

# *History and the popular: rewriting national origins at the Argentine Bicentenary*

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# History and the Popular: Rewriting National Origins at the Argentine Bicentenary

*Catriona McAllister*

Argentina's Bicentenary celebrations commemorated the most significant date in the nation's patriotic liturgy: 25 May 1810. Although not the official moment of Independence, this date heralds the 'birth of the nation', a potent moment of origin that sets in motion the possibility of a national 'imagined community' in the terms outlined by Benedict Anderson. This primordial *fecha patria* has occupied a privileged position in nation-building discourses for the whole of its two-hundred year history, and its canonical narrative represents a founding pillar of what is known as 'official' (or 'liberal') history in Argentina: a recognisable set of historical discourses associated with liberal political ideas.<sup>1</sup>

This article sets out to explore two literary reconfigurations of May 1810 published around the time of Argentina's Bicentenary. Rather than conceiving of the self-reflexive, metafictional play with history in both texts as a meditation on the relationship between 'fiction' and 'fact', my analysis situates their historical reimaginings in relation to politicised configurations of the nation's foundational narrative. The close relationship between the 'official' version of May 1810 and the liberal nation-building projects of Argentina's nineteenth-century political elites, particularly through the dominance of Bartolomé Mitre's historical accounts, provided the narration of this origin with both a clear political role and distinct ideological association from its inception. This 'official' history has been challenged by different incarnations of 'revisionist' history throughout the twentieth century and, in the context of the lead-up to the Bicentenary, the intimate links between revisionist history and *kirchnerismo* provided an additional, inescapable politicised context within which to consider these rewritings.

The two texts I will explore are a novel, Washington Cucurto's *1810: la Revolución de Mayo vivida por los negros* (2008), and a play, Manuel Santos

1 On the idea of 'official history' in Argentina see Goebel 24–32 and Romero 39–49. On the symbolic role of 25 May in the early moments of Argentina's Independence struggle see Buch 29–33.

Iñurrieta's *Mariano Moreno y un teatro de operaciones* (2012, first performed 2010). Cucurto's novel is a raucous and irreverent romp through an alternative version of the nation's history, whilst Santos Iñurrieta's play embarks upon a metatheatrical, Brechtian retelling of Argentina's founding revolution. Both texts' engagement with the narrative of May 1810 is strongly focused on the idea of the popular, although configured in different, and politically significant, ways. This article will therefore explore the relationship between these characterisations and political traditions within Argentina, particularly those of Peronism and the Marxist Left, in relation to the public discourses of history generated by these groups as a challenge to 'official' history. By highlighting the importance of ideologically infused historical narratives for these literary rewritings, I aim to reconsider our assumptions about the relationship between literature and history in self-reflexive fictional engagements with the past, challenging the limited definitions of the 'political' that emerge from postmodern readings of the blurring of boundaries between the two.

### **Defining the Popular: Tradition and Reinvention**

The contrasting definitions of the 'popular' in both texts are negotiated through the role of the 'pueblo': a crucial actor in the traditional narrative of 25 May. In Mitre's account (the cornerstone of 'official' history), the *pueblo* emerges as a jubilant crowd celebrating the installation of what came to be known as Argentina's first government, the *primera junta*. This 'pueblo de la plaza pública', an embodiment of the 'popular will', appears as a seemingly united, homogeneous and patriotic political subject welcoming the dawning of a free Argentina.<sup>2</sup> This *pueblo* unites all individuals under the banner of the nation, ascribing to them a single voice and eliding people and nation in a seamless enunciative act. The 'people as citizens' of 25 May therefore also become an embodiment of what Homi Bhabha terms the 'nation-people' (200–9): the rhetorical category that allows slippage between the political construct of the nation-state and its apparent unified 'imagined community'. The *pueblo* therefore not only performs a distinct political role in the narrative of May 1810, but also provides a potent symbolic site for the negotiation of ideas of national identity.

In both texts explored in this article, this idea of a *pueblo* that is at once historical and timeless, a manifestation of the nation's people, is set against another definition – the idea of the *pueblo* as the 'popular classes' in opposi-

2 See Mitre's *Historia de Belgrano* 67–8.

tion to a cultural and economic elite. This conceptualisation is presented in two very different ways in these texts: one profoundly connected to the construction of the popular classes under Peronism, and the other bound up with the Marxist idea of the proletariat. This distinction corresponds to a crucial (if complex) divide in the Argentine political landscape between Peronism and the 'traditional Left' with a predominantly Marxist orientation. Whereas Marxist traditions conceptualise the proletariat in economic terms focussing on class, Peronism contributes additional cultural implications to its construction of the 'sectores populares', as explored in Maristella Svampa's detailed analysis of the concept of 'barbarie' in relation to Peronism. Svampa describes how, when Peronism initially erupted onto the Argentine political scene, the mass movement it unleashed did not correspond to the 'civilised' working-class revolutionary figure revered by the Marxist Left (253–4). Describing the initial reluctance of the Left to acknowledge Peronism as a political force, Svampa explains that 'Para los socialistas [el peronismo] tenía que ver más con la moral y el grado de educación, con la ignorancia y el resentimiento, que con la emergencia de un actor social hasta ahora desplazado de la escena política' (255). As a result of this perception, an oft-repeated refrain in opposition discourse from both sides of the political spectrum was the threat Peronism apparently posed to 'cultura', which was effectively employed as a synonym of 'civilización' and seen as allied with progress and reason, leaving the Peronist alternative as threatening descent into barbarism and chaos (Svampa 256). Even as intellectuals criticised Perón and his followers for their 'incultura', however, this rejection of 'civilised' norms was appropriated in Peronist discourse, which adopted what Svampa terms a 'barbarie autorreferencial' (209).

