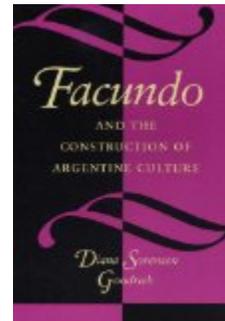


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Diana Sorensen Goodrich. *Facundo and the Construction of Argentine Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. x + 218 pp. \$14.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-292-72790-8; \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-292-72789-2.

Reviewed by Charley Shively (University of Massachusetts, Boston)  
Published on H-LatAm (September, 1997)



## Dreaming Sarmiento's Dream

*Facundo and the Construction of Argentine Culture* examines the various fates between 1845 and 1945 of Domingo Sarmiento's seminal *Facundo* and the role the author and the book played in constructing Argentine culture. A bravuro performance in intellectual history, cultural studies and post-modern theory, the work provides a useful entry into perhaps the most significant text in Argentine history and literature.

Chapter I—"The Wars of Persuasion: *Conflict, Interpretation, and Power in the Early Years of Facundo's Reception*"—tracks the initial reception of the work as it appeared in periodical, serial and book form. Goodrich lays out "the very immediate dialogue" that the text "established with the readers, the way in which a text seeks out an audience as it comes on the scene, and, in doing so, is actually struggling for influence and hegemony" (p. 23).

Chapter II—"The Risks of Fiction: *Facundo and the Parameters of Historical Writing*"—analyzes the genre problems in *Facundo*. Is it novel, history, propaganda, biography? Romance or epic? Fiction, error and/or lies? How much (if any) does *Facundo* incorporate hearsay, insider view or Olympian objectivity? Another exile, Valentín Alsina came from Buenos Aires with first hand *porteno* knowledge; to him Sarmiento from San Juan seemed an upstart *provinciano*. From a critical viewpoint, Alsina's *Notas* are interesting: Sarmiento ignored them while dedicating the next edition of *Facundo* to Alsina. The *Notas* themselves, however, were not printed until 1901.

Chapter III—"The Wiles of Disputation: *Alberdi Reads Facundo*"—examines the competitive responses of other Argentine writers/politicians such as Juan Bautista Alberdi. Alberdi's work, commonly known as *Cartas quilolotanas*, first appeared in 1853. Goodrich explains that "Alberdi's (man)handling of Sarmiento's authorial persona can be addressed in Foucault's terms, centered on the 'modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses'" (p. 73).

Chapter IV—"Facundo's Travels to the Metropolitan Centers"—traces translations or transmigrations into the United States and France. In something of a cultural exchange program Mary Mann translated *Facundo* into English and Sarmiento translated her biography of her husband Horace Mann into Spanish. Mary Mann praised Sarmiento's effort to model Argentina on the North American model, "which is their prototype, and to which they now look, rather than Europe, for light and knowledge." Charles de Mazade's brief notice in *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1846) only faintly praises *Facundo* "as one of the rare testimonies which come to us of the intellectual life in South America." Mazade claims that Sarmiento's analysis of barbarism justifies the joint French and British occupation of Buenos Aires harbor.

Chapter V—"The Nation Consolidated, *The 1880's and the Canonization of Facundo*"—deals with the canonization of the work at the end of the nineteenth century. Rather generously (see my analysis below), Goodrich uses Sarmiento's own *Conflicto y armonias de las razas*

*en America* as “a new, transformed, grown-up version of the earlier text” (p. 110). Sarmiento’s term as president (1868-74) and his death in 1888 placed his work in a new critical position. Goodrich might have made more of the publication (1885-1902) of the fifty-two volume *Obras* and the more modest six volume sesquicentennial *Obras* in 1961. Other authors must move cautiously before the canonized author. Since few have ever read the fifty-two volumes, Joaquin V. Gonzales can simply misread Sarmiento and claims that *Facundo* supports Gonzales’ “gran nacion quichua” (pp. 118f). And Lucio V. Mansilla, according to Goodrich, “like his muleteer, is sometimes trapped by the very authority figure he would like to supersede” (p. 141). The battle of texts may not, however, be so easily concluded: in the same Texas Pan American series as Goodrich’s study, the University of Texas has announced a forthcoming translation by Mark McAffrey of Mansilla’s *An Expedition To The Ranquel Indians*.

