

Facundo Yesterday and Today: An Orientalist Analysis of the Argentine *Caudillo* System

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Abstract. This essay explores the contrasting views of Juan Facundo Quiroga's representation in the 19th and 20th centuries through the analysis of Domingo F. Sarmiento's 1845 essay *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* and the 1995 cinematic representation directed by Nicolás Sarquis *Facundo, la sombra del tigre*. Though the Republic of Argentina gained independence from Spain in the mid-19th century, it faced internal conflicts between the two central political parties, the Unitarians and the Federalists. The life of Juan Facundo Quiroga provided a platform for Sarmiento to display and expose the supposed barbarism of Facundo, a *gaucho* figure, and the Federalist party. A century later, Sarquis revisited the image of Facundo in order to rescue the native elements of Argentina, such as the gaucho. This film representation of Facundo poses a counterargument to the orientalist image Sarmiento set forth because it identified Facundo as a progressive military leader who intended to forge a peaceful republic. In my analysis of this essay, I demonstrate how Sarmiento employs an orientalist archetype to represent the Argentine *gauchos* and the Federalist Party through the images present in European literature. This essay also suggests that through modern film, Sarquis attempts to rescue those same indigenous elements of Argentina by allowing the public to identify with the character of Facundo.

Introduction

In the middle of the 19th century, Argentine thinker and politician Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1810-1888) published his views on the ideological conflict between civilization and barbarism in his well-known essay *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845)¹. In this essay, Sarmiento denounces the politics upheld by Juan Facundo Quiroga (1788-1835), the Argentine *gaucho* leader who shared ideological attachments with the government system of the *caudillo* of the capital province of Buenos Aires, Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793-1877).² Sarmiento's

*Facundo*³ is based on the life of Quiroga, yet the author takes advantage of the opportunity to propound arguments against the *caudillo* system in Argentina. In part, Sarmiento supports his theories by comparing the image of Quiroga with certain orientalist stereotypes associated with life in the Orient.

In the present essay, I intend to delineate how Sarmiento reverts to images and figures of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia in order to establish a contrast between the way of life of the supposedly civilized Western traditions and the "Oriental" side of Argentina that the author perceives in the peripheral areas of the country. In the second part of this study, the figure of a more benevolent and compassionate Facundo is analyzed in the film *Facundo, la sombra del tigre* ("Facundo, the Tiger's Shadow") (1995), an Argentine film whose director, Nicolás Sarquis, de-

¹ For the purpose of this study, I will be citing the English version of *Facundo: civilización y barbarie; Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism: The First Complete English Translation*. Translated by Kathleen Ross.

² Juan Facundo Quiroga was an Argentine *caudillo* of the Federalist party, governor of the province of La Rioja from March 28, 1823 to July 22, 1823, and military chief of the militias of the Llanos (1820-35). Juan Manuel de Rosas was

another *caudillo* belonging to the Federalist party who governed the capital province of Buenos Aires for several terms (1829-1832; 1835-1852) (Pigna).

buted in the mid-1990s. I propose an analysis of the construction and re-construction of this character within two periods of Argentine history and the significance that both authors bestow onto this national (anti) hero, the *gaucho* as personified by the image of Facundo.

Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism is an extensive literary work divided into three parts. The first part focuses on Argentina, its provinces and the people that inhabit the country. The second part traces the life of Juan Facundo Quiroga in his native province of La Rioja. Finally, the third part centers on the social war and the politics of the time. The author specifically looks at the division of the Argentine republic between Juan Manuel Rosas and Estanislao López. In addition, the politics instituted by Rosas and the state of the Republic are also discussed and critiqued. This essay creates the initial argument by separating the urban and rural spaces and designating them as civilization and barbarism, respectively.

