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World War I from the South

Abstract: The article proposes to investigate the representation of World War I in Argentine literature. Given the separation in space, one might think that the war was a circumstance with little or no impact on Argentine literature. The study of the popular *Caras y Caretas* and the journalism gathered in *La Nación* (the metropolitan newspaper of Buenos Aires), which published during the war the writings of well-known authors like Roberto Payro (commissioned as war correspondent), shows that the war attracted the attention and discussion of the Argentine intelligentsia. Since the early twentieth century (in Argentine literature there are some antecedents in the Paraguayan War, 1865–1870), journalism has become a primary companion to war, with war correspondents adding and obtaining fresh information which has been used by popular reviews to argue for or against war. The attractiveness of the so-called Great War points to a society which, being on the geographic periphery of the world, thought of itself as a main actor in contemporary history. The study of representations of World War I in *Caras y Caretas* allows us to see the relationships between language, images, and war, and is fertile ground for thinking about the way war impacts on literature, even when – as in this case – it is so far away.

Keywords: Argentine literature, correspondents, journalism, representation, war

This piece was intended for a symposium on the representations of World War I in different cultures and literatures. Unfortunately, the symposium was cancelled, so some remarks are needed to make our starting point clear.

Before endeavouring to study how World War I was viewed by the media in Argentina in the early twentieth century, it should be noted that much of Argentine literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was first published in newspapers and periodicals, both news bulletins and publications of a cultural nature. The late David Viñas, one of the scholars who contributed most to a significant reassessment of critical views of Argentine literature (1964), never ceased to urge his disciples and colleagues to focus on periodicals because, as he demonstrated, it was there that much of the national literature, which had been disregarded, was to be found. Although a move in this direction has already begun, the material is vast and heterogeneous.

A second matter we must take into account when studying Argentine literature and culture is that the latter has been two-faced, characterized by Gloria Videla as having one face towards the Atlantic, Europe, and the northern hemi-

sphere, and another one looking within the country – allegedly the most rooted, the most South American view. In this sense, the port of Buenos Aires, the great gate of the country, can be seen either as a point of evasion or invasion (Featherston 2009, 279). These tensions conferred a special dynamism on this always-evolving culture, so richly cosmopolitan, so open to the universal, and, at the same time, so of itself (Videla de Rivero and Castellino 2004, 9). When the Great War started, an event on which we will focus in this paper, this dynamic swing was to be expressed forcefully. If, on the one hand, and as the result of the strong presence of immigrants of European origin,¹ paying attention to what was happening in Europe – whose exports also inspired Argentine “progress” – was unavoidable, on the other hand, the challenge for governments was to answer this trial by fire with national identity.²

Another significant matter when dealing with the study of Argentine literature is that, during a large part of the nineteenth century, this literature was shaped by various political and social aspects. Authors like Sarmiento, Lucio V. Mansilla (1860s and 1870s), and then Miguel Cané, Jr, and Eduardo Wilde (1880s) tinged their writings with permanent references to and considerations of the world in which their works were conceived, probably also because the professionalization of the writer did not commence until the end of the century and begins to take place in periodicals that accompanied the transition from one century to the other. Until 1880, the reflections on unpublished dilemmas in Argentina had been dominated by those who were both members of the political class and a presence in the intellectual field (Halperin Donghi 2007, 70), but at the beginning of the twentieth century, the spheres appeared to be separating from each other.

1 The third census of the Republic of Argentina (1914), showed that European immigrants made up 49 % of the Buenos Aires city population. This number showed a sustained growth from the first census (1869), when the percentage was 30 %, and the second census (1895), with a percentage of 37 % (Otero 2006, 153–154).

2 The 1914 Argentine census showed that 269 Argentine men and 193 Argentine women lived in Germany, a number similar to those dwelling in England (340) and significantly lower than those dwelling in Italy (1,296) or France (1,462; *Tercer Censo Nacional* 1916, 102). With regard to immigrants, the 1914 census shows that German immigrants inhabiting Argentina numbered 62,006; Italian 2,283,882; Spanish 1,472,570; Russian 160,672; Ottoman 136,079; Austro-Hungarian 87,108; English 55,055; Swiss 33,057; and North American only 6,447. The vast majority of this foreign population dwelt in Buenos Aires city (*Tercer Censo Nacional* 1916, 201–205). German people were ahead of all other nationalities in the amount of literate immigrants to Argentina: 42.2 % of them, both men and women, were literate (*Tercer Censo Nacional* 1916, 214). Immigrants represented, in 1914, 49 % of the total population (7,885,237) of the Republic of Argentina. Classifications such as “English” and “North American” are those used in the census itself.