Chapter VI—“A Classic Corrected *Rewriting the National Myths*”—considers the Argentine response to *Facundo* between 1890 and 1945. On May 1, 1890, Argentina had its first May Day celebration, a habit only begun in 1883. In both the United States and Argentina such evil as labor organizations and May Day celebrations could be blamed on immigrants (the Germans in particular whom Sarmiento had hoped to entice to Argentina). Leopoldo Lugones, who began as an anarchist poet, praised by Ruben Dario, wrote in 1911 *Historia de Sarmiento* but balanced it in 1913 with his lectures on *Martin Fierro*. Here following his anarchist leanings, he praised the gaucho, the barbarian, the enemy of civilization. Goodrich herself closes “with Ricardo Rojas’s 1945 *El profeta de la pampa*, written to commemorate the centennial of *Facundo*’s publication” (p. 20). Rojas praises *Facundo* for its attack on tyranny, but “after 1860 we must take it only as a pragmatic truth favoring our culture due to its deep native emotion, to its popular traditions, its Spanish American language and Argentine ideals—all of which it translates in admirable synthesis...” (p. 167).

#### Slippery Canons

The canon question must always remain slippery and changing; thus Goodrich traces *Facundo* in its trajectory from *folletin* to classic in Argentina. The canon in Latin America, however, remains nearly as uncertain as the term “Latin America.” Perhaps a work becomes canonical in Latin America if it is published and recognized in Spain and translated into English and/or French. Reflecting conventional wisdom, at least at Yale, Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon, The Books and School Of The*

*Ages* (1994) gives little space to Latin America and less to Sarmiento.

In Latin America itself, the availability (even setting aside government censorships) of authors varies significantly from country to country. One test of “Latin America” canonical status might be translations into Portuguese. The Harvard College Library has a second edition (1938) of *Traducao brasileira de Carlos Maul*. Likewise a useful text-test might be how many other Latin American nations have independent printings of a title and whether it is currently available in libraries or in print. The book trade within Latin America seems to work better between Spain and each individual Spanish speaking country than between countries.

A quite haphazard investigation of this question found that at least three nations outside Argentina have editions now in print and for sale of *Facundo*. In Mexico, Editorial Porrúa in their “Sepan Cuantos”—over six hundred titles to date—includes *Facundo* as #49. In Bogota, Ediciones Universales publishes an edition of *Facundo* along with Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends (Como ganar amigos)*. Biblioteca Ayacucho (Caracas, 1977) has produced the most scholarly edition, edited by Noe Jitrick. That edition can be found in a Cambridge, Massachusetts bookstore but not in Mexico, Ecuador or in the stores I could examine in Peru and Columbia. In Quito, only one bookstore (Cima) and one library (PUCE) carried the Madrid edition of *Facundo* printed by Alianza.

More might be done in this area to examine how wide *Facundo*’s influence (or readership) has extended outside Argentina. Such dissemination would help establish canonicity. Another test must be worldwide rites. Again my own examination of this question is quite haphazard, but I can only find record of *Facundo* translated into Portuguese (1938), English (1868), and Russian (1988).

Translations, of course, don’t drop from the sky. Particular groups, countries or interests sponsor such effort. Thus the Protestant Bible has been rendered from the King James version into virtually every indigenous language in Latin America. Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* has received assistance in its distribution (as has Chairman Mao’s *Red Book*) into many languages and nations. The French provide subventions to publishers to translate works into other languages.

An instructive lesson on canon formation concerns Borges’ translation into English. Bloom gives England Shakespeare; Spain, Cervantes; Italy Dante; Greece Homer, etc. For Latin America, he predicts Borges will be

the big one. Currently Borges might be the most widely read Argentine in the United States, the most canonical since Sarmiento. Harvard offers a whole course devoted to Borges. (Cortazar has found a wide readership in the United States as well as Cuba and Nicaragua, where neither Sarmiento nor Borges are so popular.) In *Lingua Franca* (7: pp. 40-50 June/July 97) Matthew Howard, "Stranger Than *Ficción*," studies the "strong-minded American translator who sought to stamp out the ambiguities of his [Borges'] richly allusive prose." Goodrich uses Borges lines as her epigram for the book: "Del tiempo que despues, antes, ahora, Sarmiento el sonador sigue sonandonos" (In times after before now Sarmiento's dream dreams us).

The Borges' "nos" ("us") is problematic, of course, who is the "nos?" More or less part of what they call "the scholarly community," readers of this review may include the "nos." In Latin American studies, "we" have constantly to struggle to demonstrate how "important"—that is, canonical—the country of our origin or of our study and its history, literature or culture might be. And even when a country might obtain recognition—Cuba with Castro, Dominican Republic with Juan Bosch, Nicaragua with the Sandinistas, Chile with Allende, Columbia with alleged drug cartels or Mexico with an adjoining border—the history, literature and culture of each country usually receive only sporadic attention. The traps of the CIA on the one side and the snares of orientalism await us wherever we turn.

Thus the canon includes (for each country) not only what books get published, distributed, read and reviewed, but the country itself becomes subject to canonization (can the process be distinguished from cannibalization?). In some ways there can be no reply to someone saying that a book, a person, a field of study or a country is insignificant or marginal. Perhaps rightly so, Goodrich must begin with the assumption that *Facundo*, Sarmiento, and Argentina deserve study and attention.

