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Journey to the Centre of the Earth: Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, a Man of Letters in Algeria*

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Ah, quando fia ch'io possa in Italia tornar? Ha ormai tre mesi, che in questi rei paese
Già fatto schiavo, e dal mio ben lontano…

Alas, when might I return to my Italy?
For three months now I have been enslaved in this evil land, so distant from my home
Gioacchino Rossini, L'Italiana in Algeri

Nineteenth-century travel accounts contributed to the existing body of knowledge about the world at the time they were written, and today they serve as witness to the merging of expansionist progress with the scientific state. The primary function of these accounts was to circumscribe the world of rationality. Their authors were enlightened nomads whose duty was to incorporate new and astonishing facts as objects of knowledge into their writing, which created a *mise en scène* of mysterious plots; this process was in fact the first globalisation. Romanticism organised this narrative into a powerful textual montage on alterity, which combined scientific discourse, aesthetic response, and humanistic concern. Such a multifaceted set of characteristics posed serious challenges for the traveller-writer of that era, and Latin Americans had their own *grand tour*.[1]

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento represents the Latin American tradition of statesmen-writers and personifies the historical articulation between

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[1] Ricardo Cicerchia, *Journey, Rediscovery and Narrative: British Travel Accounts of Argentina* (London, 1988), p. 2.

Romanticism and nation to the extent that his travel narratives are a cornerstone around which the principles of Argentinean national identity were elaborated.[2] The epistolary published as *Viajes por Europa, Africa y América, 1845–1847* (*Travels in Europe, Africa and America 1845–1847*) was part of the foundational corpus of writing which emerged with the modernist project of Argentina, and it also offers readers a clear portrait of Sarmiento's personal ambition to forge history in his own image.[3]

In this study, I will focus on the Algerian episode, the most genuinely exotic stretch in Sarmiento's *Viajes*. This chapter moves away from the canon of travel writing toward the morality tale. An understanding of this paradox is best achieved when placed in the context of Sarmiento's deeply ingrained ambitions as a statesman, his obsession with the dilemma of Argentinean politics, his ideological preconfiguration of otherness, and the deployment of narrative strategies that manipulate observation and experience.[4]

As a genre, travel accounts condense the crucial components of nineteenth-century modernity: science, subjectivity and historical memory. They provide the rationale for the emancipatory process of secular thought in its instrumental and technological form. These accounts are the tools with which emergent national images were established. In my view, we are dealing

[2] The relation between Romanticism and national identities has been amply demonstrated. I refer specifically to the ideological postulates of Romanticism related to its vision of the universal in the particular, the mutual interpenetration of the subject and its object, the harmonious evolution between history and nature, and subjective time as permanence. Such postulates gave rise to nationalist sentiment in which each nation affirmed its ethnic, linguistic and mythic specificity, created as a set of fictions which imagined national destiny. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York, 1991), pp. 6 ff. For a philosophical reflection on Romanticism and modern identities see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1989). Sarmiento belonged to the generation of 1937, a group of young men who organised a literary society whose goals were to initiate critical thought on society and devise a model of nation. The ideological identity of the group is closely linked to the energetic anti-Rosism of its members, as well as their affiliation with tendencies of romantic culture. Among them, Sarmiento was the one who had a noteworthy public career as a diplomat, ambassador, minister of education and president of the nation.

[3] Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Viajes en Europa, Africa y Asia* (Santiago, 1849). This was the first edition of his letters, collected and edited in Santiago, Chile. Viñas describes Sarmiento's travel accounts as being of the Balzac style when he defines his narrative as 'self-centred utilitarianism'. See David Viñas, *Literatura argentina y política* (Buenos Aires, 1995), p. 30 ff.

[4] Sarmiento moves away from the constraints of literary convention which structure this genre, and in this way he indicates his tenacious preference for an aesthetic-moral emotion. See Adolfo Prieto, *Los viajeros ingleses y la emergencia de la literatura argentina, 1820–1850* (Buenos Aires, 1996), p. 177. On the political nature of this essay as a continuation of *Facundo*, which advocates a modern, Europeanised nation, see Nicholas Schumway, *La invención de la Argentina. Historia de una idea* (Buenos Aires, [1991] 1993), p. 154 ff.

with strategic devices of European ethnocentrism and its national hegemonies.[5]

Recent studies of these accounts have reintroduced an academic and political debate linked to theoretical reconsiderations about imperialism, the history of science, and the construction of otherness. Until very recently, the majority of work on European imperialism, specifically its British manifestation, had focused either on the analysis of the political and economic structures which supported the imperial edifice, or on the ideologies which lent them legitimacy. This limited conception of the notion of domination motivated historians to emphasise the formal evolution of empire; those 'red zones' on the world map.[6] From the vantage point of postcolonial thought, the evidence revealing the complexity of colonial processes has made it necessary to think about a vast informal imperial universe, which had hitherto been ignored in research.[7] The question of whether this informal universe did indeed exist, and if so, how it might be characterised, has been a major topic of contemporary historiographical debate.

It is in this context that the relations between centre and periphery have now become key issues for historians of science, who have begun to evaluate in earnest the conditions in which science was produced. The intersection of this debate with the first results of the so-called 'new history of science and technology' at the end of the 1980s produced a plethora of studies characterised by a healthy hybridity.[8] Each of the scientific disciplines, from physics to ethnography, from botany to astronomy, was relocated in its imperial context as a great theoretical project accompanied by the revelation of important enigmas about its own genealogy. Traditional ideas regarding the diffusionist theories of science from the metropolis to the periphery began to be challenged. The initial expectation of finding cultural forms through

[5] A particular confusion in the conceptualisation of the genre is associated with the holistic idea that everything is potentially interpretable as language, and consequently potentially interpretable as literature. This misconception eliminates the possibility of joining discursive practices with material and symbolic realities throughout the long century of travel (end of the 18th century and the 19th century) and reduces the historical specificity of its subjects, the protagonists of *locus and habitus* of the encounter. See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1985), p. 261; and Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna G. Singh, *Travel Knowledge. European 'Discoveries' in the Early Modern Period* (New York, 2001), introduction.

[6] George Basalla, 'The Spread of Western Science,' *Science*, vol. 156 (1967), pp. 611–22.

[7] Patrick Wolfe, 'History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism,' *American Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 2 (1997), pp. 388–420.

[8] Among these we should note the work of Daniel Headrick, *Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1988); Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, NY, 1989); John MacKenzie, *Imperialism and the Natural World* (Manchester, 1990); Satpal Sangawan, *Science, Technology and Colonisation: The Indian Experience, 1757–1857* (Delhi, 1991).

which the imposition of models of domination functioned have been modified by the acknowledgement that cultural representations of the process of domination speak as much about the conditions of their production as about their effects, that is to say, they are indeed historical. It is this critical point which has obliged us to reevaluate the importance of discursive variety of the European expansionist project.[9]

It was in the area of cartography that representational production was analysed in ways that would reconfigure the global diorama: the panoptic strategies of ordering and territorialisation of exotic spaces was an essential operation for the creation of the 'imperial archive'.[10] The spatial approach towards the history of imperialism gained momentum with innovative work at the end of the 1980s, when a process of deconstruction of cartographic texts began, with emphasis on the role of the traveller-explorers in imperial constructions.[11] One of the results of this debate has been the resignification of the 'Orient' in the legitimation of European cultural domination. The 'call of the Orient' was the expression of fervour for the exoticism which dates back to the last decades of the eighteenth century.

