

The Dilemmas of Male Consumption in Nineteenth-Century Argentina: Fashion, Consumerism, and Darwinism in Domingo Sarmiento and Juan B. Alberdi*

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Abstract. This article explores how the relationship between luxury, consumption and gender in Argentina changed in response to the introduction of Darwinian ideas. Ideas surrounding consumerism were transformed by the 1870s, influenced by a scientific revolution that gave new meaning to gender categories. The introduction of Darwinism at a time of extreme ideological confusion about how to organise the nation only enhanced the perceived dangers about how economic changes and the expansion of markets would affect elites' ability to govern. The article focuses specifically on changing perceptions of gender and consumerism between 1830 and 1880, paying particular attention to the work of two of the most important intellectuals of the *Generación del '37*, Juan B. Alberdi and Domingo F. Sarmiento. By closely examining their reflections on the expansion of markets and accumulation of luxury goods, it reveals the nature of the cultural changes introduced by the Darwinian revolution.

Keywords: Argentina, consumerism, Darwinism, sexual selection, gender

The importance of consumerism in determining conceptions of gender, and in general the political well being of society, has a long history in Spanish American nations. Rebecca Earle has shown how in the colonies' richest cities, and in Spain itself, there was a debate among writers about 'whether luxury provided an essential stimulus to the economy, or whether it led to corruption, feminization, and, ultimately, damnation.'¹ General writings about consumption in Spanish America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries explain this process in two ways, according to Earle: '[o]n

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¹ Rebecca Earle, 'Consumption and Excess in Spanish America (1700–1830)', Working Paper 1 (April 2003), University of Manchester. Centre for Latin American Cultural Studies, p. 3.

one hand, excessive consumption signaled both moral degeneracy and weakness. On the other hand, it could be read as a sign of the grandeur and success of the colonial world.²

European philosophers were in many cases responsible for explanations that attributed Spanish America's problems to the alleged weakness and inferiority of the people born in the colonies.³ Creole degeneracy was associated with a feminisation that had its origins in the love of luxury among wealthy local elites. 'Luxurious consumption thus lay at the heart of a debate about the fitness of Spanish America to govern itself. It was simultaneously a sign of grandeur and a mark of infamy, an illustration of America's glorious destiny and proof of its permanent inferiority.'⁴ This association between consumerism and gender continued after Independence, particularly through the influence of French revolutionary ideas that also linked luxurious desire with monarchical excess and feminisation of men. The Republic was conceived in its early years as a Spartan institution representing the opposition to excess that conspired against reason.⁵

In the case of Argentina, the debate about consumption, degeneration and feminisation began in the mid nineteenth century. The absence of both a strong aristocracy and wealth comparable to the richest areas of the Spanish colonial system made this region a backward outpost in which consumption did not follow the patterns studied by Earle in the early Republican era. But by the 1880s and 1890s there was an obsession with the role of consumers that reproduced the concerns observed in other Spanish ex-colonies years previously. In fact, the pattern was similar in that concern was provoked by the changing European ideologies employed in debates on the alleged inferiority of the ex-colonies, and on their capacity for self-government. This time, however, these ideologies invoked the new scientific ideas derived from the Darwinian revolution.

The debate about the role of consumerism in the development of the nation can be clearly observed in the changing attitudes of intellectuals who belonged to the *Generación del '37* and the *Generación del '80*. While for the former the purchase of cultural goods that represented 'civilisation' was one of the most important tools against the primitivism of Juan Manuel de Rosas, for the latter consumerism would become a tool that led to degeneration and feminisation. It is suggested here that this relationship between luxury,

² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³ Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World. The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900* (Pittsburg, 1973), David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo. Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the Eighteenth-Century* (Ithaca, 2002).

⁴ Rebecca Earle, 'Consumption and Excess', p. 8.

⁵ See: Rebecca Earle, 'Rape and the Anxious Republic. Revolutionary Colombia, 1810–1830', in Maxine Molyneux and Elizabeth Dore (eds.) *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America* (Durham, 2000), pp. 127–46.

consumption and gender changed because of the introduction of Darwinian ideas. Ideas about consumerism were transformed by the 1870s, influenced by a scientific revolution that gave new meaning to gender categories. The introduction of Darwinism in Argentina at a time of extreme ideological confusion about how to organise the nation enhanced the perceived dangers about how economic changes and the expansion of markets would affect elites' ability to govern. The focus here is on changing perceptions about gender and consumerism between the 1830s and 1880s, paying particular attention to the work of two of the most important intellectuals of the *Generación del '37*, Juan B. Alberdi and Domingo F. Sarmiento. Analysis of their reflections on the expansion of the markets and accumulation of luxurious goods can help determine the nature of the change introduced by the Darwinian revolution.

The Early Role of Consumerism for the Generación del '37

Members of the *Generación del '37* believed that acts of consumption were part of the process of civilisation itself. As Rebecca Earle has noticed, for people like Juan B. Alberdi 'comfortable, pleasant things came from Europe,' and there was a need to acquire them.⁶ For the members of this group, modernity was linked to the emergence of a culture of consumption of civilised objects that would free them from the mould of the old warrior of past generations. In 1837, one year before leaving for exile, Alberdi was editing the magazine *La Moda* in order to promote the values important to the members of his generation. The very title of this publication already hints at the connections that he and his friends saw between civilisation and consumption. In fact, an article published in the very first issue clearly explained how the emergence of consumerism was the natural expression of a more civilised society. In an article written by Alberdi under his pen name Figarillo, he explained the goals of the publication in the following terms:

1. continuous news of the present state and changes in fashion (in Europe and here) of men's and ladies' clothing, goods, colours, of hairstyles, furniture, footwear, of meeting places, of matters of general discussion;
2. clear and short articles, without metaphysics and accessible to all, on modern literature, music, poetry, and customs;
3. [t]he need to cultivate the spirit of girls and of young men interested in business will be underscored;
4. the simple and healthy basics of a democratic and noble urbanity in dance, at the table, during visits, at the theatre, and in church;

⁶ Rebecca Earle, 'Consumption and Excess', p. 19.

5. our columns will be impervious to any ugly or tasteless production;
6. publication of a 'Musical Bulletin' to include 'a minuet, a waltz, or a quadrille, always something new.'⁷

The importance that members of the young generation gave to fashion and manners, the acquisition of foreign goods, and the emergence of a new socialisation that was more engaged in the public display of consumerism, created a generational conflict with those who followed Rosas. The latter perceived that such attitudes represented a feminisation of men that was dangerous for the country. The 'style of dress served to identify different ideologies at a time when the emerging nation's political panorama was dominated by two tendencies: the Unitarians and the Federals.'⁸ In another article entitled 'The Present Generation versus the Past Generation', Alberdi addressed this ideological division. The protagonist of the story is an old man who represents a masculinity based on the values of the old warrior culture. For him the young consumers of everything European were 'cowards who instead of weapons seek shields: insolent as women and children when a strange force protects their impotence,'⁹ '[w]eak hypocrites full of greatness in their mouths and languor in their hands!'¹⁰ He decried a 'Generation of words, and nothing but words; an era of words' and 'men of style, in the full meaning of the word: a style of walking, a style of dress, a style of writing, a style of speaking, a style of thinking, a style for everything and nothing else but style: this is the vocation, the trend of the young generation – style, form: men of form, a form of men. They speak as men but they are only children.'¹¹

The end of the story makes it clear that the fresh new ideas and spirit of change are not the enemy the old man portrays them to be, but rather a necessary step toward progress. Yet it is interesting to note that the tension between old and new values created by the emergence of the new consumption described by Alberdi was not very different from the earlier reception of the 'culture of sensibility' in England.¹² There, by the eighteenth

⁷ Juan B. Alberdi, 'Modas de Señoras' in *Obras Completas*, vol. I (Buenos Aires, 1886), pp. 273–4.