These contrasting definitions of the popular classes from Peronist and classical Marxist perspectives find their echo in opposing threads of revisionist history in Argentina. Revisionism, a historiographical current most commonly associated with the promotion of an alternative national pantheon centred on the figure of Juan Manuel de Rosas, has a long-standing association with Peronism (Halperín Donghi 40–3). The discourse of the Juventud Peronista, a prominent political force, drew heavily upon revisionist history to generate a narrative that reinterpreted Argentina's past as a series of conflicts between the *pueblo* and the forces of imperialism (Sigal and Verón 182). Within this revisionist historical vision, May 1810 becomes another manifestation of this eternal battle, projecting the Peronist *pueblo* back to the origin of the nation (see Sigal and Verón 47–9). Rather than an obedient crowd marking their approval of the liberal political project, as seen in Mitre's construction of the 'pueblo de la plaza pública', this *pueblo* embodies the restless spirit of 'barbarie' underlying the Peronist idea of the popular, a potent force ever-

ready to defend the *patria* against imperialist threats.

The challenges to liberal history from the ‘traditional’ Left focused on producing a Marxist interpretation of Argentine history rather than celebrating an alternative pantheon of *caudillos*.<sup>3</sup> Within the vision of history sustained by the Communist Party (PCA), the *pueblo* of 1810 has most commonly been depicted as a revolutionary force that embodies the latent radical potential of the proletariat.<sup>4</sup> This *pueblo* is a politically conscious body clamouring for revolution in explicitly Marxist terms, envisaging a different form of historical progression from that of the Peronist narrative outlined above. Significantly, Svampa asserts that these Marxist historical narratives retain their connection to ‘civilización’ and ‘cultura’ despite their rejection of traditional liberal history, being faithful inheritors of the concepts of reason and progress that fundamentally characterise Argentine liberalism (256). Omar Acha acknowledges this to be one of the charges most frequently levied at Communist historians in Argentina, accused of representing ‘un marxismo liberal, mitrista, que denostaría la “feudalidad” de los caudillos y, así, se mantendría al margen de las corrientes realmente populares de la historia nacional’ (*Las izquierdas* 133).<sup>5</sup> The schism that runs through the idea of the popular in these competing political traditions, with their corresponding historical visions, creates a complex politicised panorama within which to consider literary transformations of the narrative of 1810.

The meaning of national history has proved a site of lively debate in Argentina in recent years, reminding us of its continued explicitly political role in national intellectual life. The historical revisionism associated with Peronism has seen a resurgence in recent decades, most significantly throughout the 2000s. Michael Goebel outlines a growing public interest in national history over the course of the decade, citing the popularity of public debates (led by essayists such as Pacho O’Donnell and Felipe Pigna) and the increased use of historical events and figures by political actors over the decade (210–16). The prevalence of revisionist historians in these public events and the government’s drawing on revisionist history led Acha to describe the emergence of ‘un sentido común histórico “revisionista”’ in the lead-up to the country’s Bicentenary (‘Desafíos’ 58).<sup>6</sup>

3 For a detailed analysis of left-wing history in Argentina see *Las izquierdas en el siglo XX*, the first volume of Omar Acha’s *Historia crítica de la historiografía argentina*.

4 See Acha’s chapter on Communist narratives in *Las izquierdas*, particularly 151–2 and 162. Although these Communist narratives also represent a form of revisionist practice, they do not conform to the wider, commonly understood cultural definition of revisionism, which is much more closely linked to the Peronist connection outlined above.

5 Acha cites works by Arturo Jauretche and Norberto Galasso as examples of these criticisms, which he seeks to dismantle in his own work.

6 Goebel stresses that this incarnation of revisionism is dominated by revisionist ideas

Despite the close relationship between the Kirchner governments and revisionist history, however, the historical debates of the 2000s retained a complexity which does not merely reduce the concern for the place of the *pueblo* in national history to a pro- or anti-government stance. Although he protests the emergence of an apparent 'nuevo sentido común', Acha concedes that the discourses surrounding the May Revolution in the Bicentenary were not reduced to two easily definable narratives ('Desafíos' 57). Not every focus on 'el pueblo' is a revisionist one: the volume *Y el pueblo dónde está? Contribuciones para una historia popular de la revolución de independencia en el Río de la Plata*, edited by Raúl Fradkin, situates itself clearly in relation to Social History rather than revisionism, seeking to uncover the role of the *pueblo* as a neglected social actor rather than pursuing a rhetoric of combative resistance. The *pueblo* therefore ultimately remains a site for contestation and redefinition, rather than an easily attributable cipher.

Taking this complex interplay between competing public discourses of history as my starting point, my analysis of Cucurto's and Santos Iñurrieta's texts seeks to move beyond the focus on epistemological uncertainty that underpins Linda Hutcheon's idea of the 'historiographic metafiction' and much criticism on the Latin American historical novel (particularly Menton, Pons and Aínsa). I will argue that these texts' play with history does not represent a general comment on the unknowability of the past, but an attempt to appropriate and reconstruct an emblematic moment of national origin in relation to versions of the past produced by distinct political projects. This opens the possibility of perceiving these texts as a much more directly political intervention, not only 'destabilising' existing narratives but opening the possibility of building meaningful alternative visions with an ideological function.