It is in this framework that the dilemma of the traveller-narrators is expressed most clearly, especially through forms of discursive composition which produces meaning about modernity that is constrained as much by an ideological mandate as by an experience open to new cultural frontiers. Of course, this is a more complex process than their merely carrying out duties as the vanguard of capitalism.[12]

[9] These ideas are complementary and in my view enrich those expressed by Said with respect to the process through which all colonial discourse produces an 'other' as an object of thought and intervention. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993).

[10] Frank Lestringant, 'Fictions de l'espace brésilien à la Renaissance: l'example de Guanabara,' in Christina Jacob and Frank Lestringant, *Arts et légendes d'espaces: figures du voyages et rhetoriques du monde* (Paris, 1981). On the imperial forms of construction and accumulation of knowledge, see Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (New York, 1993).

[11] The principal work along these lines is J. B. Harley, 'Deconstructing the Map', *Cartographica*, vol. 26, no. 2 (1989), pp. 1–20. See the recent monographic studies of Walter Mignolo, *Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor, 1995); Barbara Mundy, *Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago, 1996); Simon Ryan, *Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia* (Cambridge, 1996); and Graham Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago and London, 2000).

[12] The first to point out such a phenomenon was Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (Boston, 1987). These observations can be understood as an extension of the distinction that Certeau makes between 'practices' and 'strategies'. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1984). The topic is also developed with less wit by Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Trasnculturation* (London, 1992).

Travels appeared originally in two volumes published in 1849 and 1851, respectively.[13] Organised in 11 letters, they were conceived as letter-reports and addressed to several political allies, the majority of them very well-known anti-*Rosista* exiles living in Chile and Uruguay, who were publishing in French, Spanish, Uruguayan and Chilean newspapers. In the most prestigious modern editions, the work is published in three volumes. The first two, 'De Valparaiso a Paris' and 'España e Italia' consist of five letters each. The third, 'Estados Unidos' or 'Viajes en los Estados Unidos en 1847' is a very long letter (400 pages) addressed to Valentín Alsina, the editor of *Comercio del Plata*, one of the most influential newspapers in Montevideo.[14]

Literary approaches have understood these texts by Sarmiento to be an emblematic account of travel literature, and they foreground the author as a man of letters, sensitive to the impact of experience. However, this corpus, and particularly the African segment, have little to do with the tradition and the canon consolidated by Humboldt, von Martius and Darwin, and even less with that critical aspect of their work which transmits experience, since there is little evidence of any perceptive capacity that this Sarmiento might have possessed, absorbed as he was in forming his own political thought.

Sarmiento considered the personal letter to be an elastic and flexible register capable of admitting diverse subjects and styles, so it was perfectly adaptable to the natural thematic variety of travel. However, the letter was the means by which he avoided diary and its mediating function, placing a narrator rather than a traveller in front of his preselected reading public. This is a pedagogical enterprise defined by an almost exclusively literary register. Sarmiento offers us, in my view, a peculiar example of the instrumentalisation of the travel genre.

What, then, happens to our protagonist? Instead of privileging experience and taking advantage of the magnificent atmosphere surrounding him, as

[13] The first edition was written in Santiago, Chile. When the complete works (*Obras completas* Santiago/Buenos Aires, 1885–1903), were compiled, the two volumes of *Travels* were combined as Volume V (1886).

[14] Here I am referring to the following editions: *Viajes*. Tres Volúmenes. Introducción de Julio Noé (Buenos Aires, 1922); *Viajes*. I. *De Valparaiso a Paris*. Estudio Preliminar de Alberto Palcos. Colección 'El Pasado Argentino' (Buenos Aires, Hachette, 1955). II. *España e Italia*. Estudio Preliminar de Norberto Rodríguez Bustamante. Colección 'El Pasado Argentino' (Buenos Aires, Hachette, 1957). III. *Estados Unidos*. Estudio Preliminar de Antonio de la Torre. Colección 'El Pasado Argentino' (Buenos Aires Hachette, 1958). This edition of *Viajes*, under the direction of Gregorio Weinberg, includes, for the first time, the *Diario de Gastos*, which Sarmiento carried with him on his travels. I rely on this edition for the quotations and textual references in the present study. More recently an excellent critical edition has been published in a single volume by Javier Fernández: Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Viajes por Europa, Africa y América 1845–1847 y Diario de Gastos* (Buenos Aires, 1993).

some authors have affirmed, he produces a fictional and moralising narrative. The exploration and explanation of this phenomenon is the main objective of the present study.[15]

'*To have the pleasure of hearing and reading my name*'

As already mentioned, one of the clues to unlocking this text relates to Sarmiento's destiny as the founding father of Argentinean national identity. Sarmiento's biography evinces a passionate intellectual pilgrimage from James Fenimore Cooper to Alexis de Tocqueville, and it is critical that we trace this trajectory.

As a very young man Sarmiento was influenced by the author of *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826).[16] Sarmiento's pseudo-scientific rhetoric on civilisation and barbarism, native drama, and the extravagance of his characters move within the parameters of North America which Cooper created through the militant pen of progress. Furthermore, he knew that the civilising process required clear and convincing signs regarding a specific republican institutionalisation, and he understood the message to read as follows: eliminate any trace of nomadic cultures without ambition, eliminate all vestiges of indigenous peoples and gauchos, eliminate the 'Bedouins of America'.[17]

In 1828 Sarmiento was named lieutenant of the provincial infantry battalion, having just reached the age of fifteen. As was normal at the time, his military responsibilities were intermittent. Three years later, he travelled to Chile as an émigré. In Santa Rosa de los Andes he became a teacher and later taught in Pocuro. Finally at the port of Valparaíso he worked as a clerk:

> Possessed by an anxiety that had worried me and yearning to wander, to see the world, to contemplate the ocean my eyes had never seen, a fantasy overcame me to

[15] While it is true that its textual structures are not static in the sense that they propose a particular agility in the montage between narration and description, at times incorporating minor macrostructures as stories and brief poetic compositions of other authors, such a strategy still nullifies the experience of interaction between the I and the other, there becoming a device the main function of which is to support the text. Only in this register is it possible to verify a 'dynamism of action', its moral reflection, which is a basic content of his discourse that is maintained unchanged, especially during his stay in Africa, facing the experience of travel. For a stylistic defence of Sarmiento, see Ana María Barrenechea, 'El estilo de Sarmiento,' in *Sarmiento educador, sociólogo, escritor y político* (Buenos Aires, 1963); and by the same author, 'Sobre la modalidad autobiográfica en Sarmiento,' *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, tomo XXIX (Mexico, 1980). In spite of the two years and three months he spent travelling, Sarmiento considered himself a 'traveller in a hurry'. See William Katra, 'Sarmiento de frente y perfil,' *Ibérica*, vol. 7, 1992, pp. 151–79.

[16] James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757* (Philadelphia, 1826).

