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*Journey, Rediscovery
and Narrative:*

*British Travel Accounts of
Argentina*

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JOURNEY, REDISCOVERY AND
NARRATIVE:
BRITISH TRAVEL ACCOUNTS OF
ARGENTINA (1800-1850)

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*Readers are travellers, they move across
lands belonging to someone else, like
nomads poaching their way across fields
they did not write, despoiling the wealth of
Europe to enjoy it themselves.¹*

In August 1831 the *Beagle* was ready to sail for the coasts of South America. This expedition, like so many others, had a position open for someone who could double as an officer and as a naturalist. However, the obsessive Captain FitzRoy had another requirement. The suicide of the ship's previous commander had left him with disturbing premonitions. FitzRoy wanted a scientist, but – beyond that – he longed for a cultivated man with whom to pass the time in the isolated conditions that awaited them.

FitzRoy hired a recent Cambridge graduate in Divinity who was also a frustrated student of medicine. His name was Charles Robert Darwin. Darwin returned to England in 1836. The next year, he began to organise his notes into a 'Journal of Researches'. This was the original title of *The Voyage of the Beagle*, whose three volumes, the official account of the voyage, finally appeared in 1838.

Darwin's narrative is a brilliant evocation of an encounter with a natural world (the Americas) in all its variations: its majestic forests, sublime mountain ranges, and rustic villages. In his descriptions, Darwin subjected the populations to pre-Victorian anthropology, while comparing the natural cosmos to the peaceful English countryside in which he had grown up.

The structure of the narrative consists of remarks on life aboard ship, scientific observation, and humanistic comments. The tone is one of direct experience in keeping with that canon of travel writing: the diary. In this respect, the holistic format Humboldt had invented in his *Personal Narrative* continued to have a marked influence on later literary treatments. This story, like the others, is both ordinary and extraordinary. I will myself address the latter.

British travellers' chronicles of the Río de la Plata, which were published between 1800 and 1850 and known in Europe as *Travel Accounts*, abound in descriptions, experiences, and travel narratives arranged in the form of adventure stories, the style of which is often tedious, repetitive, and confusing. In the past

¹ Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, vol. 1, *Arts de faire* (1980), new ed., ed. Luce Giard (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 251.

few years, important studies have succeeded in focusing and clarifying the genre and revealing its historical and literary characteristics.

It constitutes a narrative corpus that emerges from an intercultural space and, at first glance, seems to be nothing more than an attempt to provide an objective description of indigenous societies.² Nevertheless, imbued as they are with the desire for exploration and knowledge characteristic of the time and of its enlightened mentality, the texts transcend the requirements of description. In addition to new information, a certain perception and a sensibility arise in the wake of the travellers' experience. That experience connects the cultural universe of the authors – and their readers – to the Argentine reality. The accounts were one way of harmonising the conflicts inherent in this encounter.

This investigation will attempt simultaneously to explore the development of these chronicles in three fields: the configuration of a new community of readers; the voyages and their creation of Argentine images; and the relationship between the accounts and the first national narratives. In sum, the aim of this work is to analyse the travel literature historically and to trace some features of the cultural history of society in the Rfo de la Plata region in the first half of the 19th century.

During the 18th century the demand for information about South America increased. London publishers began to profit from the accounts of visitors to foreign lands. Among the first to appear were Frazier (*A Voyage to the South Sea*, 1717) and Juan and Ulloa (*A Voyage to South America*, 1758), and these also became the most popular.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the widespread diffusion of Humboldt's writings demonstrated the international interest in the *Travel Accounts*. English translations and the original French versions appeared simultaneously (for example, Marcus Carey published an early translation by Maria Williams in Philadelphia in 1815).³ The publication of travel books on South America reached its peak between 1815 and 1830. These accounts, whether excellent, run-of-the-mill, or trivial, became immensely popular and a number of them sold very well. Head's chronicle of Argentina (1825) was one of the most impressive successes. A few years later Edmond Temple (1830) wrote a similarly successful book, in which he confessed: 'I would be happy if the whole world were to gallop through my books as rapidly as one gallops through Head's notes, and with half the pleasure they provide.'⁴ Around the middle of the century, this enchantment waned. Civil wars in Chile and Argentina, the battles for Uruguay and the imminent revolution against Pedro II in Brazil created a sense of disillusionment. Businessmen and investors begin to look towards the

² In reference to the colonial discourse, certain authors propose a perspective which I find deterministic, treating the travel accounts as mere expressions of British expansionism, like traded goods. See Kristine L. Jones (1986).

³ A good summary on the scientific legitimacy of the travel accounts and European curiosity about the region can be found in Tom B. Jones (1949).

⁴ Temple (1830, Introduction).

United States and the Orient in search of greater stability and security. Despite the sympathies occasioned by the birth of the new nations of South America, it came to be perceived as a dubious region, where chaos prevailed.

Almost all the titles and most of the authors in this genre can be identified with literary forms that acquire a 'conscious exoticism' associated with the new expansionist movement. It is no longer a matter of writing the history of the colonial wars, but of telling adventure stories from personal experience and inventing rare and exquisite curiosities.

At that time, certain bourgeois values were translated into fiction as individual formulas for knowledge, virtue, wealth and progress, creating in turn a community of readers that included (as one of the devices for social control) the popular classes. In this narrative form, productivity and the circulation of individuals and signs occurred in an altered, yet recognisable, whole that utilised a system of representations, a system of truths, that was structurally similar to realism. Due to their educational value, the travel chronicles form part of this new literature. Ever since Montaigne's essays on the education of children, travel narratives have been considered to be an effective pedagogical instrument. Unmarred by nostalgia, melancholy, or aberrations, their paramount feature is observation, and this is also true of the *Travel Accounts*.⁵

In these accounts, which introduced an extensive inventory of 'national customs', an important part of the national identity of the new countries of the Americas emerged for the first time in written form. Was this merely a literary form of neocolonialist discourse? In broad terms, and from a cultural perspective, all colonial discourse is based on three elements imposed on the colonised society: the practices of daily life, language, and legal norms. During the conquest and colonisation, in the case of the English, this domination was symbolised by the *turf and twig* ceremonies characteristic of the 16th century.⁶ The rhetoric of gardening, the custom of fencing in properties, and the ritual celebration of fertility were part of these ceremonies. At that time, Anglo-Saxon appropriation did not require dramatic conquests; all that was necessary were gestures that could be perceived as genuine acts of possession.

In the eighteenth century the previous operations intended to legitimise dominion no longer sufficed. In order to be understood as such, possession required a new set of actions. Commercial expansion superimposed some new rules of the game on older English traditions: the new features being science, exploration, and narration. There was now a new 'planetary consciousness', defined by the dramatic temporal and spatial expansion of European cosmogony and cosmography and an orientation towards the exploration of continental interiors, with natural history as its instrument. This new consciousness later became the central element in contemporary Eurocentrism.⁷

⁵ See Abbeele (1992, p. 85).

⁶ See Seed (1995, pp. 4-5).

⁷ See Pratt (1992, Chapter II). On the concepts of distance and time, see Helms

The exploration and documentation of the interior territories replaced the maritime paradigm prevalent during the first three centuries of European expansion. The exploration of the interior became the greatest challenge to the expansionist's energy and imagination. This clearly had a direct effect on the travel narratives. Here were new objects and new forms of knowledge/possession. From now on, no expedition would be complete without a written account.

Travel and narration blend into one. From the second half of the 18th century onwards, the inventories required by natural history became mandatory even on non-scientific expeditions. Natural history, Condamine asserted, can reduce a whole region to a system of variables in which each value must be designated, if not in quantity, at least through a clear and delimited description. Therefore it became possible to establish a system of identities that corresponded to existing natural entities, even in their differences.⁸

Like all colonial discourse, the *Travel Accounts* were elaborated on the basis of a dichotomy between culture and nature. Scientific inquiry implied a cultural device that subsumed the culture and history of other societies into the natural universe. Once again, natural history provided the model, removing specimens not only from their organic or ecological relationships, but also from their cultural context. Peoples were deprived of their history. The *Travel Accounts* fulfilled, in part, the essential task of mediating between the scientific world and the general public, lending social significance to this cultural operation.

