

# Martín Fierro at University of Texas: Between the Pan-American Crusades and the Persistence of the Gaucho's Libertarian Role (1958-1968)

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## Abstract

This article analyzes one of the most remarkable derivations of the poem *Martín Fierro*: its use for either Pan-American or anti-Communist purposes. The exploration of the personal archive of one of the main promoters of the gaucho figure in the United States, Dr. Edward Larocque Tinker, together with the “*martinferrista*” library of the University of Texas at Austin, sheds light on the variety of meanings attributed in the United States to this Pampean character. At the same time, the persistence of the rebellious and unruly nature of the gaucho is examined in texts published during the Cold War, bringing to the fore unresolved tensions.

**Keywords:** Martín Fierro; Pan-Americanism; Anti-Communism; United States

## Resumen

Este artículo analiza una de las derivaciones más singulares del *Martín Fierro*: su utilización para fines panamericanistas y anticomunistas. A través de la exploración en el archivo personal de uno de los principales promotores de la figura del gaucho en Estados Unidos, junto con la revisión de la biblioteca “*martinferrista*” de la Universidad de Texas en Austin, se indaga la circulación de sentidos sobre el personaje pampeano en el país del Norte. Al mismo tiempo, a partir de los textos editados en la época, se recupera la pervivencia del carácter levantisco y rebelde del gaucho evidenciando tensiones abiertas.

**Palabras clave:** Martín Fierro; panamericanismo; anticomunismo; Estados Unidos

### **Introduction: The United States and Latin American culture**

This article emerges from a series of reflections around a 1968 academic publication authored by the researcher Nettie Lee Benson. She offers a brief account of the presence of José Hernández's poem *Martín Fierro* in different collections in the holdings of the University of Texas at Austin (UT). She provides concepts that bring about a series of queries, posing specific questions regarding the readings, adaptations, and intended purposes of this poem in the United States. Among the agents that promoted the appreciation of the poem throughout the U.S., Dr. Edward Larocque Tinker must be mentioned. Documentation about activities carried out by this specialist in literature, together with his visits to and contacts in Argentina, constitute a unique collection to analyze the representations of the gaucho Martín Fierro during the Cold War. The prelude to a lecture on the subject, given by Tinker at the Kentucky University in 1958, marks the start of this journey. By that time, several demonstrations in Latin America had unveiled widespread anti-American sentiments, which contextually complicated any attempt to culturally bring together North and South America, as Tinker sought to do.<sup>1</sup>

The interpretations of *Martín Fierro* carried out in the United States, in the 1950s and 1960s, contrast with some diametrically opposed portrayals of the poem in "gaucho-land." Thus, this documentation can contribute to a series of investigations analyzing relations established between the United States and Latin American countries in the context of the cultural Cold War, and facilitate an understanding of shifting identities within the framework of an intense circulation of cultural products and of the utilization of the gaucho for political-cultural purposes, both in Argentina and abroad.

What role did American promoters of continental unity assign to the gaucho Fierro? What transformations were fundamentally based on this literary protagonist to accomplish specific goals? Why was *Martín Fierro* presented as symbol of American integration? What were the limitations of said characterization? Where did his spirit remain unruly and rebellious? Where did his unruly and rebellious spirit remain? What was the endurance of its literary representation? These are some of the queries that this article seeks to explore.

The cultural exchanges between the United States and Latin America within the context of the Cold War are the focus of an expanding field of studies. The suggestive book by Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the*

*World of Arts and Letters* (1999) promoted new research that explored “the battle to conquer the human mind.”<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Gilbert Joseph has highlighted the importance of analyzing other actors who, without being marines, politicians, or army generals, established themselves as messengers of US imperialism, as did many academics.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, towards the end of the 1930s, a vast network of academic connections that promoted Pan-Americanism at the continental level was already established.<sup>4</sup> These connections were controlled by the State Department and numerous US philanthropic foundations collaborated with them. This context made it possible for Tinker to travel to the Río de la Plata and encounter gaucho culture in its habitat.