[17] This is the phenomenon that Sommer defined as 'irresistible romance'. Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions. The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford, 1991), pp. 1–29 and 77.

embark on this journey about which so many had said such wonderful things, and although my good mother had opposed my doing so, she was forced to submit to my bothersome and repeated pleas, finally persuaded by the fact that I have a strong inclination toward travel, which she had noticed since my youth in my headstrong predilection for running through the streets and alleyways instead of schoolrooms and benches, in spite of all the threats of whiplashes and rebuke of me as a good-for-nothing … *But what my mother never recognised was my invincible propensity to narrate a journey, travel in which I should be the hero, and the greatest goal would be to have the pleasure of hearing and reading my name.*[18]

He enjoyed visiting schools, military academies, museums, zoos, parks and scientific institutes. At the age of 22 he settled in Chile and began the systematic study of English, first teaching himself, and then with a tutor, whom he paid two *reales* per week. At that time he devoured Malte Brun's *Geografía Universal*: and he never forgave him for the inaccuracies about region of Cuyo.[19]

For reasons of health, he returned to his home province after trying his luck in the Chañarcillo Mines. In 1840, at the height of Rosas's rule, Sarmiento sought exile in Santiago where he lived in an attic in Portal de Sierra Bella on the Plaza de Armas. A small room with used furniture, a lamp and some books that could only be placed on the brick floor.

Once he had settled in Chile, Foreign Minister Manuel Montt assigned him the task of setting up and administering Latin America's first teachers' college, the Escuela Normal de Preceptores. Sarmiento wrote for the newspaper *El Mercurio*, edited by the Catalan Manuel Rivadeneyra, collaborated on *El Progreso*, and he enthusiastically supported Montt's ministerial projects and presidential candidacy. In 1843 he published *Mi defensa* to defend his actions before numerous adversaries who attacked his style and ideas. A cunning and contradictory polemicist, he quickly made enemies. From *El Siglo* the Godoy brothers demanded his expulsion from the country. In the midst of a series of insults and quarrels, Sarmiento's *Civilización y barbarie* began to appear in the form of a newspaper serial. At the suggestion of Andrés Bello, Sarmiento was made a member of the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities of the University of Chile, and with that appointment he felt that he had become the main protagonist of South America's evolving drama.

The ministry interrupted Sarmiento's dream of emigrating to Bolivia when it offered him a trip to Europe to study its educational system. To the relief of many, on 28 October 1845, he set out with a modest sum for his expenses, three suitcases and his diplomatic credentials on *La Enriqueta*, a dilapidated sailing ship. On board were General Eusebio Guilarte, entrusted with

[18] Quoted by Edmundo Correas, *La pasión educativa de Sarmiento. Sarmiento viajero* (San Juan, 1958), p. 29 (my emphasis).

[19] Brun erroneously affirmed that San Juan de la Frontera, near Lake Guanacacho, was located in a terrain rich with gold mines and inhabited by 20,000 Indians, at 40 leagues to the northwest of Valparaíso.

representing Bolivia in Rio de Janeiro, his secretary Solares and a young boy called Huelin.[20]

When the ship arrived at the Island of Más Afuera in the archipelago of Juan Fernández, that remote site immortalised by Daniel Defoe, Sarmiento had his first travel experience and a revelation. On land he stumbled across four hermits from North America. Sarmiento notes that these characters, like Robinson Crusoe, are aware of the time – they know perfectly well that it is 4 November 1845 – and they are swept away by the tale of their own adventures. This is Sarmiento's first revelation: he would have to write a story of his own travels. He immediately wrote to Demetrio Peña the first of the letters he would later publish as *Travels*.

In December he arrived in Montevideo, the city under siege by the forces of General Oribe, supported by Juan Manuel de Rosas in the so-called Guerra Grande. *El Nacional* was publishing his *Facundo*. It is here that the cream of the Argentine exile community resided – Florencio Varela, Valentín Alsina, Esteban Echeverría, Bartolomé Mitre and General Paz. Sarmiento left for Rio de Janeiro, met Fructuosa Rivera, 'an annoying and insipid idiot', and ranted against slavery: 'the whites do pay a high price for this injustice'. He had a friendly conversation with Tomás Guido – close friend of San Martín and ambassador of Rosas – and he met and had regular discussions with the poet José Mármol, who read sections of his *Pilgrim's Songs* (*Cantos del Peregrino*). For this work, Sarmiento coined this sentence: 'Be the Isaiah and Ezequiel of that chosen people who have renounced civilisation and adored the golden calf.' In his letter to Miguel Piñero dated 20 January 1846, he wrote far more about what he thought than what he heard and he apologised for what he could not feel: 'I walked around shocked by the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro … and at each detail of the spectacle I feel that my ability to feel cannot take in so many marvels.'

In the entire account, Sarmiento acted as through he were dealing with real materials, but he was oriented far more to the production of a kind of watercolour, distant from the critical capacity of experience.[21] Aesthetic conviction and the strength of his narrative composition were constructing a moral

[20] For the reconstruction of this travel we have used correspondence already edited and indicated in the bibliographic references and in some unpublished letters which are found in the Museo Histórico Sarmiento, and which are described in detail in the following: Carta de Montt a Sarmiento (Santiago, 17 de octubre de 1845), Documento 7578 bis. Carta del Gobierno General de la Algeire a Sarmiento (29 de diciembre de 1846), Documento 3578. Carta de Lesseps a Sarmiento (Barcelona, 19 de enero de 1847). Documento 7385. Carta de la Subdivision de Mascara a Sarmiento (Mascara, 8 de junio de 1847), Documento 3578.

[21] Shumway is impressed by the complex personality of Sarmiento: '… his ambition, his shameless self-promotion, his gift for the epithet and insult, his disdain for the popular classes, his fascination with Europe and the United States, his creative treatment of the facts, his incapacity to recognise someone else's talent.' Shumway, *La invención*, p. 201.

truth that gave meaning to the political and social reality that he was observing. For this reason alone, it is fair to grant him the privilege of original thought.[22] It is certainly on his trip through Europe, Algeria and North America that his writing first displayed a distinctive discourse. What were the historical conditions and the cultural nature of this literary operation?[23]

He set off for Europe on board the luxurious French ship *La Rose*. He made friends with the captain of the ship, Massin, and another Frenchman, Tandonnet, an admirer of Fourier and Rosas. On deck they discussed the future forms of 'warrant order', the utopian phase of Fourier's social system, and they made a deal: the Frenchman would translate a small work by Sarmiento about the life of José Félix Aldao.[24] He landed at The Hague on 6 May and continued on to Rouen, where he wrote his first impressions of Europe to Carlos Tejedor: 'just imagine how I happy I am, only four hours away from Paris.' Now in the City of Light he interviewed Thiers, and visited Versalles, Fontainebleau and the Louvre. On 24 May 1846 he fulfilled his promise and, in the company of Manuel José Guerrico, visited San Martín at his Grand Bourg retreat: 'in the soul of this man shines a deep flame that hides strange looks, but they don't escape those who examine him carefully. So much glory and so much silence'.[25] In his small briefcase he carried the letters of introduction of some people close to the Liberator, such as Las Heras, Blanco Encalada and Gregorio Gómez.

