

The long journey of the Family Silver

Uruguay is a young country: it did not experience Antiquity, did not undergo the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, and only two hundred years ago it woke up as a by-product of Spanish imperialism. What today is the *República Oriental del Uruguay* (meaning „Eastern Republic of Uruguay”, being Uruguay a river) was formerly called *Banda Oriental* (literally, the „eastern bank of Uruguay river”), and it was a Spanish colony in South America. To Uruguayans, 1811 is the starting point of a revolutionary time, during which a series of seemingly unrelated events prepared the ground for the fight against the Spanish Crown: the armed opposition against England’s invasion (still as a colony) and the emergence of rural warlords, leading socially and politically marginalized people. The actual process of emancipation is culmination of a chain of historical events that includes federalist experiments (1811–1816), a period of Portuguese-Brazilian domination (1817–1828), an insurrection against the latter in 1825, and, finally, the declaration of independence and its first Bill of Rights (1830).

Brandishing their lyres, poets also joined the fight for independence. A seasoned and universally known cooperation between pens and swords, that means that, like any war, this one was fought both on the battlefield and in the most abstract field of ideas, through two main aesthetics: Neoclassicism and gaucho poetry. Although we will return to the latter from time to time, I will focus here on the classical muse.

She is the bearer of what in Spanish we call *las joyas de la abuela* („grandma’s jewelry”). The saying has an English equivalent in „the family silver”, referring to objects or beliefs of immensurable and everlasting value, things that are part of the very essence of any

human group, and so, things that should never be sold or forgotten. This lecture is intended to examine the role played by our family silver, that is classical tradition in the Uruguayan nation-building process during the first third of the 19th-century.

In 1835, there were issued *Parnaso Oriental* („The Eastern” or „the Uruguayan Parnassus”), compiled by Luciano Lira, and *Un paso en el Pindo* („A step towards Pindus”), by Manuel Araúcho, both of neoclassical inspiration, as their titles suggest. Although universally considered the founding texts of our country, neither of them will stand the test of time, and a few years later, they will experience disdain and oblivion. The arrival of Romanticism to our shores dethrones the classical muse, whose lyre, apparently, could no longer charm individuals who did not understand its cultured language nor identify themselves with the protagonists of our independence, copiously celebrated by her patriotic odes. The gaucho muse, on the other hand, seemed to speak the language of the common people and had better luck than her sister, even surviving Romanticism.

In the Uruguayan academic field, the fate of the classical muse was not different: literary critics rescued her from of silence of forgetfulness when it began to study the so-called „nation-building poetry”, only at the end of the 19th-century, but the reunion was not a happy one. Francisco Bauzá, for example, stressed the important role played by gaucho poetry during the emancipatory wars but harshly criticized the neoclassical poets, whom he condemns for using an obsolete aesthetic to sing historical events that, according to him, required new expressive forms¹. More than a century later, documenting *Parnaso Oriental* and its pieces, Pablo Rocca studies the complex dialogue between them and the political project, but considering it „una masa confusa, de pocas variaciones temáticas y nula impronta personal” (a confusing mass, with few thematic variations and no personal input)².

¹ F. Bauzá, *Estudios Literarios*, Montevideo 1885, s. 99.

² P. Rocca, *Poesía y Política en el s. XIX. Un problema de Fronteras*, Montevideo 2003, s. 55.

Uruguayan first literature is, indeed, epigonal and it has the distinctive smell of Spanish and French 18th-century neoclassical poetry, but these criticisms object to its essential features: the imitation of traditional models as a creative principle, balance and moderation of form, and subjection to a formalized poetic art (in this case, Aristotle's and Horace's *Poeticae*, as mediated by Boileau and Luzán). All this is what makes a neoclassical text precisely that and not, as Bauzá, Rama and Rocca want, *avant-garde* Romantic poetry³.

The *Parnaso* was the first poetic anthology linked the *Banda Oriental*, this territory soon-to-be Uruguay; in it, Luciano Lira included texts that appeared in the Buenos Aires and Montevideo press, and loose leaflets that circulated around both cities or were issued on holidays and patriotic festivities. The collection follows closely the chronology of the emancipatory process in epic and patriotic terms. As Lira puts it:

Hemos tenido en vista al formar esta colección el reunir lo más selecto, y todo lo que tuviese relación con las grandes épocas de la patria, huyendo con escrupuloso cuidado de insertar en ella, nada que fuese personal⁴.

