COWBOYS AND GAUCHOS:
CONTRASTING VIEWS IN THE FRONTIER LITERATURE
OF ARGENTINA AND THE UNITED STATES

by

Dennis K. Olson

B.A., Metropolitan State College of Denver, 2010

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Master of Arts in Spanish
2012
This thesis for the Master of Arts degree by

Dennis K. Olson

has been approved for the

Master of Arts in Spanish

by

Michael Abeyta, Chair and Advisor

Andres Lema-Hincapié

Tomas J. Noel

November 14, 2012
Olson, Dennis K. (M.A., Master of Arts in Spanish)

Cowboys and Gauchos: Contrasting Views in the Frontier Literature of Argentina and the United States

Thesis directed by Michael Abeyta.

ABSTRACT

While there are many similarities in the frontier literatures of the United States and Argentina, the contrasts between the two are most vividly seen in the countries’ respective views concerning the role of nature. The nineteenth century authors of the literature constructed an imaginary foundation on which the generations that were to come would build a framework of their respective ideas concerning the relationship between nation and nature. In analyzing the publications of the nineteenth century, particularly those that deal with the image, in the United States, of the frontiersman and the cowboy in the ever-expanding western landscapes of the nascent nation, and those that explore the Argentine image of the gaucho and the campesino on the pampa, one comes to understand how they eventually built an imaginary national foundation based on preconceived myths that they held about nature, a foundation on which the national self-image would be interpreted and later perceived as historical reality. However, those ideals were based on myth and ancient customs from the motherlands and cultures from whence these two peoples came. These myths and customs were hardwired from birth into the psyches of the European settlers, and by extension into the psyches of the authors of United States and Argentine frontier literature, manifesting themselves in varying psychological mother-complexes as related to Mother Nature. Carl Jung described a positive and negative mother complex that can also be applied to man’s relationship with Mother Nature. While the colonizers of the United States projected a positive mother
complex regarding Mother Nature upon themselves, those of the Argentine Republic projected upon themselves a negative mother-complex. Authors from both countries, however, appeared to suffer from Sigmund Freud’s Oedipus-complex as it related to Mother Nature while attempting to penetrate Mother Nature’s realm and tame her. This implies a metaphorical shift in their views of her from Mother to object of sexual desire. The myths, combined with certain psychological archetypes unconsciously influenced the writings of frontier literature and the author’s views of nature in the nineteenth century.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Michael Abeyta
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Leesa Olson, my loving wife, and my children, Stefanie Walker, Victoria Olson, and Gillian Sanchez, for their endless support and patience with me during the countless hours I spent on research, writing, and revisions, as well as my granddaughter, Savannah Sanchez, who, too often, sacrificed the love and affection of her grandfather during the preparation of this thesis. I, also, dedicate this work to my parents, George and Christine Olson, for their encouragement and their belief in my ability to complete the task.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank, first and foremost, Michael Abeyta, who patiently advised me in the development of this thesis and without whose insight this work would not have been possible. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the following very knowledgeable professors at the University of Colorado Denver: Andrés Lema-Hincapié, whose knowledge of J. L. Borges and the gaucho was particularly helpful, Devin Jenkins, for his expertise on Spanish in the southwestern United States, and Tom Noel (Dr. Colorado) for his ability to bring the history of the cowboy and the Old West alive. Each of their classes has proven invaluable to my research into the topic on which I have written. And finally, it is with deep affection that I acknowledge the influence of the greatest of High School history teachers, Coach “Willie” Robinson, Forest Hill High School – Jackson, MS. It is to him alone that I attribute my great love and interest in historical studies.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

**PROLOGUE** .................................................................................................................................................. 1

**I. INTRODUCTION** .......................................................................................................................................... 9

Frontier .......................................................................................................................................................... 10

Civilization and Barbarism .......................................................................................................................... 14

Gauchos and Cowboys ................................................................................................................................. 18

Pampa and Prairie ......................................................................................................................................... 32

**II. THE IMAGINARY CONTRACT OF THE FRONTIER IN THE LITERATURE OF ARGENTINA AND THE UNITED STATES** .......................................................................................................................... 38

The Authors of Frontier Literature and How They Shaped the Development of Their Respective Countries ................................................................................................................................................. 44

Cowboy and Gaucho Poetry ......................................................................................................................... 52

**III. PSYCHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPES AND COMPLEXES IN THE VIEW OF NATURE IN THE FRONTIER LITERATURE OF THE UNITED STATES AND ARGENTINA** .......................................................................................................................... 56

The Projection of the Great Mother Archetype onto Nature ........................................................................ 62

The Mother-Complex .................................................................................................................................. 62

The Oedipus Complex of Men Toward Mother Nature .............................................................................. 74

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................................... 79

**WORKS CITED** .......................................................................................................................................... 82
PROLOGUE

As I stepped onto the platform and boarded the train on that blistering hot January day in 1980 that would take me from the sprawling metropolis that was Montevideo to the river port city of Salto, Uruguay, little did I realize that my boyhood fantasy of living in the Old West was about to become reality. I had grown up on a farm in rural Mississippi, spending my childhood reading the easy frontier fiction of Zane Grey, Louis L’Amour, and Jim Kjelgaard, watching Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and, of course, the Duke – John Wayne, and playing the now highly politically incorrect childhood game Cowboys and Indians. I felt as though my time and place on this earth had been miscalculated and that I was meant to have been born one hundred years earlier out on the western plains of Kansas or, possibly, Texas. But as the locomotive left the urban surroundings of the capital city, Montevideo, and chugged through ever longer stretches of unhindered grasslands it became apparent that, at least to my mind, I was on a time machine that, with each passing kilometer, was transporting me further back in time. It was as if I were in a dream state, like Borges’s character, Johannes Dahlmann, in “El sur”.

At the first stop some wonderfully rough looking characters boarded and sat across from me. They were dressed in a fashion that I had never seen. They wore baggy, flared-leg britches that were buttoned tightly above each ankle, dusty leather boots, a brightly colored sash tied firmly about their waists which barely concealed the hilts of finely sharpened knives, dingy white shirts under ponchos that were pulled up over one shoulder and wide brimmed hats cinched about their necks. A couple of the men were smoking foul smelling cigarettes. They were speaking in a dialect of Spanish that I barely understood. It wasn’t long before a curious looking set of playing cards was pulled out
and some sort of gambling game began in earnest. Even though I was unfamiliar with the
dress of these men, I knew almost immediately that they were cowboys, even though the
stereotyped six-shooter was conspicuously missing from their attire. It wasn’t the dress
that gave them away as much as “the type” that I had read about in so many western
novels. As the realization dawned upon my consciousness that these were the famed
gauchos of South America my imagination began to run rampant and much like Owen
Wister’s narrator, in *The Virginian*, the preconceived stereotypes that I had come to
associate with the Wild West colored my initial thoughts. I simultaneously became
excited at the fulfillment of my longed for dream and somewhat, naively, afraid for my
own life as a couple of the men began speaking with raised voices. One of these men
appeared quite agitated and, in my naivety, coupled with a less than firm grasp on the
language, I could only assume that in the course of their card game the other man had
been accused of cheating. Perhaps I had just seen too many Cowboy movies. My
imagination began to run rampant and I was sure a knife fight was about to ensue; that I
would somehow be caught in the middle. I began to imagine what that knife fight might
have looked like had the confrontation escalated to the level that I was expecting and not
been cut short by a friendly slap on the back of the more boisterous individual by one of
the other men, which was promptly followed by the jovial laughter of the one offended.
Years later, as I read “El encuentro” (“The Encounter”), one of the many gaucho stories
of Jorge Luis Borges, I was delighted to discover those far away imaginations written in
detailed account:
Los hombres peleaban. Al principio lo hicieron con torpeza, como si temieran herirse; al principio miraban los aceros, pero después los ojos del contrario….

Sin el poncho que hace guardia, paraban con el antebrazo los golpes. Las mangas, pronto jironadas, se iban oscureciendo de sangre….

Duncan… quería estar muy cerca del otro; Uriarte retrocedía para tirarse en puñaladas largas y bajas….

Nadie se atrevió a intervenir. Uriarte había perdido terreno; Duncan entonces lo cargó. Ya casi se tocaban los cuerpos. El acero de Uriarte buscaba la cara de Duncan. Bruscamente nos pareció más corto, porque había penetrado en el pecho. Duncan quedó tendido en el césped….

No cerró los ojos, no se movió y yo había visto a un hombre matar a otro. (1041-42)

The men were fighting. At first they fought clumsily, as though afraid of being wounded; at first they watched their opponent’s blade, but then they watched his eyes…

As their forearms (with no ponchos wrapped around them for protection) blocked the thrusts, their sleeves, soon cut to ribbons, grew darker and darker with blood…. Duncan tried to stay close to the other man, while Uriarte drew away in order to make long, low thrusts.

No one summoned the courage to intervene. Uriarte had lost ground; Duncan then charged him. Their bodies were almost touching
now. Uriarte’s blade sought Duncan’s face. Abruptly it looked shorter; it had plunged into his chest. Duncan lay on the grass…

He did not close his eyes, he did not move, and I had seen one man kill another. (Hurley 367)

I didn’t think much about it at the time, how men’s life and death struggles are learned from the observation of nature and the animal kingdom, but years later as I read Ricardo Güiraldes’s *Don Segundo Sombra* I couldn’t help but draw certain comparisons between the dance of death performed in the pit at a cock fight and that of two men embroiled in savage artistry:

*El giro cargaba de firme, el buche pegado a su contrario, que le daba un poco el flanco cruzando el pescuezo. Pero el bataraz, cuando se sentía picado en las plumas del cogote, zafaba el encontrón echando casi al suelo la cabeza, de modo que los puazos pasaran por encima, sin herirlo….*

*Brillaban las cabezas barnizadas de sangre. Afanosos los picos buscaban los verrugones de las crestas o un desgarrón de pellejo para asegurar el bote….*

*Pertinazmente el giro seguía empujando con el buche; agravando así el silbido de su respiración penosa, y noté que aflojaba en su juego de pico.*

*…Era necesario permanecer en la defensiva, evitando el golpe decisivo, salvando en media hora de resistencia, y tirar hacia abajo a cada picada del contrario….*
De pronto un murmullo de sorpresa sofocó al público. El giro se había despicado. Un triangulo rojo yacía en la tierra barrida del reñidero. (176-77)

The gray went straight for his foe, closing breast to breast. The red turned a little to one side, and they crossed necks. But when the red felt the blows on his neck feathers, he dodged, lowered his head almost to the ground, and the attacks went over him, without wounding him….

Blood varnished their heads. Beaks sought the ridge of the comb or a torn strip of flesh for the final thrust….

The gray kept thrusting breastfirst; the whistle of his breathing grew more labored; the volley of his beak, I observed, was slowing.

…The thing to do was remain on the defensive, avoiding any possible decisive blow, to stall at least half an hour and to duck every head thrust….

Suddenly the audience gave a murmur of amazement. The gray had lost his bill. A small crimson triangle lay on the hard dirt of the ring.

(De Onís 95-6)

Thus did my imagination run wild as I envisioned every thrust, dodge, and blow of my stereotyped characters in the personas of these innocent men.

As the iron wheels rolled further and further into the never ending grasslands of the interior and the argument I had witnessed passed into a treasured recollection of my first day in country, I began to wonder whether I was in South America or the wilds of Africa as ostriches (ñandú) rose out of the high grass, watching the passing of the
locomotive. I had no idea that ostriches existed on the American continent and I was captivated by my experiences, but the recent discovery would not be the last revelation of that momentous day. Suddenly, still other gauchos on fleet-footed horses barreled onto the scene, boleadores swirling above their heads like the rotor of a helicopter, charging toward the oversized fowls which now numbered at least two score. With amazing precision the whirling stones, encased in hard leather sacks, flew from the callused and dexterous hands of the pursuers, wrapping themselves around the long necks of their prey, felling three of them. “What a wonderful, barbarous land I have come to,” I thought to myself.

Salto, my destination, is another, yet much smaller, metropolis bordered on the west by the Río Uruguay and on the east by a vast stretch of pampa. In appearance it reminded me of the French Quarter of New Orleans with its old world charm. The milk I drank was delivered fresh each morning by a horse drawn wagon; the food that was to be prepared for the noon meal was purchased each day from street vendors or local retail merchants. Refrigerators held only the nourishment that was to be consumed during that day. Each day began and ended with the habitual ritual of maté and bread, which constituted the morning and evening meals. Many of the automobiles were throwbacks from the 1930s or 1940s. I began to silently wonder in what decade of what century I had landed.

Now that I was settled in, one of my first orders of business was to secure a good copy of *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, the only Spanish work of which I had any knowledge, as I had determined to read it in the Spanish language during my two year stay. In my ignorance, I had assumed that this book was the quintessential classic of the
Spanish speaking world and was hailed as such in every country. I searched every bookseller I could find in Salto but was not satisfied with any edition that I found. A friend suggested a door-to-door bookseller that had access to a catalogue beyond the selection that I would find in stores. When at length the vendor paid me a visit he quickly dissuaded me from my preconceived selection, informing me that if I truly wanted a classic of Uruguay and Argentina that I should instead purchase Martín Fierro. He pulled from his bag a copy of the most exquisite book I had ever seen and allowed me to peruse it. It was bound in the laminated hard wood of the ceibo tree and encrusted with 24 carat gold inlay lettering. The spine was of rich-looking finely grained leather. The large, heavy pages smelled like the wood in which it was bound. Inside were superb paintings by Juan Lamela that reminded me of Frederick Remington’s paintings of the Old West. I promptly forgot all about Don Quijote and, no matter the price, had to have the book that I was then holding in my hands, a very expensive edition at the cost of 3,000 pesos (roughly $300 in the currency exchange of 1980). I read it through intensely and marveled at the language and verse, at the compelling story it told. I began to notice similarities in the cowboy heroes of my youth, as well as stark differences in the attitudes of nature, race, religion and politics, social structures, and the treatment of women.

