

Gauchos at the Origins: Lugones, Borges, Filloy

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Fue tantos otros y hoy es una quieta
pieza que mueve la literatura.

Borges, "El gaucho"

In *Los gauchipolíticos rioplatenses*, Ángel Rama demonstrates that gauchesque poetry was not written by gauchos but rather by a certain lettered elite who for various reasons had knowledge of the gauchos and their way of life.¹ Though there were gaucho poets, the gaucho genre is distinct, particularly in its overabundance of local color. In "El escritor argentino y la tradición," Jorge Luis Borges clarifies the difference: "La prueba es ésta: un colombiano, un mejicano o un español pueden comprender inmediatamente las poesías de los payadores, de los gauchos, y en cambio necesitan un glosario para comprender, siquiera aproximadamente, a Estanislao del Campo o Ascasubi" (551). The gaucho genre is rather a space in which the gauchos are constantly appropriated and used to carry out a variety of ideological and aesthetic programs. In *The Gaucho Genre*, Josefina Ludmer analyzes how

1 Rama states, "El poeta no se consustancia con su público sino que aprovecha el sistema para adoctrinarlo en orientaciones políticas que pueden ser ajenas, incluso contrarias, a los intereses del gauchaje. El poeta no sirve a su público sino a las elites que él integra o que lo dirigen y financien" (52).

the figure of the gaucho is constructed and manipulated by the lettered elite: “The gaucho genre implemented this conjunction: it constituted a literary political language, politicized popular culture, and left its founding mark on Argentine culture” (69). Masking their place of enunciation under the guise of popular, oral culture, the genre’s canonical authors and critics use the voice of the gaucho to speak to the masses of the nation.

In this essay, I explore three uses of the figure of the gaucho and of the gaucho genre in Leopoldo Lugones, Jorge Luis Borges, and Juan Filloy. All three place gauchos at the origins of their aesthetic and political projects, and in this way they are all a part of a long tradition of appropriating and transforming the gaucho into a literary device. However, they derive different meanings and interpretations from this originary position. Lugones’s opening sentences in *El payador* essentialize the gaucho and the genre as the only origin of national culture; his writings attempt to erect monuments that set in stone a singular vision of Argentina. In clear opposition to Lugones, Borges paradoxically creates a new starting point for interpreting and rewriting the gaucho genre as part of a national tradition while proclaiming the need to exceed local color and regionalisms. In a similar vein, Filloy’s *Ochoa Family Saga* definitively explodes the essentialized place Lugones created for the gauchos while still situating a gaucho at the origins of his provincial saga; in contrast to Borges, he writes new stories that expand the genre beyond its nineteenth century protagonists, and his writings can now be brought into this critical debate. Overall, Lugones’s use of the gauchos and the genre serves as a point of contrast to the differential, but not oppositional, strategies developed by Borges and Filloy, both of whom seek an aesthetics and a politics that do not need to appeal to rigid notions of nationalism or to define the essential qualities of Argentine culture. My analysis of Borges and Filloy demonstrates that it is possible to appeal to the gaucho and the genre as seminal figures and texts in Argentina’s past while still making room for a plurality of subjects of different origins who speak in contrasting voices within the nation.

THE ORIGINAL GAUCHO

Lugones first delivered the ideas present in *El payador* at the Teatro Odeón in Buenos Aires in 1913; he then published an expanded version in 1916, coinciding with the Centenary of Argentine Independence. Lugones today

is the name most closely associated with these nationalist celebrations, and it is well known that his appeal to the gauchos and the genre stems from an ideological desire to delimit and control official Argentine culture in the face of rapid immigration to Buenos Aires. To this end, from the capital he turns to the provinces as a supposed repository of the national essence, a place considered by him to be uncontaminated by foreign influences. “It was a timely invention,” Beatriz Sarlo explains, “for immigrants from Italy, as well as Germany and Central Europe, were arriving by the thousands in Buenos Aires, and the intellectuals were worrying about the future of their culture” (37). The impetus from which Lugones interprets the genre can be described, to use Derrida’s term, as “archive fever”: “a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” (91). Lugones turns to consecrated words and texts in Western culture through etymologies and ancient and medieval aesthetics, but he does not simply uncover the absolute commencement of the gaucho tradition. Rather, he appropriates the genre and actively constructs an “origin” in retrospect by imagining the gaucho as the essential figure of the Argentine nation-state. The opening sentences of the prologue and first two chapters prove illustrative of the rhetorical strategies he employs to essentialize the gaucho and canonize the genre.