For all of these reasons, the travel account became 'naturalised' and standardised. The educated ambience incorporates the human tone, organising two contrasting and complementary languages for all travel literature: one scientific and the other experiential. Thus, 19th century travel discourse (travel motivated by commercial expansion) is the favourite son of natural history and the Enlightenment. Humboldt and his thirty-volume *Travel Accounts* became the paradigm for travel narratives, and his texts were the most prominent interlocutors in the process of redefining the Americas. *Views of Nature* and its sequel, *Views of the Cordilleras*, contain a repertory of Latin American images. Three of them in particular canonise the representation of the new continent: the abundance of tropical jungle (the Amazon and the Orinoco), the snowy mountains (the Cordillera and the Mexican volcanoes), and the vast interior plains (the plains of Venezuela and the Argentine pampas). Ever since, part of the European imagery of the 'new continent' has been framed by nature. One could say that in the 19th century the Europeans reinvented the Americas as a geography. This is the ideology underlying the later development of the travel narrative.

The Enlightenment idea of the utilitarian voyage was no longer embodied

(1994, pp. 355-77).

⁸ Condamine's report, presented to the Académie Française in 1745, was swiftly translated into various languages (Condamine, 1748, p. iv).

solely in the figure of the naturalist. Darwin himself, in both his complexity and his functions, surpassed such a classification. The new narrator was primarily a narrator/traveller: from one place to another; from one viewpoint to another; from the known to the unknown; from common sense to the exceptional; from obsessive reference to the past to a soothing and predictable future. Scientific information, aesthetic concerns, and humanist vocations created a controlled diversity. This rationality, along with some romantic inflections – subjectivity dominated by a positivist spirit – shows the reader a recognisable and prestigious otherness.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to indicate that the chronicles are basically the projected image of the traveller's own ideological universe, nor can they be seen – as Pratt maintains – as merely the vanguard of capitalism.⁹ To what extent can this literature reveal the cultural processes associated with the social history of reading?

The chronicles are part of a political, economic, and scientific enterprise that is categorically and fundamentally cultural. They belong to a large-scale literary project generated by the publishing revolution that provides certain specific features of 'colonial discourse'. As a result of a *communication* circuit running from author to reader, passing through the editor, the printed edition, and the critics, access to the reading community is linked to an understanding of the phenomenon of the book. Both critics and readers complete the cycle; their influence on the author is both anterior and posterior to the act of writing. In other words, an author does not write books, he or she writes texts. The space of circulation between text, printing, reviews, and reading endows the object/book with meaning.¹⁰

The authors are readers as well. Through their association with the reading community, they themselves acquire ideas about genres and styles, respond to criticism of their previous works, or anticipate possible reactions from the public. They always address themselves to an average audience and to reviewers who, by the second half of the 19th century, had begun to assume not only a presence but a certain power. The circuit is fluid and permanent; and as a process it is related to other economic, social, political, and cultural systems of the age.¹¹

These are the specific historical forms that the so-called 'reading revolution'

⁹ I refer to the somewhat schematic notion that the travel narratives are only colonialist expressions in literary form. For example, Jitrik (1969, p. 14) and Pratt (1992, pp. 115 ff).

¹⁰ This model is analysed in Darnton (1990), Chapter 7. On the construction of the meaning of the book, see Chartier (1992).

¹¹ In interpreting the origins of the French Revolution, Roger Chartier maintains that it was actually more a cultural than an intellectual phenomenon. He mentions the new cult of private life, the process of secularisation, the visibility of the popular classes, and particularly the influence of literature on what Habermas terms the 'bourgeois public sphere' (Chartier, 1990, pp. 25-35).

assumed. Until 1750, there were very few 'mass-consumption' books: the Bible, almanacs, confessional works. These were read and reread. It was a case of an intensive, almost reverential reading of a limited number of texts. The last decade of the 18th century stimulated new types of curiosity that demanded new titles, other genres and a variety of topics; the practice of reading spread and became secularised. The taste for 'light' fiction and for newspapers in general coincided with the habit of reading each text only once. The final point in this modulation seems to have occurred at the end of the 18th century, with the emergence of a mass reading audience that acquired extraordinary proportions during the 19th century, as the publishing industry expanded and literacy spread.¹² As Poovey maintains, in addition to legal and scientific instruments, literary discourse and the process of individuation of the author became fundamental ingredients in the formation of the individual in the 19th century.¹³ This established new relations between the reader and the author and between the author and the text, both closely linked to the idea of 'authenticity'. From this point onwards, the reaction of the reading community became one of the keys to understanding the way in which the encounter between the world of literary representation and the subjective world of the reader operated in modern society.¹⁴

Other cultural experiences, even in Europe, cannot compare to the lavish history of reading fields in England. This commenced in 1557, when London began to dominate the printing industry. Classical literature and humanism took centre stage.¹⁵ After 1750, new literary genres began to flourish. This new literary sensibility was oriented towards the historical context and towards the public. Innovations towards the turn of the century included texts classified as *Arts and Sciences*. Travel books and works on natural history tended to become successful publications. They constituted slightly over ten per cent of the titles in libraries in England, Germany, and the United States.¹⁶

Certain indicators suggest a remarkable familiarity with texts written after 1770. The averages for England, France and Germany suggest that about 50 per cent of merchants, 35 per cent of artisans, and no less than 30 per cent of workers owned text in one form or another: books, posters, pamphlets, or almanacs.¹⁷

The way in which reading took place also supports the theory that it was a relatively mass and popular phenomenon. Although a high percentage of children (estimated at close to 60 per cent of the population between the ages of five and fifteen) were enrolled in schools, and children learned to read more rapidly than

¹² Although this model has been criticised as excessively simplistic, the idea is useful for understanding the configuration of the new community of readers. The first to develop it was Rolf Engelsing (1969, pp. 944-1002).

¹³ Poovey (1989).

¹⁴ Ricouer (1985, vol. 3, p. 230).

¹⁵ Barber (1976).

¹⁶ For a comparative analysis of book production and the stock in public libraries, see Ward (1974).

¹⁷ Darnton (1990, p. 163).

to write, reading – particularly in England – occurred in workshops and in the countryside, outside the confines of the classroom. Among the popular classes, most were engaged in some form of work by the age of seven.¹⁸ Workers generously shared the art of reading with each other.¹⁹ The process continued to advance, and by 1840, when the trade in British books began a massive expansion, the literary profession itself became the subject of numerous essays and popular novels. And consequently its public, the readers, participated as influential spectators in the stories of the new protagonists, the writers.

One of the ‘functions’ of the new literature was to identify a national character, defining which elements were considered as those shared by all the English (*Englishmen*). The idea of a national identity and a national literature went hand in hand. One proof of this phenomenon was the emphasis placed on laws concerning authors’ rights, which verged on the patriotic.

A form of English identity sketched out during the reign of the Tudors and further developed during the 17th century wars came to be represented by the figure of John Bull. He was portrayed as businesslike, honest, brave, visionary, and balanced – although somewhat xenophobic, simple-minded, and obstinate as well.²⁰ At this point another quality was added to the characteristics of the archetypal Englishman: the habit of reading. The public lost interest in exotic books and refined editions, while there was a surge of ordinary books that were to become literary experiences for the ‘common people’.

Towards the end of the 18th century, the English publishing world was in rapid expansion. Up until that time, publishing houses, distributors, and bookshops remained unfamiliar novelties to the public. Books, whether sold or lent, were articles in the same category as medicines, theatre tickets or jewellery. In 1774, James Lackington opened the first bookshop in London and soon became a wholesaler. His strategy was to buy remaindered stock from printers in bulk and reduce retail prices. To the disgust of many publishers, Lackington soon became rich and very popular. The configuration of a community of readers was also closely related to the monetary value of a book. The relative accessibility of this object led to greater visibility for the authors, many of whom were delighted to accept between five and thirty pounds – the average amount paid for advanced

¹⁸ In 1851 the population of England was over 16.5 million. That same year, Scotland had 3 million inhabitants and Wales 1.2 million. At that time, London’s population stood at close to 2 million, almost 10% of the island’s total population. If the outlying satellites of Surrey and Middlesex are included, the urban area contained 17% of the total population of England, which made it an exceptionally large urban area. Few of the world’s cities had a population above 100,000. Between 1811 and 1851 the percentage of young people in the population increased. In 1826, two out of every five people in Great Britain were under the age of 15. Facts re-elaborated from Wrigley and Schofield (1981).

¹⁹ The following may be consulted on literature and literacy in England from the 16th to the 18th century: Mitch (1992); Thomas (1986). On reading among the popular classes, see Webb (1955); and Altick (1957).