⁸ Regina A. Root, 'Fashioning Independence: Gender, Dress and Social Space in Postcolonial Argentina', in Regina A. Root (ed.), *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (New York, 2005), p. 31.

⁹ Alberdi, 'La Generación Presente á la Faz de la Generación Pasada' in *Obras I*, p. 385.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

¹² See Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London, 1986); John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1988); Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1987); Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660–1760* (London, 1988); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, (Bloomington, 1985).

century, male writers ‘recognized the large changes commercial capitalism was bringing about in Britain and tended increasingly to advocate them as signs of the progress of civilization.’ But just as in nineteenth century Argentina, these writers demonstrated a ‘persistent and fundamental concern’ about ‘the meaning of changed manners for manhood, traditionally bound up with classical and warrior ideas.’ The decline of the model citizen-soldier was linked to notions of ‘degeneracy’ and to the rise of the ‘monied interest’, a process that had a gender-specific dimension, expressed in the widespread use of the term, ‘effeminacy.’¹³ In Argentina there was a similar concern about the decline of the soldier culture that had existed since the days of Independence, and, as Francine Masiello has demonstrated, documents of this period indicate ‘a less stable set of gender assignments than one might have expected.’¹⁴

Domingo F. Sarmiento was another member of this generation who clearly identified the emergence of a new sensibility represented in the accumulation of certain objects and a different male identity. Reading Sarmiento one is often surprised by his obsession with acts of consumption. In his travel book, he kept a close description of everything he purchased, and associated the possession of these items with the acquisition of a civilised status. His concerns with fashion and consumerism are detailed in his *Facundo*, where he associates a distinguished society with the ‘elegance of manners, the refinement of customs, the cultivation of literature’ and ‘the great commercial interests.’¹⁵ Like many of his generation, by the 1850s he judged that the new male archetype was the *flâneur*, a representative of the new urban consumption that his generation craved to experience. The *flânerie* allowed the members of his generation to participate in a ‘form of imaginary colonialism’ that was absent in their lives because of their peripheral position in Western culture.¹⁶

Sarmiento had the opportunity to finally travel to Europe, the golden dream of ‘civilized’ Latin Americans, in 1848. Once Sarmiento arrived in Paris something very important happened: he was transformed by ‘flâner’. In a letter addressed to his close friend from San Juan, Antonio Aberastarain, he writes that this city of his dreams has left him thoroughly amazed. Its completely feminised space, with streets as ‘charming and coquettish as a

¹³ G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility* (Chicago, 1992), p. 104.

¹⁴ Francine Masiello, *Between Civilization and Barbarism: Women, Nation and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina* (Lincoln, 1991), p. 20.

¹⁵ Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Life in the Argentine Republic in the days of the Tyrants; or Civilization and Barbarism* (New York, 1968), p. 70.

¹⁶ See: Rolf J. Goebel, ‘Benjamin’s Flâneur in Japan: Urban Modernity and Conceptual Relocation’, *The German Quarterly*, vol. 71, no. 4 (Autumn 1998), p. 379.

girlfriend,' caught his attention.¹⁷ He wrote that the city offered itself to him completely, and that he quickly learnt the skill of *flâner*, of strolling, devoting himself to wandering the streets: '*Je flâne*, I walk like a spirit, like an element, like a soulless body in the loneliness of Paris.'¹⁸ Possessed by the 'distracted observation and dream-like reverie' that was characteristic of the *flâneur*, Sarmiento found in this activity the central quality of modern experience.¹⁹ It allowed him to 're-privatise social space', and gave him 'assurance that the individual's passive observation was adequate for knowledge of social reality.'²⁰

According to Lenora Auslander, the *flâneurs* 'occupied public space without a tangible purpose, lingered in cafes,' and were 'definitively men.'²¹ The French *flâneurs* 'consumed the streets and the scene with their eyes and feet rather than with money; they did not even come to possess the objects of their attention.'²² Sarmiento enjoyed this type of consumption. He said that this activity took him to the contemplation of the 'Chinese baths', the 'café Cardinal', and 'lithographs, prints, and books' exhibited on the street by a shop, an activity that he pursued everyday without any particular planning. He got to know all the artists' studios, all the places where 'those *petits riens*' of Parisian art were sold, and all the 'warehouses of *nouveau-tés*.'²³ Interestingly, while describing his consumer habits he felt the need to address the gender preoccupations raised by the Rosistas and emphasise that these men who had a 'half-stupid gaze' were also the same people responsible for the 1789 and 1830 revolutions, pointing out the coexistence between the masculinity of the old warrior with the modern consciousness represented by the new male archetype. He even affirmed that the Frenchman who had brought such terror to the battlefields was also the most 'soft and attentive man.'²⁴

This representation of the activity of '*flanear*' as typical of the sociability of modern men was very common among the members of Sarmiento's generation. José Mármol in *Amalia*, published in 1851, talked about *flanear* 'in

¹⁷ Sarmiento, *Viajes*. vol I (Buenos Aires, 1955), p. 207.

¹⁸ Sarmiento, *Viajes*, p. 208. Italics in the original.

¹⁹ Susan Buck-Morss, 'The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering', *New German Critique* vol. 39 (Autumn 1986), p. 103. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²¹ Leora Auslander, 'The gender of consumer practices in Nineteenth-Century France' in Victoria de Grazia, Ellen Furlough (eds.), *Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley, Calif., 1996), p. 91. ²² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²³ Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Viajes por Europa, Africa I América, 1845-1847* (Madrid, 1993), p. 100. Italics in the original.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100. Around the same time Alberdi also mentioned the elimination of the differences between men and women, something that he was very concerned about. He wrote ironically about the socialists' claims against the difference of the sexes and denounced the fashion that confused the role of men and women. See: Enrique Gandía, 'La Ironía Política de Alberdi', in *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, vol. 8. no. 4 (1966), p. 501.

a museum of feminine delicacies, where everything was reproduced infinitely', showing how modernity was associated with acts of consumerism.²⁵ Jens Andermann has explained this passage by showing how, in this novel, liberal ideology is represented in the presence of objects that refer to transportation, the economy and the circulation of goods.²⁶

In her study of Walter Benjamin *Arcades Project*, Rebecca Schwartz says that if this work suggests anything it is 'that modernity cannot be conceived outside the context of the city, which provided an arena for the circulation of bodies and goods, the exchange of glances, and the exercise of consumerism.'²⁷ Reading Sarmiento's description of Paris and of the *flâneurs*, and in general his interpretation of modern life, we cannot fail to recognise the similarities between his analysis and that of Benjamin. For the *Generación de '37*, including the young Alberdi of *La Moda*, consumerism was a key experience that allowed men the possibility of representing modern culture not as one dominated by male production, but one characterised instead by male consumption. This recognition, which was very advantageous to those who were not part of an industrial society, created many gender concerns as to how virility could be expressed in such an environment. Sarmiento's reminders that the *flâneur* was also a warrior are an example of this tension.

This generation, and Sarmiento particularly, shared Walter Benjamin's analysis of the modern experience. For the latter, 'the commodity world was one which presented itself as the source of infinite variety and diversity, as the focus of new tastes and styles, innovation and invention.'²⁸ Fashion was at the centre of this world of production and consumption both for the members of Sarmiento's generation and for Benjamin, but it would acquire a different meaning once the impact of the Darwinian revolution was felt in Argentina.