After an impressive etymological exercise that traces the ancient roots of the word “*payador*” in Greek, Latin, and other Romance languages, Lugones declares in the prologue that the gaucho genre is the essential tradition of the Argentine nation: “Titulo este libro con el nombre de los antiguos cantores errantes que recorrían nuestras campañas trovando romances y endechas, porque fueron ellos los personajes más significativos en la formación de nuestra raza” (xvii). His etymologies intend to prove that all roads lead back from the eighteenth and nineteenth century gaucho’s *payada* to the dance and poetic composition of the medieval troubadours. In this manner, the Argentine gauchos become the local equivalent of those whose works are recognized as the precursors to European epic poetry. Lugones’s positivist logic suggests by analogy that the same path has been followed in his home country: if the gauchos are Argentine troubadours, then the *Martín Fierro*—in his view, the best of the gaucho

genre—is the Argentine epic poem. After only one century of independence, Lugones assures his audience that Argentina is poised to become one of the great Western nations.

In the opening sentence of the first chapter, Lugones clearly states the outcome of this association: “Producir un poema épico es, para todo pueblo, certificado eminente de aptitud vital; porque dicha creación expresa la vida heroica de su raza” (1). Epic poetry values justice and liberty above all, and the epic hero righteously spreads civilization along his journey. Lugones combs through the archives of the Western epic, from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* to the *Divine Comedy* and the *Cantar de Mío Cid*, to certify the Christian transformation of those ancient Hellenic values. He highlights Odysseus’s just revenge against illegitimate usurpers and Cid’s holy campaign to free Spain from the Moors. Lugones already situated the gaucho at the origin of the Argentine “race.” If the *payada* leads to the development of an epic poetry, now the expression of the highest moral values to which a nation can aspire, then the gauchos are the original heroes who assured the spread of justice and liberty across the national territory in its earliest moments after independence.

Lugones’s transcendental argument culminates in the opening sentence of chapter two wherein he proclaims a logical outcome to his premises: “El gaucho fué el héroe y el civilizador de la Pampa” (19). This is a jarring assertion that essentializes the link between nation and state through the figure of the delinquent gaucho. A modern-day Cid, the gaucho would be for Lugones the national hero who successfully exterminated the indigenous peoples of the Pampa and spread civilization during the Campaign of the Desert. Lugones’s gaucho exceeds the valor and military strength of the Spanish conquistadors who failed to conquer the indigenous; thus, his comparison asserts that Argentina has progressed beyond its Spanish heritage. Underlying his entire argument, however, are the flat aesthetic conventions that stereotype the indigenous as barbarous and the Pampa as an indomitable desert landscape. In the prologue to *Poesía gauchesca*, Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares argue that this construction of the Pampa throughout the genre—one that Lugones reads literally—is based solely on *a priori* conception of that space: “Cabe afirmar que, en general, la poesía gauchesca no describe la vida de la llanura, sino que la presupone. Habla de pampas, de baguales, de estancias, para personas que ya tienen

imágenes claras de esas palabras” (x). These narratives allow Lugones and others to easily justify the violent expansion of the state throughout those lands.

Lugones acknowledges the gauchos’ imperfect social code—their historical disappearance was necessary for Argentina to become fully civilized—but in retrospect they become heroes who appear to have vanquished the indigenous of their own volition. In contrast, one of the most common tropes of the gaucho genre is for the gaucho to lament the unjust system by which he was conscripted into the army, as in the following example from *La ida*: “Ay comienzan sus desgracias / ay principia el pericón / porque ya no hay salvación / y que usted quiera o no quiera / lo mandan a la frontera / o lo echan a un batallón” (121). For Lugones, the means by which the gauchos arrived at the army are less important than the fact that their particular skills in horseback combat proved indispensable for what he considers to be a legitimate and necessary conquest; in the gaucho’s absence, Lugones takes liberties to erect a monument to a hero of his own creation, to a just and civilizing national warrior who assured the expansion and prosperity of the Argentine state that the historical gauchos and those represented in the genre frequently opposed.

El payador is a complex text that scours the Western archives to prove the value of a local tradition by situating it alongside already consecrated texts. The gaucho is constructed as the ordinary, yet absent, figure whose essential moral qualities persist in the modern Argentine man. Overall, Lugones fastidiously situates his idealized gaucho at the origin of the nation—one that becomes indistinguishable from the state—to prove Argentina’s status as a civilized country, and he desperately seeks to establish a stable foundation and consecrated space as a bulwark against the influences of foreign immigrants. His elitist appeal to the lower strata of Argentine society only reaches out to a figure who no longer exists and can therefore be manipulated to suit his needs; this fiction of the original gaucho will become a major source of contention in the following decades.