About a year and a half into my stay in Uruguay I had the pleasure of living and working in the gaucho village of Fraile Muerto, so far removed from civilization that the only way in and out of the town was either by horseback or train. By the time I began my graduate studies in Spanish my course of study had already been chosen for me based on the fascination I had come to have for the gaucho and the love that I had already, from my youth, for the cowboy. Martín Fierro and an observant humble bookseller had set me
on what would eventually be my path. During those two years I never did get around to reading *Don Quijote*. 
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Man’s relationship with nature is a prevalent theme in the frontier literature of nineteenth century America. While the cowboy era in the United States and the gaucho era of Argentina and Uruguay are replete with similarities between the two cultures and their lifestyles, as written in the literatures, there is one area of deep contrasts: the view of man’s relationship with nature. The main characters in this literature were men who ventured away from home and hearth and whose view of nature was heavily influenced by myths that they brought with them from their respective homelands in Europe, as well as by psychological archetypes and complexes formed through numerous generations. The authors of this literature were, more often than not, of the educated class who penned their works from comfortable surroundings in the East and who had no contact with the class of people they were portraying. Furthermore, several of these authors had not even visited the locations they were writing about at the time in which they were putting pen to paper to spin their famous tales. Words and phrases employed in the frontier literature of each nation offer rudimentary clues of the myths and archetypes and serve, in this work, to distinguish the literature of the United States from that of the Argentine Republic and Uruguay. Because the cultures of Argentina and Uruguay are so similar it is to be understood that in this thesis where I write of Argentine culture that of Uruguay is also implied.

Because the meaning of words are sometimes vague or could be construed to have differing meanings between author and reader I feel a brief explanation of certain terms that I will employ in this text should be clarified. Therefore it will be beneficial to the
reader to understand why I chose certain terms over others and their meanings as employed herein. For that reason I give here the etymology of these words and my rationale for their use.

**Frontier**

Frontier

Cowboy literature, more commonly known in the United States as western literature, and gaucho literature trace their origins back to young colonies with small townships on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean in both North and South America, full of independent minded men and women, that would not be subjugated by a governing body, no more visible than a deity, halfway across the world. As the long-arm of European dominance stretched across the waters to the shores of the North and South American Atlantic coasts the recent inhabitants of the newly found lands, attempting to outrun the grasp of mother England and father Spain, traversed further into the wilds of their respective adopted domains. The direction for escape was always westward into the frontier and onto the prairies and pampas. “I have come, old man, into these districts because I found the law sitting too tight upon me,” explained Ishamel to Natty in Cooper’s *The Prairie*, “and am not over fond of neighbors who can’t settle a dispute without troubling a justice and twelve men” (61). Güiraldes picks up on the same theme in calling the gaucho, Don Segundo, “un espíritu anárquico y solitario, a quien la sociedad continuada de los hombres concluía por infligir un invariable cansancio” (a “lone, anarchic spirit that wilts in prolonged intercourse with men”; 146; De Onís 69).

The word ‘frontier,’ according to Douglas Harper’s *Online Etymological Dictionary*, comes from the Old French, first seen in print in the thirteenth century and originally meaning the front line in an Army’s defense. By the fifteenth century it took on
the meaning of a borderland surrounding a densely populated center, which had a density of two or more inhabitants per square mile. It was not until 1869 that its use as a borderline between geopolitical entities first came into use. In the English language of the present day it symbolizes the wild country where there are very few inhabitants, or perhaps none. In this sense it is applied to Outer Space, also known as “the final frontier.” In today’s Spanish, frontera is used almost exclusively to denote the border between countries. However, in this work, I use the word in an expansionist sense as a perceived borderline between what was then considered civilization and barbarism. The frontier was there to be conquered and civilized, in a semi-European fashion, by men and women who wished freedom from the oppression of their native lands; but, also, it was a haven for those who had a disdain for civilized life. Later, as the independent nations of The United States and Argentina were established men, sometimes with their families, ventured into the wild regions for a multitude of reasons: the lure of land and riches, a place free of a governing body where they could forge their own destinies unencumbered, a place to practice their religion freely, or simply to flee justice for some felony committed against the ruling body’s restrictive laws. The young tenderfoot protagonist of Don Segundo Sombra, much like Huck Finn, fled before the restrictive rules of those placed over him: “De ningún modo volvería a hacer el vago por las calles aburridas. Yo era, una vez por todas, un hombre libre que ganaba su puchero, y más bien viviría como puma, alzado en los pajales, que como cuzco de sala entre las faldas hediondas a sahumerio eclesiástico y retos de mandonas bigotudas” (“I was done forever with loafing around those tedious streets. Once and for all I was a free man, earning the bread I ate. I’d rather live like a mountain lion alone in the wilds than be a
lapdog again under the incense-stinking skirts of those bossy, whiskered old maids”; 106; De Onís 37). Of course, there was always a more mature and more experienced mentor to “break-in” the more naïve and often foolish newcomer. Huck Finn had Jim; the narrator of *The Virginian* had the Virginian and the young gaucho had Don Segundo.

In the acclaimed twentieth century frontier play, *Paint Your Wagon*, Alan J. Lerner attempted to sum up the mindset of these men, who often dragged women and children with them into the wilds, in the words of the farcical song, “The First Thing You Know”:

> They civilize left.
> They civilize right,
> Till nothing is left;
> Till nothing is right.
> They civilize freedom
> Till no one is free;
> No one except,
> By coincidence me.

The men of the frontier were, more often than not, thought of as rogues and “ne’er-do-wells” with little regard for law and order. Whether the stereotype was fitting or not, they were considered by so-called “civilized society” and depicted by writers of frontier literature as hard-living, hard-drinking, thieving individuals who, while not civilized in the classic sense, neither did they quite fall under the category of the barbarian. While this class of men was shunned by a more refined society, they were somewhat tolerated as long as they kept to themselves and came into town only
infrequently, rarely meeting with the hostility shown toward the completely uncivilized Indian. After all, as Benedict Anderson wrote in his *Imagined Communities*, “Half civilized was vastly better than barbarian” (21). These frontiersmen were merely individuals who had lost their way. This was the way that Fennimore Cooper portrayed Natty Bumpo (aka, Leatherstocking, Pathfinder, Deerslayer, Hawkeye, and the trapper), the way Owen Wister portrayed The Virginian, the way Domingo F. Sarmiento portrayed the gaucho in general, and the way José Hernandez portrayed Martín Fierro. These “types” continued to relocate to the frontier as civilization crept upon them. However, the self-imposed banishment from a civilized state began long before there were cowboys or gauchos.

The frontiersmen, of course, did not share the view that the urbanites had toward them as pertaining to their character. In her forward to *Cattle Kings of Texas*, Dian Leatherberry Malouf writes, “Texas was never a refuge for the lowly or oppressed. Early settlers, says T. R. Fehrenbach, looked upon themselves as ‘a chosen race,’ as a collection of men who considered themselves morally superior, noble, and unafraid.” They took pride in being a bit rough around the edges, taking their calloused hands, sweat-stained hat bands, and their ability to overcome the challenges of nature as signs of real manhood. Leatherberry Malouf continues:

Among the earliest arrivals in Texas were the hot-blooded, difficult-to-govern, and iron-willed but loyal Scotch-Irish. They avoided existing civilization whenever they could, opting for the wide-open and empty space of a desolate frontier. Most were quiet men who preferred to stick to themselves. Involvement and participation were not in their character.
Their only need for acceptance was internal – this has not changed. When the settling of the East, North, and West began, the Scotch-Irish headed to the last place left on the frontier – South Texas.” (9)

There were no Anglo cowboys at the time of the first influx of eastern United States’ settlers into the West and Southwest. However, the charros (skilled and dexterous Mexican horsemen), vaqueros (Mexican cowboys) and rancheros (ranchers) already had a long and proud tradition in what would become the Southwestern United States. Anglos learned the skills necessary for ranch work from the rancher class of Mexico. There probably would have been no American cowboy had there not first been charros and vaqueros. Because the cowboy sprang from the wandering, adventurous, Anglo frontiersmen who, upon entering then Mexican territory, blended their culture with that of the Mexican ranchero class I do not limit my scope in the study of United States’ literature strictly to the cowboy. I explore not only the cowboy and gaucho, but also their precursors as written in the literature, the frontiersmen and homesteaders, those men and women who lived in the borderlands between barbarism and civilization, always moving further west and south as civilization encroached upon them. Thus, instead of differentiating between gaucho, cowboy and frontier literature in the following argument, I will simply classify all three as frontier literature, as all of the characters of these genres lived and worked on the borderline between what was considered civilization and barbarism.

**Civilization and Barbarism**

Civilization and barbarism are highly subjective terms, dependent upon the culture that employs them. For example, what some cultures in the Middle East condone
as civilized behavior flies in the face of western sensibilities and vice versa. When the Spanish conquistadors first began to subject the native peoples in America, they considered the great cities of the Aztecs and the Incas to be peopled by barbarians, at the same time referring to them as civilizations, setting up an unfathomable dichotomy in the usage of the terms. Can a barbarous people truly have a civilization? In order to fully understand these terms it is important to analyze the etymologies of these words. One cannot begin to look at the term “civilization” without first considering the meaning of the word’s roots, “civil” and “civilize”. The roots come to us directly from the Latin *civilis*, an adjective “relating to a citizen, relating to public life, befitting a citizen,” thus one who is civil is “popular, affable, courteous.” By the late fourteenth century the French extended the meaning of the word relating it to “civil law or life” (Harper). The philosopher, John Locke, who had such a profound influence on the United States’ Declaration of Independence and the subsequent Constitution of the country, defined the limits of civil law as it applied to the nature of man, balancing it with man’s liberty. He wrote that a “state of liberty” is not a “state of license”:

> Though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession, but where some nobler use than its bare preservation calls for it. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone. And reason, which is the law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions. (444-45)
By the seventeenth century the French employed the verb *civilizer* (to civilize), which in essence meant to indoctrinate the uneducated rural masses in the proper etiquette of city life, or as the *Online Etymological Dictionary* defines the term, “to make citified.” To understand the rules of civility and the forced implementation of those rules would keep the uncivilized, rural ruffian from running afoul of the law when they were within the jurisdiction of the city. It was not until 1704 that the first instance of the use of the term as a noun came into the public domain with the meaning of a “law which makes a criminal process civil.” Then, in 1772, the first recorded instance of the term, signifying a “civilized condition,” was employed in opposition to “barbarism,” a term from mid-fifteenth century French meaning an “uncivilized or rude nature.” This term, however, has its roots in the ancient Greek *barbarizein*, “to do as a foreigner does,” and was an extension of the Greek *barbarismos* and the Latin *barbarismus* meaning “foreign speech.” By about 1450 barbarism signified an “uncivilized or rude nature”; to be barbaric was to be “uncultured, uncivilized, unpolished” or, as in the Greek meaning of the word *barbarikos*, to act “like a foreigner.” All of these terms were extensions from the original term “barbarian”. In order to fully appreciate the significance of that term I submit the following entry, in its entirety, from Douglas Harper’s *Online Etymological Dictionary*:

Mid-14c (adj.), from M.L. *barbarinus* (cf. O.Fr. *barbarin* “Berber, pagan, Saracen, barbarian”), from L. *barbaria* “foreign country,” from Gk. *barbarous* “foreign, strange, ignorant,” from PIE root *barbar-* echoic of unintelligible speech of foreigners (cf. Skt. *barbara-* “stammering,” also “non-Aryan”). Greek *barbaroi* (n.) meant “all that are not Greek,” but
especially the Medes and Persians. Originally not entirely pejorative, its sense darkened after the Persian wars. The Romans (technically themselves barbaroi) took up the word and applied it to tribes or nations which had no Greek or Roman accomplishments. The noun is from late 14c., “person speaking a language different from one’s own,” also (c.1400) ”native of the Barbary coast;” meaning rude, wild person” is from 1610s.

Based on the etymology and borrowing of the words “civilization” and “barbarism” between cultures it is readily apparent how a culture could take these words, make them their own, and through the principle of attachment, apply them to their own culture. This often caused conflicts to arise between the citizenry of different nations who looked at their own culture as the civilized entity and the culture of the “foreigner” as uncivilized. This often resulted in misunderstandings that eventually led to violence as an invading culture would assert their supremacy over the meaning of what it was to be “civilized” above that of the local populace. Therefore, those who left the city (civilization) and divorced themselves from city etiquette were considered to de-evolve into barbarians, being no longer involved in civil society, committing barbarous acts of violence one with another as is epitomized in frontier literature, such as the cowboy gunfights in the Old West of North America and the gaucho knife-fights on the pampa of Argentina. These were truly barbarous actions according to city etiquette, while a moderated duel with pistols and a single shot at ten paces was the civilized way of settling an unsolvable conflict, according to French civil law. This sort of “gentleman’s
“Duel” was readily practiced in New Orleans until the mid-nineteenth century and is the basis of many folkloric stories in the antebellum Deep South.

The frontiersman, the man who left civilization looking for riches or a better life, was at times an unwitting victim of the forces that surrounded him; but by his very nature man is a survivor and, in his survival, often does “barbarous” things which make him an outcast to civilization. Writing about the gaucho in *X-Ray of the Pampa*, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada argues:

> He did not want to lower himself to the status of the Indian, a product of the conjunction of forces that surrounded him. He fought against this force burrowing deep into his flesh, but in the end he adopted the customs of the native he despised: he learned the Indian’s way of fighting and living; he used the Indian’s weapon, the knife; he mated with the squaw; he built his casual hovel; and he left offspring behind him. (21)

**Gauchos and Cowboys**

In the early nineteenth century, even before the advent of the North American cowboy, the term “gaucho” began to circulate throughout the world. After the populace of the North American continent became familiar with the epithet “cowboy” they would define the “gaucho” as the cowboy of South America. By the beginning of the twentieth century this word would become part of the English lexicon. According to Sara Parkinson de Saz in her edition of Ricardo Güiraldes’s *Don Segundo Sombra*, the word ‘gaucho’ derives from the Quechua word *huachu*, which carried the meaning of a child or animal that was raised far from its parents, like an ‘orphan’ (69). The *Online Etymological Dictionary*, however, places the word’s origin as *cauchu*, meaning ‘wanderer,’ from a
different native language, Aruacanian – the language of the Aruca Indians. The case can also be made that the term came from an “advanced, Berber-speaking Stone Age people” of African descent known as the Guanches that inhabited the Canary Islands and were the first victims of European expansion. Sven Lindqvist wrote of their demise in “Exterminate All the Brutes”: One Man’s Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide:

In 1478, Ferdinand and Isabella sent an expedition with guns and horses to Grand Canary. The plains were quickly captured by the Spaniards, but in the mountains the Guanches continued a stubborn guerilla warfare. Finally in 1483, six hundred warriors and one thousand five hundred women, children, and old people capitulated – all that remained of a once numerous population. (110)