The interventions of the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA) throughout the region have also sparked a number of recent investigations. From its creation in 1940 until its dissolution in 1946, the OIAA conducted tasks that set essential precedents for such collaborations. As stated by Gisela Cramer, OIAA produced one of the most successful radio programs of its time in Argentina, a family soap opera called *Las andanzas de los Varela*, which promoted the US American way of life through the voice of one of its characters.<sup>5</sup> In a broader study, Cramer & Putsch introduced a series of works focused on the action of OIAA outside the country, as well as the local impact of some of its programs.<sup>6</sup> It is worth emphasizing that one of this institution’s objectives is to generate “sympathetic understanding,” that is, to foster the recognition of resemblances and similarities, rather than highlighting differences. This emphasis on similarities was also directed at audiences in the U.S.<sup>7</sup>

In a study about Walter Disney’s tour of South America, that was funded by OIAA, Sol Glik contributed to this analytical perspective by discussing not only the tour’s effects on the Latino audience, but also the implications of this cultural exchange on the American people.<sup>8</sup> Richard Cándida Smith’s recent book shows how the dynamics of Latin American artists within the United States disseminated Pan-Americanism among the US population. Despite tension and conflicts, the “cultural ambassadors” from different countries of the continent exposed the audience in the U.S. to a variety of experiences.<sup>9</sup> These studies are of particular interest for this article since the focus of the analysis is the United States. My perspective differs in that, instead of examining Latin American artists, I will focus on those activities directly performed by US American scholars.

The scholarly literature on Inter-American relations has observed an increase in cultural resistance to US American products in Latin America. For example, Maricruz Castro Ricalde revealed that in the Golden Age of Mexican films, a sort of nationalist claim arose with the motto “Mexican movies for Mexicans.”<sup>10</sup> From another perspective, in Chile the famous Chilean cartoonist René Ríos Boettiger (Pepo) rebelled against the proposed Chilean character generated by

Disney Studios after its creator (Disney) toured South America. Instead of the tiny plane named Pedro, the protagonist of *Saludos Amigos* taking mail from Mendoza and trying to fly over the Andes with dubious success, Pepo proposed a condor in order to authentically represent Chilean identity. This gave rise to the most successful comic strip in Latin America, centered on the adventures of the noble Condorito.<sup>11</sup>

In Argentina and Uruguay, there was something peculiar about the figure of the gaucho. The films starring Rudolph Valentino and Douglas Fairbanks in the twenties had already generated a series of criticisms of the evident distortions in the outfits and accessories.<sup>12</sup> The painter of popular scenes Florencio Molina Campos, famous for his massive Gaucho almanacs, expressed a similar opposition when he worked at Disney studios.<sup>13</sup> In the Río de la Plata, the local reactions to these Hollywood movies sought to purify the gaucho from foreign interventions.

The journey on horseback that an “authentic gaucho” undertook, riding across the continent to eradicate the false images exhibited on the silver screen, is a good demonstration of the many meanings that the gaucho encompassed. This gaucho left the interior of the Buenos Aires province in July 1938 and arrived in Washington in 1941. The truth is that, beyond his original purpose, the journey emulated what could be read as the gaucho’s surrender to the influence of the film industry. Once in the US territory, the protagonist displayed a devotion to certain Hollywood stars and openly expressed his desire to visit cinema studios and even participate in some of the filmings.<sup>14</sup>

Rafael Nocera has studied the transition from Pan-Americanism, a stance that the gaucho characters in movies at the beginning of the 1940s defended, to attempts to build a true anti-Communist alliance at the continental level. The Eisenhower administration was an example of this crusade.<sup>15</sup> The Alliance for Progress initiative, which was promoted by Eisenhower’s successor, John F. Kennedy, created oscillating positions in the region. The Argentinian president, Arturo Frondizi, did not respond favorably to such policies. In fact, Argentina led the rejection of Cuba’s expulsion from the OAS.<sup>16</sup> In this swinging context of bilateral relations, the figure of the gaucho was brought out through Martín Fierro, the most famous literary character of the Río de la Plata region.

The conferences, readings, and references centered on Martín Fierro at that time had a broader scope than US interests. The main character of the poem written by José Hernández had been established as an Argentine national emblem decades prior. Nationalistic culture, fostered by Leopoldo Lugones and Ricardo Rojas in the early twentieth century, among others, had found in *Martín Fierro* the Argentinian epic.<sup>17</sup> The publication, some time later, of another Argentine masterpiece *Don Segundo Sombra* by Ricardo Güiraldes (1926), depicted a

tamed gaucho, fully adapted to his chores as the meek hired hand at a ranch. A key step in this process of consolidation of the gaucho as a national symbol was the establishment in the late thirties of the celebration of Tradition Day. This was a celebration in which the people of Buenos Aires, followed by the rest of the country, were invited to dress as gauchos and recreate a supposedly shared past.<sup>18</sup>

Despite attempts at disciplining the gaucho in literature and commemorations, some left-wing sectors in Argentina maintained a revolutionary representation of the Pampean farmer and reinstated him as a symbol of resistance against the injustices inflicted by the State on the people. Conversely, I consider that, in the United States, the recuperation of the protagonist of *Martín Fierro* adapted the figure to the original characterizations typical of the Cold War context and of the intended tutelage of the United States throughout the rest of the continent. Those representations were influenced by readings and exchanges among specialists on the poem in the two extremes of the continent.

