Translation of twelve Argentine gaucho short stories, with an introduction on the Argentine gaucho in life and literature

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A TRANSLATION OF TWELVE ARGENTINE GAUCHO
SHORT STORIES, WITH AN INTRODUCTION ON THE ARGENTINE GAUCHO
IN LIFE AND LITERATURE

by

LIDO J. VIZZUTTI
B.A., Montana State University, 1950

Presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
1951
This thesis has been approved by the Board of Examiners in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Chairman of the Board of Examiners

Dean of the Graduate School

Date ______________________________
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INTRODUCTION

I. Conditions Leading to the Growth of the Gaucho Type, Origin, and Emergence as a Social Class.

The gaucho, often referred to as the "Cowboy of the Pampa," has been a topic of considerable interest to the student of Argentine history and literature for many years. A number of theories, any one of which might easily serve as a project for intensive research, have been set forth concerning his origin. He emerged as a distinct social type in the Argentine approximately the year 1750. As an individual his first crude appearance is traced back to the early years of the seventeenth century when economic activity in La Plata (which, besides Argentina, includes the present territories covered by Paraguay, Uruguay, and part of Bolivia) found a stimulus in contraband trade, raw cattle and horse hides being the most important product. The need for a hunter to secure the valuable hides encouraged the growth of a wild, independent type, whose home was the vast, unsettled Pampa. Without the Pampa, the horse and cow, and the illegal trade in hides, the gaucho could scarcely have evolved.

The Pampa, Introduction of the Horse and Cow into La Plata, and Contraband Trade—Economic Factors Responsible for the Growth of Gaucho Type.

There is hardly room here to go into any detailed description of the Pampa of the Argentine, nor will space allow a thorough sketch of the background history of the horse and cow and the part they played
in contraband trade. However, since the gauncho is a product of these things, at least a brief explanation of them is necessary.

In the Pampa lies the chief wealth and prosperity of the Argentine. It is a vast, undulating expanse of grassy plain, dotted here and there by the gnarly-trunked ombú, the native tree of the Pampa. It stretches from the Atlantic to the Andean region in the west, and from the Gran Chaco in the north to the frontier of Patagonia in the south, covering some two hundred thousand square miles of land, in which lies some of the most fertile soil and richest grazing land in the world. W. F. Mayer creates an unusually vivid sense impression of the Pampa as he saw it in 1858:

... We are standing in the center of a boundless plain. Look north and south and east and west: for five hundred miles beyond the limit of your vision, the scarcely undulating level stretches o’ either hand. Miles, leagues, away from us, the green of the torrid grass is melting into a misty dun: still further miles, and the misty dun has faded to a shadowy blue; more miles, it rounds at last away into the sky. A hundred miles behind us lies the nearest village; two hundred in another direction will bring you to the nearest town. The swiftest horse may gallop for a day and a night unswervingly, and still not reach a dwelling-place of man. . . .

The Pampa, although it is extremely hot in the summer and cold in the winter, is not unpleasant, and perhaps can be compared, both in topography and climate, to the Mississippi Valley. Sudden cold and hot winds and violent storms often interrupt the serenity of the atmosphere of the plains, however. Darwin in The Voyage of the Beagle

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tells of hailstones the size of small apples killing deer, ostriches, and other wild-life. Also a bane to the Pampa are the locusts which often cut a devastating path through the land.

Such was the country beheld by the early Spanish settler who set foot on the shores of La Plata: no fabulous kingdoms of gold or silver to tempt him, but a deep, fertile soil and an endless sea of verdant pasture peopled by countless numbers of unclaimed cattle and horses, which had been brought over by earlier expeditions in small numbers.

The Spanish horse was not the first horse to roam over the plains of La Plata. Darwin, on his expedition to this region in 1833, unearthed fossils of horses that had long become extinct. The horse, nevertheless, as we know it today, first reached the New World with the Mendoza expedition in 1535. Conflicting evidence makes it difficult to establish the number of animals that were disembarked, but most sources agree that the country near the coast was overrun with horses by as early as the year 1580.

Cattle followed shortly afterwards. They, too, multiplied rapidly, and soon spread by the thousands throughout the land. From the beginning until past the middle of the eighteenth century, the pampas of La Plata were covered with wild cattle from the Gran Chaco south to the Rio Negro, and not being restrained, extended as far west as Chile.  

The Great British Established Trade Between the Colonies and the Crown

In an attempt to strengthen further the monopoly in the New World, the
merchants and speculators alike, with the Patriot
meant that the more mercantilist into the commerce of the colonies.
Treasure house into the interior and that some of her precious gold
activities in the year 1799, the Spanish crown, having
pointed and confirmed—development or the plateau in favor of her
merchants Spain was only interested in gold, neglecting the
legitimate trade in hides was of short duration; however, for

British and British traders.

By importance and were especially in demand throughout the colonies and by
or business, flour on the Pampas, on the other hand, earned steadily
for a choice market, or use it for a hunting post, since few these
interest was so cheaply regarded a monopoly would kill a bear market.
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Benevolent improvements took what they wanted of these undeveloped

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Benevolent improvements took what they wanted of these undeveloped
once remarked:

Let the sovereign authority of this country over the colonies be asserted in as strong terms as can be devised, and be made to extend to every point of legislation whatever. That we may bind their trade, confine their manufactures, and exercise every power whatsoever, except that of taking money out of their pocket without their consent. 3

At the time she issued this imposition against La Plata, Spain was plagued with domestic difficulties, thus making it necessary to keep most of her fleet close to home. The unprotected shores of La Plata served as an invitation to zealous Dutch and British traders to deal in contraband. The Royal order failed, too, to prevent the flow of goods between the colonies.

Contraband trade became an enterprise for many. Officials, from the Governor, who preferred to be bribed rather than deal in the open, on down to the lowest, became involved in illegal trade. By the middle of the seventeenth century, hundreds of thousands of hides were smuggled out of the colony each year. In return, manufactured goods from Europe found their way into Buenos Aires, underselling the costly manufactures that came to La Plata overland from Porto Bello in Panama, the only port on the Atlantic side that was permitted to trade with Cadiz. 4

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3 Thackeray, A History of William Pitt, ii. 73, 74, as cited in W. A. Hirst, Argentina, p. 53.

4 From Porto Bello on the Atlantic coast of Panama goods were taken across the isthmus and transported by boat from there to Lima, Peru. By pack train they crossed Peru and Bolivia to La Plata. The complete trip from Cadiz to Buenos Aires took about two years. This actually hastened the development of much of the back country of Argentina—Jujuy, Córdoba, Tucumán, and Mendoza, all of which lay along the Andean mule paths that led to the mines in Bolivia and Peru.
Origin of the "Gaucho"

The origin of the gaucho hunter of hides who emerged with the growth of contraband trade is yet a problem to scholars. Some have preferred to theorize that he resulted from the fusion of Indian and Spanish blood, while others believe he was essentially Spanish. The general consensus of most writers who have had occasion to do extensive research or who have been fortunate enough to obtain reliable information seems to favor the former theory, that the gaucho evolved from the mixture of the Spaniard with the aboriginal Indian. 5

F. M. Page tells us that the gaucho type "became more decidedly Spanish in proportion to the proximity to the coast." 6 Conversely, then, if that was true, the gaucho on the frontier was predominantly Indian. Justo P. Saéz believes the gaucho was essentially of Spanish descent, although other elements, such as individuals of other nationalities (European mostly), Indians, and even Negroes (infinitesimal in number, however), were to be found within his group. 7 A little less definitive, Torres-Ríosco in An Epic of Latin American Literature refers to the gaucho as a mestizo (a mixture of Spanish and Indian), and assumes that he originated from the Spanish vaquero, or cowhand.

5 Henry A. Holmes, Martín Fierro, An Epic of the Argentine, p. 16.
6 F. M. Page, Los Payadores Gauchos, p. 23, as cited in Henry A. Holmes, op. cit., p. 17.
7 Sherman H. Eoff and Paul C. King, Spanish American Short Stories, p. 105.
It is highly possible that the gaucho type may have started life either as a Spaniard, a mestizo, or an Indian, but that later in the course of his evolution he became essentially Spanish. The hunting of hides for contraband belonged to the man versed in the arts of horsemanship and in the other arts pertinent to the handling of cattle. Such a man was to be found in the vaquero, or in the native Indian, who had learned to make early use of the horse and cow and who had in great numbers succumbed to the early advance of civilization on the Pampa. Both the vaquero and the native, therefore, might easily have developed, independently of each other, into hide hunters, or crude gauchos. The mestizo element was a natural and unavoidable consequence of two races coming into close contact with one another. Inter-mixing grew in La Plata, no doubt, until the Indian population began thinning out. As the native decreased in numbers, the Spanish influence increased, until by the middle of the eighteenth century, when the gaucho came into his own, it was predominant.

The reader must not be led to believe that the gaucho was known as such from the beginning. On the contrary, this name appeared late in his development, although no one knows exactly when. And it has continued to be a mystery to philologists to the present day. More than twenty-five derivations have been offered, of which a few should be mentioned here:

Some philologists choose huacho, which to the Quechua tribe (see footnote 30) signified orphan, as it was applied especially to
Although more than one source was used, the definition of the word "guacho" meaning "the social life of the gaucho community" was either not available or not used.

Esperanza was certainly born of a rich and varied background, and it could be said that she spent her entire life in the Argentine plains. In any case, it is her story that we are interested in, not that of someone who/enjoyed a mere existence. In these plains, she was at times synonymous with nature and her fate, as it is suggested that it may be for this reason that she opened her heart to those who took refuge in the hierarchy of society, or open to those who took refuge in the hierarchy of society, or open.

"Gaucho"—a confirmation of the name, equivalent to outlaw, under (Latin of ratus or ratus, the name that was applied to the pretended idea of guacho who derived his name from the Argentine match is

a notion, which is believed to be both a gaucho and

anendeorr read a story from home. Others prefer to relate it to the
When with eighteen times the netizens to society was nearing

the end, the Gauchos began passing from the American scene as a social

class not as many writers to casually remark because he failed to

write about the advance of a material civilization, but because he saw

philosophical romances and educational courses

by the Gauchos who were able to in turn ragazzo to support of Gauchos, who

in New York: At this moment, the Gauchos were forgotten in the center of its federalist, it was the Gauchos who fought

self-reliant, brave to transcend, ready for attack at a moment's

note to which the Gauchos, unprincipled in the Congress, it was the Gauchos, unprincipled in the Congress,

wrote pages of the Argentine up to the representation, during the war

during the colonial period it was the Gauchos who opened the

concise pleasure of the passage, interrupted

to be what is now modern Argentina.蔓延 across us with a

three date of the disappearance as a class, he noted much of the life-

the true study of this "notable savages" being. Until 1875, the approach-

care about the Indian ancestors. Here

is Patagonia, the Inca Empire shows him composed about this time as a so-called

the Indians, the serfs were indispensable to the economic warfare of

since this primitive plantation was the only person suited for societies

Intellectual备注 in which had increased to triumphant proportions, and

assumed importantly role in the economic structure of the Patagonia.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Gauchos had come to

existence of the Gauchos class and reasons for the decline
the happiest man on earth.

It is not easy to conceive of a lesser life than that of the hero, a purposeless existence of earth. He is in prison to the sword-covered footpaths of the Ride de la Pomme, and in the wind of the Galapagos, from the south of the earth, and he is nourished by the land. So that he may not, no longer could he find a mode of expression in life because outmoded, he was transformed to suit the times, and no longer could he find a mode of expression in life.
II. Some Aspects of the Social, Economic, Military, and Political Life of the Argentine Gaucho.

Social Make-up of the Gaucho

The gaucho was essentially a primitive rural type, skilled in handling a horse, and unsurpassed as a herder of cattle. Once established on the Pampa, he became a roving horseman, a prodigal son of society, independent of day to day necessities, disdainful of anything that might imperil his freedom, of civil law and social restraint. He was both physically and mentally strong, and had to be, for survival of the fittest reigned on the plains where a man had only himself to pull him through the rigors of a day to day existence. Surrounded by a foreboding expanse of land, and constantly aware of its infiniteness and mystery, which he was unable to rationalize, he often turned to his superstitions or to his Christian beliefs, both of which he inherited from his Spanish forefathers. Yet, he was essentially a realist, for he was too close to life to speculate much on idealism or in abstractions.

His vocabulary was rich when it dealt with his own little world of things and men, but action served him better than words. However, around the camp fires at night, or at the pulpería, he excelled as

\[\text{pulpería, old type country store in the villages of the Pampa. There the gaucho could procure the few articles he needed, such as tobacco, clothing, and mate (Paraguayan tea). The pulpería also served as bar, inn, exchange, general meeting place and unofficial club. Dances were also held there, as were singing matches, and many a fight.}\]
a story teller, either in musical verse, accompanied by his Spanish
guitar, or in prose. Often he improvised on his guitar, singing—of
his mother country, of war, or of some unrequited love—from the depths
of his soul, which revealed a deep melancholy in his nature.

Although the gaucho had only scorn for law enforcement, he
respected the rights of others, living always by an unwritten moral
code, which in essence was: "courage and fairness in the fight;
fatalism in accepting without complaint whatever might happen; moral
strength in sentimental adventures; caution with women and liquor;
trust in friends; prudence when dealing with strangers."12 Innately
over-sensitive, he often became involved in quarrels of a bellicose
nature, quarrels which often ended in bloodshed. On the whole, the
gaucho was law-abiding. Bad elements, of course, appeared within his
group just as they inevitably do among any social group; and, unfortun-
ately, it is these elements by which he is often judged today.

Above all else, the gaucho was proud of his own breed. He pitied
the man not like him, the man of the city who read much, but who was
ignorant of the ways of the Pampa: how to throw a wild bull, or catch
a horse on the open plain, alone and on foot; or how to hunt the jaguar
armed with only a knife.13 On the other hand, the sedentary inhabitant
of the city placed him, along with the Indian, at the lowest rung of the

Translated by writer of this thesis.

13 Domingo F. Sarmiento, Facundo, p. 51.
social ladder, at the most, tolerating him only from a distance.

Darwin's impression of these two classes favors the gauchos, who, he writes:

... are very superior to those who reside in the towns. The Gaucho is invariably most obliging, polite, and hospitable. I did not meet with even one instance of rudeness or inhospitality. He is modest, both respecting himself and country, but at the same time a spirited, bold fellow. On the other hand, many robberies are committed, and there is much bloodshed; the habit of constantly wearing the knife is the chief cause of the latter. It is lamentable to hear how many lives are lost in trifling quarrels.14

The physical appearance of the gaucho was both singular and striking, and showed clearly the influence of his environment. Bunge has sketched the semblance of this countryman with the pen of a finished artist:

He was strong and handsome; olive-complexioned, bronzed by the out-of-doors; of medium-height; wrinkled as a mystic; with thick, knotted muscles testifying to his rude daily tasks. His piercing black eyes were wont to plumb the depths of desert perspectives. Horsed, he was a centaur. On foot, he made a less striking appearance, having slightly bowed shoulders and crooked legs. His regular features, silky hair and beard, and especially the soft grace of his women-folk, reminded one of the Arab, transplanted to the banks of the Betis.15

No less striking was the gaucho's colorful, rustic attire.16

16 The more primitive gaucho used green horseshide for his boots (botas de potro). He stripped the hide from the lower leg of the animal, and while it was still green, he slid it over his foot, allowing it to dry on him. The boot was never removed until it was to be replaced. Since his stirrups consisted of single rawhide thongs tied into a knot at the bottom, he left his toes exposed, inserting a thong between the two largest toes of each foot when he mounted.
At the time of this occurrence (1780), the Egan was a class head already experienced of leaves present.

under which the tassel is well illustrated by the top most

above a tinging scar on the face of the exasperator. The Egan has, when his boner was at stake, the purpose was to impart a wound, to

wound, and even due with it. we are not he used it to KII only

will the dotted be the from the peatlike epithel? repeated his ear.

unlike of a bench, when it was more than a weapon, for it added in with equal rapidity in

more than the tassel (lason)? without it he was never fully dressed. but it

as bare it was streaked in a precious guacamole, the Eganac consistently

wore the leather belt wrenched down with circumstances of sister.

in face of contrasted exasperator. around his waist he usually wore a

under which showed white linen drawers (calliope) action is named

trousers, he wore a picturesque, shaded-the Egan, the epithel.

effectively shifted agents the butte of the opposite. In the place of

a blanket, and wrapped around the feet are in a duel, it became an

from his shoulder, falling to below the knee. It preceded him also as

a square-cut pommel, or oaks, stick in the center for the need, hung
When the gaucho wasn’t wandering over the Pampa, he could be
found living with his family in a crude, windowless and doorless hut,
primitively furnished with the parts of skeletons from cows or horses,
if at all. This was his habitat at birth, and here he received his
limited education, which began with infancy and ended in adolescence
with his becoming a full gaucho. Almost before he learned to walk he
was given lessons in horsemanship and in the use of the facón, his
chief plaything; and by the time he was five, practice in the lasso
and the bolas were added to his daily enterprises. At length the
day arrived when he became independent in his own realm, accomplished
in equestrian skills and in the ways of the plain: he could break a
horse, check the furious onslaught of a wild bull, lasso an animal by
any leg, kill and cook his own meat, make and repair his own harness
out of rawhide, and cope successfully with most of the hazards presented
by man and nature.

For food the gaucho depended almost exclusively on the cow, and
for months at a stretch meat was his only diet. Yet he suffered no ill

---

18 bolas, or boleadoras, most original and characteristic
accoutrement of gauchos. Originally developed by Indian, it consisted
of two balls attached to the ends of a thong about 12 feet long (or
two thongs 6-8 feet long) or three balls, in which case three thongs
would be used. These balls were made of heavy wood or stone covered
with rawhide. The lightest ball was held in the hand, and while
riding at full speed, the gaucho whirled it about his head, flinging
it at the legs of a running animal. If thrown accurately, the thongs
wrapped themselves around the legs by the momentum of the balls,
thereby upsetting the animal. The bolas was chiefly a hunting device,
though it was upon occasion also used as a weapon. It is said that
mounted the gaucho could throw it effectively up to eighty yards. It
is still in use today for sport.
effects from it. This, perhaps, can be rationalized by the fact that
he ate a large proportion of fat, which is of a "less animalized
nature." 19 Little addicted to intoxicating beverages, the gaucho cul-
tivated a gourmet's appetite for mate, 20 the drink that became almost
as much a part of him as the horse and cow. The sipping of a mate to
him was an Epicurean's delight, and he did so incessantly: it was the
first thing to settle in his stomach at early dawn and the last thing
to wet his lips at night. It may well be compared to the American
Indian's peace pipe, for should a stranger enter the gauchos' midst,
he partook of the mate with them as a gesture of friendship, sucking
in turn from a common bombilla (tube).

The cow, and to a slightly lesser degree the horse, not only
advanced him his food, but also all of his leather goods, such as boots,
belts, and trappings, and, as we have already mentioned, his scant
pieces of furniture. 21

His horse was his prize possession, however, for without it he
could not have caught the cow nor could he have enjoyed the freedom to
wander, and upon that animal he spent the most of his life. He loved

19 Charles Darwin, op. cit., p. 130.

20 mate, Paraguayan tea. Although this word is given to the
tea, yerba is its true name. The mate is actually the gourd out of
which the tea is sucked by means of a tube perforated at one end
(bombilla). Yerba, or mate is pleasant to taste, is slightly laxative,
and like our coffee or tea, is a mental and physical stimulant. It
enables the body to undergo long stretches of hunger and fatigue with-
out apparent after-effects.