The “stubborn guerilla warfare” tactics employed by the gauchos may have led to an extension in the use of the term “Guanches,” in reference to these men of the pampa, which within the evolutionary tendency of languages, morphed and evolved into the term “gaucho.” The first recorded instance of the word was in 1790, shortly after Juan de Garay first brought cattle into the Argentine grasslands. The gauchos of Argentina and Uruguay are generally depicted in the literature as a group of Spaniards who went off into the frontier from Buenos Aires, procreating with the native population, having mestizo, dark-skinned children, learning “guerilla warfare” tactics from the indigenous peoples, and according to Martínez Estrada, de-evolving, in many ways, into what could be described as a Stone-age mentality (15). The authors of gaucho literature depicted the gaucho as a victim of a de-evolutionary process that returned them to something “cruder”
than the natural state of man, thereby endearing them to the romantics that wrote of the era, like Jose Hernández, Esteban Echeverría, and Ricardo Güiraldes, and earning the disdain of the elites who were responsible for the eventual demise of the original gaucho. Martínez Estrada appears to have taken the standard of the elite, unfolding in his treatise, *X-ray of the Pampa*, the de-evolutionary process on the people that would later come to be known as gauchos. “He moved backward and thought he was going forward by pushing against the future with his back,” he wrote (15). Hernández, though a friend to the gaucho, had Martín Fierro say essentially the same thing: “Hace mucho que sufrimos / la suerte reculativa” (“For a long time now we’ve borne / our fortunes running backwards”; 2125-6; Ward 2125-6). In this vein Martínez Estrada argued:

Under imperceptible influences the population regressed into an inferior state; and such regressive states, relapses into barbarism, are cruder than the natural state. They involve the surrender of civilization and the return along many paths, such as one may stumble upon in the prairie land, to the lowest level of animality…. Disillusionment leads to destruction and mockery of everything that reminds us of the superior state we abdicated, not only in objects around us but in ourselves. The love for what we have is hate for what we cannot have, and vice versa. Much of what has been taken for barbarism is simply the disillusionment of an ordinary dreamer. (15-16)

Whatever the origin of the term “gaucho”, whether it is that of an orphan, a wandering nomad, or the memory of a less than civilized and vanquished people, it is assumed that the original term carried a connotation of a displaced person, an orphan, and
will be used as such in this work. Also, the meaning employed in most gauchesca
literature is consistent with the meaning of ‘orphan.’ The young gaucho in Don Segundo
Sombra, who is also the narrator of the novel writing in the first person, begins his tale by
stating, “Pensaba en mis catorce años de chico abandonado, de ‘gaucho’, como
seguramente dirían por ahí” (“I was thinking of my fourteen years as a gaucho – the name
everyone around there surely gave me – an abandoned orphan”; 69; De Onís 7), and later
affirming the status when he replied to an inquiry concerning his parentage: “¿Padres?
No soy hijo más que del rigor; juera de ésa, casta no tengo nenguna; en mis pagos
algunos me dicen ‘el Gaucho’” (“Parents! I am the child of hard knocks; that’s all the
family I’ve got. Where I come from, folks used to call me the gaucho”; 273; De Onís
178).

Under these definitions it would not be too far of a stretch to term Natty
Bumppo, of Cooper fame, the first “gaucho” in American literature. He was dispossessed
by his own people and raised by the Delaware Native American nation; he adapted in
many ways to their mode and manner of life; he spoke their language; he was more
comfortable with his Indian village than he was in the settlements of the whites, choosing
at his death to be buried with the Pawnee of the plains. In The Last of the Mohicans Natty
declared, “I have no kin… no people” (429) and in The Prairie, at the end of his life, he
affirmed, “The Wahcondah made me to live alone. He never tied my heart, to house or
field, by the cords with which the men of my race are bound to their lodges; if he had I
should not have journeyed so far and seen so much” (278). Is not this the definition of
‘orphan’? Blake Nevius in his introduction to The Prairie wrote: “Perhaps the most
durable and pervasive theme in American fiction, the theme of dispossession and flight,
on both the physical and spiritual levels, … has preoccupied every major novelist from Cooper’s day to our own” (Nevius xii). Using this theme of dispossession De Onís, in her introduction to the translation of *Don Segundo Sombra*, quotes Sarmiento as taking it even further by claiming that the Argentine himself is dispossessed: “one had only to look under the frock coat of an Argentine to find the gaucho” (216).

The theme of the gaucho as a South American nomad, displaced from civilized society, is prevalent in Domingo F. Sarmiento’s semi-historical account, *Facundo: civilización y barbarie*, where he calls them “American Bedouins” and an “Argentine proletarian” that prefers to live away from society, fighting nature on their own, hardened by their privations, and not counting on any resource more than their own capacity and skillset in order to take precautions against all the risks that continually surround them (62-3). Sarmiento describes the gaucho in the following terms:

El hombre de la campaña, lejos de aspirar a semejarse al de la ciudad, rechaza con desdén su lujo y sus modales corteses; y el vestido del ciudadano, el frac, la silla, la capa, ningún signo europeo puede presentarse impunemente en la campaña. Todo lo que hay de civilizado en la ciudad está bloqueado allí, proscrito afuera; y el que osara mostrarse con levita, por ejemplo, y montado en silla inglesa, atraería sobre sí las burlas y las agresiones brutales de los campesinos. (66-7)

The countryman, far from attempting to imitate the customs of the city, rejects with disdain its luxury and refinement; and it is unsafe for the costume of the city people, their coats, their cloaks, their saddles, or anything European, to show themselves in the country. Everything
civilized which the city contains is blockaded there, proscribed beyond its limits; and anyone who should dare to appear in the rural districts in a frock-coat, for example, or mounted on an English saddle, would bring ridicule and brutal assaults upon himself. (Mann 19)

Charles Darwin, however, a staunchly educated European, found the gaucho quite amiable. In The Voyage of the Beagle: A Naturalist’s Voyage Round the World, Darwin wrote about a contingency of gauchos that came into his camp one evening “to drink spirits and smoke cigars.” He was intrigued by their appearance, which he called “striking,” describing them as “tall and handsome.” He detailed their clothing, stating, “With their brightly coloured garments, great spurs clanking about their heels, and knives stuck as daggers (and often so used) at their waists, they look a very different race of men from what might be expected from their name of Gauchos.” Darwin translated the term gaucho as meaning “simple countrymen.” He went on to write, “Their politeness is excessive; they never drink their spirits without expecting you to taste it; but whilst making their exceedingly graceful bow, they seem quite as ready, if occasion offered, to cut your throat” (44).

The Gaucho’s counterpart in North America was the Cowboy. The etymology of that word has a rich and varied history. It is widely assumed that the term ‘cowboy’ was an English translation from the Spanish vaquero – from vaca (cow) signifying one who works with cows; however, that assumption is incorrect. ‘Buckaroo,’ a synonym for ‘cowboy,’ traces its origins to that Spanish word. According to Brent Colley’s online History of Redding, Connecticut, the first use of the word ‘cowboy’ came from eighteenth century England and carried the simple meaning, “boy who tends to cows.” In
this sentiment it did not mean strictly a juvenile male, as the word ‘boy’ would seem to imply; it was also a reference to a grown man with a lowly social status. By the time of the United States’ Revolutionary War the term was applied by independence-minded patriots to a select group of pro-British raiders “who harassed and plundered the rural districts of the boundary between American and British forces in Westchester County, New York.” The term “cowboy” was applied to this group because they would sell cattle that they had stolen from pro-independence colonists to the British forces as a way of raising money. James Fenimore Cooper’s novel, *The Spy*, is centered on these partisan cowboys and their exploits among the patriotic inhabitants of Westchester County.

The *Online Etymological Dictionary* reports that by 1849 the term had been extended to ranch hands that made their living by working with cattle and by 1942 took on the additional meaning of a “brash and reckless young man,” furthering the stereotype that had been penned for the rough and tumble characters of frontier literature since early colonial days. The term ‘cowhand’ was not seen before 1852, possibly as a way to rid the term of the negative connotation of ‘boy’. The term ‘cowpoke,’ another modern-day synonym for ‘cowboy’ came into use in 1881 and “was originally restricted to the cowboys who prodded cattle onto railroad cars with long poles.”

Due to high-societal, stereotyped caricatures and portrayals of the cowboy as suffering an inferiority complex when they were around the educated class, the same attitudes concerning outsiders that are portrayed in Gaucho literature are also prevalent in the literature that deals with the North American cowboy and frontiersman, especially in the literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although without the same degree of open hostility. For the most part, according to the fictional literature dealing
with the frontiersman, the outsider was just ignored or sometimes the victim of impious pranks. Having already witnessed a perverse sense of humor among the cowboys the citified narrator of Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* felt himself a complete outcast in Medicine Bow, Wyoming and wished no more scrutiny of his person then he could help:

I made no attempt to talk, for no one in this country seemed favorable to me. By reason of something, - my clothes, my hat, my pronunciation, whatever it might be – I possessed the secret of estranging people at sight. Yet I was doing better than I knew; my strict silence and attention to the corned beef made me in the eyes of the cow-boys at table compare well with the over-talkative commercial travelers. (12)

And as to the alleged inferiority complex, again the character of the Virginian can serve as a prime example of the stereotyped “ignorant” cowboy of frontier fiction penned by the educated eastern elites of the United States, imagining a culture to which they had little or no exposure. In the novel, Molly, the eastern school teacher, loans the Virginian a couple of books to read, one a detective story by an unmentioned author and the other, *The Mill on the Floss*, by the British novelist George Elliot (aka, Mary Anne Evans). The Virginian struggled through the volumes and then let his opinion be known to Molly: “If I’d known that one was a detective story, I’d have got yu’ to try something else on me. Can you guess the murderer, or is the author too smart for yu’? That’s all they amount to. Well, he was too smart for me this time, but that didn’t distress me any. That other book talks too much” (103).

This short review by the protagonist of Wister’s novel, of those two fictional works, besides demonstrating the Virginian’s lack of comprehension of the full
significance and intricacies of the plots, also shows the straightforwardness in the attitude of the fictionalized man of the frontier; he preferred to get straight to the point. When informed that the author of the other book, George Elliot, was a woman and not a man his simple observation was, “Well, then, o’ course she talks much” (103).

His feelings of inferiority, however, were valid only as to a “cultured” education, full of what he deemed were nothing more than trivial facts that had nothing to do with himself or his surroundings. When it came to a working knowledge of nature or mankind’s survival in a hostile country, the educated man or woman of the East was more likely to get killed, and in such situations the cowboy and the frontiersman felt a vast superiority over the farcically portrayed intellectual. Admonishing the newly arrived schoolmarm to Medicine Bow, Mr. McLean in *The Virginian*, warned, “Jest because yu’ happen to come from Vermont… is no cause for extra pride” (87). James Fenimore Cooper seemed to take especial delight in portraying the intellectual as an individual with little common sense on the frontier, whether it was the psalmist, David Gamut, in *Last of the Mohicans* or Dr. Obed Battius, the naturalist, in *The Prairie* and even Cap, in the beginning, in *The Pathfinder*; the intellectual was always used as a tool in order to place the protagonist in some perilous situation. While scaling the wall of a towering bluff, overlooking the prairie, in order to rescue a kidnapped girl from a group of desert pirates Dr. Battius is oblivious to the danger that the rescuing group faced:

While imitating the movements of his companions, and toiling his way upward, with the utmost caution, and not with great inward tribulation, the eye of the Naturalist had caught a glimpse of an unknown plant, a few yards above his head, and in a situation more than commonly exposed to
the missiles which the girls were unceasingly hurling in the direction of the assailants. Forgetting, in an instant, everything but the glory of being the first to give this jewel to the catalogues of science, he sprang upward at the prize, with the avidity with which the sparrow darts upon the butterfly. The rock which instantly came thundering down, announced that he was seen… the trapper gave him up for lost. (153)

It was only the quick action of those in the rescuing party that saved the Naturalist’s life, demonstrating that an education by book may not be equal to actual experience, placing the frontiersmen and cowboys in an environment where they were a vastly superior fit to their environs then were the city dwellers who ventured forth for adventure. In comparing an educated city boy to his Native American friend, Uncas, Natty quipped, “your young white, who gather his learning from books and can measure, what he knows by the page, may conceit that his knowledge, like his legs, outruns that of his father; but where experience is the master, the scholar is made to know the values of years, and respects them accordingly” (Cooper, Mohicans 260).

In this respect the authors of Gaucho literature also concurred. The young protagonist in Don Segundo Sombra was dismayed at the years he threw away in formal studies: “Todo lo aprendido en mi niñez aventurera resultaba un mísero bagaje de experiencia para la existencia que iba a emprender. ¿Para qué diablos me sacaron del lado de “mama” en el puestito camero, llevándome al colegio a aprender el alfabeto, las cuentas y la historia, que hoy de nada me servían?” (What I’d learned in my haphazard childhood was of little worth to prepare me for the life I challenged. Why the devil had
they taken me from my mother and stuck me in school to learn reading, arithmetic, history, which were of no use to me now?”; 108; De Onís 39). Martín Fierro also warned:

Aquí no valen dotores,

solo vale la esperencia;

aquí verían su inocencia

esos que todo lo saben;

porque esto tiene otra llave

y el gaucho tiene su cencia. (1.1457-62)

Your professors are no good here,

experience is all that counts;

here, those people who know everything

would see how little they know –

because this has another key

and a gaucho knows what it is. (Ward 1.1457-62)

In other words, the educated shouldn’t go into the frontier among the gauchos, Indians, woodsmen, mountain men, and cowboys with a know-it-all attitude or they will find just how inadequate to the task they really are, finding little help among these people who will be content to let the “smarty-pants” figure it out for themselves. Wister’s Virginian explained this attitude as follows:

Now back East you can be middling and get along. But if you go to try a thing on in this Western country, you’ve got to do it well. You’ve got to deal cyards well; you’ve got to steal well; and if you claim to be quick with your gun, you must be quick, for you’re a public temptation, and
some man will not resist trying to prove he is the quicker. You must break
t all the Commandments well in this Western country, and Shorty should
have stayed in Brooklyn, for he will be a novice his livelong days. (Wister
295)

After the publication of The Virginian in 1902, the cowboy found a new-born
respect among the populace of the United States and the cowboy became a romanticized
United States’ symbol of freedom and true manhood. In an interview conducted for Ken
Burn’s documentary, The West, the historian Richard White affirms:

When Americans tell stories about themselves they set those stories in the
West. The American heroes are western heroes. When you begin to think
of the quintessential American characters they’re always someplace over
the horizon. There is always someplace in the West where something
wonderful is about to happen. It’s not what has happened, it’s something
wonderful is about to happen. And even when we turn that around, even
when we say, “Well, something has been lost,” what’s lost is always in the
West.