Etiquette caused him financial hardship: he bought a white tie for four francs to meet Guizot; he protested about the five francs for the trip to Grand Bourg, fretting over accounting for the costs of his itinerary.[26] For some, the *Diario de Gastos* (Expense Account) is the true narrative of his travels.[27] He

[22] On representational devices in artistic production, W. Benjamin, 'La obra de arte en la época de la reproductibilidad técnica,' in *Discursos interrumpidos I* (Madrid, 1982), pp. 22 and *passim*.

[23] The importance of this analysis lies, I believe, in the topics which structure his version of Africa: education, social hierarchies and civilisation compose the framework from which to understand an important part of his national project. D. F. Sarmiento, *Sarmiento's Travel in the United States in 1847*. Transl. Michael Rockland (Princeton, 1970), 'Introduction'.

[24] Alberto Palcos, *Sarmiento, la vida, la obra, las ideas, el genio* (Buenos Aires, 1938), p. 65. José Félix Aldao was his exact opposite: a Dominican priest, revolutionary organiser of indigenous guerrillas, and loyal to the Santa Federación. An ally of Facundo Quiroga, he became governor and Commander of Mendoza defending the *Rosista* cause.

[25] Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Obras Completas*, 52 vols. (Buenos Aires, 1948–56), vol. V, pp. 320 and *passim*.

[26] Museo Histórico Sarmiento, *San Martín y Sarmiento*. Conference given in the 'Círculo Militar' 13 August 1947 by the director of the Museo Histórico Sarmiento, Señor Antonio Castro (Buenos Aires, 1950): pp. 18 and *passim*.

[27] In his 'Advertencia' Sarmiento says that we are dealing with one of the best memories of his travels. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Diario de Gastos durante El viaje por Europa i America emprendido Desde Valparaiso el 29 de octubre de 1845*. The original manuscript of this small book that Sarmiento began the day he arrived in France (6 May 1846), is found in the

acquired dictionaries, grammars and cigars; he threw a few not very subdued parties, and he anxiously read a significant number of newspapers and information about Africa.[28] Then, with little enthusiasm, he moved on to Spain.

In Madrid Sarmiento stayed with Rivadeneyra, the editor of great Spanish authors. He went to bullfights and to the 'Del Príncipe' Theatre, where he enjoyed 'El desdén con el desdén', which he had recited as a young boy with Saturnino Laspiur in his travels through the Andes. He soon decided to leave Spain, informed José Victorino Lastarria, his contact back in Argentina, and left Madrid for Cadiz, from where went to Gibraltar and Valencia, finally arriving at Barcelona, which he considered to be outside of Spain: 'another race, another heritage, another language'. A chance meeting with the English economist Richard Cobden stimulated him to study the controversy between free trade and protectionism. At the same time, he learned the value of propaganda in favour of liberal values: to impose a doctrine by persuasion, simply through the use of language. This is how he rediscovered the value of his career in public relations.[29] He met Prosper Mérimée and the poet Juan Thompson, son of Mariquita Sánchez.[30] He became friends with Ferdinand de Lesseps, the future builder of the Panama Canal and general consul of France in Barcelona, who recommended that he meet Marshal Bugeaud. In December Sarmiento continued on to Mallorca and then crossed the Mediterranean to go to the Maghreb. The most 'exotic' destination and also the most unplanned feature of his itinerary.[31] In January we find him

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Museo Histórico D. F. Sarmiento, it was published in a facsimile edition in 1950 preceded by a study of Antonio Castro. The Spanish translation of original segments in French, English and Italian was completed by Eduardo Suárez Danero.

[28] It is possible to determine with some precision what Sarmiento read about Africa during his stay in France and Algiers. Besides the newspapers such as *L'Illustration*, *Le National* and *La Quotidienne*, he was surely interested in those published in Algeria, *La France Algérienne* and *La Revue d'Afrique*. In his Diary, he also recorded the purchase of several documents: 'Etude sur l'insurrection du Dhara'; 'Lettre sur les affaires d'Algérie', 'Deux planches costumes' and 'Carte d'Alger'.

[29] Norberto Rodríguez Bustamante in *Viajes II*, pp. 29 and *passim*.

[30] Elda Clayton Patton, *Sarmiento in the United States* (Evansville, 1976), p. 55.

[31] At the beginning of the nineteenth century Africa was still a mystery for the West. Travellers would follow only in Napoleon's tracks until around 1820 when Sir Gardener Wilkinson published the first work of the great Egyptologists. The Association for the Promotion and Discovery of the Interior of Africa, created by Sir Joseph Banks, the travel companion of James Cook, and which had operated in London since 1788, was reestablished, and it was not out of mere geographic curiosity. The European elite, seduced by the development of the natural sciences, particularly by ethnographic research, anticipated the creation of a conscious exoticism. The compendium of 'manners and customs of the Arabs' become famous and 'Turquerie' represented a great aesthetic tendency which went so far as to include humour to represent non-western milieux: ridiculous sultans, anachronism, eunuchs and pirates. This was as much comic opera as Rossini's (in his era, as popular as Napoleon himself) '*drammi giocosi*' sending up the confrontation of two worlds, two different cultures.

back in the continent, at Marselles. He only grudgingly acknowledged that he was half Moorish, on the maternal side he was Abs-al-Razin.

Back in Europe, he passed rapidly through Italy: Genoa, Pisa, Civitavecchia, Milan, Rome, Florence. He spent time in Switzerland and arrived in Munich. He travelled down the Rhine and went to Gottingen. From France he visited Holland and Belgium briefly. He joined the Historical Institute of France and took leave of San Martín. Without a penny in his pocket he crossed England and from Liverpool he boarded the *Moctezuma* to head 'toward the great spectacle of the United States': the other journey.[32]

Inventing Algeria

Sarmiento visited Algeria at mid-century. The French had conquered the region in 1830, beginning a brutal and prolonged colonial war. Together with Tunisia and Morocco, Algeria formed part of the region that the Arabs had occupied since the Seventh Century, the Maghreb. With a population estimated at three million, more than half were of Berber origin, both cultures lived together in a relatively narrow space between the sea and the northern border of the great plains that surround the coastal cities of Algiers, Constantine, Tlemcen, Mascara, Oran, Miliana, Medea and Cherchell.[33] The urban nuclei of the region were fragile. With a strong rural base population, one permanent and the other itinerant, the material foundation of these precolonial Algerian cities responded to the needs of the rural world and mercantile interests. The French invasion reactivated commercial activities which had previously been concentrated in predetermined cities, where activity was organised around the bazaar, the French garrison and the main mosque.[34]

[32] Sarmiento's letter to Manuel Montt dated in Paris 15 July 1847. Carlos Segreti (ed.), *La correspondencia de Sarmiento*. Primera Serie: tomo I, Años 1838–1854 (Córdoba, 1991), p. 120.

[33] By 1830 the proportion of the urban population with respect to the rural remained at scarcely 10 per cent. However, an important point of the social energy of this culture came from urban centres. The most populated cities were: Algiers with a population of around 60,000 inhabitants; Constantine with 35,000; Tlemcen with 20,000; Mascara with 12,000; Oran, Miliana, Medea with 10,000; and Chercell with 3,000. Mahfoud Bennoune, *The Making of Contemporary Algeria, 1830–1987* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 27.