When compiling this anthology, we had in mind to bring together the most excellent, and everything related to the great time of our homeland, avoiding with scrupulous care to include anything personal in it⁵.

It is indicative of its political purpose, not only the prefatory statement regarding the „great time of our homeland”, but also the fact that it was published shortly after the first Bill of Rights was sworn. In this sense, *Parnaso Oriental* is an assertion of the newly

³ As explained by O. Karamán, *De la República de las Letras a la República Oriental del Uruguay. El neoclasicismo en la formación del Estado y el sujeto nacionales (1811–1837)*, Vancouver 2010, s. 8–9.

⁴ quoted in P. Devoto, *Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 1, Montevideo 1981, s. XII.

⁵ This and every other translation are mine.

acquired political freedom and, at the same time, a canonization of the main aesthetic at the time, „the most excellent”. Political and poetic order walk hand in hand, mutually legitimizing each other:

Los parnasos fundacionales constituyeron una suerte de soporte – uno de los varios soportes – sobre el cual la clase letrada vinculada al proyecto de Independencia y fundación de los Estados – Nación de América Latina reformularon/propusieron/construyeron el imaginario colectivo de sus respectivos países, ya sea mediante la apropiación o la nacionalización de su pasado colonial, ya mediante su creación *ab nihilo*⁶.

The [Latin-American] founding *Parnassus* served as an endorsement – one of many – on which the cultured class linked to the independence project and Latin-American nation-building processes reformulated/depicted/ envisioned the collective imagination of their respective countries, either through an appropriation or nationalization of its colonial past, or through its creation *ab nihilo*.

This it to say that the poetic effort is corollary of the political one, and our young country had not only laws but also its very own Parnassus –an ancient cultural tradition on which it could rely on. It could also be thought that, beyond the poetic anthology and the historical testimony, *Parnaso Oriental* seems to have offered that young country a certain sense of „nationality”⁷. However, the statement is problematic because the very concepts „nation” or „border” do not apply easily to the 19th-century Río de la Plata. The problem is clear when we consider not only the presence but also the sheer number of events and heroes – that today we would consider Argentinian, celebrated in *Parnaso Oriental* and completely undifferentiated from their Uruguayan counterparts, proving what Carlos Real de Azúa had already noted: in its earlier stages, Uruguayan and Argentinian

⁶ H. Achúgar, *Parnasos fundacionales. Letras, nación y estado en el siglo XIX*, w: *La fundación por la palabra. Letra y nación en America Latina en el siglo XIX*, red. H. Achúgar, Montevideo 1998, s. 44.

⁷ P. Devoto, P. Devoto, *Parnaso Oriental...*, s. X.

founding poetry cannot be told apart, much less studied as something different from one another⁸.

Parnaso Oriental, thus, informs us of an imagined community, free from Spain, rather than any modern concept of „nation”, because, either politically or culturally, the inhabitants of the eastern bank of the Uruguay River did not consider themselves any different than their neighbors on the western bank. So it seems to prove it an ode that hails Argentina’s independence, written by Francisco Araújo (born in Montevideo) and titled *A la libertad de su patria* (1812, „To the Freedom of his Homeland”); this is to say, the poet considered Argentina his homeland as much as Uruguay:

¿Quién habrá, que consienta por mas tiempo
 El imperio fatal de los tiranos?
 No... que subió al Olimpo el fuerte grito
 De los hijos del Sud así clamando:
 O MUERTE, ó LIBERTAD ¡Augusto voto!
 Digno de ánimos nobles y bizarros.
 Ea, pues, valerosos Argentinos,
 Si tal resolución hemos fijado,
 Constantemente unidos conspirémos
 A realizar un voto tan sagrado.
Nuestra causa no puede ser mas justa:
 Los recursos están en **nuestros** brazos;
 Purguemos de rivales á la Patria,
 Y para siempre libres **nos** hagamos⁹.

Who will there be to consent to the fatal empire of tyrants any longer? No... the loud exclamation of the children of the South sored to the Olympus, thus crying: DEATH or FREEDOM! Majestic vow!

⁸ C. Real de Azúa, *De los Orígenes al Novecientos*, Montevideo 1968, s. 2. Regarding this: O. Karamán, *De la República de las Letras...*, s. 58–59; P. Rocca, *Poesía y Política...*, *passim*.