In *Facundo, la sombra del tigre*, Nicolás Sarquis presents his audience with the last days of Facundo. The old Facundo recalls his life in La Pampa in the form of a flashback. He narrates that he travels to Salta to investigate the state of the Republic, in terms of the creation of the Argentine constitution, and the next phase of the Republic. Before his departure to Salta, the Federalists are informed of a plot organized by the Unitarians to assassinate Facundo while he travels through the province of Córdoba. After his mission is completed in Salta, Facundo begins his return to Buenos Aires and while passing Córdoba on the trail of Barranca Yacos, Facundo is assassinated, possibly by his Unitarian enemies. This cinematic portrayal provides a modern opinion of the controversial figure of the *gaucho* that has been manipulated by the party in power.

Before beginning the analysis of these two works, an explanation of the historical and the political contexts of Argentina in the latter part of the 19th century are imperative. After declaring its political independence in 1816, Argentina lingered in an unstable condition and was in politi-

cal disarray. The Argentine nation that had fought against Spanish rule became fragmented into two parties with irreconcilable political programs. On one side there were the proclaimed “unionists/Unitarians,” whose interests were in favor of the aristocracy, the *criollos* and the groups of higher economic means, whose urban orientation did not favor the rural society (Katra 17). This party sought a government with a structure similar to that of a monarchy and pursued a centralized government, whose base would be established in Buenos Aires. Sarmiento proposed to end the cultural backwardness and develop agriculture, mineries, and, more than anything, elementary education (Barrenechea and Lavandera 47). These preferences toward elitist interests in the country motivated the rural population and the desert zones inhabited, in majority, by farmers and peasants, many of them indigenous, and mestizos known as *gauchos*, to support the future of Argentina as proposed by the alternative party system of the “Federalists.” The urbanites, the intellectuals, and the educated most commonly supported the Unitarians, while the uneducated, rural population conformed to the Federalist party (Katra 17-18). While the Unitarians, whose ideology centered on empirical reasoning, developed a rift between itself, the Church, and its Spanish roots, the Federalist made use of religion and the church to attract the uneducated population. The Federalists were willing to govern alongside the church, following the model of an ancient Spain. This fundamental view in favor of secularism for the country was of great use in Sarmiento’s discourse to denounce the barbarism of the Federalists and on a larger scale, the *gauchos*, because of their *mestizo* condition.

However, the filmmaker Nicolás Sarquis takes the opportunity to rehabilitate the negative image of the Pampa and its plains by recreating the last days of Juan Facundo Quiroga, and alters the savage figure that Sarmiento presents by manifesting Facundo as a civilized man. Sarquis does this by projecting Facundo’s charisma. Ariel de la Fuente talks about a leader’s charisma and points out that oral culture reflects charisma, the percep-

tions of the followers, and plays a powerful role in nation formation. The illiterate, in this case, the *gaucho*, primarily used oral culture. Facundo's charisma within the *gaucho* community made him a cultural hero through his prevalence in songs and jokes, forms of oral culture (114-15). Sarquis reinvents this charisma by taking what he considers Facundo's most controversial features and projecting the ideology of the *caudillos* to a wider audience on the cusp of a new millennium ("Murió Nicolás Sarquis"). At the end of the 1990s, Argentina as a nation sought to rescue indigenous aspects of the country as well as all national industries. Through his film, Sarquis renovates Facundo's image as an Argentine hero and his representation of the Pampa reflects a positive aspect of the native land. Sarquis attempts to portray Facundo as a less violent man and more of a cultured individual. Facundo's notoriety for being a fierce man is reformed in great deal due to the projection of a more humane and progressive figure.

In 1837, various Argentine intellectuals opposed the *caudillo* Federalist leadership. Thinkers and writers like Domingo F. Sarmiento, Esteban Echeverría and Juan Bautista Alberdi, among others, comprised the intellectuals of the Argentine Generation of 1837. In the nation building period in Argentina, Unitarian and Federalist writers, such as Esteban Echeverría (*El matadero*, 1838) and José Hernández (*Martín Fierro*, 1872), wrote vehemently against the opposite party utilizing metaphoric language in order to discredit the opponent and interchange the roles of heroism and savagery. Altamirano proposes that Sarmiento utilizes orientalism in order to indicate despotism within the politics of the Federalist party (89). Sarmiento, originally from Buenos Aires and a Unitarian, exiled himself to Chile and traveled to Europe when Rosas began his second dictatorship after Quiroga's assassination in 1835. Jaime Concha suggests that Sarmiento's decision to publish *Facundo* in Chile demonstrates a "strategic distance" by fighting outside the combat zone of Argentina, taking a position of "rear guard" which Sarmiento consid-

ers a more civilized and rational form of battle (149).

