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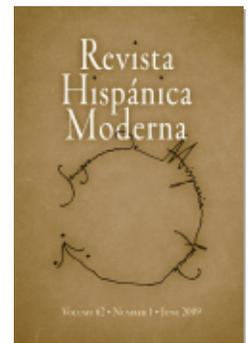
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Tourist Gaze and Germanic Immigrants in Roberto Arlt's *Aguafuertes patagónicas**

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Y yo, con mi indumentaria mitad inglesa y mitad linyera, represento al turismo; un turismo que me estoy tragando con resignación para satisfacer la curiosidad de mis lectores porteños.

—Roberto Arlt, *En el país del viento*

During the summer months of January and February of 1934, Roberto Arlt journeyed through the territories of Río Negro and Neuquén as a correspondent for the Buenos Aires newspaper *El Mundo*. His job was to visit a variety of sites in the Andean Lakes District, to convey his travel notes back to the newspaper, and to maintain the interest of his working-class readers in the capital. These articles formed a part of his renowned *aguafuertes* (notes, character sketches, chronicles), Arlt's regular column published in *El Mundo* from the birth of the paper in 1928 until the author's death in 1942. The collection titled *Aguafuertes patagónicas* has been under-studied compared to the journalist's *Aguafuertes porteñas* and his other travel series, like the *Aguafuertes españolas*. While analyses of the reporter's national and international travel chronicles have scrutinized how he employs Orientalist discourse (Majstorovic), treats sociopolitical conditions (Ramos de Vanella), and semanticizes rural landscapes (Saítta), critics have not adequately discussed his travelogues in the frame of tourist criticism. This essay examines the journalist's tourist gaze within Argentine nation-building initiatives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Touring Patagonia, Arlt's gaze focuses on the Germanic elements of the region and registers a lack of Argentine national flavor.¹ His inability to interpret the sites according to national models produces contradictions resulting in a pioneer trope that symbolically incorporates the Germanic population into the Argentine nation by fictionalizing it in accordance with North American frontier myths.

*My sincere thanks to the anonymous reviewers at *RHM*, as well as Ylce Irizarry for their suggestions on an earlier version of this essay.

¹I use the term Germanic because it is more inclusive; it refers to people of different origins who speak a Germanic language.

El Mundo, Roberto Arlt, and his *Aguafuertes*

Between 1890 and 1920 the social setting of Buenos Aires changed considerably. Mass immigration engendered population growth and the rise of the middle class precipitated a broad, more diversified reading public. *El Mundo* (1928) formed a part of a new style of journalism that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century catering to this audience. The new “popular press” did not rely on a political party or a member of a ruling class for its continued existence. Instead, it was written and managed by professional journalists to represent the concerns of middle-and lower-class readers. These papers employed innovative techniques that departed from the more conservative style of *La Prensa* (1869) and *La Nación* (1870), such as the use of colloquial language, irony or sarcasm, as well as caricatures, illustrations, and high impact titles. Newcomers manifested a more intrepid attitude than their didactic and moderate predecessors.²

Fitting the profile of *El Mundo*'s readership, Arlt also came from a middle-class family. Although he was the son of Germanic immigrants who relocated to Buenos Aires, Anne Saint Sauveur-Henn suggests Arlt had no contact with the abundant social institutions established for and by members of the Germanic community in the capital.³ The historian explains that his parents spoke Spanish with difficulty and concludes that he must have learned Spanish outside of the home. She also notes that Arlt's parents did not conserve his German language skills by enrolling him in one of the many German schools in the city. Unlike other artists, intellectuals, and writers of Germanic background, Arlt never wrote in German nor did he publish in Germanic presses; instead, he became fully integrated within circles of Argentine journalists, making a name for himself by 1930 (“Arlt y la emigración” 23–24). Arlt's identification with Argentina is significant for the comprehension of his Patagonian travel notes.

Roberto Retamoso and Andrea Pagni have examined key discursive features of Arlt's *aguafuertes*. Retamoso traces a strong presence of the writer in his texts, which is evident in their subjective nature and the use of the first person or the author's proper name. Furthermore, he contends that Arlt's travel notes can be read as autobiographical because they narrate the subject (Arlt) in space and time (305–06). Pagni argues that the journalist's *aguafuertes* create a pact of solidarity between Arlt and his readers where they share the same moral judgment. According to Pagni, the appellative gesture (*ustedes*) creates an imagined community with a common way of thinking, while the use of *nosotros* constructs a community with readers yet, excludes others (“El cínico” 164–65). These defining characteristics of Arlt's *aguafuertes* intimately link him to his texts as the subjective narrative voice.