Through the texts published at the time and the exploration of the personal archive of one of the main promoters of the figure of the gaucho in the United States, Dr. Edward Larocque Tinker, together with the examination of a library devoted to *Martín Fierro* at the University of Texas at Austin, the following sections analyze both the circulation of representations of the Pampean character in the United States and the tensions that those readings generated among those who insisted on his unruly and rebellious character.

### **A *Martín Fierro* for the world**

It has been mentioned above that an academic article published in 1968 had been one of the catalysts for the present research. In a sense, Nettie Lee Benson's text was the starting point and, at the same time, the corollary for this investigation. This dual role is explained in the orientation that the researcher provided in her work, "*Martín Fierro* at the University of Texas," which assessed the existing publications in the different libraries belonging to the University.

Benson was reared in a region next to Corpus Christi in Southern Texas. As she lived and worked in a border area, her work in Monterrey as teacher in a Methodist school for girls is responsible for stimulating her interest in Latin America. After years of teaching primary and secondary school in the United States, she returned to college in the forties and graduated in History, specializing in research on Mexico.<sup>19</sup> Simultaneously, the University of Texas founded its Institute of Latin American Studies, thus confirming the expansion of academic projects specialized on the region. Beginning in 1942, Benson served as director

of the university's Latin American collection of library holdings, a post that sent her on numerous trips to Latin America to acquire new materials. By the time of her publication about *Martín Fierro*, Benson had become one of the US' most trusted voices on Latin American themes. The collection that now carries her name had positioned itself as one of the most complete resources on the region worldwide.

The 1968 article on *Martín Fierro* was originally published in *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin* and soon was part of the "Offprints" series that reproduced works by the professors affiliated with the *Institute of Latin American Studies*. Benson's text responded to three specific objectives: reviewing the proliferation of Spanish-language first editions of *Martín Fierro* with an emphasis on their context of publication, reassessing the international context of the poem, and highlighting the virtues of the collection in Texas for furthering knowledge about the poem.

Regarding the first aspect, the readings that Benson surveys did not differ from the classical studies published in Argentina, which focused on the journalistic, political, and familial endeavors of José Hernández to exhibit his early affiliation with the world of the gauchos.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, that background was revisited in order to explain Hernández's position in favor of the working population of the countryside and his permanent support of the gauchos who suffered abuse at the hands of the authorities, such as forced recruitment by the army or being forced to work toward the transformation of the Pampas plains, for example, at modernizing ranches.<sup>21</sup> Benson described the publication of *Martín Fierro* in 1872 in line with José Hernández's statements to the press. Her first characterization of the poem read: "The poem is one of protest. Using the language and life of the gaucho, Hernández recounts the ill-treatment of a disinherited class of Argentine society."<sup>22</sup>

The rebellious intent of Hernández's poem is reflected in the fragments chosen by the author to synthesize the story for an audience possibly unfamiliar with the content. Martín Fierro had been forcefully separated from his wife and two children, enlisted to join the border troops fighting the indigenous people in the southernmost limits of the Pampas plains. A victim of torture and exploitation in these regions, Fierro disappeared after realizing that he had lost his home as well as his family. He then began his journey through indigenous territories, demonstrating that it was better to live with the enemy rather than be persecuted on the outskirts of "civilization." Naturally this summary bypassed one of the central aspects of Fierro's outlaw life: the two crimes that he committed and that led to police persecution.

In a certain sense, Benson's omission reconstructed a Fierro centered on denunciation and poetry as the only two outlets to channel his sufferings.

Even if the first editions of her account included illustrations of a significantly combative scene, the author did not feel the need to clarify why the gaucho was brandishing a knife. By omitting those issues, she avoided having to give further information about his transformation in the second part of the poem published in 1879. In this second part, Benson referred to José Hernández's reconciliation with politics and to the consolidation of *Martín Fierro* as both an educational and moral tool.