[34] The political structure before colonial domination had been maintained through an alliance of rural tribes or regional lineages (*gabyla* in Arabic and *taqbilt* in Berber). The nation was divided into four regions or autonomous provinces with Algiers as the capital of the province and the seat of the sultan (Dar-es-Sultan). This fragmented society, rich in rural traditions, but which promoted urban culture, was ethnically diverse when it suffered the French imperial invasion, which might be divided into four stages. The first, between 1830 and 1839, was marked by the occupation of the principal cities. The second between 1840 and 1847, was characterised by an armed conflict of more than seven years between French troops and the al-Amir Abdel Kader partisans. The military occupation forces successfully

In Africa, as was his tendency, Sarmiento vehemently submitted everything to civilising judgements. This is his contribution to Orientalism. He saw shadows, suffering, poverty, filth and religious fury. Following his meeting with Abd-El-Kader, the Arab emir who was the resistance leader against the French, he predicted:

> May God uphold European domination in this land of pious bandits, devotees … France should apply the Muslim maxim: the land belongs to him who best knows how to fertilise it.
>
> What kind of morality do these people have, who live in God's presence, and whose leaders call themselves the *Servant of the Merciful*, for that is what Abd-El-Kader means, or the *Servant of the Strong*, the translation of Abd-El-Raman? It is impossible to imagine greater moral deprivation or more deeply held criminal habits. History has no comparable case, except in its darkest eras. The *agah* lives off the despoiling of his own tribe, a tribe that carries out raids (the *malones* of our own Indians), against others to steal their cattle, and the leader who rules over them with his own hand beheads the *cadi* or *agah*, a wretch whose goods and life he takes.[35]

The letter addressed to Juan Thompson that narrates his African experiences is dated Oran 2 January 1847. His trip to Africa would be a journey 'without poetry'. He sees a Mediterranean furrowed with steam, cauldrons and chimneys. What is waiting for him is a trip full of obstacles, misfortune and uncertain routing: it is intolerable. He knows that he is 'going in' and he will report it as it happens. Finally, after three nights, they arrive at Algiers, where he has never been before.

> Algiers is enough to give us an idea of the manners and customs of being of Orientals; because with respect to the Orient, which has so many charms for the European, its antiquities and traditions are a dead letter for the American. Our Orient is Europe.[36]

There was no official mission in Algiers, just a clear need to reinforce his social theories in an exotic context. To feign first person experience was one path, to learn French colonisation a moral duty. He would write in 1887, stunned by the development of Argentine provinces brought about by migrants:

> [the traveller] did not find himself in Algiers in 1846 by accident, he was not in that African terrain as part of a traveller's itinerary to Europe, but rather to visit and

---

extended their domination to the richest rural zones in the north. The third stage extends from 1848, when Algeria becomes part of the French territory through the constitution of the Second Republic until 1872. Finally, during the period from 1873 to 1954 the sedentary mountain communities were subdued. The first two stages were times of depopulation, war and famine for the native population. Sarmiento must have seen the signs of this colonial foundation, since he was there at that time.

[35] Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Viajes* II, pp. 120 *passim*. Abd-El-Kader turned himself in to General Lamoriciere in December 1847, a few months after meeting with Sarmiento. Sarmiento's silence on one of the most important historical processes in the history of Zagreb is surprising.

[36] D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes*. II, p. 105.

travel through French Africa and see in Oran, in Mascara, the state of European colonisation and the French and Spanish immigration that administered it …[37]

In the chapter of *Facundo* entitled 'La Rioja' Sarmiento had taken a quotation from Roussel's book *Palestine*, a nation which he would only visit in books: its reddish colour, the dryness of some places and its cisterns … a people with a sad disposition, taciturn, serious and sullen, an Arab who rides on burros and dresses sometimes in calf leather like the hermit of Engaddy. He says of the plainsman: 'he is the only one who does not know that he is the most unfortunate, miserable, barbarian being; and thanks to this he lives happily and contented when hunger does not pursue him.'[38] The several pages that he would later write dedicated to Algeria display a plethora of prejudices.

Sarmiento falls prey to an orientalist pseudo-culture and he reifies three of its fundamental icons: the Arabs descend from Abraham, through his son Ishmael; they are nomads and inhabit the desert; North Africa and the Mediterranean (in short, the whole Arab world) are ancient Roman (i.e. Western) provinces, usurped by Islamic desert-making. The reconquest of Arabia was, above all, an eschatalogical imperative.[39]

In Sarmiento's work, theory precedes the act, and ideology comes before observation. Contrary to his own exotic nature, increased by cultural distance from Latin America, Algeria is now, in his spirit, a familiar country. Thus, condemned, the Arab becomes a laboratory specimen, a philological instrument, part of the evolutionary chain. He is ripped out of his cities, neighbourhoods and farms (his historical environment), and he is thrown into the desert (his mythical environment).

Now in Algiers, the 'country of quicklime', mysterious 'Moorish' women surprise him as they cross the street covered from head to foot in a swathe of veils. Arabs covered with 'whitish, dirty, torn *bornoz*', dark neighbourhoods, winding rows of shops, and humid alleys form serpentine streets. It is an African Algiers that he sees or imagines beyond the facades of French domination. A human landscape subjected to a raw nature. The French, he says, 'also became entranced by that calm appearance of the Algerian landscape and society'.

His liberal passion pays tribute to strong anti-religious feelings. He sees a detestable legacy of a colonial church embellished by the Counter Reformation and obscurantism. Sarmiento is also merciless with the Muslim

[37] Quoted in Paul Verdevoye, 'Viajes por Francia y Argelia,' in D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes* (edited by Javier Fernández), p. 690.
[38] D. F. Sarmiento, *Facundo, civilización y barbarie* (Santa Fe, 1966), pp. 113–14.
[39] Silmane Zeghidour, 'Sarmiento y su viaje por Argelia'. *La Gaceta* (Translation from the French by Ricardo Casterán) (San Miguel de Tucumán, 4 September 1983).

religious spirit, which he views as an all-encompassing entity which governs the character of the community. For them, 'everything is religious, from shame to pillage':

> The Arab disguise is always there, and under its wide folds, an original people, a primitive tongue, and an intolerant and ferocious religion par excellence, which does not accept any dealing with Christians that does not entail eternal damnation. The habitual sadness of the solemn Arab countenance is revealing, in his apparent humility, the resignation that does not despair, the energy that never gives in, but that postpones vengeance, rehabilitation and triumph for better days.[40]

He discovers the beauty of the Mitidja plain, at the opposite side of the first chain of the Atlas Mountains: 'majestic and solemn heights like the screen that hides the mysteries of Central Africa'. Nature and barbarism with an oasis of civilisation: the French military colony of Beni-El-Merrch 'notable for its beautiful column erected in memory of 32 soldiers who were defending themselves against four thousand Arabs'.