⁹ M. Araújo, *A la libertad de su patria*, w: *Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 1, red. P. Devoto, Montevideo 1981, s. 13, emphasis is mine.

Worthy of noble and bizarre spirits. Come, then, brave Argentinians, if we have made such a resolution, let us come together, always together, to fulfill a sacred oath. **Our** cause could not be more just; the means rest in **our** hands. Let us purge our homeland of enemies, and **we** shall forever be free.

This fragment exemplifies not only the border problem (or its lack thereof), but also *Parnaso Oriental's* main theme: the homeland and its defense. It is, clearly, fertile ground for classical epic formulae and terminology, but our poets did not stop there, portraying our shores like a new theater of Homeric wars. This way, heroes, gods, and goddesses of classical Antiquity made their way to our shores, in force and with a vengeance.

The first Uruguayan dramatic play was written by a priest, Juan Francisco Martínez: *La libertad más acendrada y Buenos Aires vengada* („The purest loyalty and Buenos Aires avenged”). The play is an allegory celebrating the reconquest of Buenos Aires from English hands (1806). It portrays Buenos Aires as a nymph, a catholic nymph no less, bitterly crying her misfortunes, occupied as she is by „the vile Anglican, a horrendous monster”¹⁰; her daughter, Montevideo, offers her help and that of her children (that is, Montevideo’s Governor, its Town Hall, and its people). In the meantime, Mars comes to aid Spain, and England is championed by Neptune. The actual combat – the one carried on by mortals – takes place at the backstage while the gods face each other on stage in a fierce duel of colorful insults and name-calling:

Marte:

Y te juro por todas las deidades,
 El dejarte en tu abismo confundido,
 Echando sobre ti de un golpe solo
 Valles, selvas, peñascos, montes, riscos,
 Vesubios, Etnas, llamas, Mongibelos,

¹⁰ J. Martínez, *La libertad más acendrada y Buenos Aires vengada*, w: *Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 3vol. 3, Montevideo 1981, s. 233.

Y todos los incendios del abismo,
 Que chupen y consuman gota a gota
 El humor de tu imperio cristalino.
 Neptuno:
 Marte, dios sangriento, horrendo y feo,
 No sé cómo tus voces he sufrido;
 Pero ya mi venganza se prepara:
 Te juro por el sacro lago Estigio,
 Que en amparo y favor de Inglaterra
 He de abortar asombros y prodigios:
 Las escuadras y naves españolas
 Ha de sorber el mar en sus abismos¹¹.

Mars: And I swear to you by all the gods, I shall leave you muddled in your abyss, throwing onto you, at one fell swoop alone, valleys, jungles, boulders, mountains, cliffs, Vesuvius, Etnas, blazes, Mongibellos, and the fire of the abyss to drain and consume, drop by drop, the waters of your crystalline domain.

Neptune: Mars! You bloodthirsty, ugly, and horrendous god, I do not know how I have suffered your words, but my revenge is already being prepared. I swear to you by the sacred Lake Styx that, defending and aiding England, I shall bring forth wonders and marvels. The Spanish squadrons and ships shall be swallowed by the sea and cast into its depths.

The play is inspired by the confrontation between the Olympian gods regarding the fate of Troy in *Iliad*, but Martínez takes a step further, dignifying the local color to the detriment of the same literary references that nurture the allegory. At the end of the play, the chorus claims:

Alaben, canten, digan siempre extremos
 de esos semi-dioses fabulosos,
 fingiendo Magas, Cires, Polifemos,
 encantos y hechos de armas prodigiosos;
 que acá **en el Argentino** cantaremos

¹¹ *Ibidem*, s. 258.

de héroes más admirables y gloriosos
acciones, con que dejan confundidos
a **esos dioses soñados y fingidos**¹².

[Let others] praise, sing, and always claim excessive statements of those fabulous demigods, those imaginary Magas, Circes, Polyp-hemuses, their charms and extraordinary feats of war; that **here in Argentina** we shall sing the achievements of more admirable and glorious heroes, by which those **dreamed and fake gods** are left behind in bafflement.

It is a plain *amplificatio*. It crowns the hyperbole, apparently denying the *exemplum* and implying the model is now obsolete. The formula was liberally exploited by our Neoclassical poets, and is nothing but an overenthusiastic claim of a new era that allows the immediate audience to speculate on overcoming a tradition to start a new one. Although poets do not seem to acknowledge the irony, only classical tradition keeps the structure together.

