

CHAPTER ONE

PLANTING WHEAT AND REAPING DOCTORS

Another Way of Being Argentine

The fabric that is Argentina is woven of many threads, not least of which are the warp and woof of cultures, languages, and beliefs of the people who made their way into that nation. In this book I search for one of the strands in the complex fabric of Argentine history and self-representation, the strand of Jewishness. I tug on the fibers of Jewishness in Argentina to test the strength of the weave that holds them, and I consider the patterns of nation and meaning they form in combination with the threads alongside which they lie and those with which they interlace. The fabled Argentine Jewish migratory route from the shtetls of Eastern Europe to the agricultural settlements of the pampas and to the urban centers of the nation gave rise to the sardonic observation that Jews came to the countryside of Argentina where they sowed wheat but reaped doctors, as their children went off to live in the nation's urban centers. This pattern is just one of the ways that Argentina's Jewish history resonates both with Jewish diasporas more generally and with Argentina's past as a nation of immigrants, even as the story of Jews in Argentina rings changes on other Jewish and Argentine migration and assimilation narratives.¹ Jewishness and Argentineity have been modified and inflected by each other so that Argentineity slips into Jewishness, just as Jewishness is another modality of Argentineity.

The very project of modernity in Argentina, the weaving of that cloth of many textures, relies, in part, on a submerged and troubled relationship to the paradox of Jewish otherness in, and identification with, the nation. It thereby claims a central place for Jewish-authored texts and the deploy-

ment of Jewishness, as an idea as well as an identity, in shaping Argentina's cultural landscape as a modern nation. As a multicultural immigrant nation with a large, and still largely ignored, indigenous population as well as a little-acknowledged history of African slavery and its aftermath, Argentina struggles with, and is enriched by, conflicting and interlacing meanings of religion, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and gender.² Visual artists, filmmakers, and writers, who often speak both of documenting their world and discovering it as they create, have often interrogated the meaning of Argentine modernity in relation to Europe and to the rest of Latin America. Literary and visual texts marked by complex representations of Argentina's sites of difference, tied to such critical moments in the nation's history as the rise of labor and anarchist movements in the early part of the twentieth century, Peronism in midcentury, the dictatorship and repression of the 1970s and 1980s, and times of economic crisis like those of the turn of the millennium are, therefore, critical sites for both exploring and temporarily stabilizing such meaning.

Argentina claims to be a modern nation, a claim that would be utterly precarious were it predicated only on the nation's political and economic status in the world. Instead, Argentine modernity rests on a balance between unitary national identity and a mix of often-subdued internal differences that may trouble such unity but that also link the nation to a globalized cosmopolitanism. Both close and symptomatic readings of Argentine literary, visual, and cinematic texts to examine cultural representations of difference, give ample evidence that Argentine modernity is predicated on such a balance. The texts I call upon, mostly by Jewish-identified authors, a category that is hardly uniform or unambiguous, give ample evidence that Argentine modernity is poised between a unitary sense of nationality and a range of marginalized ethnic, racial, sexual, and gender identities.

For its part, Jewishness holds multiple meanings related to Argentina's claim to modernity.³ In the context of Argentina's struggle to claim a place in the modern world, Jewishness is, among other things, a matter of cultural representations and elisions. At times Jewishness is salient, for good or ill. For Jewishness is a productive irritant that, in Argentina as elsewhere, refuses to dissolve completely. Making their way into the very stuff of the immigrant nation, Jews and Jewish culture inflect national identity in ways that are embedded in Argentina's vibrant literary and visual cultures. Argentina's Jews are associated with urban life and rural development, capitalism as well as socialism, medicine, psychoanalysis, and intellectual and artistic pursuits—in other words, with modernity. Nevertheless, theorists of modernity often consider it as a purely European phenomenon, and in fact

European modernity produces itself against the colonial, raced, and feminized other that includes both Jews and Latin America. This is the modernity of the atomized subject that has come under so much feminist scrutiny, but it is also one that is almost immediately recovered for community by the (distinctly masculinist) social contract. Modernity is necessarily globalized insofar as it produces itself against the other from without, as well as in contrast to the other within.

The familiar if somewhat tired argument that Latin America has never been part of modernity, but rather has always been postmodern, derives from the notion that the singular, European (unmarked but for that reason no less masculine) subject can never have been fully transplanted onto American soil: that the *criollo* was by ancestry Spanish, but by history and geography American.⁴ The embrace of hybridity came much later, but it sealed the (post)modern pact as forever and necessarily marked by the incorporation of at least one of its others. One observer, Adolfo Colombres, distinguishes between “dominant modernity,” the modernity of the Enlightenment, which “aspired to put reason at the service of liberty and justice” (95) but lost its way and became an obsessive religion of progress (95) and “our [Latin American] modernity,” produced through the diversity of Latin American cultures, traditions, belief systems, and histories (106ff.). Nevertheless, despite his attention to class differences, Colombres’s Europe is ethnically monolithic, excluding Jews and other minorities, and both his Europe and his America are hetero-masculine, with room neither for women or sexual minorities.