THE FIERRO-CRUZ REDUX

Borges’s writings related to the gaucho genre condense many of the aesthetic and political ideologies that underlie his works. Within these essays

and short stories, Borges relentlessly critiques Lugones's use of the gaucho genre and modernista sensibilities. In fact, Borges and Bioy Casares dismantle Lugones's entire argument by claiming that the *Martín Fierro* is not an epic poem:

Ello es erróneo. Ni la compleja historia argentina cabe en las guerras de frontera de mediados de siglo, ni el protagonista –con su destino tan personal y así policiaco– puede ser emblemático de un país. Lo cierto es que la epopeya argentina no ha sido escrita; está acaso esbozada en la heterogénea obra de Ascasubi. La novela, en su doble carácter de testimonio de una época y de plena declaración de un destino, está ilustremente dada en el *Martín Fierro*. (xxi–xxii)

By displacing the poetic genealogy to Ascasubi and enshrining Hernández as the forefather of the Argentine novel, Borges and Bioy Casares attempt to make Lugones's painstaking etymologies and essentialist references to the archive irrelevant to any discussion of Argentine aesthetics and politics.² This is not to say that these two are impartial historians of the genre. In "Borges y Bioy Casares, 1955 y la *Poesía gauchesca* como paradójica rebeldía," Laura Demaría demonstrates that their prologue, selections and notes throughout the anthology present a clear, though implicit political ideology; they contest the historical revisionism that constructed Rosas as a national hero while they decry Peronist politics as dictatorial: "Con la desmitificación de Hernández responden a la apología del nacionalismo; con la revalorización de Ascasubi y su uso de la gauchesca como arma política atacan al peronismo" (27). Central to their essay is the imperative to destroy and discard Lugones's "erroneous" gaucho as well as his essentialist definitions of Argentine culture that close it to future interventions, because, as Alfonso García Morales has demonstrated, the *Martín Fierro* for Borges was a classic that would survive "tendiendo siempre hacia un *más allá* de sentido" (33). Thus, Borges mounts a two-part *redux* in prose of Hernández's poem that transforms the gaucho genre from an untouchable masterpiece into the motor of a fictional machine that generates the

2 Borges and Bioy Casares also direct their critique toward Ricardo Rojas for deriving the gaucho genre from the oral tradition of the gauchos: "Rojas quiere derivar el género gauchesco de la poesía popular de los payadores; creemos que esa genealogía es errónea: el rústico, en trance de versificar, procura no emplear voces rústicas. Tampoco busca temas cotidianos ni cultiva el color local" (viii–ix).

possibility of rewriting the genre and of expanding the boundaries of Argentine culture beyond the purely local.³

Borges's "El fin" is often read by emphasizing the death of Fierro as "an end to the gauchesque cycle" and to the pedantic, moral code of *La vuelta* (Sarlo 41). Ludmer, for example, argues that Borges had to kill the popular, national hero in order to dispute "literature for the people, that is, literature that constructs the equation identifying justice with law and places this fusion within the people's language" (196). Certainly, Borges's short story can be read as a closure to a certain appropriation and use of the gaucho and the genre, especially when placed at the end of a genealogy that includes Hernández's *La vuelta*, Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra*, and Lugones's *El payador*, in which the state and its laws are essentialized as national culture and justice. These critics do not limit Borges's intervention to that of a definitive closure, but they do focus on what Borges brings to an end in his fictions.

Within this discussion, what interests me is to shift the emphasis toward a reading of the title through which the "El fin" paradoxically becomes a new beginning, an opening toward future narratives. Toward the end of the payada scene in *La vuelta*, El Moreno reveals that he is one of nine brothers of the man Fierro killed in *La ida*; he has come to seek justice through bloodshed for "las muertes injustas / que algunos hombres cometen" (339). Fierro backs down from this fight, ultimately renouncing the violence of the gaucho's moral code at the same time he prepares to give Cruz's son and his own numerous pieces of advice about how to be good citizens of the state. Fierro's transformation signals the gaucho's acceptance of the new social order. Before this closure, he also leaves a gap in his narrative: "Yo no sé lo que vendrá / tampoco soy adivino; / pero firme en mi camino / hasta el fin he de seguir: / todos tienen que cumplir / con

3 In "El escritor argentino y la tradición," Borges makes many of the same arguments as in the prologue with Bioy Casares; however, for Argentine culture to become worthy of the laurels Lugones would bestow upon it, Borges argues that it must be capable of exceeding the particular customs and traditions of local culture: "Quiero señalar otra contradicción: los nacionalistas simulan venerar las capacidades de la mente argentina pero quieren limitar el ejercicio poético de esa mente a algunos pobres temas locales, como si los argentinos sólo pudiéramos hablar de orillas y estancias y no del universo" (554). The only trait Borges deems worthy of applying to his entire nation is "la versatilidad argentina," the ability to adapt, change, and be skilled at various endeavors (555).