These intellectuals reflect the different viewpoints between the two major political parties of the time. In this sense, Sarquis's focus on Facundo's image draws on the defense of the independent, that is, the *gaucho*, faced with the preferences of the urban population of Buenos Aires that are influenced by foreign trends and events. Both Hernández's Martín Fierro, like Sarquis's Facundo, are humanized characters, with virtues and flaws, compassionate and generous on occasion, but also rebellious because of the rigid system created by the parties in control.

Sarmiento begins Facundo's biography with a detailed geographic description of La Pampa and its deserts, and he contrasts them to other urban spaces, such as Buenos Aires and Córdoba. He also reassures the reader that Buenos Aires has enviable advantages because it is the largest city in the Americas and has a favorable climate. As a nation, Argentina consists of 23 provinces, 4 of which surround the capital province of Buenos Aires. These are La Pampa to the west, Córdoba to the northwest, Santa Fe to the north and Entre Ríos to the northeast.

The essay incorporates rich images and metaphors to allow the reader to visualize life in the Argentine Pampa, most notably in the first chapters. However, the rhetorical figures used reaffirm the barbaric nature and even demonic space inhabited by the "other," the gaucho that the Palestine author Edward W. Said describes in his study *Orientalism* (1978), which serves as the theoretic framework for the present study. Said's theory suggests that by presenting romanticized images of the Orient, European and American powers justify colonization. One of Said's principal ideas is that the general understanding of the Orient is neither based on real facts nor in any tangible reality but in ideas and preconceived archetypes created by the Western culture, and above all, everything that is classified as "oriental." Also, orientalism determines that the Orient is the polar opposite of civil society, that is, the Western world. Sarmiento's study focuses, on a

grand scale, on creating the same for Argentina, conflating the Orient with the Pampa and the oriental other with the *gaucho*. In contrast to the literary Facundo, in Sarquis's cinematic version of the life of Facundo, the negative attributes of the *gaucho* are subverted, and the director elevates this character to the category of a hero worthy of praise as a result of his love and commitment to the Argentine Republic. The 1995 film depicting Facundo shows a progressive and educated man with a number of values, who awakens the compassion of the masses by effectively and unwittingly objecting to the assumed barbarism associated with the *gaucho*.

In the beginning chapters of *Facundo*, Sarmiento denounces the geography and the people of La Pampa. The author clarifies that the geography of both La Pampa and the Orient is a space conducive to a "savage" population, and the author assures that those individuals raised in these landscapes are less civilized than their compatriots in the city. It is in this manner that Sarmiento critiques the Argentine Federalists, by way of an oriental civilization that he knows of only through European writers. Sarmiento determines that in order to be civilized, the country must Europeanize (Garrels, "Traducir" 270), and in order to Europeanize it, it is necessary to adopt ideals and customs from outside the country, which Federalists believed to be harmful to the Argentine nation and a form of betrayal to the homeland. Incidentally, Sarmiento does not consider Spain as a civilized space due to its proximity to Africa, particularly the south of Spain, such as Andalucía, where the Muslim presence is most evident.⁴ In the following citation Sarmiento

⁴ Although Sarmiento is in favor of the European, he is against the Spanish facets due to the Orient's prominence in the Spanish culture and way of life. For example, Sarmiento is against the Arabic influence in the Spanish language and the presence of Moors in Spain. The author adds an endnote that contextualizes his observation of the atmosphere in which the Argentine *gaucho* drinks wine: "It is not beside the point to recall here the notable similarities with the Arabs shown by the Argentines. In Algiers, in Oran, in Mascara, and in desert villages, I always saw Arabs meeting in cafes, since they are completely prohibited from drinking

claims that Europeans are more civilized and Argentinians should imitate Western customs and education:

The man of the city wears European dress, lives a civilized life as we know it everywhere: in the city, there are laws, ideas of progress, means of instruction, some municipal organization, a regular government, etc.... the man of the country, far from aspiring to resemble the man of the city, rejects with scorn his luxuries and his polite manners; and the clothing of the city dweller, his tailcoat, his cape, his saddle—no such sign of Europe can appear in the countryside with impunity. (53)

In this excerpt, Sarmiento defines the European way of life as civilized. Laws and order are established within the European cities that allow progressive ideas to flourish and influence the inhabitants of urban areas. By correlating progress and law as an aspect of the urban scene, Sarmiento reinforces the impossibility of being able to implement civilization in rural areas.

In the first part of the biography, Sarmiento describes the Pampa and the Middle East in a very basic and general manner, but when the author details the life of Facundo in the second part, he detains himself on the description of Facundo's native province of the Rioja. Sarmiento states that "[he has] always had the idea that Palestine is similar to La Rioja, down to the reddish or ocher color of the earth, the dryness of some areas, and their cisterns..." (104). The reference to the reddish color of the land in the Rioja invokes a bloody and destructive image of which Argentinians are cognizant due to the violence between Federalists and Unitarians as a result of

liquor, grouped around a cantor—in general two—accompanying themselves on the vihuela as a duo, reciting national songs, mournful like our tristes. The reins used by Arabs are woven from leather, with little whips at the ends like ours; the bit we use is the Arab bit, and many of our customs reveal our parents' contact with the Moors of Andalusia. As for physical appearance, that goes without saying: I have met some Arabs whom I would swear I had seen in my own country" (*Facundo* 70).

different ideologies. Sarmiento compares this to the carnage that presents itself throughout centuries in the Middle East, such as religious wars between Muslims, Jews, and Christians. From this violent resemblance, the author expresses his thoughts as to what would happen in Argentina if Federalists rise to power. Sarmiento depicts connections between Palestine and the Rioja, including its dryness, the mountains and the plains (104). By focusing on the plains of both regions, Sarmiento analyzes what type of individual dwells in these places and concludes that individuals are made beautiful, rude, miserable (104) and taciturn because they struggle against these environments in order to survive. According to the author, the Rioja and Palestine appear to be the same place because of the same rugged geography in which the same vulgar people reside (104).

It is important to note that Sarmiento knows the Orient only through his readings of European literature, and he bases his entire critique on these works (M. Fuente 12). Maria Dolores de la Fuente notes that as a result of having knowledge solely through European written works, Sarmiento fears that Quiroga presents a danger to the continuance of Western progress, or civilization (12). When the author commences each chapter of *Facundo*, he uses citations of these thinkers as epigraphs, and the content and tone of each respective chapter is set in relation to an orientalist image for Argentina. Carlos Altamirano discusses the importance of these epigraphs in the discourse for two reasons. The first purpose coincides with Sarmiento's political motivations to correlate the countryside with the Orient, whilst his second literary motive is to add an exotic, romanticized image to the Argentine Pampa (83-84) For example, to begin the fifth chapter, the life of Facundo Quiroga, Sarmiento integrates thoughts of the Frenchman A.L.F. Alix (*Histoire de l'empire Ottoman*, 1822) in an epigraph to adjudicate that Facundo is a natural man: "Au surplus, ces traits appartiennent au caractère original du genre humain. L'homme de la nature, et qui n'a pas encore appris à contenir ou déguiser ses pas-

sions, les montre dans toutes leur énergie, et se livre à toute leur impétuosité."⁵ (91) The words of the aforementioned French author refers to the history of the Ottoman Empire of the 19th century. In that context, the natural man is an individual who lives of the land. In this epigraph the oriental man and the *gaucho* are "natural" men who have neither been able to control their emotions nor hide their passions and are, therefore, irrational. Thus, they are impetuous. This epigraph alludes to the "...original character of humankind" and taking into consideration the previous definition of civilization, according to Sarmiento, he concludes that everything indigenous and natural is barbaric and should be replaced by the foreign, the European, and the rational.