Arlt is best known for his notes on Buenos Aires and its denizens, which constitute the vast majority of his *aguafuertes*. His identification with Buenos Aires, the subjective, autobiographical nature of his texts, and the shared camaraderie

² For more in-depth information on this topic see Sylvia Sáitta, “El periodismo popular en los años veinte.”

³ His father, Karl (Carlos) Arlt, was from the Prussian province of Posen (now a part of Poland); his mother Ekatherine (Catalina) Jobstraitbitzer was from the port city of Trieste (now a part of Italy) (Sáitta, *El escritor* 13–14).

established with his readership shape his unique tourist gaze and justify the emphasis that he places on the socioeconomic situation, politics, and the idiosyncrasies of everyday people in his chronicles.⁴

Touring Patagonia in 1934

It is essential to underscore that in 1934 Patagonia was no longer the unexplored backcountry of the 1880s. Government programs had begun to integrate Amerindian lands, seized during the Campaign of the Desert (1879–1883), into national and international networks of production. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the localities of Nahuel Huapi and San Carlos de Bariloche were backed by Germano-Chilean entrepreneurs, and formed a part of a thriving capitalistic emporium that included the first large-scale tourist schemes to market the region as “la suiza chilena y argentina” (Bandieri, *Historia* 241; Méndez).⁵ Moreover, lands donated in 1903 by Francisco Moreno for a nature reserve had become Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi.⁶ By the 1930s the lake region had developed into a dynamic vacation spot that was regularly promoted on the pages of *El Mundo*. For the newspaper’s working-class readers, the advertisements included images of a train, forested terrain, and a list of towns that served as national tourist destinations.⁷ It is the railroad that made these locations accessible and permitted members of the urban reading public to imagine interacting with bucolic surroundings unlike their own.

Already a seasoned travel correspondent for *El Mundo*, in the summer of 1934 Arlt traveled to Patagonia by train with stops in the port towns of Carmen de Patagones and Viedma. Once in the Lakes District, he was hosted by the prominent Newbery family using their *estancia* as his headquarters to venture out on day trips that provided him with material for his articles. His chronicles regularly included Kodak photographs of the landscape.⁸ The author’s texts demonstrate that his tourist gaze was initially transfixed by his environs, but gradually focused

⁴ Analyses of the reporter’s *Aguafuertes porteñas* by Sylvia Sáitta, Daniel C. Scroggins, and Rita Gnutzmann observe the attention that he places on the sociopolitical and cultural state of affairs in the country. They also highlight his extraordinary observation skills, as well as his spirited, insightful representations of *porteños* and their cultural practices. Critics like Retamoso indicate Arlt provides descriptions of social “types” that all of his readers could recognize, as well as his special affinity for providing ironic case studies of dubious individuals, such as thieves, bachelors, and landlords (“Roberto Arlt” 310–11).

⁵ The Chileno-Argentina company maintained strong economic ties with Germany until WWI and established lucrative businesses in both Southern Cone nations. Research on the company and its role in the transnational economic development of the region can be found in Méndez (2006) and Bandieri (2005).

⁶ See <http://www.parquesnacionales.gov.ar/03_ap/27_nhuapi_PN/27_nhuapi_PN.htm>.

⁷ For an example, see the Nahuel Huapi advertisement that appeared in *El Mundo* on 17 January, 1933, p. 11, published the summer before Arlt’s excursion south in 1934.

⁸ The overwhelming majority of the photographs that accompanied Arlt’s Patagonian chronicles were of the landscape (rock formations, forests, and buildings). I could only identify one image with a person. Published at the beginning of the series, the article titled “Vida portuaria en Patagones” describes a man with one leg identified in a caption as “el rengu de Patagones”; Arlt includes a picture of this man (*El Mundo*, 13 January 1934: 8.).

on people and their social conditions.⁹ As a result, his *Aguafuertes patagónicas* first depict scenery, but later emphasize settlers' tales of survival in a harsh region. Moreover, his salient articles refer to the Germanic colonists in Bariloche. Perhaps because of the time and word limits imposed by the daily, Arlt's accounts provide no references to past travelogues. Instead, his *Aguafuertes* refer to fictional texts or movies that serve to compare surroundings with untamed lands and daring individuals to which he and his metropolitan readers could relate.¹⁰ Therefore, one could argue that his chronicles project a larger-than-life image of Patagonia.