21 The oranium of a horse or cow was perhaps the part of the
skeleton most used for furniture, and it served as a seat.
it as he loved his china (wife or girl friend), his children, and his friends, above all worldly goods, and to own a tropilla (string of horses usually all of the same color) which he himself had tamed, was to have realised a life's ambition. Like the American cowboy of the early west, to use a rough comparison, the gaucho became what he was mainly because of the horse; without that noble helper, he would have developed into a sedentary farmer instead of a gaucho, and in the place of eating meat, he would have eaten beans or corn.22

Gauchos were known to be perfect riders. Mounted, they possessed an uncommon coolness and alertness in any situation, whether on a bucking bronco or in the midst of a barbarous stampede, and the idea of being thrown seldom entered their heads. When they rode, they gave the impression that man and beast were welded together as one, as the well worn allusion to the gaucho, "Centaur of the plains", so picturesquely suggests.

How gauchos rated with their North American counterpart in their equestrian skills, however, is difficult to determine. Competition between the stock rider of North America and the gaucho at a time when they both had already become modernised versions of their prototypes revealed that the gaucho threw his lasso at a longer range but with less accuracy than the North American cowboy. The gaucho also took more time in roping a steer, but was less brutal in his effort.23


In throwing the bolas, the American, of course, unfamiliar with its use, could not compete. Judging by this, each was superior in his own way.

Taming horses was both a crude and vicious task, and demanded great physical stamina on the part of the domador, or horse breaker. Although the Argentine colt (potro) was not a great busker, he was wary in other ways: kicking, biting, rolling over, etc. But the gaucho soon proved his mastery over the animal, showing it no mercy as he dug unyieldingly into its tender flanks with his giant roweled spurs, lashed it with ringing blows on the head region whenever it dared lower its head, and pulled with his almost superhuman strength on the rawhide reins that led to an inhumane bridle bit.

Twofold was the purpose of this arrogant plainsman when he applied every device, however barbarous, to his trade: to break a horse thoroughly of its savage wants was, of course, his primary aim, whether for himself or in the service of others; but his personal pride, too, was involved in the violent conflict between man and beast, and not for a moment might he jeopardize it by allowing the animal a single advantage. Once broken and trained, however, the pozo (pingo) took on a new significance, sharing with the gaucho, in work and in play, the hardship and the glory of his independent life.

Generally, it was driven unrelentlessly in every kind of endeavor, for the gaucho neither spared himself nor his mount. Sometimes the rugged plainsman ran his horse to death, and he has even been accused of doing so for sheer pleasure. The performance of so barbarous an act
was, however, more the exception than the rule, for the gaucho thought enough of his horse to retire a weary animal for a day or more in favor of a fresher one.

Very few gauchos possessed fewer than a pair of saddle ponies. A man with a single mount, living at the mercy of the infinite Pampa, where days of constant riding often separated one from his nearest neighbor, considered himself to be seriously handicapped and only slightly better off than the man on foot. For one thing, the hunt for hides and the **rodeo** (cattle drive)\(^2\) were far too exerting to be undertaken by the horseman lacking a suitable number (two at the very least) of mounts. Furthermore, the probability that a horse might suddenly become incapacitated, due to lameness or a broken leg, presented a constant threat to the gaucho, isolated and often alone on the plains. As no sober individual would consider crossing Death Valley without a spare tire for his auto, neither would the rational gaucho, unless pursued by the law, attempt to penetrate the Pampa without an extra saddle horse as insurance against possible mishap.

During his more relaxed moments, the gaucho might be found attending some cockfight, of which he was an avid betting fan, gaming

\(^2\) The rodeo (cattle drive or roundup) was usually performed by the gaucho in the service of a *patrón* (owner of an *estancia*). After the wars for Independence in the 19th century, immigration to Argentina grew steadily and the roaming herds of unclaimed wild cattle began to disappear. The gauchos then were forced to hire out to the large *estancias*, either in the capacity of horse tamer or cowboy for the roundup and the cattle drive, never remaining for any length of time on any one job. During these *rodeos* gauchos exhibited their skill in the various arts of roping, branding, and handling cattle in general.
for a more detailed description see page 25
(El Pato), in which he could try his skill with a horse. The origin of the ring game has been traced to the Arabs, who were expert horsemen, and through the Spaniard it became embodied in gauchesque sport.

Gaucho society, it should now be evident from the preceding pages, was a class apart from either the cultured criollo (Spaniard born on American soil) or the barbaric native, although elements of both were present. The only social pattern he understood was that offered by his natural environment, the Pampa, and within its bounds lay his whole world, a world that represented to him God's finest art.

That the virile frontiersman bitterly resisted material and social advancement, that he opposed industry, schools, and government in favor of a free, semi-barbaric life, thus contributing little or nothing to the culture of the country, has greatly marred his otherwise

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27 El Pato. A game of horsemanship (played by old gauchos) which was prohibited under Rosa's regime and that now, more modernized and modified, is played in a less brutal manner. It was a contest of strength and skill which was greatly enjoyed by the rural population: A duck was placed in a leather ball with only its head protruding—a prize for the strongest and most courageous rider. Two or four teams of riders were formed, each team being assigned a goal about half a league from the center of the game ground. A rider from each team turned the rump of his horse to the leather ball and with one hand took hold of a rawhide thong that was secured to it. (As many thongs were attached to the ball as there were teams.) With the other hand he held the reins high to show that he didn't depend upon any support except that afforded him by his stirrups and his saddle. At a signal the riders, spurred their mounts in opposite directions. The rider who succeeded in tearing the leather ball from the others, rushed toward his goal, aided by his team mates. The opposing teams chased after him in an attempt to get hold of the thong, using their horses to block the course of the horseman, or in any other way they saw fit. If the rider was able to get the leather ball (in which the duck was enclosed) to his goal, he won the duck and was acclaimed by all for his bravery. This contest invariably resulted in broken bones, blows, and even knife wounds inflicted by angry opponents. (Ibid., p. 281).
brilliant record of accomplishments. However, he should not be judged too hastily even here, for the failure of his countrymen to understand him was indeed in part to blame for his rebellious attitude. No effort was made to find a useful place for him in society so that he might become assimilated. Instead he was unwanted and exploited for little or nothing in return. He could turn only to the Pampa for consolation, and when civilisation advanced to threaten his existence there, he was justified—judging from his point of view—in struggling to preserve his authority over it.

Nonetheless, this rustic, in spite of the black marks against him, laid much of the ground work, although unintentionally, that made further advancement possible in Argentina. And, here, as we shall soon see, rests his claim to historical recognition.

The Gaucho as Indian Fighter

The economic usefulness of the gaucho had passed its peak in the early years of the 19th century. Contraband trade in hides was no longer a profitable venture after 1809, for Spain in that year lifted the trade restrictions which she had imposed against La Plata some two hundred years before. The gaucho found a meager outlet for his services in the industry of salting meat, which sprang up in 1812, but the hordes of wild cattle that had once roamed the plains were no longer to be encountered. Cattle were still plentiful, but they belonged to the vast estancias (ranches) that covered the Pampa.

The gaucho was not to disappear, however, for he had already
put to use another of his natural abilities—that of Indian fighter, serving in the frontier armies against the predatory savages.

Three indigenous tribes lived on or near to the Pampa when the Conquest began: the Querandies, a warlike people who resisted the conquerors; the Puelcheans, who possessed customs and a civilization similar to that of the Patagonians; and the Araucanians, from whom the gaucho inherited the lance and the boles. These tribes were largely nomadic, although a number of natives called Pampa Indians were found settled on the coast as early as 1535, when Buenos Aires was first founded. Some villages contained two or three thousand inhabitants, chiefly employed in the arts of fishing. Whether they belonged to a distinct tribe or a branch from one of the three main groups is difficult to establish, since some authorities mention a Pampa Indian encountered near the coast while others do not name him. The first Spanish settlers adopted the Quechuan word pampa (meaning wide open spaces) to designate the level plains around Buenos Aires, and in all probability called both the natives on the coast and those later found in the interior by that same name.

The aborigines met by the conquistadors in La Plata were peaceful and many of them were quickly converted to Christianity. It was not

30 The Quechuan were dominant in the Inca Empire of Peru, which also extended down into Chile and Argentina.
until the frontier was extended and Indian lands encroached upon that they took to the warpath against the Spaniards for what they believed rightfully belonged to them. Like the gaucho, the natives became dependent upon the horse and cow for their subsistence, and later took to driving cattle by the thousands over the Andes for sale in Chile. Their first attacks were directed at retrieving cattle and horses on the Spanish side of the frontier. Later, when wild cattle and horses decreased, they began taking revenge against the Spaniard by raiding settlements and caravans. The maloc, or Indian raid, was similar in kind to those perpetrated by some of the North American tribes, except that in the former only the men were brutally murdered. The women and children were carried away into captivity, and great numbers of cattle were stolen.

Warfare with the Indians posed a serious problem to the development of Argentina, for the natives struck suddenly and then retreated far into the Pampa, making pursuit difficult. Some forts were erected along the frontier, but the small garrisons of criminals and gauchos who manned them were unable to halt the hordes of savages from penetrating their lines. Finally, military expeditions, largely made up of gauchos, were sent out to exterminate the native. In 1882, after some two hundred and fifty years of intermittent warfare, General Roca,

31 Life on the frontier posts was so undesirable that volunteers were difficult to get. Therefore, criminals were sent there to serve their sentences. Many gauchos also were ordered to garrison the forts. Often, rather than rot on the frontier, they took refuge among the Indians.
on his historic drive, forever brought to an end all danger from predatory savages.

Without the aid of the gauchto, who, like the Indian, could live on mare's flesh and very little water for days at a stretch, who day or night could make his way over the immense plains, with only his keenly developed senses to guide him, and who was versed in the tactics

32 All the gauchos of the interior were natural born trackers (rastreadores) and guides (baquianos), although some were professionals in these sciences, as Sarmiento calls them.

The rastreador could pick up a track, many times imperceptible to others, and trace it. If it was an animal, he could tell you what kind, male or female, speed of travel, whether the animal carried a load or not, its size, etc. However fantastic the abilities of the rastreador may sound, it is not unbelievable when the vastness of the pampas is considered, with its maze of trails made by man and beast. In fact, it is quite natural that the gauchto should develop the sense of analyzing a track that scarcely appeared to exist, for his existence depended partly on such an ability—a good example of man's power to adapt himself to his environment. (Domingo Sarmiento, op. cit., p. 61).

Darwin in Voyages of the Beagle wrote of the rastreador:

... One glance at the rastro [track] tells these people a whole history. Supposing they examine the track of a thousand horses, they will soon guess the number of mounted ones by seeing how many have cantered; by the depth of their impressions, whether any horses were loaded with cargoes; by the irregularity of the footsteps, how far tired; by the manner in which the food has been cooked, whether the pursued traveled in haste; by the general appearance, how long it has been since they passed. They consider a rastro of ten days or a fortnight, quite recent enough to be hunted out. (p. 113.)

The baquiano, reserved and serious, was the map of the pampa. He could reproduce in his mind 20,000 square leagues of plain, forest, or mountain. He was the sole map a general carried with him during his campaigns, and he was also the general's intelligence service. No secrets were held from him—the success or failure of the battle, future conquests, etc.—for much depended upon his accuracy. The baquiano was generally a trusted man, and in turn, he was usually faithful in his service. (Domingo Sarmiento, op. cit. p. 63).
of plains fighting, the task of subduing the native warriors could scarcely have been accomplished at that time by the Spanish soldiers alone, untrained and physically unaccustomed as they were to that type of warfare. The gaucho, on the other hand, hardened to life from childhood, reared to a good extent by animal instinct, and conditioned to resist in stoic proportions heat, cold, hunger, and pain, was well fitted for such an undertaking, mentally as well as physically.

The Gaucho in War and Politics

With qualifications such as those just described, it is not to be wondered that this coarse plainsman should be acclaimed as the main-stay in the armies of the revolution and other conflicts which threatened his country. Furthermore, he enjoyed the excitement and the dangers of war, and these were, perhaps, his chief motivations.

In the defense of Buenos Aires against the British (1806-07) Pueyrredón, Alsaga, and General Liniers, the magnificent leader of French descent who successfully repelled the foreign invasion, found a ready soldier in the rugged inhabitant of the Pampa, compared to his urban countryman, who under the paternal rule of Spain, had lost the qualities of self help and initiative.33 This battle, as a prelude to the closely ensuing War for Independence, which began in 1810, served to unify the provincial gauchos, making of them a highly effective and

33 W. A. Hirst, Argentina, p. 87. This success against the British inspired the Spanish patriots with considerable self-confidence, thus preparing them psychologically for the struggle for liberation from Spain.
respectable fighting force; and until beyond the middle of the 19th century, during which time Argentina suffered much from internal turbulence in an effort to achieve national organisation, the gauchito played his greatest role in the history of the country.

After the many successful campaigns in the War for Independence in which the gauchito participated, his name for the first time was pronounced with respect by all of Argentine society, although they still refused him a place among them. Under Guemes he had ably defended the Peruvian frontier against the invasion of Argentina from the northwest; with Belgrano at Tucumán he had seized victory from the powerful Royalist forces; under the leadership of Artigas, he had driven into Uruguay (then a part of the Viceroyalty of Buenos Aires, founded in 1776), thoroughly defeating the Spaniards at Piedras; and in his greatest triumph, he crossed the Andes with the immortal liberator San Martín, taking the Spanish army by surprise and defeating it on Chilean soil in the famous Battle of Chacabuco near Santiago on February 12, 1817. By 1820 Spanish resistance had been largely broken throughout her colonial empire.

Peaceful development did not take place, however, in the newly born Argentine nation. Like her neighbor republics, she was not prepared or unified enough to burden herself with the task of self-government. Anarchy, despotism, and internecine warfare characterized the first thirty years of her independence, and during this time the gauchito completely dominated the scene, led by petty caudillos (political chieftains), one of whom, as we shall soon see, left the bloodiest record in
all of Argentine history—Juan Manuel Rosas.

The Government of Buenos Aires (Unitarian group) favored a strongly centralized rule and progress with a prince of foreign extraction at its head, while the provinces (Federalist group) argued for provincial power and the status quo so that they might retain the autonomy they had always known. 34 Cadillos, such as Lopes in Santa Fe province, Ibarra in Santiago del Estero, Ramírez in Entre Ríos, Quiroga the cold-blooded "Tiger of the plains", and Rosas soon sprang up, encouraging a spirit of rebellion to the government of Buenos Aires. From 1820 to 29, when anarchy and chaos reigned supreme, guerilla warfare against the cities was the main occupation of the gaucho, who followed his chieftain blindly. Much of Argentine culture was destroyed during these Indian-like attacks. Yet, the gaucho was an innocent participant in that he knew nothing of culture and its value; his was the heritage of the barbarian, of illiteracy, and it was little wonder that Rosas was able to exploit him with so little effort. 35

34 The settlements founded in La Plata by early colonists were widely separated and out of close contact with each other, since the horse was the only means of communication. They became independent, autonomous "city-states", so to speak, dependent upon themselves for subsistence, protection from the Indians, and local government (cabinlo). It is plain to see, then, that the kind of government desired by these provincial peoples was not something that grew out of the Wars for Independence, but was firmly rooted in their colonial society.

35 For an interesting—and bitter—account of the cultural devastation that accompanied guerilla warfare with the cities, see Domingo Sarmiento's Facundo, pp. 84-91.
Rosas gained control of Argentine politics largely through the aid of the gaucho, who found an idol in the crafty dictator. A gaucho himself, he owned a large estancia on the Pampa, and was very skillful in all the arts of gauchasque life. It is said that he could identify any of the large cattle ranches south of Buenos Aires by the taste of the grass from its pastures. His first important bid for laurels came in the Indian wars, when he intrepidly led the gauchos against the ravaging natives. Then, in the revolt of the provinces against Brazil which began in 1827, he found the way open to have himself elected Captain-General of the Republic (1829), representing the interests of the Federalists. Rivadavia, the great progressive leader of the Unitarians, had begun to lose popularity because of his unwillingness to carry forward the struggle against the Brazilians. On July 7, 1827 he was forced to resign, and he was succeeded by Dorrego, who was soon expelled by Juan Lavalle, a Unitarian army officer who felt he had been slighted. Meanwhile the provinces, governed firmly by caudillos, were growing as strong as the government at Buenos Aires. They turned against Lavalle, and Rosas, with the support of the guileless gauchos, was able to defeat him and his party, thereby, gaining control. Re-elected in 1832, he refused office because of the limitations imposed upon his government, and left with an army of gauchos to exterminate the marauding Indians on the Patagonian frontier.

36 Ibid., p. 64.
He was recalled, however, in 1834 to accept the title of Governor and Captain-General with full dictatorial powers, which he accepted. Thus began the ruthless military dictatorship of Juan Manuel Rosas. Little can be said to support the gacho during this bleak period, except to repeat that, unschooled and emotional, he followed without reasoning his favorite chieftain.

For nearly twenty years this artless, fanatical despot ruled the country with an iron hand. Aside from the facts that he did encourage agriculture and was highly aggressive in foreign relations, his regime was pitiless, retrogressive, and barren. Cold-blooded in his tactics, he stopped at nothing to protect his power. His ruthless reign of terror was carried out by secret organizations called the masorcas,37 and so "zealous were its members in their hunting and killing of men that Rosas himself is said to have restrained them."38

Without arguing over the merits of the old adage that something good always grows out of the bad, it is sufficient to say that it can be with reserve applied here, for the tyranny of Rosas inspired a national sentiment against him and unified the Argentine population in its effort to depose him. The end came when the skillful General Justo Jose de Urquiza, a former Rosist leader, took the reins in the movement

37 Masorcas is defined in Spanish as an ear of corn, but the derivation of the name for this secret society is often traced to mas, meaning more, and horca, meaning gallows.

38 Mary W. Williams, The People and Politics of Latin America, p. 713.
against the tyrant. With his gaucho army from Entre Ríos, he met Rosas at Monte Caseros near Buenos Aires, and crushed him on the 3rd day of February, 1852. The fallen dictator was exiled to England, where he died at Southampton on May 14, 1877. With his defeat the gaucho class began its decline.

The victorious Urquiza acted as president of the Argentine confederation from 1853 to 1860, but Unitarian disaffection in Buenos Aires refused to wither during his stay in office. On September 17, 1861 the Army of Buenos Aires under Bartolome Mitre met Urquiza's gauchos at Pavón, Santa Fe. Although the conflict was indecisive, the great Federalist general withdrew from the war and the national scene.

Entre Ríos remained under an independent government for a short period, and was the main center of Federalist resistance against the Unitarian government of Mitre. The gauchos of that province also found an occupation in the war against Paraguay (1865-70). Their star had eclipsed, however, and with the death in 1870 of General Urquiza, the last great gaucho leader, they vanished as suddenly as they had appeared from Argentine politics, no longer free to return to their independent life on the Pampa, for it existed no more.

The Disappearance of the Gaucho as a Social Class

Domingo Sarmiento, intelligent and progressive, ushered in the era of modern Argentina when he became president in 1868. National organisation had finally taken root after the loss of much human blood and wealth, and now the new republic could direct its efforts toward
the peaceful development of industry and productive enterprise. Foreign trade expanded and cities grew prosperous. Fences imprisoned the vast stretches of level plains where once the primitive gaucho roamed unobstructed, while railroads found a natural bed along the well beaten caravan trails between the distant towns. And where once only the lonely, gnarly-trunked ombú projected itself above the infinite sea of grass, now there stood the lofty telegraph pole, proudly bearing upon its cross arms gleaming wires that sang of a prosperous future. As far as the eye could see, the Argentine Pampa, in a few years, had become transformed from a wilderness into a veritable garden of Eden, into a land of mechanisation and convenience, beckoning with open arms to the incessant flow of immigrants who found there a refuge from their old existence.