The heroic characterization results from the undiscerning merger of Greek and Latin *exempla*, both historical and mythological, and martial traits are prevailing since love for the homeland almost always means defending it with one's life. This is, in fact, expressed as an ethical tenet in an ode written by Acuña de Figueroa sanctioned as our national anthem in 1833. Incidentally, it is also the first piece in *Parnaso Oriental*. The whole poem is organized around a series of mutually exclusive juxtapositions:

Orientales, la Patria ó la tumba!
Libertad, ó con gloria morir!
Es el voto que el alma pronuncia,
Y que heroicos sabremos cumplir¹³.

¹² *Ibidem*, s. 271–272, emphasis is mine.

¹³ F. Acuña de Figueroa, *Himno, declarado nacional por el superior decreto de 8 de julio de 1833*, w: *Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 11, s. 1, emphasis is mine.

Uruguayans, the homeland, *or* the grave! Freedom, *or* to die gloriously! That is the oath sworn by the soul and we shall heroically know how to fulfill it.

From this starting point, the following stanzas recall the times of Spanish and Brazilian control of our land, and the wars Uruguayans had to endure to finally enjoy their freedom. Thus, Acuña opposes two distinctive semantic fields: first, the one related to servitude and oppression and the one related to freedom, where we find mostly positive semes („homeland”, „laws”, „equality”, „patriotism”, „union”, „glory”). The ode concludes with a warning to those „barbarians who might affront Uruguayan greatness”; it promises them the spear of Mars and the dagger of Brutus¹⁴.

Juan Manuel Oribe was born in a patrician home of military tradition. He was active during the uprising led by Artigas and during the second siege of Montevideo. He was Lavalleja’s second in command at the *Cruzada Liberadora* („Crusade for freedom”, April 19, 1825); he fought and won several battles (Sarandí, 1825, Cerro in 1826, and Ituzaingó, 1827), before assuming the second democratic presidency of our country in 1835. A whole life dedicated to politics and warfare made of him the perfect candidate to celebrate, and this is exactly what Acuña de Figueroa profusely does in an ode commemorating August 25 (Battle of Sarandí), where he begins with a rhetorical question that is at the same time a *recusatio* as plain as its celebratory nature: „Who could limit in restrained verses illustrious Oribe’s most colossal glory?”¹⁵ His superlative praise, as it often happens in Acuña, is full of Homeric undertones and the character’s martial prowess puts him hand in hand with Achilles:

No más tremendo ante llión armado
se vió Aquiles furente
cuando hacia atrás turbado
volvió el undoso Xanto su corriente,

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, s. 4. Also vide. O. Karamán, *De la República de las Letras...*, s. 116–117.

¹⁵ F. Acuña de Figueroa, *En el 25 de mayo de 1836*, w: *Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 3, s. 6.

que en Sarandí se viera, y en el Cerro
 aquel héroe blandir el duro hierro:
 el hierro que en sus manos
 será siempre el terror de los tiranos¹⁶.

No more terribly brave before Troy ferocious Achilles was seen when it turned around the undying and muddled Xanthus's stream, that in Sarandí and in the Cerro it was seen that hero [Oribe] wielding hard iron in his hands. He will always be the terror of tyrants.

Oribe's exploits are like those of the Homeric hero to such an extent, that to sing his triumphs, Acuña turns the obscure place where the confrontation took place in a new Troy and the modest water stream that gives it name becomes a new Xanthos. In his characterization, Oribe has every prevalent trait of the classical hero: he is the quintessence of patriotic spirit, he is „the favorite son of our country”, „a brave champion”¹⁷, and no one guarded „the sacred privileges of our Laws” with more zeal than him.¹⁸ This way, he becomes „tutelary Numen” and „protector of the People”.¹⁹ Acuña de Figueroa only rivals to himself when it comes to his flattery, underlaying in his depiction the apotheosis in life with which the Romans honored Augustus²⁰: Oribe's birth was announced by the stars, the Fatherland itself calls his name in time of need, Apollo greets him while playing his „soft lute” (for some reason), and his kindness elevates him „like a new god”²¹.

Another one that climbs up to this pantheon of national heroes is Juan Antonio Lavalleja. Although some of his schemes during

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, s. 7.

¹⁷ F. Acuña de Figueroa, *Oda con el objeto de solemnizar la jura de la constitución del Estado Oriental del Uruguay*, w: *Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 1, s. 29.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, s. 30.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, s. 31.