### **1810: la Revolución de Mayo vivida por los negros: Carnival and 'Contamination'**

The creation of a 'popular' fictional world is a central concern of Washington Cucurto's whole literary output, and his rewriting of the *revolución de mayo* in 1810 exploits history in order to add another dimension to this enterprise. Cucurto is the literary persona created by Santiago Vega, a poet, writer and

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other than the celebration of nineteenth-century *caudillos*, focusing instead on concepts such as 'the opinion that Argentina had been pillaged and indebted by a powerful "oligarchy" in alliance with "foreign", particularly British, interests or the view that Argentine history had been "falsified" in order to "silence" the nation's true soul and interests' (216).

co-founder of publishing house Eloísa Cartonera.<sup>7</sup> Whilst his poetry has attracted critical attention as part of the poetic 'generation' of the 1990s, his prose works have proved more controversial due to their provocative, outrageous content that casts out any idea of political correctness. Beatriz Sarlo, for example, has accused Cucurto of offering a sex- and *cumbia*-infused world with an eye more on the sales-appeal of his literary project than its artistic value, writing rather disdainfully that 'a Cucurto le interesa mucho más mencionar culos y tetas que las vueltas de la subjetividad' (5).<sup>8</sup>

With *1810: la Revolución de Mayo vivida por los negros* Cucurto takes the *cumbia*-inspired world that has brought him notoriety and transports it to a reimagined origin of the *patria*.<sup>9</sup> His version all but completely disregards historical fact to take the reader on a chaotic journey through a sex-, alcohol- and drug-fuelled tale of clandestine homosexual love affairs and self-interested scheming: an extreme, radical inversion of the traditional tale. The rewriting of history that *1810* undertakes is playfully presented as an attempt to recover José de San Martín, the *padre de la patria*,<sup>10</sup> from the clutches of power and restore him to his rightful place among the people. The text contains a poetic 'Manifiesto' which outlines this vision, dismissing existing histories as written by and for an economic and cultural elite: 'La historia ha sido por años una actividad / para burgueses adinerados / o vanos intelectuales de cerebro de pajarito' (Cucurto 13). Through the 'Manifiesto', the text energetically presents itself as a history of the people written by the people, claiming that 'ahora la historia la escribiremos nosotros' and outlining what must be done 'Para que la historia sea del pueblo' (13–14).

The popular history advocated by the 'Manifiesto' is one which transgresses all accepted codes for historical writing. It proposes an approach which overturns not only the concrete facts we have been told about the past, but recourse to fact as a valid tool for approaching reality. Instead, the text presents us with the utopian ideal of following 'el camino de la imaginaria y el amor' (13): the joyful intrusion of an anti-rational, anti-scientific form

7 Eloísa Cartonera is a small, independent publisher which binds books in recycled cardboard purchased from the *cartoneros*, workers in the informal sector who collect and sell recyclable material.

8 Sarlo has also criticised Cucurto for what she perceives as his 'exoticising' of the popular and of his predominantly black cast of characters (5).

9 The type of *cumbia* that Cucurto evokes in his works is *cumbia villera*, popularised in Argentina in the 1990s and 2000s. An explicitly popular musical (and dance) form, it represents a departure from the traditional manifestation of the genre both aesthetically and lyrically, introducing 'a sudden change in which social grievances, violence, drugs, and sexualised and obscene topics replaced traditional love-related lyrics' (Vila 31).

10 As the *padre de la patria*, José de San Martín occupies the most important position in the pantheon of Argentina's national heroes, known as the *próceres*.



of thinking into historical meaning. In claiming to rewrite history through imagination the text presents a broader rejection of the relationship between literature and power embodied by the lettered city: a provocative challenge to all interwoven hegemonic structures.

The connections made between class, power and control of knowledge in Cucurto's 'Manifiesto' affirm the political potential of challenging values which have been dictated by the cultural standards of the dominant classes. The 'Manifiesto' positions the text as an expression of 'incultura': a joyful explosion of *barbarie* finally breaking through all limits of *civilización*, presented in recognisably Peronist/anti-Peronist terms. This use of the popular therefore presents itself as a chaotic challenge to bourgeois values of stability, order and restraint. Cucurto's form of 'incultura' is one that demonstrates knowledge of literary debates, generic codes, and traditional classics, but with the aim of subverting them and subjecting them to his 'alternative'. Seen from this perspective, the 'culos y tetas' that Sarlo dismisses as empty commercial posturing become a deliberate challenge to the limits of 'acceptability' in literature. This is cast into sharper relief through an observation by Santiago Llach, poet and editor of many of Cucurto's works, who states that:

Cucurto es el espejo negro de la literatura pequeñoburguesa. Los críticos, los que lo festejan y los que lo desdeñan, reproducen frente a sus textos las dicotomías sarmiento-peronistas. De las páginas de Cucurto, la literatura pequeñoburguesa sale empetrolada. Lo que ve la pequeña burguesía cuando lee a Cucurto es el vacío de sus propias ilusiones progresistas e ilustradas. (141-2)

When we talk about postmodernism's concern with the provisionality of previously solid empirical foundations, we often frame this in terms of anxiety, caution or uncertainty. Cucurto's text, however, joyfully seizes upon this chink in the armour of the lettered city. The wavering of one idea of knowledge, a cultural paradigm devised by the elite, becomes the opportunity for a vibrant popular carnival to burst forth and redefine our processes of meaning-making and our idea of knowledge. The implicit relationship between reader and the values of modernity is reimagined through this aesthetic act: it is no longer *our* understanding of the world that is under attack, but one that has been imposed by a powerful 'them', the decline of which represents a tantalising promise of freedom. The text's concern is therefore not to warn that constructing knowledge is now a problematic enterprise, but to playfully imagine the possibilities of a world completely unfettered by the idea of meaning-making devised by the elite: a world where *barbarie* could reign supreme.