Law and order accompanied material growth, banishing the fecon as the imperious arbiter of justice on the plains, and formal education, with emphasis on culture, found its way into the illiterate back country, where reading or writing was hitherto unknown.

In this onward roll of progress, the gaucho, conqueror of the Pampa, too weak to resist, had been stripped of his habitat and his way of life, and thus could no longer remain a fixed type in Argentine social structure. Yet, there should be no misgivings, for he had completed his usefulness to history. Instead, it should be rewarding enough that "he possessed so much good as he did, considering the unfavorable vice-charged, lawless, social, moral, and religious conditions under which he had been
compelled to live."39

Today remnants of the gaucho class can still be found in parts of Argentina, retaining in modified form some of the customs and dress of its prototype. On the whole, however, the gaucho is now a peon (and is known as such), working as a day laborer on farms, on ranches, and in industry, and the only resemblances he bears to his ancestor are in his speech (if he lives in the country) and in his personality traits, which continue to be much the same.

The transition from a primitive state to one of civilization was not easy for the undisciplined, freedom loving, plainsmen who preferred the ideology of the former; and many of them were either unable, or doggedly refused, to submit to the exigencies of a new pattern of life, sinking into a state of misery or taking to a life of crime to perish eventually along the wayside or in some prison. Those who survived the cataclysm, however, have become respectable, deserving citizens and have lived to see their ranks immortalized not only in history but also in a great national literature. And although they may look back upon their national heritage with a certain pang of sadness, they are content to move along with the ever changing tide of a dynamic civilization. The "Cowboy of the Pampa", like the "western cowboy" of North America is now largely a legendary figure.

39 "Gauchos at Home," op. cit., p. 682.
III. A Brief History of Gaucho Letters in Argentina.

It is not surprising that Argentina's literary history should have embraced the gaucho theme, drawing upon it to furnish a new genre, largely free from European influences; for Argentina had found but little original literary expression before the gaucho emerged as a class in the 18th century. In his specific type—in the singularity of his customs and environment—poets discovered the seeds of a rich local literature, one that grew, as did the gaucho himself, until it flowered into a literature that reflected the nation as a whole. Had this early inhabitant of the plains been content to lead a local and passive existence, his contribution to this field might have attained only a transitory significance. But the part he played as a national figure in the Wars for Independence and in the turbulent years following served to keep alive his spirit. This role was largely responsible for the far-reaching proportions to which the genre ultimately succeeded toward the close of the 19th and on into the 20th century. Although the gaucho has since ceased to be the central theme in literary productions, the gauchesque genre continues to be important to Argentine literature, and through it he lives on as a national hero in the hearts of his countrymen.

Gaucho literature had its simple beginning in oral tradition. Somewhat of a natural poet, the primitive "orphan", surrounded by mystery and loneliness, was moved to express himself in improvised song to the accompaniment of his guitar, which was a part of his Spanish
heritage. Some gauchos excelled in singing these unwritten folk songs and in playing the guitar, and soon there arose a class of professional minstrels—the payador, a troubador of the Middle Ages who moved about in the 19th century, praising the deeds of legendary figures, or bemoaning the death or defeat of some valiant person. He was the chronicler, the biographer, and the historian who wandered from place to place, stopping only long enough to sing his knowledge.  

The payador grew to fame quickly with his ready wit and unusual ability to improvise, and was in great demand at festivals and other social gatherings, where he became the center of attraction, singing tristesa and vidalitas to the accompaniment of his guitar. Often he related his own exploits, many of which were not always within the law, or he insulted fellow gauchos in his improvisations. Many times he was compelled to make use of the facón to protect himself or to escape the quickest he could from officers of justice or indignant gauchos.

Perhaps the most challenging, as well as the most interesting facet of the payador's life as a bard was the contrapunto, or extemporized singing match. It was an institution in the land and every pulpería had its local champion. In this contest of wit the opposing singers would in turn challenge each other to explain some metaphysical

\[h0\] Domingo Sarmiento, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

\[h1\] *triste*, melancholy love song.

*vidalita*, popular ballad sung with chorus and accompanied by guitar and drum. This was the popular verse in which happenings of daily life were improvised by the gaucho.
question or one pertaining to past deeds. Surrounded by an eager audience, they would continue—for days if necessary—the constant see-saw of questions and answers, at the same time pitting guitar against guitar, until finally one would yield. Giving truthful answers was not the object of the match. Rather, it was the ability to show some comprehension of the subject and to put it across with wit, grace, and originality of style. Juan Manuel Rosas, whose many feats in gauchesque skill are perhaps largely legendary, is also credited with capturing gaucho hearts by his skill in the contrapunto.

Unwritten and unmemborized, the payadas (songs of the payador), like the early ballads of the troubadours in France, Italy, and Spain, were mostly lost. However, a transition period followed in which the popular lyrics of the payador were imitated in writing. At first, the authorship of the new indigenous genre, the poesía gauchescas, remained anonymous, but in approximately the year 1777 the first poem written in gauchesque style by an established author appeared in La Plata, a ballad by Juan Baltazar Mazial (1727–1788) in which he praised the military exploits of the viceroy. However, according to Holmes, the first significant chronological link in the chain of cultivated gaucho literature, aside from anonymous popular lyrics, is to be found in the romances of Pantaleón Rivarola, which appeared around the year 1806.

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42 The payada had its origin in Andalusia, a province in southern Spain, from which the earlier settlers to La Plata came.

About this time, it will be recalled the gaucho began to assume a national importance, serving against the British, and a few years later against the Spanish royalists in the cause for independence. Poets began adapting early 19th century forms of dance songs, such as the cialito and gato, and payadas to uses of political propaganda, many of which were composed to champion the rights of the persecuted gaucho class.

One of the writers who first served as a mouthpiece for the plainsman was Bartolome Hidalgo (1787 - ?), called by Mitre, in speaking of the gauchesque genre, the "Homer of the genre."44 In the famous dialogues of Chano y Contreras (about 1820), didactic in form, in which he uses gaucho dialect, he describes conditions around Buenos Aires, cries against the unfair social treatment of the gaucho, and laments the plight of his countrymen in general who at that time refused to become unified.45 These lyric poems, epic in quality, served as a model for the development of epic literature in Argentina.46

With the growth of anarchy, caudillism, and the tyrannical dictatorship of Rosas, more writers turned their pens to the production

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45 In the dialogues gauchos acted as interlocutors, discussing among themselves many diversified phases of the subjects mentioned, and many others.
46 Critics have often refused to call the heroic poems (Martin Fierro, Santos Vega, and Fausto) Argentina epics. However, since a few eminent critics have done so, they shall, for the sake of convenience, also be considered here in this sense.
of gaucho literature. Some, like Juan Qualberto Godoy (1793-1864),
addressed their poems against Rosas and other caudillos, or against
the bondage to which the gaucho was subjected, while others, such as
Esteban Echevarría (1805-1851), who is credited with introducing
Romanticism into Argentina, began to find a new subject in the Pampa,
with its mystery, its beauty, and its simplicity of life. The Cautiva
(1837) of Echevarría, although not truly a gaucho poem since it was
written in classical Spanish, is nevertheless of great significance to
this genre because of its vivid and detailed descriptions of the Pampa
and Indian life. Godoy, on the other hand, like Hidalgo, knew gauchos
and gaucho dialect well, having lived among them, and wrote in the
language of the rustic.

Also to be included among the important contributors to the
poesía gauchesca of this period are Juan María Gutiérrez (1809-1878)
and Bartolomé Mitre (1821-1906). Gutiérrez is best known for his long
poem Los amores del payador (1838), a typical gaucho legend in which
he expresses deep poetic feeling, and has also been considered one of
the most eminent critics of the 19th century. Mitre, who is perhaps
best remembered for his part in Argentine politics and history, in
addition reached considerable fame both in gaucho poetry and in literary
criticism. In the former his youthful verses and the treatment he gave
to the famous legend of the payador Santos Vega place him among the
great lyric poets of Argentina.\footnote{47}

\footnote{47 The beginning of a national literature in Argentina is dated
about the time these men wrote.}
Gaucho poetry continued to be important until the end of the 19th century, when the gaucho had largely passed from the Argentine scene. In the meantime, the epics of Estanislao del Campo, Hilario Ascasubi, and José Hernández had become the main center of literary concern in gaucho literature. Much of the credit for keeping gaucho lyric poetry alive during this period goes to three men—Ricardo Gutiérrez, Rafael Obligado, and Francisco Soto y Calvo. Gutiérrez (1836–96) found recognition in his poetic ability to portray the gaucho soul, penetrating it deeply and with understanding, while Obligado (1851–1920) achieved a masterpiece in Tradiciones Argentinas, a poetical interpretation of the Santos Vega legend in which Juan Sin Ropa (believed to be the devil) defeats the great payador in a contrapunto.48

With the publication of Nastasio by Francisco Soto y Calvo in 1899, gaucho poetry ceased to be recorded. Coester says of this work:49

"Into this poem filled with the spirit of the pampa, the author has attempted to concentrate the essence of all the rich gaucho literature."

The first of the three great Argentine epics appeared in 1851 in the Santos Vega of Hilario Ascasubi (1807–75). An intense foe of Rosa's tyranny Ascasubi took up arms against the dictator, distinguishing himself both on the battlefield and with the pen. He composed bitter

48 The defeat of Santos Vega here symbolizes the passing of the gaucho—the new ultimately conquering the old.

49 Alfred Coester, The Literary History of Spanish America, p. 145.
propaganda against the federalist regime (which in reality was not federalistic) of Rosas in favor of Unitarian principles, yet his sympathy lay with the illiterate gaucho. The success of his efforts at political writing inspired in him a desire to attempt a portrayal in writing of gaucho life between 1778 and 1808 (some twenty years before his time), the result of which was his immortal epic. His fame rests almost solely upon it.

In this work all phases of gaucho life on the Pampa are described in minute detail—horsemanship, the rodeo, military service, Indian attacks, customs, etc.—while the legendary payador Santos Vega unfolds his tale of twin boys from the estancia of La Flor. Its language is the faithful reproduction of the gaucho idiom, and its quality is, perhaps, as nearly epic, if not more so, than that of Martín Pierro by José Hernández, both of which were greatly influenced by the Díalogos of Hidalgo.

Least interesting of the three important epics is the Fausto (1870) (full title: Fausto. Impresiones del gaucho Anastasio el Pollo en la representación de esta ópera) of Estanislao del Campo (1834–80). It is generally agreed that it is classed with the other two epic poems only because of its resemblance to them. Torres-Rioseco writes that "At best, Fausto is only a very weak mock-epic, in which the romantic temperament of del Campo belies his gaucho psychology." 50 The story

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50 Arturo Torres-Rioseco, Epic of Latin American Literature, p. 145.
concerns Anastasio el Pollo, the gaucho who attends Gounod's opera Faust at the Colón theatre in Buenos Aires. With his illiterate and primitive background, he relates his impressions of the opera to a fellow gaucho, placing it in the realistic atmosphere of the Pampa. Aside from its weak epic qualities and its wavering attempt at gaucho vernacular, Del Campo's work has much to commend it, for it is highly lyrical and artistic, the work of a city-bred poet, which he was. And like Ascasubi's Santos Vega, although to a lesser degree, it influenced Hernández, who was shortly to reach a climax in the gaucho epic with his immortal Martín Fierro.

Martín Fierro is rated as one of the classics, not only of Argentine literature, but of Spanish American literature. It has been translated into several languages, and is yet interesting to scholars all over the world, especially for its gaucho idiom and spirit, and its literary technique. It is a touching lament for the passing of the gaucho, for his unfettered and virile existence on the plains, and for his unjust treatment at the hands of his compatriots and his government, both of whom persecuted him at every turn. It is the interpretation of the Pampa with all its glory and pathos as only the gaucho could see it, a lasting portrait of the heart of Argentina in its primal state and a symbol of its free way of life.

José Hernández (1834-86) was a true gaucho himself, having grown up among the plainsmen whom he learned to know intimately, and his

51 Ibid., page 150.
purpose for writing Martin Fierro he claimed was "to teach his illiterate countrymen how to read by so imitating their manner of expression and their way of thought that reading would seem a natural continuation of their lives." During the civil wars, he defended the Federalist cause, thus supporting the party against which Ascasubi had so virulently entrenched his pen. Later he founded the newspaper Río de la Plata in Buenos Aires, and entered into a life of politics, where he held various government offices. His reputation, however, lies primarily in his great contribution to literature.

Part I of Martin Fierro was published in 1872. It met with such astounding success among both the unschooled country folk and the educated city dweller that Hernández was inspired to add a sequel to it—The Return of Martin Fierro (La Vuelta de Martin Fierro)—which appeared in print seven years later (1879).

As a national epic, Martin Fierro surpassed in popularity either of its two predecessors—Santos Vega and Fausto. Its hero, the true payador Martin Fierro, came to represent to Argentina what El Cid and Roland have to Spain and France. In the country's literature it "marked the course to be followed by the drama, short story, poetry, and novel for some time to come."53

This poem, which is considered to represent the height of all gauchoesque verse, is a series of episodes in which Martin Fierro is the

53 Ibid., p. 85.
the story of Juan Moreira, based partly on the real person of that
1057-90, who, in 1890 published a newspaper serial in Buenos Aires
the crude beginning in the Gaucho outlaw fiction of Eduardo Guittarere
expression in prose, as yet to be introduced into the novel, which had
with the success of Martín Fierro, Gaucho literature found new

seems worthy of reproducing a nation.

Pérez Arceza found the nearest thing to a perfect echo one that
qualities that the former echo lack to a great extent. In Martín
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matters, most of which had been repeatedly used in the past, the expert

the Gaucho aesthetic covered by the material (Indian) race,
the attention on the scenes

The process—and its consequences—have been represented in the novel—

character. To scrutinize the events and impressions of a national

history with a critical eye, the book has become a national

novel, and the attention to events and impressions of the

national novel, with the national document, in which the

attitudes have a real

Besides the choice of the 19th century distinguished writers, such

"journalists; not an artist."

novel and the dream, "are interdependent, for bitterness, "as a career, etc.,

aside from journalism, which contributed to both the growth of the

Stanley Gurner of the day. The interest accomplished, however,

masses' and journalists' the author of many of them, became the part

women, and won out over great odds, became extensively popular among

writer, in which bad Gurners battled each other, seduced beautiful

name, whose crimes made History in the 60's.
between a country father and a republics city–sneakily and was presented

the first great success, which is to date the story of the conflict

national drama reached its height peak

Spanish American participant of the time. Through the genius, Argentine

Irenee (1875–1910) stood out above the rest. Not only was he the

the events in the treaty congressional, of those, the United

Lawed, adverse, F. Peayoff, and Franco. Uneven begun to distinguish

were the choice of the century, new writers, such as

with Franco's "play become a part of regular theatre repertoire

(1894)" and other popular works of the day.

the production led to the stage of "Pershing's Zero" (1907), theater

of which it was then presented in dramatic form. The success of

an operatic family that later reached significant heights in the United

referred and soon it became extremely popular. The Rosedale brothel,

outnumber, with horses and cattle, played 177 and adding a touch of

Our "entries," June Moreira, in July a pantoas in the drama. Real
in 1903 at the "Comedia" theater in Buenos Aires. This work has been hailed as one of the brighter moments of Argentine theater, but it is scarcely superior to his other two great rural dramas—*La Gringa* (1904) and *Barranca abajo* (1905), both of which reflect his dramatic genius at its best. In these two works, as in *Hijo el doctor*, Sánchez presents the age old struggle between the old and the new, between barbarism and progress, typified in the former by the conflict between an indolent gaucho and an industrious immigrant who invades the Pampa and in the latter by the problem of land versus industry.

These plays, though they represent only a part of Sánchez' total output, make up his chief contributions to the gauchesque genre. In them he portrays the gaucho of his day, the gaucho who had now become sedentary, but who still refused to relinquish his traditions to progress—the gaucho who, lovable as he was, hindered the growth of modern Argentina, and, therefore, acted as a thorn in his side. Sánchez sympathized with him, as he sympathized with all the less fortunate, but he seldom, if ever, sacrificed realism to sentiment in his work. He was essentially a naturalist with a keen sense of observation, and he possessed the rare ability to record minutely in his mind concrete scenes from everyday life, interpreting them frankly and without disguise in his work. And therein lies much of his dramatic genius: to develop a conflict, which is usually universal, without affectation, naturally and spontaneously, in the simple language of the gaucho, the criollo, and the gringo.

Gaucho drama reached its climax in the rural plays of Florencio Sánchez, and by the first quarter of the 20th century the gaucho genre
as a whole was nearing its end. Before it disappeared, however, many eminent writers, including such men as Martiniano Leguizamón, Roberto J. Payró, Manuel Ugarte, Manuel Galvez, Benito Lynch, and Ricardo Güiraldes, contributed generously to the gaucho novel, most of them also composing short stories in the meanwhile. Of this group, Benito Lynch and Ricardo Güiraldes, who both wrote about the same time, produced the last great pieces of gaucho literature.

Benito Lynch (1885- ) has written quite profusely in both the field of the short story and that of the novel. But his fame as a writer rests primarily on his novels, which have gained him considerable popularity throughout the Spanish speaking world, and especially in his own country. One of his best, the tragic El Inglés de los gueyes (1921), reflects his profound comprehension of gaucho psychology and superstition, and displays his unusual ability to describe human emotions. The story centers around the dignified Mister James, an English anthropologist who has gone to the Pampa to do research, and Balbina, an illiterate, untamed, but beautiful gaucho girl whose extreme dislike for the Englishman turns into unrestrained devotion. The final note ends in tragedy: Balbina, who fails even through sorcery to keep Mister James from returning to England after he has completed his studies, takes her own life.

In this work Lynch has attained an intense realism, characteristic of his writing, and, as in most of his other works—Los oseranchos de la Florida (1931), Raquela (1918), and El romance de un gaucho (1930), to mention a few—he has created real living characters and authentic, highly charged situations. To sum him up in brief: Benito Lynch paints
a vivid picture of the gaucho and of the pampas in a simple, unpretentious style. His works are genuine expressions of rural life, rich in local color and rustic speech. In them he has furnished a deserving account of the gaucho "as he really was." 58

The greatest of all gaucho novels, however, and one of the classics of Argentine literature is Ricardo Güiraldes' (1886-1927) Don Segundo Sombra, which was published in 1926. Ethel W. Plimpton and María T. Fernández write of this work: 59 "It is one of the finest examples of how rudimentary and primitive literary material can be transformed in the hands of a conscious artist. In it the two planes of crude yet beautiful reality and of poetic fancy intersect in a way that inevitably recalls Don Quijote." The story is that of all gauchos, epitomized in the ideal gaucho Don Segundo Sombra, who represents in the book more an idea than a living character, more the spirit of the free gaucho than a gaucho himself.

Güiraldes wrote Don Segundo Sombra as a tribute to the gaucho class, so that it might live on forever as a symbol of the Pampa and the men who inhabited it in the literature of his country. Born on an

58 Torres-Ríoseco, op. cit., p. 163.

I

III

\[ \text{The letter was presented over Don Segundo Sombra.} \]

This area remained (1717), however. Some years later in the novel Don Segundo Sombra, other notes by the author of the letter, he had written both pen and pencil, but the importance of the letter, he has been forgotten by the people. And in the street, however, and in the street, however, the people were forgotten by the people. In some places, and treated as an exile, in some places, increased in power, the people were forgotten by the people. In some places, the people were forgotten by the people. In some places, the people were forgotten by the people. In some places, the people were forgotten by the people. In some places, the people were forgotten by the people.

60

Guitarradas were born on this father's apartment. The porteno, near

Euchon. When the task is completed, youDeguido, just as he had appeared,

Together they pass through the various stages of the development of a

man and teacher of pedagogy, who wishes to explore the secrets of the people.