This view of the cowboy, however, is not shared outside of the United States
where the term “cowboy” is still used as a pejorative, even to this day, as is evidenced in
the European press by their labeling of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush as “cowboy
presidents” practicing “cowboy diplomacy,” with the intimation that they were slow-to-
thought, quick-to-action, hard-headed and only semi-civilized in their dealings of foreign
affairs.
With respect to outward appearance and dress, the cowboy shares a similar attitude with the gauchos. The cowboy preferred his style of dress over that of the city dweller, being used to his jeans and a loose fitting shirt, he felt somewhat claustrophobic in a buttoned-up shirt, a suit and a tie. After being forced by his new bride to dress in the manner of the city for a meeting with his new in-laws in Vermont the Virginian declared, “I and the tailor are old enemies now” (Wister 367). Any semblance of city dress on a man in the frontier or a more refined speech emanating from his vocal chords was immediately seen by the cowboy of fiction as an immediate reason for distrust and suspicion. “I have thought that matters of dress and speech should not carry with them so much mistrust in our democracy” says the narrator of The Virginian. “Thieves are presumed innocent until proven guilty, but a starched collar is condemned at once. Perfect civility and obligingness I certainly did receive from the Virginian, only not a word of fellowship” (36). Mark Twain in writing about his experiences in the silver mining towns of Nevada claimed that “if a man wanted a fight on his hands without any annoying delay, all he had to do was to appear in public in a white shirt or a stove-pipe hat, and he would be accommodated. For those people hated aristocrats. They had a particular and malignant animosity toward what they called a ‘biled shirt’” (392). Twain only wore his old navy revolver “in deference to popular sentiment” (274).

The cowboy, like the gaucho, had little use for the finer things in life, finding them quite unnecessary. Materialism was for the rich easterners of the Atlantic seaboard states who had more in common with “Old England” than the expanding United States. In his commencement address, at the University of Washington, to the graduating class of 1914, Frederick Jackson Turner asserted, “From the beginning of that long westward
march of the American people America has never been the home of mere contented
materialism” (250). The class disparity often caused the frontiersman to invent jokes at
the expense of city dwellers who, as has been demonstrated, were viewed as totally unfit
for the frontier, mocking their manner of dress and their educated way of speaking. In a
counter-point to the educated class’ portrayal of the frontiersmen, the cowboy contended
that an easy life robbed urban dwellers of their manhood. A man of the city was often
derided as a ‘dandy,’ a ‘dude,’ or a ‘city-slicker,’ not knowing the difference between a
milk-cow and a bull. One famous cowboy poem by Nick Johnson tells about a couple of
“dudes,” a lawyer from Boston and a Doctor from Baton Rouge, and their boredom and
intolerance of the simple life on the range, who were camping with a few cowboys one
night:

And the Doc turned to the lawyer
And he says, “God, ain’t this dead;
Nothin’ to do but sit and fidget,
Guess I’ll chase myself to bed.
You can talk about Dame Nature,
But the next time that I go
For to see this wide and wooly West
I’ll bring a radio.” (33-40)

But according to the unwritten Cowboy code it was even worse to have lived the
life of a cowboy and then turned away from it. In yet another poem, by Cowboy poet
extraordinaire Gail Gardner, a cowboy falls in love with a city woman and moves to a
small “dude ranch” on the outskirts of the city where he spends his time pampering
spoiled rich men and letting them think they are cowboys for a day or two. This ex-
cowboy happens to meet up with an old friend from his previous life as a ranch hand and
explains to his old partner how he has been corrupted; that he will “go on wranglin’
dudes forever / Until the day that I shall die” (67-8) The old partner couldn’t bear to see
the fate that awaited his friend and shot him. Somewhat remorseful the old friend relates:

I shorely hated for to do it,

For things that’s done you cain’t recall,

But when a cowboy turns dude wrangler,

He ain’t no good no more at all. (73-6)

**Pampa and Prairie**

What was it that made the frontiersmen so different than their “citified”
counterparts? It could have been the environment in which they found themselves: the
grasslands of their respective countries and the ever-present dangers that they
encountered therein. Perhaps it was the feelings of displacement that is engendered
within the minds of those sallying forth upon the vast terrain. Pampa, prairie, plain, and
*llano* are synonymous terms describing large and expansive flat, featureless tracts of
seemingly never-ending grasslands. For proof that the terrains are almost mirror images
of each other, at least according to the authors of frontier literature, it is only necessary to
read the descriptions of each in Cooper’s *The Prairie* and Sarmiento’s *Facundo*:

From the summits of the swells, the eye became fatigued with the
sameness and chilling dreariness of the landscape. The earth was not
unlike the ocean, when its restless waters are heaving heavily, after the
agitation and fury of the tempest have begun to lessen. There was the same
waving and regular surface, the same absence of foreign objects, and the same boundless extent to the view. Indeed so very striking was the resemblance between the water and the land, that, however much the geologist might sneer at so simple a theory, it would have been difficult for a poet not to have felt that the formation of the one had been produced by the subsiding dominion of the other. Here and there a tall tree rose out of the bottoms, stretching its naked branches abroad, like some solitary vessel; and, to strengthen the delusion, far in the distance, appeared two or three rounded thickets, looming in the misty horizon like islands resting on the waters. (Cooper 13)

Allí la inmensidad por todas partes: inmensa la llanura, inmensos los bosques, inmensos los ríos, el horizonte siempre incierto, siempre confundiéndose con la tierra, entre celajes y vapores tenues, que no dejan, en la lejana perspectiva, señalar el punto en que el mundo acaba y principia el cielo…. Al sur triunfa la Pampa, y ostenta su lisa y velluda frente, infinita, sin límite conocido, sin accidente notable: es la imagen del mar en la tierra. (Sarmiento 56-7)

Immensity is the universal characteristic of the country: the plains, the woods, the rivers, are all immense; and the horizon is always undefined, always lost in a haze and delicate vapors which forbid the eye to mark the point in the distant perspective, where the land ends and the sky begins…. In the south, the victory remains with the plain, which displays its smooth,
velvet-like surface unbounded and unbroken. It is the image of the sea upon the land. (Mann 9-11)

An interesting twist to this description was written in Güiraldes’s *Don Segundo Sombra*. The young protagonist had never seen the ocean but through his journeys on various cattle drives had become extremely familiar with the pampas. When his first view of the ocean came in sight he compared the ocean to the pampa: “De pronto, una franja azul entre las pendientes de dos médanos. Y repechamos la última cresta. De abajo para arriba, surgía algo así como un doble cielo, más oscuro, que vino a asentarse en espuma blanca a poca distancia de donde estábamos. Llegaba tan alto aquella pampa azul y lisa que no podía convencerme de que fuera agua” (“Suddenly there was a fringe of blue between the slopes of sand; we came over the last rise. From below to on high rose something like a double sky, but darker and ending, not far from where we stood, in a spume of white foam. It was a smooth blue pampa that rose so high that I could not believe it was water”; 205; De Onís 119).

The terms employed in this work will be limited to “pampa,” to describe the grasslands in Argentina and Uruguay, and “prairie” to describe them in North America as a way of fixing the location. Originally, “prairie” was a French word taken from the Latin *pratum*, meaning “meadow,” which implies a much smaller tract of grassland usually surrounded by trees or mountains, and thus not featureless. The Spanish word *prado* continues to carry this connotation as it is used in Spain and often signifies “a public park and promenade.” The word “prairie” existed in Middle English as *prayere* with the meaning of “meadow.” However, the English word and its meaning were lost but later “re-borrowed” to describe the North American plains. The word “pampa” is a direct
borrowing from Quechua, a term used to describe the immense plains of South America (Harper).

Much has been written about the mesmerizing and hypnotic effects of the pampas upon the individual crossing them. In my opening anecdote I alluded to them as a type of portal into a past civilization where a distinct and fixed placement in time becomes an unstable continuum. Jorge Luis Borges went even further in his short story, “El sur,” in which the pampa, in the end, transported the dying protagonist, Dahlman, into an alternate universe in which he could chose the manner of his own death. In describing the pampas, Borges suggests a passage through time and space: “Nadie ignora que el Sur empieza del otro lado de Rivadavia. Dahlman solía repetir que ello no es una convención y que quien atravesie esa calle entra en un mundo más antiguo y más firme” (“Everyone knows that the South begins on the other side of Avenida Rivadavia. Dahlman had often said that that was no mere saying, that by crossing Rivadavia one entered an older and more stable world”; 209; Hurley 176). As the train continues into the empty spaces Borges conjures a total feeling of displacement in the reader, much as, I imagine, an astronaut would feel as he leaves the confines of the Earth’s gravitational pull. “Todo era vasto, pero al mismo tiempo era íntimo y, de alguna manera, secreto. En el campo desaforado, a veces no había otra cosa que un toro. La soledad era perfecta y tal vez hostil, y Dahlman pudo sospechar que viajaba al pasado y no sólo al sur” (All was vast, but at the same time intimate and somehow secret. In all the immense countryside, there would sometimes be nothing but a bull. The solitude was perfect, if perhaps hostile and Dahlman almost suspected that he was traveling not only into the South but into the past”; 211; Hurley 177).
Martínez Estrada wrote of these desolate spaces: “The pampa is an illusion: it is the land of disordered adventures in the fantasy of a shallow man. Everything glides ceaselessly by, animated by an illusory motion in which nothing changes except the center of this mighty circumference. Here the coarse man discovers new beginnings; the cultivated man finds his end” (7). Even Güiraldes makes reference to the effect of the never-ending grasslands upon the psyche of the individual that traverses them: “En la pampa las impresiones son rápidas, espasmódicas, para luego borrarse en la amplitude del ambiente, sin dejar huella…. Animales y gente se movían como captados por una idea fija; caminar, caminar, caminar” (“Impressions are swift on the pampas, disjointed, vanishing with our tracks into the enormous present…. Animals and men were possessed by one fixed idea: continual movement”; 128; De Onís 55).

This idea of continual movement had different directions between the two hemispheres, and perhaps that is by nature’s design. Whirlpools rotate counter-clockwise in the north and clockwise in the south; in the North the cold wind is that coming from the north while the cold wind in the South blows from the south. Therefore, it should not be surprising that time on the pampa would appear to move backward while in the north it marches toward the future. The difference, however, is not of a paranormal nature and deals more with the political progress of the nations. While Argentina made little progress into the pampa, the United States defined its future in a continent wide expansion with the idea that its future laid beyond the prairie, culminating in great and modern metropolises of millions of inhabitants each (New York City, Los Angeles, and Dallas) on either side of the Great Desert. The great metropolis of Argentina, Buenos Aires, is the only major city of such scale therein and it stops abruptly at the grasslands.
It is as if time stood still upon the pampas with little progress made since Argentina’s colonial era. Small villages can still be found that draw water from wells that have been drilled into the earth, and as for centralized power companies to provide electricity to the inhabitants, some are still lacking. The same cannot be said for the Great Plains of the United States. Where there is a town, modern conveniences abound. For this reason one does not get the feeling of displacement within the space-time continuum while driving across Kansas as one does while gliding on wheels made of steel through an ocean of grass into the Argentine and Uruguayan hinterlands, even though the terrains are very similar. This is not to imply that roads do not exist in the pampa of today. But there are few main well-paved highways and passenger trains are still a favorite means of commuting between the cities. Before settlements had encroached into the prairies Mark Twain traveled by stage coach across the expansive region between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains and had a similar feeling of displacement: “It was another glad awakening to fresh breezes, vast expanses of level greensward, bright sunlight, an impressive solitude utterly without visible human beings or human habitations, and an atmosphere of such amazing magnifying properties that trees that seemed close at hand were more than three miles away” (29).

These “trees that seemed close at hand” but that were, in reality, distant underscored the fast pace in which the United States was moving into the future and civilizing the plains. The theme of continual progress was a common element in the foundational literature of the United States while the foundational texts of Argentina expressed a certain amount of trepidation in expanding ‘civilization’ beyond the borders of its major metropolises.
CHAPTER II

THE IMAGINARY CONTRACT OF THE FRONTIER IN THE LITERATURE OF ARGENTINA AND THE UNITED STATES

A nation’s foundational texts are so named due to their direct influence on the direction of the culture of that nation and the self-image that its citizens project upon themselves (Laguardia and Chevigny 10-21). These texts cause the reader to wax nostalgic, to imagine themselves in the construct that the author has built, and, to a great extent, rewrite actual history by placing its events into a romantic context which causes the reader to pine for “the good old days.” In the United States we miss the myth that is the West. “We linger over the myth,” wrote Robert Parker (v).

We reimagine it; live out lives by its standards; aspire to be of that place and people; form policy, love and die by the myth. It is the myth of America, and it is embodied, almost always, in a man with a gun…. It was Wister, and the success of The Virginian, that established the man with a gun as a cowboy. And it is the cowboy, the man with a gun, in all his manifestations, who has lingered longest and deepest in the American imagination…. The American Western, and hence, perhaps, the American soul (if there is such a thing), might well be different had Owen Wister not written The Virginian. (v-vii)

The Virginian has often been called “the first Western novel” by a number of literary critics. However, I argue that these critics are too simplistic in assigning their criteria to the genre by overlooking another foundational United States’ text, James Fenimore Cooper’s The Prairie, which predates The Virginian by 75 years. In The
Prairie and its companion volumes that make up the novels that have become known as The Leatherstocking Tales, Cooper had already established the nationalistic themes and character types that would give rise to the cowboy novel: an independent spirit, the gun as a valuable tool for both taking life and sustaining life, a respect and reverence for nature, freedom of expression, national expansion, and land ownership. Mark Twain picked up on these same themes - thirty years prior to the publication of Wister’s novel – in his account of a transcontinental trip from St. Louis to San Francisco at the commencement of the United States’ Civil War in Roughing It. Writing as a satirical journalist he often had flare-ups of romantic illusions but quickly came back to his own miserable reality. Nevertheless, what he wrote, Harriet Smith informs us, “played a major role in shaping the myth of the ‘Wild West,’ especially as perpetuated in countless novels, films, and television programs. No examination of American popular culture would be complete without Mark Twain’s imaginative reminiscence of what it was like to be ‘on the ground in person’” (xxvii).