Alberdi and Sarmiento Fight About the Importance of Consumerism

The defeat of Juan Manuel de Rosas by a coalition of locals and foreigners in 1852 allowed the exile community to return to the country and discuss the best way to transform society according to their ideals. Both Sarmiento and Alberdi emerged immediately as leaders of different factions that fought about the organisation of the future government and also about attitudes

²⁵ José Mármol. *Amalia* (Buenos Aires, 1964), p. 85.

²⁶ Jens Andermann, *Mapas de poder. Una arqueología literaria del espacio argentino* (Rosario, 2000), p. 62.

²⁷ Rebecca Schwartz, 'Walter Benjamin for Historians', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 106, no. 5 (Dec. 2001), p. 1733.

²⁸ Gordon Bewley, 'Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City', in *Journal of Design History*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1997), p. 101.

towards the relationship between consumption and civilisation. By then, Alberdi had changed some of his original ideas and now believed that the improvement of the country should be sought not only through the accumulation of certain goods, but also by means of an immigration policy that would allow the best men from northern Europe to populate the country. Sarmiento continued his defence of consumerism as an essential mark of civilised status. Their differences were painfully displayed during a famous epistolary exchange in which the two traded ideas and insults.

Campaña al ejército grande was written by Sarmiento in 1852 to differentiate himself from Urquiza, whom he considered another representative of barbarism. As it had been in the past, the possession of certain objects was the indication of each individual's identity in terms of civilisation and barbarism. Urquiza, for example, was of 'decent' bearing, wore a 'white poncho in the country and in the city, but a black dress-coat' when he so desired, 'without it looking wrong and [had], undeniably, a natural manner, but not offensively so.'²⁹ Sarmiento's description of himself, on the other hand, includes remarkable differences:

It happened that I was the only officer of the Argentine army dressing with strictly European severity. My saddle, spurs, polished sword, buttoned coat, gloves, French kepi, tail coat [frac] instead of poncho, all of me was a protest against the gauchesco spirit, thereby drawing some insults in the beginning, to which I would respond successfully with the practical superiority of my means.³⁰

On the battlefield, the author sees himself as representing civilisation and he illustrates this fact through a detailed account of the objects he had purchased. If someone needed a light, for example, he 'would take out an English army knife, with a flint, a lancet for horses, and a whole store of tools.'³¹ To make it clear that this was no mere frivolity, Sarmiento writes that this thing, which 'seems like a petty detail, was part of [his] battle plan against Rosas and the caudillos, followed to the letter, discussed with Mitre and Paunero.' He adds that he was prepared to make his uniform win out 'over the gaucho leggings' if he were to remain in the army.³² The descriptions don't stop there. Sarmiento details how the other soldiers mocked his sophisticated equipment, but he derides them in turn, saying that he lacks for nothing, not even 'a rubber cape' allowing him to keep up even in the torrential rain.

... to finish with the details of my cultured, elegant, and European propaganda among those wild-looking soldiers, I should add that I had rubber boots for that, a strong and well-constructed tent, an iron cot weighing several pounds, so that

²⁹ Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Campaña en el ejército grande*, Colección Grandes Escritores Argentinos, vol. XL (Buenos Aires, n.d.), pp. 112–3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

I could sleep on a lake, sperm oil candles for the night, and a table, desk, and food provisions, enough to be carried by horse.³³

In early 1853, Alberdi responded to Sarmiento's numerous charges against the government that Urquiza was trying to form. His *Cartas sobre la prensa y la política militante de la República Argentina* ('Letters On the Press and Militant Politics in the Argentine Republic') are saturated with a dismissive attitude towards the man who had presented himself as the alternative to Urquiza. In his answer Alberdi refers ironically to the episode described above by Sarmiento, showing how much his own ideas had changed regarding the importance of the creation of a consumer society as a symbol of progress. By now he was defending gender roles derived from English society, where men were producers and women mothers confined in the home. Consumption and luxury did not have a place in a healthy society. Contradicting his previous writings in *La Moda*, he said that women did not have to be too educated, and needed particularly to avoid an education consisting of 'exterior luxury, such as music, dancing, painting', such as had been encouraged until then. The only shining thing in a woman should be her 'honour, dignity, and the modesty of her life.'³⁴ Fashion was no longer important, but rather the creation of an export economy following the immigration of those who had the skills essential to its development. The accumulation of certain objects, and their commercial exchange in markets, meant nothing for him if the commercial expansion was not one that radically transformed the economy of the country.

In many ways Alberdi anticipated the post-Darwinian debates that would dominate Argentina by the end of the nineteenth century, something that it is easily explained considering that, by then, he had been influenced by the writings of the economist Thomas Malthus.³⁵ The latter inspired Charles Darwin to develop his theory of natural selection, and according to his economic view the world can hardly be seen as organised around beauty, harmony or the unlimited expansion of resources exemplified by a modern consumer society.³⁶ The world is here a place of competition due to the scarcity of resources, entailing the need to survive the fight to acquire them. While most of the members of Alberdi's generation were still influenced by positivist ideas, and Alexander von Humboldt's conception of civilisation as represented by unity, harmony and beauty, Alberdi was now imagining a

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

³⁴ Juan B. Alberdi, 'Bases y Puntos de Partida' in *Obras Completas* Vol. III (Buenos Aires, 1886), p. 420.

³⁵ Malthus' influence on Alberdi by this time can be seen in his constitutional studies, such as *Las Bases*. See, Juan B. Alberdi, *Obras Completas*, Vol. III, pp. 526–7.

³⁶ See, Francis Darwin (ed.), *Charles Darwin: His Life Told in an Autobiographical Chapter and in a Selected Series of His Published Letters* (London, 1902), p. 170.

future of competition and struggle according to the law of nature.³⁷ According to Malthus the ‘race of plants and the race of animals shrink under this great restrictive law; and man cannot by any efforts of reason escape from it.’³⁸ Men were bounded to follow natural law. Human institutions could mitigate it, though they could never suspend it.³⁹ Fashion, clothes and civilised objects did not mean much if they were not in the possession of those who knew how to use them. Replying to Sarmiento’s interest in clothing and the possession of civilized objects, Alberdi made his point clear. Clothing, culture and manners were not the solution to what was ultimately a population problem. Regardless of how individuals dressed they were determined by their nature, by the way in which they had evolved over time, interacting with particular natural forces.

An officer of a South American army dressed in the suit you wore is a curious figure, that must have entertained the troops; but an entire South American army made up of our gauchos dressed in frock-coats, French kepis, *paleots* [coats], tail coats, [frac] etc., etc., would be a comedy that would make them drop their weapons laughing on seeing themselves in suits that not even a European would wear in our fields. Those campaigns against the customs of the desert before the desert has been destroyed, against the customs breeding poverty before poverty has been ended, are bad tactics. It is not up to a tailor to distribute European or Asian civilisation with his shears. With a kepi or *paleot*, our gaucho would remain the same man always. Bring Europe through free trade, by the rivers, by the railways, through immigration, not by dressing in a *paleot* those who deserve a poncho.⁴⁰

In his second letter, Alberdi insists that *Campaña’s* arguments were superficial, attributing fashion and ‘colours’ an importance not accorded them in reality: ‘The nation’s salvation could never depend on a colour.’⁴¹ If

³⁷ The work of Alexander von Humboldt was extremely important to the members of Alberdi and his generation. See, Adolfo Prieto, *Los viajeros ingleses y la emergencia de la literatura argentina, 1820–1850* (Buenos Aires, 1996); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992).

³⁸ Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, Vol. I (London, 1826), p. 3.