In another area of canonization, critical studies or postmodernism, that formation has occurred in the last twenty or thirty years with remarkable rapidity. The work of Blake or Whitman took at least a century to establish their positions, but quotations from Foucault, Derrida, Benjamin suddenly stud texts the way Greek or Roman authors once graced Renaissance, Enlightenment or Romantic texts. What work on Latin America could dare ignore Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978), which seems to have forced even Foucault to abandon his interesting thoughts on *Ars Erotica*?

Two works have found remarkably rapid canonical acceptance: Doris Somer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (1991) and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). As remarkable, interesting and useful these works might be, it is notable that North Americans have avoided guides from Latin America. For instance, who can explain why Carlos Monsivais (1938-) (author of over two dozen remarkable books) remains virtually untranslated? North American students almost never use a Latin American author the way they use the postmodern critical canon. Latin American books can only provide raw material for the higher theoretical refinements of industrial academic prose.

The canonicity of Sarmiento in the United States may be symbolized by his statue in Boston. Mayor John Fitzgerald (grandfather of JFK) accepted the gift in 1913 but it "did not arrive here until 1973. No one seems to know the reason for the delay." In 1993, as the statue fell into disrepair, it was adopted by the Bank of Boston, which opened a Buenos Aires branch in 1917. A bank spokesman said "Our New England-based textile merchants were going to Argentina for alternative sources of wool and leather and, being a customer-focused company, we followed them. Now the bank is very much a part of the Argentine business structure." Shortly thereafter, however, the Bank of Boston disappeared into a merger (*Boston Globe* 25 November 1993).

#### Nation

An example of an absolutely canonical work, Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983, 1991) informs a great deal of Goodrich's analysis. While it is difficult to imagine how we thought about nations before this work; nonetheless, *Imagined Communities* has many limitations. Like the British Empire, the sun never sets on its flag. Anderson becomes much less convincing when he moves beyond France and England. In *Imagined Communities*, French texts remain untranslated into English. His analysis of Cambodia comes filtered through French and English texts. And his understanding of Latin America comes from little more than two books: Jean Franco, *An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature* (1969) and John Lynch, *The Spanish-American Revolutions, 1808-1826* (1973). The only Spanish text he analyzes in detail comes from the Philippines in an English translation. "Unable to read Spanish in 1983," Anderson also acknowledges in his second edition that the translation he used was misleading. Translation is an even more slippery mat-

ter than canonization. For instance, Foucault uses the French “construir” which the English and North American sociologists quickly annexed to “social construction.” Goodrich uses the word in her subtitle: “Construction of Argentine Culture.” David M. Halperin, *Saint=Foucault* (1995) 188-89 argues, “In fact, the constructionist idiom... originates not with Foucault but with his English translator, Robert Hurley; Foucault’s own term of choice is ‘dispositif,’ which means something very different from ‘construct’....”

Following Anderson, Goodrich argues that *Facundo* was/became a nation building text. Certainly she makes a strong case for the way Sarmiento used the text to further his political career, first to achieve power, then to perpetuate his ideas and memory after he was gone. He pressed for public schools (like his friends the Manns in Massachusetts) in order to spread their form of literacy. Thus they both objected to people who didn’t know their language. Sarmiento and the Manns had no wish to teach German in their public schools and they had even less respect for any indigenous languages. But some now see not learning the dominant language as a form of resistance and the public school movement as a class and race driven enterprise.

Do texts really construct cultures? Goodrich’s full title—*Facundo and the Construction of Argentine Culture*—suggests texts rule. The text problem intrigued Alexander (the Great) who bemoaned the fact that he had no Homer to celebrate his achievements, not the least of which was the spread of the Greek language across the ancient world. People still argue whether Alexander or his teacher Aristotle had greater influence, but that debate remains very alive in many Latin American countries where the importance of the armed forces remains important if not central. (In such an advanced nation as the United States, they say the military-industrial-complex has negligible power compared to the political-academic-cultural complex.)

In this area of military/literary/nation interface, Sarmiento and General Urquiza’s exchanges are instructive. Sarmiento had sent a copy of his attacks on Rosas to General Urquiza, who had his secretary reply: “regarding the wonders you claim for the press in frightening the enemy... so far Rosas has not been frightened; on the contrary, he has been growing stronger by the day.” Urquiza always thought his victory at the battle of Caseros had greater importance than *Facundo*. Certainly an argument could be made that soldiers, generals and battles still have their place in history. Alexander did

not get his Homer; instead he got Paul. Had Rosas won at Caseros, what would have happened to *Facundo*? Alberdi praises the pen over the sword: “There is no doubt that there is glory in having written for ten years against the tyrant; but there is more glory in having defeated him on the battlefield. Who would confuse Mme. de Stael’s glory with Wellington’s as victors over Napoleon?” (p. 74).