la ley de su destino” (340). As Pedro Luis Barcia has shown, this ambiguous moment in the text, the gaucho’s unwritten destiny, permits Borges to reopen the classic and imagine a future encounter between Fierro and El Moreno: “Esa posibilidad es aprovechada por Borges, pero ‘El fin’ no es cierre definitivo” (229). In Borges’s story, Fierro returns to accept El Moreno’s challenge; as a result, he restores the moral code he swore off in *La vuelta*, thus proving his “consejos” in the final stanzas to be hypocritical, and perpetuates a cycle of revenge that could continue well beyond the closing sentence of Borges’s short story. El Moreno repeats in “El fin” the same gesture as Fierro in *La ida* after killing their respective foes. The Fierro of *La ida* says: “Limpié el facón en los pastos, / desaté mi redomón, monté despacio y salí / al tranco pa el cañadón” (155). This is rewritten in “El fin,” drawing heavily from the classic: “Limpió el facón ensangrentado en el pasto y volvió a las casas con lentitud, sin mirar para atrás” (820). Fierro’s actions are translated from the poem into prose, from the first person that pretends to speak in the voice of the gaucho into a third person narrator who observes and reports the scene alongside the silent Recabarren. Thus, Borges refuses to perpetuate one convention of the gaucho genre—speaking in or through the voice of the gaucho, a popular voice, to instruct the masses—while restoring another—the gaucho’s rebellious opposition to the state. This is not to say that Borges advocated for honor killings; rather, “El fin” dismantles the moralizing end of *La vuelta* as well as Lugones’s essentialist interpretation by delinking the gaucho and the genre from the nation-state.

In the final paragraph of “El fin,” Borges sets the infinite in motion. On the one hand, the Pampa acquires a voice or musical quality, overturning the tropes that are frequently used to describe it as a desert: “Hay una hora de la tarde en que la llanura está por decir algo; nunca lo dice o tal vez lo dice infinitamente y no lo entendemos, o lo entendemos pero es intraducible como una música” (820). Instead of assuming that the Pampa’s silence is evidence of what it lacks, the narrator postulates a sublime language or music that exceeds human understanding. No longer devoid of life and civilization, the Pampa remains immense, yet filled with the unknown that inspires future fictions and symphonies to partially translate

it without end. On the other, after killing the popular hero, El Moreno takes Fierro's place in the final sentence of "El fin": "Cumplida su tarea de justiciero, ahora era nadie. Mejor dicho era el otro: no tenía destino sobre la tierra y había matado a un hombre" (820). This could be the end. But it is equally possible, now that El Moreno has become Fierro, the other, the man who has killed another, that Fierro's two sons and even Cruz's son will seek revenge for his death by challenging El Moreno. They may win or lose in those fights, and any of El Moreno's eight living brothers could also retaliate. Just as the gaps in *Martín Fierro* inspired Borges's redux, "El fin" tempts Borges's readers to imagine and write the stories of this potential feud.

"Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829–1874)" justifies this infinite task. This story is well known for describing Cruz's adventures in *La ida* as a story that "es capaz de casi inagotables repeticiones, versiones, perversiones" (862). It can be copied, translated, and adapted, because it is full of gaps: "En su oscura y valerosa historia abundan los hiatos" (863). Cruz dies at the end of Canto VII of *La vuelta*; however, Borges's "Biografía" does not end with Cruz's death, but at the beginning of his journey into indigenous territory with Fierro. In *La vuelta*, very little of Cruz's story is actually told. After being captured, Fierro and Cruz are separated for two years, and Fierro says: "No pude tener con Cruz / ninguna conversación" (211). The first person narrator of "Biografía" takes on the task of writing a story to partially fill that empty space. In Borges's story, Cruz is supposed to arrest Fierro, but after meeting him in battle, he recognizes his valor and decides to join him. Parallel to El Moreno's becoming Fierro in "El fin," Cruz "comprendió que el otro era él," that Fierro and he, the other and the self, are one in the same (864). Not only do Fierro and El Moreno inspire future narratives, but also Cruz's life story, especially those two years he spent apart from Fierro, is just as worthy of being imagined and written. In the end, Borges's Fierro-Cruz redux only begins to tell some of the possible stories that are missing from the *Martín Fierro* and the gaucho genre at large; Borges's endings create a new starting point for the genre now freed from essentialist constraints.