²⁰ Boverer and Erickson (1976).

rights.²¹

The power of Utilitarianism was making itself felt. Publicists were enthused by the philosophy associated with Jeremy Bentham and James Mill. In 1826, Henry Brougham created the 'Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge'. One of its principles was the theory that knowledge is synonymous with information, particularly in the fields of applied science, mechanics, and the growing spheres of manufacturing and communications. The movement later culminated in the 'Association for the Defence of Literature', inspired by Charles Dickens.²² Printers, books, and libraries were central to these ideals.

However, more pamphlets, newspapers, and magazines than books were sold,²³ and these rapidly became the most powerful medium of social communication. At the same time, the thirst for bibliographical reviews meant that two of these journals – the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review* – the former Liberal and the latter Conservative – became prominent, at least until the mid-19th century (both sold more than 14,000 copies, a record for that time).²⁴ The zenith of the *Travel Accounts* (1800-1850) coincided with the illustrious period of British Reviews dedicated to criticism. After 1850 the Reviews became collections of miscellaneous information rather than significant influences on public opinion.

These journals set out to employ criticism as a means of expounding on topics of interest to the general public. Their readership was not confined to specialists; the thematic range created a new figure: the general reader, someone who read widely, seriously, and devotedly. Along with the literary revival that produced new editions of the classics, the Reviews were the publishing phenomenon that contributed to the creation of the book-oriented atmosphere of London in the first half of the 19th century. The rapid growth of the Reviews after 1800 helped to form a new and greatly expanded reading public. The demand created by the new editors of the *Edinburgh* – Brougham, Jeffrey, Homer, Sydney Smith – exceeded their capacity to meet it. Initially, they only printed 750 copies of the *Edinburgh Review*. Its provocative liberalism, however,

²¹ During the first half of the 19th century, heated debates began over authors' rights. In 1850, relations between authors and publishers were regulated by three types of contractual agreements: sale of rights; commission based on the number of books printed; commission based on sales. (Bonham-Carter, 1978, vol. I, pp. 32 ff.)

²² Within this movement, and in reference to books written in Spanish and published in England, there was an adventurous publishing enterprise headed by Rudolph Ackermann, a mason and entrepreneur, inspired by his cultural interest in American processes. See Ford (1982).

²³ Books cost, on average, 15 to 30 shillings (£0.75-£1.50). At that time, four pounds of bread (the estimated daily consumption of a working-class family) could cost around nine pence (0.75 shillings). The average cost of the Reviews was 8 shillings. Consequently, books seem to have been relatively accessible for the solidly middle-class.

²⁴ In the *Edinburgh Review* in 1831 Thomas Carlyle commented, with a touch of irony, on the increased circulation of the Review as a symptom of modern consciousness and the vertiginous times. Cited in Gross (1991 edition, p. 11).

attracted more and more readers. The *Quarterly*, which followed the Tory line, took up the gauntlet, and by 1809 it had become the *Edinburgh's* arch enemy. The popularity of both publications attests to the growing importance of readers' opinions. In the age of Waterloo, the two Reviews had a combined circulation of 20,000, which translated (according to Elie Halevy's calculations) into a 'mass readership' of over 100,000 readers.

We can assume – based on the level of demand – that the two Reviews reflected and expressed the ideology of a vast sector of British society of the period, a sector made up of a nucleus of comfortably-off proprietors, but with branches among the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie and professionals.

Even in its first issues, the *Edinburgh* published several articles on Hispano-America. The editors were interested in the emancipation movement, Venezuela, and the occupation of the Río de la Plata region. John Allen, Lord Holland's librarian, secretary and ideologue, wrote a memorable series of articles on the region in which, in accordance with the editorial line, he reaffirmed his liberal and anti-clerical convictions in favour of the emancipation process (a position he began to modify in 1810).²⁵

Around the same time, the editorial lines of both publications on these matters began to resemble each other. In the *Quarterly*, Joseph Blanco White's articles expressed opinions similar to those of Allen's later writings. Instead of favouring independence, he recommended the abolition of restrictions on free trade and a reconciliation with the 'motherland' with Great Britain as a mediator.²⁶ After 1810, the essays began to take the form of book reviews. The *Edinburgh* devoted six articles to Humboldt's texts, two by Allen himself and the remainder by two well-known scientists, John Leslie and John Playfair.²⁷ The *Quarterly* then published another series of reviews, this time by John Barrow, which became classics of their genre.²⁸

²⁵ John Allen, 'Depons-Voyage dans l'Amérique', *Edinburgh Review*, VIII, pp. 378-99 (July 1806); and 'Mercurio Peruano', *Edinburgh Review*, IX, pp. 433-58 (Jan. 1807).

²⁶ J. Blanco-White, 'Walton's Present State of the Spanish Colonies', *Quarterly Review*, VII, pp. 235-64 (June 1812).

²⁷ The works of José Alberich (see Bibliography) have made it possible to identify some of the authors of the reviews:

John Allen, 'Humboldt: Essai Politique sur la Nouvelle Espagne', *Edinburgh Review*, XVI, pp. 62-102 (April 1810);

— 'Humboldt: Essai Politique sur la Nouvelle Espagne', *Edinburgh Review*, XIX, pp. 184-98 (Nov. 1811);

John Leslie, 'Humboldt: Tableau Physique', *Edinburgh Review*, XVI, pp. 223-53 (April 1810);

— 'Personal Narrative', *Edinburgh Review*, XXV, pp. 88-111 (June 1815);

John Playfair, 'Humboldt's Researches', *Edinburgh Review*, XXIV, pp. 133-57 (Nov. 1814);

— 'Voyage de Humboldt: Astronomie', *Edinburgh Review*, XXVII, pp. 99-102 (Sept. 1818).

Barrow's text on the *Personal Narrative* is supremely eloquent. After apologising for the delay (in fact only a year passed between the publication of the first two volumes and the appearance of his review in the October-January issue of 1815-1816), Barrow emphasised Humboldt's stubborn determination to collect all possible information, his zeal for the diffusion of this knowledge, and his vocation to the cause of public interest, in eighteen extremely detailed pages. Furthermore, Barrow called him 'the first of travellers'.

'It would be unjust', Barrow exclaimed, 'to deny Humboldt a measure of extraordinary talent beyond most mortals' reach. His first-rate intellectual powers are accompanied by his ardent and enthusiastic mind, full of energy and activity in the search for knowledge. In the true spirit of enterprise and adventure.'

The review found its place as an indispensable complement to the narrative. Critical commentary, the reviewers insist, helped to give the texts a wider readership and, in a sense, completed the story. They applauded the accounts' reliance on individual experiences associated with the quality of direct experience of discovery and adventure, and, in turn, celebrated certain aesthetic features that raised the obligatory entertainment quota of the genre. In this respect, Humboldt surpassed his predecessors. Barrow transcribes one of his 'most illustrative' paragraphs:

When we begin to fix our eyes on geographical maps, and read the narratives of navigators, we feel for certain countries and climates a sort of predilection for which we know not how to account at a more advanced period of life. These impressions, however, exercise a considerable influence over our determinations; and from a sort of instinct we endeavour to connect ourselves with objects on which the mind has long been fixed as by a secret charm.

At a period when I studied the heavens, not with the intention of devoting myself to astronomy, but only to acquire a knowledge of the stars, I was agitated by a fear unknown to those who love a sedentary life. It seemed painful to me to renounce the hope of beholding those beautiful constellations which border the southern pole. Impatient to rove in the equinoctial regions, I could not raise my eyes towards the starry vault without thinking of the Cross of the South, and without recalling the

²⁴ John Barrow, 'De Humboldt: Travels', *Quarterly Review*, XIV, pp. 368-402 (Jan. 1816).

— 'De Humboldt: Travels-Part II', *Quarterly Review*, XVII, pp. 135-58 (Oct. 1817).

— 'De Humboldt: Travels-Part III', *Quarterly Review*, XXI, pp. 320-52 (April 1819).

— 'De Humboldt: Travels-Part IV', *Quarterly Review*, XXXV, pp. 365-92 (July 1821).

sublime passage of Dante, which the most celebrated commentators have applied to this constellation.²⁹

The review concludes: 'the beauty of the southern sky, and of the new constellations that reveal themselves to the eyes, bring about a series of almost natural experiences and reflections that should occur to all travellers. A combination of heightened perceptions, description, practical utility, and aesthetic play.'