Likewise, in Facundo, Sarmiento’s depiction of the gaucho helped to establish the character as a source of national pride and affection, contrary to what I believe was his intention. Sarmiento, throughout his work, paid cursory lip-service to some of the admirable traits that he found in the gaucho, while in other places, he could not control his disdain for the gaucho culture or the ‘type’ as a whole. After disparaging the gaucho and stating unequivocally that the gaucho lacks a “natural morality,” Sarmiento appeared to want to soften the blow to the sensitivity of his readers who may have been sympathetic to the gaucho by offering faux praise: “Llámamle el gaucho malo, sin que este epíteto le desfavorezca del todo. La justicia lo persigue desde muchos años; su
nombre es temido, pronunciado en voz baja, sin odio y casi con respeto” (The name *gaucho outlaw* is not applied to him wholly as an uncomplimentary epithet. The law has been for many years in pursuit of him. His name is dreaded – spoken under the breath, but not in hate, and almost respectfully”; 88; Mann 41). He then returns to derogatory comments. According to Ilan Stavans, Sarmiento attempted to turn the gaucho into a relic or “an artifact” that was “alien, exotic, and eradicable” (xviii). While the gaucho of Sarmiento’s era was eventually eradicated through Argentine governmental policies, his heritage lived on in the Argentine imagination. Even Sarmiento concedes, “el espíritu de la pampa está allí en todos los corazones; pues, si solevantáis un poco las solapas del frac con que el argentino se disfraza, hallaréis siempre el gaucho, más o menos civilizado, pero siempre el gaucho” (“the spirit of the pampa is there in every heart, for if the lapels of the frock coat, in which the Argentine disguises himself, are raised a bit, one will always discover the gaucho, more or less civilized, but a gaucho nonetheless”; 246; my translation).

A contemporary of Sarmiento’s, Esteban Echeverría, had a split view of the gaucho. On one hand he depicted the gaucho and his *china* (wife) as caring, humane and courageous in *La cautiva*, while on the other hand, those *outlaw gauchos* that were aligned with the dictator Rosas were depicted as blood-thirsty savages in *El matadero*. Whereas Sarmiento appears to depict all gauchos as ‘outlaws,’ Echeverría takes pains to separate the outlaw from the rest of those who dwell on the pampa. José Hernández, however, characterizes the gaucho and *campesino* as misunderstood victims of the Sarmiento administration in *Martín Fierro*, the work that is probably most responsible for putting the myth of the gaucho foremost in the national consciousness of the Argentine
citizenry. Ricardo Güiraldes’s novel, *Don Segundo Sombra*, followed-up on the themes that were touched on in *Martín Fierro* (independence, manhood, and equal justice under the law).

An intriguing aspect of the frontier literature of the United States and Argentina is that, at first glance, the literatures of the two countries appear to mirror one another. They are both set in a period of nation building with personalities that possess many of the same traits. However, a deep contrast exists in the common themes that are employed, especially as they relate to the treatment and disposition of nature, the problems and resolutions of race, and the political systems that grew out of nations settled by two religious traditions distinctly opposed to one another in doctrine and dogma: Catholicism and Protestantism. These themes, as well as others, fomented in the authors’ psyches, found their way into each country’s legislative process as each sought resolutions to problems arising therefrom, turning the imagined into the reality of how the nations eventually saw themselves.

Donald A. Ringe, in his “Introduction” to the Penguin Classics’ 1988 edition of *The Pioneers*, wrote:

In 1823, Americans were deeply concerned with developing a distinctively American literature. It was generally thought that it should depict the realities of American experience, and novelists like Cooper and poets like William Cullen Bryant naturally sought their subjects in the world about them. But that world was, in their view, instinct and meaning. Hence, if the writer truly depicted the world as it was – not literally but in its
fundamental nature – he could not fail to discern in it and communicate to his readers significant national themes. (ix)

The same can be said of Latin American authors. As these writers looked at “the world about them” and saw the national drama playing-out before their eyes they took pen to paper, casting fictional characters into the world as they saw it. This, in turn, forced the reading public to take notice of the injustices about them, and created a populist sentiment that the government could not ignore.

In this thesis I distinguish three eras in the development of frontier literature: the formative era (1820-1860) when the frontier was being pushed from the Atlantic regions of both the United States and Argentina into the interior of the country; the established era (1860-1890) which brought the heydays of cattle drives and wandering cowboys and gauchos looking for work onto the big cattle ranches; and the twilight era (1890-1930) marking the end of the traditional cowboy, gaucho and frontiersman. Likewise, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, taking a cue from James Fenimore Cooper’s *Home as Found*, enumerated three “principle episodes or chapters” in the development of the “masterplot” found in frontier literature: discovery (“person comes upon place”), foundation (“place becomes property”), and estrangement (“person falls away from place”). Peréz Firmat categorizes these steps in the overall plot as “chapters” in an “elliptical narrative” that deals with two principle characters or “actors – person and place -” that illustrate man’s relationship to the land (6). The eras that I have chosen deal more with the attitudes prevalent in society during the years attributed to them, yet each work written within these eras follows the “masterplot” outlined by Peréz Firmat.
The texts that I have chosen to represent the chronological timetable as given above are as follows: for the formative era I chose *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841) all by James Fenimore Cooper and with the same protagonist, Natty Bumppo. This series of novels would come to be known as *The Leather-stocking Tales*, foundational texts of the United States. The Argentine texts employed for the same era are Esteban Echeverría’s *La cautiva* (1837) and *El matadero* (1839), along with Domingo F. Sarmiento’s *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (1845). For the middle era of frontier literature I chose Mark Twain’s *Roughing It* (1872) and *El gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872) along with its sequel *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* (1879) by José Hernández. Finally, for the twilight era I rely on the novels *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926) by Ricardo Güiraldes and Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* (1902). These texts clearly show the progression of the national themes in the countries that they respectively represent.

James Fenimore Cooper was clearly the precursor of all of these authors, both in the United States and in Argentina. Alice Gleason, in a publishers note to the 2007 Dover edition of *The Deerslayer* confirms this: “the *Leather-stocking Saga*, was sufficiently original to initiate a new genre, the ‘frontier novel,’ which evolved into what we call the western. Natty Bumppo is almost surely the prototype for Billy Budd, Huck Finn, Davy Crockett and hundreds of cowboy heroes” (iv). It was also evident that the Argentine generation of 1837, which included both Sarmiento and Echeverría, was also heavily influenced by Cooper’s writings, both in his ability to make nature a main character in his novels and in his formulaic narrative of life in the borderlands between civilization and barbarism (Sarmiento 76). Ricardo Güiraldes’s story-telling formula appears, in many
respects, to mirror the formula for frontier literature that Cooper employed. He nicely summed up this formula, which does nothing more than mimic real life, in the words of his protagonist: “No hay caminos sin repechos, no hay suerte sin desgracias” (“There’s no road without a turn, no destiny without tears”; 263; De Onís 170). Sarmiento admitted to Cooper’s influence in his own representation of the gaucho in *Facundo* when he asserted, “no es otra la razón de hallar en Fenimore Cooper descripciones de usos y costumbres que parecen plagiadas de la Pampa” (“This explains our finding in Cooper’s works accounts of practices and customs which seem plagiarized from the pampas”; 77; Mann 30). Cooper could well be called the father of all the frontier literature of the Western Hemisphere.

**The Authors of Frontier Literature and How They Shaped the Development of Their Respective Countries**

As a first point of consideration, in the highly stereotypical portrayal of the characters in frontier literature, the reader needs to be aware of the tendency to romanticize “the type” by educated authors, who had little or no contact with the people they were portraying. Their sole desire was to tell a good story in the midst of the national drama being played out in the countries’ capitals and the effect it had on its citizens in the interior. These authors commonly used their accounts to express a political or social commentary - as was the case with *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* – which often turned into a diatribe against the Argentine dictator Rosas - and *The Virginian*, which extolled the virtues of the western United States and the administration of Theodore Roosevelt while furthering the conception that Frederick Jackson Turner had of the West. But for the most part these educated, city dwelling authors romanticized the
frontier and re-imagined it into what would become an anachronistic and perceived historical reality.

When James Fenimore Cooper wrote *The Prairie* he had never seen it; neither had Domingo F. Sarmiento ever seen the Pampa before writing *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (Sherman Vivian 806). José Hernández’s and Ricardo Güiraldes’s exposure to Gaucho culture were those of outsiders. Even Owen Wister and Zane Grey had Ivy League educations. Wister “was of the highest educated, the most aristocratic background it was possible for America to produce at the end of the nineteenth century” wrote Max Evans (374). A notable exception was the life of Louis L’Amour who, during the twentieth century, was the most prolific and probably the most authentic writer of frontier fiction in the United States. L’Amour, grew up never having a formal “school-room” education; but, nevertheless, he acquired an insatiable appetite for the history of the frontier. His mother had training as a school teacher, teaching him to read and write. L’Amour never attended an institution of higher learning. He grew up with the characters that he portrayed in his novels and short stories, worked in the mines of Arizona and Nevada, worked on ranches, had a stint on the boxing circuit, and for a while lived life as a hobo. Yet all of these authors, including L’Amour, contributed to the romanticized, stereotyped individuals that we came to know as the gaucho, the cowboy, and the frontiersman.

Donald A. Ringe, in an article published in the journal, *American Literature*, wrote, “To understand these themes, however, one must read the romances in the spirit in which they were written and seek in the central actions of the books the poetic truth which they were designed to express” (357). Doris Sommer, in her comparative work,
*Foundational Fictions*, concurs: “All U.S. fiction of the nineteenth century can be called some variety of romance” (26). I would argue that the same is true of the gaucho literature of Argentina and Uruguay, which had many of the same themes in common. The themes in all frontier literature often pitted the civilized against the barbarian, the educated against the ignorant, the rich against the poor, the law against the lawless, the government against a disadvantaged populace, and in many instances, men against women. These were the themes, the challenges and subsequent attempts at resolutions that gave birth to the nations as we know them today. In another place in her work Sommer states, “In the United States, it has been argued, the country and the novel practically gave birth to each other. And the same can be said of the South, as long as we take consolidation rather than emancipation to be the real moment of birth in both Americas” (12). These romances, in the form of frontier literature, planted in the minds of the readers idealistic visions of what their respective nations were then and what they would become (romantic visions that Benedict Anderson termed “imaginary communities”). These “idealistic visions” transformed the actual reality of the countries into ideals, perceived by the citizenry of the nations to be the truth. Anderson contended that nations imagine themselves “largely through the medium of a sacred language and written script” (20). In contemplating the importance that a written language plays in the formation of a nation’s self-identity he writes:

> Why this transformation should be so important for the birth of the imagined community of the nation can best be seen if we consider the basic structure of two forms of imagining which first flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper. For these forms
provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation. (30)

Imagination took root in words, flowing from the mind’s speculative eye through anxious pens and spilling onto the eternal papers of authors far removed from the sources that they were describing, setting both the western United States and the pampas of Argentina in a mythical landscape that, in turn, became part of the imagination of those venturing into the wild regions, slowly transforming what was imagined into a perceived reality. The Native American writer, N. Scott Momady, in an interview conducted for Ken Burn’s award winning documentary film, *The West*, said of the western United States:

It is a dream. It is what people who have come here from the beginning of time have dreamed. It’s a dream landscape. To the Native American it’s full of sacred realities. Powerful things! It’s a landscape that has to be seen to be believed; and I say on occasion, it may have to be believed in order to be seen…. Always when people came into this landscape, we call the West; they brought with them a necessity to imagine it. One of the reasons for this, I think, is simply the vastness. When one looks at the Grand Canyon, for example, it’s endlessly mysterious. You feel the silence coming up and enveloping you and you know that there are places there where no one has ever been.

This romanticized, contemporary view of the United States’ West lies in stark contrast to the view of the pampa regions, by modern Argentine thinkers, which are portrayed as dismal and lonely places, more akin to Dante’s second circle of Hell than a
place that engenders inspiration or dreamscapes, with a wind that blows away any seeds of camaraderie or anything unnatural to its environs (Martínez Estrada 145). Thus, in this region, what man calls “progress” is nothing more than a far away and naïve pipedream. “All that dominion of nature,” wrote Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, “enclosures in which land defends its intact minerals, flora, and fauna, are the boundaries where the son of the plains [the Native American] was cast out and where he will be extinguished” (149).

The difference between these two opposing views of a very similar topography, I believe, is owed to the very early existence of a vigorous free press in the United States that could squelch the dissenting voices against expansionist sentiment emanating from the halls of congress. In the end it was this power of the press that won the hearts and imaginations of its citizens and sent them in droves into the West, and, at last, forced the legislators in Washington D.C. to capitulate to the demands for assistance by the settlers. In Argentina the press was not as strong and independent. The government had a much stronger grip on the published word, sending many with opposing views into exile – as Rosas did to Sarmiento and as Sarmiento later did to Hernández. According to Merle Simmons: “Donde hay una prensa fuerte y vigorosa, hay civilización; donde no hay prensa o donde la prensa es débil o está cohibida, no existe civilización” (“Where there is a strong and vigorous press, there is civilization; where there is no press or where the press is weak or is inhibited, civilization does not exist”; 73). So it was that when some began voicing opinions about expansion into the pampas it was seen as an affront to the strict control of Spain. By discouraging immigration away from the seaports and into the interior, Spain could exercise more control over its subjects and more easily squelch any dissenting sentiments. As a result, many pueblos of the pampas, even to this day, do not
enjoy the comforts and conveniences that are had in the prairie towns of the United States
due to the lack of support from Buenos Aires.