³⁹ Malthus’s negative ideas about the indigenous and Spanish populations of America left a profound impression on Alberdi. Consider the following quotation from Malthus and its connection with Alberdi’s demographic theories: ‘If the United States of America continue increasing, which they certainly will do, though not with the same rapidity as formerly, the Indians will be driven further and further back into the country, till the whole race is ultimately exterminated, and the territory incapable of further extension. These observations are, in a degree, applicable to all the parts of the earth where the soil is imperfectly cultivated. To exterminate the inhabitants of the greatest part of Asia and Africa, is a thought that could not be admitted for a moment. To civilise and direct the industry of the various tribes of Tartars and Negroes, would certainly be a work of considerable time, and of variable and uncertain success.’ Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Juan B. Alberdi, *Cartas sobre la prensa y la política militante de la República Argentina*, in *Obras Completas*, vol. IV (Buenos Aires, 1886), 40. Italics in the original.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Alberdi wanted to unleash an explosion of uncontrollable indignation, he succeeded. Sarmiento's response includes everything, from the insignificant to the sublime, displaying an almost paranoid character that was not foreign to the writer's thinking as a whole. But it is interesting that he felt extremely threatened by unflattering connections between consumerism and gender. He immediately mentions his own role as a warrior in the battle that sent Rosas into exile, while the advocate of the Entre Ríos government 'absconded to Montevideo' to protect himself during the uprising. Sarmiento reminds his rival that he had been 'among the first' in presenting himself with his 'rifle at the site of combat.'⁴² His rage makes him describe Alberdi in turn as weak, 'like a woman,' too afraid to say what he actually was thinking.⁴³

In Sarmiento's reply to Alberdi, the topic of clothing and consumerism is again presented with the same insistence as before. Personal appearance is the first area that must be mastered in order to establish the new hierarchy elevating work over sloth. In the desert no one could be found living in decent conditions: the women were 'barefoot, foul, ragged,' 'neither sewing nor spinning anything' the children heard not 'a clock, nor [did they see] order in anything, only lakes, rivers, deserts, and a few naked and vagrant men.' They were accustomed to independence, 'in every aspect they knew no measure or order.'⁴⁴ He then warns Alberdi: 'Here you see where the deviations of THAT TAIL COATED MULTITUDE [*multitud de frac*] lead.' Recklessly pursuing the point, he reminds Alberdi that during the twenty years of his rule, Rosas had 'persecuted the tail coat and had those wearing it gelded (rabonado).'⁴⁵ Rosas had subjugated 'the business, moral, and cultured class,' wearing 'civilisation's suit.'⁴⁶ Finally, Sarmiento feminises Alberdi and reclaims his own virility to separate himself from his enemy.

And there was not a man belonging to the tail coated multitude [*multitud de frac*] in Valparaiso who would pull the pants off this weak, hunchbacked, civilised man and dress him in skirts; since the *chiripá*, which is fighting the tail coat, would never work with the weakling who doesn't ride horseback; an abbot by his manners; an acrobat by his hypnotic gestures; a woman by his voice; a rabbit by his fear; a eunuch by his political aspirations; Federalist-Unitarian; eclectic-pantheist, journalist-attorney, conservative-demagogue, and plenipotentiary sent by the Argentine Republic, virile, noble, great even in its blunders!⁴⁷

The feminisation of Alberdi responds to the tensions that Sarmiento felt in justifying both his consumption and his masculinity. In the 1852 debate between these intellectuals we can see how consumerism and gender were at

⁴² Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Las ciento y una*, in *Obras*, vol. XV, p. 139.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 149. ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 172. ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 180. ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 180. ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

play, and how Alberdi had changed his youthful ideas about the importance of fashion, manners and the creation of a consumer society.

Consumerism and Darwinism

By 1870 the reality of Argentina was very different from that of twenty years before. Juan Manuel de Rosas had left the country to live in exile and his enemies, among them Sarmiento, had begun to reshape economic and social life through policies that aimed at modernising the country to create their desired civilised nation. The economy had expanded and consumption was at a level that was unheard of during the Spartan times of Rosas. As Fernando Rocchi explained, between 1877 and 1910 consumption in Argentine markets grew as a consequence of the export boom initiated in the previous years. Furthermore, massive immigration tripled the population, which became two and a half times richer. As a result of these changes, the Argentine economy reached first place in Latin America and became a benchmark of prosperity for the area; a drastic departure for a country that had begun as one of the poorest areas of the Spanish colonial system. By the end of the nineteenth century all the economic indicators showed the rapid development of markets and an explosion in the consumption of several goods, among them clothing.⁴⁸

Alberdi's attitude toward markets and consumerism had taken an even more negative turn by the 1870s. As Ricardo Salvatore has explained, according to Alberdi the 'integration of the country into the world market had had a discouraging effect on people's habits and attitudes; it had only engendered conspicuous consumption among the wealthy, leaving the poor in the same state of inactivity and poverty.'⁴⁹ The changing perception of the dangers of male consumption continued an old debate, but one now dominated by the way in which gender and sex had been called into question with the publication of *Origin of Species* in 1859, and *The Descent of Man* in 1871. The spread of the Darwinian conception of evolution was quite fast in Argentina, and was followed very closely by the members of the *Generación de '37*, who were always committed to science as a way to improve the political and social environment of the country.

Beginning in the 1860s we can find several manifestations of the evolutionary discussion in the country. In 1862 José Manuel de Estrada published *El Génesis de nuestra raza* in order to refute the teaching of

⁴⁸ Fernando Rocchi, 'Consumir es un Placer: La Industria y la Demanda en Buenos Aires a la Vuelta del Siglo Pasado', *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 37, no. 148, (Jan.–Mar. 1998), p. 535.

⁴⁹ Ricardo D. Salvatore, 'The Strength of Markets in Latin America's Sociopolitical Discourse, 1750–1850', *Latin American Perspectives*, no. 104 (Jan. 1999), p. 32.

Lamarckian evolution in schools.⁵⁰ The English-speaking community also introduced copies of *Origin* by the mid-1860s, as William Hudson related in his memoirs.⁵¹ Hermann Burmeister, the Director of the Public Museum of Buenos Aires, knew the work of Darwin; in fact received the journals in which his early papers were published, and he himself had been cited as reference by the English naturalist for his work on entomology.⁵² In 1866 Alberdi wrote that it was obvious, after a quick glance at the catalogue of any library in South America, that the books in highest demand were those of ‘Contillach, Malebranch, Darwin, Jouffroy, etc.’⁵³

The new scientific ideas deeply influenced the two intellectuals analysed in this article. Juan B. Alberdi published *Peregrinaciones de Luz del Día* in 1871, among other things to attack the misinterpretations of Darwinism in his country, particularly those of Sarmiento. In 1883, Domingo Sarmiento completed *Conflicto de Razas y Armonías in América* as an attempt to update *Civilization and Barbarism* after Darwinism. Both works are extremely confusing, and show how hard their authors were struggling to adapt to the new conceptions of progress and civilisation.

It is very difficult to pinpoint exactly when each of them read Darwin, but their interest in the ideas that revolutionised science is hardly strange. As Juan María Gutierrez affirmed in a public speech, for members of this generation, literature and science were responsible for the improvement of material existence and the perfecting of human beings.⁵⁴ They were all avid readers of both literature and science journals, and they tried to keep up with the latest ideas of the most prominent scientists. In 1868, while he was travelling back to Buenos Aires from the United States, Sarmiento wrote that he knew of the disputes between Agassiz and Darwin, further asserting that ‘Darwin’s theory was Argentine’ and that ‘he would nationalise it with the help of Burmeister.’⁵⁵ He did not know at the time that the latter was actually totally against the *Origins* on strictly methodological grounds. In the case of Alberdi it is clear that he knew about the new theory by around the same time. By 1869 he wrote that ‘racial distinctions have no sense’ according to a science that sees the perfecting of the species ‘in the mixing’ of the races. In

⁵⁰ José Manuel de Estrada, *El Génesis de Nuestra Raza* (Buenos Aires, 1862).