The style is not unimportant. There has always been a natural tension between information and narrative. Humboldt's formula, the personal narrative, and his compositional style, were not always suited to an exhaustive explanation of phenomena. At times, scientific disquisitions interrupt the narrative, and Humboldt senses this. Barrow indicates, almost in passing, that these disquisitions should be included in appendices rather than eliminated. In this sense, the critics are much harsher with King (1846): 'His work, as we have seen, consists of twenty-six chapters. It would be enormously improved if all of them from the eighteenth on were eliminated. Then we would have a much more instructive image of this anarchic society.'³⁰

In Humboldt's case, a certain encyclopaedic quality is balanced by 'his lack of egoism, allowing his genius to linger on familiar objects that the general public can understand'. This is not a sentimental or selfish narrative, the review maintains. Humboldt thus rejects the temptations of an exaggerated autobiography and of narcissism. His objective, as indicated in the Preface, is to look at nature and that is, in fact, 'what he succeeds in reproducing in the reader'. For Barrow, the *Personal Narrative* was definitely 'a skilful call for attention to the imperfection of our knowledge'.

The review of Volume Five of the *Personal Narrative*, which appeared in 1821, acknowledged further achievements in precisely the direction indicated in the first volumes. It had improved in style, in the eloquence of the descriptions and in the elimination of scientific minutiae. 'The views he has taken of this magnificent country [the Orinoco region] are so clear, detailed, and comprehensive, that the reader has perpetually before him a panorama of the surrounding objects as he travels along.'³¹

As already implied in their reaction to Humboldt, the critics were beginning to place much greater emphasis on the literary virtue of moderation. 'Nothing inspires such confidence in an author as his disinclination to go to extremes.' That was the opening line of the *Edinburgh's* review of Andrews's text on the Río de la Plata.³² Andrews's achievement is to pass calmly between two violent

²⁹ John Barrow, 'De Humboldt: Travels-Part IV', p. 395.

³⁰ John Barrow, 'King's Argentine Republic', *Edinburgh Review*, LXXXVII, pp. 535-65 (Jan.-April 1848).

³¹ John Barrow, 'De Humboldt: Travels-Part IV', p. 391.

³² 'Travel in the Mining Districts of South America', *Edinburgh Review*, LXIX, pp.

and antagonistic moments. The almost convulsive fever that produced the mining mania in the 20s; and the calamity, the lack of foresight, and the moral horror of the total abandonment of the entire project fifteen years later.' Pedro de Angelis's *Colección* is praised for the same reasons, as 'a literary operation that implies a sense of pleasure in gazing calmly at the impassioned past'.³³ Certain ethnographic exaggerations, such as describing the Patagonians as actual giants, were by then considered unacceptable. In contrast, according to the critics, FitzRoy's text is a classic of sobriety.³⁴

Emphasising the search for harmony reinforces the security of a type of knowledge characteristic of this period, and the accounts, according to their very function, acknowledge the inescapability of certain structures. By the 1920s, the travellers are referred to as *our travellers*. This operation is regulated by two cultural phenomena: the consolidation of a reading community that, as we have seen, becomes an accomplice of each of the texts; and, as a parallel effect, the configuration of a national identity that is basic to the enterprise. In 1826, the *Quarterly* expressed it in the following terms:

But leaving the individual adventures out of the question, the very spirit of enterprise, which such undertakings as these we are speaking of keeps alive, is of no inconsiderable moment, in a national point of view, to a country such as ours. They tend, as they have already done, to raise Great Britain, as in better days they did Spain and Portugal – now alas! how fallen – in the eyes of every civilised nation. It is, indeed, and ought to be a subject of high exultation that, while a spot remains untrodden by the foot of man, her subjects should be engaged in exploring it, with a liberal and enlightened policy, which disregards the prospect of immediate and exclusive benefit.³⁵

This national sentiment was reinforced even in the face of a growing disillusionment with the progress of some of its ventures, such as those associated with the mining industry. Head's text is a paradigm of this spirit:

We have not, it is true, a range of mountains to equal, in sullen magnificence, the stupendous Andes, but Mont Blanc is quite high enough. We have neither the dark impenetrable forests of North America, nor the vast interminable plains of the Pampas; but we possess, in their stead, the snugger regions of civilised life, and we have beef somewhat tenderer than that of the wild bull, with plenty of good coal to cook it. In like manner, we do not possess mines of gold and silver to equal those which are said to be deposited in the lofty Cordilleras of the American mountains; but we have, in our own country, in great abundance, humbler metals, which possess the

497-515 (June-Oct. 1827).

³³ 'Collections on the Río de la Plata', *Edinburgh Review*, LXVI, pp. 87-109 (April-July 1837).

³⁴ 'Voyages of Captains King and FitzRoy', *Edinburgh Review*, LXIX, pp. 467-93 (April-July 1839).

³⁵ 'Parry and Weddell's Voyages', *Quarterly Review*, XXIV, pp. 379-99 (June-Sept. 1826, p. 391).

inestimable value of being within our reach, and under the protection of our own laws.³⁶

This spirit was also based on society's perception of the positive influence Great Britain had on the new countries. Thus, the author of the review of King and FitzRoy's text warns: 'We should not fail to note with satisfaction the beneficent impulse that the energy of the Englishman bestows on the new republics on both sides of the continent.'³⁷

The critiques of the *Travel Accounts* really began with the series on Humboldt. On average, each issue of both publications contained around fifteen articles, two or three of them dedicated to travel accounts. In relation to the Río de la Plata, between 1800 and 1850 there was a total of six accounts written by British travellers in the *Edinburgh* and nine in the *Quarterly*.

As far as Argentina and the other countries in the Americas are concerned, the accounts of these voyages have consecrated early images perpetuated in the imagery of the community through the first national literature:³⁸ sailors, military men, businessmen, naturalists, diplomats, men of letters, industrialists, geographers and simple tourists – some in transit, others in residence.³⁹ The English predominate, both in numbers and in importance. A historical line confirms the relationship: the consequences of Utrecht; the military adventure of 1806-1807; sympathies in favour of the revolutionary movement; capital investment; the relations with Rivadavia and the blockade. Between 1805 and 1835 British editors published over a dozen titles on Argentina. The 1820s was the most prolific decade for publication, with works by Vidal (1820), Brackenridge (1820a; 1820b), Caldcleugh (1825), Head (1826), Miers (1826), Beaumont (1828), and Miller (1828). The *Travel Accounts* seemed to be perfectly suited to demand.⁴⁰ Following the fall of Rosas, there was a resurgence of the Argentine chronicles, completing a series that culminated in 1880 with fourteen additional titles. Bourne (1853) and MacCann (1853) were among the most distinguished authors of this second generation.

³⁶ Capt. F.B. Head, 'Cornish Mining in America', *Quarterly Review*, XXXVI, pp. 81-106 (June-Oct. 1827, p. 91).

³⁷ 'Voyages of Captains King and FitzRoy', p. 491.

³⁸ There is a long tradition of British publications on Argentina, initiated by the Jesuit Thomas Falkner. His detailed *Description of Patagonia and the Adjoining Parts of South America: Containing an Account of the Soil, Produce, Animals, Vales, Mountains, Rivers, Lakes, etc. of those Countries; The Religion, Government, Policy, Customs, Dress, Arms and Language of the Indian Inhabitants; and Some Particulars Relative to Falkland's Islands* was published in London as a pamphlet in 1774. But it was only with Humboldt that the genre was standardised and popularised. See Minguet (1969).

³⁹ The biographical data on the authors provide an accurate assessment of the appetite for South American travel. See Cordero (1936).

⁴⁰ Between 1800 and 1850, 20 works on Argentina were published. In reconstructing a bibliographical list, I have consulted Santos Giménez (1983); Alberich (1959) and Jones, Warburton and Kingsley (1955).

Like all narratives organised from the perspective of a return, the predominant vision is a metropolitan one, defined by a community of readers.⁴¹ These British travellers penetrated Argentine territory, constructing a type of Latin American landscape out of their modest and personal epics, fleshing out the natural settings, and evaluating the societies. They spoke of the precariousness of the cities, the interminable expanse of the pampas, the exhausting voyages, the majesty of the Andes, the barbarous customs of the peoples, the disadvantages of the Spanish heritage. As we shall see, the way in which these images were evoked by Echeverría, Alberdi and Sarmiento, the first national authors, indicates the historical modes in which *textual networks* operate in configuring the boundaries of the national community.