These are curious functions of memory. French massacres in African territory were already denounced the world over, and the poverty and depopulation which had arisen through the occupation could not be hidden.[41] Curious operations, these, of Sarmiento's 'humble literary pride'. Sarmiento was moved by General Arnault's response to a study of his *Civilizacíon i Barbarie* by Charles de Mazade in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*: 'Just look (says the general according to Sarmiento) how in the middle of Africa, we are up to date with what is happening in the world.' He was the world.[42]

Sarmiento is against integration. His ideas are nearer to those of final solutions. His judgement is as severe as his political instinct would become. His dream of freedom from customs, security, taxes and constitution is only possible by forcible imposition and violence. His formula to end Argentine or Arab armed rebels ('*montoneras*') was always based on the ideology of a forced harmony:

> Barbarism and fanaticism have never managed to penetrate deeply into the heart of a people, and to petrify it so that it resists any improvement. Among the Europeans and Arabs in Africa, there is not now nor will there ever be any amalgamation or

[40] Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Viajes*. II, p. 109. He develops the same ideas about the gaucho in the Río de la Plata: 'the gaucho is a Moor'. Sarmiento believes that his isolation, his anti-European resentment and his treacherous psychology make him into a mortal enemy of civilisation: 'the incurable barbarism of our Argentinian pampas'.

[41] Several testimonies give an account of the nature of the colonial project. Among them is one from the Duke of Orléans about the destruction of Masacara, capital city of Abdel-Kader, bombarded by French troops in 1835. Duc d'Orléans, *Récit de campagne* (Paris, 1892), pp. 139–40. Demographic data indicate a heavy migration from the cities as a result of the 'pacification' policies of colonisation. The entire country lost around one million inhabitants alone between 1850 and 1870. J. Ch. M. Boudin, *Histoire statistique de la colonisation en Algérie* (Paris, 1853), p. 53.

[42] D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes*. II, pp. 140–1.

assimilation possible; one of the two peoples will have to disappear, retire or dissolve; and I love civilisation too much not to desire from now on the definitive triumph in Africa of civilised peoples.[43]

Sarmiento's project requires stereotypes, and Africa completed his racial vision. In *Viajes* he would sketch with clarity the crucial points of his model social script. His ideological orientation would soon take on its definitive trajectory. The failure of the 1848 Revolution would reveal to him the gap that exists between progress and social demands. In the prologue to *Educación popular* (1849) he describes Huangalí, a marginalised neighbourhood of Santiago, as a site of agitation and barbarism that threatens social order, in the same way that the French proletariat challenges the order of European civilisation.[44] Wealth should be measured in terms of culture. He was a defender of the educated elite, proposing an aristocracy of knowledge and educational programmes for the ignorant masses which would achieve the extermination of the centres of barbarism.[45] His project also cultivated a racial preference and an international order:

> … Four million human beings are agonising from hunger in Ireland; beggars whom no illness pursues assault the countryside in bands in Belgium and Holland; English charity is exhausted from feeding millions of poor people, and thousands of artisans queue up every day, because their salary is not enough to satisfy the hunger of their children. A thousand Prussians have disembarked in Africa recently to receive land from the government that they were going to search for in North America … One hundred Europeans gathered in Africa in spite of the devastation of the fever, which kills one of three who arrive; and they are sketching out a plan to attract two million more in six years … What Atlantic current, which leads the people from Europe to the North, might be bent toward South America, and why don't you and I see in our distant country small villages and cities emerge over the face of the earth, through a powerful impetus of society and government that penetrates the population, growing in stages to lend mutual support from the River Plate to the Andes, arriving with civilisation and industry to the border of the unknown Saharas which hide America beneath the torrid zone?[46]

Sarmiento affirms that civilisation is a moral and physical aptitude. For South America, these signs of civilisation are found in anti-Spanish Europe. The attributes of a society of progress – invention production and enterprise – should be introduced as part of a new process of national

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 122–3.

[44] Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, 'Educación popular,' in *Obras completas* de Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, vol. XI (Buenos Aires, 1950).

[45] Ducey compares Sarmiento's thesis with Frederick Jackson Turner's ideas about North American frontier development. Despite differences, and in Sarmiento's case there was not a systematic proposition, it is true that both expansion and increase in population were key factors in this development. Cathryn Ducey, 'Travel Narratives of D. F. Sarmiento: A Seminal Frontier Thesis,' in Steven E. Kagle (ed.), *America: Exploration and Travel* (Ohio, 1979).

[46] D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes*, 1958, pp. 146–7.

constitution. These obsessions in the African itinerary that I have tried to recreate, form a movement that has remained unexamined. Unlike travel accounts, Sarmiento's text possesses only the attraction of his dreams and fantasies.

The journey of the letters

The heart of Sarmiento's ideas is expressed in the opposition between 'civilisation and barbarism' and acquires a public profile with the publication of *Facundo*. The work deals with the foundation and rationalisation of a dichotomy imposed as a paradigm of the process of modernisation in Latin America. Although his writing and actions changed and at times contradicted each other, Sarmiento was a passionate admirer of the ideals of European liberalism.

His legacy is political and ideological. The efficiency of his prose rests on the organisation of images which follow a pattern of symmetries and repetitions. They produce a peculiar narrative order, his specific way of creating loyalty in the reader masquerading as historical narrative. Even his most realistic text, *Viajes*, is an 'artistic' creation. Confined as he is to ambiguity and the challenges of his time, the power of his prose and his talent will rest largely on his personality and his commitment to the eternal human conflict between progress and tradition. Sarmiento's literature and politics, autobiography and national destiny, role as a man of letters and bureaucrat, continue to fascinate readers.[47]

Viajes is the perfect example of this. Its ideas on race and national destiny depend on the rhetorical articulation of liberal values.[48] Because of that same composition, it is difficult to find in the text the myth constructed around Sarmiento's capacity to allow himself to be entranced by all he encounters in reality that contradicts him, 'that happy immersion of the author in the fluctuations of experience'.[49] The act of writing in Sarmiento is an exercise of power. His selection and thematic order, together with his direct style are designed to produce a calculated impact. The spontaneous air of his epistolary strategy hides a strong desire to spread his ideals. He must impose on the forms of national life a liberal bourgeois model of society while earning a

[47] On Sarmiento's 'originality' see Adolfo Prieto, *La literatura autobiográfica argentina* (Rosario, 1968), p. 9.

[48] This is what William Katra called the *performati*ve when he referred to a composition whose function is more to alter than to describe reality. William Katra, 'Rereading Viajes: Race, Identity, and National Destiny,' in Tulio Halperín Donghi et al., *Sarmiento. Author of a Nation* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1994).

[49] Quotation from Juan José Saer, 'Liminar: Sobre los Viajes,' in D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes*. Critical edition of Javier Fernández, p. xv.

place of prestige among the intelligentsia.[50] The letter of his journey to Africa is to a great extent political propaganda staged as a literary autobiography but it is saturated with fiction.

Sarmiento's idea of presenting a critical and, at the same time, picturesque description of the African people is not unrelated to the popularity which the literary genre of '*Manners and Customs*' enjoyed at that time. Sarmiento knew his readers well enough to anticipate their eagerness to learn more about different societies, above all those viewed as exotic; he would refer to this as toasting 'the peculiar shade of the era'. Many of the travel accounts of the early nineteenth century formulate such an identity. By 1830 even the most basic travel diaries would contain information about the habits and customs of the communities under observation. In these cases, the structure of the canon of the genre was partly abandoned in order to concentrate on the 'cultural' descriptions. Direct, personal observation continues to be essential, but the personality of the author and the itinerary of the journey in first person is removed to a subtext, and replaced by a more polished exposition in third person. In this way, a displacement is achieved toward a form of ethnographic reflection. Sarmiento demonstrates a certain lack of discipline as he confronts the rigours of this style. His goal was not popularity but prestige.