Arlt's first piece in the series captures the reader's attention by announcing his location: a shady hotel room in the town of Carmen de Patagones, 915 kilometers to the south of Buenos Aires. He outlines his itinerary and reveals his expectations; the text is infused with dramatic anticipation redolent of an adventure movie, in which the narrator is the star:

Como los exploradores clásicos me he munido de unas botas (las botas de las siete leguas), de un saco de cuero como para invernar en el polo, y que es magnífico para aparecer embutido en él en una película cinematográfica, pues le concede a uno prestancia de aventurero fatal, y de una pistola automática. Todavía ignoro si la ametralladora tira o no, pues me la prestó mi gran amigo Diego Newbery. Con las botas, el saco de cuero y la pistola enigmática, espero descubrir más tierras maravillosas que sir Walter Raleigh [. . .] (33–34)¹¹

The reporter's caustic humor is characteristic of his work and promises an account of the escapades of a city dweller (like his audience) in the Argentine interior. The portrait he paints refers to seven-league boots, a magical accessory from European folklore that permits heroes to cover great distances quickly, and invokes the tradition of adventurers, like Sir Walter Raleigh, who searched for gold in South America.¹² Despite the fact that Arlt undercuts his heroic stature by using adjectives such as "embutido" or referring to his gun as "enigmática," his witty description is based upon preconceived notions of Patagonia.

Tourism critic John Urry affirms that tourist destinations are chosen to gaze

⁹ Critics such as Sylvia Saítta (2000) and María Rosa Ramos de Vanella (2004) have made similar observations with regard to Arlt's *Aguafuertes porteñas* and later his *Aguafuertes gallegas*.

¹⁰ Sylvia Saítta is the only critic who has fully examined Arlt's corpus. Her study of the journalist's *Aguafuertes patagónicas* considers how he semanticizes the Patagonian landscape. She argues Arlt, an urbanite, translates the rural landscape into writing by utilizing a mechanical and geometric lexicon to describe it. Saítta also observes that the reporter assumes a "textual attitude" by privileging and providing literary and cinematographic analogies for his metropolitan readers ("Prólogo" 14–18).

¹¹ Unless otherwise indicated, quotes from Arlt's *Aguafuertes patagónicas* are from the collection *En el país del viento: Viaje a la Patagonia* (1934). The edition does not include the photographs that originally accompanied the articles.

¹² Walter Raleigh was a sailor, pirate, poet, and courtesan who achieved a prominent position in the court of Elizabeth I. Inspired by the legend of El Dorado, he traveled to Guiana in 1595 and published his account of the voyage, *The Discoveries of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana*, in 1596. In 1617 he returned to Guiana to search for gold under the auspices of King James I (Beer 21; Shirley 56).

upon due to anticipation, oftentimes in the form of fantasies and daydreaming; this anticipation is constructed and maintained by such non-tourist practices as film, literature, and magazines (3). Thus, underlying Arlt's sardonic self-portrait is a set of expectations that stems from culturally constructed images of Patagonia as a dangerous and uncharted territory. Such perceptions originate in the projects of late nineteenth-century Argentine scientists and travelers, like the renowned Francisco P. Moreno, who were instrumental in mapping and describing the Andean Lakes District for metropolitan readers. Their accounts underpinned widely held beliefs regarding the area and inspired the fantasies of visitors. It is precisely such preconceived notions that help to define the concept of "tourist gaze."

Breaking with established routines, tourism is a pursuit that facilitates a tourist's interaction with different surroundings and cultural observances. A "tourist gaze" is fashioned via a collection of culturally constructed signs that the subject interprets, acting as a semiotician, by reading the landscape for signifiers made up of pre-established ideas or signs (Urry 13). As a journalist nurtured in a capital city enriched with symbols reinforcing heritage and homeland—like museums, architecture, monuments, and even culinary traditions—Arlt, as a traveler/semiotician, was accustomed to interacting with and interpreting national signs.

In nineteenth-century Europe and Latin America, statesmen employed deliberate methods for inventing national traditions to create citizens and to cultivate patriotism in residents and immigrants. In this context the idea of a nation spread by way of communications, including transportation (railways) and print media (newspapers).¹³ Likewise, travel played an integral role in national construction and understanding: "more generally, since the mid-nineteenth century, travel to see the key sites, texts, exhibitions, buildings, landscapes, restaurants and achievements of a society has developed the cultural sense of a national imagined presence" (Urry 158). Dean MacCannell implies tourist gazes are not arbitrary; people are taught when, where and how to gaze by clear markers ranging from guidebooks to plaques (41; 109–11). Arlt's travel chronicles clearly indicate that he had been trained to look for markers to help him interpret his surroundings and, since he was traveling within his own country, match them up with established, urban notions of "Argentineness."