⁵¹ William H. Hudson, *Far Away and Long Ago* (London, 1931), pp. 326–32.

⁵² The *Anales del Museo Público* de Buenos Aires includes a detailed description of the journals received through subscriptions. The references to Burmeister in Darwin’s correspondence are available online through the *Darwin Correspondence Project*: <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/>

⁵³ Juan B. Alberdi, *Ensayos póstumos*, vol. VII (Buenos Aires, 1899), p. 104.

⁵⁴ Quoted by Alberto Palcos, in Esteban Echeverría, *El Dogma Socialista*. Edición crítica. (La Plata, 1940), p. 258.

⁵⁵ Domingo Sarmiento, ‘Un Viaje de Nueva York a Buenos Aires: De 23 de Julio al 29 de Agosto de 1868’, *Obras Completas*, vol. XLIX (Buenos Aires, 1900), p. 321.

order to lend authority to his claim, he affirmed that ‘the naturalist Darwin has cleared away any doubt concerning this natural truth, that is much more important than generally believed to the freedom of the human lineage [*género humano*].’⁵⁶ Alberdi clearly incorporated Darwinian theory into his political writings by the 1870s, something that was easy to do due to the fact that both he and Darwin relied on similar economic sources.⁵⁷

Eduardo Holmberg’s *Dos Partidos en Lucha*, published in 1875, provides a good account of how the young educated elites discussed the new scientific ideas, with a view toward understanding how the future of Argentina might look, given the truth of evolutionary doctrines.⁵⁸ It also shows the violent disputes between those who supported Burmeister and those who supported Darwin, including the majority of the educated elites. By the 1880s, the catholic opposition and the press talked about the ‘naturalist’ culture to refer to those who defended some form of evolutionism, whether Lamarckian, Spencerian or Darwinian.⁵⁹

The impact of the concept of natural selection is reflected in the concerns about extinction that predominated in the literature of the 1880s. Sarmiento himself, in a departure from his usual self-aggrandisement, said in a letter written in 1885 that he was unable to evolve completely due to the difficulty of his ‘struggle for life’, an expression that was by then a favourite in his vocabulary.⁶⁰ Alberdi also wrote about the consequences of natural selection in his later essays, though for him they only reaffirmed his previous call to base civilisation on the selection of the right population and not on the accumulation of unproductive goods. In 1874 Alberdi wrote in his *Estudios Económicos* that the cycle of debts and civil wars was an expression of the ‘struggle for life, in the Darwinian sense, as applied to economic facts.’⁶¹

Marcelo Montserrat has demonstrated that by the middle of the 1870s, Darwinism was regularly invoked by ‘new groups constituted by the most

⁵⁶ Juan B. Alberdi, *Ensayos póstumos*, vol. VII (Buenos Aires, 1899), p. 349.

⁵⁷ By the 1870s Darwin is always mentioned by Alberdi as the new scientific source to understand America. See, *Ensayos póstumos*, vol. XII (Buenos Aires, 1900), pp. 80–1.

⁵⁸ Eduardo Holmberg, *Dos Partidos en Lucha: Fantasía Científica* (Buenos Aires, 1875). On Darwinism in Argentina, see, Marcelo Montserrat, ‘Holmberg y el Darwinismo en la Argentina’, *Criterio* no. 47 (1974), pp. 591–8; ‘The Evolutionist Mentality in Argentina: An Ideology of Progress’ in Thomas Glick, Miguel Angel Puig-Samper, Rosaura Ruiz, (eds.), *The reception of Darwinism in the Iberian World* (Boston, 1999), pp. 1–29. *Darwinistas! Evolution, Race and Science in Nineteenth Century Argentina*, written and translated by Adriana Novoa and Alex Levine (forthcoming, University of Nebraska Press).

⁵⁹ See, José Manuel Estrada, *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires, 1905). There is a continuous overlapping between Darwinian and Spencerian evolutionism; for the purposes of this article I concentrate only on those ideas that came from Darwin.

⁶⁰ Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Epistolario Intimo* (Buenos Aires, 1961), p. 120. English in the original.

⁶¹ Juan B. Alberdi, *Escritos Póstumos*, vol. I (Quilmes, 2002), p. 195.

advanced members of the *Generación del Ocbenta*.⁶² It is important to recognise that the Darwinian revolution also spread among those who neither read Darwin nor knew much about how his scientific ideas actually worked. In the same way that cloning has, in our contemporary society, become a common fantasy following the popularisation of genetics, the press and popular literature of late nineteenth century Buenos Aires brought to public attention the most popular ideas introduced in the *Origin* and later *The Descent of Man*. One such idea was the notion of human descent from apes, reproduced, for example, by the popular journal *El Mosquito* in order to ridicule Sarmiento's Darwinism.



El Mosquito, 23 September 1877.

The Death of the Flâneur: Consumption and Feminisation in the 1870s and 1880s

Juan B. Alberdi was well aware of the changes introduced by the new scientific ideas and the different modernities that resulted from following the examples of England and France. In 1870 he criticised the influence of Parisian culture and, following the example of the British society that he

⁶² Marcelo Montserrat, 'La mentalidad evolucionista en la Argentina: una ideología del progreso' in *Documento de Trabajo* (Universidad de San Andrés, 1997), p. 9.

favoured, proposed the creation of a male culture that organised spaces related only to production. The body and bodily pleasures, seen as the ‘natural’ realm of bad women, were for him exemplars of a primitivism that would not bring progress to the nation. In Alberdi’s view, English culture was exemplified by the masculinisation of modernity. Parisian consumption was the opposite, oriented not towards male activity, but towards a consumerism controlled by a femininity that distracted men from productive work. Alberdi clearly denounced the predominance of female desire, or desire for females, in his later writings.

It was true what M. Zimmerman, the old English immigrant in Buenos Aires, used to say, though he does so less now, to a respectable lady, who noted his withdrawal and that of the English from Buenos Aires society: ‘We don’t withdraw: they withdraw us. The new society has excluded and segregated us callously, and little by little, like heterogeneous elements, for some years at this point.’

French influence, the wrong influence, that of their industrial, corrosive, and corrupting literature: the influence of Paris, that is to say, of the civilisation of the *cocottes*, of the *petits crevés*, of the *baretas*, of the cabarets [...] is taking over and replacing, bit by bit, the English influence of the era of *Moreno*, *Rivadavia*, *Las Heras*, etcetera.

As the most progressive sectors of Paris become anglicised, Buenos Aires is frenchified in the sense of the Paris of Mazzini and Garibaldi, the Paris of Castelar; suburban Paris; the Paris of Rochefort and street lamps: of the republic of Belleville that understands its freedom as breaking the street lamps.⁶³

According to the author of *Las Bases*, Argentina needed to control its consumption of imported objects with a morality that placed clear limits on expenditures. This morality would be regulated, following Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, by the imposition of a family structure that controlled access to property.⁶⁴ Men outside the structure of the family were a problem; men whose gains were not reinvested towards the accumulation of property for the future generations were destroying the country. In 1871 Alberdi published *Luz del Día en América* to show how the use of new scientific ideas, and particularly Sarmiento’s use of them, were actually creating more chaos in Argentina. Sarmiento is named Tartufo, the enemy of truth represented in the main character, Luz del Día.⁶⁵ In a section entitled ‘Darwin’s theory applied to social regeneration’, Alberdi explains how Don Quijote, who had emigrated to Argentina, had read Darwin’s *Origins* and with the book in mind organised an experiment to perfect a state in

⁶³ Juan B. Alberdi, ‘Comment of 1870’ in *Escritos póstumos de Juan Bautista Alberdi*, vol. IX (Buenos Aires, 1895–1901), pp. 661–3.