By 1800, the voyage between Europe and South America had not become much easier. It followed the 'natural' route: Madeira, the Canaries up to Cape Verde and the Brazilian coasts of Pernambuco and Cabo Frio. Setting sail for South America demanded planning and calculation. Many of the travellers who disembarked in Buenos Aires were headed for Chile or Peru. Given the choice between travelling on dry land and a sea journey around Cape Horn, they invariably opted for the former. No matter how arduous or complicated the prospect of a stage on land might be, after an exhausting maritime crossing it was irresistible.

Two more factors entered into the decision. The land voyages were shorter both in time and in distance, and sailings for the Pacific were irregular and infrequent. From Buenos Aires, one sailed west to Luján and then north-west, parallel to the course of the Paraná River. Then to the point where the Río Saladillo intersects the Tercero, and finally to the Esquina de Medrano – a trip of approximately 350 miles. The Peruvian route continued on north, passing through Córdoba, Santiago del Estero, Tucumán, Salta and Jujuy, before crossing into Bolivia through Tarija.

Rough Notes by Captain Head, director of the Compañía Minera del Río de la Plata and future governor of Canada, tells the story of this voyage. It is a fast-moving account of his journey on horseback through the immense territory of Argentina, with plenty of vivid local colour. Published in a fine quality edition, *Rough Notes* soon went to two reprints and was an obligatory reference for European travellers heading for the Río de la Plata. Head was partially responsible for many of the European judgements and prejudices about Argentina.⁴²

His criticisms of Buenos Aires are numerous: 'this town is hardly an agreeable residence for those accustomed to English comforts'.⁴³ Later, George

⁴¹ See Prieto (1996, p. 21).

⁴² Head is one of the few travellers who enjoyed a certain literary prestige. On his return to London in 1838 he received an official pension of one hundred pounds sterling a year in recognition of his works.

⁴³ See Head (1826, pp. 23-35).

Fracker (1826) points out that the artistic standards in the city are even worse: 'The theatre is a low and miserable building ... and the performances are in keeping with it.'⁴⁴ A few years earlier, Brackenridge (1820) had complained about the actors' voices, the discomfort of having to bring one's own chairs, and the quality of the performances. He found productions of English tragedies particularly irritating, remarking of one of them: 'I saw Shakespeare murdered.'

Besides the general precariousness of the village, there are descriptions of *porteña* eccentricities such as the brothels and several hotels (two British and one directed by a North American widow) that flourished in the Bajo zone. In 1827, the first public park combined a zoo, exotic animals, a high-class house of prostitution, and a refined auditorium in the Oriental style.⁴⁵

The activity of travelling produced a certain inherent instability. Settling in one place altered the traveller's perceptions. Thus, the British consul, Woodbine Parish (1839), provided a more positive image of the city in his statistical table. In 1836, there were: 358 wholesalers; 348 distributors; 323 tailors, shoemakers and other artisans; 44 hotels and eating establishments; 76 mills and bakeries; 874 carriages; 598 general stores; and 6 bookshops, a surprisingly high number.⁴⁶

Travellers crossed the pampas on horses or in wagons, and few Europeans or North Americans were capable of riding horseback for such long distances. It took John Constance Davie (1819), a man of the cloth, almost a month in his oxcart. Peter Schidtmeyer (1824) preferred two small horse-drawn carriages called *barouches*. Nevertheless, the covered wagons, also known as stagecoaches, were the most comfortable way to travel. They were long covered wagons with seats on both sides and a back entrance. Drawn by four horses, they could carry as many as eight passengers. Although the official mail made the journey between Buenos Aires and Mendoza in five days, the stagecoaches took at least two weeks.⁴⁷

The early accounts generally agree that the posthouses were few and miserable. Plain adobe huts with crude straw roofs and earthen floors, furnished with a few cowhides and cow skulls, they were usually filthy. Not far from the hut – an open lean-to that served as a kitchen – was the corral made of fence stakes and, next to it, another smaller one for the herd of sheep belonging to the postmasters.⁴⁸

John Miers (1839) gives the best description of these scenes. In 1819 he, his wife and a group of English technicians and workers embarked in London, headed for Chile. They were supposed to set up a copper refinery. Once they reached Mendoza, Miers, refusing to listen to the advice of his friend Dr.

⁴⁴ See Fracker (1826, p. 114).

⁴⁵ Anon, *Five Years in Buenos Aires* (see Bibliography), pp. 29-40.

⁴⁶ See Parish (1839, p. 114).

⁴⁷ Tom B. Jones (1949, p. 33).

⁴⁸ Concolorcorvo (1938, pp. 85ff).

Colesberry, decided to cross the Andes. His pregnant wife insisted on accompanying him. On the way to Villavicencio they lost the mules, Miers's wife had an accident, and the party had to spend the night in the open air. After four days of heavy rain and snow, the messenger they had sent out returned without any news. They were only rescued as a result of the personal intervention of San Martín. A few days after he took action, a drover and a nurse managed to locate the group.

In 1827 Captain Head met Miers's wife in Uspallata. She and some of her children were on their way back to Buenos Aires. He listened to her account of endless penury, voyages plagued by accidents, and a difficult return journey, although with fewer problems. The copper business had failed. This story leaves two impressions: of permanent obstacles and of an enterprising spirit. Miers returned to Buenos Aires and attempted to make his fortune with a machine for processing mint. His stubbornness and resoluteness earned him the title of 'a scientific English gentleman' from Beaumont. Finally, following another failure, the Miers family returned to London, completely disillusioned with South America. The ghost of the indomitable Miers is part of the mystique of all the *Travel Accounts*.

There are frequent and lengthy descriptions of forests, jungles and mountains in the *Travel Accounts*. The travellers' evident frustration in attempting to describe 'the sublime' arouses a certain sympathy that allows the reader to disregard their minimal sophistication. Uspallata was the first post stop after Villavicencio – one day's journey, crossing the difficult Parabillo. Not far away, a few mining and silver companies tried their luck without success. Nevertheless, on arriving at Cumbre: 'What could be more sublime!' Head reiterated to the English miners. In the 18th century, the word 'sublime' referred to a particular type of landscape or setting. The word was reserved for extraordinary, wild or awe-inspiring scenes.⁴⁹ The notion of the sublime was related to discovery, a single moment divided into three phases: impact and astonishment; an appreciation of noteworthy features; and scientific calculations on the natural phenomena. These texts were paradigms for the celebration and description of discovery. All the *Travel Accounts* resemble them in this respect.

Other chronicles rounded out the Argentine geography. Robert Proctor (1825) focused on the outlandish dimensions of the Cordillera and the descriptions of the most remote regions. This financier, who met San Martín, O'Higgins and Bolívar, enjoyed the virtues of lands around Mendoza. 'A pleasant relief for the traveller who has covered a thousand miles of the least interesting region in the world; there are so few objects of curiosity to interrupt the tedium of the perpetual plains and uninhabited wastes.'⁵⁰ Edmond Temple (1830), a knight of the Order of Carlos III, optimistic, ambitious and cultured, was impressed by the farthest reaches of the strikingly beautiful territory of Jujuy. Years later, Dr. Webster (1834), a great humanist, trembled at the sight of

⁴⁹ Furtwangler (1993, pp. 29-33).

⁵⁰ See Proctor (1825, p. 48).

the bare, savage, and romantic solitude of Patagonia to the south.

The travel narrative was, above all, a tribute to the formula Humboldt provided in his aesthetic treatment of subjects of natural history: a record of the eternal influence of geography on the moral condition of humanity and on the destiny of societies. His texts combined scientific rigour, poetic effusion and a certain tendency towards humanism, as either intermingling or alternating elements. At this stage of expansionism, this rediscovered Argentina became for travel literature an object of knowledge, a landscape, and a source of wealth.⁵¹

The structure of the narratives was supplied by the voyage, the movement, the sheer effort. Events were organised around physical displacement in space and the deliberate manipulation of memory: the construction of a moral territory subject to muscular exhaustion, boredom, disillusionment, and a grammatical economy that appealed to European readers.

The human map rekindled a certain racism in its spectators. The habits of life in the community were idleness, crudeness, barbarism. In view of the reading audience, more civilised models of relationships between peoples and places could not be neglected. Andrews's text (1827) suffers from this lack of harmony. His denunciation of a dramatically Catholic Córdoba is almost a metaphor for the basic tension between culture and nature. Head, who was decidedly inclined towards journalistic techniques in his writing, paints a cruel portrait of the slaughterhouse on the fringes of Buenos Aires, the approach to an urban area that is textually organised around the engravings that Essex Vidal (1824) had published in London a few years before.