Improper Guidance, Nationlessness, and Frustration

Arlt's first attempt at being a good tourist failed due to ineffective markers, or rather, landmarks that offered no guidance. In Viedma he describes this phenomenon with relation to a column located in the town square:

Esta columna de mampostería remata en un busto representando a un señor de pera a la francesa y melena victorhuguesa. El busto puede representar a Bartolomé Mitre, a Clemenceau, al general

¹³ For specific methods employed for nation building in the Argentine context, see Bertoni (2001).

Roca, o al poeta Guido Spano. Y emito los irreverentes pensamientos porque la semiestatua carece de placa que dé fe de su identidad. Dicha anomalía parece formar parte del orden público en estos territorios. En Patagones ocurre lo mismo. Creo haber contado el caso de una plaza que tiene un busto sin nombre. (51)

Art's text reveals that he is confronted with signs that he is unable to interpret. As a journalist closely linked to Argentina, his gaze attempts to match the image with people and places that his readers, like the author himself, could easily associate with their country. Since the bust lacked a plaque to identify the illustrious figure, the journalist attempts to associate it with known icons of the nineteenth century: Argentine generals Bartolomé Mitre and Julio A. Roca, and Argentine poet Carlos Guido y Spano. Perhaps for comic effect, he mentions Victor Hugo and former French prime minister Georges Clemenceau. Indeed, this is the first occurrence of a breakdown in an expected relationship between nation and landmark. Arlt recounts consulting with the locals to assist him in interpreting the site, but a huge debate ensues because some insist that the statue represents General Villarino, while others argue that it is of General Belgrano. Although the mysterious sculpture provided no clear marker, feedback from locals identified it as a national historical figure and partially decoded the site for the journalist. However, this was not always to be the case, leading to confusion and frustration for the author when processing signs on his excursion. Arlt would rely on references from popular culture to overcome the lack of semantic clarity and his frustrated tourist gaze, and incite him to invent his own way of reading and interpreting the landscape to make it more agreeable for himself and his *porteño* audience.

On February 2, 1934 Arlt published an *aguafuerte* entitled "Chilenización de la Patagonia." In this piece, Arlt wrestled with the issue of nationality, revealing the dearth of Argentine nationals and of state-run institutions in this sector of the homeland. As a district inhabited mostly by foreigners, the reporter's contacts revealed that, for them, Buenos Aires was a nonexistent point of reference. At the core of his report, he observes:

Pueblos formados por extranjeros: alemanes, suizos, ingleses; masas trabajadoras constituidas por chilenos [. . .] han determinado en las poblaciones un olvido de su nacionalidad. Por otra parte, el Estado poco o nada ha hecho en favor de los "pioners" [*sic*] que se desterraban voluntariamente del mundo civilizado. (101)

While the reporter itemizes the origin of the district's residents using adjectives of nationality like German and Swiss, he also asserts that the populace has "forgotten" their nationality. The author's text implies that residents of a geographic area, recognized as a national territory, are deemed citizens by default. Thus, Arlt's observation further suggests that a region whose inhabitants do not conceive of themselves as Argentine exudes an air of "nationlessness." In subsequent paragraphs, he argues that this condition had been caused by the neglect of the Argentine state.

Spurred by the issues relayed in Arlt's *Aguafuertes patagónicas*, the director of the paper, Carlos Muzio Sáez Peña, published an editorial that appeared in the daily two weeks later titled "La acción del gobierno en los Territorios del Sur." In this piece, the editor intensifies Arlt's findings by referring to the "disintegration of nationalism" and argues that authorities were obligated to defend the homeland by instituting a rigorous plan, including the settlement of Argentines in the territory and the civil education of schoolchildren. Thus, Arlt's perception of the Southern Territories and his resulting reports touched a nerve that had been sensitive since the 1880s: patriotism and the incorporation of immigrants into the Argentine nation.

In a country composed of an immigrant body that appeared to rival the population size of its citizens, the subject of nationalism and the active construction of national identity through state-run initiatives (educational programs, construction of museums, public monuments, history, literature, etc.) had been on the governmental agenda since the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, in Buenos Aires, such programs had been actively underway since the 1890s to ensure that children of immigrants born in Argentina, like Arlt, as new Argentine citizens, would feel an affinity for their homeland and recognize their "Argentineness."

Conversely, due to lack of funding, remote areas did not receive as much direct attention from the government. Coinciding with Alberdi's famous nineteenth-century slogan, "gobernar es poblar," officials promoted immigrant settlement of border regions. In fact, they relied upon the ventures of private, foreign, and national companies to begin populating and developing them. Indeed, this was the case in Bariloche; the Chileno-Argentina Company, established in 1904 by German immigrants (to Chile) Federico Hube and Adolfo Achelis, became one of the most important businesses in Patagonia.¹⁴ The Lakes District, then, was an obvious frontier zone that exhibited a more heterogeneous population, as well as distinct transnational economic and cultural practices.