Through that perspective, Benson exposes a series of references showing the fast and far-reaching dissemination of the poem beyond Argentine borders. Benson highlighted and deepened the book's foreign reach, perhaps providing it with a greater meaning than her simple description of the content itself. It is possible that the regional approach of the Texan Latin Americanists scholars had an impact on her interpretation. In fact, a review of the titles of the Institute's Offprints series highlights their comparative or integrative thrust. Benson compiled all the information in the prologues or the annexes of the first editions to highlight the poem's international impact. She mentioned its popularity in Uruguay where local reprintings even distorted the locations where the action took place. It must be clarified here that the rioplatense region (Uruguay-Argentina), separated by the Río de la Plata, enabled a permanent and dynamic circulation of texts. In another publication, I have explored in depth this exchange of "gauchesca" publications at the turn of the century.<sup>23</sup>

Benson echoed the European reaction to *Martín Fierro* expressed in the prologue to the eighth edition. Its French printing was revisited in the *Correo de Ultramar* magazine in 1873. Benson mentioned, without including any further details, its circulation in Spanish newspapers. A group of critical studies followed suit and had its analytical vanguard with the "Generación del 98."<sup>24</sup>

European circulation led to the dissemination of the material in the United States. Regarding the latter, Benson paid attention to three concrete signs: José Hernández's being admitted as a member of the "Literary Society" of New York, the comparison of *Martín Fierro* to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the novel published by Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852, and the impact of its first translation into English. In the information revealed on, for example, the requests for permission coming from New York to reproduce excerpts in Spanish, Benson paid special attention to the letter sent to José Hernández by the writer Mariano Pelliza (Hernández's personal friend) on March 23, 1873.

What was to be the first comparison between *Martín Fierro* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can be found in this correspondence. The relevance of this novel in the United States spurred a great number of studies. From the supposed statement made by Abraham Lincoln to Beecher Stowe regarding her novel's importance for the launch of the Civil War, to the artistic adaptations into theatre and music,



to its circulation first in Great Britain and then to other countries, numerous researchers have analyzed its representations of and criticisms of the US American slavery system.<sup>25</sup> Pelliza wrote, referring only to the first published part at that time, that *Martín Fierro* could raise a similar awareness in the land of the gauchos. Benson emphasized the links between the two texts and concluded: “*Martín Fierro* had justly been called the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of Argentina.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, the analogies drawn stemmed more from the abovementioned letter, for it had been included as prologue in numerous editions of the poem, than from a direct relation between both texts.

The third point in that proximity of the gaucho *Martín Fierro* to the United States was based on the references to the first English-language translation made by Walter Owen in the thirties. This work was originally published by Oxford but was soon republished by facsimile in a New York edition. Although it is not necessary here to discuss in detail the complex process of translating the poem for the English-language public, two considerations can be useful. Firstly, the translator was a Scot who had arrived in Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century and therefore had been able to witness the process through which *Martín Fierro* became a canonical text, first thanks to the intellectual elite and then State officials. In that sense, Sara Iriarte, when studying Owen’s literary journey in depth, states that his reading of Hernández’s poem was predominantly essentialist. The translator’s gaucho was depicted, in the preliminary words accompanying the editions, as a “patient subject when facing injustice and submissive to authority.” What is more, one could hardly see any distance between the first and the second part of the work.<sup>27</sup> I view that peculiar reading as fundamental when considering the assimilation of *Martín Fierro* in the United States. The mediation exercised by the translator also incorporated references to the cowboy to connect the gaucho to a protagonistic figure that had already been mass-produced by mainstream cultural entities.

Benson was concerned with identifying connections between Owen’s translation and the collection at the University of Texas. The references to the importance of the archive gathered there reveal a propagandistic tone that comes across in different passages of her article. The status of the work at the international level, its “de-territorialization,” and the comparisons to American culture, did nothing but highlight the importance of the archive directed by Benson as far as the study of the subject is concerned. In Benson’s reading of Owen’s work, making this connection was straightforward since the translator had exchanged correspondence, manuscripts, and ideas with one of the principal agents promoting *Martín Fierro* in the United States, Edward Larocque Tinker. His extensive personal archive was also in the domain of the UT, which allowed Benson to transform the conclusion of her article into a harangue: “*Martín Fierro*, Argentina’s first



and continuous best seller, a folklorist's delight, a linguist's enigma, a great sociological document, an unexplored mine for historians of Argentine arts . . . is available now in all its diversity and complexity at the University of Texas."<sup>28</sup>

### **Edward Tinker's gaucho: Pan-Americanist and anti-Communist**

The private collection built by Edward Larocque Tinker was one of the main assets of UT's cultural heritage collection. Larocque Tinker was an eclectic figure in the Southern intellectual and cultural environment, born in New York into a wealthy family well-known for its taste for equestrian activities. He went horseback riding during the trips he took with his father to the Texan border region. He travelled vastly throughout his life, including during his university years. After graduating with a Literature degree from Columbia University, he devoted himself to studying French influences in New Orleans, probably motivated by his own maternal lineage and by his wife Frances McKnee's ancestry, as she was born in the region. His doctoral thesis, defended in Paris in 1932, analyzed the French influence in Louisiana literature.<sup>29</sup> His interests prompted Tinker to familiarize himself with the gaucho culture through a wide range of texts on the subject (poems, novels, feuilletons) to which he had access. Nevertheless, it was a professional tour in the Río de la Plata area that marked the beginning of his gaucho passions.