The traits that Sarmiento assigns to *gauchos*, bestial and terrifying, fall under this category. Facundo was well known by the *gauchos* as the "Tiger of the plains" due to physical and moral similarities (Sarmiento 93). The "beasts" to which Sarmiento refers are the tigers of Asian jungles and pumas and jaguars that inhabit the Americas. These animals are found in wild environments, incapable of being tamed and Sarmiento makes this connection with the Pampa and Asia. The author denounces the nature of the *gauchos* by comparing them to these untamable creatures, which are also symbols of prowess and strength in nations of the East.

A contrasting perspective appears in the film where Facundo's animality represents superhuman strength. The cinematography emphasizes the spirit of the tiger that gives Facundo his strength. In various scenes, growls and roars of a tiger are heard while Facundo speaks to his soldiers and when they travel across the Pampa. The director also integrates Facundo's Moorish horse in order to manifest Facundo's animal connection, as though an extension exists of the qualities of the horse to his owner. The close relationship

⁵ "Moreover, these traits belong to the original character of humankind. The natural man, who has not yet learned how to contain nor disguise his passions, shows them in all their might and surrenders to all of their impetuosity" (My translation).

between Facundo and his horse becomes a favorable and desired quality among the people. As a result of the horse being a Moorish horse, the director perpetuates the magic and superstition suspected from the Orient.

When Sarmiento recounts Facundo's life, he refers back to manuscript of a childhood friend of Facundo that describes Facundo's lewdness in his youth. In the candor with which this manuscript is supposedly written, Sarmiento leads the reader to believe that Facundo could have been compared to several great men in history. Some allusions employed by the author are references to Tamerlane (1336 C.E.-1405 C.E.), the Turkish conqueror who created an empire from Delhi to Anatolia, and Mohammad (570 C.E.- 632 C.E.), the Muslim prophet that united the Arab tribes under the Islamic religion (Sarmiento 99-100). These allusions evoke images of the Orient into the essay and the author refers to these allusions on various occasions. With these referenced names, Sarmiento establishes a parallel with great men present in the East and the *caudillos* of Argentina. The names of these important figures serve as a synecdoche to refer to all "Orientals" and Facundo's name is used in the same manner. Hence, Facundo as the representative of the *gaucho* population becomes one and the same; the figures become interchangeable. For example, the allusion to the physical resemblance of the *gauchos* and Ali-Baja of Monvoisin appears already in the first chapter of the essay that portrays Facundo. Sarmiento depicts Facundo as a man of short stature with wide shoulders, thick hair and a terrifying look who observed people with his head down, looking through his eyebrows like the Ali-Baja of Monvoisin (Sarmiento 93). Although Sarmiento associates Facundo with the Ottoman vizir, Ali Pasha of Albania, (Garrels, "Sarmiento" 7-9) he is alluding to the painting *Soldado de Rosas* (1842), by the Frenchman Raymond Quinsac de Monvoisin (1790-1870) (Biblioteca Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes) (Giordano 1285), when he speaks of the Arabic figure of Ali-Baja (Amigo 4-5). In this painting, the soldier leans against a wall found in the plains, drinking

mate, Argentinian tea. The soldier dons a cloth on his head that can be characterized as a turban, an attire characteristic of the Arab population. His eyebrows are black and thick, and he looks between them towards an object in the distance. Sarmiento uses each aspect of his image as a point of comparison with the Arabic culture.

Furthermore, in retelling Facundo's youth, Sarmiento considers that the topic of religion is noteworthy. Sarmiento comments on various occasions that Facundo rarely listens to mass, never prays, or confesses (99-100). As a leader that makes use of religion as part of his political campaign to attract the Argentine masses, it is contradictory that he does not follow the laws of the Church. Sarmiento finds a schism between the *caudillo* and the Church when they pretend to work together. While Sarmiento exploits this separation, Sarquis manifests that the *caudillo* is loyal to his Catholic beliefs. Sarquis shows the banners with the motto "Religion or Death" in the first scenes, in order to include a discussion later on in which Facundo prays and defends the Catholic religion. The film shows a less severe and more faith-driven man than the man Sarmiento exposes.