In the United States, Frederick Jackson Turner, in a speech in 1914, delineated the
appeal of United States’ citizens going beyond the frontier and into the wilderness in the
following terms:

The appeal of the undiscovered is strong in America. For three centuries
the fundamental process in its history was the westward movement, the
discovery and occupation of the vast free spaces of the continent…. The
free land and the natural resources seemed practically inexhaustible. Nor
were they aware of the fact that their most fundamental traits, their
institutions, even their ideals were shaped by this interaction between the
wilderness and themselves. (245)

In this speech Turner intimates that it was the expansionist sentiment of the
citizens, the boosterism of the press, and the independence of the populace that fostered
the ideals of the United States’ brand of democracy, making it a success to be envied
throughout the world. It was the beginning of the United States’ attitude of
exceptionalism. After all, it was these people that first conquered and civilized an entire
continent “from sea to shining sea.” It was a feat that Domingo F. Sarmiento attempted to
emulate in Argentina, but in which he failed. Writing in Facundo: civilización y barbarie
he blamed the center of governmental and economic power in Buenos Aires:

La barbarie y la violencia bajaron a Buenos Aires más allá del nivel de las
provincias. No hay que quejarse de Buenos Aires, que es grande y lo será
más, porque así le cupo en suerte. Debióramos quejarnos antes de la
Providencia, y pedirle que rectifique la configuración de la tierra. No siendo esto posible, demos por bien hecho lo que de mano de Maestro está hecho. Quejémonos de la ignorancia de este poder brutal que esteriliza para sí y para las provincias los dones que natura prodigó al pueblo que extravía. Buenos Aires, en lugar de mandar ahora luces, riqueza y prosperidad al interior, mándale sólo cadenas, hordas exterminadores y tiranuelos subalternos. ¡También se venga del mal que las provincias le hicieron con prepararle a Rosas! (59-60)

Barbarism and violence have sunk Buenos Ayres below the level of the provinces. We ought not to complain of Buenos Ayres that she is great and will be greater, for this is her destiny. This would be to complain of Providence and call upon it to alter physical outlines. This being impossible, let us accept as well done what has been done by the Master’s hand. Let us rather blame the ignorance of that brutal power which makes the gifts lavished by Nature upon an erring people of no avail for itself or for the provinces. Buenos Ayres, instead of sending to the interior, light, wealth, and prosperity, sends only chains, exterminating hordes, and petty subaltern tyrants. She, too, takes her revenge for the evil inflicted upon her by the provinces when they prepared for her a Rosas! (Mann 13)

Sarmiento believed that the pampa was topographically situated in such a manner as to provide a fertile field, ripe for germination, to the sowing and reaping of despots and tyrants; “las llanuras preparaban las vías al despotismo” (the “plains prepare the way for despotism”; 61; Mann 14) and he erected Rosas, who exploited and used the gaucho in
order to further his ruthless rule, as a model for his thesis in order to advance the argument for the civilization of the plains. However, in the mind of José Hernández, Sarmiento, as President of Argentina, was not much better than Rosas. The difference was that Rosas indoctrinated the gaucho toward his goals, establishing “a policy of protectionism in Argentina,” and “accentuated the centralized role that Buenos Aires played in national politics,” but, his success “came at the expense of freedom, democracy, and human rights” (Stavans xxiii-iv). On the other hand, Sarmiento “became known as an advocate of intellectual clarity and sophistication” (xxiv), secretly wishing for the gaucho’s annihilation but, “as a socialist” (according to Stavans) and thinking of his future legacy, capitulated to his precarious survival by making him a serf to rich land barons and strongly supporting the city over the country, “as a locus of reason and morality” (xviii). Hernández, writing from his refuge in Brazil, used his epic poem *Martín Fierro*, now considered the foremost foundational fiction of Argentina, as a platform in order to offer a rebuke of Sarmiento’s policies concerning the gaucho.

Estaba el gaucho en su pago
con toda siguridá;
pero aura… ¡barbaridá!
la cosa anda tan fruncida,
que gasta el pobre la vida
en juir de la autoridá. (253-58)

A gaucho’d live in his home country
as safe as anything,
but now – it’s a crime!
things have got to be so twisted
that a poor man wears out his life
running from the authorities. (Ward 253-58)

This poetic work, written in the dialect and manner of the gaucho, was an instant success in Argentina, bringing the plight of the gaucho to the forefront of Argentine consciousness and establishing an enduring national emblem and literature. Hernández wrote, at the end of his La vuelta de Martín Fierro: “me tendrán en su memoria / para siempre mis paisanos” (“my countrymen will keep me / forever in their memories”; 2.4881-82; Ward 2.4881-82). With the publication of Martín Fierro, the plight of the gaucho and the subsequent adoption of this work as a foundational text of Argentina and Uruguay, this statement became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Cowboy and Gaucho Poetry

Frontier poetry, in both English and Spanish, although most often penned by the educated class, is probably the most authentic of all frontier literature inasmuch as the structure, verse, and often the very words used were handed down in an oral tradition from the inhabitants of the frontier who could neither read nor write, and, in the case of written Gaucho Poetry, the structure was improved upon in syllabic structure in order to standardize the medium in conformity with the, already established, norms utilized in Spanish poetry such as: eight syllable meters, six and ten line stanzas, and couplets. In the published study of Gaucho poetry, El Martín Fierro, by Jorge Luis Borges and Margarita Guerrero, a clear distinction is made between la poesía gauchesca (poetry written in the gaucho dialect by educated individuals) and the poetry invented originally by the gaucho, often at a moment’s notice and as the occasion called for, handed down in the oral
tradition (13). One way this tradition was practiced is characterized in a folkloric dance, *el prado*, described by Güiraldes in *Don Segundo Sombra*: “Una muchacha cantó. Un hombre tenía que contestar con una relación, porque era de uso” (One of the girls sang. A man had to improvise an answer in rhymed couplets, for that’s the custom”; 158; De Onís 80). Detailing the customs of the gauchos was important to Ricardo Güiraldes and *Don Segundo Sombra*, after all, “is an affirmation of faith in the positive values of the foundations, the historic and social origins of Argentina…. Its interest lies in what is being lived, not in what the author narrates” (De Onís 220).

Cowboy poetry, on the other hand, comes to us in written form most often rough and non-structured except in simple rhyming schemes. Hal Cannon, in his introduction to the anthology, *Cowboy Poetry: a Gathering*, asserts, “At the heart of cowboy poetry is the memorized performance of traditional poems. These recitations are not monotone bastards of well-known cowboy songs, but are based instead on an oral tradition of performance in both the old and new West.” In the written form, every effort to mimic the dialect of the individual speaking is painstakingly thought out. In the United States the master of dialectical writing was Mark Twain; before he came on the scene, in 1872, with his novel *Roughing It*, a literary aficionado would be hard pressed to find an author that mimicked the authentic voice of the people he characterized – Cooper attempted it but was not consistent in its application. Quoting Charles Dudley Warner, Harriet Elinor Smith defended Twain’s use of slang, stating that the life in the mining camps “would be entirely imperfect if it had been left out” (xxvii). In capturing Gaucho speech the first to use this type of dialectical spelling was the Uruguayan poet, Bartolomé Hidalgo, and it must be argued that without the use of the dialectic gaucho literature would have fallen
short of the authenticity of the subject being portrayed. In El Martín Fierro, Jorge Luis Borges explained the importance of utilizing an authentic voice: “En mi corta experiencia de narrador he comprobado que saber quién es, que descubrir una entonación, una voz, una sintaxis peculiar, es haber descubierto un destino” (“In my short experience as a narrator I have demonstrated that to know who it is, that to discover an intonation, a voice, a peculiar syntax, is to have discovered a destiny”; 17).

It is the weaving together of the melodious sounds of a campfire and a natural ambience, the careful consideration of every word used in the recitation of the poem, and even the dialect of the performer that makes frontier poetry such an enduring and authentic medium of expression. Hal Cannon explained how all of those elements combine to enthrall the listener:

The poet is always in search of the best language, the most perfect language, for his subject matter and for his personal poetic intent. In the case of cowboy poetry this means a language which reflects light and smell and open places, hard times and soft evenings; a language coded with insider’s words, special phrases and meanings, and shared values (Intro).

These “insider’s words” are typically words and phrases peculiar to the job that the cowboy performs; it is a special jargon that ranges from a horse’s characteristics to mild pejoratives for the inexperienced plainsman, and often employing bad transliterations of Spanish words. A novice on the plains, upon hearing the following verse by an anonymous poet, would have a difficult time understanding what it was that the cowboy poet was saying:
But take your dallywelters
According to California law.
And you’ll never see your Sam Stack tree
Go driftin’ down the draw. (“Windy Bill” 45-48)

However, once the uninitiated understands that a “dallywelter” is a transliteration of the Spanish *dale vuelta* (turn around) and that a Sam Stack tree is an old style saddle named for its maker, the gist of the verse becomes much clearer.

It is this authentic voice, in both the frontier literatures of the United States and Argentina, combined with carefully crafted political commentary that reflected published newspaper accounts of the day and a mysterious, other-worldly landscape that brought out the dreamer in the readers of frontier literature, allowing the readers to adopt the visions of the artist, who painted his literary canvas with the flowery verse and prose of a master. Most novels of the nineteenth century were a mixture of illusion, fact, and fantasy that colored the readers’ perceptions of the whole reality. These readers would pass the stories as facts down to their children who in turn would pass them to their children. Before long the legends and attitudes of these authors became a perceived reality and even, until recently, taught as historical truth in the educational systems of the countries. Perhaps this is because the “imagined” reality was easier and more pleasant than the actual history.
CHAPTER III

PSYCHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPES AND COMPLEXES IN THE VIEW OF NATURE IN THE FRONTIER LITERATURE OF THE UNITED STATES AND ARGENTINA

Domingo F. Sarmiento contended, “Modificaciones análogas del suelo traen análogas costumbres, recursos y expedientes” ("Analogies in the soil bring with them analogous customs, resources, and expedients"); 77; Mann 30). To bolster the argument, he listed a series of parallel technologies employed in the writings of James Fenimore Cooper against the forces of nature, “expedients” naturally used in both the prairie and the pampa: the use of bow and arrow by the native inhabitants, the damming up of a brook in order to recover the trail left in a stream by of a band of fleeing Indians, setting a backfire as a prevention against being consumed by the flames of a prairie conflagration, the making of an animal skin raft in order to cross a raging river in relative safety, and even the manner of roasting a buffalo hump in the desert. Sarmiento contended that these are the same practices that the frontiersmen of Argentina would have employed (77). John Donahue, however, doesn’t find Sarmiento’s comparisons to be very compelling: “Naturally, people with parallel customs have produced similar bodies of literature,” he wrote, “but the mythic underpinnings of that literature are not necessarily the same” (166). Gari LaGuardia and Bell Gale Chevigny also considered Sarmiento’s argument to be, on its surface, too simplistic, agreeing with Donahue that authors in the United States and Latin America, “particularly in the nineteenth century, often begin their contemplation of nature from comparable ideological positions.” They, nevertheless, provide supporting statements that these same writers “often end up in different conceptual spaces.” The composers of United States’ literature, they write, “confront
nature… as a space destined to fuse with the American self as it inevitably actualizes its predestined dreams” by making themselves one with the environment around them. Therefore, they view nature as “a presence that is actualized by, even as it actualizes, the self that contemplates it”. On the other hand, Argentine authors diverge from the romanticist’s view and “shy away from an unmediated encounter. American nature, whether hated or loved, dominant or dominating, is always constituted at a distance from the self” (10).

The stark differences in the attitudes toward nature, between the United States and Latin America, can be traced back to the “mythic underpinnings” of the people that initially settled the wilderness areas of their respective domains. To understand these mythic elements it will be necessary to penetrate into the psychological realms, to interpret the archetypes conjured from the unconscious of these individuals, to examine examples from the texts of the various authors of frontier literature that serve as a basis of this work. According to Carl Jung every human being is born with a collective unconscious that is identical in every individual ever born; the archetype breaks forth from this unconscious. He defines the archetype as “essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived and it takes its color from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear.” The individual consciousness colors it in accordance with “its relations with myth, esoteric teachings, and fairytale,” which in turn are handed down from our progenitors and those in whose charge we were placed during our formative years of life in the way of tradition; thus, the archetype is a paradigm of a universal order that is altered by one’s own colored perceptions (Archetypes 5).
A person’s thoughts are a conglomeration of all those around him, as well as those from his past, including ancestors long since deceased; therefore, it is no wonder that those of the North American continent, who were mostly of English and Germanic stock, had an almost divine respect for nature, religiously revered it and, by so doing, had a measure of control over it, utilizing this control for both good and bad. Their ancestors, the earth-worshipping druids, derived their myths and superstitions from a belief that certain powerful witches and wizards within their ranks had the capability to direct the forces of nature. After the advent of the spread of Christianity into the British and Germanic realms, which promulgated the old Mosaic dictum, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Exod. 22.18), adverse weather patterns were attributed directly to sorcery. Even though the Catholic Church scoffed at the idea that nature could be controlled by humans, witches or not, at the Council of Brega in 563, Wolfgang Behringer writes that the belief in weather malevolence was so strong, as a carry-over from pagan antiquity, that “virtually all Germanic law codes professed a belief in weather-magic” and “contained proscriptions against it” (4). Emily Oster points out a reversal of the Church’s stand in 1484 by Pope Innocent VIII in his Papal Bull, the Malleus Malleficarum: “This book was instrumental in codifying the existing beliefs about witches, their powers and actions. It gave specific guidelines about how suspected witches should be ‘questioned’ until they confessed of their crimes. In addition, it calls our attention to the extant beliefs about witchcraft, weather making and crop destruction at this time” (217).

In large part these beliefs were responsible for the persecution leveled against ‘witches’ during the “little ice age” - especially in England, France, and Germany - from the fourteenth to the end of the eighteenth centuries, who were blamed for the
deteriorating crops and bitter cold. These beliefs were passed down through generations, and reinforced in the Anglo-Saxon occupiers of the United States as they encountered sorcerers, known as Medicine Men, within the ranks of the native inhabitants of the land who called for “rain dances” during times of drought. Thus being faced with a culture that aligned more closely with the old pre-Christian belief system of their ancestors and a view that gave credence to the myths from their own past, by experiencing phenomena that their understanding of Christianity could not readily explain, the old archetypes surfaced and became dominant in the way the pioneers viewed nature. Therefore, the belief that humans could control their own fate in the hands of Mother Nature, that she was not a vindictive mother but rather a loving matriarch that allowed her children to sometimes learn hard lessons, lessened the fear that the frontiersmen had of going into the wilderness to confront the Great Mother head-on.

The Spanish, as part of the Mediterranean tradition and culture, had a much more realistic view and fear of nature, and were more often disposed to interject the whim of the gods (or God) as a means to explain nature’s phenomena. In New Science the Italian philosopher, Giambattista Vico, explains the fearful image of Nature in relation to the pagan Roman pantheon:

The first theological poets invented the first divine myth, which was the greatest myth ever invented: Jupiter, the king and father of gods and men, in the act of hurling a thunderbolt. The figure of Jupiter was so poetic – that is, popular, exciting, and instructive – that its inventors at once believed it, and they feared, revered, and worshipped Jupiter in frightful religions…. They believed that
Jupiter commanded by signs, that these signs were physical words, and that nature was Jupiter’s language. (147)

Nature was seen as the fearful language of God. It was how God admonished humans or blessed them. Throughout early Mediterranean literature the harsh realities of nature were not tamped down nor were they romanticized, but rather they were bitterly endured while being explained away by an association with divinity. This is readily observable in Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Nature was to be feared and respected, not tamed; for, according to their belief, one cannot dictate the will of God, which controlled Nature.

This, along with a firm belief in the doctrine of predestination, probably explains the often repeated and extremely common refrain, “si Dios quiere” (God willing), as a response to any question concerning future plans. In this sense, archetypal projections of nature played a significant role in the differing views held by the settlers of the two hemispheres.