²⁰ Cf. Hor. C. 4. 5. 31–36, 4. 14. 43–44.

²¹ F. Acuña de Figueroa, *Himno, declarado nacional...*, s. 26; O. Karamán, *De la República de las Letras...*, s. 129–130.

the first years of Uruguay's independent life do not shed good light on him, during the emancipatory process, he played a key role in opposing Brazilian domination. On April 19, 1825, he led a small group of soldiers („the Thirty-Three Uruguayans”) across the Uruguay River, the event known as *Cruzada Libertadora*. Uruguayan Neoclassical poets' perspective of the expedition is of an extreme exceptionalism; it is something unseen or untold before, unique in the history of mankind:

No suenan las Termópilas, los llanos
de Maraton no suenan;
Platée y Salamina
cual si no fueran són;
y ya no llenan
Leonídas y Temístocles el Orbe;
que otra gloria más ínclita domina,
y la atencion del Universo absórve.
Esos nombres ilustres se eclipsaron;
Los de Alvear y Brown los reemplazaron²².

Thermopylae do not sound anymore; the plains of Marathon do not sound anymore. This is like, and it is not like Plataea and Salamis. Leonidas and Themistocles no longer gratify the Orb because it now sounds a more distinguished glory and it captivates the attention of the Universe. Those illustrious names were eclipsed; Alvear and Brown replaced them.

Told as the poet did, the local skirmish transcend the limited scope of our borders, becoming a bright chapter in the history of wars. In terms of legitimacy, and this is always interesting – though not unfrequent – there is a pre-eminence of historical memory to the detriment of the poetic one. The everlasting remembrance

²² J. Varela, *Campaña del Ejército Republicano al Brasil, y Triunfo de Ituzaingó. Canto Lírico*, w: *Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 1, s. 62–63.

of events is assured by Clio rather than Calliope, and thus, unwritten mythology gives way to written history²³.

Every culture has its negative *exempla* and regarding these, *Parnaso Oriental* is also a commendable display of classical restraint, moderation, and *decorum*. The anthology reduces to an anecdotal minimum any references to foreign (once enemy) powers, like Brazil and Spain. As a result, and letting aside a few exceptions, our brave independent freedom fighters seem to be struggling against some abstract notion of servitude, rather than any specific political force.

Luciano Lira also silences the disgruntled whispers of civil war brewing on the horizon. Juan Antonio Lavalleja disputed our first president's power, Fructuoso Rivera, and the latter took arms against the second one, Manuel Oribe. It was an all-against-all fight that would eventually end in *La Guerra Grande* („the Great War”). However, almost nothing in *Parnaso oriental* informs us about these warlords battling each other in the countryside. For instance, just a few lines, politely veiled by classical allusions, remind us that Lavalleja was in Buenos Aires (May 1836), plotting against the Oribe's government, when Acuña de Figueroa invited him to come back to Uruguay by saying:

Cese ya el ostracismo; ven dichoso
 como nuevo Temístocles virtuoso,
 no quiera el hado insano
 hacer de un Escipión un Coriolano²⁴.

Let the ostracism end now; come back joyfully, like a new virtuous Themistocles, and do not let the insane fate turn a Scipio into a Coriolanus.

²³ Dramatically depicted by Florencio Varela, by a frustrated Apollo trashing his lyre and giving way to the personification of History (F. Varela, *Oda*, w: *Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 1, s. 137).

²⁴ F. Acuña de Figueroa, *Oda con el objeto...*, s. 6.

This Themistocles-wannabe is Lavalleja. Like the original one, he had fallen into disgrace and fled to Buenos Aires. The poem, however, does not say a single word about the uprising against the government, something that could very well be described as treason; the comparison is biased too because, according to Thucydides and Plutarch, Themistocles exiled himself when he lost the favor of the Athenian people, which it was not a crime *per se*, but Lavalleja was banished. So, the poet disguises the severity of his scheme and then he amplifies the depiction by invoking the Roman generals. By doing so, Lavalleja is presented with an alternative: to be remembered as a successful strategist or to go down in history as a crazy traitor motivated by revenge.