In "Chilenización de la Patagonia," Arlt tackled the subject of Bariloche's national composition by explaining the origins of regional architecture. The reporter acknowledges that the first commercial establishments in the territory were installed by the Chileno-Argentina Company (100). This also permitted him to make the following comment relating such companies to local building design:

Hasta hace poco, el Neuquén era considerado un país de más allá de los límites lógicos y, por eso, inapto para los buenos negocios. Sólo firmas europeas pedían concesiones al gobierno, y esto explica la

¹⁴ The company owned large swaths of land on both sides of the Andes, imported European goods, exported local products, and established the first large-scale tourist route between Puerto Montt and Bariloche that included transport and a network of hotels. The Argentine administration recognized the activities of the firm and valued its potential for developing the Andean region. By official decree in 1904, President Roca declared the zone where the company carried out its business excluded from the jurisdiction of Argentine customs (Bandieri, *Historia* 240–44; 313; Méndez 231–49).

existencia, en el territorio, de pueblos cuya arquitectura es netamente nórdica, germánica, suiza o inglesa. (101)

Architectural style is a rich component of the landscape in the *Aguafuertes patagónicas*. The fragment demonstrates that the Nordic aesthetic features of the town's buildings infuse them with the aura of other countries, resulting in a noticeable contradiction in the reporter's observations. Earlier, Arlt declares that the area emits a feeling of "nationlessness," but again, his use of adjectives of nationality draws attention to residents' ethnic origins. This repetition emphasizes foreign building style, and the reporter's attempts to decode the physical characteristics of the town. Once inside the town, his tourist gaze continues to register interactions with the community's sights and residents.

"Hombres y mujeres fuertes de Bariloche" offers intriguing details about the journalist's experience in the frontier town. The first paragraph reveals astonishment when relating that the town's inhabitants, overwhelmingly comprised of Germans and *mestizos*, speak fluent German to each other in everyday business transactions. Even more confounding is the venue itself, which Arlt narrates as follows:

En Bariloche hay una confitería alemana. Una casa de fotografía alemana. Un almacén de ramos generales alemán. Varios bodegones alemanes. Un hotel suizo. Un treinta por ciento de la población infantil escolar tiene padres alemanes y madres chilenas. Bariloche es algo así como una semicolonía chileno-alemana. Los ingleses escasean. Y los argentinos ¡ni qué hablar! (117)

The remarks related to the use of the German language and enumeration of Germanic businesses are compelling and yet, the final exclamation of the piece reveals a tone of indignation. In this travel note, the Neuquén territory, its cityscape and people suggest a departure from the journalist's notions of Argentine tourist zone, while the reiteration of the adjective "German" highlights a predominant foreign presence. The occurrence that Arlt describes as "forgetting their nationality" clearly indicates that, as inhabitants of Argentine territory, immigrants should be aware of Buenos Aires as the nation's capital, and exhibit cultural practices that he could identify as "Argentine." The clash between the journalist's preconceived notions about national signs and the Patagonian reality raises questions about citizenship and migration.

Sociologists Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson discuss spaces where nationals and immigrants mix: "the idea that foreigners control part of the national space evokes emotive reactions because it goes to the heart of the myth of the nation" (132). For Arlt, the combination of Nordic architecture, Germanic stores, German as *lingua franca*, and residents composed of mixed Chilean and Germanic origins do not correspond to his conception of an "Argentine Territory." Castles and Davidson describe steps in community formation among immigrants using the terms "home-building" and "place-making," which can help to understand the phenomena documented in Arlt's travel reports.

"Home-building" refers to the private process of constructing a residence

using affective building blocks based on feelings, such as security, familiarity, community and sense of possibility. This includes the use of the home language, preparation of ethnic foods, display of traditional decorations, and the observation of customary family roles. In contrast, “place-making” is a public extension of home-building, in which ethnic groups collectively construct an area to correspond with their needs and values, like shops, markets and restaurants (Castles and Davidson 131). Considering the incongruous descriptions in Arlt’s *Agua-fuertes patagónicas*, we can understand Arlt’s conclusions that rather than visiting a place that he, as a tourist, could match up with culturally constructed notions of “Argentine”—ideas created within an urban context rich in symbols that residents and foreigners alike could associate with the land and its people—he was touring a rural community that was actively “place-making.” Thus, Arlt encountered no signs to confirm his expectations of a completed national place to reinforce his metropolitan vision of the Argentine community, its shared history and cultural practices.