On the other hand, the dominant strains in Jewish cultural studies approach the question of modernity with little reference to Jews outside Europe, the United States, and Israel. Until the quite recent entry of feminist and queer perspectives in Jewish cultural studies, gender and sexuality were not taken into account in either the affirmation or the theorization of Jewish modernity. Still, even this narrow understanding of Jewishness makes space for the suggestion that Jewishness and modernity are linked. Despite having absorbed European understandings of Jewishness, Argentina, as a hybrid nation, necessarily modifies the conventional European view of Jewish difference. Jews remain outsiders among more easily assimilated immigrants to the nation, but because most Argentine Jews *are* European, they are not so “other” to the dominant culture as are indigenous people and Afro-Argentines. The recent exodus of Jews from Argentina is another mark of Jewish difference, but these new Israelis, Europeans, and North Americans identify also as Argentines.⁵

As languages and narrative systems, English and Spanish both inscribe actor and action in relation to some other. Written narrative implies a multiplicity of subjects circulating among the subject of the sentence, the narrative voice, and the author her or himself, and always presupposes at least one subject-receptor, the reader or listener. Nevertheless, the indirect complement of the verb, the one who is not its subject and whom I am loath to call its object, may stand in a relation of alliance, friendship, and trust. It is a relationship that Martin Buber calls I/Thou, in which the encounter between the two is not the monological relationship between subject and object, but rather an encounter between subject and subject, in which both may undergo a certain transformation as a result of their coming together. In the encounter between Jews and Argentina, both are changed, and both grow.

This discursive ground is not without moments of conflict. Two foundational texts of Argentine Jewishness, Julián Martel's antisemitic, urban *The Stock Market* (*La bolsa*, 1891), and Alberto Gerchunoff's *The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas* (*Los gauchos judíos*, 1910), which stakes a Jewish claim to Argentina's iconic pampas, frame the contested meanings of Argentineity and Jewishness.⁶ Subsequent writers have embraced and rewritten the emblematic figure of Gerchunoff's Jewish gaucho, while *The Stock Market's* blatant antisemitism persists as a symptom of anti-Jewish sentiment.

The pseudonymous Martel published the foundational (if noncanonical) antisemitic text of Argentina, *The Stock Market*, within two years of the arrival in the port of Buenos Aires of the steamship *Weser*, which carried the first group of Russian Jewish immigrants headed for a rural life in Argentina. Less than twenty years later, Alberto Gerchunoff, a descendant of one of the *Weser* passengers, wrote his own story of Jewishness in Argentina. Gerchunoff's *The Jewish Gauchos*, like Martel's *The Stock Market*, stakes a claim to authentic Argentineity; each organizes that claim around radically different representations of the Jewish immigrant and diametrically opposed views of the value of Jewishness to Argentina as a modernizing nation. What is more, both Martel and Gerchunoff implicitly represent both Jewishness and Argentineity in distinctly gendered and sexualized ways as they develop an understanding of Jewishness in relation to its bearing on Argentina as a modern nation.

The urban setting of *The Stock Market* troubles traditional masculinity, which, in the city, is challenged not only by the domestic demands of the bourgeois Catholic woman, but, more overtly, by what the narrator describes as a veritable invasion of immigrants. The modernity of industrial-era civi-

lization is a cause of anxiety. Among the trappings of that civilization, the brightly lit home that Luis Glow, the novel's embattled hero, provides for his loving but implicitly demanding wife, Margarita, and their children both symbolizes the enlightenment of modernity and testifies to the rash, ostentatious spending that threatens the traditional, conservative family. The newly developing capitalism that promises Argentina entry into the modern economic world is shot through with the danger of degeneracy, corruption, and deceit. In *The Stock Market*, these dangers are embodied in the figure of the Jewish speculator. He is not the only corrupt figure in the novel, but he is unmistakably the source of corruption. Textual anxiety about the inappropriate entry of Jews into the fabric of polite society finds an echo in distress over class mobility. A conversation between Glow and his friends expresses astonishment and not a little dismay that a former waiter is now hobnobbing with the gentry and can no longer be berated by his (erstwhile) social betters. It is the Jew, however, whose presence most threatens the social order. Martel's Jewish man is deficient in his unhealthy body; described in feminine terms, he is both degenerate and dishonorable:

The one who mangled these French words with German teeth, and not the purest German at that, was a pale, blond, lymphatic man, of short stature, and in whose disagreeable and effeminate face could be observed an expression of hypocritical humility, which earmarks the Jewish race through a long period of servility. He had small bloodshot eyes, like the descendants of the tribe of Zabulon and the hooked nose typical of the tribe of Ephraim. He dressed with the flashy showiness of the Jew, who can never quite acquire the noble distinction which characterizes the man of the Aryan race, his antagonist. His name was Filiberto Mackster [*sic*] and he had the title of Baron which he had bought in Germany believing that this would lend importance to his obscure name. (1948, 33–34)

[El que lo hablaba, masticando las palabras francesas con dientes alemanes, y no de los más puros, por cierto, era un hombre pálido, rubio, linfático, de mediana estatura, y en cuya cara antipática y afeminada se observaba esa expresión de hipócrita humildad que la costumbre de un largo servilismo ha hecho como el sello típico de la raza judía. Tenía los ojos pequeños, estriados de filamentos rojos, que denuncian los descendientes de la tribu de Zabulón,

y la nariz encorvada propia de la tribu de Ephraim. Vestía con el lujo charro del judío, el cual nunca puede llegar a adquirir la noble distinción que caracteriza al hombre de la raza Arya, su antagonista. Llamábase Filiberto Mackser y tenía el título de barón que había comprado en Alemania creyendo que así daba importancia a su oscuro apellido. (1891, 35–36)]

