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**“They Look Like
They’re Trying to Pull Up Nails with Their Heels”:
Ricardo Güiraldes’s Response to Cultural Appropriation
in *Don Segundo Sombra***

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Abstract: Cultural appropriation has often been linked to American treatment of indigenous cultures. In *Playing Indian*, for example, Philip J. Deloria investigates how images of Indianness, however inauthentic, stereotypical, or completely ethnocentric, work to help white Americans come to terms with their history of conquest and possession. While the term cultural appropriation has been linked to the conflict between dominant and indigenous cultures as Deloria suggests, it is used far less frequently with respect to American and Latin American cultural identities. Yet, the preponderance of movies and literary works in which Americans follow the same rubric—use Latin American culture to define American cultural identity—evoke the same sense of loss on the part of Latin Americans, in this case, Argentines. For over a century, for example, the gaucho has been examined, evaluated, and reevaluated by Argentines within gauchesque literature to make sense of modernization, notions of civilization versus barbarism, and what creates *argentinidad*, or what it means to be Argentine. Ricardo Güiraldes sought to respond to the cultural appropriation and misrepresentation of the gaucho, specifically that gaucho culture could be taken up by anyone and used for any purpose, no matter how benign; and that gauchos were a part of the past, eschewing modernization in forms such as industrial ranching and technology when, in fact, they embraced it. In *Don Segundo Sombra*, Güiraldes addresses these issues. Rather than permit cultural appropriation and ethnocentrism to remain unremarked upon, Güiraldes demonstrates that gaucho culture has remarkable qualities that cannot be imitated by novices, both foreign and native. He then examines gaucho culture, particularly the link between frontier life and economic displacement, in order to champion the gaucho and *argentinidad* as the models for Argentines to follow.

Keywords: Ricardo Güiraldes, *Don Segundo Sombra*, gaucho, *argentinidad*, cultural appropriation

I

When thinking about the Argentine gaucho, a nomadic cow herder from the pampas region of the country, a particular idea about his identity emerges: that he is interchangeable with the American cowboy or the Mexican vaquero. In fact, many American films like Douglas Fairbanks’s *The Gaucho* (1927), *The Gay Gaucho* (1933), and Gene Autry’s *Gaucho Serenade* (1940) do just that—confuse gauchos with vaqueros or even cowboys. In American literature, the tendency is not to exchange the figure, but rather, juxtapose the superiority of cowboy culture over gaucho culture.

Either way, defining the Argentine gaucho as something he is not in order to define or explore a culture outside of the figure is a form of cultural appropriation, in the case of Fairbank’s and Autry’s movies, or both cultural ethnocentrism and appropriation in literary works like Frederick Faust’s *The Gentle Gunman*. In *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law*, Susan Scafidi defines cultural appropriation as:

the taking [of] intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission. This can include unauthorized use of another culture's dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc. It's most likely to be harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive, e.g. (9).

Cultural appropriation has often been linked to American treatment of indigenous cultures. In *Playing Indian*, for example, Philip J. Deloria investigates how images of Indianness, however inauthentic, stereotypical, or completely ethnocentric, work to help white Americans come to terms with their history of conquest and possession. In addition to this, in *Indians in Unexpected Places*, Deloria draws attention to the unidimensional portrayals of Native Americans in the modern era when, in fact, Natives were equally as engaged with exploring and finding themselves in a modern world (6).

While the term cultural appropriation has been linked to the conflict between dominant and indigenous cultures as Deloria suggests, it is used far less frequently with respect to foreign and Latin American cultural identities. Yet, the preponderance of movies and literary works in which non-natives like Americans follow the same rubric—use Latin American culture to define American cultural identity—evoke the same sense of loss on the part of Latin Americans, in this case, Argentines. For over a century, for example, the gaucho has been examined, evaluated, and reevaluated by Argentines within gauchesque literature to make sense of modernization, notions of civilization versus barbarism, and what creates *argentinidad*, or what it means to be Argentine. While nineteenth-century gauchesque literature portrayed the gaucho negatively, thus forcing him into a life of crime and outlawry in famous works like José Hernández's *Martín Fierro* and Rafael Obligado's *Santos Vega*, by the turn of the twentieth century, Argentine authors turned to the gaucho as a means of defining *argentinidad* in Leopoldo Lugones's *La Guerra gaucha* and Ricardo Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra*. For these authors as well as some filmmakers like Eduardo Martínez de la Pera in *La Nobleza gaucha*, the gaucho was uniquely Argentine and, as a result, could not be interchanged with Mexican *vaquerismo* or American cowboy culture. Certain works within the Argentine gauchesque, like Ricardo Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra* as a consequence, can function as a contestatory space against foreign colonialism and cultural appropriation.