The Heroic Days of Bariloche and Larger-than-Life Germanic Pioneers

Although Arlt initially conveys his discomfort in Patagonian surroundings that lacked a strong Argentine presence, he does communicate his fascination with local immigrants and their accomplishments (103, 112). His travel notes undergo a marked change; they begin to record the deeds of Bariloche’s residents by conforming them to a mythical pioneer trope present in the literature and films of popular culture. Pioneers have been depicted in two ways: on the one hand, as hard-working men and women who tame a wild frontier zone to establish permanent settlements; on the other, as uncouth, villainous individuals who forged a living in this context. First disseminated as part of national development programs and then in literature and film, the pioneer trope plays a significant role in Arlt’s chronicles.

Arlt was known to have read books that followed the adventures of *gauchos* like Hormiga Negra and the Barrientos Brothers; he was also known to be an avid moviegoer (*El escritor* 17–18).¹⁵ In this series of travel notes, the journalist makes references to cinema when drawing comparisons to transcribe his Patagonian experience for his *porteño* readers.¹⁶ Arlt was familiar with portrayals of settlers already circulated widely in the early to mid-nineteenth century, radiating from the United States to South America. Fueled by the development of their North American neighbors, illustrious Argentine statesmen like Bernardino Rivadavia,

¹⁵ Critic Carlos Rodríguez McGill analyzes Eduardo Gutiérrez’s *gauchesque* serials, including his famous characters Hormiga Negra and the Barrientos brothers. Rodríguez McGill argues that there is a transculturation present; in these works immigrant figures are acculturated while the *gaucho* becomes modernized (“Los folletines gauchescos”).

¹⁶ Jorge B. Rivera discusses Arlt’s interest in cinema and references to it in the author’s novels and plays (9–10). A limited collection of Arlt’s film reviews, from the newspaper *El Mundo*, have been compiled by Gastón Sebastián M. Gallo and published as *Notas sobre el cinematógrafo*.

Juan B. Alberdi, and Domingo F. Sarmiento espoused immigration programs as the foundation of their nation-building plans. For them, northern European immigrants promised to stamp out the remnants of Spanish colonial heritage, mix with and improve the local gene pool, eradicate traces of Amerindian populations, and spark progress.

Glorified images of cowboys and pioneers that shaped an existence out of inhospitable terrain were propagated in the nineteenth century by way of newspaper serials, dime novels, western shows, and, by the 1890s, silent films (Flynn 3). Similarly, in the early twentieth century, frontiersmen were promoted by the motion picture industry entrenching them as icons of national and international folklore. Such movies featured multiple facets of North American frontier life, from the epic journeys of wagon trains to Indian attacks, railroad construction to poker games and barroom brawls (Johnson 2–3). Westerns would peak in popularity in the 1920s with films like *The Covered Wagon* (1923), on the adventures of a wagon train, and *Tumbleweeds* (1925), about cattlemen and homesteaders on the Kansas-Oklahoma border. Of particular importance is Academy Award-winning *Cimarron* (1931), based on Edna Ferber's 1929 best seller, portraying a resourceful pioneer couple who stakes their claim during the Oklahoma land rush and leads the transformation of the territory into a state. While I have not found definitive evidence these films were screened in Buenos Aires, or that Argentine authors like Arlt saw them, the work of film historian John King helps to confirm its probability. King demonstrates moving pictures from the United States saturated the Argentine market.¹⁷ He also points out another important consequence of this phenomenon, which is that "Hollywood would create and universalize modern myths" (11).

The pioneer trope permitted Arlt to overcome his frustrated tourist gaze and symbolically incorporate the Germanic residents of Bariloche into the Argentine nation by providing exaggerated portraits reminiscent of North American frontier myths and by relating them to figures or "types" to which he and his metropolitan reading public could relate. Arlt first touts the accomplishments of the Germanic pioneers by emphasizing their miraculous transformation of the landscape. In "Entrada a Bariloche," he surveys the road leading into town:

Levantando los ojos, veo en la cima del barranco una plomiza casa de madera, una hilera de postes, un socavón sombrío, y allá más abajo, lisa, perfecta, larga, arbolada, bonita como una de aquellas calles de la película americana, la calle Bartolomé Mitre, que hace cuarenta y nueve años era un pantano boscoso, sin un solo hombre blanco, a este lado del horizonte. (109)

Readers follow the journalist's sweeping gaze and discover a civilized landscape. Bartolomé Mitre Street is the welcoming boulevard that leads into Bariloche. Not only is the thoroughfare named after a celebrated Argentine soldier and

¹⁷ King explains that "by 1926, Argentina was the second largest U.S. market outside Europe. In 1920 Jacobo Glucksmann [*sic*], who was chief buyer for his brother Max's major import firm, could estimate that 95 percent of screen time in South America was taken up by U.S. films" (*Magical Reels* 11).

politician, but by using a simile he equates it to comparable streets in American movies. The fragment also alludes to “white men” conquering the land, thus foreshadowing what is to come: namely, the narration of pioneer stories and the establishment of the town.