Characters, Don Seguidor and the adopted son Pedro—these together by the main

structure: In a series of episodes, held together by the main

There is little plot in Don Segundo Sombra. In construction it

*Teacher and the victorious snap of the whip as a horror is broken

at the race, the cockfight, of the country. danger. The lack of sadness

Segundo Skirtley religion and take with a kiss, the moments of torture

increased the spirit of the people. around the Tracy committee. as Don

extended cattle little that lacked the energy of even the most vigorous

the thunderstorm, the blithe foxtrot, and the charming beast the

the bitter reality of the cockfight plane, with the sudden, earth-shattering

the bitter reality of the cockfight plane, with the sudden, earth-shattering

of Guadalupe. It is touched upon in the copyright, the title of this book.

presentation of the fishman in the native habitat. Practically every phase

In this, the greatest work, he aimed at a nearly perfect interd-

a parenthesis be learned to love and aspire.

The, and in their minds the sound of Don Seguidor of his classic novel,

Estacionismo, 60
vanishes into the shadows of the night. But his spirit remains behind; and, as Guiraldes had hoped, it continues to live on in Argentina's literature.

The gaucho genre continued weakly on for some years after Benito Lynch and Ricardo Guiraldes had faded from the scene, but mostly in the form of the short story, which prevented the genre from dying out completely.

Gaucho short stories had a spontaneous beginning in the tales told around the campfire by the early settlers on the Pampa. This form of amusement, along with singing, served an important function in their isolated lives, just as it did among our own pioneers, and soon they became quite proficient in story telling, as is evinced by the tales told in Don Segundo Sombra.

The first recorded short story in the region of La Plata dates back to 1840 in a work by Echeverría entitled El matadero (The Slaughterhouse), in which he denounces the tyranny of Rosas. It was not until late in the 19th century, however, when prose fiction found its way into the novel, that the gaucho short story began to find popularity as a literary form. After the turn of the century, artistic story tellers like Roberto J. Payró, Martiniano P. Leguizamón, Leopoldo Lugones, Manuel Ugarte, Godofredo Daireaux, and Benito Lynch, many of whom had already composed novels, began to flourish in this new medium.

61 Gertrude M. Walsh, Cuentos Criollos, p. xvi-xvii.
Like the criollo short story as a whole, gaucho tales are not usually concerned with plot, so characteristic of the European short story. They are, rather, convincing and realistic sketches—slices of life—depicting the gaucho in the hazards of frontier life, wars, and in every day life and customs surrounding the rural scene. To the student of the gaucho they furnish an accurate documentation of the Pampa and its inhabitants.

Since the main function of literature is to interpret life, its importance as a useful aid in learning to understand a foreign people cannot be stressed too greatly. Until fairly recent years little was known of Spanish American literature in this country. The last few decades, however, have witnessed a tremendous amount of energy expended in the effort to better acquaint us with Latin American literary movements, and by so doing, also provide us with a more tolerant attitude toward our Spanish speaking neighbors. Literary histories have been written and numerous translations have been made of Spanish American literary efforts. These accomplishments, thus far, have been commendable, but they represent only a beginning.

It is hoped that the following short stores will add to the translations already existing on the gaucho and that they will serve to illustrate some of the phases of rural life on the Argentine Pampa.

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62 Until late in the 19th century Spanish America as a whole adhered closely to literary movements in Europe, especially to those of Spain and France. Once writers came into direct artistic contact with the American scene, they declared literary independence from Europe. Thus began a new regional literature (criollismo), original in form, style, idiom, etc.
THE TRANSLATOR'S PROBLEM

The translator's task, although a pleasant one, is not always easy. My belief is that the essence of a good translation lies in its proximity to the original, in style, in flavor, in communication of thought, and in fluency of expression. A word for word translation will hardly produce the desired result, nor will a translation for thought alone. Literal translations become stilted, unwieldy, and often meaningless. On the other hand, the translator who seeks only to retain the thought of the original, disregarding such things as style and flavor, invites the danger of allowing his own creative talent to enter into his work. Both of these methods of translation, nonetheless, are indispensable and can be very effective when used in their right proportions. The translator's task, then, is to seek a happy medium between the two, always bearing in mind that he is reproducing a piece of literature, not creating one. To ensure a flowing translation, the translator has at his disposal mechanical devices, such as rephrasing, reparagraphing, etc., which he is licensed to utilize when necessary.

Unfortunately, no translation can hope to reflect the complete singularity of the original. Languages possess peculiarities which, when taken from their original context, naturally lose some of their color and often some of their meaning. For example, they differ greatly one from another in syntax, each having its own peculiar word order, uncommon grammatical constructions, and other distinctive structural features, all of which place at least slight limitations upon the trans-
sent.

been done to the coadjutant and unmated works that I have chosen to pre-

require charity have been rooteded. It is in hope that justice has
of words, if it will be found, have been left in the article. Those that
the following pages, I have endeavored to bear them in mind. A number
translating the collection of evanheegue short stories that appear on

Buterty, such are the problems that face the translator. In

language.

expression—that only too often lack suitable equivalents in other
instructor. Also, every tongue possesses a unique set of idioms—regular
TRANSLATIONS ILLUSTRATING GAUCHÉSQUE LIFE IN ARGENTINA WITH BRIEF PREFACES ABOUT THE AUTHORS
Godofredo Daireaux, author of many Argentine short stories, in the following selection *The Gaucho and His Crowbait* (El gaucho del gateado) presents a symbolic sketch of the passing of the gaucho. In the person of an old and decrepit plainsman, who resembles more a spirit than a living character, he embodies all the natural skills possessed by the gaucho of the old school. Although reality gives way to symbolism in this brief tale, its animated style and intrinsic interest makes it both pleasant and worthwhile reading.

The following translation of *The Gaucho and His Crowbait* was made from the Spanish tale as it appears in Keating and Flores, *El gaucho y la pampa*, an excellent collection of gaucho tales.
The gathering was very much alive: bets were exchanged as though any old nag might suddenly turn into a thoroughbred, and the races followed one upon the other with such rapidity the riders scarcely had time to abandon the track before the next race began.

During the course of these races an old gauchito, snowy white of hair and beard, could be seen mixing with the crowd. He was very thin, with parchmentlike skin, and his clothing looked old and shabby. His mount was an old cinnamon-colored nag, more withered than he; an aged animal, decked with a miserable looking saddle.

The gauchito was a stranger there, and no one paid him the least attention. Among the throng of riders he resembled a spirit of the past, a gauchito spirit of long ago among a crowd of modern Spanish Americans. Suddenly, a young fellow noticed the old gauchito, and, laughing loudly, he shouted to him:

"Hey, grandpa, you want to race me with that old 'crowbait'?"

Laughter broke out everywhere. The thought of an old gauchito running a race on a decrepit old nag was a good source of amusement to those chaps so well mounted. The laughter grew even louder when, very seriously, the old man answered:

"Sure, I'll race you. At what distance?"

"Hundred yards," replied the boy. "Or is that too far for that four-legged creature?"

"Fine," the old gauchito answered, "and how much you going to bet?"
"Let's make it fifty cents . . . if you got that much."

"Got it right here," spoke the gaucho as he dug deeply into his tattered pocket.

Interest heightened. A hundred yards was a race for men on foot, but even that distance seemed to be a challenge to that frail beast. Nevertheless, they all found this old man very daring, to race at his age on such an animal, even though the stakes were negligible and the distance short.

The old gaucho threw off his cape, removed the saddle from his horse, tied his bandanna around his head, and the race began.

My good reader, that old 'crombait' ran like wildfire! Scarcely were the judges in their stands when it passed by them like a streak of lightning. The full gallop of the other was a mere trot in comparison.

"I'll run my horse against yours again, this time two and a half miles," spoke the gaucho to his adversary after they had joined each other.

"All right," retorted the young loser, quite irritated, "and for a hundred dollars, if you want."

"You're on," returned the old gaucho simply, and taking the hundred dollars from his pocket, he handed them to one of the judges. "I'm a poor man," he added, "but I've got plenty of faith in my horse."

The crowd was now greatly aroused. The race would be interesting, but why bet on it? How could that old nag possibly last? . . .
"Well, didn't you see what it did a moment ago?"

"Of course, but what's a hundred yards? This time it's two and a half miles, and that's quite another story."

Amidst these and other comments many bets were exchanged. And it is certainly safe to assert that those who wagered in favor of the 'crownbait' didn't belong to that group of skeptics who deny everything.

Again the old nag won, and when its rider dismounted, everyone looked upon him in admiration. A few old gauchos present spoke up with pride:

"We still have some of the prowess of olden times."

With the hundred dollars he had won, the old gaucho invited those friends to celebrate his victory with him, and he spent the entire sum with an eagerness characteristic of the Spanish American, who always spends to the last cent.

A short while later a disturbance broke out in the little country store that served also as saloon and meeting place. Two impetuous youths, wielding knives, attacked each other, both intent upon drawing blood. The old gaucho attempted to intervene, but when he did so, the youths suddenly stopped fighting between themselves and turned on the old fellow, insulting him and threatening him with their knives. The episode that followed was short-lived, for the crafty gaucho, when he saw them press toward him, with lightning-like speed drew his knife and, "swish, swish", with a darting slap at each one, disarmed them quickly. Then he advised them to let their beards
grow, because then they would look more like gauchos.

Now everyone looked upon this old gaucho with respect. No longer did he appear so frail, nor did his horse. And when they disappeared in the darkening shadows of the Pampa, everybody wondered who the man might be. . . . More than one believed that, rather than a living man, he must have been the spirit of some gaucho from olden times.

However it may have been, the fact is that on the same day, and at a good distance from there, the old gaucho appeared suddenly at a place where various men were endeavoring to bring down ostriches with their boleadoras,\(^1\) succeeding only in tiring their mounts. Both the gaucho and his cinnamon-colored nag were old, very old, and apparently without strength or vigor. Nevertheless, the old man dared to criticise the actions with which those men threw their boleadoras. The hunters were at first impelled to make fun of him, and a few counseled him to keep what advice he might have to himself, since he was much too old to run about chasing ostriches.

The old gaucho looked at them without answering. Then, suddenly, very near to the group, a young stag jumped up and quickly vanished in the tall grass.

\(^1\) boleadoras, leather thongs about eight feet in length, with cowhide covered balls (bolas) of stone or wood fastened to each end. (Often they consist of three balls. In this case each ball is secured to the end of a thong, and the three thongs are tied together at the free ends.) See page 15, note 18.
"Let's see who gets him!" shouted the old man; and, before the other riders could get their mounts going, the gaucho was away, whirling his boleadoras around his head as he rode. When the bewildered hunters caught up with him, the stag was already on the ground.

The admiration those hunters displayed for that old gaucho! They called him 'grandpa' with deep affection and implored him to remain among them so that they could learn from an experienced old gaucho the ways of the Pampa.

But he stayed for a short time only. He had to go, he said, to a ranch where young colts were being broken.

"And you're going to break broncos?" they all asked, abashed.

"Why not, my friends, why not?" queried the old man.

The men at the ranch expressed the same disbelief when, upon arriving at the corral that enclosed the unbroken colts, the gaucho asked if they were in need of an extra hand at breaking. Even the boss himself, when he learned what the old fellow wanted, asked him if he wasn't too old for the job. But he persisted, and, in fact, even requested that he be allowed to choose his own colts. His wish was granted.

He unsaddled his mount and turned it loose to pasture. Then removing his worn cape and securing his faded bandanna around his head, he took to the task. With his lariat coiled he entered the corral. What a sight to behold! Or was it an illusion? Steady on his feet, this old man, with the agility of a young boy and the strength
of a young bull, skillfully with one sure throw lassoed a wild colt. After the choking animal stopped struggling against the rope, the old gaucho began to saddle him. His actions were swift, so swift the ranch hands scarcely knew what took place; nor did they make an effort to help him. The old gaucho went about his business, forgetting nothing. One quick leap and he was in the saddle. Then the wild, potential killer exploded like a bag of dynamite: it lunged, kicked, sunfished, trying hopelessly to cast off the weight on its back. Fascinated eyes were glued to the gaucho’s every move.

The gaucho finished with the animal, and the ranch hands received him with enthusiastic cheers, cheers to the gaucho of old who had returned to teach them how horses were broken in the good old days on the plains, evoking with his spirit the proud memories of the Argentine Pampa.

Those men genuinely admired the impetuous courage and deliberate skill of both the old gaucho and his withered nag. They wished to acquire and pass on to their children the natural gifts of the clever gauchos who had adorned many generations of the past, long-suffering gauchos imbued with strength, both generous and loyal.

At night, the old gaucho told them stories or he sang ballads, accompanied by his guitar. His songs recalled a world that had already disappeared—its customs, its proverbs, and its wearing apparel. They told the story of the gaucho soul: the base and the essence of the Argentine soul.

One day, no one knows how it happened or when, the old gaucho
failed to arise with the rest of the ranch hands. They say that, having seen a large mountain in the distance, he wished to go in search of it and of new things that would add to his knowledge. It is known for certain that he was never seen again. This old man with the snow-white hair and the cinnamon-colored nag disappeared completely, no more to display his strength and his courage.

After much struggling to preserve its authority, the Pampa of the gaucho was inevitably conquered, ignored, forgotten, without strength enough to assert itself, despised by those who failed to understand it. Like a gust of wind, the gaucho soul disappeared, taking with it forever the old gaucho and his 'crowbait'.
ISMAEL BUCIICH ESCOBAR
ISMAEL BUCICH ESCOBAR, 1890-

Ismael Bucich Escobar for many years served as editor for a daily newspaper in his native city of Buenos Aires. Greatly interested in the art and intellectual development of his city, he accepted the position in 1938 of Director del Museo Historico Sarmiento, in which capacity he has served since that time. Although his literary works are chiefly concerned with history, he has written one volume of fiction, Este era un bucey (narraciones del campo), 1923, in which he presents many colorful stories about life in the rural districts. One of these tales, Luciano's Guitar (La guitarra de Luciano), paints a sentimental picture of a dying payador, abandoned and alone in his old age, who seeks comfort in his memories—memories awakened by an old and battered guitar that hangs uselessly under the eaves of his crude shelter. The following translation of this story is based upon the Spanish in Cuentos Criollos, a collection of Spanish American short stories, edited by Gertrude M. Walsh.
LUCIANO'S GUITAR

Hanging on a forked pole under the eaves of the crude adobe hut, where in the good old days it poured out its vibrant melodies to the accompaniment of lively pericones\(^1\) and melancholy vidalitas\(^1\), Luciano's battered guitar, silent for these many years, swayed gently in perpetual rhythm.

Inside the hut old Luciano, failing in health and weighted down with misfortune, lay stretched out on his poncho, with his head resting on a ragged saddle pad.

Abandoned and alone, he knew that death would soon take possession of his frail body. With his remaining energy, he concentrated on the bold heart that in other days had spurred him on to exciting and daring adventures.

His memories were awakened by the gentle swaying of the old guitar that could be seen through a crack in the dilapidated door. Old Luciano experienced a severe nostalgia for his youthful days as a payador\(^2\) and guitar player as he contemplated the partner of his errant days, old like him, and like him rendered useless by the years. The things that guitar

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\(^1\) pericones; vidalitas. The pericon, danced to the accompaniment of a guitar and singing of the dancers, resembles a quadrille. The vidalita is a melancholy love song, also sung to the accompaniment of a guitar, and often a small drum.

\(^2\) payador. Early day minstrel of the Pampa. Usually sang improvised verse (generally in competition) to the accompaniment of the guitar.
must have known after having so often accompanied him, hanging from
his back! A procession of pleasant memories began to soothe the bitter-
ness of his old age.

He could remember clearly that morning when the cattle ranch had
awakened to the anguishing cries of: *La indiada! La indiada!* It
seemed as though he could still see the *patrón* and the peons saddling
hurriedly and rushing toward town. Luciano trembled with emotion on
his poncho as he recalled that tender episode of his life, when the
*patrón* noticed in desperation that his son, who was not among them,
doubtless was at the mercy of the savages. Like an echo, he could
still hear the heart-stricken supplications of the father:

"Where is my son? Tell me, you cowards, where is my son?"

And he, Luciano, scarcely a lad of fifteen, dug his spurs in his
chestnut horse, riding bare back, and started off like the wind in the
direction of the ranch. Returning with the boy, two Indians overtook
him as he passed the big shed. The hair-raising cries of "*huinca!*
*huinca!*" roared in his ears. And how the lances did fly! Two of them
shaved his head. That chestnut horse ran like wildfire with a double
load on its back.

The Indians failed to overtake him and he soon arrived to where
the *patrón* and the peons, fraught with anxiety, were waiting.

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3 *La indiada*. Indian raid.

4 *Huinca*. War cry of the Pampa Indians.
"Here is your son, patrón," he said, dismounting.

The ranch owner, beaming with gratitude, clasped Luciano tightly for a moment. Then they mounted and galloped at full speed away from the Indians. Once in town, the patrón called to him.

"Luciano," he said, "you acted the part of a brave man and my wish is to compensate you for it. Just ask for anything you want."

Luciano shook his head, but the benevolent father kept insisting:

"Anything I have is yours, Luciano. Why the son you rescued for me is worth more than all my material belongings. Just name it: Do you want the land next to the arroyo colorado? A string of ponies? Or would you prefer money?"

"Oh, no, patrón."

"I beg you, ask for something!"

"All right, patrón, now that you are determined to repay me, I'm going to accept a guitar."

How well Luciano could remember that look of complete stupor on the old ranch owner's face when he heard the word 'guitar'.

"All right," he finally remarked, "a guitar... the best guitar in Buenos Aires."

Sometime later, after the ranch had recovered from the shock of the Indian raid, the owner appeared one day with a large leather case. The guitar! And what a guitar! Adornments all over it, ivory pegs, and what tones! Feverishly, he tuned it and then he strummed it and sang until the cocks announced the newborn dawn.
Within a few short months he was an accomplished and famous
guitarist and as a singer there were few who equaled him. They came
from great distances to engage his services. His fame spread every-
where; and everywhere he was welcomed with open arms. With his guitar
on his back he traveled about the country, eulogizing the great Santos
Vega. 5 How vividly those adventures stood out in his mind!

The affectionate glances of the young ladies who invited him to
sing, wherever he went; the ineffaceable outline of his loved one who
always swooned when she listened to his melancholy love songs; the
violent provocation of that payador from Entre Ríos who, defeated in a
contrapunto 6 that lasted two consecutive days, had cut all six strings
of his guitar with one formidable slash of his knife. He then—how
graphic in his mind—had rolled up his poncho around his left forearm
as a shield, while pulling out his knife with his right hand. Like a
payador and a true gauchito he had defeated his adversary.

A train of recollections kept filtering through his mind. How
stimulating those nostalgic memories to a man whose life was fast ebb-
ing away... The warmth of past experience eased the growing coldness
of a dying heart.

One magnificent Spring morning Luciano closed his tired eyes
forever. The honeysuckle that bloomed around the rustic hut gave off a

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5 A famed legendary payador of the Pampa and the subject for
many writers and poets of the gauchesque genre.

6 contrapunto. Competitive dialogue of improvised verse, with
accompaniment by guitar. See pages 35-36 of Introduction.
faint perfume, and a pair of finches that had built their nest in the heart of that old guitar accompanied with their trilling the last sigh of the old payador.
Neither Ricardo Guiraldes nor his renowned work Don Segundo Sombra, from which the two following selections in translation have been adapted, need to be discussed here, since they have been covered sufficiently in the Introduction. Guiraldes wrote no short stories, but the episodic nature of Don Segundo Sombra lends itself so readily to adaptation that many episodes, which are complete stories in themselves, have been used in various collections of gaucho yarns. The two that appear in this thesis—The Challenge and The Tale of Misery—are both well known, and are incorporated here because they best illustrate the gaucho as an expert story teller and as a skillful duelist with the facon, or knife.