Ricardo Güiraldes sought to respond to the cultural appropriation and misrepresentation of the gaucho, specifically that gaucho culture could be taken up by anyone and used for any purpose, no matter how benign; and that gauchos were a part of the past, eschewing modernization in forms such as industrial ranching and technology when, in fact, they embraced it. In *Don Segundo Sombra*, Güiraldes addresses these issues, thus making his novel a contestatory space against foreign colonialism and cultural appropriation. Rather than permit cultural appropriation and ethnocentrism to remain unremarked upon, Güiraldes demonstrates that gaucho culture has remarkable qualities that cannot be imitated by novices, both foreign and native. He then examines gaucho culture, particularly the link between frontier life

and economic displacement, in order to champion the gaucho and *argentinidad* as the models for Argentines to follow. In addition to this, he reshapes gauchesque literature by creating a setting that is a modern one, full of foreign investors, industrialized ranching, and natives that become complicit in their own subordination. In the midst of all of this is Don Segundo and his apprentice, Fabio Cáceres who try to hold onto gaucho culture despite the negative forces around them. For Don Segundo and Cáceres, gaucho culture represents what it means to be Argentine, one of the primary reasons why imitation of the gaucho proves meaningless. Imitations merely define the culture appropriating them, rather than the originating culture. By reading *Don Segundo Sombra* as a contestatory work in relation to cultural appropriation, ethnocentrism, and economic displacement, it becomes apparent how damaging these notions of cultural inferiority and appropriation can be, most obviously for the cultures that get rewritten in favor of untruthful narratives.

II

Güiraldes's tale of modernized gauchos was produced in the 1920s. Before World War I, Argentines imitated an American approach to the social changes of immigration and urbanization as they incorporated American pseudo-scientific theories regarding race and class into law. But the outbreak of war exacerbated economic problems that had remained latent for decades. Despite Argentina's successful beef business in the 1890s, the nation could not retain control over its resources during the first few decades of the new century. Contrary to its vision of itself, "viewed in the long term, the Argentine economy was closer to the rest of a more volatile and impoverished Latin America than it was to that of the wealthy United States" (Rodríguez 252). By 1909, as David M.K. Sheinin records, many American meatpacking companies like Swift and Company had bought out several Argentine packing plants, thus curtailing Argentine control over their one consistent export. This led Argentine authorities to exclaim that "trouble comes from the United States" (76). While Argentine politicians had encouraged U.S. investment in the completion of the railroads in Argentina in the nineteenth century, by the 1920s, many Argentines worried about American economic control. This concern originated with Argentina's economic collapse at the onset of World War I. At first, Argentine president Hipólito Yrigoyen's (1916-1922) decision to remain neutral during the war did not affect U.S.-Argentine relations because Yrigoyen supported continued trade with the U.S. But trade did not occur equally between the two countries, and Argentina remained painfully dependent on the northern nation (76).

As the war progressed, Americans' vested interest in Argentina's social problems changed their views on Yrigoyen's neutrality. At first, Americans looked askance at the growing German population in Argentina, mostly landowners in Buenos Aires, along with German firms in Comodoro Rivadavia that traded in hides and wool. It saw this German presence as an indicator of Argentine pro-German sentiment. In this context, however, U.S. anti-German sentiment was rooted as much in Germany's capacity to imperil U.S. trade in Argentina as it was in the war. Once Americans recognized that Germany was powerless to alter the mechanisms of established trade, anti-Bolshevism replaced U.S. anti-German sentiment (49).