In 1943, Tinker was sent to Mexico sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation to deliver some lectures within the program for international peace. As stated by Richard Candida Smith, the corporation had been leading cultural exchanges between the United States and Latin America since the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> The scholar's successful performance made it possible for the State Department to send him two years later to the Río de la Plata region to repeat his conferences.

In 1945, Tinker arrived in Montevideo for a series of lectures at the Universidad de la República, followed by similar lectures in Buenos Aires. Across the region, the official cult of the gaucho was brewing. Political, intellectual, and commercial interests merged to present the Pampas rider as the national archetype on both sides of the Río de la Plata. Thus the American visitor was entertained with folklore shows, barbecued beef, visits to "pulperías," ranches, and picture exhibitions all of which totally confirmed the gaucho personality on both banks (Uruguay and Argentina). The events in which Tinker participated during these travels yielded specialized projects and numerous acquaintances that later on became friendships and institutional connections that enabled the accumulation of vast material.<sup>31</sup>

For our analytical purposes, the most significant consequence of these tours was that they introduced Tinker to *Martín Fierro* the poem. From 1945 until his passing in 1968, gauchesca topics became a priority for Edward Tinker. So much so that when considering possible names for his autobiography, one of his proposals to his editors was “Memoirs of a Gotham Gaucho.”<sup>32</sup> One of his practices deployed since the fifties: the circulation of Hernández’s poem as a “Pan-American crusade.”

Indeed, Tinker was recognized as an agent of Inter-American solidarity. So reads, for example, the journal *Americas* published by Pan-American Union. This journal highlighted his contribution to the continental cultural approach.<sup>33</sup> President Dwight Eisenhower, who had highlighted the need for these exchanges, showed sympathy toward Tinker’s work in private correspondence. This relationship was confirmed by the friendship between their wives who jointly participated in different events in New York.<sup>34</sup>

The previous exchanges and the final lecture at the University of Kentucky in November 1958 constitute a highly representative example of Tinker’s experiences in relation to *Martín Fierro*. The Library Director at the university, Lawrence Thompson, contacted Tinker at the end of 1957 to put him in contact with a Swedish academic visiting the university who had a particular interest in Latin American literary studies. Thompson’s letter, his first to Tinker, preserved in the recipient’s archive, shows recognition of Tinker as an authoritative voice on the subject.<sup>35</sup>

From this epistolary exchange, an ongoing dialogue took shape on the basis of their compatible literary interests. Thompson, for instance, claimed to have read all of Tinker’s investigations on French literature published in Louisiana and acknowledged various invitations to hear Tinker give talks on several themes. In less than a year the epistolary contact gave way to personal visits. In addition to literature, horses were another common interest around which they bonded. Both kept collections of saddles, mounts, and equestrian accessories.<sup>36</sup> It is probable that this common interest prompted Thompson to invite Tinker to offer one of his frequent lectures on the “gauchesca”.

In fact, since his return from his trip to the Río de la Plata region, Tinker circulated the texts and also showed artefacts of the gaucho culture in events, exhibitions, talks, and publications. At the beginning of 1958, Thompson regretted not being able to attend a lecture by Tinker on gauchesca books and requested a written version of the talk. This yielded a formal invitation to an event held in November at the Librarian Yearly Meeting. The host expected substantial attendance, for the local audience had a taste for equestrian activities.

The promotion of Tinker’s lecture, announced as “The gaucho on the book-shelf,” included several events. Among them, an exhibition in the Main Hall of

the Margaret I. King Library of “Argentine cowboy literature” where the *Martín Fierro* was highlighted as the most important piece of noteworthy creative literature in America.<sup>37</sup> The students at Kentucky University were able to find the Rioplatense gaucho in the central area of the library until December 1958. Similarly, they could see Tinker’s talks promoted in *The Student Newspaper*. An edition of Hernández’s poem illustrated by Adolfo Bellocq in 1930, which had been lent to the University by Tinker in anticipation of his visit, was also made available. Paradoxically, in his illustrations the painter had attempted to show the anguish and suffering of social outcasts.<sup>38</sup> Tinker emphasized other characteristics of gauchos and, as will be seen, he even tried to “alleviate” the aforementioned suffering.