The Tale of Misery is a religious story told by Don Segundo to his adopted son Fabio with the skill and the spontaneity characteristic of the gaucho narrator of yarns. It is rich in gaucho idiom, which, unfortunately, is lost in translation. In The Challenge Fabio (the narrator) and his god-father, as he calls Don Segundo, witness a duel that unexpectedly climaxes in the death of one of the participants. Antenor, Fabio's young acquaintance, is content to live up to the gaucho code and end the struggle after he marks the face of his rival; but the latter, whose personal honor is shattered, insists upon a fight to the finish. One man is left dead on the ground, and the other is compelled to flee from the law. The ruthless facon has again unnecessarily taken its toll, and Guiraldes assails his countrymen, whom he loves, for their barbarous methods of settling personal disputes.
THE CHALLENGE

One of the first persons to enter the almost empty saloon was Antenor. He invited me to have a drink with him and we walked lazily to the makeshift bar. I was telling him about a run-in my god-father had with the saloonkeeper when a stranger approached us, shook our hands, and began talking loudly to the crowd in general. He must have been about fifty, dressed in the usual gaucho garb. At his waist he carried a long silver-handled knife in a sheath, also of silver. His brown poncho lay over one shoulder, and from the looks of his dusty riding boots, sweat-stained from rubbing against his horse, he was a man who had traveled a long way.

Exhibiting an abundance of good humor, he invited the crowd to drink with him; and in a little while, as though he had some definite purpose in mind, he became the center of attention.

Suddenly, he started talking to Antenor as if he knew him, referring in an exaggerated tone to the youth's physical prowess and his ability with a knife. No one seemed to know at first what he was driving at with his hyperbolical remarks until, with the deliberate intent of picking a quarrel, he spoke.

"I ask myself: Wouldn't this youngster's blood curdle if someone flashed a knife in his face?"

As though we were all possessed by that question, we turned as one to Antenor. He had lowered his head, pale as a ghost, seemingly very frightened.
"I, too, had faith in myself in my youth," continued the grey-whiskered stranger, "and even yet I have faith enough to believe I could put my mark on this boy anywhere I'd like."

Antenor raised his head, and still giving us the painful impression that he was afraid, he said, "Sir, I'm a peaceful fellow, and even though I practice with a knife for the sport of it, I don't go around looking for trouble, nor do I want anyone to trouble me."

"Listen to the kid," laughed the provocative stranger, turning to the crowd. "'He's as meek as a dove. I didn't intend to cripple him... just test our eyesight, that's all, and maybe draw a little blood. Or has his sight gone bad all of a sudden?"

"Mind if I say a word?" interrupted my godfather, suddenly.

"Go ahead," replied the stranger.

Don Segundo then turned to Antenor. "Look here, lad," he said as everyone, and I more than anyone else, looked upon him with astonishment. "Look boy, this gentleman for some time now has been inviting you as politely as he knows how, and you're missing a chance to have a little fun."

What was the quarrelsome old stranger going to answer to that? For a moment he was silent. Then, more solemn before a possible misunderstanding of his purpose, he let us suspect the seriousness of the matter.

"Showing off," he said, "is all right for the gamecock or for the fellow who cuts fancy capers when he knows he can do what he likes."

We knew that under the boisterous talk of this old gaucho there
was a deep resentment.

What would Antenor say?

With a start he straightened up his body and looked the stranger in the eye. It was then we knew one thing more—the young gaucho knew to what and to whom the stranger was referring.

"I was just a kid," he said, frowning, "and she was a bitch who gave any man the come-on. In our district we used to call her: the one you learn on."

The furious stranger, angered by this remark, lunged forward, but a couple of men close by checked him in time. Antenor, still very pale, perhaps now more from anger than fear, said, "There's more room outside." Then he turned and walked out.

We followed. Just outside the door the stranger removed his spurs and wrapped his poncho around his left arm as a shield. Then, with slow deliberate movements he drew his long pointed knife from its silver sheath. A smile caught at the corners of his mouth. Sure of himself, he spoke softly, as though he had suddenly forgotten his recent anger.

"Now you're going to see how a young novice gets his face marked up."

Out in the open yard Antenor waited with his back to a wheel of an old wagon. The stranger approached with the confidence of one toying with a child. He made a slap at the young gaucho with the fringes of his poncho, but the latter veered instantly, almost imperceptibly; and the poncho failed to touch him. The parry was perfect in precision; not one inch more nor less than was necessary. At that moment I believe
we were all thinking the same thing: Poor old fellow, his boasting was going to cost him a bitter price!

The stranger started to move in. Antenor, unswerving, with only an ordinary butcher knife against a long pointed dagger and no poncho to serve him as a shield, evaded each attack with slight movements of his lithe body. Suddenly, he made a leap with his armed hand thrust forward. His knife encountered flesh, and the stranger's face was slashed from ear to chin. Antenor, thinking that the dispute was ended, withdrew.

"Everybody keep aside," spoke the stranger defiantly. "One of us must die here."

Antenor didn't bother to take up again his position near the wagon, where he had, with mere manipulations of his wiry frame, evaded the threats of his opponent. Steady on his feet, he moved forward from where he was standing, determined to put a quick end to this fight that was forced upon him.

It didn't take him long. The two men met once, and we saw the stranger lifted into the air only to fall to the ground like a limp rag.

It was all over. We picked up the old gaucho and seated him on the ground with his back against the wall of the saloon. Blood was flowing impetuously from his breast. Crowded in a semi-circle around the wounded man, we watched with affliction the inevitable advance of death enter his body with every gasping breath, driving away life through the gaping wound in his chest. Then, for a moment the blood stopped flowing. The dying stranger, fully aware that his life was fast ebbing
away, spoke his last agonizing words.

"The police...will be looking for...him... You are... all witnesses...I... I started...it."

Antenor was already fleeing on his horse.

The stranger's body, drenched from the chest down in its own blood, began to stiffen. One of the onlookers disgustedly kept repeating to himself: "Hell! We praise ourselves for being Christians, while all we are is dogs—nothing but dogs!"

Another, calmer and more pensive, added: "It's pride that kills us, friend. When a man insults us, the best thing we could do would be to act like humans. But no, we've got our pride, and it makes us speak out louder and louder against insults. Then, one loud word leads to another, until, finally, the only recourse is the knife."

"Yes, sir. We're all like dogs, and yet we dare call ourselves Christians."

"I," spoke my godfather, "have had quite a few run-ins of this kind with men who were bad, or at least they thought they were bad, but I've never been marked by any of them. Neither did I ever find it necessary to kill. Just the same, the unfortunate lad is not to blame. The fight was a fair one; and if that dead gaucho had kept his word, it would have ended with the first cut.

"And over women," another was saying, "over a female that I knew... a bitch, like the kid said...and an old one, at that. But then, what can you expect? It's destiny, that's all, and that guy insisted on carrying his out."
To prove it the dead gaucho lay there with his eyes staring and his body freed from all earthly care. Somebody threw a blanket over him to keep off the flies.

After a long while, the police arrived with a doctor who, immediately, walked up to the body and lifted the blanket. After examining it, he said a few words I shall not soon forget.

"What a knife cut! When I was an intern, and not a weak one at that, I used to sweat half an hour to open a thorax like that."
THE TALE OF MISERY

"I'm going to tell you a story that you can pass on to a friend when he is down and out," my godfather said to me.

He began his tale:

Our Lord who, as the story goes, was the creator of all good, used to go from town to town throughout the Holy Land, teaching the gospel and healing with mere words. He took Saint Peter along as an assistant on these trips.

Well, on one of these trips, a shoe fell off the mule our Lord was riding, just as they were about to enter a town.

"Be on the watch for a blacksmith's shop," our Lord said to Saint Peter, as they rode into the town.

Saint Peter, who was gazing around attentively, finally saw an old house with a sign above the door that read: Blacksmith's Shop. He pointed it out to the Great Master, and they stopped in front of the yard.

"Hello there!" they shouted. An old man in rags appeared and beckoned them forward.

"Good afternoon!" spoke our Lord. "My mule lost a shoe. Could you hammer on another one?"

"Dismount and come in," answered the old man. "I'll see what I can do for you."

"What is your name?" our Lord asked the blacksmith after they had entered the shop.
"They call me Misery," replied the old man, and he began to look around the room for the shoe he would need to help the strangers. This servant of God searched with great patience in all his boxes, but he found nothing. He was just about ready to apologize to the two strangers when, turning over a pile of rubbish with his feet, his eyes fell on a ring of solid silver. Picking it up, he went over to the forge, hammered out a shoe, and put it on our Lord's mule.

"How much do we owe you, my good man," asked our Lord. Misery looked at Him from head to foot and replied, "As far as I can see, you men are just as poor as I am. What the devil am I going to charge you? Go in peace, for someday, perhaps, God will reward me for it."

"So be it," said our Lord, and bidding him goodbye, the strangers mounted on their mules and departed.

As they were traveling, Saint Peter said to Christ:

"Truthfully, Sir, we are ungrateful. That poor man shod the mule for us with a silver shoe. Poor as he is, he didn't charge a penny. And we leave without even doing him one favor for his kindness."

"You are right," answered our Lord. Let us return to his house to grant him three favors which he may decide for himself."

When Misery saw them return, he thought the shoe had come off. But our Lord told him why they had come, and the old man looked at him with a desire to laugh.

"Think carefully before you make your request," advised our Lord.

"Ask for Paradise," whispered Saint Peter to the old man,
standing behind him.

"Keep still, oldster," Misery answered in a low voice. Then to our Lord he said, "I wish that anyone who sits in my chair is unable to get up until I give him permission."

"Granted," said our Lord. "Now for the second favor. Think carefully, my good man."

"Ask for Paradise," Saint Peter whispered to him again.

"Be quiet, old man," Misery retorted in a low voice, afterwards to turn to our Lord and say:

"I wish that anyone who climbs my walnut trees is unable to come down until I say so."

"Granted," said our Lord. And now for the third and last favor.

Don't hurry."

"Ask for Paradise!" whispered Saint Peter with anxiety.

"Are you going to keep quiet, old man?" Misery came back at him angrily, again turning to our Lord to say:

"I wish that anyone who gets in my snuff box is unable to get out without my permission."

"Granted," said our Lord, and then he took his leave and departed.

As soon as Misery was left alone, he began to think it over; and, little by little, he became angry at himself for not having used his three requests to better advantage.

"I must be a fool," he shouted. "By gosh, if the devil showed up right now, I would give him my soul for twenty years of life and plenty of money."
At that moment a gentleman appeared at the door and said to the old man, "If you would like, Misery, I can draw up a contract, granting what you ask." And with that he pulled from his pocket a roll of paper covered with writing and numbers. Together they read the contract and, agreeing on the deal, they signed their names above a seal.

As soon as the Devil had gone and Misery was alone, he felt the golden-laden purse that the Devil had left him. He looked at his reflection in the duck pond and saw that he was young again. Then, he went down town to buy some clothes. Like a rich man, he got himself a room at the inn, and there he spent a very satisfying night.

My friend, you should have seen how this man changed his way of living! He rubbed shoulders with princes and governors, played the races, traveled over the world, and was on friendly terms with the daughters of kings and marquises. . . .

But well-spoken is the refrain that years spent in this fashion pass by quickly, for the last year was up and at an unexpected moment when Misery had returned to make light of his old house, a devil by the name of Lili appeared. He produced the contract and demanded that the agreement be carried out.

Misery, who was an honorable fellow, told Lili to wait for him while he went to wash and dress so that he might present himself in Hell as was fitting. And he did just that, thinking that at last his happiness had come to an end.

When he returned, he found Lili sitting in his chair waiting impatiently.
"Well, I'm ready," said the old man. "Shall we go?"

"How can we go," answered Lili, "when I'm stuck to this chair as if by a miracle!"

Misery remembered the wishes the man with the mule had granted him and he said, "Get up, then, if you are the devil!"

But the devil couldn't get up, and the sweat was pouring off him as he looked at Misery.

"Well, then," Misery said to him, "if you want to go, give me twenty years more to live and plenty of money."

The devil did what Misery asked, and the latter gave him permission to go.

Again the old man traveled about the world: he rubbed shoulders with princes, spent more money than anyone else, and was treated kindly by the daughters of kings and marquises.

But the years pass quickly for the man who enjoys himself, so that, when the twentieth year had passed, Misery kept his word and returned to his blacksmith's shop.

Meanwhile Lili had talked in Hell about the miracle of the chair.

"You must proceed with caution," Lucifer had said. "This old man is protected. This time two will go to carry out the terms of the contract."

That is why Misery, when he returned to the house, found two men awaiting him, and one of them was Lili.

"Come in and sit down," said the old man, "while I wash and dress so that I may enter Hell as is fitting."
"I'm not going to sit down," replied Lili.

"As you wish. You can go out to the patio and pick a few walnuts. No doubt, they will probably be the best you have ever tasted during your life as devils."

Lili wouldn't have anything to do with it, but when they were alone, his companion told him he was going to walk around under the walnut trees to see if he could find a nut that had fallen so he could taste it. He returned shortly, saying that he had found a few, and that after tasting them, no one could deny that they were the tastiest in the world.

Together they went into the patio and began to look for nuts, but found nothing.

Lili's devil friend said he was going to climb the tree, and the former warned him to be on his guard. But the glutton paid no attention and climbed the tree, where he started to eat voraciously, saying from time to time:

"How good they are! How good they are!"

"Throw me down a few," shouted Lili from below.

"Here comes one," said the devil from above.

"Throw me a few more," Lili shouted again, as soon as he ate the first.

"I'm too busy," answered the glutton. "If you want more, climb the tree."

Lili climbed the tree.

When Misery came out of the room and saw the two devils in the
walnut tree, he laughed uproariously.

"Here I am at your service," he shouted. "Let's go when you're ready."

"But we can't get down," answered the devils, who seemed to be stuck to the branches.

"Fine," said Misery. "Now let us sign another contract, giving me another twenty years to live and plenty of money."

The devils did as Misery asked and then he let them descend from the tree.

Again Misery traveled the world: he rubbed shoulders with princes and was treated kindly by the daughters of kings and marquises....

But when the twentieth year again arrived, Misery, as an honorable man who wished to pay his debt, remembered the blacksmith's shop in which he had suffered.

Meanwhile, the devils in Hell had related to Lucifer what had happened, and he said to them:

"Curses! Didn't I warn you to be careful? This time all of us are going. We'll see if he gets away from us."

And that's why Misery, on arriving at his house, saw many people. It made him think that maybe Hell itself had moved to his house, so he asked them:

"Do you want to talk to me?"

"Yes," spoke up one of the devils.

"I didn't sign a contract with you," answered Misery.

"But you're going to come with me," shouted the other, "because
I am the King of Hell."

"And who's to prove it to me?" asked Misery. "If you are who you say you are, you have the power to make all the devils enter your body and then turn yourself into an ant."

Lucifer, blind with fury, gave a shout; and in that very moment he changed into an ant with all the demons of Hell inside it.

Without delay, Misery seized the insect as it crawled over the stone floor. He put it in his snuff box and hastened to his blacksmith's shop. There he placed it on the anvil, and began to pound it with all his might with a hammer.

Every day he set the snuff box on the anvil and gave it a tremendous blow.

And so the years passed. No longer were there any quarrels in the village, nor lawsuits, nor accusations. Husbands didn't punish their wives, nor mothers their children. Uncles, aunts, and cousins understood each other perfectly. The ill became well, and the old never died.

But since there is no fate without misfortune, it came to pass that lawyers, attorneys, justices of the peace, doctors, and all who live by the misfortunes and vices of other people began to die from hunger. Deeply concerned over what was happening to them, they went one day to the Governor to ask for help. The Governor, who was also one of the victims, told them he was powerless to assist, but he gave them a little money, advising them that he wouldn't do it again because it wasn't the government's obligation to aid them.

A few months passed, and already many attorneys, judges, and
other persons had died when one of them, the most roguish, persuaded the others to go with him to seek aid again from the Governor. The attorney told the Governor that all those calamities happened because the blacksmith Misery had the devils of Hell locked in his snuff box.

The Governor immediately ordered that Misery be brought to him, and in the presence of all he said to the old man:

"You've made a fine mess of the world with your enchantment. From now on you are going to let things be as they used to, without taking it upon yourself to punish devils. Can't you see that, since the world is like it is, we can't get along without evil, and that the laws and diseases and all those who live by them—and there are many—require that devils travel over the earth? Go this moment and release the devils from your snuff box."

Misery, realizing that the Governor was right, confessed the truth, and then went home to carry out his order. Besides, he was now very old and bored with the world; leaving it didn't matter to him at all.

Before he freed the devils, he placed the snuff box on the anvil, as usual, and for the last time he struck it a tremendous blow with the hammer.

"If I let you go, are you going to stay around here?" he asked the devils.

"No, no," they shouted from within the box. "Free us and we swear to you never to return to your house again."

Then Misery opened the snuff box, telling them they could leave. The ant crawled out and changed again into the Wicked One. Instantly,
all the devils began to spring from the body of Lucifer, and away they went to Hell.

A few days later Misery died and presented himself at the gates of Heaven. When Saint Peter opened the gate, he recognized Misery, who was asking permission to enter.

"Hmmm!" said Saint Peter, "when I was at your blacksmith's shop with our Lord to grant you three favors, I told you to ask for Paradise, but you told me to keep quiet. Three times you were offered Heaven, and you refused to accept it. I can't let you enter now." And with that the gatekeeper closed the door.

Misery, thinking that one must choose the lesser of two evils, turned toward Purgatory to see how he would make out there. But they told him that only those destined for Heaven could enter in that place; and since he could never experience the glory of Heaven, they couldn't keep him there. He had to undergo eternal punishment in Hell.

So Misery went down to Hell and pounded on the door just like he pounded the snuff box on the anvil, making the devils cry out. How angry he was when the door opened and he came face to face with Lili himself!

"Curse my luck!" he shouted. "No matter where I go, I meet old acquaintances."

Lili, recalling the beatings, ran to tell Lucifer. The King of Hell, also remembering the rigors of the hammer, began to shout out orders to lock all doors tightly so that such a person could not enter.

And there Misery remained, unable to enter anywhere because they
didn't want him as a companion in Heaven, Purgatory, or Hell. They say it is for this reason Misery has been a part of this world since that time. Nor shall he ever leave it, for nowhere else will they permit his existence.
MARTINIANO LEGUIZAMÓN (1858-1935)

Martiniano Leguizamón, born in the province of Entre Ríos, has contributed probably more than any other gauchesque writer of his time toward keeping alive the gaucho theme in Argentine national literature. By profession he taught literature and history in Buenos Aires. He displayed a remarkable degree of versatility in all literary forms, writing for the drama (Calandria, 1898), the novel (Montarás, 1900), and the short story, of which he has composed a number of volumes. In addition, he has written various literary criticisms and historical treatises. He is chiefly remembered, however, for his short stories, which are detailed and highly artistic reflections of rural life and spirit.

In the following tale The Horse Tamer (El domador), translated from Keating and Flores, El gauchito y la pampa, Leguizamón skilfully relates a story within a story, both of which reverberate with gaucho spirit. The sensitive old gaucho in this tale remains true to his heritage when he repudiates the fellow who dares insist that foreign horsemen are anywhere near equal to the gaucho—the gaucho of old, that is.

The Bullet of Mercy (El tiro de gracia), which follows The Horse Tamer, reflects Leguizamón's artistry at its best. Written in an intellectual style and unsparing in realism, it serves as a vivid example of the aimless slaughter that took place during the turbulent years preceding national organization throughout much of Latin America and that still happens not too infrequently today in many countries of the
world. The touch here is universal. *El gaucho y la pampa* by Keating and Flores serves as the source for the present translation of this story.