'Sans cérémonie', exclaimed Robertson, on referring to a rustic meal during his trip to Santa Fe in a letter postmarked from London in 1838. 'All the diners crowded around an *olla podrida*, an enormous clay pot whose varied and bubbling contents sent up clouds of steam from it. Everyone ate together, each seizing the tasty morsel that most appealed to him. Only he and the governor had plates, but it seemed that the functionary preferred to eat directly from the pot.'⁵²

A simple social schema was behind these homogeneous perceptions of the black, mulatto, indigenous, Creole, and Spanish communities in the native society. MacCann elaborated on it, writing: 'No other society in the world can boast of such an ill-assorted collection of people; the variety of faces is so great that one is led to doubt that the human species descends from a single trunk. The olive complexion of the Spaniard, the sallow skin of the Frenchman, and the rosy hue of the Englishman alternate with Indian, Tatar, Jewish, and Negro physiognomies.'⁵³

Of all of them, it is the Indian who inspired the travellers to the most lofty

⁵¹ See Cicherchia (forthcoming).

⁵² See Robertson and Robertson (1920, p. 78).

⁵³ See MacCann (1853, pp. 150ff).

fantasies: the obscure aspects of an inscrutable psychology, the ferocity of his instincts, and the malice of his gestures. The epic nature of an account was greatly enhanced by journeys to the frontier, like those of MacCann himself. The attributes that remained for the rural people were, with luck, sacrifice, modesty and a certain independence of spirit.

'The *gaucho* was the male of that curious species of human being that inhabited the pampas. Compared with the British rustic', Temple concludes mercilessly, 'they were little better than carnivorous beasts.'⁵⁴

Even before 1800, the figure of *gaucho* had already been presented to the inhabitants of Europe and North America. Travellers meeting them for the first time, therefore, were more or less prepared, as were readers. One was expected to admire their skill with horses, lassos, *boleadoras*, and their perfect adaptation to their surroundings. They were the protagonists of a culture defined as fundamentally equine.

The accounts also reinforced the patriarchal nature of society. As part of the message of power over the model of the exemplary wife/mother, there was a need for women who were committed to the family order. An image of a subordinated woman was imposed over an image of that paradigm of disorder, the woman of the people. 'The centres of life for decent women were the church and the home, centres in which they distinguished themselves not by their intelligence but by their charm; they possess the purity of a boy, and they deserve forcible confinement in cases of insubordination.'⁵⁵ Otherness was barbarism, or at best, nature. Some literary fantasies were directly linked to submission or exclusion.

There was some measure of humanism. Almost aggressively, Head denounced 'the negligence and abuse of the Indians on the pampas ... and the mortal exploitation suffered by the Andean miners, which inspires the deepest horror; no sentiment except avarice can approve of maintaining a number of creatures in such desolation'.⁵⁶

Unlike Humboldt, these travellers presented themselves neither as explorers nor as naturalists. Reality was not news to them. Nature was collected in samples, almost as raw material. In their contemplative accounts, scientific rhetoric is replaced by the rhetoric of usefulness. Effort is, in itself, the achievement of the narrative. The travellers struggled against a conspiracy of scarcity, delays, inefficiency, discomfort, laziness, bad roads, impossible posthouses and unfavourable climates. Thus, Hispano-America was represented as a logistical obstacle to any eventual European movement. John Miers lamented:

⁵⁴ See Temple (1830, vol. 2, p. 75).

⁵⁵ A number of accounts agree with this version. See Gillespie (1818, pp. 7-85) and Vidal (1820, p. 23).

⁵⁶ See Head (1826, p. 224).

It has taken us thirteen days to cross 180 leagues, averaging only fourteen leagues per day instead of the twenty-five leagues we had intended. Now that we have taken the main road to the few existing posthouses, I cannot accept new excuses that would delay us, like those frequently proposed by the peons.⁵⁷

Simple formulas were suited to this reality, a true grammatical economy.⁵⁸ An authentic style was much appreciated by the critics. For example, Robert Proctor's 1825 description of the Cordillera as 'enormous black mountains heaped up at random' became famous as did his apologies for having depicted them almost in terms of the stock exchange.⁵⁹

The model of the English voyage to South America was one of the prototypes of the *Travel Accounts*: disembarking in the miserable port of Buenos Aires; crossing interminable pampas; the sight of the majestic Cordillera; the unsung return to England. It was like an Inca road, a pilgrimage, narrated from the point of return, the failure of the enterprise. Descriptions were reproduced like postcards. For these Englishmen, the voyage to Argentina was the opposite of a rise from rags to riches.

As we saw, from the 1820s onwards, the English reader became more interested in reports on South America, and in particular on Argentina, and no longer just political reports, but social and economic accounts. Spanish America was potentially a region for investment. Hence the texts and reviews proliferated:

Every species of authentic information regarding the southern portion of the great continent of America is the more particularly welcome at this moment, when the long depressed energies of so many millions of people are at length roused into action, and the whole frame of society, in all its members, is assuming a new attitude.⁶⁰

Some of the aforementioned chronicles became classics, including the adventures of the remarkable captains, Andrews and Head, and the accounts of the botanical amateur John Miers. The speculative fever that arose in respect to the region's mining potential is well documented. Many of the travellers were actually agents for the mining companies, as was Andrews himself, who became a representative for one of them in record time. Head himself supported the practice of army or navy officers transferring to the mining enterprises, which were much better able to make use of their knowledge of explosives and in which they were definitely better paid.⁶¹

As the decade ended, the mining market suffered a spectacular decline:

⁵⁷ See Miers (1826, p. 91).

⁵⁸ Franco, (1979, pp. 129-142).

⁵⁹ See Proctor (1825, p. 79).

⁶⁰ John Barrow, 'South America', *Quarterly Review*, XXXII (June-Oct. 1825), pp. 125-52; p. 125 for Alexander Caldcleugh's text (see Bibliography).

⁶¹ José Alberich (1982).

The rational part of our community have now, we believe, come to the general conclusion that these mining speculations are absurd; yet, as the foundation of this opinion is not clearly defined, or, in other words, as the question has not as yet been considered with the requisite calmness and minuteness, we think we may do some service by laying before our readers....⁶²

This passage echoes the contradictions in the accounts themselves. In 'Cornish Mining in America' it is easy to discern Head's pessimism about the poverty of the region and the meagre opportunities it offered the 'sons of John Bull'. Miers shared this attitude, in marked contrast to Andrews's previously declared and celebrated moderation.

There were also those who continued to dream of El Dorado. Perhaps the most Utopian among them was J.R. McCulloch, a writer for the *Edinburgh Review* and an impassioned supporter of a 'massive emigration that would solve Great Britain's demographic and employment problems'. The experiment, tested by 190 Scottish colonists, proved a total failure.⁶³

Nevertheless, by the middle of the century it was impossible to ignore the degree of disillusionment that had set in. At that time, the *Edinburgh* was in the habit of issuing categorical judgements: 'The Argentine Republic is poorer, less populated, and less civilised than it was in the age of the ignorant and egotistical Spanish tyranny.'⁶⁴ However, the disputes were, necessarily, literary as well. Thus, for example, the stories and styles of Head and Miers competed with and complemented each other in the *Quarterly*.⁶⁵

Miers left for Chile in 1818, intending to establish a fairly large copper-mining business. A substantial sum of capital travelled with him. After five years, he returned to England a failure, with nothing but a poor vestige of his fortune. For his part, Head, who was known for his military talents, left for the Río de la Plata as a representative of a mining business interested in the region's gold and silver. Accompanied by a distinguished group of five men, he crossed the wide plains of the Pampa in search of the gold of San Luis and then proceeded on to Uspallata, which was supposed to be rich in silver.

The reports of Miers and Head essentially depict the same panorama, but their narrative styles are so different that, as Southey remarks, it is hard to believe that they are based on similar experiences. Miers offers his English

⁶² Capt. F.B. Head, 'Cornish Mining in America', *Quarterly Review*, XXXVI, pp. 81-106 (June-Oct. 1827, p. 81).

⁶³ J.R. McCulloch, 'Emigration,' *Edinburgh Review*, XLVII, pp. 204-42 (Jan. 1828).

⁶⁴ John Barrow, 'King's Argentine Republic', *Edinburgh Review*, LXXXVII, pp. 535-65 (Jan.-April 1848, p. 537).