From his cultured ebony tower, Luciano Lira barely scrutinizes Uruguayan young society and political theater, allowing only very general and very light criticisms to his poetic republic. And, even so, these are more admonitory reprimands than condemnatory notes, and they certainly never reach the *ad hominem* level. On the contrary, the gaucho muse throws blunt and brutal accusations, condemning the crooked actions of government officials, sometimes identified by name or by impish nicknames, presumably well known to everyone²⁵. This is the case of Eugenio Garzón, of whom, thanks to an anonymous „cielito” (a folk song) we know, among many other things, that people called him *Chamusquina* („Scorchy”):

El coronel chamusquina
dicen que el Fuerte quemó
pa que se ardieran las cuentas
del dinero que robó²⁶.

Colonel Scorchy is said to have set the fort on fire to burn down the accounts of the money he stole.

²⁵ *La primitiva poesía gauchesca del Uruguay (1812–1851)*, red. L. Ayestarán, Montevideo 1950, s. 358.

²⁶ *Cielito compuesto por mi amigo Birrinchin*, *ibidem*, s. 363.

In four lines, the man is explicitly accused of two crimes; our gaucho muse is not known for being subtle. And so, letting aside the formal aspects, its general lack of discretion also makes of this little poem an unlikely candidate for Lira's anthology. All in all, the whole *Cielito* names six other politicians of its time, insulting and accusing them of embezzlement and corruption.

On July the 18th, 1830, the first Uruguayan Bill of Rights was sworn. It seems to have been a time of naïve optimism; the solemn and public oath that crowned the event was thought to be a definitive means to overcome any old disagreement. As it often happened in history, written laws were expected to have wonderful consequences, such as economic progress and social well-being for everyone. Contemporary poets reflect that spirit and, so, the Constitution is depicted as the end to the institutional chaos prevailing during the first thirty years of the 19th-century. Accordingly, commemorative odes bloom without limit, each piece more hyperbolic than the next and the authors of the Constitution are celebrated in style, retorting to a well-known stock pile of classical references:

Desde el recinto de legislar, sagrado,
 al dulce seno de la privada vida
 ya vais a descender; ya os ha llegado
 la clausura debida,
 que la toga dejando
 y al trabajo tornando,
 cual otro Cincinato
 Honor de Roma, sed su fiel retrato²⁷.

Now you leave the sacred parliament halls to return to the sweet embrace of home. You have already fulfilled your task, and now, leaving behind your togae and going back to your work, be like another Cincinnatus – Roman jewel – and be true to his example.

²⁷ I. De María, *Oda. Al cerrarse los trabajos parlamentarios de la 2da Legislatura Nacional*, w: *Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 3, s. 46.

Reverence to the law is such that it indeed becomes an object of some secular new faith, and as in any neoclassical commemorative ode, Isidoro de María's poem exudes an aura of sacredness or supramundane transcendence. That new judicial body can only be handled by individuals of sublime sobriety and greatness, and in turn, they are out-of-this-world men whose wisdom lights everything around them.

Florencio Varela, singing to the „Jura” (the pledge of allegiance), even concocts a divine apparition, an „august deity, bearing the spoils of war, and an olive branch among them”²⁸. Obviously, she is Minerva. The goddess holds her iron spear high, adorned with Freedom as a badge of honor, while Strife lies defeated at her feet²⁹. Through and through, this ode has a huge solemn performativity, that it reaches a climax when the goddess points at „the sacred tome in which Wisdom engraved the rights of the people”³⁰. The spiritual children of the mythological virgin, faithful to this republican creed, worship the Constitution in some kind of general communion, by which they become one and the same by the shared pledge:

Ellos llegan: con miedo religioso
doblando la rodilla,
de nuevo juran mantenerlo iléso;
y cargar de baldones y mancilla
el nombre del apóstata insolente
que atropellarle en su delirio intento³¹.

They come full of religious fear and bending their knees, swear to keep it [the Bill of Rights] safe and to brand as infamous and shameful the name of the insolent apostates who irrationally may try to run over it.

²⁸ F. Varela, *Oda*, s. 141.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, s. 142.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

I think it is important to point out here that even though that „religious fear” is simply poetic figure here, many of those attending the pledge were illiterate and had good reason to doubt, even to be afraid of the contents of that „sacred tome”. In any case, the social contract that joins mankind under the same political umbrella is the guardian of the pledge; therefore, *Parnaso Oriental* doggedly praises it while warning about any insurrection against the young government, bound to result in chaos and misery:

La ambiciosa anarquía es un torrente,
hórrido abismo de furor cruénto,
que arrebatada con impetu violento
a la Patria, al Patricio é Inocente³².