Mackser's physical degeneracy is echoed by the social and moral corruption embodied by his young associate, a man engaged in sex trafficking, slavery, and pro-Jewish propaganda:

He was accompanied by a young man, countryman and fellow believer, who practiced the white slave trade, supplying the brothels of Buenos Aires with all the beauties which supply the German and Oriental markets. He also wrote for a daily evening paper, in whose columns he lent important services to the interests of the Jews, quite often winning public approval for them. He was, besides, president of a club of slave traders. (1948, 34)

[Iba acompañado de un joven, compatriota y correligionario suyo, que ejercía el comercio de mujeres, abasteciendo los serrallos porteños de todas las bellezas que proporcionan los mercados alemanes y orientales. También escribía en un diario de la tarde, en cuyas columnas prestaba importantes servicios a los intereses judíos, consiguiendo muchas veces dirigir la opinión en favor de éstos. Era, además, presidente de un club de traficantes de carne humana. (1891, 36)]

Martel's schematic description of Mackser and his sidekick crams a cartload of stereotypes into these short passages. Between them, the Jewish men are sickly, pale, short of stature, unpleasant to look at, effeminate, affected, hypocritical, servile, flashy, corrupt, and quite possibly homosexual:

Pale blond, sickly, and of short stature, God only knows what strange bonds united him to the Baron de Mackster [*sic*], whom he seemed to treat with extreme consideration. (1948, 35)

[Pálido, rubio, enclenque y de reducida estatura, sabe Dios qué extraños lazos lo unían con el barón de Mackser, al que parecía tratar con exagerados miramientos. (1891, 37)]

The religiously suspect, sexually degenerate Jew is part of an international conspiracy to take control of the new nation's sources of wealth:

The Doctor [Glow] knew that the Semite was an envoy of Rothschild, the English banker, who had sent him to Buenos Aires to operate in gold and to exercise pressure on the market. What the Doctor didn't know was that Mackster [*sic*] had the assignment of monopolizing, with the help of a strong Jewish syndicate, the principal productive sources of the country. (1948, 35)

[No ignoraba el doctor que aquel semita era un enviado de Rothschild, el banquero inglés, que lo había mandado a Buenos Aires para que operase en el oro y ejerciese presión sobre la plaza. Lo que el doctor no sabía era que Mackser tenía la consigna de acaparar, de monopolizar, con ayuda de un fuerte sindicato judío, a cuyo frente estaba él, las principales fuentes productoras del país. (1891, 37)]

Mackser and his partner mimic Gentile ways in a manner that is always insufficient: they mangle both French and German, and their attempt at elegance inevitably misses the mark. The older man affects a language and a title to which he has no right and, in an echo of the scurrilous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, is the envoy of an international Jewish conspiracy bent on taking over the nation's economy.⁷ Mackser's companion traffics both in women and in propaganda, and he writes pro-Jewish columns for the press. A third Jewish character, a moneylender who refuses to lend the protagonist funds when he learns that he is the financially ruined Glow, is a similar caricature.⁸

The Stock Market is blatantly antisemitic in its condemnation of Jewish lust for money, accusations of treachery, and the suggestion of an international, antipatriotic conspiracy that would undermine not only the naive blond protagonist but the ever-whiter nation he embodies as well. Martel marshals the culturally available hate-mongering stereotypes quite overtly, but he is only a bit more circumspect about the way the feminization of the villain depends on a pejorative valuation of femininity itself. His depiction of modern bourgeois femininity debases the image of the idealized wife and mother, whose upkeep and desire for social advancement underlie the protagonist's eagerness to enter into a shady deal in which he becomes the victim.

The innocent protagonist loses all his money by trusting the persuasive Jewish-led cabal, but in the end he was never all that innocent. His plan to

make a killing in the stock market (a practice in which someone is necessarily left as loser) is already corrupt, already contaminated by the pull of modernity, even without the Jewish agent of overt dishonesty. The civilized modernity that Glow craves is built upon a foundation of barbarism. The blazing lights of the house that advertise his hoped-for success as a speculator edge toward making literal the metaphor. The house built on (failed) speculation cannot stand. Glow cannot afford to keep it up; all that light emanating from it might as well mean that it is burning to the ground.

The central cause for anxiety in *The Stock Market* is modernity itself, which cannot keep its masculine, European, Christian purity intact. Just as Jewishness—here in the debased form of modern capitalist practices—underpins modernity, the masculinist modernity of the West needs the feminine: the house in the city with all its lovely furniture and its decorative woman and children who are (remembering Veblen) the very proof of modern masculine success. Although Luis Glow originally fell in love with Margarita in the purest way, all love and beauty and romanticism, she is much more practical—even mercenary—than he:

His wife, who was quite ambitious and who seemingly had married him because he was a rising young man, had dreamed of driving him to reach a very high position (the Doctor didn't even suspect this); she also induced him to go into politics. And the sly girl hadn't made a bad choice because, among his contemporaries, he was the one who showed the most promise, the one who would go farthest, but—The Stock Market swallowed him. (1948, 89)

[Su mujer, además, que era ambiciosa, y que quizás, al casarse con él sabiendo que era un joven de esperanzas, había soñado en impulsarlo a subir alto, muy alto (esto el doctor ni lo sospechaba), también lo inducía a meterse en política. Y no había elegido mal la pícara muchacha, porque de la generación de Glow, él era quien más valía, quien iría más lejos; pero . . . ¡Se lo tragó la Bolsa! (1891, 93)]

Both the wife and the stock market have their claws into Glow; he is the blue-eyed innocent.