Nonetheless, the Great War was a source of confusion that needed experimental responses in a world that had shaken the liberal capitalist civilization that was hitherto believed to be unshakeable.

In this context, Argentine culture was to be agitated by the outbreak of the Great War – the events that unfolded after the hot day of 28 June 1914 when Gavrilo Princip shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, and after 4 August, the day the British ultimatum was sent and a conflagration with international dimensions began. Immediately afterwards, but even before the official beginning of hostilities, the conflict had generated interest in periodicals. We will focus on the way this interest was addressed in a popular-style publication, *Caras y Caretas*; in one of the newspapers that agglutinated public opinion, *La Nación* (mainly by making use of its correspondent in Brussels, the acclaimed Argentine author Roberto Payró);³ and in the prestigious magazine *Nosotros*, a publication that, during its long existence, was the expression of Argentina's identity as belonging to the American continent and having strong ties with European culture (Ravina 2014, 25). The aim is to reconstruct the experience of war in a context far distant from the main theatre of operations. As Argentina was neutral and thus distant from the everyday experience of war – hunger, cold, wounds, grief, weariness – the representation is always remote, but periodicals tried to account for the magnitude of the facts. It is noteworthy that in many respects there were echoes of journalistic representations in the countries involved.

Caras y Caretas, subtitled *Semanario Festivo, Literario y Artístico y de Actualidades* [A Festive, Literary and Artistic, and Up-to-Date Weekly Publication], marked the reappearance in Argentina of a weekly publication founded by the Spanish journalist Eustaquio Pellicer in Montevideo in 1890. Pellicer was accompanied in this endeavour by a caricaturist, also Spanish, called Manuel Mayol – who often used the pseudonym “Heraclitus” – and by Luis Pardo. The first editorial director of this magazine was Bartolomé Mitre y Vedia, quickly followed by José Sixto Álvarez – known by the pseudonym “Fray Mocho” – a popular Argentine humorist and writer on local customs and manners. The magazine's layout does not largely deviate from the one it had had in Montevideo: the first page is reserved for what, with the passing of the years, would become a distinctive colour cartoon of characters from public life, and the internal pages – 24 in the first issues and more than 100 around 1914 – include lots of advertisements

³ *La Nación* is an Argentine newspaper founded in 1870 by Bartolomé Mitre. Over the years, it displaced another important nineteenth-century newspaper, *La Tribuna*, and became, together with *La Prensa*, one of the most read newspapers all over the country.

and photographs, a novelty in those early years (the *La Prensa* and *La Nación* newspapers, those read by doctors and students [Saítta 2013, 32], incorporated this novelty only in 1903 and 1904 respectively).⁴ By 1913, *Caras y Caretas* was the most widely read magazine in urban areas, not only in Argentina but also in Peru, Uruguay, and Chile. Readers were attracted by the miscellaneous character of the publication, an imitation of English and North American magazines that combined diverse material with advertising messages of various kinds.

Despite this miscellaneous combination of materials, the magazine never neglected the Europe with which many of its readers were closely linked because they were the children of immigrants of various nationalities. For this reason, it is not surprising that, after war was declared on 4 August 1914, the cover of the 8 August issue showed a cartoon related to the conflict: the gaunt and bony figure of Mars, his head covered by an old helmet and his hands resting on the bullets for a machine gun whose barrel passes through the globe, surrounded by animals representing the major players in the conflict: the British lion, the French rooster showing the three colours of the Republic, the Austro-Hungarian eagle, and the Russian bear. The epigraph that, as usual, accompanies the image reads:⁵

Marte dio el grito de guerra
Y acudieron las naciones
Con sus armas y cañones
A enlutar toda la tierra. (*Caras y Caretas* 8 August 1914, front page)

[Mars gave the war cry/ And the nations came/ With their guns and cannons/ to dress in mourning the whole earth.]