THE OCHOA FAMILY SAGA

Filloy's "Saga de los 8A" is composed of four texts, *Los Ochoa* (1972), *La potra* (1973), *SexAmor* (1996), and *Decio 8A* (1997).⁴ These short stories and novels begin with the birth of Proto Orosimba Ochoa in 1821 and follow a number of his descendents throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of particular relevance to this essay are the prologue and first three short stories of *Los Ochoa*—published by Macció Hnos. in Río Cuarto, a city in Córdoba Province near where many of the fictional plots take place—that narrate some of the adventures and misfortunes of the two gauchos in the family, Proto and his son Primo. Filloy's gaucho narratives do not directly critique the work of a previous author or critic, as happens with Borges against Lugones in their ideological disputes over the *Martín Fierro* and the genre at large; rather, they relate the lives of different gauchos whose otherwise untold stories become intertwined with the densely populated archives in which the so-called desert landscape of Córdoba Province has been imagined and documented. Avoiding essentialist constructs and regionalisms, Filloy's writing can be described, to use the category developed by Demaría in *Buenos Aires y las provincias*, as "escritura en provincia": "una escritura 'situada', marcada por el lugar de enunciación desde el que se narra la provincia pero que no refiere a un ser identitario sino a un archivo de historias en constante movimiento" (420-21). In my reading of the Saga, these original narratives displace a number of the genre's essentialist conventions, while proposing an open-ended relationship between the figure of the gaucho and the history of the nation as it explores and transforms the nineteenth century archives.

Born just after Argentine independence, Proto is the family's earliest recorded member. His story is also the first of the collection, titled "El juído (El patriarca)," but his status as the patriarch is secondary, literally placed in parenthesis, to that as "el juído." The verb "*juir*" is used throughout the genre as the gaucho's pronunciation of "huir," meaning "to flee, to run away, to escape (from)," and "el juído" can be translated as "the fugitive." In Canto II of *La ida*, Fierro emphasizes this characteristic as

4 See Carlos Hernán Sosa's "Ecos paródicos. Resonancias de la gauchesca en *La potra* de Juan Filloy" for a cursory exploration of the links between the Ochoa Family Saga and the gaucho genre.

he describes the life of the gaucho and goes on to relate his experience: “Estaba el gaucho en su pago / con toda siguridad; / pero aura... ¡barbaridá!, / la cosa anda tan fruncida, / que gasta el pobre la vida / en juir de la autoridá. [...] // Así empezaron mis males, / lo mesmo que los de tantos” (120–21). Whereas Lugones would solidly ground Fierro as the national hero, Filloy’s narrative restores the importance of the verb “juir” to the description of the gaucho. Proto, this other founding father, is an outlaw on the run after assaulting and disfiguring an officer: “Güeno, lo golpié del lao zurdo rebanándole l’oreja” (12). To avoid punishment, he deserts his post in the army, flees to the unincorporated nineteenth-century countryside, and takes refuge among the Ranquel. Establishing an affinity with the most well-known gaucho, Proto misquotes the *Martín Fierro*, further underscoring his own errancy: “Lo mesmo le pasó a Martín Fierro: *Anduvo siempre juyendo / Siempre pobre y perseguido / No tuvo cueva ni nido / Como si juera un maldito; / Porque el ser gaucho, carajo / El ser gaucho es un delito*” (10).⁵ The classic text is written in the present tense, generalizing Fierro’s story as representative of all gauchos; Proto’s translation into the past tense restores the particularity of Fierro’s experience, but he retains the final moral lesson: to be a gaucho is a crime. From this beginning, the patriarch of the Ochoa family appears already in perpetual motion, and his connection to the nascent nation-state is tenuous at best.⁶

Before introducing this errant figure, the “Prólogo” to *Los Ochoa* grounds the entire family saga on quicksand in the first sentence: “Esta nativa ‘Saga de los 8A’ no es un engendro literario, sino una concreción de hechos y episodios de seres humanos, emergidos en la superficie de

5 In Canto VIII, the *Martín Fierro* reads: “Él anda siempre juyendo. / Siempre pobre y perseguido; / no tiene cueva ni nido, / como si juera maldito; / porque el ser gaucho... ¡barajo!, / el ser gaucho es un delito” (157).