⁶⁵ R. Southey, 'Head and Miers on Buenos Ayres and Chile', *Quarterly Review*, XXXV, pp. 114-48 (Jan.-March 1827).

readers a highly detailed account, but one 'so burdened with small objects that at times it becomes unmanageable. Its over a thousand pages produce an obsessive compendium of his journey'.

Head's notes, on the other hand, are the exact opposite. 'His accounts are so clear and well-defined that they produce the effect of a finished image. His object is daily life, and his images are virtual portraits.' The *Edinburgh* also recognised this quality: 'The readers see how the pampas are crossed.'⁶⁶

Miers is impressed by the negative effects produced by the climate and the abuse of alcohol. 'The Indians are the most cowardly race, only to be compared with the *criollos*.' In contrast, Head reacts against the 'brutality' of the customs he encounters. His accounts of the hunting of cows by the 'famished' *gauchos* are famous: 'In a few seconds, moments of confusion impossible to describe. Many times I was obliged to flee from the midst of these scenes in order to save my life.' Such descriptions did not bother the critics. It was implied, particularly in the *Edinburgh*, that many of these moral vices were the legacy of Spanish indolence and the ignorance of the Catholic priests: 'The inhabitants are depicted as submerged in total ignorance, and the priests accused of keeping them uninformed and helping the old Spaniards to instil in them the worst European vices, without refinement.'⁶⁷

As frustration with the Río de la Plata region grew, anti-Catholic tirades became more pointed. The *Edinburgh* sharpened its pens. It insisted on singling out the clergy as the 'real cause' of such backwardness. On the Argentine situation in particular, the critics advised:

The principal habits that education should impart are intellectual freedom and moral subordination. The Spanish Americans were trained in intellectual slavery and moral anarchy. The predominance of the priests and the terrors of the Inquisition produced the first, priestly ignorance and corruption were the basic causes of the second... Having a monopoly on education, they have neither the power, nor perhaps the desire, to teach anything but the routines of a destructive superstition.⁶⁸

Faced with the Andes, the last frontier, Miers proceeds to note elaborate details of every circumstance. Trivial objects, obsessive descriptions, all sorts of conjectures, a narrative that the reviewer acknowledges as 'very useful for the naturalist, but very tedious for the readers'. Head, in turn, who writes directly and simply, is mildly criticised for yielding to his permanent tendency to exaggerate. In a sense, both of them bear the stigma of the sublime. Distances, measured in English miles, are the images most frequently invoked. The bitterly

⁶⁶ 'Travel in the Mining Districts of South America', *Edinburgh Review*, LXIX, pp. 497-515 (June-Oct. 1827, p. 501).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 503.

⁶⁸ John Barrow, 'King's Argentine Republic', *Edinburgh Review*, LXXXVII, pp. 535-65 (Jan.-April 1848, p. 538).

hostile climate and the bad roads are impassable obstacles, ensuring that neither the Río de la Plata nor the Chilean mines can operate successfully in the long run.

But, once more, deprivations are not allowed to obscure the literary quality of the narrative. A certain level of tragedy was permissible, but not excessive lamentations. Besides, a certain skill was required to emphasise the protagonists' bravery and courage while at the same time providing useful, though sometimes negative, information (attempting to warn others of the intolerable problems immigrants faced in these territories). 'We should tell our readers', advised the review of Waterton's text (1825), 'how the amiability and benevolence, the imperturbable sense of humour and the simplicity of spirit of a pen like Waterton's was able to make ... that painful odyssey ... more comprehensible.'⁶⁹

Seafarers have a greater opportunity – says Sydney Smith, in reference to Hall's *agreeable and sensible* text – than the majority of our readers to see new countries and strange scenes. Stories and interesting accounts have been lost through the inability of certain nautical men to turn themselves into writers, appearing before the public with clean hands and a bottle of ink. It is fortunate for the public when sailors write, if they do so with a certain amount of common sense and skill.

The author – the review continues – has given us an accurate description of Lord Cochrane and his admirable nautical talents and his courage in the face of adversity. No Englishman can remain indifferent to the attitudes of such a compatriot and to the noble way in which Hall's pen depicts them.⁷⁰

Latin American classics dating from the period of Independence cite Humboldt with startling frequency. Invoking him seems to acknowledge his text as an inaugural gesture (one that bestows legitimacy) towards the intellectual imagination and aspirations of the *criollos*. The textual network created by travellers, adventurers, explorers, and scientists was one of the factors in the creation of national communities. Argentina was no exception.

The rational and utilitarian discourse and the rhetorical arsenal of a rudimentary romanticism used to describe the scenery, the cultural models, the landscape of an immense, desolate territory to the European public set out to demonstrate the 'primitive' relationship between nature and society. In the process, they contributed to the shaping and the creation of this first Argentina. The *Travel Accounts* left a definitive imprint on Echeverría, Alberdi and Sarmiento, among the founders of the first national literature.

⁶⁹ 'Waterton's Wanderings', *Quarterly Review*, XXXIII, pp. 314-32 (Dec. 1825-March 1826).

⁷⁰ Sydney Smith, 'Captain Hall's Journal', *Edinburgh Review*, XL, pp. 31-43 (March-July 1824).

In 1834, Alberdi published *Memoria descriptiva sobre Tucumán*.⁷¹ In this text, an all-embracing harmony is achieved through a philosophy of history and civilisation that altered the course of the physical description of the nation. His strictly autobiographical narrative, learned recollections, and a touch of melancholy were the seal of a romantically imagined Argentina. There are unmistakable echoes of Andrews, like the beggar's guide. It was literature that proved capable of establishing the exact relationship between the natural surroundings and the history of a people – literature as a political project. Travel, and later, exile, set the tone of the narrative, amazement at fate, the desolation of the setting, the exaltation of experiences. All of this, as we know, was of dubious originality.

'Bad roads, ill-provisioned posthouses, poverty and aberrations were common currency' Alberdi tells us of the trip from Tucumán to Buenos Aires, and it is not so different from Gillespie's tone in describing his journey to the salt mines many years before.⁷²

Alberdi does not disguise his complicity. He writes brazenly: 'It seems opportune to warn my readers that both Mr. Andrews and myself visited Tucumán at the saddest season of the year, and we did not venture into the most beautiful countryside, more than three leagues from the town.'⁷³

Andrews wrote in 1827: 'Tucumán is the garden of the universe in respect to grandeur and sublimity.' Prieto maintains, justifiably, that Alberdi was working on a collage that was to produce one of the most recognisable images of Argentina. He paraphrases, quotes, copies, uses quotation marks and exchanges experiences: 'He does not say, as I do, that Tucumán is extremely beautiful, he says that in respect to grandeur and sublimity, nothing on earth surpasses it, that Tucumán is the garden of the universe.'⁷⁴

The process of alienation suffered by the indigenous cultures is also part of the literary discourse. The transposition of scientific notions about barbaric peoples to the field of literary images was denounced by Andrés Bello in the magazine *El Araucano*:

In Argentina I believe that the theme of the barbarity of the natives of the Pampa and Patagonia, perceived more and more often as an almost indiscernible group, moves from the anthropological to the literary record by way of romanticism.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Published in Alberdi (1900, tome XIV).

⁷² Alberdi (1927, p. 40).

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 23-4.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 322-3.

⁷⁵ Cited in Pedro Navarro Floria, 'Salvajes y bárbaros: la construcción de la idea de barbarie en la frontera sur argentina y chilena (Siglos XVIII-XIX)', *Saber y Tiempo. Revista de la Historia de la Ciencia*, no. 2 (1996, pp. 101-12).

Echeverría's description of the indigenous peoples in his lengthy poem, *La Cautiva*, also obeys these postulates. In his case, the immeasurable steppes and deserts serve as a metaphor for a country swept up in Rosas's regime. The Indians of the pampas wander through desolate territories like savage hordes, in a disjointed chaos of images and sounds:

Then, like the sound
of distant thunder
on the tranquil plain a muffled mingled clamour
faded ... and then ... violently, like a shriek inspiring horror
emerging from a vast horde spread reddish on the wind
terrifying the brutes.⁷⁶

The ground trembles. Clouds of dust, horses, lances, and heads, as in John Barrow, are seen all around. Echeverría plays with frenzied question marks:

Who is it? What senseless crowd?
With its howling perturbs God's
solitudes?... Where is it going? From whence does it come?
What is its pleasure? Why does it shout, run, fly...?⁷⁷

La Cautiva also dramatises the defeat of civilisation at the hands of barbarism. The story is an allegory of the traumatic experience of the Americas. Indians pursue a white *criollo* woman, her English husband, Brian, and their young daughter and treat them brutally. Echeverría's approach contrasts with all other captivity narratives, in that the others are traditionally told from the perspective of safety (the narrator is usually a survivor), while Echeverría speaks in the third person, as an observer. *La Cautiva* tells the other story, in which there are no survivors of the encounter. It is the story of the young Argentine, a romantic semi-hero, solitary, circumspect, a wanderer. It is the failure of Gaulpo, one of Echeverría's characters, and a stand-in for the author, and it is the last in the list of English frustrations.