On page 4 of the same issue, there appears a piece – which was to reappear, varying in location and extent, throughout the period of the war – entitled “Notas sobre la guerra europea” [Notes on the European War]. The magazine, which in its previous issues dedicated sustained attention to the innovations of war armaments (machine-guns, submarines, planes), forecasts now, at the very beginning of hostilities, that “los aviadores están destinados a desempeñar un importantísimo papel en la presente guerra” [the aviators are called to play a big role in this war] (“Noticias” 1914, 4).

⁴ See Geraldine Rogers’s description of the magazine format of *Caras y Caretas* during the first six years of publication (2008).

⁵ All translations in this article are my own.

Fig. 1: *Caras y Caretas* (8 August 1914, front page) announcing the outbreak of war. Picture taken by the author in the University of La Plata Public Library.

It is even more interesting to note the predominant tone in which the conflict is treated: the magazine tries to strike a balance between the belligerents so as not to disturb the neutrality chosen by the nation, while approaching the war from the perspective of duty and the need people feel to go when their motherland calls. Thus, it is expected that the Austrian people will save their aging emperor from defeat (“Noticias” 1914, 45),⁶ but two pages later, the resistance of the Serbs is underlined and their sacrifices extolled, as the blood shed by “*this new David*” (emphasis in original) who has thrown the stone at the giant will pay for the birth of a new life for the Slavs. The history of the Serbs is oxymoronically characterized as living to die for the Slav cause (“Noticias” 1914, 46). As can be seen in these “Notes,” a jingoistic, propagandistic speech predominates, counterbalanced, in turn, by other sections of the magazine suggesting, with an admonitory tone, that all the consequences of war in the past will be nothing compared to the potential

⁶ Austro-Hungarian people, mainly located in Río Cuarto, Córdoba, numbered 87,108 according to the 1914 census (*Tercer Censo Nacional* 1916, 214).

Fig. 2: “The Horror of War,” illustration by Alonso, in *Caras y Caretas* (8 August 1914, [50–51]). Picture taken by the author in the University of La Plata Public Library.

of modern warfare. The editorial entitled “El horror de la guerra” [The Horror of War], illustrated by Alonso, has a section that recalls the paintings of Vereshchagin, distancing themselves from any epic vision. The illustration presents four soldiers (one Russian, one French, one German, and one Austrian) distinguishable by their attributes; Death accompanies them, and their mouths are hung open in expressions of scream and rage. The illustration embodies a meaning antithetical to the words of the section, insisting on the sacred duty to be fulfilled, met with joy by every man. The image belies the words. The alternation of linguistic discourse brimming with patriotism and propaganda on the one hand with pictures or remarks that synthesize despair and criticism on the other, is apparent on many occasions. However, this first issue dedicated to the European conflagra-

tion sets the tone that will be maintained in subsequent issues: the effects of war are not minimized or provided with a heroic Romantic halo, and patriotic duty and sacrifice are accepted. The photographs of Belgian, Serb, or French reservists embarking at the port of La Plata to fulfil the sacred duty mentioned above, and appearing as an enthusiastic group of heroes that bid farewell, seem to confirm this view.

In the next issue (15 August 1914), a new shade appears in the focus on the war: it is approached as a tournament of knights, of gentlemen. Expressions such as “the gallant attitude of the King of the Belgians,” the “mystique of the Russian people,” and “French enthusiasm” are often repeated. The confrontation between the French and the Germans is described as a “thrilling aspect of war.” And that is just one example. An intention to maintain neutrality and not to favour either group with comments can be observed. In this sense, the position of the publication remains the same, as explicitly stated on 8 August:

La guerra europea ha repercutido en Buenos Aires intensamente pero a pesar del gran número de súbditos de potencias europeas que viven entre nosotros no ha habido escándalos que lamentar y todos se han mantenido dentro de la corrección y cultura que corresponde a un país absolutamente neutral como el nuestro. Al recibirse las primeras noticias la Avenida de Mayo se llenó completamente de público que acudía ansioso a informarse de las noticias telegráficas que exhibían los diarios en los pizarrones. (“La emoción de la guerra” 1914, 54)

[The European war has intensely affected Buenos Aires, but, despite the large number of subjects of European powers living among us, there have not been any scandals to regret, and everyone has remained within the decorum and culture that befit a country of absolute neutrality such as ours. Upon receiving the early news, Avenida de Mayo street was completely filled with people coming eagerly to learn the telegraphic news that newspapers exhibited on blackboards.]