Continuing with this theme, “Alemanes de Bariloche” introduces one of the founders of Bariloche, Bernardo Boock, to *porteño* readers. Arlt describes Boock as gigantic in stature with enormous fists, the father of twenty-five children, and a formidable presence (111–12). Originally from Brudelsdof [*sic*], Germany, Boock arrived in Bariloche and, according to the reporter, was a driving force during the region’s “heroic era” when the town was nothing more than swamp and forest (112). He relates Boock’s arrival to the area:

Boock venía de Viedma, con un carro cargado de tres mil kilos y arrastrado por catorce caballos. Con él viajaban su mujer y sus hijos. Tras del carro marchaba una tropilla de ciento cincuenta caballos para los relevos. En el carro, Boock traía armas, alimentos, medicinas, ropas, herramientas. Tras de él, marchaba lentamente un rebaño de setecientas ovejas. (112)

The German’s odyssey is suggestive of U.S. westerns that provided full-screen images of pioneer wagon trains. Rather than traveling with a group of settlers, Boock and his family journey from the port town of Viedma deep into the Argentine backcountry—alone. The stature of Boock and the troupe of animals exceed proportion, transfiguring a real man into a mythic icon.

Arlt devotes more lines to hyperbolic sketches of Germans and their offspring in “Hombres y mujeres fuertes de Bariloche,” describing them all as giants, titans, and Herculean. His exaggerated physical portrayal of Bariloche’s residents culminates in the following observation:

[. . .] aquí el grandote Cámpolo no llamaría la atención de nadie. La estatura de la gente es simplemente extraordinaria. Los nativos, los mestizos chilotos, las mujeres del pueblo aborígen, resultan, junto a estos magníficos ejemplares de bestias rubias, raquíticas estampas. (118)

In this passage, the reporter chooses a celebrated figure of Argentine popular culture as a point of reference. At 6 feet 9½ inches, Victorio María Cámpolo, also known as “el gigante de Quilmes,” was a celebrated professional heavyweight boxer from Buenos Aires in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁸ Arlt’s mention of Cámpolo, an internationally recognized Argentine athlete from the working-class neighborhood of Quilmes, is a popular culture reference to which his urban audience could relate. However, one by one, the reporter explains that the Germanic settlers were, indeed, more imposing than their native hosts.

¹⁸ Born in Italy in 1903, Cámpolo fought several illustrious fighters like Primo Carnera, Tommy Loughran, Phil Scott and Tom Heeney before he retired in 1934. See *Boxrec Boxing Encyclopedia* http://www.boxrec.com/media/index.php/Victorio_Campolo.

Within the confines of the journalist's reports, the members of this community are infused with superhuman qualities and its residents become the god-like beings that tame the Patagonian wilderness during what Arlt dubs as the region's "heroic era."

While Arlt may present Bariloche's inhabitants and their origins in a "heroic" light, this does not imply that they were civilized or respectable. The author's final portrait evokes nefarious origins, which dovetails with stereotypes of colonists and cowboys:

La mayoría vino de muy lejos, interponiendo saludable distancia entre la justicia de sus patrias y sus robustos cuerpos. Otros, más prudentes aún, se cambiaron los nombres y los apellidos; otros . . . en fin . . . Hay que ser un poco sensato. Nadie se convierte en pioner [*sic*] por puro amor al arte de la colonización. Eran hombres violentos, prontos de manos y dedos ágiles en el gatillo. Algunos habían trabajado de vaqueros en los valles de California; otros, de buscadores de oro en Australia; otros, pertenecían a la muy alta nobleza de sus países. Entraron al Neuquén por caminos distintos, pero siempre por la cordillera, o fueron desembarcados clandestinamente de veleros cuyos tripulantes les desearon una muerte feliz. Llegaron, lucharon como titanes. (120–21)