Margarita is beautiful, richly attired, and sexually appealing. The danger suggested in her voluptuous body is expressed in the metonym of her

hair, described as both “rebellious” and “provocative.” Martel’s increasingly overwrought description of her ends with a comparison to a deadly snake:

tall and with a slightly rosy whiteness which meant ardent and young blood; black, shining, enormous, fascinating Andalusian eyes; wavy, rebellious hair which was darker than her eyes, if possible, and on whose waves lay a small golden hat which seemed to be shipwrecked like a gold-masted ship, a toy on that sea which at every instant overflowed in the form of a provocative lock of hair on the narrow Greek forehead, giving an excuse to the small agile hand to throw it back with a movement of affectionate familiarity; wrapped in a luxurious bronze-colored velvet coat whose folds let one guess the exciting form of a body which had reached the height of splendid development; high breast, full throat which rose in a soft curve to lose itself in a swan skin wrapped around the neck like a snow-white viper. (1948, 92)

[alta, blanca, con esa blancura ligeramente sonrosada bajo la cual se adivina la sangre ardiente y joven; de ojos negros, relampagueantes, ojos andaluces, enormes, luminosos, fascinadores, el pelo ondeado, rebelde, sin reflejos, más negro, si cabe, que los ojos, sosteniendo en sus olas de tinta una gorrita dorada que parecía naufragar, como bajel de mástiles de oro, juguete de aquel mar que a cada instante se desbordaba en forma de provocativo mechón sobre la angosta frente griega, dando pretexto a una manecita ágil y regordetona para echarlo atrás con un movimiento lleno de familiaridad cariñosa; envuelta en lujoso abrigo de terciopelo bronceado, cuyos pliegues dejaban adivinar las formas incitantes de un cuerpo llegado al apogeo de su espléndido desarrollo; alto el seno, la garganta llena y turgente, escapándose en suave curva para ir a confundirse con la piel de cisne arrollada al cuello como una víbora de nieve. (1891, 96–97)]

Health, high color, sensuality, and rich clothing all come together in this description of beauty, excess, and danger. Margarita is far more astute than her husband, perceiving that he is likely to be swindled, and she is suspicious of the dishonorable people he is dealing with. While Glow is giddy over the prospect of investing in an underhanded scheme to make cheap liqueur, Margarita has been following the stock market with a dispassionate

eye. She is a better judge of investments and has a cooler head than her husband. It is he who makes the showy display of burning lights in every room in the house, and when she chastises him for his ostentatious waste, he blames her for not being at home to greet him. Refusing to stay quite in her place as the angel in the house, Margarita begins to embody the transgressive woman whose monstrosity lurks beneath the surface. Her sexuality is firmly accounted for within the novel, but her superior economic acumen is another link, however domesticated, to the Jewish threat against which the naive Glow has no defense other than his antisemitism, which is not sufficient to check his greed.

Luis Glow, whose first and last names both suggest the light of modernity, and whose title, Doctor, bestows society's recognition of a secular formal education and perhaps even wisdom, ends in a descent into madness, destroyed by the stock market, which drives him "insane, insane forever" (1948, 195) [*¡loco, loco para siempre!* (1891, 311)]. In his delirium, he succumbs to a beautiful temptress who turns into a monster, entrapping him in her claws, stabbing him with her quills, and breaking his body. In its seductive beginnings, what will become that nightmare vision is reminiscent of Margarita herself, with her serpentine neck, bare arms, and warm breast, "the most beautiful creature that his eyes had ever beheld" (1948, 194) [*la criatura más hermosa que habían contemplado sus ojos* (1891, 310)]. Just before she reveals her true nature as a horrible beast, Glow, trapped in his own desire, "tasted all the joys of love and of satisfied vanity" (1948, 194) [*probó todos los goces del amor y de la vanidad satisfecha* (1891, 310)]. Once he is ensnared in her embrace, she turns into a hairy, reptilian, sharp-edged monster that identifies itself as the stock exchange, associating Margarita with the temptress stock market in its deadliest incarnation.

The lure of the material—of the feminine, of sensual delight and vast wealth—makes Glow seek out the monster, the deformed, literally grasping and clutching beast that, however seductive, is also metaphorically the Jew with whom it has been identified through the course of the novel. The all-engulfing feminine materializes in this nightmare in which the stock exchange is personified and made monstrous at the same time. Here Martel conjures the fear of castration, images of the vagina dentata, and the terror of being engulfed by the feminine, which he has already associated with the degenerate Jewish cabal at the center of the corrupt and corrosive stock exchange. Not for nothing did Martel choose his pseudonym; the medieval warrior's hammer deals a fierce and wicked blow to Jewishness, femininity, and modernity.

In order to function, modern urban financial success requires the very system of corruption that the Jew is conscripted to embody in this novel. The young capitalist earns his money by investing (i.e., by speculating), not by exchanging his labor for wages, or by exploiting Argentina's natural resources, or even by dint of inheritance. These more straightforward means of earning a living are intimately connected to the rural life that Alberto Gerchunoff claims as deeply Jewish, once the Jews have left their shtetls and come to Argentina.