No two archetypal projections of nature are strictly identical, but there are commonalities between certain projections which allow psychologists to categorize them by assigning like characteristics under a specific heading of archetypal genres. Because nuances exist in each individual projection of the archetype, minute traces of crossover characteristics appear in each grouping. Therefore, in comparing the frontier literature’s views of nature in the United States and Argentina one should not be surprised to find trace elements of one projection creeping into another. Though the frontier literature of the United States produced the romantics’ view of nature, minute instances of strict realism can be found therein (Gleason iii). Thus the reader finds “a severely conflicted Cooper” who, personally, “was predisposed to look favorably on the progress of
civilization” while, at the same time, “opposed the march of progress and expressed the counterargument in the character of Natty Bumppo” (Nevius xi). Speaking of the dismal waste and apparent uselessness of the prairie, Natty interjects the realist’s view into the romantic’s vision: “You may travel weeks, and you will see it the same. I often think the Lord has placed this barren belt of Prairie, behind the States, to warn men to what their folly may yet bring the land” (Cooper, *Prairie* 24).

In the same way flare-ups of romanticism can be discovered in the harshly realistic frontier literature of Argentina. At one point in his narrative Martín Fierro remarks, “Yo hago en el trébol mi cama / y me cubren las estrellas” (“I make my bed in the clover / and the stars cover me”; Hernández 101-2; Ward 101-2), and then later repines:

Es triste en medio del campo
gasarse noches enteras
contemplando en sus carreras
las estrellas que Dios cría,
sin tener más compañía
que su soledad y las fieras. (Hernández 1.1463-68)

It’s a sad thing to spend whole nights
out in the midst of the plain,
gazing at the stars
that God created, in their course,
without any company except
the wild beasts, and your loneliness. (Ward 1.1463-68)
Writers of frontier fiction in the United States, like the Native Americans, drew their “metaphors from the clouds, the seasons, the birds, the beasts, and the vegetable world” (Cooper, *Mohicans* 4) while the similes of Argentine authors are more apt to be based on hard experience, as in the case of the young gaucho in *Don Segundo Sombra*: “Creo que la afición de mi padrino a la soledad debía influir en mí; la cosa es que, rememorando episodios de mi andar, esas perdidas libertades en la pampa me parecían lo mejor. No importaba que el pensamiento lo tuviera medio dolorido, empapado de pesimismo, como queda empapada de sangre la matra que ha chupado el dolor de una matadura” (“My godfather’s love of solitude may have influenced me, for as I looked back on my wandering life, these deep communions with the silent pampa seemed the best of it all. It did not matter that thoughts were somewhat unhappy and soaked in gloom, the way a saddle blanket gets soaked in blood from a wound”; Güiraldes 255; De Onís 163).

These various conceptions of nature in the minds of United States’ and Argentine authors can best be explained by analyzing “The Great Mother” archetype proposed by Carl Jung.

**The Projection of the Great Mother Archetype onto Nature**

**The Mother-Complex**

Earth is our mother. We are her children. The environmentalists and naturalists have told us this from time immemorial. We hear it, and it is reinforced, in the terms “Mother Nature” and “Mother Earth.” It lies at the very base of our Judeo-Christian belief system with the early declaration by Moses that we were formed “of the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2.7) and reinforced by the Apostle Paul, claiming that we also bear the image of the earth since our first father was of the earth (1 Cor. 15.47-49), giving us a
direct genealogical line to her. She (the earth) then, by reason of our own dogma, could rationally be called our great matriarch, our Great Mother. Her elements form our makeup. The idea of the earth as mother permeates our collective psyche both consciously and unconsciously. Upon arriving on the American continent and coming face to face with a Native American culture that believed in a very literal interpretation of the same idea the immigrant, then, had the view of earth as mother confirmed to them. Frontier literature, then, would be incomplete without paying homage to the mother archetype projected upon her by its authors. This archetype is prevalent in both United States’ and Argentine literature. Wister, in *The Virginian*, wrote of the narrator’s return from the bustle of the city into a natural environment: “To leave behind all noise and mechanisms, and set out at ease, slowly, with one packhorse, into the wilderness, made me feel that the ancient earth was indeed my mother and that I had found her again after being lost among houses, customs, and restraints” (278), thus evoking images of a prodigal returning to the loving embrace and psychological security that a caring and generous mother’s home provides. On the other hand, the archetype conjured by the Argentine author of the period projects the more negative attributes of a haggish and cruel mother: “La tierra es madre de todos, / pero también da ponzoña” (“The earth is mother to us all / but she gives us poisons too”), penned Hernández (2.347-48; Ward 2.347-48).

Carl Jung describes two contrasting mother-complexes as a result of the archetype bursting out of the unconscious mind, and, by way of extension, projecting itself upon the image of Nature as mother, picking up the prejudices of the conscious as it travels to the surface of thought in the form of positive and negative attributes or personalities. Using
memories of his own mortal mother to illustrate how these attributes may appear to the observer he writes:

There was an enormous difference between my mother’s two personalities. That was why as a child I often had anxiety dreams about her. By day she was a loving mother, but at night she seemed uncanny. Then she was like one of those seers who is at the same time a strange animal, like a priestess in a bear’s cave. Archaic and ruthless; ruthless as truth and nature. (Memories 50)

Jung was able to see the whole of the persona; whereas, too often, as frail humanity, we look back at episodes or people in our lives, and sketch our memories of them in either black or white, which keeps us from placing them in their true context and getting the full picture of what they truly are. This is what the early writers of frontier literature did. For United States’ authors the earth and nature were filled with wonder, causing them to emphasize the positive attributes of Mother Nature. For Argentine authors she was an overbearing and cruel mother; thus, they concentrated on her negative attributes. Except for rare occasions, both groups of authors lost sight of the fact that “nature is not only harmonious, she is also dreadfully contradictory and chaotic” (Memories 229).

Now that we have seen how the mother-complex is projected upon the relationship of humankind to nature, it will prove beneficial to enumerate the positive and negative aspects that Jung placed upon that complex. The positive mother-complex takes the shape of
...the mother-love which is one of the most moving and unforgettable memories of our lives, the mysterious root of all growth and change; the love that means homecoming, shelter, and the long silence from which everything begins and in which everything ends. Intimately known and yet strange like Nature, lovingly tender and yet cruel like fate, joyous and untiring giver of life... the accidental carrier of that great experience which includes herself and myself and all mankind, and indeed the whole of created nature, the experience of life whose children we are. (Archetypes 92)

This is the mother-complex that invades the psyche of the English descendants of the ancient earth-worshippers - those who are the writers of United States’ frontier fiction. They seek out Mother Nature as a refuge from the storms of life, placing their characters in the embrace of her health-giving and protective arms, and in some cases, even symbolically returning to her womb in order to be reborn. When the Virginian started his new life as a married man he took his bride to meet the only mother he related to, Nature. This was a special place – a womblike enclosure in the middle of a mountain forest protected by an amniotic barrier of pure water. “Often when I have camped here,” he told his bride, “it has made me want to become the ground, become the trees, mix with the whole thing. Not know myself from it. Never unmix again” (Wister 363). In a combined mix between baptism and the marriage ceremony that hearkens back to ancient pagan rituals, man and wife chastely bathe together in the same stream at opposite ends of the enclosure, in the life giving waters and are reborn as one with each other and the earth. Albert Gelpi sees the same connection to the earth as mother in the opening chapter
of Cooper’s *The Deerslayer*. Natty and Hurry Harry “hack their way out of ‘the tangled labyrinth’ of the Great Mother’s maw or belly. The description acknowledges the awesome solemnity of the ‘eternal round’ of the Great Mother’s economy but acknowledges as well the threat to the individual snared in her dark and faceless recesses and unable to cut his way free” (85).

Cooper here seems to imply that somehow humankind, despite the constant fight for freedom and individualism, despite the displacement of the natural order with concrete and asphalt, are still tethered to the Great Mother by a symbolic umbilical cord that continues to draw those rebelling against Mother Nature back into her womb, thus never completely severing the psychological connection he has with her. For she is “primarily a generous mother endowed with curative powers for the body and soul and can even be the object of love,” wrote Donahue. He observes that in *The Virginian* nature is frequently portrayed as a “healing mother,” best illustrated by Wister himself who “had first come to Wyoming to recuperate from an illness, and when the eastern narrator is sick, his cowboy friend writes him that the best cure is a hunting trip out West” (173).

In contrast to the positive mother-complex that is projected upon nature by the authors of frontier literature in the United States, the Argentine authors of the genre appear to project upon themselves a negative mother-complex. Jung describes this complex as a “pathological phenomenon” that is “unpleasant, exacting, and anything but satisfactory partner” (sic). He continues by stating that those afflicted by this complex rebel in “every fiber” of their being “against everything that springs from natural soil” and even at their best they “will remain hostile to all that is dark, unclear, and ambiguous, and will cultivate and emphasize everything certain and clear and reasonable.” According
to Jung, however, those who project this negative mother-complex have the best
certainty to be “an outstanding success during the second half of life,” but only after
they have lived out their complex to the full and have drunk “down to the dregs.” The
bearer of this complex, Jung informs his reader, “started out with averted face, like Lot’s
wife looking back on Sodom and Gomorrah. And all the while the world and life pass by
her like a dream – an annoying source of illusions, disappointments, and irritations, all of
which are due solely to the fact that she cannot bring herself to look straight ahead for
once” (*Archetypes* 98-99).

Sarmiento lamented the backward-looking inclinations of the Argentine republic
and its people and, at least in respect to the adventurous position of sallying forth into
nature held by the colonizers of the United States, opined that the Argentine government
should look forward, instead of over its shoulder at the policies of Spain, making the vast
extent of the pampa work for them, which, he explained, could easily be done by
navigating the many rivers into the interior. Instead, he blasts the government at Buenos
Aires, for its “política estúpida y colonial” ("senseless colonial policy"), inherited from
Spain:

No fue dado a los españoles el instinto de la navegación, que poseen en
tan alto grado los sajones del norte. Otro espíritu se necesita que agite esas
arterias en que hoy se estagnan los fluidos vivificantes de una nación….
Bajo un clima benigno, señora de la navegación de cien ríos que fluyen a
sus pies, reclinada muellemente sobre un inmenso territorio, y con trece
provincias interiores que no conocen otra salida para sus productos, fuera
ya la babilonia Americana, si el espíritu de la Pampa no hubiese soplado
sobre ella, y si no ahogase en sus fuentes el tributo de riqueza que los ríos y las provincias tienen que llevarle siempre. (58-59)

The instinct of the sailor, which the Saxon colonists of the north possess in so high a degree, was not bestowed upon the Spaniard. Another spirit is needed to stir these arteries in which a nation’s life-blood now lies stagnant…. Under a benignant climate, mistress of the navigation of a hundred rivers flowing past her feet, covering a vast area, and surrounded by [thirteen] inland provinces which know no other outlet for their products, she would ere now have become the Babylon of America, if the spirit of the Pampa had not breathed upon her, and left undeveloped the rich offerings which the rivers and provinces should unceasingly bring.

(Mann 12)

After all, it was the inland rivers and tributaries that expedited the exploration and unification of the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It was the adventurous, non-timid spirit of the Mother Nature-loving English, French, Dutch and German that diluted any fears that they may have harbored in leaving civilization in order to set out into the unknown. The spirit that Sarmiento attributed to Spanish heredity made the frontiersmen of Argentina fearful of the unknown, making them more cautious and anxious about leaving the safety and security of the city. José Hernández sums this fear up nicely in *Martín Fierro* when he has his protagonist offer the observation, “porque el cardo ha de pinchar / es que nace con espina” (“the reason a thistle pricks you / is because it’s born with thorns”; 2.359-60; Ward 2.359-60). For the Argentine author of frontier literature nature is no friend to mankind. It is laden with danger. According to Hernández
one must be wary in nature, as well as in one’s dealings with man, because “nadie sabe en qué rincón / se oculta el que es su enemigo” (“you can never tell what corner / your enemy is lurking in”; 2.4599-4600). As with the young couple in Echeverría’s *La cautiva*, those who venture forth into the wilds of the pampa live in fear; the pampa becomes a nightmarish prison where the brave heroine faces hostile natives, a grassfire, a tiger, a raging river and, after all of the horrendous tortures that nature can devise for her and her mortally wounded husband, a lonely death. There is no compromise with the vindictive Mother that is Nature. For the gaucho going into the wilds

Su esperanza es el coraje,

su guardia es la precaución,

su pingo es la salvación,

y pasa uno en su desvelo

sin más amparo que el cielo

ni otro amigo que el facón.(Hernández 1.1439-1444)

Courage is his hope-

caution is his protection

his horse means safety…

and you live in watchfulness

with no help except from heaven

and no friend except your knife. (Ward 1.1439-1444)

The frontier literature of Argentina pits man against nature while the genre among authors in the United States seeks to place Mother Nature and mankind in a delicate balance and in an uneasy harmony. Donahue contrasts the differences between the
Argentina and the United States’ view of nature by explaining that in Argentina “nature
remains primarily a pictorial element, as well as a necessary element to explain human
character”:

The gaucho would not exist if nature were not constantly at work shaping
and molding him. Nature was not seen as a transcendental power, although
moments of harmony between man and nature, such as those in Guiraldes,
are to be found. We do not find for nature the love and tender feelings of
the Virginian. Guiraldes does not project onto nature a symbolic value but
remains faithful to his realistic bias, never losing sight either of the hostile
environment in which the gaucho lives or of the thin layer of varnish that
separates the civilized man from the savage. Escaping organized society is
not a rush into the warm embrace of a wise and protective mother but into
an environment that is ferocious, unforgiving, and implacable… Nature is
not a generous mother who cares for man but rather a conjunction of blind
forces …. (174)

With respect to Donahue’s assertion that “Guiraldes does not project onto nature a
symbolic value” I would have to disagree, for the “the gaucho” calls Raucho, the
protagonist’s young, cultured companion, “una criatura libre de dolores, sin verdadero
bautismo de vida” (“a child unbaptized by the waters of life and innocent suffering”; 310;
De Onis 209). What was the baptism that “the gaucho” had experienced that Raucho had
not? That of his immersion into what Donahue cites as the “blind forces” of Nature which
even “the gaucho” attributes to supernatural forces that are at play upon the house at the
edge of the crab-filled bogs. In another place “the gaucho” calls himself “un hijo natural”
(“a natural child”) and “un hijo de Dios, del campo y de uno mismo” (“a child of God, child of the pampas, child of oneself”; 303; De Onís 203). The nature described by Güiraldes was not that of a “generous mother,” but rather that of a vindictive and cruel mother. Be that as it may, “generous mothers”, as well as mothers who are domineering, produce children who, sooner or later, will attempt to cut the psychological cord that ties them to the mother. This form of natural progression, that is a type of adolescent rebellion, applies to the mother/child relationship no matter what form the mother may take. It makes no difference whether the mother is flesh, a motherland, or the Earth Mother. Naturally, each of these strains in the mother/child relationship are discussed in the frontier literature of both Argentina and the United States and each serves to point out the matriarchal role of Nature as the child leaves the mother of his youth; following the flight from the motherland of his inheritance, the child/gaucho finally pits mind, muscle and spirit against the Great Mother herself. It is a cycle that repeats itself over and over again as the child searches for an elusive true independence.