As a result, Americans took an active role in interpreting and controlling Argentina's social ills. Latin Americanist Robert J. Alexander explains that Argentine worker unrest became perceived as communist activity because immigrants formed the bulk of the urban working-class, and immigrants from Italy, Spain, and Central Europe at times brought radical ideas with them (147). Worker unrest had long been a problem in Argentina, not because of adherence to leftist politics, but born of rights abuses in factories and other industrial settings. Marginalized as anarchists in the 1910s, labor organizations in the 1920s became known as communist. Labor unrest increased after World War I because of unprecedented levels of unemployment and inflation, which impacted Argentina's working class to the greatest degree (Deutsch 37). In *Las Derechas*, historian Sandra McGee Deutsch explains that during the war years, salaries dropped 38 percent, while the cost of living rose 71 percent (80). As labor unrest increased in Argentine cities, Sheinin notes, Americans criticized Yrigoyen's "ambivalence toward labor activism during the war" (51). But Yrigoyen's attitude was not ambivalent. As Deutsch argues, he was called the "dictator of the masses" by the Liga Patriótica Argentina (LPA) and other rightist factions because he routinely employed a humanitarian perspective with the working class and he regulated both work hours and the distribution of pay in national currency (Deutsch 153). Because Yrigoyen seemed to favor workers' rights, Americans worried about the safety of their goods, particularly if cargo would be unloaded and distributed upon arrival (Sheinin 52). The result was the U.S. State Department's reliance on the LPA, an anti-labor organization comprised of police, military, and bourgeoisie, which violently suppressed labor unrest by adopting, as Sheinin puts it, the "fascist postures of Primo de Rivera and Mussolini" (52). Americans tended to support the LPA's unconstitutional tactics, rather than Yrigoyen's relaxed attitude towards labor unrest. In turn, the LPA made efforts to create political ties with similar groups in the U.S (Deutsch 166). Overall, however, the LPA encouraged what Deutsch calls "nationalistic solutions" to foreign exploitation (Deutsch 101).

It was in this context of economic and political instability that Argentine writers like Ricardo Güiraldes reevaluated Argentine society, especially in the treatment of industrialized ranching on the frontier. Güiraldes refused to present the gaucho as an extinct figure displaced because of the effects of modernization. In *Vida y obra de Ricardo Güiraldes*, author José R. Villar argues that Güiraldes believed "to evolve does not mean to disappear" (97). Instead, Güiraldes modernized the gaucho as a symbol of *argentinidad* and the foreigner as an insatiable materialist. As Villar points out, Güiraldes's gauchos, like Don Segundo, find foreign culture slowly encroaching upon their space and dislodging their traditional way of life (149). As a result, modernization had to be addressed, particularly as it influenced new agricultural methods, such as breeding and fattening techniques, which, as Charles Bergquist suggests, altered land use and the labor systems of the pampas as they increased the rate of production (93). Alterations like this had not lived up to the grand expectations of nineteenth-century thinkers like Domingo Sarmiento, who saw this as the ticket to Argentine power. This caused intellectuals like Güiraldes to reevaluate Argentina's role in the world market; indeed, in *Don Segundo Sombra*, Güiraldes presents Argentine dependency on foreign capital and ideas as one cause for its failure.

In particular, Güiraldes explored the connection between U.S. economic expansion and long-standing beliefs regarding class and race. As a member of a wealthy landowning family in Buenos Aires, Güiraldes was aware of beliefs about others deemed unfit to participate in the modern nation. Güiraldes's family also owned a ranch, La Porteña in San Antonio de Areco, which likely meant he recognized the importance of autonomy and the pitfalls of blindly following American models. In this, Güiraldes would not have been alone. As Deutsch points out, Manuel Carlés, a member of the LPA, drew a connection between foreign investment and the leftist threat associated with immigrant worker unrest, which threatened Argentine autonomy (49). In its efforts to modernize its economy and become a world power, Argentina had adopted American approaches to bolstering trade. By the 1920s, however, many Argentines recognized that the nation did not control the modernized system it attempted to create. Instead, American companies dominated Argentine economics, particularly in the steel and agricultural industries. As a result, Argentina remained economically dependent on the U.S. Furthermore, by imitating an American economic system, more powerful Argentines had lost their culture, thus becoming, according to Justin Piquemal Azemarou's "muñecas" ("dolls") controlled by foreign powers (79).

Güiraldes's corrective to a weakened Argentina was a return to a version of *argentinidad* that was seemingly absent in 1920s culture. While Güiraldes allegedly deplored racism in all of its forms, he resented foreign ranchers' obsession with money, as well as foreign businesses that proliferated throughout cities like Buenos Aires. Although his wife insisted in an interview, "Ricardo was never against anyone as long as they similarly despised pride," and "Ricardo treated [foreigners] in general with sympathy," his depictions of foreign capitalists—whom he must have seen as prideful—are largely unsympathetic (Azemarou 117). Güiraldes blamed upper-class foreigners as well as the Argentines who imitated them for Argentina's national problems. By returning to *argentinidad*, which for Güiraldes included hard work, loyalty, manliness, and individualism, Argentines could control their own destiny. He found these traits best represented by the figure of the gaucho.