## Defining the Nation: Repositioning the Popular

The first intrusion of *barbarie* into the traditionally 'civilised' tale of the nation's origin in 1810 comes through the text's inversion of racialised discourses of national identity. The popular world that Cucurto constructs in 1810 presents itself as an attack on the sanctioned discourses of Argentine national identity, particularly the idea of a white, European nation 'descendida de los barcos'. The concept of the *pueblo* as a homogeneous, unified social force is fundamentally challenged by this deliberate process of fragmentation and energetic explosion of heterogeneity into the canonical narrative of the nation's birth.

Cucurto's revolutionary *pueblo* is a diverse, disorganised force that shatters any attempt to conceive of Argentina as a predominantly 'white' nation. Unlike in other Latin American nations, such as Brazil or Mexico, where the national narrative of *mestizaje* emphasises the diverse ethnic make-up of the population, or other nations who stress diversity within their 'melting pot' of immigrant cultures (such as the USA), Argentina's *crisol de razas* does not follow a similarly pluralist model (Miller 12). Based upon a specific period of immigration, it is implicitly conceived of as a fusion of white, European origins, which ultimately dissolve their differences into the 'Argentine' (Garguin 165). Cucurto seizes upon this identity trope in 1810, providing a radically different racialised narrative of the nation's past. The plot hinges on the arrival to Argentina of a boatload of African slaves, who ultimately become the driving force behind the alternative *revolución de mayo* that the text describes. The arrival of these slaves is, however, recounted through language that evokes the idealised narrative of the immigrant dream: the new city as a land of opportunity, the desire to work and the promise of freedom and a better life. This description strategically repositions the arrival of Argentina's black population as part of the legitimised immigration narrative, pointedly circumventing the traditional exclusion of black Argentines from the nation's 'imagined community'. By subverting the conventions of this national narrative, the text contravenes the strict historical separation between the arrival of black slaves and twentieth-century European immigrants, aptly described in anthropologist Claudia Briones' observation that 'las poblaciones asociadas a un remoto pasado africano ligado a la esclavitud no encuentran cabida alguna en un "venir de los barcos" que parece acotarse a los siglos XIX y XX' (25).

Crucially, it is not only the question of race that is highlighted by 'flipping' these roles, however: it is the link between race and economic exclusion. By presenting his black characters in the most economically and politically disenfranchised position possible, that of slaves, Cucurto's chaotic popular world pushes the dual components of the anti-Peronist 'cabecita negra' stereotype

(class and race) to their extreme. The racialisation of this social category represented a prevalent strategy in the 'othering' of Peronism (Garguin 173–4), and Cucurto's unleashing of an unruly band of black slaves on the orderly world of Buenos Aires smacks of an overtly Peronist literary revenge. By exposing well-worn discourses of Argentine identity as both limited and exclusionary, therefore, the text paves the way for the creation of its own, new definitions.

### **Dirtying literature: 'Dama tocada' and 'El Phale'**

The text's assault on the traditional idea of 'cultura' is underpinned by an aesthetic of rupture and excess that announces the boisterous intrusion of the popular into the bourgeois form *par excellence*, the novel. Cucurto's model of literary subversion is closely linked to the *neobarroco/neobarroso*: he frequently cites Cuban poets José Lezama Lima, Reinaldo Arenas and Severo Sarduy as significant influences, alongside Argentines Néstor Perlongher and Osvaldo Lamborghini.<sup>11</sup> Key to Cucurto's use of the *neobarroco* is the idea of 'mal gusto' at the heart of Lezama Lima's baroque, characterised by Roberto González Echevarría as 'un barroco que viola las reglas del decoro poético y la reverencia por los clásicos, que los deforma y contamina con elementos fuera de tono, de mal gusto' (438). The 'mal gusto' of this *neobarroco*, therefore, is an aesthetic of rule breaking that seeks to fracture accepted forms by contaminating them.<sup>12</sup> Perlongher describes Osvaldo Lamborghini's development of the *neobarroso* as a heightening of this intent, describing it as a 'dirtying' of Argentine literature, a process of contamination and debasement (97; Bollig 167). The intrusion of 'mal gusto' and the 'dirtying' of both literature and history can be seen very clearly in *1810*, linking the promise of a 'popular history' with an assault on accepted cultural forms.

The most direct representation of this 'contamination' of literature in *1810* comes in Cucurto's re-writing of two canonical Argentine short stories. The 'newly discovered' papers presented at the end of the text offer a version of Cortázar's 'Casa tomada', rendered as 'Dama tocada', and Borges' 'El Aleph', inverted to become 'El Phale'. In Cucurto's re-telling, these unconventional versions are the originals, written by black slaves and used by posterior famous writers in an act of 'infamia' (208). Argentine literature is re-founded in this move, its greatest works stemming from the influence of those far removed

11 See, for example, Bernal. These authors' names also appear frequently throughout Cucurto's poetry. For a detailed exploration of the *neobarroco/neobarroso* in Argentina see Bollig.

12 Significantly, neither Perlongher nor Cucurto cite Carpentier among their *neobarroco* influences. Ben Bollig explains that in Perlongher's construction of the tendency, 'Carpentier is held up as an example of the academic, state-sponsored *barroco*, rather than the rogue spirit found in Góngora and Lezama' (168).

from the traditional political and cultural elite. This underscores the significance of the way in which Cucurto represents the Independence narrative, tying history and literature together as part of the same bourgeois construction that represses the 'distasteful' exuberance of the world of *barbarie*.