That Leguísmón was well acquainted with the rural scene is attested to by his tale *The Stranger* (*El forastero*), also included in this collection. In it he describes in minute detail a contest of skill between a savage bull and a daring gaucho. When bad luck befalls the game horseman, a total stranger, who is in danger of being apprehended by the police for an "unfortunate killing", rescues him from the jaws of certain death without regard for his own personal safety. The law of the Pampa prevails: never to refuse aid to a fellow gaucho. The Spanish version of this selection can be found in L. A. Wilkins, *Antología de cuentos americanos*. 
THE HORSE TAMER

Suddenly, almost without a sign of twilight, the sun disappeared over the horizon. Throughout the pampa now covered by shadow and mystery, appeared the glow from the bonfires of distant ranches. From the corral the dismal bleatings of the imprisoned sheep filled the night air; and some horses, freshly unsaddled, stampeded in search of the herd.

Around the bon-fire at the ranch, while the water for the mate\(^1\) boiled over the hot coals, one could hear the laughter and the shouts of the ranch hands as they waited for the supper hour. The flames from the fire, rippling with the breeze, illuminated now and then the bearded, copper-colored faces that might easily have served as models for any of the vigorous figures in Velázquez' painting Los Herreritos.

"If the wind doesn't change, we'll have a long drought," spoke one of the men, looking with anxious eyes toward a sky that disclosed a few pale stars.

"It's a mighty steady north wind," remarked another. "Not a bird was singing this evening. The ducks are already beginning to look for new ponds. . . . Sure is one hell of a dry spell!"

A new character suddenly fell in with the group of ranch hands, and the comments on that prolonged drought stopped abruptly. He had returned from the city where he had helped drive a herd of cattle to the slaughter house.

\(^1\) Paraguayan tea.
"You must have a mouthful of news. Out with it, brother,"
exclaimed another, reaching for the **mate**.

The man who had just arrived sat down, and amidst laughter and
exclamations of surprise, he began to relate the gauchesque exploits of
some foreign horsemen from over yonder somewhere—Englishmen who had
come to try their best against the Spanish-Americans as lassoers and
horse tamers, even though they used the short lasso and had to wear
gloves to keep from skinning their hands.

The group became more and more animated as the narrator continued
telling of the abilities of those foreigners who knew how to rope a
young steer, giving the horse a free rein to take up the slack while
they dismounted, threw, and hog-tied the animal; or of the dark-skinned
fellow who straddled a bull just to make it bellow.

"And that's the novelty causing so much excitement among the towns-
people!" exclaimed the oldest man in the group with disdain, as he handed
the empty **mate** gourd to the cook for a refill, lighted his hand-rolled
cigarrette with a glowing coal, and then continued.

"You call that news? Why any old gaucho who could rustle a steer
all by himself and slit its throat just to get a choice piece of meat
could certainly do what those fellows did. Any old ranch hand could
rope a stubborn 'critter' around the neck or belly and drag it back to
the herd. As for riding herd on bulls, well, there were lots of gauchos
who used to ride them bare-back woman fashion."

The amused group laughed at the old man's emotional outburst.
The young messenger, however, still dared to insist upon telling the news.
"Look here, old man, those strangers with their big hats and their red Caribaldi shirts, once they mount it appears they're stuck to the saddle. They don't even use spurs. I saw them."

When outsiders come in and attempt to teach us how to perform brave deeds, the fact is there probably aren't any more horse tamers in our land, now that the gaucho is gone. But before, as the gaucho Martín Fierro sang:²

Ahi! In olden times . . . what a joy it was
To see a countryman ride herd!

These words were written by a poet who had searched the depths of the gaucho soul and who had found there the things which made up the gaucho's pride, things in which his kind excelled, but which had long been forgotten by the native sons who now bestowed praises upon those who came from the outside. The old man felt deep in his heart the wound opened by those praises for foreigners. Yet, he must have been exalted by old memories that flashed through his imagination, for he soon began to relate one of those straightforward stories told many times around the open campfire, stories filled with superstition, sprightly conversation, and local color.

It was the story of the horse tamer—a tradition of my native land—³ who would like to tell it with that supreme art in which the

² Here the author has taken the privilege to speak for himself without using one of the characters to serve as his mouthpiece. This type of construction is typical of Leguízamón.

³ Here again the author inserts a personal note, using the pronoun "my".
words seem to fall from the very lips of the guileless speakers and in which the description of the lively atmosphere has the force of natural color, with all its rustic and serene poetry.

The sky had clouded over; here and there a pale and distant star twinkled momentarily through the dark clouds and then vanished. The moon, still imprisoned in its double ring, declined to the west without casting over the dark plain more than a livid brilliance. The infinite, mysterious silence of the country night reigned supreme over the mate immensity.

Even the men around the campfire were silent as they waited for the old man to unfold his story, but he delayed in telling it. The taciturnity of the surroundings must have penetrated his soul with silence, for he was lost to a world of memories.

Finally he took heart, and raising his head, he began seriously to tell his story:

My father, who was a good rider and an honest man, used to relate that in his youth he had heard tell of a certain Abdón Mendieta who had never been thrown by a horse.

They used to turn over to him the wildest broncos, and in a little while he would return them, completely tamed as saddle horses.

He went over to Campos Floridos, an extensive ranch that belonged to Mateo García Lúfaga, the richest and most generous rancher known in the province of Entre Ríos at that time.

In one of his corrals he had a young colt that no Christian was able to ride. That 'critter' was a veritable hurricane when he snorted
and bucked to throw its rider!

Well, it happened that one day Don Mateo, who was somewhat of a practical joker, offered an ounce of gold to the man who could stay on that colt. Of course, everyone was excited by the shiny gold pieces the old man had taken from his pocket, and more than one rider undertook to win the prize. But none stayed in the saddle long before they were thrown brutally to the ground.

Abdón was among the group, and since many had spoken to the boss of his prowess as a horseman, Don Mateo at once spoke to him.

"Would you like to try your luck with that colt, son?"

"Yes, sir! Why not?" he said, as he adjusted his trousers snugly around his waist, loosened his spurs, and tied a bandanna around his head to hold fast his hair.

The already saddled colt, pretending to be a gentle animal, let Abdón approach it. The young rider took hold of one of its ears, put his foot in the stirrup, and lifted himself into the saddle. Then, holding fast to the reins, he threw back his shoulders and dug his spurs deeply into the colt's flanks.

The horse snorted wildly and immediately began to struggle—bucking, weaving, throwing its forefeet into the air, sunfishing, kicking, stiffening its body, leaping forward and backward, turning, twisting—, but the smiling Abdón, glued to the saddle, kept digging with his spurs, infuriating the colt even more by jerking the reins unmercifully.

Don Mateo laughed, and the spectators, refusing to admit that the horse was beaten, spoke out with envy: "He's going to make you eat dirt
A general outline of Tangle, followed as that strange tale.

The man answered in a whisper, after looking so long through the
Hilltop-Hilltop-Hilltop.

answered.

he was, and when they all crested him as the reached the central gate, he
saw a bearded engine appear on a light-colored horse. No one knew who
set a hand in front of horse in the very same wall, the reach behind suddenly
one bright morning a few years later, while they were again break-

"That is what everyone believed. Not should think they have believed
without a doubt Adron had been thrown against a tree and killed."

smattered up by the earth
produced no evidence. The octal with the young rider seemed to have been
rather, but failed to uncover even a treaty, days of nothing searching
that may have made the young riders search the Hilltop for the horse and

and so came the night.

Reach breeds who were unable to appeared for
and stood over the open country toward the distant Hilltop, pursued by the
suddenly the octal lay back the ears, let loose with a whine.

He appeared to be rooted to the earth's back
like a protruding but the young horse never set unmoved in the saddle
the wind octal, protruding with anger, continued to buck and throw

Right now, young fellow."
ended. I had listened to it very moved, and I felt rise in my mind the image of that horse tamer of the past, whose legendary prowess is already finding its way into the realm of our native folk-lore as a symbol of the courage and the skill of that admirable type now lost to us. 4

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4 Leguizamón again projects himself as author into the story.
THE BULLET OF MERCY

In one of the drawing rooms of the club, several persons were discussing the merits of the new book on national history that had recently appeared in print.

"A book to deceive fools," one of those present interrupted solemnly and dogmatically, reflecting an almost belligerent attitude.

"Oh, my good sir," observed another courteously, "so fixed a criterion places us again back in the very year 1840! ... And, precisely, it is the history of that unfortunate epoch with which the book deals, the epoch that was destined to suffer the greatest rectifications in order to strip it of its factional hue. It is these unbiased books, void of hate, oriented in a new light, that will, through their tedious investigations, clear up the truth. . . ."

The conversation was spirited, and the mention of the many brutal acts—those factional enemies knew no clemency—brought heated cries of justification for either the unitarians or the federalists, depending upon the political inclinations of those who cited them.

Comfortably seated in an over-stuffed chair near the stove, an old man, displaying a considerable degree of dignity, vigilantly followed the controversial issue. He smiled now and then to attenuate the radical exaggerations or the conventional lie which factional tradition by dint of constant repetition finally embodied in popular belief.

That venerable, highly cultured man descended from the best of Spanish American stock, and he possessed a prestige that springs from
tried and true valor. He had served both as witness and actor to some of the episodes that were being debated. His testimony acquired, then, insuperable authenticity. Someone asked him a question. Adapting his words to the strictest truth so that his story would result in a faithful likeness to the ambient of the past, he calmly related to us the following anecdote:

"Ah! Those were cruel times for the vanquished. But I can assure you that it was the same everywhere. . . . I, too, have been a barbarian in my day. Judge for yourselves, my friends," spoke the old man, as he added fuel with a trembling hand to the dying embers of the fire. And then, half closing his eyes, as if somewhere beyond in the darkness of painful memories the scene was being reproduced, he continued:

It all happened in the year 1812. I was serving under the command of Orbe ¹ who, as commander of the federalist army, marched from Tonelero to battle the troops of Rivera ² that had invaded Entre Ríos.

We soon reached the banks of the Arroyo Grande where the enemy was encamped. After we made contact, one of the bloodiest battles ever to be recorded in the annals of our civil wars ensued, considering the number of combatants, the quality of the troops, and the skill of the

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¹ Manuel Orbe. Famous Uruguayan general and statesman, second president of the Republic, who died in 1857.

² Fructuoso Rivera, (1790-1854). First president of the Republic of Uruguay. He fought Rosas and, conquered by Urquiza, fled to Brazil.
officers who led them. By nightfall the invading army had suffered complete defeat. The dead from both sides lay strewn by the hundreds over the blood-soaked battleground. Scores of prisoners, artillery, equipment, and even the embroidered jacket of Rivera had fallen into our hands. . . .

Many of the captured officers were Argentinians. Besides the crime of being enemies to the cause—according to the standards of that day—they were accused of serving the separatist ambitions of Rivera, whose aim was to disunite our territory by annexing to the Estado Oriental of Uruguay the provinces of Entre Ríos and Corrientes. For those prisoners there was no clemency; the penalty would be cruel and barbarous.

"Four shots each for the traitors!" was the direful sentence pronounced by the vanquisher upon learning the prisoners' names. The company I commanded was given the task of execution. Taking charge of those men, whose misfortune I could do nothing about, I attempted to proffer at least what consolation I could to make their last few hours easier.

Resigned to their fate, but nevertheless arrogant, some of them limited themselves to merely nodding their feeble appreciation.

One of them—the youngest of the group—whose vigorous manner I shall always remember—came forward, intimating that he wished to confide something in me. I had met him the night before during the savage battle. He was fighting courageously against a ring of lancers who were about ready to finish him. . . .and with only a sword to arm him and a tired
horse. It fell to my lot to save his life. . . .

"Captain," he said to me as soon as we were out of hearing distance of the guards, "you're a man with a heart. I know you'll do me a last favor. Only two people in this world will suffer by my death: my mother and an invalid sister. They own a small place down the creek not very far from here. The house is next to the road, so it won't be hard for you to reach them and give them my last regards. . . . and if you can, help them out in some way. I beg you do it. . . . I was their only bread and butter. . . ."

Then, unfastening his coat, he removed a medallion of the Virgin from around his neck, pressed it to his lips, and kissed it tenderly before he handed it to me. His voice, veiled with intense emotion, trembled with those last words. There was a sadness in them so manly, so heroically resigned, so contagious for all those who know suffering, that, feeling myself invaded by his misfortune, and without pausing over the consequences that might result, I placed my hand on his shoulder and said quickly:

"Men like you shouldn't have to die; your life isn't your own. At dawn when you are lined up for the execution, make sure you're the last one to be shot. My men will load with blank cartridges. When they fire, fall to the ground and make out you're dead; and after the troops have marched off, crawl to that small thicket over yonder. There you'll find a horse saddled and ready to go. Get on it and head toward the coast of Uruguay. It's just a short distance from here. The horse is a powerful one and a good swimmer. . . ."
Then, returning the medallion, I signaled him to mingle with his companions so he wouldn't arouse suspicion, and I went to give the necessary orders for the execution.

I cautioned a sergeant and four sharpshooters—in whom I had complete confidence—of what they were to do. After that I checked the guard. The soldiers, against their usual custom, sat around the camp fires saying nothing. It seemed as though the misfortune of those prisoners waiting to die had put a knot in everyone's throat, those men who only a short time ago were fighting under the shadow of our flag, spurring us on with the great voices of fearless men who are capable of hurling the proudest and most heroic soldier to his death....

The night silence was oppressive. A sensation of grief and infinite helplessness floated over the encampment, and to augment the sadness of the scene, the hoarse voices of the guards on watch broke out from time to time.

Unexpectedly the clamorous sound of a bugle cleaved the air from the direction of the cavalry divisions, followed by many others. Clear and sharp, like voices that answer from the shadows, they echoed, then faded in the distance. Afterwards came the roll of drums and the mingling of bugles and drums into a single harmony, into a warlike reveille pounding the ears of that silent army.

For a moment my eyes rested on the group of prisoners; their dispassionate gazes, in which there sparkled a savage pride, crossed mine. The young officer's gaze reflected greater anguish than those of his companions. I smiled to give him courage, but he moved his head
dejectedly, as though he felt his final hour had come. Was he possibly doubting my word? Or was it a sinister foreboding...?

But there was no longer any time to be lost. The pale glow of dawn announced the arrival of day and any delay could thwart the escape.

My company was formed and ready. At a signal four sharpshooters stepped forward with their rifles ready, and the first prisoner was placed with his back against the trunk of a tree. Four shots rang out, and the man collapsed in a heap, his chest riddled with holes. A dull crackling of flesh torn loose by murderous lead, a violent, agonizing sigh on the bloody grass, and another victim sacrificed to the fury of those times so painful to remember! Such was the scene that will never be eradicated from my memory!

Finally, the young officer came forward and placed himself against the tree. He opened his coat to expose his chest to the firing squad. His sombre, suffering eyes were fixed on mine, and he shook his head as if to say goodbyes.

I pointed my sabre toward the thicket so that he could see the horse I had ready for him; and then, in a voice half cut off by uncontrolable emotion, I gave the command to fire.

The discharge sounded weak and hollow, like the noise of skyrocket's. Intensely pale, the young officer stiffened and fell; but he was unhurt. A hot gun wadding fell on him and began to burn through his coat... .

I gave the order to march immediately, and, as I turned around, a sudden panic swept over me. Through the ash colored fog of the early
morning I spotted a horseman, rigid in a military dress coat with a high neck trimmed heavily in braid. A metallic glint, like that of a viper’s eye, shone in his eyes, and he wore a cold, impassive expression on his face. Halted a few paces away, he was witnessing the execution. Behind him his many aides stood motionlessly by, awaiting his orders.

That moment was one of supreme anguish, a moment I shall never forget as long as I live. I can still see the wry smile on that bloody executioner’s face, and I feel my flesh creep to remember the echo of those imperious lips that finally opened to tell me in a voice so strange and so glacial as to be almost mocking:

"Captain, that man doesn’t seem to be completely dead. Put him out of his misery with another bullet."

Trembling under the spell of that voice and that look, I approached the body of that hapless young man, who had tried in vain to mock death. Overawed, I placed the barrel of my pistol against his brow and painfully squeezed the trigger. . . .
THE STRANGER

Several riders halted their horses alongside the palisade. The man in front stood up in his stirrups and greeted: "Howdy, boss."

"Howdy. How'd things go?"

"Just fine. The cattle are all corralled. Them outlaw bulls fell in with 'em. There's a mottled one... wild and treacherous as a yarará viper... The critter turned on us, see, and gored one of the broncs."

"Throw a lasso on 'im."

"Come on, men," said the foreman, "I'm goin' to rope 'im and drag 'im out so hard his back'll crack on the ground."

And with his face lit up with that manly satisfaction that builds up in men's chests when they dally with danger, the rustic added:

"Say, boss, if I straddle that mottled critter backwards and ride 'im with my big spurs, what'll you give me?"

"I'll give you my colored silk handkerchief to wear at the dance tonight so you kin show it off."

"It's good as done!" he added walking toward the corral followed by the rope throwers.

A few moments later a riotous noise could be heard; then an excited voice that forewarned impending danger: "Look out fer the bull!"

The enraged animal, trampling the lasso, charged at the lassoer with its horns lowered, but the horseman, turning his mount, evaded the attack, and the animal fled by in the midst of jeers from the onlooking
Then with a sudden jerk the bull spun half way around in its tracks. It began pawing angrily at the ground, blowing hard into the trampled grass of the corral. Its tail lashed savagely at its mottled flanks and its blood-streaked eyes flamed with anger, while frothy saliva dripped from its quivering underlip.

The rider urged the animal on again by shaking the braid of the lasso with snake-like action before its eyes. The bull shook its head, feinted with its horns, and then attacked, snorting with rage, but the skillful rider turned his mount swiftly in a circle and the bull stabbed harmlessly at empty air.

The lasso tightened until it creaked like a taut cable; the caught beast stopped short, uttering loud bellows—humiliated, powerless, exhausted in that admirable struggle of skill and courage in which the horseman mocked its ferocity and brute force.

Suddenly the beast changed its tactics—it refused to move. The gauchó then slackened his lasso and began to approach the animal, presenting to it the rump of his horse.

With its body quivering, a ferocious look in its eyes, its bristly head erect, and its pointed horns threatening like the half moon of a gigantic lance, the beast, standing motionless, panted laboriously.

The laughter and the jeers died suddenly. The other riders had taken on an expression of intense anxiety.

Each backward step of the horse cut the distance between man and beast. With his head turned to the animal the rider kept a steady eye
on its movements, the reins firm in his left hand while his right hand rolled in the lasso—his spurs were poised ready to dig into the horse's flanks.

A slow anguishing moment passed by.

"Hey, hey, little bull!" spoke the rider in a calm voice that resounded strangely in that vast silence.

The stubborn beast did not stir.

Twitching with fear, its ears thrown back, and its body crouched, the gentle horse took another shaking step backward. Over the short distance that separated it from the bull the tightened rope remained very taut.

Again the voice sang out, "hey, bull, hey!" . . .

Finally the harassed beast crouched and lowered its head. Then it closed its flaming eyes and charged.

The rowels of the rider's spurs rang out as they dug deeply into the horse, forcing it to lunge to one side. In that same moment one of the bull's horns cleaved the horse's tail, carrying with it tufts of hair.

Once more the lasso tightened as it girded itself around the bull's horns with a violent jerk that emitted a small cloud of smoke. Suddenly, a sharp snap was heard, and the lasso, broken next to the ring, whistled through the air directly toward the horseman who, in vain, attempted to evade the lash by throwing himself over the horse's neck.