Tinker’s lectures on Pampa riders were, at times, accompanied by illustrative artefacts. For example, in Louisiana, when, in March 1954, he offered a presentation surrounded by ponchos, gaucho paintings, boleadoras, and miniature toy reproductions.<sup>39</sup> The event in Kentucky was no exception. The university “literary community” could enter the gauchesca world, after paying the two dollar fee for a reservation.

Although Tinker’s extensive lecturing on certain illuminating aspects of the gaucho offer many points of entry, it is worth considering the “spiritual approach” to American countries. In alignment with this approach, Tinker, after showing empathy toward the Bluegrass region, made a thorough diagnosis of the international scene. On the whole, the real question was to materialize the proximity to the “monster”—in reference to Communism—due to its influence in certain Latin American countries. In this sense, he drew from the ideas of the Domino Theory, which stated that if a country adopted Communism, the latter’s influence would inevitably expand across the whole region.<sup>40</sup> Nixon’s controversial visit to Caracas, months before the lecture, was taken advantage of in order to promote the urgency of the anti-Communist mission. Truly enough, Alan McPherson analyzed the incident as a sign of a certain anti-American atmosphere (that is, opposed to the United States) across various parts of the continent.<sup>41</sup> Tinker imagined apocalyptic scenarios, envisioning economic and military catastrophes, for instance saying: “Mexico is more biased towards Communists than towards Yankees.”<sup>42</sup>

Regarding that statement, the content of the message had a clear and specific recipient: the librarian. Such a description of the situation appealed to everyone’s cooperation. Tinker explained that it was necessary to dismantle any prejudice regarding the neighbors from the South, meet them, and, if possible, visit those countries. As travel was within the means of only a lucky few, books needed to step in, which brings us to the role of the librarian. The speaker invited librarians to “place the gaucho in the library shelves” so as to evoke as closely as

possible the Río de la Plata area. Yet one question remained: Which gaucho was Tinker talking about?

In the first place, this gaucho was surprisingly known to his interlocutors. He was “a close relative” of the cowboy, separated by six thousand miles. As similar as models of Ford cars are, he claimed, both gauchos and cowboys had offered their blood in the fight against the Indians. At this point, he narrated in detail the episode in which *Martín Fierro* rescues a woman captive held by a native and then murders the “brute.” The spiritual connection between the gaucho and the cowboy is endorsed by the verses of the protagonist that refer to values like courage and nobility of character. Their similar love for horses and their canonization as folklore heroes linked both of them to certify that “two nations that produced classes of men so alike must have much in common, as well as a strong spiritual kinship.”<sup>43</sup>

Tinker was right when he pointed out the “production” of folkloric heroes. Moreover, his own intervention nurtured the circulation of such constructions, which had begun in Argentina and Uruguay in the first decades of the twentieth century. According to Tinker, José Hernández had placed “an excessive emphasis on the tragedy” of the gaucho due to his own political interests. Thus, the speaker made a kind of defense of the Pampean ranchers, for he understood that they looked after and cared for the gauchos with fatherly love, from the cradle to the grave. To further support his portrayal, he referred to another protagonist of Argentine literature: Segundo Sombra. A tamed gaucho that symbolized the end of the wild, untamed, fugitive gauchos and their full assimilation to the agricultural working conditions as seen in the novel *Don Segundo Sombra* published in 1926.

The ranch worker gaucho possessed *Martín Fierro*'s moral virtues. In the lecture that Tinker delivered in Kentucky, he questioned the oppressive working conditions imposed upon the gaucho and his outlaw status. For Tinker, the protagonist of José Hernández was the condensation of fraternal attributes, so dear to his interests at the time. His essentialist views on the gaucho flourished in his exchanges with Walter Owen, to whom he paid tribute, and in his correspondence with the writer Herminia Brumana, who in 1939 published the book *Nuestro hombre*.<sup>44</sup> This was a text that interpreted Fierro as an example of nobleness, of Catholic morality, and of Argentine virility and stoic heroism. In fact, several of these qualities were mentioned and consolidated in a collection of 24 articles that Brumana sent to Tinker.<sup>45</sup>