The ruthless anarchy is a horrid torrent, an abyss of bloodstained fury, that snatches away with fierce violence our Fatherland from the patrician and the innocent alike.

Presumably, this anarchy refers to Lavalleja’s first uprising, which so challenged those poets’ optimism and excessive confidence in the power of the written law. Unfortunately for the literate city reality was far different from its peaceful dream of prosperity and justice, and at the beginning of 1834, Lavalleja once again was raising the specter of civil war.

Although at least someone took it as a joke and wrote a gaucho parodic epic, *La Lavallejada* (something like „The Lavallajiad”; Devoto, 1981b: XVIII–XIX), the astonishing insistence of most poets on peace, unity, and brotherly love we find in *Parnaso Oriental* seems intended to conjure them up in bombastic performative terms rather than to describe an actual state of affairs at the time.

De hoy mas la Patria brillará en la historia
constituida, feliz, independiente³³.

³² F. Delgado, *En las fiestas de Julio de 1832. A la Patria*, w: *Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 1, s. 180.

³³ F. Acuña de Figueroa, *Oda con el objeto...*, s. 146.

From now on, our homeland will shine in history as well – established, happy, and free.

This future is endowed with many positive traits, the most important of them being equality and freedom, thought by those poets to be essential human rights. That first Bill of Rights represents the beginning of a new era whose prosperity rivals that of the mythical Golden Age. In Emilio Irigoyen's words, Neoclassical poetry brings together a proud self-affirmation, the longing for an ideal past, and a complete confidence in the future into expressions reminiscent of Virgil's Arcadia³⁴. However, this idyllic and exceptionalist vision of Uruguayan Neoclassical poets necessarily points at a desired future rather than at a long-lost past (nonexistent in Uruguay whatsoever).

In Uruguay, Arcadia's economic stability depends on livestock farming, multiplying by itself on empty grasslands. Two thousand years after Hesiod, the inhabitants of that young republic (as for many today), the future depended on livestock as the main source of wealth and progress. For that reason, it is not surprising that shepherding is celebrated along with the first Bill of Rights:

Ya el Pastoréo empieza
a anunciar del Estado la grandeza;
antigua como el Mundo
esta fuente de vida,
por la Lei protegida,
difundirá su manantial fecundo:
torna al Pueblo Oriental el siglo de oro,
y el Pastoréo es su mejor tesoro³⁵.

Now it comes the livestock grazing to announce the greatness of our land; ancient as the world itself, this means of livelihood is now protected by law, and it shall deepen its prolific well of wealth. The Golden

³⁴ E. Irigoyen, *La patria en escena. Estética y autoritarismo en Uruguay. Textos, monumentos, representaciones*, Montevideo 2000, s. 42.

³⁵ F. Acuña de Figueroa, *A la Jura de la Constitución en 1830, w: Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 1, s. 153.

Age returns to the Uruguayan people, whose most valuable treasure is shepherding.

The rural economy had already made its way to the national coat of arms a year before. An ox stands together with a horse (symbolizing freedom), the scales of justice, and the Cerro de Montevideo. As every Uruguayan learn in school, the ox represents both wealth and hard work, as understood by two different but complementary traditions. On the one hand, since classical times, cattle have been a measure of wealth. On the other hand, the ox is linked to a rural, sedentary, and peaceful life, as sung by Virgil in his *Georgicon*.

Although it would take fifty years before industrialization to change the economy and for codes of law and educational programs to produce any substantial change, in 1830, hope was in the air, and Uruguayans thought their little republic had much to offer. Thus, poets fully dedicated themselves to promoting that new country's wealth (real or not), stressing its natural resources as well as its immaterial assets (such as freedom and justice). With doing so, they sought to lure foreigners to take shelter under that „tree of Liberty” that would „lavishly grow” in fertile Uruguayan soil³⁶:

Bajo su sombra aména,
del Támesis al Nilo,
y desde el Volga al Séna,
vendrán los libres á buscar asílo;
y dirá el Mundo al repetir tu nombre,
¡He allí la patria general del hombre!³⁷

Under its pleasant shade, to seek refuge, freemen shall come from every corner, from the Thames to the Nile, from the Volga to the Seine. And the entire world will say, when repeating your name, „Behold the universal homeland of mankind!”