We can conclude that, in the first period of the war, *Caras y Caretas* represents the conflict without creating breaks on the level of discourse: it always manages to channel the discourse in the direction of rationality: the story is horrible, dreadful, but *Caras y Caretas* evades any breach of good taste and conventionality. “Decorum and culture” seem to be the representational imperatives of the magazine, from which it departs only on its cartoonish covers or in the illustrations inside it. Photographs were duly circumspect and aimed, in these first issues, to corroborate the enthusiasm with which people heeded the call of history.

As the months went by, however, the discourse was to keep this tone but the photographs were gradually to reveal the horrors of war, as was the case, for

example, in May 1915 with “difficult” scenes in which dead bodies or prisoners can be observed.⁷ War takes over the publication, and although the number of pages allocated to it, at times, begins to decrease, interstices begin to appear in the smooth, rational speech, thus suggesting the horror of war.

These rare photographs illuminate “the unbridgeable chasm that separates ordinary life from extraordinary experiences of political trauma” (Linfield 2010, 102). The American photographer and theorist Susie Linfield, openly arguing with Susan Sontag and “many of her postmodern and post-structuralist heirs” (Linfield 2010, 85), maintained that all photographic documents of barbarism are at the same time documents of civilization, and so that offering photographs encourages readers to think about the catastrophic histories of which they speak. The smiling faces of the reservists tell us nothing about the pain of war, but the hanging body of a dead watchman tells the local reader of *Caras y Caretas* “This is so” while, by implication, also exhorting “This must not be” (Linfield 2010, 33). The few photographs showing the horrors make recipients face what James Agee called “the cruel radiance of what is” (quoted in Linfield 2010, 44).

Despite its abundance of journalistic clichés, the language of *Caras y Caretas* offers a field where Elisabeth Krimmer’s “metonymic slippage” (Krimmer 2010, 3) can be observed in literature trying to represent war. What is at stake is the horror, the destruction, the physical pain of the wounded bodies; but all that is sublimated, presented as the triumph of the mind over the body, of abstract ideas of duty, patriotism, and honour over the body. It should finally be noted that, in the early months, war took over the popular covers of *Caras y Caretas*. Between 8 August 1914 and 1 January 1915, more than thirty covers allude to the various aspects of war, displacing all traditional cover allusions to national politics. On 16 January 1915, the cover is a turtle and the epigraph reads “¡Cuándo llegará a la meta!” [When will peace come!], a clear allusion to the prolongation of a war that many had believed would be more short-lived.⁸ This temporal expansion will possibly explain why, by mid-1915 and during 1916, war-related covers are not so recurrent, although we should note that, in those that do allude to the conflict, the figure of Uncle Sam appears and reappears ever larger and more powerful, taking advantage of European ruins. These cartoons begin to account for the new threat posed to Argentine writers: an American continent that begins to lean towards the north, a threat to Argentine identity, always hesitant and multifaceted.

⁷ According to Adrian Gregory (2008), between April and May 1915, the general public (British in particular and European in general) became fully aware of the atrocities of the war.

⁸ *La Nación* and also *La Prensa* spoke of a fast, epic, even knightly war. Cf. the issues of August 1914.

A view with different nuances can be traced in Roberto J. Payró's contributions published in the prestigious newspaper *La Nación*.⁹ Readers expected reliable information on world events from this newspaper. To satisfy their expectations during wartime, the newspaper had correspondents of its own, as *Caras y Caretas* did. Payró's case was almost fortuitous: this regular contributor to the publication had been based in Brussels since 1909, where he engaged in the writing of new books and newspaper reports. Roberto Pablo Payró, his grandson, states that during the outbreak of World War I, "he diligently devoted himself to informing the Argentine public about what happened in Belgium following the invasion and occupation of its territory by German troops" (R. P. Payró 2009, 21). Even though Payró was a member of the Socialist Party, since 1912, in his notes to *La Nación*, he had criticized the general strikes organized by Belgian Socialists, as he considered them to be harmful to the workers themselves.¹⁰ A similar critical perspective was adopted when he referred to Belgium's participation in the war. Payró wanted to communicate to the readers of *La Nación* in a fresh and first-hand way the experience of war he had in Belgium. His chronicle following the events of which he was part recounts the initial coldness or lack of enthusiasm of the Belgians when the German ultimatum was made known. That is to say, with a keen eye, he accounts for a reaction that was heterogeneous, as the idea of a war immediately accepted by a majority was nothing but a fiction, productive when assigning responsibilities. However, also with a keen eye, Payró notices that the German invasion becomes significant, as it provides an excuse for many pacifists who had already decided to resist Germany. He described it in the following terms:

Pero ¡qué entusiasmo guerrero el de este pueblo, pacifista entre los pacifistas! Las cuatro oficinas de enganche que funcionan en Bruselas están literalmente asediadas por grupos compactos que aún crecen por momentos, y en el día de hoy los voluntarios inscriptos en todo el país ¡alcanzan a quince mil! Es como lo dice el rey Alberto, se trata de la defensa del hogar, se trata de oponer al imperialismo y a los últimos representantes del viejo régimen. (R. J. Payró 2009, 615)

⁹ *La Nación* is a still-influential newspaper founded in 1870 by Bartolomé Mitre, former President of the Republic of Argentina (1862–1868). In 1879, *La Nación* had its first correspondent in Europe and in 1910 it published the first photographic portrait, that of Brazilian President Manuel Ferraz. During World War I, the newspaper paid at least for the first-hand written impressions of Colonel Emilio Kinkelín, afterwards a self-declared Nationalist, who resided in Germany and maintained a pro-German point of view, and also, and perhaps more significantly from a literary perspective, the writings of Roberto J. Payró, who lived in Brussels and covered stories from the trenches and hospitals. Payró declared himself a Socialist. See Tarruela (2014) and Rock (1995).

¹⁰ Cf. his "La huelga general" [General Strike], written in Brussels in November 1912 and published in *La Nación* on 30 December 1912 (R. J. Payró 2009, 305–309).

[What warlike enthusiasm these people show, pacifists among the pacifists! The four offices operating in Brussels are literally besieged by compact groups still growing at times. Today the number of volunteers enrolled nationwide reaches fifteen thousand! It is, as King Albert says, all about home defence, opposing imperialism and the last representatives of the old regime.]

The language echoes the topics of enthusiasm and volunteering and the sublimation of war. However, the chronicles reveal an author trying to dismantle the lies of propaganda and the rumours of war. He owes his Argentine readers an expository rigour that guides his chronicles. One of his concerns was, in this sense, to dismantle the rumours that echoed public opinion and the popular press. On more than one occasion he complains about the unfounded rumours crossing Belgian territory – for example, the rumour that the Germans had poisoned every source of drinking water (R. J. Payró 2009, 619) – and urges avid Argentine readers not to be gullible:

Entretanto corren en Bruselas los rumores más heterogéneos y encontrados, que mucho creen a pie juntillas, aunque ignoren su procedencia y – lo que es peor – aunque sean evidentemente falsos. (R. J. Payró 2009, 621)

[Meanwhile, there run in Brussels the most heterogeneous and conflicting rumours that many take at face value, even when ignoring their origin and, worse, even if they are patently false.]

In the section “Diario de un testigo” [Diary of a Witness], where his chronicles appear in *La Nación*, Payró warns that his vision is probably more partial than the newspaper’s, as the latter is nourished by the visions provided by other correspondents in more open war zones, but that his testimonies in this diary have the nerve to reflect, with more or less intensity, the emotions that took over in these terrible days (R. J. Payró 2009, 806).¹¹ In addition, his notes – impressions, at times monotonous and seemingly trivial – give the reader in Buenos Aires the point of view of a spectator witnessing the systematic suppression of a small and noble Belgium (807).¹² A very interesting perspective on this chronicle with which

11 “Yo no puedo ver, en efecto, sino un pequeñísimo rincón del escenario en que se desarrolla este drama colosal, rincón más reducido aún por el aislamiento en que el invasor nos mantiene” [I cannot see – indeed – but a very small corner of the scene where it takes place, this colossal drama, a nook that is even smaller due to the isolation in which the invader maintains us] (R. J. Payró 2009, 806).

12 “Nada más trágico que asistir impotente a la destrucción de un país y mi papel de simple espectador suele atormentarme al ver la supresión sistemática de la pequeña y noble Bélgica”

he wants to fight the morbid exaltation caused by war, can be obtained by noting that Payró focuses on the pain of the people, civilian victims, while lamenting the material destruction of works of art, churches, and architectural treasures. The German soldier is a soldier when he executes someone with a firearm, when he tortures somebody, even when he rapes that somebody, but he becomes a “Hun” when he sets fire to artworks, churches, and libraries.¹³ With these testimonies coming from the scene of hostilities, the public in Buenos Aires can change their views and review their original “jingoistic enthusiasm.”