In contrast to *The Stock Market*, Alberto Gerchunoff's *The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas*, set in autochthonous rural Argentina, makes the case that Jews are ideal Argentines. Gerchunoff embraces the gaucho myth as well as the project of development, the scene of robust, implicitly reproductive sexuality and the modernization-cum-Argentinization of Jews who, nevertheless, keep their Jewishness intact. Gerchunoff stakes a claim for Jewish Argentineity that is also vigorously and normatively masculine without relinquishing the settlers' deeply held Jewishness.⁹ By naming their town Moisés Ville, in honor of the Jewish baron who bequeathed them the land and reminiscent of the biblical figure who led their ancestors out of slavery in Egypt, the Jewish settlers tie the place to a particularly Jewish strain of patriarchy, one that makes a place for women as sexual beings. Unlike Martel, Gerchunoff has no need for a demonized feminine sexuality. His Jewish women settlers are healthily fertile, as if in sympathy with the land. The majority of them are willing adjuncts to their husbands and dutiful daughters to their fathers. The desire they arouse is destined to be contained within a marriage in which they are expected to be productive, not ornamental.

Gerchunoff's Jewish men are the ideal rural males in their physical prowess, but they also epitomize Jewish masculinity in their dedication to study. Women are necessary for reproduction and for male sexual delight. Gerchunoff's earthy Jewish women settlers are the antidote to the consumerist beauty of Glow's wife in *The Stock Market*, but in other ways they are not that unlike Margarita, prized for their beauty and their capacity to reproduce. In both texts the women are secondary, present in relationship to the men who value them. But whereas Margarita is the decorative wife who permits Glow to display his affluence, Gerchunoff's hardy Jewish women are productive, hardworking participants in the colonial project. Still, in their voluptuousness, both Gerchunoff's Jewish milkmaid and Martel's bourgeois wife are described with a lasciviousness that is only recuperated by their containment in sanctioned masculine desire.

This is not to suggest that Gerchunoff displays no anxiety about the perils of assimilation. These are gender-coded as well: he tells the story of

the insufficiently demure young woman who runs away with a real—not a Jewish—gaucho. For although the Jewish men who are his heroes live in the countryside and learn to drink maté, ride horses, and handle a knife, they are new settlers, not the often-itinerant cattle-herders of indigenous and European ancestry named by the term *gaucho*. Only their connection to rural Argentina makes it possible for Gerchunoff to so strategically call these Jewish settlers gauchos. Ironically, the Jewish gauchos (the name stuck) are part of the modernizing project of rural development, a project that in essence does away with the real-life gaucho. They are willing, if not necessarily self-aware, pawns in the national goal of ethnic cleansing, displacing the indigenous inhabitants of the land.¹⁰ Their part in the modernizing project culminates with migration to the cities as subsequent generations chose to leave the agricultural colonies in favor of higher education, the professions, and the world of commerce. In all of this, Gerchunoff and subsequent cheerleaders for Jewish participation in the project of making Argentina, make the case for a specifically Jewish Argentineity.

As the cultural valence of transgressive sexuality changes, as gender queer and sexual transgression (particularly women's embrace of their sexuality and of desire itself) tip toward the positive, the meaning they lend to any text also must shift. A feminist perspective radical thirty years ago but now perfectly mainstream, for example, reveals the crude underlying sexism of Martel's *The Stock Market* of a piece with its antisemitism and homophobia. It also reveals similar attitudes concerning women's proper place in Gerchunoff's *The Jewish Gauchos*, highlighting the shared heteronormativity of both texts.

Although both *The Stock Market* and *The Jewish Gauchos* are part of the project of modernity—colonization, development, urbanization, assimilation, and the policing of gender—the contrast between the two texts' understanding of Jewishness in that project could not be more stark. Gerchunoff's Jew is integrationist, assimilationist, and nationalist, while holding on to religious tradition. The healthy Jewish body of the Jewish gaucho and his family, and the appropriate sexuality of desirable women and men who build those families, stand in stark contrast with Martel's sickly, sexually suspect, cosmopolitan Jew. For both, the ideal male is the handsome protagonist with his charming wife and beloved children, the ideal, heterosexual, reproductive head of household who provides the model for the benignly patriarchal state.

Given the obsessive connection between sexual degeneracy and Jewishness, it is no surprise that *The Jewish Gauchos* and subsequent texts

petitioning for Jewish admittance as trustworthy, respectable Argentine citizens cleave so strongly to heteronormativity and sexuality in the service of reproduction. The Gerchunoff character who all but drools in the presence of a lusty young Jewish farmer's daughter is displaying a state-sanctioned masculinity that is in concert with patriarchal norms. Women's own desire is subdued in the text, except as a counterexample, and even there the breach is well within the bounds of heterosexual propriety. The young woman who runs off with her Gentile suitor establishes a marriage with him. Her behavior may be devastating to her Jewish family and community, but it also serves to reinforce the bonds of heteronormativity between Jewishness and Argentineity and even presages the assimilation-cementing intermarriage that becomes so common in later generations.