Although it may appear that he is giving an account of the matters of contemporary society, this sub-genre was constructed through a discourse capable of combining the archaic with the modern, presenting the past as present. This offered an excellent opportunity for those who attempted to write with the pretensions of both the antiquarian and the judge. Sarmiento practised this career as a critical writer of manners, and the scenes of daily life were the preferred objects of such description:

> I have received the *diffa* (the meal that the *aduar* provides the envoys of government) in four *aduares* (meetings of twenty-five shops), of diverse tribes, and more or less rancid butter; a tin jar with the impression of the fingers of three generations, instead of a copper pot; some wild thorns, or a handful of dates on the side, everywhere the *diffa* is always the same. You already know, from what is visible in the life of the shop, that you should not attempt to intrude on domestic life, which

[50] The reception of *Viajes* provoked a remarkable response in Juan Martínez Villergas' lampoon, *Sarmienticidio o a mal Sarmiento buena podadera. Refutación, comentario, réplica, folleto o como quiera llamarse esta quisicosa que, en respuesta a los viajes publicados sin ton ni son por un tal Sarmiento, ha escrito a ratos perdidos un tal J. M. Villegas* (Paris, 1853). This is an enraged critique of the style, grammar and anti-Hispanic feelings of Sarmiento. Martínez Villergas, with less talent, was right to condemn Sarmiento's prose as a manipulation of his travels in order to impose 'his rich imagination'. The text is mentioned in Juan María Gutiérrez, *Cartas de un porteño. Polémica en torno al idioma y a la Real Academia Española, sostenida con Juan Martínez Villergas, seguida de Sarmienticidio*. Prologue and notes by D. Ernesto Morales (Buenos Aires, 1942), p. 200.

should be one's own. Women are not accessible to the gaze of outsiders, even if one can hear guttural voices in the next room from the shop entrance.[51]

Sarmiento would follow in the footsteps of de Tocqueville, whose worldwide reputation he envied. Indeed it is inexplicable that he did not want to see de Tocqueville when, in December of 1846, both were received by the governor of Algeria, Marshal Bugeaud. The two were profound admirers of the United States. Both also took great care to reproduce that social energy in their own native countries. Both were born in the midst of great revolutionary change and reached maturity in an era of restoration. On the one hand, they were both deeply liberal and republican. On the other, they were highly critical of romantic revolution and were fond of pragmatic propositions. The two represent an elite generation with a responsibility to forge a synthesis between the institutionalisation of liberal principles and a hierarchical social order. Both were conservative.

De Tocqueville's interest in Algeria is inscribed in the framework of the colonial doctrine that traverses his own political biography. Some of his most important writing coincided with his intense parliamentary activity.[52] His *Lettre sur l'Algérie* (1837) formed part of a political campaign to become elected as a representative. Some years later, he boarded ship for the first time to go to Algeria in the company of his friend Beaumont. He wrote a travel diary of a tour that scarcely lasted two months, between May and June of 1841, and with this material he organised his *Travail sur l'Algérie*. Back in France he completed his memoirs of the colonial situation in *Rapport sur l'Algérie* (1847), and as a representative he participated in a variety of commissions that examined the position of the colony and the problem of slavery. It is here that de Tocqueville developed his colonial theory.

Sarmiento's interest in Africa is less committed, more superficial, profoundly ideological. It is naive to think that he had been carried away by the Algerian landscape: 'I was, then, in Algeria, which, from the time I left Chile, had formed a very important part of my travel programme.'[53] There is no doubt that the utopian and conservative nature of these texts creates a structure that systematically avoids the truth about Algerian history. His correspondence provides him a space for rhetorical manipulation of the tension between his ethical judgements and the colonial reality.

[51] D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes*. II, p. 132.

[52] Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la colonie en Algérie*. Prologue by Tzvetan Todorov (Brussels, 1988).

[53] D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes*, II, p. 105. Here I express my disagreement with some philological interpretations about the spontaneity of form and substance in his epistolary which forms this book.

Sarmiento is here, in the entire meaning of the word, a *bricoleur*.[54] *Viajes* conceives writing as an action capable of transforming reality. Therefore the *travelling* dissipates as an act of recognition organised in the matrix of the classic Sarmentine account: travel as exile, experience as a literary form, and the composition of the narrative register controlled by an idealist system of analogies. A kind of aesthetic and moral constellation that we might order into five fundamental propositions.

Proposition 1: Exile as intellectual positioning. When, at the end of 1845 he began his trip to Europe, Algeria and North America, Sarmiento had already suffered two experiences of exile in Chile. His most important work dates from that era.[55] Although he was now on an official mission, the traveller organised his accounts in a polemical, ironic and accusatory tone, as if he could not avoid the curious enthusiasm and irritation which displacement had awoken in him. He does everything with certainty. A citizen of the world, he does not carry foreignness with him, he carries imperturbable aspects of his culture, he practises a literature of resistance. The letters are an ideal vehicle for the arbitrary order of his thoughts, which should travel distances, arrive at precise addressees, articulate loyalties and silences, and return to his homeland:

> And as in moral things the idea of truth comes less from its own essence than from a predisposition of its will, and from aptitude of the one who appreciates facts, who is the individual, it is not strange that to the description of scenes to which I was a witness should, very frequently, be added what I did not see, because it existed in myself, as a result of my way of perceiving, my own concerns becoming clear to me more than those of others.[56]

Proposition 2: Sarmiento ignores evidence; his obsession is accusation. He announces 'miscellaneous details of observations, reminisciences, impressions and incidents'. The imperfect result of 'seeing with his own eyes' and of 'feeling' other nations.

The term Arab did not designate a people or even an ethnic group. Arabia was a western nomenclature which he only knew how to appreciate – to the point of exaggeration – when it had to do with the enchantment of perfumes and aromatic herbs. Nomadism did not determine an ethnicity, it was a style of life appropriate to all the peoples living in regions bordering the desert.

[54] Concept taken from Lévi-Strauss by William Katra, *Domingo F. Sarmiento: Public Writer (between 1839 and 1852)* (Tempe, 1985), pp. 42 *passim*.

[55] His residence in Chile from 1840 to 1852 was the most prolific time in his literary career. There he wrote and published *Facundo* (1845), *De la educación popular* (1848), *Recuerdos de provincia* (1850), *Argirópolis* (1850) and *Campaña en el Ejército Grande* (1852).

[56] D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes*. I, Prólogo.