At a time when *Caras y Caretas* could already take pride in its long history – a very long history, given the parameters of periodical publications in Argentina at that time – in August 1907 a new magazine appeared in Buenos Aires, *Nosotros: Revista de Letras, Arte, Historia, Filosofía y Ciencias Sociales* [Magazine of Literature, Art, History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences].¹⁴ *Nosotros* appealed to a totally different readership; from its editorial proposition, the magazine was positioned as a milestone in the process of intellectuals’ self-assertion as a distinct group within Argentine society (Prislei 1996, 3395). Founded by two descendants of Italian immigrants, *Nosotros* never abandoned its intention to become a spokesman for a country that was making itself while simultaneously observing itself (Shumway 1999, 168). We could say that, compared to the catchy popularity of *Caras y Caretas*, *Nosotros*, with a much more austere and less attractive format, prides itself on a certain elitism, although it never abandoned the idea of achieving an “inclusive” elitism, even when every “we” supposes a “them” that the magazine described as coarse, vulgar, hackneyed, and always tried to eradicate from its publication (*Nosotros* August 1907, 1).

In addition to its monthly publication, but no less important than the magazine itself are its interventions in the intellectual field of the time. For that purpose, it not only participated in the organization of cultural events but also organized several “surveys” throughout its long existence. One of the best-known examples is the one that tried to find a definition of national literature in Argentina, promoted in 1910.¹⁵ No less influential was the 1915 survey on the European

[Nothing more tragic than to see – helpless as I am – the destruction of a country, and my role of simple spectator torments me when I notice the systematic elimination of small and noble Belgium] (R. J. Payró 2009, 807).

¹³ In several pieces as a correspondent, Payró includes accounts of survivors in Leuven and other Belgian towns.

¹⁴ The name of the magazine, *Nosotros* [We], shows the intention of Argentine intellectual leaders to define themselves. As Shumway (1999, 165) says, “Who are we?”

¹⁵ Another significant survey in *Nosotros* in 1913 asked several poets and intellectuals about the worth of *Martín Fierro*. The magazine did not publish all answers in full.

war, following criticism that one of the figures involved in the survey had received. In the August 1914 issue, *Nosotros* devoted a long editorial to commentary on the outbreak of war. As in the case of *Caras y Caretas*, albeit in a higher register, a sublimation of war was echoed, together with a heroic halo around the edge of the events. Nevertheless, the magazine made its neutral position clear:

La conflagración tremenda que todos anunciaban como fatal y en cuya posibilidad – sin embargo – todos se resistían a creer, ha estallado, magna en sus proyecciones, espantosa en su desarrollo, oscura en su desenlace, impenetrable en sus consecuencias, tal cual se la preveía. Ha estallado como el rayo, instantánea, y en el momento en que se produjo, inesperada. (“La guerra” 1914, 117).

[The tremendous conflagration that everyone announces as fatal, whose possibility – strange contradiction – everyone refused to believe, broke out, foundational in its projections, frightening in its development, dark in its outcome, impenetrable in its consequences. Has broken out instantly like a bolt of lightning and in the moment it began unexpected.]

The images used are the clash of Xerxes, the barbarians entering the Roman Empire by force, or the Turks at the gates of Vienna (117). While avoiding biased views in favour of either side, the images of destruction seem to refer to the Prussians. However, this generation cannot stop thanking Providence for the place in which they have been put: “Vivimos en el medio de una epopeya y nuestros nietos nos envidiarán, ¡oh ironía!” [We live in the middle of an epic, and our grandchildren will envy us, oh irony!] (“La guerra” 1914, 118). We have not seen this vision of war so unilaterally sublimated in any of the other two publications. The magazine, whose readership is more intellectualized, abstracts much more what Sarah Cole (2009, 1634) called “enchanted vision” and seems to laud war. From this “tremendous conflagration” of the “bloody madness of a few years,” a “greater experience for some centuries” will be born (“La guerra” 1914, 118). The editorial writer avoids assigning responsibilities, preferring to read the event in terms of the “responsibilities of the centuries and the low status of man” (“La guerra” 1914, 118).¹⁶