Nothing less than the right to full nationality is at stake in Jewish masculinity, an observation rendered obvious in any consideration of Argentine Jewish texts that deal with Israel. The tension of the other-as-same within the nation that wreaks havoc on Jewish masculinity in Argentina (and elsewhere in the diaspora) is resolved in straightforward Zionist masculinity, the fully realized Jew as rightful inhabitant of the land. The Jewish man in these texts does not have to deal with his Jewishness as *another* way of being fully part of the nation; in Israel he can claim untroubled belonging. In Daniel Burman's *The Empty Nest* (*El nido vacío*, 2008), for example, the Israeli son-in-law is the ideal man who bests the Argentine father in the competition for the daughter's love. More importantly, he is the Jewish writer as supermacho, winner of prizes and famous throughout the world.¹¹

In Jewish Argentine texts that figure Israel, Jewish claims to heteronormative masculinity are often bound up with the warrior figure of Israeli nationalism. Elías, the protagonist of Marcelo Birmajer's *Tres mosqueteros* (Three musketeers, 2001), moves to Israel to become a spy to help protect Jews as a direct result of his inability to protect his two friends in Argentina when they became urban guerrillas and were captured by the paramilitary. Zionism is a masculine project in these, and other, Argentine Jewish texts. In Burman's *Lost Embrace* (*El abrazo partido*, 2004) the father has long ago left his family and gone off to Israel. He is eventually absolved of the abandonment of his wife and son when it is revealed that he left because his wife was unfaithful to him, effectively trampling on his masculinity. When he returns, it is as an Israeli war hero, but he is also physically scarred—his missing arm is a kind of castration that is also a sign of heroic masculinity, a visible sign of a damaged virility recuperated by sacrificing himself for the land of absolute Jewishness and absolute Jewish masculinity. The film

ends with the father and son marching together arm in arm, a reconciliation that leaves the mother behind. The war-hero father embodies ideal masculinity for the son. Israel in these texts is clearly a space of Argentine masculine Jewish desire, where Jewish manhood can be rewritten, as it was on the pampas.

Gregorio Tavosnanska's 1999 novel *Ydel, el judío pampa* (Ydel, the pampas Jew) can be read as an homage to *The Jewish Gauchos*, abiding as it does by the values, and even more deeply by the themes, of Gerchunoff's foundational text. Published close to a century after *The Jewish Gauchos* but set in around the same period, Tavosnanska's novel is structurally more complex than Gerchunoff's series of vignettes, and, with the inclusion of a Black character who describes his life before and after slavery, he is more sensitive to the racism of the era than Gerchunoff. Nevertheless, his Ydel (the Yiddish form of Judah, a name that translates literally as "Jew") is a hypermasculine figure who loses his virginity on the boat to Argentina and whose sexuality is subsequently properly channeled in marriage. The older woman who initiates him, and who makes the experience of the voyage a time of pleasure and delight only the two of them share, is called Raquel, a name long associated with Jewish prostitution in Argentina.¹² Once Raquel teaches Ydel to please women sexually she conveniently disappears from the text, allowing him to be both an expert lover and a good husband. Raquel essentially dissolves into the city; the woman who is marked as sexually free has no place in the productive—and reproductive—countryside.

Ydel makes a Jewish home on the pampas anchored by his wife and father, but he also enjoys the freedom of the journey by horseback that makes him a true Argentine man. Tavosnanska contrasts him not only to his wife Fany, who has somewhat less than happily given up the communal life of the small agricultural settlement, where women enjoy each other's company in carrying out their domestic duties, and who fears the weapons her husband has learned to use, but also to his elderly father, who represents the old country and the old ways. The old patriarchy gives way to the new. Unlike his father, Ydel learns Spanish, drinks maté, rides his horse, and dresses in the gaucho garb that allows freedom of movement on horseback and protects him against the cold. Ydel is proud of his skill with the *facón*, the short-handled knife that any self-respecting gaucho must learn to wield. He is also proud that he makes up for taking his wife away from women's companionship by providing her with sexual satisfaction. Her desire satisfied, she is not only unquestionably, but also unquestioningly, subordinate. Like Gerchunoff, Tavosnanska inserts his exemplary Jewish male into the

most Argentine of settings, making and remaking the case for Jewish Argentinicity rooted in proper masculinity. The story is his; dominant narratives of generation and gender assure that. Nevertheless, Tavosnanska's retelling of the foundational story is less sanguine about the adaptation of Jews to Argentina and vice versa. Even the bitterest episode of *The Jewish Gauchos*, in which Gerchunoff memorializes the death of his father at the hands of an angry gaucho, is burnished by the author. In *Ydel*, on the other hand, Tavosnanska does not minimize the hardships of settling the land. Nor does the narrative nurtured and proffered to tourists by the handful of Jewish women of contemporary Moisés Ville who are dedicated to maintaining and transmitting the Jewish history of their town.