From antiquity to the present, Bedouin Arabs represent only a tiny minority of the Arabic population. Islamic culture prospered in agricultural and urban areas in Syria, North Africa and Andalusia but it did not in the desert. For this reason, the abstractions in Sarmiento do not hold up to the slightest shred of historical reference. His descriptions were simply the product of a 'mobile existence', and they had to appeal to the partisan interests of his interlocutors, that is to say, his best readers: 'I ask with all my heart that my friends indulge me, keeping at bay the deserved criticism.'[57]

Proposition 3: The fictional imprint of the account. The decadence of a 'very overused genre' whispers here, which only seems interested in 'trying to keep the attention of the readers.' But at the same time, it recognises in the 'travel account' golden pages of literature. Falsifying the nature of the genre and its roots, about these 'travel impressions' Sarmiento comments:

> They have been exploited by pens such as that of the inimitable creator of the genre, the popular Dumas who, with the privileged energy of his spirit, have redressed everything that falls within his gaze in lively colours, beautifying his portraits almost always with the fictions of fantasy, or rather appropriating dramatic or novel events which occurred many years before others, and conserved by local tradition, to the point that we don't know if what we are reading is a capricious novel or a real journey through an edenic spot on the earth.
>
> As to the purely artistic and literary merit of these pages, it is never far from my mind that Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Dumas, Jaquemont have written about their travels, and have moulded public taste. If, among our intelligent companions, educated in such a prestigious school, there one those who have pretensions of resembling them, I will be the first to give up the pen and revere them. There are regions that are too high, in whose atmosphere those who have been born in lower lands cannot breathe, and it is madness to look directly at the sun; there is certain danger of losing one's sight.[58]

The African account is basically a morality tale. Sarmiento was never concerned about updating any of the editions published during his lifetime. This is how he viewed the literary endeavour even for those works which he himself considered less important.

Proposition 4: The aesthetic control of the narrative. Sarmiento separates the traveller from the writer: 'I have written what I have written'. He is enraptured by the possibility of beautiful descriptions, his natural inclination toward the fantastic, and he laments the 'torment of the traveller', which he does not even consider part of the narrative condition. Irritation, discomfort, and monotony are a duplication of reality. Travel as experience is disenchantment, the story, however, should be fascinating. He speaks about a

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *Ibid.*

solidarity between the narrator and the narrative, vision and object, the subject under examination and perception. In this way he proposes a spiritualisation of the text in an operation that he submits to the observation of consciousness. As he embarks for Algeria, he complains:

My God! What is this that I see! A raft of 10 *varas* length and so overloaded, that the sailors carried their utensils bending overboard toward the sea. I count the passengers; thirty pigs occupy two thirds of the deck, and the remaining space, on top of a pyramid of bundles, pipes and packages, three women have to find room, four sailors, five passengers on the hold, two dogs that don't ask permission to settle into the lap of the first one to allow this, not to mention ten dozen turkeys and hens. Feeling compassion for this wretched folk, I ask where my bed will be. Bed? The captain smiles respectfully, … wherever you like.[59]

Proposition 5: A politics of analogies. Sarmiento lays out a stable system of parallels that establish conditions of appropriation. It is a game of associations in search of similarities. But this approach, useful for the travel genre, is displaced by observation, which is organised around ideological creation. A transposition of the imagination capable of placing next to each other two landscapes with physical features as incommensurable as those of the Sahara and the Pampa:

And suddenly, with the abrupt petulance that the imagination has for getting from one place to another without rational transition, perhaps guided only by the analogy of the exterior physiognomy of the Sahara and the Pampa, I found myself in America, on this side of the Andes, where you and I were born.[60]

Such a displacement of 'that spectacle' animates his national fervour:

The fact is that the fine arts, institutions, ideas, events, and even the physical aspect of the nature of my expanded itinerary have always awoken in my spirit the memory of analogous things in America, making me, for lack of a better word, the representative of those distant lands, and offering as a measure of its being, my own self, my ideas, habits and instincts.[61]

It is an act of recognition, but above all a lesson in ethics. His objective is to move the comparison to the terrain of national internal struggles in order to determine the winner of the battle.[62] Sarmiento does not foreshadow any

[59] D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes*. II, p. 103.

[60] *Ibid*., p. 145. This capacity is almost naively attributed to the uncontrollable power of his prose and to the genius of his pen. A grotesque version of this approach toward the figure of the founding father is in Mario Quiroga, *Sarmiento y sus viajes, a dissertation on culture* published on 23 October 1943 through the support of the Sociedad Popular de Educación 'Antonio Mentruyt' de Lomas de Zamora (Buenos Aires, 1944), p. 39. Borges would say, in the prologue of *Recuerdos de Provincia* (Buenos Aires, 1944) 'anyone can correct Sarmiento's writings, but no one can equal him'.

[61] D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes*. I, Prólogo.

[62] Adriana Rodríguez Pérsico, Hebe Clementi and Susana Zanetti, 'Sarmiento y su visita al exterior,' in *Jornadas Internacionales Domingo Faustino Sarmiento* (Neuquén, 1988), pp. 43–88.

flaneur, just the opposite, he is a soul without a body. His narrative turns on an absence which, paradoxically, becomes a cardinal point of reference in *Travels*: the spectacle of war in the Río de la Plata:

> Why could not the Atlantic current, which from Europe leads the population toward the North, be bent toward South America? … When the series of my ideas had gotten to this point, I shook my head to make sure that I was awake, and I spurred my horse on, as if I could leave behind the bad mood that was tormenting me, I arrived quickly to join my people, waiting around a person who was telling everyone the details of a disaster. The Arabs had just left for dead the drivers of a carriage and nearby the cadaver of a murdered settler was lying covered with wounds. Before me, I said to myself, is the reality of things! Now, at least, I can be sure that I am not dreaming! There is blood and murder! This is the only thing that is possible and feasible![63]

All travel narrative must develop three thematic nodes: the definition of alterity, the effect of displacement, and the forms of registering observation.[64] At least beginning at the end of the Eighteenth Century, such developments must be organised by a story that should begin, consciously or unconsciously, with experience. Its absence indicates, even in the case of travel that has been realised, a discourse of another kind, nearer to fictional artefact. As we have seen, Sarmiento denies African experience. Algeria is his journey to the centre of the earth, or more accurately, to the centre of himself. It is the ratification of the unyielding insularity of his vision. A centre which, like a mirror, completes his identity. What dominates is an essentialist reencounter, the bouncing back from his ideological platform and his passion for letters and control.[65] This is a destiny for the privileged place of his thought, where it is possible to impose a theory, suppress reality, and triumph due to the hegemony of *gracia*.[66]

Responding to a reality which he judges to be both defeated and under the influence of his own convictions, Sarmiento the orientalist foreshadows the characteristics of the Latin American intellectual seeking and inventing the essence of national ethos. And even recognising the monumentality of his vision, it is still a shame that this future president of the Argentine never arrived in Algeria; he never narrated his travels there.

[63] D. F. Sarmiento, *Viajes*. II, pp. 146–7.

[64] Michel de Certau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1986), pp. 60–7.

[65] My research has taken a curious itinerary, culminating in a rereading of Jules Verne and I came across R. Bellour and others, *Verne: un revolucionario subterráneo* (Buenos Aires, 1968).

[66] Martínez Estrada would say about Sarmiento: 'If this fighting attitude can be obtained through the diversity of first decisions, these primary decisions respond to a fixed ethical position, to a destiny, to an indisputable grace, for using the language of essences.' Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, *Sarmiento* (Buenos Aires, 1956), p. 202.