III

In *Don Segundo Sombra*, Güiraldes describes a young gaucho who travels from ranch to ranch, looking for work, adventure, and his own identity. He repeatedly juxtaposes the noble qualities of two cow herders, Fabio Cáceres and Don Segundo Sombra, against the greedy materialism of foreigners searching for financial gain on the Argentine frontier. In the 1920s, Argentine ranch land was frequently bought and sold by both Argentine and foreign buyers. Furthermore, according to Bergquist, foreign workers outnumbered natives two to one during this period (89). Yet, these statistics are seemingly absent from Güiraldes's narrative. Rather, foreign investors proliferate the landscape of *Don Segundo Sombra*, demonstrating the effects of economic dependence. For Güiraldes, a foreign presence always hailed to an Argentine loss, starting with economics and eventually ending with culture. Instead of a basis for shared values, the gaucho became a symbol of resistance to first, foreign investment and then, cultural appropriation.

Don Segundo Sombra begins with the perspective of fourteen-year-old cowhand Fabio Cáceres. Unlike many gauchesque texts, which were largely written in third-person, this novel's first-person narration is a way to signal that Cáceres's quests throughout the novel are part of a search for his identity. Güiraldes's manipulation of the gauchesque was so novel that critics like Javier Lasarte Valcerel have considered him to be an avant-garde writer who incorporates traditional literary structures only to disrupt them (52). For several decades, gauchesque writers made these subtle alterations to the genre (Garganigo 198). Although Güiraldes uses a first-person narrator, it does not mean that his novel is merely an individual's story. Rather, the deployment of the figure of the gaucho in and of itself is an exploration of "identificación cultural," rather than an individual experience (Alcalá 80). In addition to this change, Güiraldes based the titular gaucho in his novel, Don Segundo, on a historical figure, Segundo Ramírez, who Güiraldes met on his family's ranch. Villar insists that he used encounters with living people as his inspiration instead of inventing his characters out of the "cloth of the imagination" (96). Other critics, however, like David Sisto, have argued that Güiraldes was inspired by fictional sources (75). Either way, *Don Segundo Sombra* departs from earlier gauchesque novels as it blends history and fiction. For this reason, G.H. Weiss argues that the novel represents "the entire process of historical change [in Argentina] even though it speaks but of the present moment" (150).

Güiraldes begins his novel with a romanticized version of both the frontier and gaucho culture which is embraced by Cáceres. According to Robert DiAntonio, Güiraldes envisioned the pampas as a "place of refuge" and raises the boy-man-wilderness relationship to a mythical level (140). In this transition, Güiraldes transforms boy to man. Regardless of era, Latin American literature has been dominated by the theme of the search (Eyraguirre 130). Güiraldes accomplishes this by dividing the novel into three parts: "departure, quest, and return" (Weiss 355). Cáceres's main goal throughout the narrative is to find himself and a sense of cultural belonging in a world that has become increasingly convoluted. In contrast to the suffocating religious atmosphere of his aunts' home where he grows up, Cáceres finds his sense of purpose through his manly adventures as a cattle herder.

In contrast to Hollywood films and literary works that champion American cultural superiority when juxtaposing the cowboy against the gaucho, Güiraldes reverses this trope by blaming Argentine rootlessness on foreign investment that displaces Argentines. For Güiraldes, foreign investors prioritize money over cultural identity like the gaucho's *argentinidad*. Although G.H. Weiss suggests that Güiraldes's text demonstrates a longing for universal brotherhood as his characters search for the similarities among people (353), Güiraldes accomplishes quite the opposite when he pits gaucho nobility against the barbarity of foreign control in Argentina. Because the frontier has already been corrupted by the extension of foreign capital to its major ways of life, Güiraldes begins with the consequences of this: many Argentines, such as Cáceres's aunts, have lost their Argentine roots. As a young boy, when Cáceres is taken away from his mother and placed with his aunts, Asunción and Mercedes, he finds that in contrast to the warmth he experienced from his mother his aunts verbally abuse him, considering themselves to be superior as pious church-goers. They refer to Cáceres as "dirty, lazy," and "good-for-nothing" because the narrator attempts to

embrace Argentine culture, instead of foreign models (Güiraldes 6). Cáceres states that, "I went to school for three years. I don't know why I was given my freedom. One day my aunts simply claimed that it wasn't worth the trouble to continue my education, and they began to send me on a thousand errands that kept me on the streets almost all day" (6). Uninterested in reciting the rosary, the narrator is unable to conform to his aunts' version of society. Without the ability to be guided by his caregivers, Cáceres cannot find himself or financially survive. Even young boys like Cáceres suffer when Argentines like his aunts reject their own cultural origins.