#### Race

Lugones claimed that “Sarmiento is this eternal and enormous thing: the father of a literature, the representative of a people” (p. 161). But Sarmiento represented a small spectrum of the “people.” He seems to have had nothing good to say of African Americans and his views of the indigenous people were genocidal. Some argue that *Facundo* represented his youthful enthusiasm and his *Conflicto y armonias de las razas en America* represented his bitter old age. Goodrich argues that the latter is only an update of *Facundo*. That may be, but she certainly softens some of the harsh things in *Conflicto y armonias*. Sarmiento asks why the United States is more developed than Argentina. Because, he answers, they killed off their indigenous population and replaced them by European immigrants. Q.E.D., Argentina to develop must exterminate their indigenous population and encourage European immigrants. Understandably *Conflicto y armonias* has not been translated into English; people in the United States like to hear that public education makes their nation strong, but they don’t like being charged with genocide.

Sarmiento and Argentina’s racial policies could be compared with the ideas of Jose Vasconcelos (1881-1959). *La raza cosmica; mision de la raza iberoamericana, Argentina y Brasil* argues that a new race was coming into being in the new world a mix between the Iberian and the indigenous populations. While there is certainly an element of wishful thinking in his theory, it has become more or less a constitutive myth in Mexico. In Argentina Ricardo Rojas (1882-1957) denounced Sarmiento and Alberdi’s founding texts and mythologies and proposed instead a recovery of “Amerindian” roots (pp. 164-5). From a theoretical viewpoint, Goodrich could have benefited more from considering Vasconcelos than several of the postmodern authorities.

#### Sexuality

Goodrich fails to utilize one area of Foucault by not exploring Sarmiento’s position in the circulation of sexual power. Sarmiento’s sexuality relates to *Facundo* and

Argentina in several ways. They relate closely to his understandings and silences in regard to women and homosexuality. Alberdi suggests slyly that Sarmiento as an author has a place in history comparable to a woman: He asks, "Who would confuse Mme. de Stael's glory with Wellington's as victors over Napoleon?" Sarmiento's belligerent argumentativeness may say something about himself and his culture. And his division between Savagery and Civilization rests on some of his sexual politics.

In the Coleccion en la intimidad de los grandes hombres, there is a volume devoted to Sarmiento, *Paginas confidenciales; sus luchas, sus pasiones, sus triunfos, las mujeres en su vida* (B.A., 1944). Hardly very revealing, these letters show him to be something of a Romantic correspondent (a Mme. de Stael?). There is also his work on the death of his son which demonstrates a motherly grief over the death. His relations to the so-called "tender emotions," certainly relate to his educational programs which utilized women in the mission of carrying civilization to the savage Argentinans. How do his love letters connect with his distinctive belligerence in relating to other men? Goodrich perhaps too closely follows his line that he was the only one who formed ideas of the romantic state in Argentina. She does notice that in his attacks on Adreas Bello that "it is remarkable to note how aggressive the writing is." And with Alberdi (no less than with Echeverria) the disputes "are overshadowed by the constant negation and by the will to argue, to dispute" (p. 68).

In this line, the love/hate relation Sarmiento had with the gaucho (cowboy? Marlboro man?) and the Indi-

ans is fascinating. Among the Ranqueles, Mansilla comments, "they kissed me with their dirty, drooling, alcoholic, painted mouths" (p. 131) For Sarmiento, both the gaucho and the indigenous were savage and sexual. That appears in his descriptions throughout *Facundo*. Significantly, in a mini edition of *Facundo* (B.A., 1955) of only hundred pages, the sections that remain cover the gaucho and cantor, la "pulperia," and silently pass over some of what Goodrich finds more significant. Sarmiento and his readers have found these physical men attractive and sexual. Why else would anyone read *Facundo* today?

Some might think such sexual questions insignificant, but they go to the heart of Sarmiento. In the "Author's Notice," (excluded from the English translation) Sarmiento explains how he wrote in French "On ne tue point les idees" (You can't behead ideas) on the bathhouse of Zonda. This bathhouse like most in Latin America might have had precolumbian origins but more likely it goes back to the hamman of the Arabs. Then and now men gathered naked and some of them made love with each other without much thought. Sarmiento denounces "those bloody bacchanals of low soldiers and mazorqueros." He replies with a French quotation. Had he got off his high horse and made love with the soldiers, the history of Argentina might have been significantly different. Instead he wrote a castration anxiety slogan in charcoal on their house of cleanliness if not of love.

Copyright (c) 1997, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit, educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-latam>

**Citation:** Charley Shively. Review of Goodrich, Diana Sorensen, *Facundo and the Construction of Argentine Culture*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. September, 1997.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1319>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).