⁶⁴ Juan B. Alberdi, ‘Estudios Económicos’ in *Escritos póstumos de Juan Bautista Alberdi*, (Quilmes, 2002), pp. 284–5.

⁶⁵ This is the name that he used to identify Sarmiento in his latter writings. See, *Escritos Póstumos*, vol. X (Buenos Aires, 1899), p. 59.

Patagonia named Quijotania. Mocking Sarmiento's emphasis on the power of education to perfect future citizens, Alberdi makes fun of his arch-rival's understanding of modern science, and of his costly efforts to transform men who were incapable of ever really becoming civilised. Don Quijote, in this tale, also has many attributes that are closely associated with the author of *Facundo*, the first of them being his delusional tendencies.⁶⁶

Don Quijote had read Darwin's famous book on the origin of species, in which the natural history of the Earth proves that all of them must have descended from the four or six original forms in which the animal and vegetable kingdoms first appeared on the globe. These forms had been infinitely multiplied under a law peculiar to organic life, the law of natural selection or spontaneous perfectibility, on which species have the capacity to accumulate the improvements introduced by education, for the benefit of posterity. By this law of continuous, natural creation, the human species must have descended from some other, less perfect species – such as the ape, for example.⁶⁷

Mocking Don Quijote's interpretation of the new theory that was 'heating so many heads,'⁶⁸ Alberdi explains how this pathetic character had decided that in fact man descended from sheep instead of apes, and how through education and the adoption of man's most elevated culture, the sheep (*carneros*) could actually become men.⁶⁹ Don Quijote intended his experiment 'to transform animal species in mere years when Darwin had said that this process happened over millennia.'⁷⁰ He 'knew that Patagonia had inspired in Darwin his great idea about the origin of species. He wanted to have the glory of creating in this same desert the first successful and practical experimental proof of this theory.' What's more, he wanted to do so in the name of a patriotic idea that demanded that in four days 'a simple estate (*estancia*) could be turned into a federal nation of the great confederation of the River Plate, through an artificial and hastened effort of natural selection, a kind of a nature's *coup d'état*.'⁷¹

⁶⁶ Sarmiento was known in the popular press as 'el loco Sarmiento.'

⁶⁷ Juan B. Alberdi, *Luz del Día en América* (Buenos Aires, 1916) p. 169.

⁶⁸ Juan B. Alberdi, *Luz del Día*, p. 169.

⁶⁹ During his stay in Boston, Sarmiento read the work of Huxley and even wrote an article in *The Boston Daily Advertiser* about the breeding of sheep, aiming to prove that there was a new species of sheep in Argentina. It is very probable that Alberdi was making fun of this article in order to show his rival's ignorance. See *The Boston Daily Advertiser*, September 19, 1865. Sarmiento also repeats this argument in a eulogy given on the occasion of Darwin's death: 'It seems to me that we Argentines have sufficient motive for subscribing to the transmutationist doctrine, given how we transmute one variety of sheep in another. We have constituted a new species, the *argentiferous sheep*, so-called both because of its Argentine origins, and because it brings in the silver.' Domingo Sarmiento, 'Lecture on Darwin', presented at a public meeting of the Medical Circle (*Círculo Médico*) in the National Theatre, 30 May 1882, after news of Darwin's death had arrived. The English text comes from *Darwinistas! Evolution, Race and Science in Nineteenth Century Argentina*.

⁷⁰ Juan B. Alberdi, *Luz del Día*, p. 169.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Alberdi continued his old debate with Sarmiento about the importance of education and consumerism in the process of civilising the country. In a satire of Sarmiento's interest in funding colonies that populated the country while improving the evolution of its population, Alberdi mentions the absurd laws enacted and the immense waste of resources invested in the process. Education and the creation of markets of consumption were for him only masks that disguised the fact that only those men who were truly evolved had the secret to survival and progress. The social evolution of Argentina demanded the importation of the most advanced bodies, which were in fact the most precious resource. Darwinism made Alberdi's distrust of consumerism and luxury even more radical, and his distaste for Sarmiento's interest in social engineering even stronger. As Evelyn Fishburn has shown in her analysis of *Luz del Día*, for Alberdi 'the Anglo-Saxons and the Northern races stand at the top of racial pyramid. They are the people who have reached the goals that he values most highly: political maturity and economic success.'⁷²

Throughout the 1870s, Alberdi strongly criticised the idea of civilisation defended by Bartolomé Mitre, Varela and Sarmiento. He considered their liberalism truly ignorant and based on an expansion of consumption and luxury that did not respond to the logic of a sound economy, a fact that showed their 'natural' inability to govern the country. In one of his writings he called this attitude 'educated barbarism' and compared these political figures to the participants of the 1871 commune in Paris who 'not only knew more, but dressed better, knew about courtesy, were more elegant; but even so they were not less barbaric.'⁷³ During this decade he hardened his view of the local population based on Darwin's ideas. He further asserted that according to the English naturalist, all the domesticated and educated European animals imported to South America had returned to their original primitivism after being abandoned and left on their own in the desert. 'Man can be no exception to this law of reversion to ancestral type, against which we need to help nature.'⁷⁴ In 1878 Alberdi wrote that he believed that the government worked by 'natural law', and that the latter was 'responsible for the life and progress of the species (Darwin's *natural selection*).' 'The human species grows like all other living species, and the government can have no more authority over this growth than the owners of cattle have over the growth of their flock.'⁷⁵

⁷² Evelyn Fishburn, *The Portrayal of Immigration in Nineteenth Century Argentine Fiction* (1845–1902) (Berlin, 1981), pp. 41–2.

⁷³ Juan B. Alberdi, 'Varela' in *Escritos Póstumos*, vol. XII (Buenos Aires, 1900), p. 57.

⁷⁴ Juan B. Alberdi, *Escritos Póstumos*, vol. XI (Buenos Aires, 1900), p. 404.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 403. Italics in the original.

By 1871 Sarmiento was a fervent defender of Darwin, but the way in which he used his work was as usual very eclectic and less deterministic than his rival's. Even when he had also changed his view on the role of male consumption in civilisation, he was not willing to part from his faith in the power of education and the creation of a culture of civilised consumerism. For this reason, by contrast with Alberdi, he paid more attention to sexual selection than to natural selection. Sexual selection was 'the selection of certain traits in animals not because of the advantage they conferred to an individual in the struggle for life, but because of the advantage they conferred in the struggle to find a mate.'⁷⁶ Sexual selection was responsible for all of the changes that were not the result of the struggle for life. For Darwin, race was not a change that resulted from this struggle, since when he 'came to analyze the physical racial traits in man, he could not see what use many of these traits might have had in the struggle for life. If they had no use in the struggle for survival, they could not have arisen by natural selection.'⁷⁷

Sarmiento was clearly aware that according to the new evolutionism, change could occur by either natural or sexual selection. His 1882 eulogy for Darwin shows clearly how he understood the new science. He explains that, after 'attributing the variation of organic forms to the natural selection of the most vigorous types, and those most adapted to the struggle for existence in their respective environments', Darwin had proceeded to analyse 'an even more significant cause, the sympathetic aspiration toward beauty, by which so many animals have clothed themselves in such exquisite forms, adorned with inimitable elegance and luxury, heightened by all the colours of the rainbow and all the metallic tones of enamel.'⁷⁸ If in Alberdi, Darwin's theory was visible in the economic laws of competition and productivity that were regulated by natural selection, in Sarmiento it is the search for beauty that gives society a sense of harmony and balance. In this regard the latter used Herbert Spencer's ideas for rejecting the role of natural selection as the force behind human morality.⁷⁹

Sarmiento was particularly interested in keeping the consumption of beautiful objects as one of the most important expressions of civilised life. In his long lecture about Darwin, Sarmiento presented a summary of his own ideas on the new theory of evolution and on how it had ushered in a new way of looking at civilisation. According to him, as anyone 'who has seen the spectacle of an aristocratic ball can attest, when young women move to the cadence of the music, they instinctively confirm Darwin's theory.' The women 'improve and beautify the race by means of all the attractions and

⁷⁶ Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800–1960* (Hamden, CT, 1982), p. 59.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁷⁸ Domingo Sarmiento, 'Lecture on Darwin.'