Despite these discursive precautions, several contributors to the magazine were quick to react to and criticize the pro-Allied preferences they believed were

¹⁶ In August 1914, in an article named “La guerra” [The War], the editors asked themselves: “¿A qué desear el triunfo de esta o aquella nación, si ninguna puede legítimamente arrogarse el derecho de ser la única civilizada y la única fecunda de porvenir, y menos en este momento?” [What reason is there to desire the victory of this or that nation if none of them can in a legitimate way assume itself to have the right of being the only one civilized and the only one with a rich future, least of all at this moment?] (“La guerra” 1914, 118).

present in the publication, especially in a note reporting the murder of Jaurès. Alfredo Giusti and Roberto Bianchi, directors of the magazine, referred to “our” side, those of “us” who lamented the death of the Socialist, and to the archaic side defending the Austrian Emperor. The debate is rarefied and the magazine chooses to conduct a survey asking intellectuals about “La Guerra europea y sus consecuencias” [The European War and its Aftermath]. There were two questions.¹⁷ There is not space here to dwell on individual responses, but we can refer to several issues that account for the cracks beginning to show in the Argentine intelligentsia. Firstly, a large number of voices rose up against the supposed neutrality of Argentina, as being neutral was considered equivalent to being a corpse-bearer. One of the most decisive interventions in this regard was that of Juan Más y Pi, who confessed to have been the one who asked for the survey. He is clear about his point of view:

¿es posible la neutralidad? ¿es posible en este inmensa perturbación de conciencias, en esta terrible subversión de todos los valores, haya quien pueda mantenerse aislado o independiente, es decir neutral, despreocupándose por el triunfo de unos o de otros? (“Nuestra tercera encuesta” 1915, 151)

[Is neutrality possible? In this immense disturbance of consciences, in this terrible subversion of all values, is it possible to find someone who can remain isolated and indifferent, that is to say, neutral, unconcerned by the victory of one or the other?]

Más y Pi understood that it was time to define positions and that if all wars changed borders – sometimes material objects and always moral (“Nuestra tercera encuesta” 1915, 153) – not the future was essential but the present, and that is the reason why he exhorted the magazine and Argentine society to define which side they wanted to take, uncompromisingly and without hesitation (155). While many members of *Nosotros* would enrol in this “redeemer of war” vision that marked the end of a feudal and autocratic order, many others – we can mention among them Augusto Bunge, a medical hygienist and member of the Socialist Party – saw it as a matter of rival imperialisms and capitalisms (139) and warned against the danger of being hypnotized by Paris and thus losing the freedom to examine Goethe, Kant, Wagner, and Marx (Bunge 1915, 145). These responses brought with them a discussion of the problematic distinction between the German concepts of

17 The questions sent to several intellectuals were: “what consequences do you glimpse for humanity as a result of this war?” and “what influence will current events have in the future moral and material evolution of countries in the American continent and especially in Argentina?” (“Nuestra tercera encuesta” 1915, 138).

Kultur and *Zivilisation*,¹⁸ a curious appearance in the Argentine media of a debate that seemed to show the British, French, and German war propagandists for what they were. It is a curious appearance also because it was the backbone of a set of ideas that the same Argentine intellectual actors would discuss with supporters of the opposing positions in the looming decade. More interestingly, in this debate among the intelligentsia, the European war lost the contact with concrete material life that cartoons and photographs in *Caras y Caretas* had maintained. It was also distanced from the representation of horror transmitted in Payró's chronicles, entering instead the realm of the abstract, of an ideological debate that could only be pursued by those sheltered from the real danger. Intellectual voices relegated the increasingly ordinary and unimaginative horrors of the conflagration and, despite several divergent voices, set about thinking about which Argentina would emerge from the smoking ruins of Europe.

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¹⁸ According to Gregory, the German concepts of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* would not have been a dichotomous opposition until the eighteenth century, when *Kultur* came to mean "the inward, honest self-cultivation of the German Burger, rooted in Protestant piety. This was opposed to the latter [*Zivilisation*], a product of the 'artificial' court society of the aristocracy: alien, Latinised, immoral and French" (Gregory 2008, 1395). The opposition remained ambiguous until its reappearance in 1914, when the concept of *Kultur* deepened its semantics as a compendium of German values opposed to a *Zivilisation* understood as hypocritical varnish.

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