Foreigners and their investments are only one source of contention for Güiraldes. Güiraldes also critiques everyday Argentines who disparage their culture; the church becomes a symbol of this disparagement in figures beyond Cáceres's aunts. Before a cockfight, for example, Don Segundo and Cáceres enjoy lunch at a restaurant in Navarro. Because it is Sunday, the townspeople are dressed in their finest clothing, which causes them to look down on the humble dress of the *gauchos*. Cáceres notes that these church-going Argentines "glanced at us out of the corner of their eyes, observing, though pretending not to, the rough, unpolished presence of my padrino [Don Segundo]" (85). But even more than religion, Cáceres's comment critiques Argentine class pretensions tied to assimilation to foreign norms. Even the waiter approaches them, full of judgment: "the waiter greeted us with a sly smile we didn't understand. Perhaps it seemed to him an excessive extravagance, this business of two cowhands having lunch in the 'Fonda del Polo'" (85). After two days spent herding cattle, Don Segundo and Cáceres attempt to experience Navarro's culture, yet they find themselves entirely alienated from their own country in a town where Argentines privilege foreign materialism. Through his depiction of the *gauchos*' reception at a fine-dining restaurant, Güiraldes demonstrates that Argentina's loss of its natural resources via foreign investment in industrial ranching, for example, creates an even deeper, more significant loss: that of culture. As a result, Güiraldes associates the upper class with cultural emptiness. Despite the *gauchos*' humble dress, they behave civilly, and indeed nobly, in opposition to the pretentious townspeople who, it is implied, should return to Argentine cultural origins.

Güiraldes counters foreign cultural superiority when he describes the negative effects of foreign influence on Cáceres's aunts and the people of Navarro. While these minor characters view Argentine heritage through a foreign lens—barbaric and unformed—Güiraldes's protagonists reverse this presumption by categorizing foreign influence as empty and uncivilized. In the scene at the restaurant, for example, Cáceres observes the following:

In the center of the room, three locals were talking in harsh, loud voices, calling attention to their peasant or shopkeeper faces. Near the door an Irish couple were wielding knives and forks as if they were pencils; the woman had freckles all over her hands and face, like a tero egg. The man was looking around with fish eyes and his face was full of bursting veins like the bell of a freshly skinned lamb. (86)

The *gauchos* recognize the foreigners' uncouth behavior as an outgrowth of their materialistic gluttony. In making a connection between behavior and capitalism,

Güiraldes presents a reason for cultural abandonment. While foreign investment on the frontier promises economic boons, it only does so for foreigners. Yet captivated by the illusion that they too may gain wealth, Argentines have relinquished both their resources and their culture. As observers, the gauchos describe the effects of foreign investment in Argentina, and they are presented in opposition to it. In *Don Segundo Sombra*, Güiraldes describes the Argentine and the foreign as utterly divided.

In order to rectify the divide between foreigners and gauchos and show what is at stake for Argentina as a nation, Güiraldes presents additional examples of immigrants using the Argentine frontier for financial gain with little regard for culture and tradition. As Azemarou points out, Güiraldes believed that the immigrant “considers the native as simple and only useful for economically improving the life of the immigrant” (109). As a result, Güiraldes uses example after example of negative foreign influence in *Don Segundo Sombra*. Cáceres, for example, notes that: “behind us sat a rosy-cheeked young man with the eyelids and runny tear ducts of a tired old horse. Judging from his clothes and the way he acted, he must have been the representative of some grain company.... At the same table, a man was having a conversation about the price of hogs, and the grain dealer was offering his opinion with thick German r’s” (Güiraldes 86). The men who own the companies are foreigners, while the men who work for them are Argentines. Their conversations about business demonstrate Argentine loss of economic resources. The native Argentine workers are described as “tired” with “runny tear ducts,” thus suggesting the hardships they face and the limited financial rewards garnered for their services. Gauchos are completely absent from the conversations that Cáceres overhears. They pass entirely unnoticed by foreigners because international investors are solely interested in the frontier’s financial possibilities, rather than alleged symbols of its past.