The liberated beast rushed at the staring lassoers who hurriedly
scattered from the onrush. Then it stopped, stretched its body, and
dug its hooves savagely into the ground, raising great clouds of dust,
while its tail lashed viciously at its sides. Its resounding bellows
shook the surrounding thickets.

The bull took a step forward, prepared to close in on its enemy
who, stunned by the blow from the rope, remained motionless, his face
intensely pale around the red furrows left by the rope.

Powerless to help, the rider's friends stood off to one side,
staring dazedly at the scene that confronted them.

With its hair standing on end, its muzzle drenched with thick
frothings, and its horns glistening white in the sun, the animal kept
advancing slowly, sniffing the ground before it, as though it enjoyed
itself in prolonging the terrible agony.

The distance was very short now; a step more and the bull would
be on top of the helpless rider.

... ...

At that moment another rider brandishing a whip surged from a
thicket in the woods. Uttering a yell of defiance to attract the infur-
iated bull's attention, he spurred his mount forward.

There followed an unbelievable episode of courageous action,
swift as the zigzag of a bolt of lightning, the kind upon which few
human eyes have come to bear.

Faced with that sense of supreme abnegation that drives a man to
chance his own life to save another's, a poor unknown gaucho, who arrived
by chance to the place where a defenseless man was about to die, rushed forward, scornful of danger, composed and proud, without a trace of fear in his heart.

Not one voice spoke; breathing stopped. All eyes were focused on that impressive spectacle. With its head high, its mane waving, and its eyes glowing with excitement, the horse, spurred on by that stranger, galloped at top speed. The rider, standing in his stirrups, cracked his whip as he shouted his echoing challenge:

"Hei, hei, hei!"

And before the crowd of astonished onlookers, the strange horse—man drove into the bull from the side as it was about to gore the injured rider.

There was a violent savage impact. A muffled moan rang out and the bull, the horse, and the stranger rolled in confusion amidst a cloud of dust. A yell of terror split the air, followed by another—the spectators were overcome with anxiety.

The stranger struggled to his feet flourishing a large knife, and throwing himself at the bull, he buried it to the hilt.

... ... ... ... ... ...

That evening, upon hearing the comments of his prowess around the foreplace at the ranch, the uneasy stranger excused himself:

"Come now, no use talkin' about it. All I did was give a hand to a man in a little trouble. . . ."

And when they extended him an invitation to the dance that was to
take place that night, he spoke with a sigh:

"...I'm in a little trouble myself... They're on my trail. Had some bad luck in a fight...a fair fight. I see, I killed my opponent. They didn't even give me time to bury 'im... and that means bad luck."

The boss fixed his gaze upon the stranger. The stranger's eyes glowed; he wasn't lying. Touched by this man's misfortune, the ranch owner spoke to him with the age-old gallantry of the gauches, without first finding out more about his life:

"My herd of sorrels is in the corral. Go on, pardner, and throw yer saddle on the one suits you best. All of 'em are in fine shape fer beatin' the law."

The stranger didn't wait to have the offer repeated. A short while later, as mysterious and taciturn as when he had arrived, his shadow disappeared into the darkness of the starless night.
JAVIER DE VIANA
JAVIER de VIANA, 1872-1926

Javier de Viana may be considered as belonging to either Uruguay or Argentina. He was born in Uruguay, where he grew up on his father's estancia, and later attended the University of Montevideo. After a number of unsuccessful years in politics, he moved to Argentina, in which country he spent the rest of his life concentrating on his literary efforts. Although he dealt briefly in the drama and wrote one novel (Gaucha), his primary interest lay in the short story, of which he composed a prolific quantity—some ten volumes. A few of them are: Campo (cuentos), 1896; Macachines (cuentos camperos), 1910, 1913; Yugos (cuentos), 1912; Abrojos (cuentos criollos), 1936.

The tales of Viana are highly artistic, original, and sincere interpretations of rural types and customs. They are extremely realistic, sometimes gruesome and even revolting to the reader unfamiliar with the author's work. In them local color is subordinate to a piercing psychology with which he treats his characters, usually half-degenerate types who have made a poor adjustment to a changing social pattern and who have, consequently, become improvident, irresponsible citizens.

The following short sketches by Viana—The Innocence of Candelario (La inocencia de Candelario), Niceto's escape (La salvación de Niceto), and Time Heals Everything (El tiempo borra)—depict the gaucho removed from his original environment. Time Heals Everything is a serious treatment of a gaucho who is thwarted in his attempt to become a respectable land owner and family man. The Innocence of Candelario, humorous, but diabolically so, portrays a simple gaucho sheep harder
who, after he kills a man, is still sincerely convinced of his own innocence. Along this same vein is Niceto's Escape, a brief scene in which an old fisherman tells one of his numerous yarns: Niceto, at odds with the police, succeeds in evading them, but subsequently meets a violent end. No matter. It is only important that the law, despised by all gauchos, fails to apprehend him. These stories are translated from the Spanish as they appear in Eoff and King, Spanish American Short Stories.
Not a cloud moved in the clear blue sky. Scattered over the grassy plain, great numbers of cattle grazed peacefully. It was neither hot nor cold; the air was still. There was only light and silence: an intense light and an infinite silence.

As Indalecio advanced at a trot over the crooked trail, he felt a great sadness in his soul, but it was a tranquil sadness. He experienced sensations of fear at the surprises that might await him at his journey's end and he felt a strong desire to turn back.

How dismal was his return! Fifteen years and two months of absence. In his mind he relived that gray afternoon, the argument with Benites over the horse race won unfairly, the struggle that ended in the death of his adversary, his subsequent detention by the police, the sad farewell to his plot of ground, to his stock, to his newly constructed house, to his young bride of only a year. . . . He was twenty-five then, and now he was returning as an old man, thwarted by fifteen years of prison life. He was returning. . . for what? Were his wife and son still alive? Would they remember him; and if they did, would they still love him? Could anything good await one who had escaped from the grave? Could he be certain that was his ranch? It didn't look familiar. Those white buildings to the left weren't there before. More and more depressed, Indalecio continued along the trail, impelled by some irresistible force.

Was this house in front of which he reigned his horse really his? For a moment he was skeptical. But it was his, in spite of the zinc roof that replaced the one of straw. It was his very own.
"Get down," shouted an elderly looking woman from the doorway of the kitchen, hesitating long enough to arrange her hair before she walked toward him, followed by half a dozen curious children.

"How are you?"

"Fine, thank you. Come inside."

She had not recognized him, but he thought he could see his beautiful young wife in that tired face and that gray hair that showed under her 'kerchief.

They entered the house, sat down, and then he spoke:

"Don't you know who I am?"

She stared at him without uttering a word. Then, suddenly turning ghostly pale, she exclaimed with fright:

"Indalecio!"

She began to cry, and the frightened children clung tightly to her skirts. After a little while, she calmed her tears enough to speak, thinking that she could justify herself:

"I was alone. I couldn't take care of things. Today they rustled a cow; tomorrow they butchered a sheep; later...five years passed like that. Everybody kept telling me you would never return, that you had been sentenced for life. Then...Manuel Silva asked me to marry him. I resisted a long time...but finally..."

The unhappy woman went on talking, talking, repeating herself, starting over, defending herself, defending her children. But Indalecio had stopped listening for some time now. Seated near the doorway, he saw stretched before him the extensive panorama of a vast grassy plain,
at whose boundary stood the western forests of Uruguay.

"Please understand," she continued, "if I had known you were
going to return..."

He interrupted her:

"Are they still fighting in the Banda Oriental?"\(^1\)

Very much astonished, she answered:

"Yes. The other day a group of soldiers passed by here, going
toward Lake Negra, and..."

"Well...goodbye," interrupted the gaacho again.

And without saying another word, he went to his horse, mounted,
and rode off at a trot in the direction of Uruguay.

She stood in the patio, looking aghast at him until he was lost
from sight. Then, sighing deeply with satisfaction, she made her way
into the kitchen where, just as she had left it, the grease sizzled
hotly in the frying pan.

\(^1\) Eastern Border (country) of Uruguay. The land east of the
Uruguay River and extending to the Atlantic is known as the Banda Oriental.
Rather killed the ranch gone, the life, and a youth boy one might witness

A mistake, sir Judge. A great mistake. I'll give that to

And they had their shot because of the being a satirist

Most certainly! I'll give you a satirist!

"In heaven, your Father" Judge. I swear by the memory of My Father, God rest the soul in heaven,

where murder half happened to betray I never wavered anywhere, sir

Occasion:

Candor, to rise from the chair and exacted a denial from the Judge.

Interpreted the Judge entirely.

"I demand that you confess how you murdered Baldemero Velezquez."

"Good one. Why I assume you strike when the played cards.

What become of? Sir Judge. I meant to say that he was a no

Speak with more respect.

Respect what?

"Severely.

"Khady, respect the dignity of the court," the Judge said to him

"... and Baldemero, speaking of horse, were more than a horse. I know you shouldn't speak badly of the dead, but the truth is the truth.

"That I never thieved Baldemero. I don't deny. Any deny for.

Fluently and without interruption, he answered the question:

of the one in ignorance and the certainty of being experienced.

be unmasked cattle, almost joyful. It's one who is sincerely concerned

ted into the presence of the Judge, Candor, to show interest to

THE INNOCENCE OF CANDARLO
they slept. . ."

"And he did it because of his being a saint?"

"No, sir judge! My father was a sleepwalker, you see, and that night he got up dreaming that a gang of bandits was attacking the house, and he rushed to the aid of the ranch owner and his wife."

"And he killed them!"

"By mistake, naturally, since he was walking in his sleep! Poor papa!"

"All right, all right! It is not a question of your father, since he already paid for his crime. This matter pertains to you. It has been proved that Baldomero Velázquez was killed by a shot in the shoulder while he strolled through the woods. . ."

"That's what they say. . .May God have pardoned him."

"And it has also been confirmed that you were near the scene of the crime armed with a loaded shotgun."

"That's right. I was hunting the caranchos that were causing heavy damage to my sheepfold."

"It was also proved that the shot that killed Baldomero was of the same gauge as yours."

"Well, sir judge, whether or not I hit the poor fellow while firing at the birds, I just don't know. But to hit him deliberately, by no means! A mistake. . ."

"And by mistake you gave him eleven slashes with a knife?"

1 Spanish-American birds of prey.
"That's slander!" exclaimed Candalario indignantly.

"Then who inflicted the knife slashes?"

"How do I know! ... Someone who. ..."

"It is useless to deny it. There is conclusive proof against you: your knife covered with blood and the bloodstains on your clothing. ..!

The accused could contain himself no longer, and with a violent expression of sincerity, he uttered:

"I swear, sir judge, the accusation of the knife slashes is an absolute falsehood! Some enemy is trying to slander me! ... The only thing I did was cut his throat!"

And he sat down again, very composed and serene, convinced of his innocence.
NICETO'S ESCAPE

Stretched out on the ground with his head resting against his hand, Don Liborio appeared to be asleep, his feet and legs bare and his shirt unbuttoned. A fishing line passed between his big toe and the adjacent one of his right foot, so that the tiniest nibble would attract immediate attention. His left hand loosely held another line that passed over his body and lay partly coiled in the grass on his left side.

Don Liborio showed all indications of being in a bad humor that afternoon. His bottle of gin was still uncorked; there was no fire lit to brew the habitual mate; and, rarest of all, the brown paper cigarette was missing from the lips of the old fisherman. Without doubt Don Liborio was ill.

Pedro Miguez, who had approached with the idea of spending a few pleasant moments listening to the endless tales of the old man, believed he had made a futile visit.

"Fishing, Don Liborio?" he asked sociably.

"No, I'm a feedin' the fish," quipped the fisherman, "why even the dorados¹ and the surubises¹ is on doctors' prescriptions."

"Look, one is biting now," indicated the young man enthusiastically.

"Biting! What kind a bit? you call that? A guyrumina ² or a sabalaje,² nothin' else! Serious fish, none. . . . There ain't nothin' . . . "

¹ South American fish; very desirable.

² Worthless fish.
left in this country 'ceptin' gurrumna and sabalaje!"

The old man almost shouted the last sentence. Then, touching
his stomach with the palm of his hand, he complained:
"I ain't felt good since yesterday. No doubt it's them ostrich
eggs I et."

"Did you eat many?"

"No, m'son, only about half a dozen."

"If you would like a drink of brandy," invited the youth, "I have
a bottle with me."

"Young feller, that'd sure hit the spot!"

Migues pulled out the flask, and Don Liborio took a drink. Then
another little one. The last was followed by a prolonged swallow.

"Ah, ah! How soothin'."

The old fisherman's features changed almost immediately. His
eyes took on again their habitual roguish but benevolent look. He stuck
a brown paper cigarette in his mouth, and his lips stretched widely into
a smile, as though electrified by the contact of the freshly rolled
cigarette.

Don Liborio delayed but little in recovering his garrulousness.
Without moving from his prone position, he lit the fire and began to
prepare the mate.

"A danged beastly afternoon," he said. "These afternoons is most
always a bad omen. T'was on a afternoon like this, last winter, when
the late Niceto saved himself."

"Niceto Benavides?"
"The very same feller."

"But didn't he die?"

"Why sure. Why'd you think I said the 'late' Niceto? Poor man. The police kept 'im on the run without allowin' 'im to rest even for a moment."

"For what reason?"

"Because Niceto had bad eyesight, that's why, and sometimes he misread the brand when he butchered a critter. Well, late last winter they cornered 'im, and he was forced to beat it for the lagoons of Mandisovi. The soldiers didn't dare follow, and Niceto, after makin' certain of that, begun to think that gettin' out of there wouldn't be so easy. . . . But, friend, when t'is God's will that a man save himself, there ain't no one kin change it."

Don Liborio hesitated long enough to take a sip of mate, drink a swallow of brandy, and puff deeply on his cigarette. Then he continued:

"No sir, friend, there ain't no one kin change it. . . . You see, the strong current of the stream broke a piece like a small island off the bank of the stream. And there was Niceto Benavides floatin' down the Uruguay River, leavin' them soldiers behind.

"He was a mighty happy feller floatin' down that river, and since t'was then already night and plenty dark, he laid down to sleep a wink. But, friend, when Niceto woke up the next mornin', his hair stood straight

---

3 A tributary of the Uruguay River in the province of Entre Ríos.
What about you that the three killed him? I'm not. I said he saved himself from the police, that's all.

How can you say then that he saved himself?

Sure I did. What about you?

But didn't you say that the three killed him?

himself.

there aren't no one kin' chance it. When I think of how he's saved

just as we dead. You see, Kinder, when a man is sentenced from above,

time. When we keep their teeter jumped on the poor fellow and in a

and he was waiting to fight, but the man that just didn't give in no

"Shame solider!

with him."

up on the head. You see, he found another passenger right alone.
ROBERTO J. PAYRO (1867-1929)

Novelist, dramatist, short story writer, and journalist, Roberto J. Payró is one of the most famous literary names in Argentina. He contributed greatly to the development of the teatro ríoplatense, writing dramas himself, eight of which have been published to date.

In addition to his own literary creations, he translated works of many 19th century French writers. Payró was deeply interested in rural life and customs of his country and in the transition of rural communities from comparative barbarism to civilization. His well received novel Pago chico (1908) is a study of the changing rural scene of his day.

The Devil in Pago Chico (El diablo en pago chico), translated here from Jones and Hansen, Hispanoamericanos, is an animated cuadro (sketch)—a minutely detailed painting—of a prairie fire on the Pampa, showing also something of the superstitious nature of the plains people. In this realistic masterpiece of short fiction Payró has clearly demonstrated his genius with the pen.
THE DEVIL IN PAGO CHICO

Viacaba, that good old rustic, well-known as a hard-working countryman, at that time had his dwelling some leagues from Pago Chico. It stood above the backwater of a small stream which reflected the ravine, steep and bare of vegetation, and the sheep corral; and which ran almost at right angles back to its old bed, flowing leisurely, shallow, and turbid, emptying itself finally into the Rio Chico which in reality never became a river except in times of flood. Viacaba had lived there many years with his wife Panchita, his two sons Pancho and Joaquín, already grown, his daughter Isabel—a very ugly but intelligent brunette—and a couple of peons, Serapio and Matilde who, aided by the old man and his two sons, were more than enough for the usual chores of that little ranch.

These chores were far from exhausting, even though Viacaba owned a good number of cows and mares, and enough sheep for his own use only since he was not overly fond of that type of animal.

The heat was oppressive that afternoon. The sky was almost white, and absolutely cloudless. Everywhere crickets chirped incessantly, and the air hummed with monotonous overtones of whirring insects, coming from no fixed direction.

It is not strange then, that, weary from the morning's work and overcome by the oppressively sultry weather, everyone slept—the men under the low-hanging eaves that faced east, free of the sun, and the women inside the house, where the shade offered a momentary coolness.
morning

very afternoon, and that he planned to take the stage the following day.

The proprietor explained that he had urgent business in town that

"good afternoon, madam. Come in and get down. Get you.

and petit and grand, anticipated by the voices, were filling about

of course, have been over here in the shade.

same

"It is a friendly ad for water" I say. "Here's the home.

"The treater shared behind the hedge, who went ahead to import whisky.

Lamentably to read the least of the clouds of fumes that had settled upon it.

horse, sleek from dust and sweat, valuable the head, careful, and tall

horseman. The others, looking toward the gate, got a glimpse of a grey

and with now, Bennett, stepping out to inspect the unoccupied

name filled him like a part of the showmen on a cart, got up testily,

prettily, in an enormous, homely dress, from a carriage whose rearview

started them out of their stable.

had not the gadabout of a horse and the curious bending of the doer

over their dark shkins. Prostrated, they would have gone on steading

and large drops of sweat broke out from their pores, to run in trickles

to weapon and lose weight. The steading men breathed with difficulty

drought was already so pronounced and menace the animals were beginning

The air was still. It was almost entirely at this hour and the

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He was a tall, thin young man, ruddy of face, with a sharp glint in his eyes; his forehead was narrow and his nose long, like the beak of a bird of prey; and his exaggerated politeness failed to erase the unfriendly impression that he had produced from the first moment upon those simple and coarse men.

He drank the freshly drawn water with a true thirst, and, thoroughly enjoying the shade, he remained seated on the bench under the eaves. When Isabel, followed by her mother, appeared with the bitter mate she had brewed in the kitchen, he got up with great ceremony, bowing and murmuring compliments to the amiable "señoguita" and respectable "señora."

The visit lasted over an hour. Matilde, meanwhile, watered the pony and tightened its cinch, as if to do so might hasten the stranger's departure.

While he started a black cigarette with makings Viacaba politely offered, the Frenchman spoke of the drought and the sad condition of the crops. He had traveled a good distance, and all the country he had traversed presented the same aspect of desolation: water holes parched and hard as rock, streams so low that almost all of them could be crossed with one jump...

"We're lucky it hasn't hit us so hard here yet," exclaimed Viacaba with a certain satisfaction.

But he raised his head suddenly, alarmed, when the stranger said that in many places he had seen great whirlwinds pick up enormous clouds of dust from the barren ground.
"The dust storms!" he murmured in a frightened voice. "Then they've already begun!"

And he became profoundly thoughtful, recalling that terrible calamity, not suffered for many years, but which at one time had passed through there sowing devastation, leaving the immense pampa completely depopulated of animals and seemingly dead and buried under an ashen cloak of dust. . . .

With the sun already low in the sky, the Frenchman departed, gesturing his intense gratitude. Viacaba accompanied him as far as the gate, while the rest of the household watched side by side from under the eaves.

A moment later Isabel, returning with the endless bitter mate, expressed the thought common to all their minds:

"I don't like that man even a little bit!"