About a hundred years after the first boatload of Russian Jews landed in Buenos Aires, the schoolchildren of Moisés Ville, as if in homage to Gerchunoff, were invited to create a rosy picture of the settlement of that Jewish village on the pampas and a happy coexistence between immigrant Jews and their already-Argentine neighbors. The charming murals they painted decorate the walls surrounding the Moisés Ville museum on the Argentine

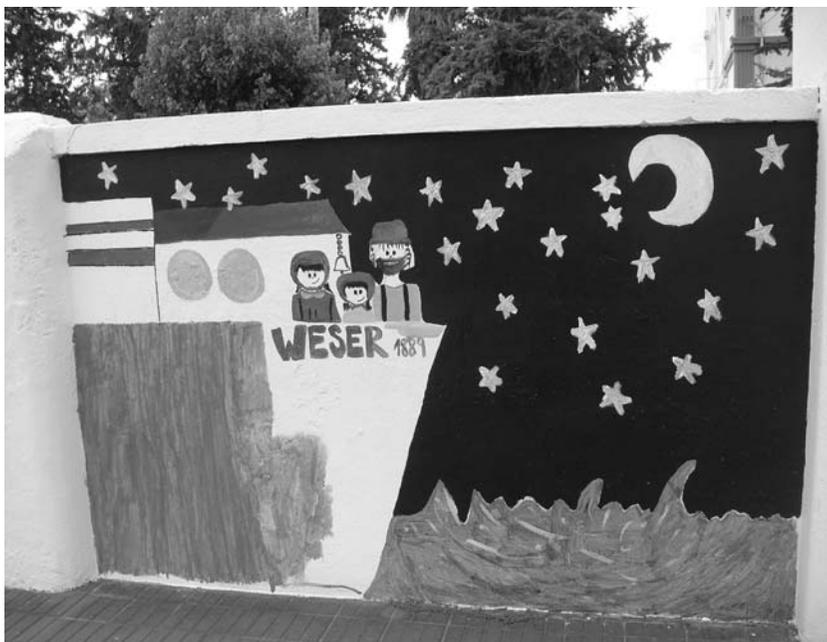


Figure 1.1. Anonymous. Children's mural of the arrival of the SS *Weser*. Source: Amy Kaminsky.

pampas, depicting the arrival of the steamship *Weser*, bringing smiling Jewish immigrants to the shores of Argentina. Nearby, the artists have joined traditional Jewish symbols—the Star of David and the menorah—with icons of Argentine nationalism—the flag, the map, the nation’s colors—to celebrate both the nation’s welcome of these immigrants and the Jews’ embrace of Argentine national identity. Between these two images is a darker one, linking the Holocaust to Argentina’s 1976–1983 dictatorship (see chapter 7).

Indeed, the Jews of the *Weser* came at the invitation of the Argentine government, intent on filling the land with Europeans and scuffing the traces of the indigenous people they had pushed off this fertile land. What happened to the *Weser* travelers does not make for joyous murals; you learn about that only by entering the museum itself. In other words, that story is legible to those who go beyond the triumphalist story of immigration and assimilation.

In 1881 the Argentine government, which had begun its invitation to immigrants years before as a way to populate their new nation with industrious European stock, extended its reach to those it had formerly



Figure 1.2. Anonymous. Children’s mural in Moisés Ville, including map of Argentina with Jewish, indigenous, and national symbols. *Source:* Amy Kaminsky.

eschewed: Eastern European Jews. The eugenicist impulse to create a racially superior nation was not entirely abandoned, and the Jews, like the Italians who constituted such a large percentage of Argentina's immigrants, were not thought to be of the caliber of the British, French, and Germans who preceded them and were welcomed somewhat more ambivalently.

The original group of approximately one hundred and thirty families (just over eight hundred people) that sailed on the *Weser*, led by their rabbi, arrived in Argentina from Ukraine in 1889. They had agreed to purchase land from Rafael Hernández, who reneged on the deal, leaving the immigrants stranded. A second landowner agreed to sell them property on which to settle, and after several weeks in the Immigrants' Hotel, an overcrowded holding area meant to house two thousand but sheltering three times as many, the Weser Jews made their way to the pampas town of Palacios in hopes of meeting up with the agent who had promised them their land. He did not appear.

Why did these landowners feel they could do this? Were they simply scoundrels? Did these immigrants simply seem less than human to them? Was their being Jews a factor?¹³ Without the land they had been promised, this small band of Jewish immigrants could not build themselves proper shelter, so they remained over the winter in the railway station where they had been abandoned. Those who survived did so thanks to the charity of the railway workers who gave them food. One hundred and eighty died, including more than seventy children. The following spring, Wilhelm Lowenthal, a Jewish agronomist visiting from Europe at the request of the Argentine government, passed through the station where the travelers were encamped. He heard their story and brought it to the attention of the authorities, and upon his return he prevailed upon Baron Maurice von Hirsch to buy land in Argentina to set aside for Jewish settlers escaping antisemitic violence in Russia and Poland.

Rafael Hernández's brother, José, authored what is arguably the national epic of Argentina, *The Gaucho Martín Fierro* (*El gaucho Martín Fierro*), which mythologizes and laments the gaucho, whose way of life is eroded by the arrival of the new immigrants. His poem documents the violence of gaucho life; it is a testament to a brutal brand of masculinity. *Martín Fierro* can be read as a paean to violence, violently extirpated. Chillingly, the great poet's brother performed a real act of violence of his own that ended in the death of scores of children and adults. After the winter was over, their families carried their bodies to what would become Moisés Ville, led to their new home by their Italian settler neighbors. The children

were among the first to be buried in the town cemetery; their graves are marked by the long grass of the pampas, at the edge of the crowded rows of headstones of their parents and subsequent generations. The stories of some of those people can be read through their gravestones: the dead are identified as mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, wives and husbands. Sometimes their professions are engraved in those stones, and sometimes the nature of their deaths. Family plots indicate generational continuity, and the grandest headstones signify wealth or stature in the community. At the edge of the cemetery, but within its walls, lie a handful of suicides—testament, I imagined as I stood in front of them, to the struggle to adjust to life in such a harsh and strange place.