Some of the play in these parodic stories is a deliberate, tongue-in-cheek insertion of outrageous behaviour and offensive language into the texts (which would make their later versions 'sanitised' rewritings by white, well-to-do authors). The sedate daily activities of knitting and cooking described in Cortázar's opening sequence are replaced by a decadent, sex-driven existence in Cucurto. As the title 'Dama tocada' suggests, the tale is irreverent in the extreme: Victoria Ocampo appears as 'Victrola', part of her name replaced by a derogatory slang term, and we learn that she and her sister 'tenían de noviecitos a dos boludos que se pasaban el día leyendo literatura francesa' (211).<sup>13</sup> 'El Phale' openly declares its sexualisation of Borges' story from the title itself, and the story's content does not disappoint this expectation. Graphic sexual descriptions open the text, expressed in extremely colloquial terms and evoking the (female) body's most taboo physical processes: menstruation and defecation. These transform Borges' narrator's wistful longing for a decorporalised woman, the deceased Beatriz Viterbo, into an extremely bodily representation of the female engaged in sexual acts. Significantly, these descriptions are brought into relationship with the act of writing: 'Con la punta de mi pija, con sangre y puntitos de mierda en un acto cucurtiano escribo' (220). Writing is also contaminated, made physical and sexualised, rather than remaining on the plane of philosophical ideas that Borges' story inhabits. The text revels in the inclusion of language that defies any definition of 'lo culto': the slang terms used to convey the graphic sexual acts are as much an assault on the carefully constructed literary masterpieces as the content of the acts themselves.

These linguistic intrusions are accompanied by explicitly political inversions that reinforce the link between a 'popular aesthetic' and the socio-political dimension of the text's challenge to the lettered city. The supposed banality of the daily existence presented in the first paragraphs of 'Casa tomada' is revealed as a privileged lifestyle by transposing the scene of the action to an entirely different type of housing: the large colonial house becomes a 'yotibenco', a slang term for tenement-style immigrant housing derived by reversing 'conventillo'.<sup>14</sup> Whereas Cortázar's fantastic story takes

13 The word 'victrola' can also refer to a type of phonograph often sold in the San Telmo market of Buenos Aires, a play on words that recalls the *porteño* setting.

14 *Conventillos* are associated with the wave of European immigration to Argentina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This anachronistic use of this type of housing again serves to underline the links Cucurto is making between different periods of immigration and their widely differing place in the national narrative.

life in the house as the recognised point from which the strange events will depart, Cucurto de-naturalises the ownership of the house in an overtly political statement: 'La casa es el tema nuestro y de 40 millones de argentinos. La casa siempre imposible, el sueño eterno, lejano improprio para nuestra pobreza' (213). Owning property is transported to the realm of the fantastic, exposing the class implications of the serene normality the opening of Cortázar's story presents.

These subversions culminate in a final twist on Cortázar's plot that emphasises the political implications of the original tale and asserts an alternative allegiance with popular values. At the conclusion of 'Dama tocada', we discover that each locked room in the house contains a family who will be trapped in the isolated space forever, cut off from the vibrancy and the community surrounding them. Whereas in the original tale the anxiety focuses on who might get *into* the house, here the final anxiety revolves around being able to get *out* and into a space of community that is taken to define popular life. The colonial mansion transforms from a longed-for space of protection into a suffocating, restrictive trap as Cortázar's nightmare is turned on its head. In dragging this story through the 'mud', Cucurto re-positions the popular as the side of right in the battle between *civilización* and *barbarie*, implicitly moving the reader's loyalty over to the same side.

The 'contamination' of literature Cucurto engages in here therefore employs two interrelated strategies: it incorporates the intrusion of popular language and graphic sexual acts into the texts, along with challenges to the implicit class assumptions that underpin canonical texts. It is an aggressive 'contamination' of the bourgeois by the popular, of the philosophical by the sexual, of the acceptable with the obscene. This process provides a drastic rewriting of the Argentine literary canon, but it is an operation with far wider implications in Cucurto, which can be expressed as the rejection of the 'correct'.

### **Overturning the Bourgeois: Rebellion and Provocation**

While Cucurto's exuberant inversion of canonical tales generates a radical and energetic rebellion against narrative forms of *civilización*, the text's rejection of any imposition of 'correctness' results in some textual strategies likely to sit uncomfortably with the reader. In abandoning the tried and tested literary codes of the lettered city, *1810* also casts out any idea of political correctness, and the text is replete with exaggeratedly stereotypical characterisations of race, gender and sexuality that transgress contemporary ideas of acceptability. The most evident of these is the portrayal of the black characters within the

text, which mercilessly evokes racial stereotypes of eroticised black females and well-endowed black men who are only interested in dancing, sex and having a good time. Doris Sommer goes as far as to wonder whether *1810*'s 'sexist, racist and just plain smutty language' is designed just 'to get a rise out of readers whose liberalism he strains to the breaking point with elaborately staged bad taste' (8). This 'bad taste' is certainly a defining feature of *1810*, and its role within the text requires careful consideration, demanding that we decide how to respond to these clear transgressions of any idea of political correctness.

If we choose to condemn the text for its deliberately insensitive portrayal of race and gender, we are refusing to enter into the challenge it presents: to abandon *civilización* in favour of an energetic embracing of *barbarie*. This can be perceived as a game created by the text, or perhaps more usefully as a 'carnavalesque' temporary inversion of the status quo. Cucurto evokes a carnivalesque spirit in his references to Armando Discépolo and his *grotesco criollo*, and even directly alludes to Rabelais in his description of the 'pantagruélica' living conditions of immigrants in one of the episodes he recounts (219). Bakhtin stresses the overturning of societal hierarchies and norms as a defining feature of carnival, which becomes a 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order' (9–10). The raucous appropriation of the most solemn and official of all Argentina's national commemorations in *1810* can be interpreted as a direct inversion along these carnivalesque lines: it is a defiant interpellation of the most institutionalised national event in order to resignify its potential.