"Nothing good can come from his visit," muttered Matilde, preparing to saddle up.

"He seems half... a fool," joked Pancho, the most tolerant, after Viacaba.

And though they sat for a long while in silence, that visit must have continued to worry them, because Serapio did not say to whom he was referring when he remarked:

"There he goes, through the meadow."

Indeed, a shape, now scarcely visible, of a man on a horse moved rapidly in the distance. It crossed a high grass-land that extended far in the direction of Pago Chico.
"A fool, you said," objected Joaquin, still thinking over Pancho's words. "Well, to me, what he seems to be is a bird of ill omen, with that beak of a plucked owl. ... Let's hope he hasn't put a curse on us."

"Forget the omens, Joaquin!" exclaimed Viacaba. "Those gringos always manage to have such faces... deformities. But what of it? Do they have to be witches on account of it?"

Viacaba was superstitious too, but age and experience thinned out somewhat his belief in witchcraft.

The peons, followed by Joaquin, went out to the fields to the west, where the main part of the ranch lay. Beyond the creek to the east there were only a few mares and a small herd of stallions.

At dusk, when they returned for dinner, the sky in the west was an immense purple cloak reflected to the east in a thin transparent veil. And in front of this veil an erect column of dust-like vapor rose from the grass land, whirling about itself.

"Didn't I say so? The dust storms are beginning already," shouted Viacaba, walking to the kitchen with the others.

It was not, indeed, the cloud of dust that a whirling current lifts from the dry countryside and twists in the air, to toss it afterward from side to side in a whimsical dance and then let it drop suddenly in space, where it vanishes like a fantastic nightmare. No. The column was fixed at one point, rising and spreading out in the calm sky.

The sun had just set, and gentle breezes, messengers of peace, began to hover about, growing and multiplying by the moment, announcing the newborn night.
It was dark now. Nevertheless, the column could still be seen above the grass land, vaguely luminous, like the column that guided the Children of Israel in the desert.

Meanwhile the Viacaba family ate in the kitchen around the fire, now more animated and talkative, for the gentle breeze, though blowing warm still, aroused them from their lethargy as it gathered strength and settled along a more determined course.

The conversation, interrupted now and then, still focused persistently on the Frenchman's visit, the event of the day. And no one spoke one friendly word for him.

"That evil face can go straight to the devil! I've never seen an uglier beast!" insisted Joaquín. "And how he stared, with those colorless eyes, and in spite of all his 'voulez-vous?... He looked to me like...""

"Like the Devil himself, no?" interrupted Matilde, the Chilean.

Like a reverberating echo to these words, the anguished voice of Panchita, who had just gone to the well for fresh water, rang out in the patio in a cry of alarm and terror:

"Fire!... Fire!... Fire in the high grass!...

"Didn't I say so!" moaned Joaquín, rushing outside with the others.

The menacing pillar, now rising rapidly, swelled and illuminated itself with spasmodic flashes, taking on the aspect of a giant trunk, small, round, and white at the crest. Then, as the wind blew stronger, it suddenly disappeared; immediately, in the growing darkness, a line of fire, alive with sparks and tiny dancing flames that mirrored themselves
resplendently in the falling mist, appeared from the position of the
column's base. It seemed as though the giant tree had collapsed, flar-
ing from end to end. At once the red, flashing line along the ground
grew in the east, consuming space as if the horizon were its goal.
From the house luminous reflections could be seen wandering over the
grass land, contrasted against the black night and in harmony with the
purple line of the fire. In the sky a crimson blotch seemed to mark
the course of disaster.

On a small hill overlooking the fields, Panchita and Isabel
solemnly watched the terrifying spectacle. The men, after saddling
hurriedly, furiously galloped their horses toward the grass land, only
guessing at the most visible point of danger, so confused and shaken
they could not think clearly. . . .

The wind raised clouds of smoke and hot beds of sparks; it tangled
smoke around the nearby thickets, illuminated by the fire, and scattered
sparks like a bouquet or tied them into gleaming sheaths of golden grain;
then it let them die or fall over the fields in a thin, devastating
shower. . . . Hot gusts as if from an oven reached the women, carrying
with them the acrid smell of scorched hay, a product of the dense masses
of smoke that rolled over the ground.

Slowly at a distance, but rapidly in reality, the line of fire
spread. It seemed to form an arc whose center was the small hill on
which the buildings stood, and deliberately it came nearer, as if it
were tightening by brilliant military tactics the siege it had suddenly
laid around it. Between the house and the fire the plain shone brightly,
and enormous shadows moved about and wavered upon it; the rounded ones of clumps of hay and the long ones of the horsemen who raced around the blaze.

A drumlike beat of alarm suddenly broke the silence of the night, making the earth tremble; it was the herds fleeing to the west, hammering the dry, resounding ground with their hoofs. A shapeless shadow passed, enveloped in clouds of dust, casting reflections of haunches and waving manes to the wind. . . . And the furious drumming faded and died in the night. . . .

"The horses!" Isabel cried in anguish, shaken an instant from her lethargy.

"Virgen Santa! Who knows if we'll ever see them again!" lamented the mother.

And in the meantime off in the distance more sounds, muffled, confused, and indecipherable, filled the pampa, reaching the women on the wings of the wind laden with ashes and smoldering sparks. . . .

Viacabe, his sons, and the peons had galloped off to the fire, thinking they could suffocate it. But when they got within a quarter of a mile, agony gripped their hearts: the dry grazing land blazed as far as the eye could see. Puffs of air, hot as the inferno itself, blew at them; and when, with flashing eyes, they looked one upon the other, they saw bleak, sweaty faces, black with grimy soot. The horses, with ears laid back almost horizontally in line with the fire, snorted in terror, refusing to move ahead.

Less than a quarter mile away, smoke and flying sparks enveloped
the men, and they seemed to advance amidst clouds and constellations
of shooting stars. The acrid smoke blinded them, and the fiery gusts,
singeing hair and beard, forced them to turn their heads . . . . Burning
chaff hovered over them an instant, and then, seised by the wind,
continued its flight to scatter disaster by leaps and bounds. . . .
The men could scarcely be heard above the roar of the crackling grass,
and only by shouting loudly could they communicate.

". . . Back-fire!" Viacaba was heard to yell as he leaped from
his horse. His first words had been lost in the deafening noise.

Behind the veil of flames that the conflagration cast before their
eyes, the night took on an unusual blackness. The dark moonless sky
seemed to descend lower and lower, blacker and blacker, until it fringed
the fire itself. Red star-like sparks that died out one after the other
broke up the line between fire and sky, leaving that part of the great
expanse momentarily dark and empty. The horizon had neared to within
a few steps of them, and they felt as though they stood at the edge of
a measureless abyss. . . . The glare itself seemed to be driven ahead
by the raging wind that blew from that fiery cavern. . . .

At the voice of Viacaba, they all dismounted. A signal drew them
together, and they heard this cry:

"Not here! It would be worse! At the edge of the tall grass! . . . ."

They retraced their steps a stretch, clutching the bridles of the
terrified mounts to keep them from turning their heads toward the blaze.
Fighting to break loose, the sweaty animals snorted and trembled, while
the skin quivered along their flanks like water rippled by the breeze . . .
And thus, wrapped in crimson light, men and animals approached the edge of the tall grass, where the shorter grass, also tinder dry, began. Serapio hobbled the horses and tied them to a clump a safe distance away, then joined the others.

Viacaba and Pancho rapidly set fire to the shorter grass, in a strip a little over a yard wide, following a line more or less parallel to the fire. Behind them, Joaquin and Matilde let the grass burn down, then beat it out with brooms of greener grass, until they too blazed, or with saddle blankets, bone dry, because there was no water near. Serapio did the same...

They sweated profusely; their faces, flushed under a black, sooty mask, became swollen and lost their features. Their eyes flashed like hot coals, and around them, on their cheeks and forehead, a dark liquid formed in strands...

A useless sacrifice! From the beginning the fire mocked the empty trench they had placed as obstacle before it: it laughed at them in complicity with the wind, whose wings carried its impetuous messengers over and beyond the suffering men.

Viacaba raised his head and with a crazed, unbelieving look in his eyes screeched:

"Serapio! Matilde! The house! The house!"

Realizing finally the magnitude of the disaster, they abandoned the unimportant back-fire and raced frantically toward their horses.

But the horses weren't there. They had succeeded in uprooting the grass clumps, and with frenzied leaps, stumbling madly, blindly,
impeded by the hobbles, they fled in panic toward the west, toward salvation and life.

... The women, paralyzed from fright, stood where they were, their eyes fixed on the fire that kept coming, coming faster and harder, not only toward the buildings, but also toward the right, toward the left, to the north and the south, cutting them off from the world on one side, then another, surrounding them with a blazing uncrossable arc.

Beyond, to the right, where the Southern Cross sparkled, the grass served as a flying bridge to the devastating invasion. In an instant the entire stream was aflame. And from the grass on the near bank, the wind picked up sparks, dropping them at the women's feet. ... Some reached the house itself, dying as they fell on the thatch of the roof, too weak to set it off, ... in their supreme anguish, they failed to see the new danger. And sparks and burning chaff continued their flight, thicker by the minute ...

"Mama! Mama! ..."

The heart-rending cry of Isabel announced the crowning of the catastrophe: the central thatch, emitting billowy smoke, blazed a yard wide.

"Water! Water!" screamed the mother, torn from her stupor.

Both ran to the horse trough near the well; one filled a bucket, the other a jar; they raced to the fire; their strength was not enough to fling the water that far. ... 

"You bring the water!" stammered the mother.

And as best she could, making use of a bench, bruising her hands
and knees, trammelled by her garments, she climbed to the roof screaming desperately, as if someone could hear her in that desolation:


Bathed in sweat, Isabel kept bringing her jars and buckets of water on the run. Feverish, and in a daze, Panchita threw herself face down on the roof, held out her trembling hands, and pulled up the water automatically, dashing it on the spreading blaze. . . . And while they persevered in this sluggish, hopeless task, the wind continued to pierce the house with its flaming arrows. . . . A moment later the roof flared at many points. . . .

"Get down, mama! You'll be burned alive! . . ."

The miserable woman finally got down. Like a gay bonfire, the house blazed on all sides, lighting up the patio to the gate and the corral, where the sheep milled in panic, climbing over each other as they tried to break through the strong fence. . . . And that sinister, formidable blaze totally erased the other, now far off on the horizon. . . .

The men saw that torch from a distance, and filled with despair, they rushed back, one after the other.

There was nothing they could do. . . . They scarcely managed to rescue a few objects from the blistering oven, and even then at a great risk. . . . The ridge poles caved in with a crash, the eaves vanished, and only the blackened walls remained standing in that glaring inferno. . . . Seated on the ground, overwhelmed by helplessness and despair, they expressed now and then their agony with pathetic, heart-rending sobs. And the visit of that stranger again came alive in their minds,
diabolical and terrifying.

"Ah, the gringo, the gringo! . . ."

"He alone brought us this calamity! . . ."

"He threw a curse on us. . . ."

"No doubt about it, he flipped his cigarette butt into the dry grass, the wretch! . . ."

"No, boss! He was the Devil. . . . Just as sure as this is the sign of the Cross! . . ."

And their childish superstition became proven fact to them when, the next morning in Pago Chico, where they went to seek refuge for their poverty, they were told that no Frenchman had come there. Spreading from mouth to mouth, the event became an historical legend, even though the commissary found out and made it known that a man answering the description of the Frenchman had been in the nearby village of Sauce that afternoon, and early the next morning had taken the stagecoach to Azul.

. . .

Dawn stretched pale and sad over the plain. Men and women, drawn closer by the tragedy, formed a silent, motionless group. What yesterday had been comfort and abundance, today was misery. . . .

The pampa, with the first translucent light of day, revealed a carpet of funeral black, stretching to the horizon in every direction; and the wind, still strong, raised great clouds of black soot and showered it generously on that small unseeing group. . . .
JUSTO P. SAENZ (hijo)
JUSTO P. SÁENZ (hijo), 1892–

Justo P. Saénz, although he does not consider himself to be a professional writer, has gained considerable popularity in the field of the gaucho short story. He was born in Buenos Aires of Spanish parents. Very fond of the out-of-doors from early youth, he spent much of his time searching out the secrets of country life. The gaucho became his special interest, and during the better part of ten years, he lived among the plainsmen on a primitive estancia in Entre Ríos, the last of the Argentine provinces to succumb to modern civilization. There he studied and observed the gaucho first-hand, accumulating information that served as the basis for his literary efforts. In addition to his short stories, which fill three volumes, he has published an authoritative work on the equestrian skills of the gaucho, Equitación gaucho en la Pampa y Mesopotamia (1942).

The following story by Saénz, A Gaucho, which is translated from the Spanish version in Roff and King, Spanish American Short Stories, is a fine example of his deep penetration of the gaucho soul and of his ability to paint vividly and accurately the rural scene. In it he depicts a gaucho of the old school who, upon discovering sudden wealth, is tempted to forsake his traditions for a new pattern of life in which he envisages himself as a sedentary property owner. His temptation is short-lived, however, for he soon loses his wealth. Once again he is a poor gaucho, but an extremely happy one, because he comes to realize that to his kind happiness is not measured in terms of material riches.
A GAUCHO

Land... wild desert land. Monstrous plain, seemingly without end, covered with tall grass... An autumn morning, crisp and bright.

Stretched out on the ground near the open camp fire, Demetrio Gavilán leisurely smokes a cigarette. His two horses, close by, are all ears, listening to the going and the coming of the dogs as they investigate the surroundings.

"What tough luck a man has these days," thinks Gavilán aloud, as all men do when they are alone. "First, the requisition of animals by the military, leaving me almost without horses. Next, the fall in prices of ostrich feathers and hides, making them worthless. For the tiger I caught a few days ago... three measly dollars. That's all I got. Yes, sir, three measly dollars! Heaven help us! Luckily, I don't have a family. Just the same, there's nothing like the life of a boleador.¹ A vagabond? No, no, I'm not a vagabond, as they called me in town the other day. I'm a gaucho... a gaucho!... a free man!... I ask nothing of anyone, nor do I cause any man harm... With my dogs and my horses... My horses! What the devil can a poor fellow do with only two horses? How can I enter the boleada don Zoilo Roldán invited me to?² The last time I saw him he mentioned there was some good

¹ boleador, one who uses the boleadoras (short ropes with weights attached to the ends, used in hunting and catching animals). See footnote 18 for a more detailed explanation.

² boleada, hunt engaged in by boleadores.
hunting across from Vallemancos: Deer and ostriches? My friend, there are more than you can imagine!

The man gets to his feet and approaches his horses. He is a small man, with a deeply tanned face that almost disappears behind a beard that is heavy and coarse. He wears iron rings in his ears, and instead of a hat, a faded bandanna covers his head.

He has been traveling for some time now, mounted on his horse. The relief horse follows closely by, and the dogs run helter-skelter about the open plain without encountering a thing.

Suddenly, the man's face expresses alarm. With little effort he stands up on his horse's back and scans the infinite circle of the horizon. Over yonder in the sky, he makes out several vultures flying in low circles. He spurs his mount toward them at full gallop. Some moments later he discovers a dark form in the tall grass; and as he looks at it, he discerns the body of an Indian. Apparently, the unfortunate creature has been dead for some days. While he gazes upon the corpse, the gaucho reconstructs with the sureness that springs from experience what had taken place. Finally, he mutters philosophically, "When things are destined to happen . . ."

Gavilán has bent over to remove the beautiful bandanna from the head of the corpse. As he unties it, three small packages roll to his feet. Intrigued, he picks them up and examines them. What is contained in those three packages that make the gaucho's hand tremble so?
Money. Much money in bills from the Province of Buenos Aires Bank. With great effort at rudimentary arithmetic, Gavilán counts the money. Paper bills of a hundred . . . of two hundred . . . of five hundred . . . forty thousand dollars, more or less! Is it possible? How can the sudden turn of fortune that has placed him in possession of that vast sum be explained?

"The deuce! When things are destined to happen . . ." He doesn't finish his comment. With one leap he is on his horse again, and calling to his dogs, he gallops away.

"Now that I have so much money," he reflects, "I can buy many of the things I need. First, horses . . . many horses . . . Yes, sir, that's what I'll do. Then, clothes . . . Aha! A fine hat from Guayaquil and a good poncho. I can even own land if I want to. And cows . . . Yes, sir, that's it. But, is there enough money for all this? And why not, my friend? Didn't I count it? Why, maybe even enough for a female companion . . ."

. . . . . . . . . . .

A hunting camp. Horsehide tents. Bon-fires here and there. Horses . . . many horses, and dogs everywhere. Over the horizon in the west a few stars are visible; night invades the isolated plain.

In the light of an oil lamp hung in front of one of the tents, a few gauchos are playing at cards, a game called monte, and Taboada is the banker.

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3 monte, a card game similar to blackjack.
Taboada! Well-known in the casinos, the country stores, and the tents throughout the frontier. A type with some of the qualities of a gentleman and much of a bandit, a sportsman at times, always a businessman. Gambling is his passion and duplicity his characteristic.

Demetrio Gavilán resolves to spend the night at the camp, and he is one of the first to take part in the gambling. He desires to amuse himself, to converse, to drink; he wants to do a lot of things to compensate for the long months of living alone, and to . . . why not say it? . . . to forget he is rich and carries with him forty thousand dollars. . . forget because he is no longer the same person. He is unable to determine exactly what it is he feels, but it is something that has never happened to him before. Something like a growing uneasiness; something that has made him deplore the moment in which he had found the money; and something which to him, a man who has always spent his life alone, prompts him now to go in search of his kind of society.

Who can understand what is coming over him? He has always possessed the desire for money, and now he has it . . . but . . . what is he going to do with it? The things he had already decided upon? Stay put in one piece of ground like any foreigner? That's a good one! Not for him, no sir! He, Demetrio Gavilán, living on his very own land? That's a laugh, my friend! He is a gaucho . . . a gaucho . . . a free man! Why, all he needs is a horse to mount and a piece of earth on which to rest his bones at night.

Obeying a strange impulse, he pulls a roll of bills from his pocket and places it on a card. An exclamation of surprise from the
gauchos, and others approach to see what it is all about.

"The king of spades, gentlemen!" exclaims Taboada triumphantly.

Demetrio Cavilán has just lost his first five hundred dollars.

Excitement . . . Murmurs . . . The gambling becomes animated now, and rapid. Cavilán loads the cards with money and loses; he always loses—so much that, after six hours of gambling, half of his capital is in the hands of his adversary. Interrogating eyes rest on Cavilán, who smiles mysteriously, while he counts, bill by bill, his remaining twenty thousand dollars. It is a solemn moment.

"There's twenty thousand in the bank, gentlemen." Taboada has spoken with his usual calm.

The words of Cavilán ring out like pistol shots:

"I'll bet the works on the ace!"

"It's a bet! I'll draw for the jack!"

The spectators fidget nervously, wiping the heavy perspiration from their faces. Taboada begins to deal.

"The . . . ja . . . ck," he shouts in triumph.

Demetrio Cavilán has lost his last cent.

 Suppressing a yawn, he gets up and goes in search of his horses. He feels light, extremely light, as though he were relieved of a heavy burden; and to the lively cadence of his march, his iron spurs seem to sing a hymn to liberty.

"When things are destined to happen . . . My luck just didn't last . . . but, after all, who knows if it isn't for the best? . . . Me buy land? What a laugh, my friend!"
On the hard ground Demetrio Gavilán has fallen asleep with the tranquility of a child. His dogs mount guard, and the mysterious voice of the desert lulls the slumber of its native son.
A. BOOKS


B. DICTIONARIES


C. PERIODICALS


D. MANUSCRIPTS