⁷⁹ On Spencer and Darwin see: Helena Cronin, *The Ant and the Peacock. Altruism and Sexual Selection from Darwin to Today* (New York, 1991), pp. 371–9.

seductions, all the colours, shapes, and adornments, the fine arts can offer.⁸⁰ Through these weapons they were able to attract the attention of the best males. This paragraph shows close kinship with Darwin's idea of how sexual selection works in the aristocracies of civilised nations. For Darwin, aristocratic and wealthy families had become 'handsomer, according to the European standard of beauty' than the middle class because of 'having chosen during many generations from all classes the more beautiful women as their wives.'⁸¹

Female beauty was here what regulated racial change and the expression of heredity at work. This was not the cruel and opportunistic natural selection preferred by Alberdi. 'A spray of flowers, or feathers, carelessly draped to one side of the head, causes her to lose her balance and posture, lifting her face in compensation, and the undulation and inclination of her swanlike neck display vivacity and intelligence.'⁸² Sarmiento, unlike Alberdi, was never able to abandon away his pre-Darwinian ideas about how civilisation was built through culture and the acquisition of social traits to be passed on to future generations. In this regard, Sarmiento's adoption of a Lamarckian evolutionism that allowed for the passing of traits learned through socialisation was made more plausible by the fact that Darwin's own ideas changed from the *Origin* to *Descent of Man*, in which he was more inclined to allow a role for soft inheritance.⁸³ Darwin recognised that among men and lower animals 'brilliant colours and certain forms, as well as harmonious and rhythmical sounds,' gave pleasure and were 'called beautiful', though he makes clear that the reasons for this preference were unknown. Certainly there was no universal 'standard of beauty with respect to the human body.' But it was possible that 'certain tastes may in the course of time become inherited,' though there was no concrete evidence in favour of this belief.⁸⁴ In 1875 Sarmiento gave a speech in congress that changed Darwin's 'possible' to a sure certainty. He claimed that the author of *Descent* believed that ideas could become as fixed to people as 'their blood and their bones' since they were inherited from generation to generation.⁸⁵

In contrast to Alberdi, who did not believe in the improvement of a population through the possession of certain objects or culture, Sarmiento's reliance on soft inheritance allowed him to maintain a role for beauty and harmony. Reading one section of *Descent* entitled 'on the influence of beauty

⁸⁰ Domingo Sarmiento, 'Lecture on Darwin'.

⁸¹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* in Edward O. Wilson (ed.), *From so Simple a Beginning, The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin* (New York, 2006). p. 1220.

⁸² Domingo Sarmiento, 'Lecture on Darwin'.

⁸³ See: Peter Vorzimmer, 'Charles Darwin and Blending Inheritance' in *Isis* vol. 54, no. 3 (September 1963), pp. 371–90. ⁸⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 1217.

⁸⁵ Domingo Sarmiento, *Obras* Vol. XIX (Buenos Aires, 1898), p. 349.

in determining the marriages of mankind,' we find Sarmiento's source for his 1882 speech. In it Darwin affirms that in 'civilised life man is largely, but by no means exclusively, influenced in the choice of his wife by external appearance',⁸⁶ and this appearance in civilised societies was of course related to fashion and the consumption of those products that improve how one looks. Sarmiento understood this fact, but this time he reduced consumption to women and related their activity to the biological evolution of the species. 'Such is the history of birdsong and bright plumage, of butterflies and flowers. The cultured, elegant woman of Egypt, India, or Etruria, in whose tomb we find boxes of mirrors, powders, combs, and other ladylike affectations, is the very epilogue, and the fairest adornment of the process of organic creation.'⁸⁷ Fashion among those who were civilised was now an expression of an organic search for beauty in order to attract mates and accumulate particular traits that would make the race more beautiful.

The peacock's tail has instructed queens and princesses in their conceptions of majesty, and when a girl spends her time training her posture before the mirror, eventually she will become beautiful, or if not her, then her daughters, until the poise and elegance brought to America by the Andalusian ladies, and still preserved in our older families, become hereditary. Darwinism, pure Darwinism, is nothing more than what the vulgar, *antiscientific* mouths call coquetry, from 'cock,' or rooster, referring to the bad habit of primping and fluffing one's plumage.⁸⁸

Sarmiento's reference to birds follows closely the four sections in *Descent*, in which mating among birds is described to explain the mechanism of sexual selection.⁸⁹ In these sections Darwin compares, for example, the characteristic plumage and ornaments of male birds to 'the many changes of fashion which we admire in our own dresses.'⁹⁰ Furthermore, as 'any fleeting fashion in dress comes to be admired by man, so with birds a change of almost any kind in the structure or colouring of the feathers in the male appears to have been admired by the female.'⁹¹ Darwin clearly states that in this regard 'the mental powers of birds do not differ fundamentally from ours.'⁹² Sarmiento follows him in stressing the importance that mating and beauty have for the modification of races, though he adds a proviso concerning meaning of choice among civilised men. Among civilised people 'the strains of battle for the possession of the women' had long ceased, freeing men's energy to dedicate themselves to more productive endeavours.⁹³ Sarmiento was aware that after Darwinism, men absorbed by fashion and dress were too closely

⁸⁶ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 1210.

⁸⁷ Domingo Sarmiento, 'Lecture on Darwin.' ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, italics in the original.

⁸⁹ For further explanation on sexual selection see, Helena Cronin, *The Ant and the Peacock. Altruism and Sexual Selection from Darwin to Today* (New York, 1991).

⁹⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 1151. ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1062.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 1091. ⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 1203.

associated with barbarians who spent hours painting their faces or selecting decorative plumage. Females were the ones now concerned about dress, and who bore the burden of sexual selection with their display of beauty. Sarmiento purposely avoids mentioning in the previous quotation that the peacock tail is not a female attribute, but a male one.

Darwinism also naturalised the differences between men and women.⁹⁴ But the need to show a clear difference between the sexes went against the universal culture of consumerism. This theory's emphasis on difference between the sexes, and its naturalisation of them, required a strict separation of gender roles even despite the homogenous demands of capitalism. For Darwin, men had 'greater size, strength, courage, pugnacity, and even greater energy' than women, who had acquired 'sweeter voices and become more beautiful than men' due to the evolutionary process.⁹⁵ Man became the rival of other men, he delighted in competition, and this led 'to ambition which passes too easily into selfishness. These latter qualities seem to be his natural and unfortunate birthright.' In the case of women 'the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation', were more 'strongly marked than in man.' More importantly for Darwin, these feminine qualities were also 'characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation.'⁹⁶ On close examination it appears that rapid perception, intuition and even the power of imitation were some of the features that attracted Sarmiento to the '*flaneo*', an activity that was now an expression of decadence and degeneracy among men.⁹⁷ Strict segregation of the sexes limited the elimination of gender boundaries that Sarmiento had viewed so positively during his stay in Paris. The warriors could not be soft and intuitive anymore. Dress became a weapon destined to attract a suitor, but in civilisation women were the only ones who could display the feathers, openly expressing beauty. Men who were like women, who were not clearly different from them, were presented as degenerates.