6 Even before fleeing the army, Proto spent much of his life walking back and forth between the Postas of the Camino Real that connected, in part, Buenos Aires to Córdoba in the late colonial period and served as military posts throughout much of the nineteenth century: “Hasta me parece que n’hubiese sufrido nada yendo una y mil veces de Esquina del Lobatón a Saladillo de Ruiz Diaz, a Zanjón, a Fraile Muerto, a Tres Cruces, a Capilla de Dolores, a Esquina del Corral de Barrancas, a Arroyo Chucul y la Concepción del Río Cuarto. Saltos de langosta. Tas, tas, tas...” (9). Proto flits from one place to another, never laying down roots; even his place of birth becomes unimportant for this “satafareño, satafesino que le dicen, de Esquina de la Guardia, acordobesao en Cruz Alta y Cabeza del Tigre” (9).

diferentes actualidades en una región de ‘tierra adentro’, entre médanos y guadales de la ‘pampa seca’” (5). On the one hand, the scare quotes around “tierra adentro” and “pampa seca” showcase the irony with which these terms are employed; the clichéd description of the Pampa as a dry, lifeless, no man’s land is discarded. On the other, the narrator retains the words “médanos” and “guadales” to describe the province as being composed of dunes and sandy bogs. In this regard, Filloy’s narrative is consistent with other nineteenth century descriptions of the Pampa; in *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles*, for example, Lucio V. Mansilla along the path from Calcumuleu to Leubucó describes the difficulty of riding through “los médanos de movediza arena” (119). Though a challenge to be overcome by the expanding state in Mansilla’s narrative, Filloy’s Saga appropriates this shifting terrain as the only possible grounds for a national narrative in the provinces. Trying to remain immobile or erect permanent monuments on such terrain would be futile, but the Ochoas know how to traverse this landscape that keeps shifting under their feet. In these stories, the only originary figures are those who resist reification as common folks in a slow-paced region imagined as the reservoir of a simpler past. The human beings who emerge from the changing realities of this region cannot be so easily co-opted by the nation-state for allegorical or institutional purposes.

Filloy’s prologue ends by making serious play with the linear logic of genealogy. The narrator lists the names of the Ochoas whose year of birth could be found in the public record:

1821, Proto Orosimba 8A	1915, Mil 8A
1842, Primo 8A	1921, Decena 8A, melliza
1843, Segunda 8A	1921, Docena 8A, melliza
1863, Novena 8A, La Nona	1930, Once 8A
1877, Quintín 8A	1935, Sexto 8A
1894, Octavo 8A, gemelo	1942, Décimo 8A
1894, Noveno 8A, gemelo	1963, Crisanto Funes 8A,
1900, Tercer 8A	tataranieto de La Nona. (8)

The Ochoa Family is organized chronologically as a genealogy, not a branching family tree, that spans from Independence to the 1960s. They all write their last name “8A” as a shorthand, because the name is a homophone for “eight a” in Spanish. Also, they use another shorthand when their first names are ordinal numbers; for example, Octavo Ochoa, a homophone for Eighth Eight A, writes his name as “8°8A” (90). In observing this chronology of numerically named Ochoas, the strict ordering of a genealogy, traditionally conceived as a direct path from the present back to the origin, errs away from linear logic. The first Ochoa in the list is Proto Orosimba, the fugitive, whose name is also a suffix meaning “origin” or “beginning.” He is followed by Primo, Proto’s son and the second gaucho in the family. A possibly shortened form of “*primero*, first,” since he writes his name “1°8A,” “*primo*” also means “cousin,” suggesting a second origin for the Saga and, at the same time, displacing his direct lineage as the son. They are followed by the third person in the list, the first woman, Segunda, whose name is a homophone for the feminine inflexion of “*segundo*, second.” Tercer, whose name shifts the stress and shortens the word “*tercero*, third” appears as the eighth person in the list, after Novena (feminine “ninth”), Quintín (diminutive “fifth”), and the twins, Octavo (masculine “eighth”) and Noveno (masculine “ninth”). These names perpetually displace any and all numerical order, and other family members not listed here appear throughout the Saga. This list ends with Crisanto Funes, whose name does not even carry on the number game but takes a radical detour from this logic altogether.

The competing numerical logics—the chronology of the dates and the ordinal numbers heard in the first names—create a tension that moves back and forth along this genealogy. The dates order the genealogy along a linear path; the homophonic first names do not simply reverse this order, but rather they scatter it beyond recognition without abandoning the genealogical structure or removing the Ochoa family from Argentine territory. In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1971), Foucault analyzes Nietzsche’s use of genealogy as a method for calling into question the intrinsic worth of moral values by demonstrating how they were created and modified over time: “he finds that there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piece-

meal fashion from alien forms” (142). A genealogical exploration for Nietzsche, Foucault, and by extension, Filloy, “disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (147). In this sense, the genealogy placed at the beginning of Filloy’s Ochoa Family Saga turns against the chronology of historical progress and opens a path through the Argentine archives where perfectly ordered obstacles had previously blocked the way. This transformation can be further analyzed in the gaucho stories of Proto and Primo.