The origin story of the journey of the *Weser*—the struggle to survive, the leadership of their rabbi, and the rescue by Lowenthal and later Hirsch—has become part of the mythology of Argentine Jewish history. The retelling of this tale in Jewish immigrant narratives is one of the means of creating a legible Jewish past for Argentina.¹⁴ Jewish Argentine history is not separable from Argentine history tout court, but when told by Jews it is often inflected for Jewishness. The old joke about Peruvians descending from the Incas, Mexicans descending from the Aztecs, and Argentineans descending from boats becomes a Jewish tale of Exodus in the *Weser* story, and that story in turn encapsulates the story of the Jews who followed them. The voyage narrative is malleable: stories of Jews crossing the sea also include the voyages of women lured to Buenos Aires by men promising marriage but turning them out as prostitutes and ships filled with Jews trying to find refuge from the Holocaust. It has also been about sexual initiation (*Ydel*) and the birth of the new Argentine child (in Angélica Gorodischer's short story "Camera Obscura" (*La cámara oscura*, 1991)). The Jewish tales of the sea journey and subsequent fraught entry into Argentina intersect with stories of other immigrants, some coming down from those same boats.

These Jewish immigrants were becoming part of a community of Argentines even as they made the crossing, as depicted in the popular television miniseries *Vientos del agua* (*Winds of water*, 2006). The very Jewishness that separates these immigrants from others binds them to those others as part of an immigrant nation. Tzvi Tal, writing about the image of Jews in David Blaustein's 2007 documentary, *Hacer patria* (*Forging a nation*), observes:

[T]he story of the Jewish family is the story of the Argentineans, whose collective projects and national narratives have fragmented without the emergence of a political force that awakens popular

confidence and might channel it into necessary social reform. The courage of the Jewish immigrants who set sail for an unknown world in Argentina, and the effort they made to rebuild their lives and assure a better future for their children, are characteristics worthy of emulation by any Argentine confronting the consequences of neoliberalism and globalization. Despite the minoritarian residue of antisemitic xenophobia, the majority of the Argentine people recognize themselves in the cinematic images of the erstwhile “Russians” [i.e., Eastern European Jews] and identify with the small triumphs of the Jews of the film. (my translation)

[(L)a historia de la familia judía es la historia de los argentinos, cuyos proyectos colectivos y narrativas nacionales se han fragmentado sin que surja una fuerza política que despierte la confianza popular y pueda encauzarla en una imprescindible reforma social. El coraje de los inmigrantes judíos que se embarcaban hacia un mundo desconocido en Argentina, y los esfuerzos que dedicaron a reconstruir sus vidas y asegurar un mejor futuro a sus hijos, son características dignas de emulación por todo argentino que se enfrenta a las consecuencias del neoliberalismo y la globalización. Pese a la remanencia minoritaria de posturas xenófobas antisemitas, la mayoría de la población argentina se reconoce en las imágenes cinematográficas de los otrora “rusos” y se identifica con los pequeños éxitos y miserias de los judíos de película. (2010)]

Novelist Ernesto Sábato also links Jews and other immigrants as constitutive of an Argentine national character, in an overt and purposeful way, placing Jews more centrally in that formula. As María Rosa Lojo notes, in *Abaddón the Exterminator* (*Abaddón el exterminador*), the author’s alter ego, Sabato (sans accent), remarks:

My theory about the new Argentina . . . The result of three forces, three great nations: Spaniards, Italians, and Jews. If you think about it a little you’ll see that our virtues and our defects come from there. Yes, of course there are also Basques, Frenchmen, Yugoslavs, Poles, Syrians, Germans. But what’s fundamental comes from there. (my translation)

[Mi teoría sobre la nueva Argentina . . . Resultante de tres fuerzas, tres grandes pueblos: españoles, italianos y judíos. Si lo pensás un poco verás que nuestras virtudes y nuestros defectos vienen de ahí. Sí, claro, también hay vascos, franceses, yugoslavos, polacos, sirios, alemanes. Pero lo fundamental viene de ahí. (Sábato 193, ctd. in Lojo 53)]

Ricardo Piglia is another writer who associates Jewish with Italian Argentina, but in a far more muted way. In *The Absent City* (*La ciudad ausente*), Piglia names his protagonist Russo, a common Italian name that is, as well, a pun on “ruso,” or Jew. Not quite collapsing the two, Piglia rather sets them in an oscillation in which each is held in tension with the other. Russo, despite the complexity of his name, is not particularly marked by immigrant ethnicity. Instead, discursively linked to the Argentine avant-garde writer Macedonio Fernández (by preserving the soul of Macedonio’s dead wife), he is quintessentially Argentine.

For Sábato’s Sabato and, more discreetly, for Piglia, Jewishness is constitutive of Argentineity. These two Gentile authors subsume Jewishness into Argentineity: their implicit metaphor is the melting pot. Most of the Jewish-identified writers and artists discussed in this book, on the other hand, maintain the integrity and distinctiveness of Jewishness in the face of a sometimes-hostile dominant culture that is being claimed, also, as one’s own. For Piglia and Sábato being Argentine means being just a little bit Jewish; for the Jewish artists, filmmakers, and writers we will meet in this book, being Jewish is another way of being Argentine.