³⁶ F. Acuña de Figueroa, *Oda con el objeto...*, s. 149.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

Uruguay was going to be the envy of the Old World, depicted not only as a cultivated but also cultured land. In fact, an ode in *Parnaso Oriental* explicitly seeks to ward off the idea of it as an endless and desolate no-man's land, a refuge for unsophisticated indians and vicious bandits:

No soledad y llanos solamente
 el viajero en su marcha irá mirando,
 cuando de Oriente el campo atravesando
 contemple nuestro ser independiente,
 dó quiera verá jente,
 activa y laboriosa:
 dó quier ciudad famosa
 de artes y ciencias utiles enchida,
 do el Ciudadano libertad respira,
 dó la Ley igualmente repartida,
 no la persona, si la causa mira³⁸.

Wandering around, the traveler will see much more than endless and barren plains. When he comes to Uruguay and walks across its fields, he will see our freedom. Everywhere he goes, he will see busy and industrious people. Everywhere he sees, a famous city educated in useful arts and sciences, where the citizen breathes freedom, where the law, applied equally to human beings, does not look at individuals but at justice.

This is how the classical muse of city-literate men depicted the social, political, and cultural reality of that new country. The question is what was the gaucho muse saying in the meantime? Gaucho poetry poses a stark contrast to that of neoclassical poetry, addressing the severe inequalities and paradoxes in place at a larger level; for, in fact, the reality of the urban elite was completely divorced from the one of rural people and their problems. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that it was precisely in the countryside where

³⁸ A. Arufe, *Oda, w: Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda Poética de la República Uruguaya*, vol. 2, s. 56–57.

most cows (that is, wealth) and people (warlords among them) lived. In other words, the literate city and its dreams of peace were sitting on a powder keg that could go off at any moment with an uprising of the marginalized masses asserting their claims.

A parenthesis is needed here because the gaucho muse is an urban creature, born of nativist dreams, yes, but very much nurtured in the city like her classical sister. By no means does gaucho poetry represent a real popular culture, as opposed to the high one. However, unlike her sister, who concerns herself only with extraordinary events in the cultured language of the sublime, the gaucho muse addresses everyday life issues, mimicking gaucho and folk speech. Accepted this grotesque oversimplification, in *Diálogo de dos gauchos* („Dialogue between two gauchos”), Manuel Araúcho explains the fraught relationship between city and countryside people.

On the one hand, bread is expensive because bakers refuse to knead dough if they do not use wheat bought at unreasonably high prices, to make profit; on the other, the landowners do not pay their debts on grounds of being bankrupt. On the face of it, neither with bread nor with money, Trejo – one of the two gauchos – offers the other one a practical, albeit brutal relief:

Vamos al rodeo, amigo,
Que nos dé el viento del campo,
Porque ya estoy muy caliente,
Y puede tentarme el diablo.
De irme al pueblo ahora mismo,
Y con un garrote, á palos
Comenzar por los del pan
Y acabar por los quebraos³⁹.

Let's take the longer road instead, pal, so we can feel some cool wind on our faces. I'm already fumin', and the devil might coax me to go

³⁹ M. Araúcho, *Diálogo de dos gauchos. Trejo y Lucero*, w: *La primitiva poesía gauchesca del Uruguay (1812–1851)*, red. L. Ayestarán, Montevideo 1950, s. 413.

to town rite now and to beat the pulp out of the bakers first and the broken ones later.

The poetic process of national building could not hide the many cracks and fractures that resulted from the enforced coupling between two different worlds and realities, mutually opposed and mutually deaf to one another. The gaucho poetry strove to make visible other characters of the emancipatory process while not really sharing the republican project at the end of it. Uruguayan Neoclassicism, on the other hand, only reached out to the city population, the only one that could understand its classical references. So, in summary, *Parnaso Oriental* is a nation-building dream of the literate city on paper. In practice, the effort should have considered that other part of society, angry, as we saw, at bakers and landowners. And I say „it should have” because clearly it did not.

The project failed, and the Neoclassicism ideologically backing that project failed as well. Shortly after 1830, most literary and political sensibilities expressed their preference for the muse wearing poncho and espadrilles or the new contender, the Romantic one, always fainting and full of regrets, who had recently arrived from Europe.

No matter how severely wounded, classical tradition never truly dies: even though she was cast aside and reviled by critics, a hundred years later, the family silver rose to shine again in the Río de la Plata with the advent of Latin American Modernism. By then, our muse was hardly recognizable and no longer carried a sword, preferring instead a shepherd’s crook and pastoral clothing.

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