts upon the gauchos the unexpected role as a moral example—something likely unimaginable in earlier

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<sup>139</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, introduction to *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4-6.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



times. Martínez Estrada imparts to the gaucho a philosophical importance that would no doubt have been lost on the uneducated gaucho of past. Bayón Herrera's gauchos achieve a level of sophistication foreign to the *dramas gauchos* of the past. Ginastera places *gauchesco* music in the surprising context of classically trained musicians, orchestras, and concert halls. As Hobsbawm argues, these intellectuals have taken a person from the past—the gaucho—and “re-invented” him in a new and surprising to make him a national symbol. What the audiences sees as continuity with the past in fact constitutes a decided break with history. Hobsbawm argues that such historical disconnect is inherent in the construction of national symbols.

If Hobsbawm exposes the inevitability of historical contradiction in the creation of national symbols, Anderson's explanation of nationalism in his book *Imagined Communities* helps explain the power of national symbols and elucidates the conflicting conceptions of foreign influence. Anderson sees imagination as being the defining feature in the creation of the nation. According to Anderson, the community is imagined because it conceives a “communion”<sup>141</sup> which goes far beyond the people an individual actually meets in the course of his life. In the third chapter of *Imagined Communities* entitled “The Origins of National Consciousness”, he stresses the importance of language and literature in forging this imagined connection. The printing of books in the vernacular after Gutenberg's invention of the press both extended and limited the perceived community. Anderson explains this two-dimensional community—a community both expanded and contracted:

In the process [of print and paper], they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 44.

Anderson says that through literature (and especially the newspaper), the reader felt a connection with all speakers of the same language. At the same time, the community was limited only to those who understood and read that particular language.

If the printing press was the mechanism for creating this “imagined community” of the nation, what was the impetus for its construction? According to Anderson, national identity, much like a religion, allows individuals to feel a connection with something that transcends the limitations of time and space. Anderson says “it is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny. With Debray we might say, ‘Yes, it is quite accidental that I am born French; but after all, France is eternal.’”<sup>143</sup> Nationalism imparts (or at least seeks to impart) a deeper meaning to human life. Anderson’s perspective on the construction of nationalism explains the persistent appeal of the gaucho as a national symbol in the decades from 1910 to 1940 despite the contradictions in these representations that Hobsbawm says are inherent and inevitable.

Anderson’s argument about the nature of national identity corresponds with the use of the gaucho as a national symbol. First, his claim that the printed word linked individuals into an “imagined community” holds true: literature is what connects readers, often *porteños* with little experience of the interior, with the rural characters of a time past. A temporal and spatial chasm exists between the reader and the gaucho: the written word seeks to bridge this divide. In Ginastera’s case, music functions in the same way by using identifiable sound and rhythm patterns to connect audience members in the crowded concert-hall (perhaps in Buenos Aires) with the by-gone *payadas* of the gauchos. This connection is imagined: neither the readers nor the concert-goers leave their seats, much less travel back in time. Yet in absorbing *lo gauchesco*, they experience *lo argentino*.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>144</sup>That which pertains to Argentina.

*Imagined Communities* also helps explain why Güiraldes, Bayón Herrera, Martínez Estrada, and Ginastera all viewed European influence and immigration in different ways. If the national community is imagined rather than objective, the boundaries of this nation are fluid, limited only by the individual's perception of who is with or without of its borders. Thus Güiraldes may consider himself within the national community while living in Paris whereas Martínez Estrada might deny that an immigrant living in Buenos Aires has ever truly entered the nation of Argentina. In this sense, perhaps Ginastera comes closest to perceiving Argentine identity as Anderson defines it: he recognizes that his national identity is something he feels, something subjective, and rather than claiming an objective connection with the nation by birth or heritage.

In the decades from the 1910s to 1940s, the gaucho's longstanding importance to Argentine history took on a new form as writers, playwrights, and musicians imparted to him the role of a national symbol. This portrayal of the gaucho was full with discrepancies: the ahistorical presentation of the gaucho, the conflicting vision of the gaucho as a moral leader, and the persistence of anti-immigrant sentiment in spite of the pervasive reach of European culture. However, the theoretical models of Anderson and Hobsbawm demonstrate that such contradictions are themselves inherent in the creation of nationalism. Despite the elusive subjectivity of national identity, the works of Ricardo Güiraldes, Luis Bayón Herrera, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, and Alberto Ginastera have held emotional significance for Argentines not only at the time of their production, but even today. An analysis of their work, provide insight not only on national identity in Argentina, but also the way national symbols evolve in societies around the world.

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