The speech at the Librarian Annual Dinner Party was beneficial both for Tinker and the circulation of the “Pan American” gaucho. In fact, Thompson would confirm in later notes that he continued to receive favorable comments on the lecture. In turn, the University of Kentucky published several hundred copies

of the speech and circulated articles and books by Tinker, not limited to those related to the gaucho. The Director of the Keeneland Association Library, in a letter dated November 10, 1958, requested the delivery of all the publications on gauchesca literature to which Tinker had contributed contributed. Amelia Buckley mentioned how timely the date of the request was, since Tinker had mentioned during the event that November 10 is Tradition Day in Argentina, in tribute to José Hernández.<sup>46</sup>

**“Long live the anarchist revolution and the freedom of gauchos!”<sup>47</sup>**

It was no small matter that the Argentine government, first in the province of Buenos Aires and then in the rest of the nation, had formalized the gaucho’s status as a symbol of identity. Its consecration awakened the enthusiasm of institutions with specific political weight, such as the Catholic Church and the Armed Forces, which, in turn, forced the Pampean archetype into a religious and disciplined model.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, libertarian representations of the gaucho were circulated in inexpensive editions at political party gatherings and artistic events.<sup>49</sup> During Tinker’s time as a lecturer, two works published in Argentina showed that *Martín Fierro* also had potential for the other side of the cultural Cold War.

Far from covering all the voices dissenting from Tinker’s, the next two references condensed a historical approach to the poem and linked it to the Left that started to develop towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> In 1960, due to the death of Luis Woollands, the Agrupación Libertaria of Mar del Plata published a text that had previously remained unknown called *La Descendencia del Viejo Vizcacha* (The Descendants of Old Vizcacha), in reference to one of the central characters in *Martín Fierro*. The author, who was being honored, was the son of Dutch immigrants who had come into contact with anarchist ideas while working in construction south of the province of Buenos Aires. His engagement in anarchist militancy grew in importance due in part to the circulation of his *Carta Gaucha* (Gaucha Letter) written in the twenties.

Woollands adopted a gauchesco style and the pen name Juan Crusao to publish his complaints in anarchist newspapers. The memoirs of his militancy proved him to be a true gaucho. Pascual Vuotto, one of the notorious convicts in Bragado, remembered that upon seeing women being beaten by the police during a strike, “Crusao” rode into the conflict brandishing a knife to intimidate the uniformed officers.<sup>51</sup> Like Fierro with the captive woman, Woollands rescued the demonstrator not from the “savage” natives but from the State security forces. In his texts, the references to José Hernández’s poem in a libertarian

light were a constant feature. His famed letter already included references to the gaucho to certify his opposition to the Catholic Church, politicians, members of the military, and the law. His speeches also contained the same gauchesca methodology.<sup>52</sup>

In Woollands' unpublished work on the Viejo Vizcacha, this character was first presented as the antithesis of the exemplary Martín Fierro. He was the tutor of Fierro's youngest son who had been in his custody after the gaucho's forced confinement. His self-serving advice, his sneaky, insidious, and treacherous nature, summarized what the author considered a contemptible social style. Secondly, Woollands diagnosed "vizcachismo" as the evil of his contemporary society. Among its symptoms, he pointed at the "pseudo men of letters" who, hiding behind a fake praise of the gaucho, vilified the memory of the son of the plains. In taming him, they created a character "so far from reality, so polished that he seemed to be a Hollywood gaucho."<sup>53</sup> Woollands thanked José Hernández for truly rescuing the gaucho in his poem.

Woollands does not mention Hernández's own transformation in the second part of his work. Still, one of the speeches in the ceremony in homage to him in 1960 shed light on the matter. Luis Franco, a close personal friend of Crusao with a Trotskyist background, added to the criticisms. Regarding the authors so subtly alluded to, he said: "The gaucho was dismounted by the landowning class, turned into a housekeeper with spurs, whose idealized caricature has been offered nowadays by Güiraldes' gaucho, Don Segundo Sombra . . . for the satisfaction of lip-smacking members of the Jockey Club and dehorned men of letters of the Argentine Society of Writers!"<sup>54</sup> In the same speech, Franco accused two institutions with which Edward Tinker had established foundational contacts during his visit to Argentina of being accomplices in the taming of the gaucho as a worker "without grievance or complaint," forgetful of his servile and exploited condition. He also criticized Hernández for "the parish priest or enriched general town shopkeeper morality" that Fierro exhibits in the Second Part of the poem. Franco did not forgive this claudication that resulted from patrician warnings to the author. Instead, Franco exalted Fierro's incorruptible protest in the First Part of the poem.