While in Ranquel territory, Proto’s path crosses with Mansilla, and Filloy’s story expands *Una excursión* much in the way that Borges continued the *Martín Fierro*. In *Mapas de poder*, Jens Andermann analyzes two main currents of Mansilla’s poetics: “Por un lado hay una poética realista de relevamiento –clasificación, taxonomía, topografía–; por el otro una crítica política y cultural de la mera expansión del poder central, que es acusado de ignorar la verdad del país” (108). Mansilla journeys across the provinces and gives witness to the supposed realities of the “Interior;” he expects his experience to grant him the authority to make policy recommendations, even if they ultimately would be ignored. The story of Rufino Pereira, a gaucho who tells Mansilla he deserted the army after being falsely accused of crimes, becomes paradigmatic in *Una excursión*. When Mansilla asks Pereira where he is from, who his parents are, and why he was enlisted in the army, Pereira’s only answer is “No sé” (228). His origins are perhaps the most imprecise of any gaucho in the entire genre, making him the perfect blank slate, a name who can stand for any other gaucho. Mansilla goes on to explain how he transformed this supposed criminal into an ideal soldier by appealing to his sense of honor, loyalty, and duty. In this particular instance, Mansilla quickly elevates Pereira’s story to that of a universal form: “Nuestros campos están llenos de Rufinos Pereiras. La raza de este ser desheredado que se llama *gaucho*, digan lo que quieran, es excelente, y como blanda cera, puede ser modelada para el bien” (231). And Mansilla claims to have the magic touch, capable of transforming these Rufinos Pereiras, all the *gauchos malos*, into loyal soldiers of the state. Though operating from different ideological positions, both Mansilla and Lugones generalize from the story of one particular gaucho in order to

construct essentialist images of heroic individuals for the nation-state from these provincial bodies.

“El juído (El patriarca)” focuses on the life of another one of these “Rufinos Pereiras,” Proto Orosimba Ochoa, but the change in perspective dismantles Mansilla’s paradigm. Filloy’s narrative does not journey from Buenos Aires to the provinces; it begins from within that constant movement throughout Córdoba Province I described above, and Proto is already in Leubucó well before Mansilla arrives. “Vení. ¡Vení rápido!,” shouts someone in Leubucó, “¡Está por llegar el Coronel Lucio V. Mansilla!” (16). Perhaps hearing about Pereira’s luck in having his name cleared, Proto decides to try his hand when he learns that the sergeant whose ear he cut off was killed for becoming insolent with one of his superiors:

Lo trabajé al curita pa’qu’el coronel Mansilla me perdonase. Total, muerto el perro se acabó la rabia... Pero en el ejército nu’es así. El coronel alegó que lo mío er’una insubordinación muy grave; y la muerte del alférez una cosa justa “en defensa de la jerarquía militar”. ¡Mire la palabra qui’usan pa’joder a quien rebana un’oreja y no a quien quita una vida! (18)

Proto and the one-eared officer—he holds the rank of *alférez*, the lowest commissioned rank—committed similar offenses: they were both punished for insubordination. Proto fled, and the officer was killed in order to defend the military’s hierarchy; Proto’s clever critique points out that all he did was cut off someone’s ear, not kill anyone, yet he is still seen as having committed a greater crime than those in the military who killed the insubordinate officer. Though Proto will be forgiven for his crimes and goes on to serve under Mansilla for many years, thus confirming Mansilla’s generalized claims in his particular case, Filloy’s narrative allows the errant Proto to maintain a margin of difference. Just before the Campaign of the Desert that would exterminate the indigenous tribes, he critiques this violent logic that values hierarchy—power derived from maintaining rigid order—over human life.

The two stories about the second gaucho, Primo Ochoa, further destroy the rigid, moral logic by which the figure of the gauchos and the genre have been interpreted and appropriated. The category of the *gaucho malo* reappears throughout the nineteenth century. This bad gaucho is defined in contrast to his counterpart in a classic of the genre, Hilario Ascasubi’s *Santos Vega*. The narrator tells the story of two twins, Luis and Jacinto, the

bad and the good gauchos, respectively. Consistent throughout this entire text is the binary that divides these two brothers from the moment they first appear in the narrative:

Así, desde charabón,
el mellizo más flauchín
descubrió un alma tan ruin,
y perversa de tal modo,
que con buena crianza y todo
salió un saltiador al fin.

Este se llamaba Luis,
y el otro hermano Jacinto,
criatura de un instinto
humilde como perdiz. (*Poesía* 338)

Jacinto's story is brief, since it is relatively free of drama, whereas Luis reappears over and over again to commit violent crimes. This bad gaucho never transforms into a good gaucho; the only solace is the happy ending achieved upon his death. Whereas Mansilla proposes guiding these bad gauchos toward a better future, Ascasubi prescribes their disappearance altogether.⁷ Common to both is the moral condemnation of the thieving, unrestrained gaucho type that proves to be an obstacle to Argentina's future.