Seen from this perspective, the text's provocative 'bad taste' becomes an integral part of its extreme embracing of the chaotic and the carefree, presented as an invigorated alternative to the sterility of more controlled cultural forms. The reinsertion of the body into sanitised official spaces and insistence on its materiality become significant reintegrations of a 'folk culture' in Bakhtin's terms, perhaps more widely definable as 'the popular' for Cucurto in the sense of barbaric 'incultura' outlined above. Interpreting this integration in terms of a carnivalesque spirit reveals the relationship between the rejection of traditional, more sober literary form and the inclusion of the body with greater intention than merely to titillate or provoke the reader, as Sarlo's and Sommer's comments above respectively suggest. This is crucial to the anti-canonical rewriting of Independence that Cucurto's text undertakes, as it is this subversion of the sobriety of Independence that underpins its aggressive insertion of *barbarie* into one of the pillars of *civilización*.

The carnivalesque also encompasses an idea of laughter that demands a particular relationship between reader and text. The laughter of carnival, for Bakhtin, is a utopian laughter of the people, both mocking and joyful, as

opposed to either the 'negative satire' or 'recreational drollery' of contemporary understanding (11–12). Within *1810*, therefore, this laughter requires us to enter into the popular universe created by the text, rather than either remaining outside its reach or dismissing its mechanisms as empty entertainment. In order to embrace the text's universe of *barbarie*, we must participate in its all-encompassing, subversive carnivalesque laughter. Cucurto's text therefore challenges the reader to abandon the 'straightjacket' of liberal discourse and take the alternative he creates on its own terms, as a representation of vitality missing from restricted definitions of the Argentine, and his appropriation of these stereotypes forms part of this challenge. By conducting this game of inversion through Independence, the text engages with the status of this period as a focal point for projections of the nation, and employs this to target the intersection of cultural norms, exclusionary discourses of national identity, and the distribution of political and economic power associated with the liberal project. If we wish to enter the text's world of *barbarie*, we must be prepared to temporarily abandon the shackles of *civilización*.

### **Mariano Moreno y un teatro de operaciones: Democracy and Revolution**

Santos Iñurrieta's *Mariano Moreno y un teatro de operaciones* represents a very different engagement with the idea of the popular in both aesthetic and political terms. The play is directly connected with the cultural context of the Bicentenary, being first performed in 2010 as part of the Bicentenary programme of the left-leaning Centro Cultural de la Cooperación Floreal Gorini (CCC) in the heart of the Corrientes theatre district in Buenos Aires. Its self-categorisation as a 'seria comedia política' and première by 'el bachín teatro', the company directed by Santos Iñurrieta and renowned for its Brechtian performance style, stress the political intent behind the work.<sup>15</sup> *Moreno* depicts a cast attempting to rehearse a play about the eponymous *prócer*, the secretary of the *primera junta* reputed to be the author of the controversial *Plan de operaciones*, which outlines uncompromising strategies for revolutionary success. The play's characters are thwarted in their theatrical endeavours by the absence of the actor playing the lead role, discontent within the company towards the increasingly authoritarian and self-important director, and the

15 As well as the director of el bachín teatro, Santos Iñurrieta has formed part of the artistic team of the CCC for several years. He occasionally acts in the company's plays as well as writing and directing, including their latest piece, *Fidel-Fidel: Conflicto en la prensa*, written to celebrate 15 years of el bachín. The company have toured nationally and internationally, and have won several prizes (including an Estrella de Mar prize for *Mientras cuida de Carmela*). The company writes its name in lower case, as reproduced here. For further information on the bachín teatro's formation see Dubatti 11–18 and Serrano.

presence of a threatening mob outside the theatre door. Combining a 'play within a play' mechanism and a *Waiting for Godot*-esque structure, the text is both intensely metatheatrical and resolutely non-naturalistic, drawing heavily on Brechtian theatrical conventions.

The construction of history is at the forefront of the text's metatheatrical games. The play's action follows a rehearsal process, allowing for much discussion of what should be included and excluded from the final stage version. This is given a metahistorical focus through the constant debates about the relative significance of each historical event and the different political framing that will be given to the work through the choices the company make. A reference to the arrival of the 'actor oficial' sparks an instant self-reflexive digression into the implications of 'official history':

*Asistente:* (amenazante) ¿A qué se refiere con 'el actor oficial...?'

*Actriz:* (violenta) ¡Conteste!

*Moreno:* Al actor que ustedes esperan que interprete a Moreno.

*Director:* No se referirá a un actor que interprete a Moreno según los intereses de la clase dominante, ¿no? (Scene 4, 24–5)

This humorous misinterpretation portrays history as an ideological battleground, with each member of the cast ready to pounce on any indication that one in their midst supports interpretations associated with the elite. As the play progresses, the director's attempts to suppress uncomfortable facts or skim over ideologically complex issues become increasingly obvious, and he is held to account by his rebellious troupe of actors. His dismissal of Santiago de Liniers' counterrevolutionary uprising in the wake of the May Revolution as 'un hecho menor' is immediately seized upon by the company, who weave this event into contemporary ideological frameworks by positioning it as the nation's first coup. Similarly, the director's assertion that the alleged murder of statesman Moreno is an insignificant detail generates outrage, as the company perceive this as 'un asesinato político, fundante de nuestra historia más oscura' (Scene 25, 56). This therefore underscores the ideological urgency of selecting material for a narrative of the past, with different framings and omissions taken as direct indications of the speaker's political leanings.