Contrary to Sarmiento, Alberdi saw in nature itself the source of change in civilisation. Following his admired English society, he naturalised gender roles and affirmed that men should produce while women should be confined to the home. The mother was the sculptor of the mould that formed people. While in primitive societies luxury was the essential province of woman, and she was adorned as a jewel to seduce and be sold in marriage, in truly civilised societies what was important was to follow the essential

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1203.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1234.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1204.

⁹⁷ Alberdi noted the relationship between luxury, adornments and the savages. 'A girl in whose education no attention is paid to morality, and where the only thought is to adorn her with shiny talents, represents for civilised society the counterpart of a shirtless indigenous woman, wearing flowers in her hair and earrings.' Juan B. Alberdi, 'Educación' in *Escritos Póstumos*, vol. XII (Buenos Aires, 1900), p. 162.

qualities of nature.⁹⁸ ‘Nature is the true mother of the *creatures*: she raised them materially and morally. What we called mother is just an instrument of nature.’⁹⁹ While natural selection better described the fight to possess a family and property, sexual selection was displayed in the ballroom and the politics of mating.

The expansion of luxurious consumption after Rosas’ defeat happened at a time in which ‘some of the further implications of evolutionary theory became apparent, particularly the social and psychological implications of Darwin’s theories and their bearing on relations between men and women.’¹⁰⁰ Attending to the science that had revealed the threat that feminisation of men and elimination of sexual difference posed to society, Sarmiento began to discuss policies to create places that would promote male socialisation by fostering interactions not mediated by consumerism. Appointed by President Nicolás Avellaneda to preside over the creation of the *Parque 3 de Febrero*, he put his new ideas into play. This park, at the site of Juan Manuel de Rosas’s house in Palermo, was inaugurated in November of 1875. The former president defined the new park as the ‘birthright of the people, a true hygienic treatment that will strengthen their limbs through healthy exercise, will broaden their spirits through the sight of the fabulous views in every direction, and will cultivate good taste through the blending of the natural and artistic beauty that these extensive gardens will offer.’¹⁰¹ The changes were intended to inaugurate neutral public areas that would foment more manly practices than shopping and public displays of male beauty.

Four years later, the mayor of Buenos Aires wrote to Sarmiento, who was then Minister of the Interior, to request that troops no longer drill in the plazas, where they were ruining the greens and frightening women and children. Sarmiento, now a converted Darwinist and very far from his old *flaneo*, harshly replied that the supposed apprehensions of women and children were ridiculous, since they should be glad to see the soldiers performing ‘the exercises of modern warfare, a spectacle of intelligence, discipline and real gymnastics enjoyed by people in every country, especially women and children, who do not fear to see their defenders.’ To end forcefully, as was his style, Sarmiento reprimanded Guerrico that ‘in this case you do not express the feelings of the people, who have yet to become so effeminate that they are frightened by seeing their soldiers drill in the scientific practice of

⁹⁸ Juan B. Alberdi, ‘Varela’ in *Escritos Póstumos*, vol. XII, p. 160.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163. Italics in the original.

¹⁰⁰ Gilliam Beer, *Darwin’s Plots. Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 196.

¹⁰¹ Domingo F. Sarmiento, ‘El Parque Palermo’ in *Discursos Populares*, Colección Grandes Escritores Argentinos, vol. I (Buenos Aires, s/f), p. 208.

the military tactics for their defence.¹⁰² The notion of men as the ‘natural’ defenders of females and the emphasis on virility are placed here in the context of a modern science that demanded fitness and strength from men.

Sarmiento’s passing accusation of effeminacy on the part of the population did not go unnoticed by Mayor Guerrico, who replied in kind: ‘the descendants of the leaders of 1810, and of those who were able to emancipate the united provinces of Río de la Plata, preserve in their veins the same virility and the same patriotism of those noble and spirited men.’¹⁰³ As had been the case during the time of Rosas, the model of the man-warrior opposed to the effeminate man dominated by sensual pleasure and luxury reappeared in this exchange, only now the justification for the accusation of weakness and degeneracy was clothed in the trappings of a new science that had sparked a revolution in the understanding of sexuality and heredity.

Conclusion

This article has suggested the ways in which for Alberdi, Sarmiento, and their generation, the experience of the modern was initially linked to the creation of a male consumer society that replaced the old warrior values associated with the wars of Independence and Spanish culture. However, by the mid-nineteenth century Alberdi had changed his original view to promote a population replacement policy that would allow foreigners the right to mate to speed up social and economic reform in Argentina. Clothes, manners and the consumption of beauty were not enough for him now that civilisation had become much more connected to the bodies of those who were considered ‘naturally’ civilized. Civilisation was defined exclusively in terms of population, not in terms of culture. Alberdi’s pessimism in the 1850s was expressed in his lack of trust in the markets for those who were not ‘naturally’ inclined to produce. As he stated in his 1851 debate with Felix Frías about the role of Catholicism in civilisation, he believed that it was impossible to impose British culture on Argentines since the latter belonged to a race lacking the degree of civilisation required to understand it.¹⁰⁴ Fashion and consumption would not solve the problem; to the contrary, they would encourage the ‘natural’ lack of productivity that came from the Spaniards, whose love for luxurious consumption was well documented. For Alberdi, obsessive consumerism became after Darwinism a trait that confirmed the primitivism of the population of Argentina. Natural selection favoured those who produced over those who wasted resources.

¹⁰² *Memoria Municipal 1879* (Buenos Aires, 1880), p. 334.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

¹⁰⁴ Juan B. Alberdi, *Obras Completas*, vol. III (Buenos Aires, 1886), p. 361.

In the case of Sarmiento, in the mid-nineteenth century, civilisation was identified with the expansion of male consumption as represented by the *flâneur*. But after the Darwinian revolution he saw that men who craved luxury and pursued beauty were depicted as barbarians who wasted time on what in developed societies were female pursuits. Competition and productivity were clearly the features that characterised modern males. This new understanding of civilisation also demanded gender difference, so Sarmiento transformed his old ideas while maintaining a view that identified beauty and harmony as the essential qualities that defined civilisation. Consumption of luxurious goods and fashion were still important for him, though applied to the mating politics that underlay racial transformation. Women were the symbols of beauty while men represented strength.

In his later years Sarmiento ferociously opposed the consumerism of young males, while promoting the pursuit of beauty among females. His attitudes about women were quite the opposite of those of his rival Alberdi. While the latter tried to lock women in the house, away from consumerism and luxury, Sarmiento promoted a 'market' in females as essential to the improvement of the future Argentine race. The way in which each of them used Darwin proves to be anticipatory of the future debates that evolutionism would bring to Latin America. In response to the harsh implications of natural selection, José Rodó's *Ariel* and José Vasconcelos' *The Cosmic Race* would also try to recover the role of spiritualism, harmony and beauty. As Sarmiento correctly pointed out, after Darwin fashion and luxurious consumption can be linked not only to pleasure, but also to an important manifestation of organic evolution. While Alberdi used natural selection to prove that luxurious consumption and fashion were bad for males and females alike, since they constituted a continuation of indigenous and Spanish primitivism, Sarmiento used sexual selection to show that female consumerism was vital to evolution and racial transformation. Alberdi maintained that civilisation was the result of the struggle to acquire resources to produce more, while fashion and luxurious consumption were the expression of a degenerate society poorly prepared to govern itself. Sarmiento instead defended consumption among females as the expression of organic evolution, since it was through this activity that women triggered the racial transformation that would perfect humankind. The attention to personal appearance and the desire to be beautiful would be seen after Darwin as hereditary traits that separated those who were able to produce from those who were only able to consume.