Fillooy's gauchos do not fit within these categories. Primo, put bluntly, is an obnoxious drunk. He played tricks on everyone in his youth, and as an old man in "Carbunclo" he gets thrown in jail for urinating on the veterinarian's lawn and insulting his wife after proudly shouting: "¡Miren, carajo, apriendan! ¡Esto se llama mear!" (36). The narrator invents a new category for Primo that pries open the good/bad opposition of the genre: "Don Primo, ya raspando la sesentena, mantenía fresca por doquiera su modalidad de gaucho jodón. De gaucho jodón, pero no malo" (38). "Jodón" can be translated as "damned irritating" or "tricky, sneaky." The

7 The *gaucho malo* also figures in Sarmiento's gaucho taxonomy in Chapter II, "Originalidad y caracteres argentinos," of the *Facundo*, alongside three other types: *el rastreador*, *el baqueano*, and *el cantor*. Though Sarmiento develops a certain moral complexity in his descriptions, in particular relating to the detailed knowledge each of these gaucho types possess about the territory they roam, what characterizes the *gaucho malo* is that he steals, even if not out of malice: "roba es cierto; pero esta es su profesión, su tráfico, su ciencia" (89).

gaucho jodón is neither good nor bad; moral absolutes prove too extreme to register Primo's disturbing irreverence, what in many cases are banal insults, jokes, or tricks unworthy of eternal condemnation. For this reason, his story cannot be elevated through nationalism as a clear example of how the citizen should or should not behave.⁸ This *gaucho jodón* is just that and nothing more.

In that case, it remains to be seen what type of story can be written when no fixed origin, no solid ground below, and no moral absolutes above can orient the gaucho genre. Proto assumes this task of retelling an infamous scene from his past. The scene is first told in the third person in the story "As de espadas." At a party to celebrate the Centenary on "el 9 de julio de 1916," Primo joins three other men in a game of truco, a card game played by almost every gaucho in the genre that easily lends itself to national allegories. This narrative begins by recalling that possibility: "En la mesa de truco se tocan los cuatros puntos cardinales del país" (21). However, the game is guided by "un demonio jodón y sagaz" and requires players to "matizar los caprichos del azar" (21). Deceit and chance are the only underlying principles, further waylaying Lugones's attempt to root nationalism in these provincial figures and tropes. Once Primo realizes he and Braulio are going to lose the game, he plucks a tick from a dog and sneaks it among his opponent's snacks. Cuquejo accidentally bites into the tick, and its blood bursts into his mouth. In a rage, he tries to stab Primo, but he trips on a chair; Primo hits him on the head with a carbonated water bottle, and Cuquejo falls, his neck cracking on another chair, and eventually dies. Primo spends some time in jail but is eventually pardoned. The historical narrative ends here. Years later in "Carbuncló," back in jail for public urination, his cell mates vaguely recall some epic story from Primo's youth. They beg him to retell this story, even though he warns it was "una trigeria" (49). Primo is perfectly positioned to tell any version or perversion of the story, to borrow Borges's phrase, but what he relates is completely consistent with the events narrated in "As de

8 The Saga further dismantles the binary logic by including multiple sets of twins within the family. The prologue mentions Octavo and Noveno (b. 1894) and Decena and Docena (b. 1921), and in "Carbuncló," Segundo and Secundina, "dos sabandijas," two low-lives, but not moral opposites as in the case of Ascasubi's twins, assume the responsibility of caring for their aging grandfather (35).

espadas.” His cellmates are disgusted by the story and shocked that he is “tan repugnante,” but he told the story they asked to hear (52). He chose not to invent the past as a glorious era full of epic heroes to guide his fellow countrymen through present insecurities toward the only future he personally deems acceptable.

Ultimately, Primo sees no point in hiding unpleasant historical details. Inverting Shakespeare’s maxim, Primo leaves the following lesson: “Llámele jazmín a la mierda y apestará lo mismo” (53). As I read it in this context, Primo decries the ultimate futility of erasing the violent origins of the nation and replacing them with regionalist myths and essentialist constructs. Whereas Borges thoroughly dismantles Lugones’s rigid arguments and demonstrates the future potential for reviving the gaucho genre as a *genre*, as a narrative of the past that can always be rewritten, Filloy’s gaucho stories return to the national archives to restore the complexity, and even at times the banality, of the gauchos and the provincial lands they continually traverse. These subjects and spaces certainly comprise an important place in Argentina’s past, but Borges and Filloy revive them from Lugones’s immobile monuments to demonstrate that these texts are simply a convention for ordering one’s perception of the past and that different, even more ethical, national narratives are possible without erasing that past or calling it by another, more pleasant, name.

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