Echeverría is the most lucid figure of the generation of '37, and the archetypal civic poet. Sarmiento defined him better as 'the poet of desperation, the outcry of intelligence trampled by the horses of the pampa'.⁷⁸ His Manichean version of the factional political conflict in *El Matadero*, like the racism of *La Cautiva*, results less from an ideological viewpoint than from his unconcealed subjectivity, a subjectivity that is also a product of his reading. In the case of *El Matadero*, in particular, his familiarity with Haigh's *Sketches* and Mercier's *Le Tableau* is obvious.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Echeverría (1974, pp. 22-3).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

⁷⁸ Sarmiento (1955, p. 129).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Head, Beaumont, Scarlett, and Darwin included images of the Buenos Aires slaughterhouse in their chronicles, which were all published before Echeverría's text. Head's book established narrative procedures and the dramatisation of the scenes. In *Rough Notes* (Echeverría had a French translation of this text), the slaughterhouse represents the outermost limits of civilisation at its most cruel, captured by the attentive gaze of an unwitting passer-by. It is the description of a bloody scene full of the sensations felt by a protagonist who is actually in danger, a traveller who is forced to gallop away to save his life. Once more, Head employs the survivor's narrative to elucidate the cultural codes through which he experiences this incident.

Echeverría continues these images. He offers a distant, almost pedagogical physical description of the slaughterhouse and the work performed there. Then he shifts to a folkloric account, before ending with a stunningly realistic scene: 'A child's head was seen rolling away while his trunk still stood immobile on its stickhorse, long gouts of blood streaming from every artery.'⁸⁰ Echeverría takes an even greater risk than the *Travel Accounts*.

El Matadero is a summary of the tense encounter between the cultured, liberal, and cosmopolitan centre and a marginal popular ambience. The *Travel Accounts* had demonstrated that the ugliness of an almost brutal daily life – which wore a woman's face – could serve as literary input for folkloric illustration. Thus, the slaughter of young bulls was described as 'an animated and picturesque spectacle that assembles the dreadfully ugly, filthy, and deformed among the proletarian class peculiar to the Río de la Plata'.⁸¹ Echeverría's combination of civilising zeal and a collector's passion, shared by all the other travellers of the period, lead him to note an almost Rabelaisian popular scene:

From among the rabble eyeing and eagerly awaiting the prize of offal, there occasionally emerged a filthy hand, ready to slice off a morsel... 'Look, the old lady's hiding it between her tits!' cried one... 'You old black witch, get out of here before I stick a knife in you', yelled the butcher.⁸²

Far from becoming flat figures against a backdrop, butchers, slaughterers, workers who tie up the animals, black women, day labourers, and the curious rabble are full of energetic action, which Echeverría simultaneously condemns and highlights.

A description of national customs in the 19th century that is completed by Sarmiento in *Civilización y barbarie*, in which Humboldt's reinvention of America is also apparent. Sarmiento's classic essay consolidates discourse and inaugurates a central polemic within the national debate. The author legitimises liberal *criollo* values and discredits the colonial past, symbolised by the figure of the Riojan caudillo, Rosas. Condemning the 'obscure and illegitimate past',

⁸⁰ Fleming (1986, p. 105).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

Sarmiento contrasts it with his desire for progress.

In a more traditional vein, he opens his essay with images of empty territories. His chapter on the physical aspects of the Republic begins with a quote from Humboldt that the Argentine author carelessly (it no longer matters), attributes to F.B. Head. 'The extent of the pampas is so prodigious that in the north they are bounded by palm trees and in the south by eternal snows.'⁸³

The vast expanse of territory and its scant population immediately translate into availability. Wherever he looked, Sarmiento beheld immensity: immense plains, immense forests, immense rivers. Like all travellers, he admires grandeur, but more than anything, he is dumbfounded by it.

The horizon is always vague, always confusing itself between the clouds and mists that at a distance foreshadow the exact point where land ends and the sky begins. To the south and the north savages are preparing ambushes, waiting for moonlit nights to descend like a pack of hyenas on the cattle grazing in the fields of the defenceless colonists.⁸⁴

Once again we find indigenous hordes, indifferent to nature, lurking, dangerous, emerging from an empty terrain. This is a display of recognisably expansionist discourse, employing a polarising rhetoric to deny native societies their history.

But it is the *gaucho* who is the prime founding allegory: the human expression of the nature of the pampas, consecrated in the political biography of Facundo Quiroga, in which Sarmiento also offers his vision of crossbreeding. European theories of physical determinism are applied to the *mestizo* inhabitants of the pampas, the *gauchos*. The wide plains of the Argentine interior lend an Asiatic (despotic) cast to human character: 'the predominance of brute force, the rule of the strongest, authority without limits or responsibilities, justice without procedures or debate'.⁸⁵ This condemnation, which barely disguises an intense curiosity, is partly the product of Sarmiento's enthusiastic reading of Head, an enthusiasm the Argentine writer himself acknowledged. Even while he condemns the barbarism personified by Facundo, Sarmiento (like Echeverría in *El Matadero*) reveals his profound fascination with *gaucho* culture as a genuine source of national identity. All this augments the value of his textual experiment, and makes it the most visible predecessor of the nativist nationalism that, a few years later, reached its definitive expression in Mansilla and Hernández.

The accounts of travellers, and the British in particular, were avidly read in Latin America. Intellectuals such as Andrés Bello had no scruples about translating, citing, or plagiarising them. This was a narrative responding to a specific reading community, one that forged models of self-understanding for the

⁸³ Sarmiento (1977, p. 23).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

new republics, legitimated new ruling classes, and visualised the potential of the historical experiment that constituted this reinvented Latin America – in other words, an account that fleshed out Humboldt's utopia.

I have analysed the British *Travel Accounts* from three separate, simultaneous fields: an analysis of the reading community; the voyages and the creation of Argentine images; and their relation to the first national narratives.

The travel chronicles occupy a particular historical context: Britain's commercial expansion and, in the case of Argentina, its eventual mining benefits. Until now, historiographic works have emphasised the relationship between the travel narratives and the economic forms that determined British imperialist ambitions. Nevertheless, from the perspective of cultural history, the importance of the travel text is linked to the representation of the other. Between 1800 and 1850, British travellers printed the first Argentine images; they sketched a geography, conceived a national character, outlined conflicts and harmonies. And to a certain extent, what they encountered, observed, and described, was their own past, or in another sense, their cultural present.

The *Travel Accounts* observe the rules invented by Humboldt and consecrated by the critics: the ideology of the naturalist and an imaginary John Bull. They assume a reader to whose creation the *Travel Accounts* contribute, who is honest, simple, curious, stubborn, and somewhat xenophobic. And, though racist and sexist, avowedly humanist.

The genre is one of the clearest exponents of the reading boom in Europe, which was a decisive element in the configuration of the Eurocentric spirit. If statistics are to be believed, the *Travel Accounts* made an important contribution to the pre-Victorian British spirit. Many of the authoritative pages in the two most reputable reviews in Great Britain, the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, are devoted to them. The genre was of great interest: the scientific or pseudo-scientific descriptions, the voyages as vital experiences, and the evidential and aesthetic value of the accounts. A growing community of readers and high levels of consumption made the *Travels* a source of income for authors and publishers.

Travel literature had an extraordinary capacity to represent a national reality. On the one hand, otherness helped to confirm the English national character and, on the other, it had an impact on native intellectuals of the period. Echeverría, Alberdi and Sarmiento read almost all these works. The literary operations they performed on them were of various sorts, including out-and-out plagiarism. Without disputing Argentine political intentionality and literary talent, it is obvious that this first national narrative repeats and consecrates many of the *Travel Accounts'* representations of Argentina. The translation of the travel experience into the field of literary images is one of the cultural devices that contributed to the configuration and consolidation of the national identity.

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