Again, the reporter populates his chronicles with stereotypically iniquitous figures. This "pioneer" is based on images of cowboys and settlers in the United States and Australia, and the pioneer's nature is more violent and uncivilized. Relying on models and knowledge that his audience could recognize, Arlt enables metropolitan readers to confirm and archive away an image of the region. The more suspicious "types" also allude to the fact that there are such people everywhere, like the unsavory individuals Arlt describes in his *Aguafuertes porteñas*. Regardless of the disreputable element of this population's past, the author openly admires their transformation of a forest into a town with roads, streets, and urban structures. By establishing connections with icons of epic literature (titans/giants), popular culture (boxers), and internationalized Western frontier myths (pioneers), the Germanic residents of Bariloche become more palatable for the journalist and his readers. Arlt's *aguafuertes* borrow from these accepted sources and help him to write a new frontier story: Patagonia's conquest by immigrant pioneers. Through his fictional portraits, the author incorporates settlers of Germanic origin into his homeland's national narrative.

Conclusions

As a champion of Buenos Aires, Roberto Arlt, a first generation Argentine, identified with this urban context. His *aguafuertes* display autobiographical features, recounting his movement in space and time. The predominant features of these chronicles accentuate his subjective narrative voice, his unique tourist gaze, and reveal a camaraderie that he shared with his *porteño* audience. As a traveler as-

signed to describe the newly marketed southern Lakes District, he is painfully out of place and frustrated by this rural environment. According to MacCannell, a key part of the tourist experience is the indication by the tourist as to whether or not the site has lived up to his expectations (136). In the travel notes on Patagonia published by Arlt in *El Mundo*, the reporter clearly communicates that the area lacked expressions of “Argentineness” that he expected to find in his nation’s backcountry. The contradictory nature of his *aguafuertes* exposes, instead, the “place-making” of immigrants in Bariloche.

The epigraph at the beginning of this essay brings to light the relationship between Arlt, his tourist experience, and his readers in Buenos Aires: “Y yo, con mi indumentaria mitad inglesa y mitad linyera, represento al turismo; un turismo que me estoy tragando con resignación para satisfacer la curiosidad de mis lectores porteños” (55). Although this line appears in an *aguafuerte* before his arrival in Bariloche, it sums up Arlt’s situation as a frustrated tourist, who must maintain the interest of his readership. Out of place and bombarded with signs that do not correspond to what for him is an Argentine tourist zone, the reporter begins to write the frontier story of the Germanic population that has settled the region on an heroic scale.

While Arlt’s chronicles document his fascination with the pioneers and exaggerate their feats, these overblown images produce a paradoxical yet nonetheless common double effect of popular cultural productions: in one manner, his newspaper articles seem less reliable due to the over embellished attributes of Bariloche colonists; in another manner, the contemporary reception of his *aguafuertes* is almost guaranteed precisely by the fact that the same symbolically incorporated “types” are well-known images for his middle- and lower-class readers. Compellingly, his visceral rejection of the region as a national space due to foreign signs is precisely what would be taken up by members of the upper classes when shaping the area into an exclusive playground for the wealthy.

Architectural historian Martha Levisman de Clusellas traces the origins of what today is known as the “Bariloche style,” and indicates that the architectural design was created by a group of affluent Argentine developers inspired by “colonization illusion and fantasy” (13). Once the railroad arrived in Bariloche in 1934, the Argentine National Parks Commission actively promoted development in the region, including a regional architectural style. According to Levisman de Clusellas, “this style was spread by the National Parks in their desire to make Bariloche a special city, not like other towns and cities of the country that were laid out on the typical Spanish grid, but rather like one of the quaint mountain towns that were the pride of Switzerland and the Tyrol” (14). As a result, the National Parks Commission would sponsor the design and construction of the hotel Llao-Llao in 1939, a symbol of the region’s architecture, and a fusion of local and European inspired styles. Thus, the spirit of “colonization illusion and fantasy” that motivated upper-class legislators, businessmen, and architects would transform Bariloche into an elite tourist destination and bring about a strong connection between Bariloche and Buenos Aires (Bandieri, *Historia* 316). In this case, upper-class residents of the metropolis could reaffirm their civility and superiority by creating the illusion of a regional building style designed by an Argentine architect who resorted to a European model.

Hence, Bariloche's residents and landscape become symbolically incorporated into the Argentine nation in two very important ways: first through Arlt's writing and the employment of a mythical pioneer trope, and later, by way of architecture inspired by the illusion of colonization. As a member of the middle-class, Arlt's obstructed desire to interact with culturally recognizable signs at a national tourist destination produces an artificial solution. His use of a pioneer trope based upon foreign models does not resolve the underlying tension, but rather exposes inconsistencies in the results of official mechanisms of Argentine national construction in territories far from the capital.

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