Kay Seymour House suggested that Cooper used the name Chingachgook (Great Serpent) for his Indian mentor as an analogy for this process of seeking independence. Just as a snake sheds its skin and emerges into the world anew, so does the frontiersman slough off his “old European consciousness” that binds him to hearth (mother) and home (motherland) and “after a painful struggle” with Mother Nature emerges into a “fresh, lithe, and unfettered freedom and mobility” (x). If the analogy is continued, however, a snake’s skin is shed several times in the course of its life which appears to indicate a never-ending cycle of the search for the independence that is so desperately sought, for Mother Nature does not give up her dominance over her children so easily. Albert Gelpi
reminds his readers that, “The Great Mother, whose rhythm is the round of Nature and whose sovereignty is destructive to the independent individual because the continuity of the round requires that she devour her children and absorb their lives and consciousness back into her teeming womb, season after season, generation after generation” (85). In this respect, Mark Twain tells us that he was often reminded that in Mother Nature’s domain “we were emigrants, and consequently a low and inferior sort of creatures” (119).

The pitting of oneself against Mother Nature appears to be a defining theme and a mark of true manhood in the frontier literatures of Argentina and the United States. Those who sought their refuge in the cities or in cultured civilization were looked upon as weak individuals who had no common sense. Nature had a way of honing the senses, sharpening animal instincts, and forcing man to face his own weaknesses head-on. Wister makes this point when he describes one of the ranch’s dogs: “A much-petted contact with our superior race had developed her dog intelligence above its natural level, and turned her into an unnatural, neglectful mother, who was constantly forgetting her nursery for worldly pleasures” (57). The young gaucho in Don Segundo Sombra was more to the point as he began to feel the reality of what it meant to be a gaucho, to pit oneself against nature: “Metido en el baile bailaría, visto que no había más remedio, y si el cuerpo no me daba, mi voluntad le servería de impulso. ¿No quería huir de la vida mansa para hacerme más capaz?” (“Forced into the dance, I’d dance, since there was no way out. And if my body gave in, my will would go on. I’d wanted to get away from the soft life, to become a man, hadn’t I?”; Güiraldes 109; De Onís 39). Cooper was more critical of the “soft life” and, in the voice of Natty Bumppo, decries the “waste and wickedness of the settlements and the village” that are full of “the danger of immoralities” (Prairie 370). In the same
vein the young gaucho of Güiraldes’s novel agreed: “Para mí todos los pueblos eran iguales, toda la gente más o menos de la misma laya, y los recuerdos que tenía de aquellos ambientes, presurosos e inútiles, me causaban antipatía” (“All towns seem the same to me, and all people pretty much alike, and my memory of those stuffy useless places revolted me”; 172; De Onís 92). Wister’s narrator, who was from the city, had a more subjective view of the frontiersman as contrasted to the city dweller and seemed to understand that nature dictated the terms of their uneasy alliance:

More of death it undoubtedly saw, but less of vice, than did its New York equivalents. And death is a thing much cleaner than vice. Moreover, it was by no means vice that was written upon these wild and manly faces. Even where baseness was visible, baseness was not uppermost. Daring, laughter, endurance – these were what I saw upon the countenances of the cow-boys. (Wister 24)

The giving of life as well as the taking of life is the domain of Mother Nature. Vice is the domain of humankind. That is what led Wister to opine that, “death is a thing much cleaner than vice.” This being the case, the influence of the mother, whether of flesh or nature, shapes the character and permeates the psyche of humans from cradle to grave. Mankind, having once been connected physically to the mother, never quite loosens the cords that bind him to the psychological and emotional pillars to which he is bound even though he struggles mightily and repeatedly to do so. Martin Sorbille suggested that the struggle is precipitated by man’s inability to interpret the feminine, which is nature, with exactness and this produces the anxiety of losing power over her, a power that is derived from knowledge of her. The good son wishes to please his mother
and in return wishes the mother to shower her adoration back upon him. According to Sorbille, however, sooner or later this wish becomes a futile quest as the son comes to the same conclusion as to which Sigmund Freud came: “the feminine is impossible for a man to know” (247).

**The Oedipus Complex of Men Toward Mother Nature**

In a man’s rocky relationship with nature he goes through the same steps he goes through with his biological mother as he begins the psychological separation (which he never quite achieves) from her. First he looks at the mother as a sort of deity, like the virginal mother of Christ. The son, when he first learns of the initial act of procreation, cannot see his mother participating in such an act; however, he does not share the same sentiment as regarding his father. From his early life men are seen as the aggressors. But in the role of child, before he becomes aware of sexual desires, the mother offers a place of comfort, awe, protection, and virginal goodness. This view is what some call the North American “pastoral dream” (Sommer 56). It is this sentiment that led the narrator of *The Virginian* to make the declaration, about the Virginian’s private hideaway, in the wilderness: “It belonged to no man, for it was deep in the unsurveyed and virgin wilderness; neither had he ever made his camp here with any man, not shared with any the intimate delight which the place gave him” (Wister 357). One would seldom speak of “intimate delight” in relation to the mother. That designation is more apt to apply to a lover. Cooper’s Natty Bumppo, who often referred to nature as both virgin and mother, was asked by Judith, in *The Deerslayer*, “And where is your sweetheart?” To which he replied, “She’s in the forest, Judith – hanging from the boughs of the trees, in a soft rain – in the dew on the open grass – the clouds that float about in the blue heavens – the birds
that sing in the woods – the sweet springs where I slake my thirst – and in all the other
glorious gifts that come from God's Providence” (104).

The North American “pastoral dream,” however, did not apply to Sarmiento’s
vision for Argentina. Doris Sommer wrote:

Unlike Cooper’s wilderness, Argentina’s pampa is chaste only in the most
technical sense. Demanding to be admired wild and shapeless as she is, the
land lies ready for the man who dares to make her productive. She,
“flaunts her smooth, infinite, downy brow without frontiers, without any
landmarks; it’s the very image of the sea on land, … the land still waiting
for the command to bring forth every herb-yielding seed after its kind
(Mrs. Mann’s chaste translation gives ‘downy’ as velvet-like,’ while the
Spanish word velludo is unmistakably associated with pubic hair). (61)

Instead of the virginal mother described by Wister and Cooper, Sarmiento’s
Mother Nature was a tease and acted the harlot by “flaunting” her private places and
tempting man to come and take them. He did not have the reverence toward Mother Earth
that the Unites States’ authors appeared to have. Sommer, in referring to Sarmiento’s
vision for the pampa, concludes that “Sarmiento evidently reviles Argentina’s excess as
unproductive waste” (63) setting up a dichotomy between the barren womb and a fecund
virginity. Mother Nature, therefore, once a virginal mother is now an object of desire,
who tempts man to penetrate her private places. Cooper, in his novel The Pioneers,
laments this change in man’s attitude toward nature in the United States. He sees the
waste and destruction of what nature has so benevolently bestowed upon the earth as a
pretense to ruin and desolation causing Mother Nature to then withhold her blessings and
calming reassurance upon the soul of man as man replaces her bounty with concrete and plaster edifices, taking more than is expedient for their survival, and replacing her vestments of lush grass and forest undergrowth with the hideous scarring of the natural with ugly and barren dirt roads. Thus, according to Sorbille, the mother no longer recognizes her child in the fact that the child cannot see himself reflected in the mother (247). Therefore, by transforming mother into lover, man was then free to pursue her and love her in a different way. Sommer asks the rhetorical question, “What could be more legitimate than courting and winning a virgin? If man’s penetration threatened to destroy the wilderness, certainly this was not true conquest once conquest was figured as mutual love” (56). After all, “those who ‘civilize’ the wilderness, marry virgins, and turn them into mothers” (81). Although, as Gelpi points out, love may have only been seen as mutual by the starry-eyed pioneer who first went to woo Mother Nature:

The man who reaches out to Nature to engage his basic physical and spiritual needs finds himself reaching out with the hands of the predator to possess and subdue, to make Nature serve his own ends. Now it is not the complementarity of the powers of light and the powers of darkness, but a contest between them. From the perspective of Nature, then, or of woman, or of the values of the feminine principle, the pioneer myth can take on a devastating and ominous significance…. The woodsman goes out alone, or almost alone, to test whether his mind and will are capable of outwitting the lures and wiles of Nature. (84)
If the man succeeds in taming Mother Nature and making her his own, much as he
does in his courtship with any fair and desirable virgin, he can then “assume or resume
his place in society as boon” (84).

Sarmiento, on the other hand, did not feel any love, mutual or otherwise, toward
Mother Nature who he felt had spurned the Argentine Republic. He detested the empty
spaces that “la rodea por todas partes y se le insinúa en las entrañas” (“surrounds it
everywhere and threatens to invade her entrails”; 56; my translation), in the same way
that a barren womb was looked upon with scorn in biblical days. If the mother could not
be made to be productive she was useless. The empty landscape “defeated reason and
industriousness” (Sommer 61). But, in order to make the pampa useful, bodies were
required to penetrate into it and establish ‘civilized’ settlements (60). According to
Sorbille, however, there was a danger in facing Mother Nature head-on. This danger
came from an anxiety, which he defined as “estar demasiado próximo al deseo
incommensurable del Otro omnipotente” (“to be too close to the incommensurate desire
of the omnipotent Other”), of being absorbed by an all-powerful mother, “like a magnet
that drags him toward an emptiness.” The well-intending mother, then, reverts to her
position in an opposite sense and comes to signify “la madre siniestra” (the uncanny
mother). Sorbille continues on to say that as the mother begins to appear somewhat
sinister the individual’s unconscious interprets the character change as rejection and can
no longer distinguish the familiar from the unfamiliar, but rather “substitutes the one for
the other or, at best, merges them into one chaotic entity. Freed from the distinction of the
mother, the child then seeks retribution upon that which has caused his suffering” (248).
In a similar vein, Gelpi explains that
The pioneer who may first have ventured into the woods [or onto the pampa] to discover the otherness which is the clue to identity may in the end find himself maneuvering against the feminine powers, weapon in hand, with mind and will as his ultimate weapons for self-preservation. No longer seeker or lover, he advances as the aggressor, murderer, rapist. (85)

While Sarmiento welcomed the confrontation with Mother Nature, often puffing up his chest with his rhetoric, according to Dorothy Sherman Vivian, “Cooper felt obliged to warn the American public of an impending loss of morality and idealism which he felt would result from an excess of civilization. Sarmiento wished to make his readers aware of the amoral barbarism which was destroying the cities, the last outposts of civilization in Argentina” (808). Sarmiento’s aim was to extend civilization at the expense of Mother Nature. Cooper and Wister also wished to extend civilization, but only in harmony with Mother Nature.

In the frontier literature of both countries there appears to be a natural progression which mimics the male’s relationship with his mother as it is related to his relationship with Mother Nature. First, there is deification of the mother. Later, as the boy grows toward puberty, an Oedipus complex may manifest itself. Then realizing the impropriety of turning his mother into an object of desire and wishing to become free of her influence a period of rebellion ensues. As the man matures an uneasy alliance is formed with the mother. And finally, in the man’s old age, he comes full circle; he remembers his mother as he knew her as an infant and places her again just a little lower than God, as an angel or at a minimum, a saint. As for the relationship of the “imagined communities” of the United States and Argentina to nature and as is reflected in the literatures of today I
believe it is safe to say that both countries may have one foot on the step of rebellion and
the other on the step of uneasy alliance. Future generations will have to determine the
pace of their progress toward returning Nature to its proper place in the world order.

Conclusion

Frontier literature holds a place of honor in the foundational texts of both the
United States and Argentina and one cannot read the frontier literatures of these countries
without facing Mother Nature head-on - just as the authors of the literature did. Man’s
relationship with Nature, in part, drove the then future destinies of these two countries.
The United States saw the barren lands and virgin wilderness as an opportunity for
expansion and natural resources, while the vast majority of nineteenth century Argentine
authors took a more timid approach. The exception to this timidity was the vision of
Domingo F. Sarmiento. He wanted to see Argentina rival the United States in its
expansion and proposed ways in which it could accomplish that task. Unfortunately, his
vision never caught on with the urban Argentine masses.

These differing approaches to Nature were influenced by myths and preconceived
notions that the settlers of these nations brought with them from the Old World. Spain,
with its great old cities and educational heritage, was a largely urban and cultured
country. They, as part of the Mediterranean cone, were steeped in the myths of The Iliad
and The Odyssey, in which Nature played havoc with mere mortals. They took refuge in
the cities where they felt that there was strength in numbers, where they could keep a
distance from the larger effects of Mother Nature. When the settlers of Argentina arrived
at the mouth of the Río de la Plata, with its deep river ports, they set about building the
great city that would become Buenos Aires. Communications from Mother Spain poured
into the ports so that they somewhat lessened the distance between themselves and Spain. Those that ventured into the interior and mixed with the native races were looked down upon and fell out of favor with the urbanites. These settlers became the gauchos of Argentine fame thanks to the writings of José Hernández and Ricardo Güiraldes, though Sarmiento’s plan was to have them live in infamy. The gauchos proved their manhood by pitting themselves against Mother Nature yet they still carried with them some of the preconceptions about Nature as a violent and cruel mother.

On the other hand the settlers that arrived in New England had an almost reverential respect for Mother Nature stemming from different myths and legends brought with them from the British Isles. These were the descendants of the ancient Earth-worshipping druids. To them Mother Nature was a loving and kind mother who, nevertheless, at times saw fit to teach her children some hard lessons. The frontiersman and the cowboy generally treaded easy in Mother Nature’s terrain, learning her lessons, and learning to live in harmony with her. Rarely in the frontier literature of the United States do we read about hostile encounters with Nature. In the United States it was the cowboy, the fur trapper, the river pilots, and the miners who paved the way for the nation’s expansion.

These contrasts in man’s relationship with Mother Nature can be defined by certain psychological archetypes and complexes that emerged from the relationships held with the Great Mother in each nation’s respective homeland. The United States projected a positive mother-complex, as concerning their attitudes, upon their relationship with Mother Nature, whereas, Argentina projected a negative mother-complex upon theirs. Both countries went through a period where an Oedipus-complex, as it related to Mother
Nature, was dominant in their behavior toward her. Now, in the twenty-first century, both nations find their footing with Nature on equal terms and both are inching their way toward returning Mother Nature to her proper role in the affairs of men.
WORKS CITED


Sherman Vivian, Dorothy. “The Protagonist in the Works of Sarmiento and Cooper.”