Three years after the Mar del Plata event, Eduardo Astesano published an essay that he had been working on for years called *Martín Fierro y la Justicia Social. Primer Manifiesto Revolucionario del Movimiento Obrero Argentino* (Martín Fierro and Social Justice; First Revolutionary Manifesto of the Argentine Workers Movement). The author was a Communist militant who had been expelled from the Party due to differences among the Party's cadres in 1946. Astesano, together with other expelled comrades, founded the Communist Workers Movement, where they envisioned a rising, new political movement:

Peronism. Along that line, Astesano made notorious theoretical efforts to explain his support for the government of Juan Perón as a transition to the much awaited “socialist revolution.”<sup>55</sup>

Astesano’s reflections on the poem are connected with the previous interpretation in several ways. Thus, he stated that only those intellectuals who had placed themselves in a revolutionary perspective were “able to explain the hidden truths in the poem.” That revelation contained the criticisms to Vizcachá’s “individualistic and selfish program,” the condemnation of the arbitrary violence that the State inflicted on the gaucho class, and the notorious shift from the original *Martín Fierro*. Regarding this final aspect, when all the characters at the end of the poem scatter on their own solitary roads, Astesano notices a secret promise that is mentioned but not revealed in the poem. For him, it is about a new reunion of Fierro with his children to “organize a somewhat illegal common action to constitute a political movement of rural workers.”<sup>56</sup>

The author saw a “revolutionary agitator” in Fierro and in the verses “an action of illegal struggle.” To explain how powerful the text was, he quoted the poet Fernán Silva Valdés, paradoxically a personal friend of Tinker’s, who mentioned the poem’s massive popularity in the Río de la Plata. This would not be the only possible articulation with the interpretations sketched from the United States. Astesano, going against anarchist readings and most probably due to his rapprochement to Peronism, used *Martín Fierro* to emphasize the harmful effects of the “disintegration of the native family,” the persistence of “the religious spirit of the people,” and the somber description of “the Indian Hell.” Even in antagonistic writings, one could see spaces that confirmed both the political potential of the gaucho and his malleable personality.

## Conclusions

The publications, lectures, and events linked to *Martín Fierro* in the United States confirmed that the knowledge of the poem was a valid methodology to approach the “late nineteenth-century” social, cultural, and political “reality” of the Río de la Plata. The references to its author contained fragmentary information about the processes of national organization and the permanent asymmetries between city dwellers and rural inhabitants. Beyond those references, the attention centered on the protagonist confirmed the successful process of canonization of the gaucho carried out by different sectors in the region since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The social, cultural, economic, and ethnic diversity of the vast territory in the southernmost part of America was reduced to an oversimplified *pampeano*



character. The reproduction of *Martín Fierro* abroad as masterpiece of “Argentinity” nourished the identification of the gaucho with *rioplatense* culture. At the same time, as can be seen in Benson’s academic text, the circulation and study of the poem yielded a transnational perspective. That is to say, the constant analogies with the cowboy, the comparisons with classical US American literary works, and the references to the circulation of early versions contributed to Fierro’s “de-territorialization.”

Thus, the protagonist acquired international dimensions that grew exponentially in its manipulations within the frame of the cultural Cold War. Focusing on the archive of one of the UT Latin American collections, that of Edward Tinker, two main characteristics were unveiled: a biased reading of *Martín Fierro* that facilitated a reformulation of the gaucho to suit Tinker’s immediate needs and, as a result of this, the creation of a Pan-American and anti-Communist representation of the Pampean rider from a continental viewpoint.

If the first methodology is lacking in novelty regarding the historical manipulations that strained the gaucho figure and the taming processes devised by the political and intellectual elites of the Río de la Plata, the second characteristic mentioned truly adds new horizons. A *Martín Fierro* “trapped” in the international struggles of the Cold War was produced in the crossfire of lectures and contemporary publications. Tinker focused on the gaucho brotherhood and avoided acknowledging any sign of rebellion, labor exploitation, and state oppression in the poem. His tamed gaucho was legitimated by *Don Segundo Sombra* and thus extended to other regions the official *rioplatense* interpretations of the epic poem.

In turn, the Argentine Left challenged this taming, and Luis Franco went so far as to challenge José Hernández himself. Choosing to ignore the fact that their views would have an international projection, they highlighted the disruptive, libertarian, and revolutionary components of *Martín Fierro*. Thus, these two poles came together in the exegesis of the poem reproducing the conflict around the gaucho and his attributes. Apart from updating the functionality of the figure for extremely different purposes, the use of *Martín Fierro* offered new opportunities for the promotion of “gauchesca” activities and gave concerned parties, like Tinker and Woollands, an opportunity to channel their political views through the gauchesca’s verses.

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