Güiraldes’s novel sheds light on both the process and the implications of first, resource control, then the inevitable rejection of culture. In one scene, for example, Güiraldes provides an explanation for why Argentines reject their culture. At an auction attended by Cáceres and Don Segundo, the auctioneer connects financial gain to the nation’s future in an effort to appeal to both foreign capitalists and the Argentines who mimic them: “the auctioneer made a speech full of words like ‘national cattle trade,’ ‘magnificent future,’ ‘grand transactions,’... and he opened the sale with an ‘exceptional lot’” (95). Because the audience consists largely of foreign ranchers, the auctioneer’s rhetoric suggests that Argentina’s “magnificent future” will be experienced largely by them, rather than by Argentines: “all around the cart, on foot or mounted, were Englishmen from the packinghouses, clean-shaven, ruddy, and plump as well-fed friars” (95). Cáceres, however, observes that the Argentines at the auction greedily covet what had been left behind by foreign business owners: “the local butchers were there, too, on the lookout for a bargain, looking like boys who might try to steal off with the entrails” (95). Convinced that they can be a part of the “magnificent future” detailed by the auctioneer, the Argentines settle for the leftovers of foreign capitalists. Cáceres recognizes their disenfranchisement, and Güiraldes uses the auction house scene to contextualize why Argentines have become complicit in their economic and later, cultural disintegration.

After establishing the economic displacement caused by foreign investment on the frontier, Güiraldes turns to direct examples of foreigners “playing gaucho,” or

explicit examples of cultural appropriation. Güiraldes describes the Italians as ridiculous simpletons to illustrate that culture cannot be solely understood by changing one's clothing or learning new dances; its cultural history and meaning must be understood as well. At the same time, foreign misunderstanding and degradation of Argentine culture exacerbates its decline. Five years after the auction, for example, Cáceres attends a country dance, characterized by gaucho songs, competition for attractive women, and dancing. The richness of this Argentine cultural milieu is undermined, however, at the chapter's end when two Italian immigrants attempt to imitate gaucho dances. Observing them, Cáceres says to his friend Pedro, "sonovabitch if those aren't phony gauchos, they look like they're trying to pull up nails with their heels!" (73). In contrast to Cáceres's engagement with it, the Italians approach Argentine culture, represented by the gaucho, only superficially. Cáceres suggests that the gaucho cannot be imitated by others, and that, by extension, Argentina should cast off its foreign dependency and embrace a new nationalism. In each example of gaucho interactions with foreigners, Güiraldes changes the nationality of non-natives in order to demonstrate that immigrants in Argentina share the same types of motivation: economics at the expense of culture.

After providing examples of the negative effects of resource control and cultural appropriation, Güiraldes turns his focus to Cáceres's identity formation. By doing so, Güiraldes privileges the symbol of *argentinidad*, Cáceres's growth from boy to gaucho, thus removing any foreign influences that intrude upon his life. When he is barred from a sense of belonging in his own home, for example, Cáceres descends upon the gauchos' meeting place, the *pulperías* (country stores):

And, sitting in the bigwigs' hotel, I gave myself the luxury of ordering a bottle on my own so I could treat everyone. Then I told them something I'd recently learned, perhaps about Melo's sorrel, or the fight between the half-breed Burgos and Sinforiano Herrera, or the shamelessness of the immigrant Culasso who'd sold his twelve-year-old daughter for twenty pesos to old man Salomovich, the owner of the local brothel. (8)

The *pulpería* is a site for gaucho oral storytelling, and this tradition is made even more distinctively Argentine when it is used to critique non-Argentines, such as Culasso, as heartless materialists who sell members of their own families for profit. A story like this one serves as a lesson in culture for Cáceres, who wants to be a gaucho—in order to do so, he must reject the depravity associated with foreign cultures and capitalism.