Sarmiento describes Facundo as a cruel man in order to demonstrate the Catholic Church's hypocrisy. According to the author, the Catholic Church is capable of enabling an authoritarian government with God's permission as long as the man in power promotes the Church in what he identifies as "Papal Governments" (Sarmiento 76). The fact that the Church and the government support each other is undesired by the Unitarians, who intend to secularize the nation. Additionally, Sarmiento suggests that Federalists unite government and religion in what he considers a barbaric government (76), following the model of Islam in the Middle East. The leader of the government is the leader of the religion under Islamic Sharia law and Sarmiento proposes a secular government, taking advantage of the opportunity to attack the opposite party.

Moreover, Sarmiento notes the importance of the clothes of the population as an

indication of the degree of their civility. The *gaucho* wears a *poncho* and *chiripá* and the city dweller is dressed in the latest European fashion. If the garments worn by a leader explicitly demonstrate his modernity, then the same premise extends to the people governed by this leader. Sarmiento announces that like Facundo, if the Sultan of Turkey Abdul Medjil wants to bring civilization to his people, he would dress in a suit and tie and leave behind his turban, trousers, and caftan (133).

Nonetheless, Sarquis represents Facundo as a man who struggles for the progress of his people and desires to show the appearance of sophistication by cutting his hair and wearing a suit and tie and leaving his *poncho* and *chiripá* aside. The director demonstrates that the people closest to Facundo also dress in a “civilized” manner, contrary to what Sarmiento observes. Overall, Sarmiento depicts Quiroga as a malevolent and ignorant *gaucho* while Sarquis depicts him as a generous and cultured man. Sarquis goes a step further and displays Facundo’s aspiration to unite and educate the country. For this purpose, the director places Facundo and Juan Bautista Alberdi, an intellectual of the 1837 Argentine Generation, in a scene discussing the possible ways in which to educate the country. Alberdi proposes, in this scene, a barbaric democracy where the people of the plains are permitted to continue the *gaucho* lifestyle, but they would have better education. Sarquis contradicts Sarmiento directly by showing this as the possible intention of Facundo.

Conclusion

By countering Sarmiento’s idea that Facundo is like the barbaric “Oriental other,” Sarquis manages to humanize Facundo’s image. With this change, the audience does not see the exotic or the “other” that Sarmiento intended to show in the first pages of his essay. In Sarquis’s film, Facundo is an old, arthritic man, with a fear of dying because of the disease or due to the betrayal of his friends. In fact, by demystifying Facundo, Sarquis shows the audience the viewpoint

of the “other”; the “other” becomes the natural, thereby altering the roles of civilization and barbarism.

Accordingly, Sarquis completes his portrayal of Facundo by contrasting the new image to that proposed by Sarmiento. The director shows Facundo and the *gauchos* in a less critical manner and identifies them as common men who seek to raise and unite the country through education and religion. Sarmiento, as a politician, forms his argument around a notion of orientalism popularized by European writers. Subsequently, the author casts the “other,” the *gauchos*, to manipulate their image to favor his politics. Sarmiento’s politics seek to educate the country and end the “barbarism” of the Federalist by better integrating European civilization into Argentina. As a result, Sarmiento defends his politics by utilizing the Orient as the basis of comparison of barbarism with the Argentine Pampa. In spite of Sarmiento’s alteration of society, Sarquis takes the *gaucho* and the Federalist point of view to defend the *gaucho* lifestyle by presenting his audience with the viewpoint of a humanized “other” that modifies the perspective of civilization and barbarism. In conclusion, Sarmiento reflects a disdain for everything that comes from the Orient and its manifestation in his own country and Sarquis revives the indigenous because it is an integral part of Argentina.

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