The explicit insistence on the ideological shaping of history in *Moreno* places constant emphasis on the question of who writes history, and to what intent. Crucially, however, this game takes the fact that knowledge is constructed as its starting point rather than its final conclusion, and proudly presents its own ideologically determined reading of the past. Postmodern lessons of history's 'emplotment' (White) are applied in order to warn the spectator of the political undertones of particular readings, but this is framed as a tool that enables us to destabilise the narrative of the dominant classes, rather



than relativising all interpretations of the past. This crucial distinction moves us from the potentially nihilistic implications of postmodern approaches to history to an attempt to use these lessons as a basis for political action. In this sense, *Moreno* can be seen as evoking post-Marxist interpretations of postmodernism's potential, such as the vision outlined by Ernesto Laclau in a thought-provoking reflection on the relationship between postmodernism and politics. Laclau's contribution consciously draws on the postmodern focus on discourse, seeing this as a way of developing ideology rather than sounding its death knell:

it is precisely the *ontological status* of the central categories of the discourses of modernity, and not their *content*, that is at stake; that the erosion of this status is expressed through the 'postmodern' sensibility; and that this erosion, far from being a negative phenomenon, represents an enormous amplification of the content and operability of the values of modernity, making it possible to ground them on foundations much more solid than those of the Enlightenment project (and its various positivist or Hegelian-Marxist reformulations). (66)

Seen from this perspective, postmodernism abolishes the naivety of previous political projects, allowing them to stand on surer ground than before. Ideology is not defeated by the advent of postmodernism, but nuanced and invigorated. When we read *Moreno* in this light, this distinction means that history can be reconfirmed in its traditional didactic role: it encourages us to unravel the underlying ideological codes behind narratives in order to insert them into a politicised historical scheme with a clearly defined ideological 'truth' at its heart.

### **Pluralism and Didacticism: Brecht and *el bachín***

This politicised focus is underpinned in *Mariano Moreno y un teatro de operaciones* by the play's use of Brechtian conventions. Brecht's 'epic theatre', which aims to produce the famous *verfremdungseffekt*, is defined by practices now familiar to a theatre-going public: an episodic dramatic structure, destruction of the 'fourth wall' by drawing our attention to the mechanics of stagecraft before us, and a didactic focus throughout the work. Santos Iñurrieta's *Moreno* offers an accomplished contemporary rendering of many aspects of Brechtian technique. The application of these dramatic conventions to such a familiar narrative is designed to provide a 'jolt' distancing us from the events presented, rather than allowing them to wash over us as a reassuring retelling of a story known by heart, and therefore endows this familiar narrative with a distinctly political mission.

The original production, which I saw in September 2010 at the CCC, was unmistakably Brechtian in style. The audience were transported to the world of epic theatre from the very first scene: a sonorous, lyrical speech entitled 'Quién es el que regresa'. The monologue, performed as a voice-over by renowned actor Patricio Contreras, was accompanied by a simple melody for guitar and one voice performed live on stage, overlaid with the occasional tapping of typewriter keys, struck one at a time in an irregular, disjointed rhythm. The contrasting layers of this opening soundscape provided a Brechtian 'distancing' from the action on stage. The seductive appeal of Contreras' measured, almost hypnotic delivery, mirroring the film of gently breaking waves projected onto the cyclorama (the white gauze at the back of the stage), was disrupted by the contrasting simplicity of the live musical performance. The jarring rhythms of the recorded voice, live music and disjointed non-musical sound therefore prevented the audience from surrendering fully to the rhetorical eloquence of Contreras' words, seemingly fulfilling the Brechtian intention that artistic beauty should not create an 'illusion' masking its own status as performance. The allusion to the crafting of the play present in the incorporation of typewriter sounds provided a further reminder of the constructed nature of the action before us, asserting from the outset that we are expected to perform the role of Brechtian critical spectator.

The technical aspects of staging in the original production also reflected familiar principles of Brechtian technique. Stark, white lighting complemented a simple, non-representational set composed of three adjoining platforms and a moveable freestanding block, more akin to a makeshift arrangement for rehearsals than a fully finished set. The actors' heavy make-up reinforced their status as performers, their faces painted white with thick black eyebrows and a smudged grey circle in the hollow of their cheeks. Costume once again corresponded to the restricted colour palette present in the other technical aspects of staging, combining to create an entirely monochrome setting. Fused with the exaggerated physicality of the performers on stage, the black and white hues hinted at cinematic influences, evoking the era of silent film. Harshly juxtaposed tones, reminiscent of the heightened contrasts employed by German expressionist cinema, contributed an eerie unreality, whilst the actors' exaggerated comic gesticulation evinced Charlie Chaplin's distinctive physical comedy.<sup>16</sup> This incorporation of allusions to highly stylised cinematic technique contributed to the rupture

16 Clowning motifs recur in the aesthetic of Santos Iñurrieta's work as playwright/director, from *Mientras cuido de Carmela* (2013) to *La gracia de tener* (2011–12 production). An interest in cinema, and Chaplin in particular, is displayed in his 2004 production, *Charly (detrás de la sonrisa)*, which depicts a group of early film stars who unite behind the figure of Charly, and in his Chaplin inspired one-man play, *Crónicas de un comediante* (published 2009).

with naturalistic approaches, perhaps recalling Brecht's own enthusiasm for cinema's 'epic' potential.<sup>17</sup>

Although most of these aspects of staging are not prescribed in the printed edition of the play, its intended Brechtian performance style is carefully built into the work. By eschewing traditional character names in favour of generic denominations such as 'Actor' and 'Actriz' (with the exception of Moreno, who is still clearly denoted as an actor) the rejection of conventional characterisation is clear and the self-reflexive emphasis on theatricality reinforced, complemented by the fact that the setting of the action within a theatre is specified in the stage directions. Brechtian performance style is also continually alluded to throughout the work, which contains frequent self-reflexive references to its dramatic techniques. In Scene 4, which introduces us to the rehearsal process that structures the play, the director lectures his cast on the conventions of epic theatre in a bombastic style which is undermined by the more practical and immediate concerns of his cast. This serves as a reminder of the work's self-presentation as political theatre, but more significantly it ridicules the temptation to treat epic theatre in reverential terms which would position it as part of a bourgeois cultural repertoire rather than as a disruptive force.