In order to truly understand gaucho culture, Cáceres must quit "playing gaucho" like the Italians at the dance, and immerse himself in gaucho life and work. In this, Don Segundo becomes his entry point. After he meets Don Segundo, they begin working for an English rancher. This seems to give Cáceres the means to inculcate himself into the gaucho role, but he eventually realizes how much power the English rancher holds over him. Don Segundo, Güiraldes's stable representative of *argentinidad*, gives Cáceres the following advice: "when I was your age, I did what I wanted without asking anyone's permission" (31). Following this, Cáceres narrates: "taught my lesson, I went off by myself, trying to resolve the tension that was growing from my longing to get away and my fear of disappointment" (31). The tension that

the narrator feels is between his effort to remove himself from his aunts, with their dependence on foreign religious and class pretensions, and his fear of doing so. Cáceres learns that without autonomy from foreign influence, however, he has merely replaced his aunts' authority with the English rancher's validation. His path forward is via Don Segundo, who offers him a model of *argentinidad*. As a result of Don Segundo's tutelage, critic Jorge Aquilar Mora calls him a "padre simbólico," or a symbolic father, to both Cáceres and the reader (229). Don Segundo is in Juan Pablo Spicer's words, "un hombre experimentado en la vida," or a man experienced in gaucho life, and he can help shape Cáceres's cultural identity through his instruction (367). The lessons learned as a gaucho, about honor and autonomy, lead to the development of traits lauded in Argentine national character (Weiss 354). By listening to Don Segundo's advice, Cáceres turns toward *argentinidad* and away from foreign influence. As "master of the frontier" the gaucho character claims his rightful place in Argentina and rejects foreign influence (Taylor 233).

Güiraldes's use of gaucho oral storytelling further emphasizes his novel's embrace of *argentinidad*. Towards the end of the text, for example, Don Segundo tells an allegorical story. The main character, an old man named Misery, provides a silver shoe for Jesus's horse. Jesus starts to leave with his companion Saint Peter, but then he reconsiders, thinking that they owe Misery for his efforts, especially given the old man's poverty. They return in order to give Misery three wishes. Saint Peter instructs Misery to "ask for paradise," but Misery ignores him. At first, the fulfillment of Misery's wishes renders him a trickster figure that distracts Lucifer from creating evil in the world. Eventually, however, instead of enjoying this placid state of affairs, the town's elites find the lack of vice unacceptable: "it ended up that lawyers, prosecutors, justices of the peace, quacks and other doctors, all those in authority who live off the misfortune and vices of the people, began to waste away from hunger and were dying" (Güiraldes 162). Don Segundo's tale about Misery helps Cáceres find his way in a convoluted world and thus begin to form his individual character. Although Don Segundo's tale directly criticizes members of the upper classes who exploit others for personal gain, at the same time, *Don Segundo Sombra* overall speaks to everyday citizens (Eyzaguirre 131). By doing so, Güiraldes emphasizes that true *argentinidad* comes from a community's experience that is oftentimes marginalized by cultural and capitalist exploitation.

Although literary scholar Theodore Murguía states that Güiraldes's representation of the pampas is one of the past (88), the focus on the effects of cultural exploitation and capitalism on the frontier suggest otherwise. At first, industrialized ranching changed the way gauchos performed their jobs. In an effort to increase production rates to garner the most profit, gauchos who performed industrialized ranching work faced increased risks. In the novel, Cáceres observes "we hired ourselves out as hands for a herd of six hundred steers that a rancher was sending to the stockyards. According to experts, we had about twelve days on the trail ahead of us, assuming good weather and a healthy herd" (Güiraldes 181). In contrast to traditional work, when gauchos had months to transport herds, Cáceres's employer demands that he speed up transportation. Despite the changes imposed by industrialized ranching, however, Cáceres and his crew easily adapt and survive by relying on the skills

cultivated by frontier life: “we had ahead of us the assurance of a peaceful night, and that made us happy again and full of jokes” (181). Weiss observes “the man of the Pampa must not give up his vigorous way of life, for it is in this life, not in commercial activity (for which Güiraldes expresses contempt on more than one occasion), that the health of the individual and of the nation lies” (152). Although Cáceres must face conditions wrought by modern capitalism in his work, his *argentinidad* is never compromised because he relies on it to survive an industrialized frontier.

This experience with industrialized ranching leads to a unique identity transformation for Cáceres by the end of the novel, when he maintains his gaucho lifestyle and his *argentinidad*, while simultaneously becoming a wealthy landowner. Cáceres eventually inherits his wealth and his land from his absentee father of the same name. By ending the story this way, Güiraldes demonstrates that economic success can be fostered from within the nation, rather than through dependency on foreign capital. Cáceres thus becomes a class equal to the ranch owners for whom he used to work, yet he remains a cultural superior:

It seems unbelievable, but instead of being happy with the riches that were coming my way at the hands of destiny, I felt sad because of the poverty that I was going to be leaving. Why? Because behind those old ways were all my memories as a wandering herder and, even more, that unlimited will to keep on the move, which is like an ever increasing thirst for the open road and a yearning for possession of the world. (191)

By foregoing property, wealth, and material items, the gaucho owns the world. Yet by inheriting the kind of wealth that he had previously rejected, Cáceres is reminded of those he once criticized: materialistic foreigners. He states that, “I also remembered our lunch in the restaurant. There were some foreigners—big, gross, garrulous men—from what country?” (191). Güiraldes sees the gaucho remaining entirely distinct from foreigners, even when he grows to share their class status. Although Cáceres fears that through wealth he “had stopped being a gaucho” (187), he also asserts that “to die according to the law I’ve lived by and grown up with is worth a whole lot more to me than all the lovely things that destiny graces me with today, because I’m not like some snake that goes around changing his skin or improving his clothes” (192-3). In detaching the gaucho from his working-class status, Güiraldes modernizes the gauchesque in an effort to revitalize *argentinidad* for a modern age. At the same time, he provides a financial model for Argentines to follow: self-reliance when it comes to controlling or mining frontier resources.

Indeed, rather than portray gauchos—and by extension, *argentinidad*—as things of the past, Güiraldes suggests that they continue to be relevant. Cáceres notes that the gaucho is always characterized by his ability to survive. He remarks that, “the daily struggle of existence doesn’t give him [the gaucho] any time to waste over defeats; either he carries on, or he lets go of everything at the point when he doesn’t have an extra bit of strength left to face life... because there’s no escape from the pampa for the weak” (180-81). Don Segundo replies “I can’t do anything worse than die... and death neither frightens me nor makes me skittish” (180-81). Despite the impact of modernization on the frontier, the survival and adaptability of the gaucho

suggests that *argentinidad* will be maintained and will triumph over foreign influence. Güiraldes always expresses concern for Argentina's future in his works (Weiss 149). As a result, *Don Segundo Sombra* is a novel that deals with the future by revisiting a national tradition and appreciating its value (Schulman 879). Güiraldes argues that Argentina has a future as long as gaucho tradition and *argentinidad* remain alive. In the face of modernization, Güiraldes insists, it is still possible to resist by employing Don Segundo's advice: "if you're really a gaucho, you don't have to change, because wherever you go, you'll go with your soul leading the way, like the lead mare of the herd" (193).

Adhering to Don Segundo's philosophy solidifies Cáceres's Argentine identity at the end of the novel, when he states:

Who is more owner of the pampa [the frontier] than a herder? A smile would come over me, just thinking about all those ranchers, stuck away in their houses, always in a panic, worrying about the cold or the heat, or frightened by whatever danger a recalcitrant horse, an emboldened bull, or a strong windstorm might inflict on them. Owners of what? Some little patches of dirt that would figure as theirs on some map. But the pampa of God had been very much mine, for the things of the pampa were friends of mine by right of strength and skill. (193)

Güiraldes's coming-of-age story describes more than one boy's transformation into gaucho. Rather, the novel makes possible an understanding of the effects of cultural appropriation and foreign control of Argentina's resources. Weiss argues that by the novel's close, Cáceres becomes "the national personality of Argentina" (149). By adhering to Don Segundo's didactic instructions even as he adapts to new economic realities, Cáceres functions as a model for Argentines to follow, and, as Weiss insists, Cáceres lifts Argentina "to a higher plane in the realm of the spirit" (149). For this reason, when Don Segundo leaves Cáceres to resume his nomadic lifestyle, the young man notes that what was leaving him was "more an idea than a man" (Güiraldes 297).

In *Don Segundo Sombra*, Güiraldes critiques foreign control of natural resources and culture through the struggles of Don Segundo and Cáceres on the modern frontier. Cáceres's coming-of-stage story provides a model for Argentines to follow. By maintaining *argentinidad*, even in a globalized economy, Güiraldes suggests that Argentines can resist foreign cultural and economic influence and increase their autonomy as a nation. By portraying a culturally and economically devastated country with foreign capitalists to blame, Güiraldes shows what is at stake for Argentines: control over their resources and their ability to self-represent. Throughout the novel, Güiraldes pits gauchos against those who seek to misrepresent or devalue *argentinidad*. Only through the true representative of *argentinidad*, the gaucho, can natives truly define themselves.

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