The episodic structure of the text ensures a constant shifting in pace and movement between different types of discourse, allowing the audience very little time to adjust to any one style. Highly comic interactions give way to scenes of poetic solemnity, only to return almost immediately to frustratingly circular discussions amongst the cast over how they should proceed in their dramatic endeavours. The actual historical narration is primarily undertaken by comical puppets representing French and Beruti, revolutionary figures most famous for distributing rosettes to the crowd gathered on 25 May, who offer a radically condensed overview of hundreds of years of history in a series of brief exchanges (Scenes 2, 9, 11 and 22), employing simple, almost childlike language entirely at odds with the serious political denunciations behind their words. They describe the Spanish arriving 'con barquitos muy bonitos' and their rapid dialogue revolves around the simple but ideologically loaded question '¿todo bien con los españoles?', which receives a damning response: 'Sí, todo bien. Excepto por la espada, la cruz y los espejitos de colores. Excepto por la forma de adornar a los nativos con cadenas, grilletes y latigazos' (Scene 2, 21). The inappropriately childish language is maintained in the diminutive 'espejitos', whilst the euphemistic choice of 'adornar' to describe chains and physical punishments is imbued with intense irony. The incongruity at the

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17 Brecht saw cinema as an ideal vehicle for the impact he wished to have on audiences, arguing that 'For the film the principles of non-Aristotelian drama (a type of drama not dependent on empathy, mimesis) are immediately acceptable' (50).

heart of this scene is essential to the destabilising of the audience's perspective the play seeks to produce, and is consistently exploited as a comic mechanism throughout the rest of the work.

The departure from linear narrative created by this constant shifting between types of discourse is self-reflexively acknowledged as a way of engaging the audience's critical potential, as expressed in a metatheatrical aside spoken by Actriz:

Este texto que digo ahora es otra interrupción, porque si siempre procedemos conforme a la forma, y a la estructura dramática, comenzamos a pareceremos tanto a las bestias, puro impulso y sin razón. (Scene 5, 28)

In rejecting linear progress through a theatrical work, this statement divorces the concepts of order and reason so firmly wedded in positivist thought (a significant influence on the Argentine liberal political tradition). 'Order' is instead taken to mean blind conformity, and departure from this established path becomes the means to achieve true reasoned, engaged thought. This forms part of a wider commentary throughout the work on the workings of hegemonic discourse and its normalising impulse. This critique is focused on the concept of 'el sentido común', which is heavily satirised throughout the play, particularly in Scenes 16 and 24. Scene 16, entitled 'Sobre un sentido común', follows on from the director's attempts to impose his own artistic vision as an example of 'common sense'. His egotistic and self-important approach to artistic creation sees him in raptures over a scene of his own devising, which consists of a piano hanging from a thread, spinning and dripping water with a voiceover stating 'si los pueblos no se ilustran' (Scene 15, 42).<sup>18</sup> The cast seize upon the assertion that this patronising and paternalistic imposition of bourgeois cultural values represents 'common sense' and immediately engage in a parodic quick-fire illustration of the unspoken implications of the concept. Their dialogue fills the ambiguous signifier with a damning portrayal of bourgeois commonplaces, structured absurdly around the motif of the piano:

*Todos: (A público. Uno a la vez) ¡Cómo están robando pianos últimamente! ¿No?*  
– A un amigo mío ya le robaron dos pianos en lo que va del año. Antes los dejabas abiertos en la vereda y no pasaba nada. – Es la juventud que está enajenada, todo el día con el rock sinfónico, ven un piano, te pegan un tiro sin preguntar. [...] – Y uno pasa por las villas y están llenas de televisores y pianos – No quieren trabajar, con la cantidad de pozos que hay para hacer... [...] Yo solo pido memoria completa – Y yo exportar libremente. (Scene 16, 43–4)

18 This echoes Brecht's vision of the status of the artist when he states that 'The 'poet's words' are only sacred in so far as they are true; the theatre is the handmaiden not of the poet but of society' ('Masterful Treatment of a Model' 213).

This fear of crime and youth subcultures, combined with the presentation of the poor as lazy and feckless, form a recognisable portrait of hostile responses to both 'el pueblo' and popular culture. The incongruous intrusion of the motif of the piano into this tirade renders this discourse ridiculous, but most significantly, the concluding utterances of the sequence portray these attitudes as explicitly linked to support for neoliberal economics and a questionable position on the atrocities of the 1976–83 military dictatorship in Argentina. The scene therefore weaves a set of cultural attitudes together with a specific political position, ultimately associating capitalist practice with a willingness to support brutal military regimes. These attitudes are torn down from their self-allocated position of 'el sentido común', common knowledge shared by 'right-minded' people, and revealed instead as discourses sustaining class inequality and state violence. The 'normality' that this combination of political and cultural attitudes supports is therefore exposed as a system which functions to suppress the popular alternative. By providing an intensely ironic depiction of this 'common sense', made ridiculous through incongruous elements in the dialogue and by placing these words in the mouths of the cast (who represent the *pueblo* throughout), *Moreno* destroys the illusion of shared values upon which this discourse depends, paving the way for the popular vision constructed throughout the play to assert an alternative political and cultural structure.

### **Revolution and *Pueblo***

The choice of Mariano Moreno as the play's focus is inseparable from the way the *pueblo* is constructed and thus from the work's political intent. Moreno has featured in the revisionist resurgence primarily as the victim of a political assassination (such as in Pacho O'Donnell's *El águila guerrera*), or celebrated for his revolutionary fervour in opposition to the more conservative Saavedra, as in Felipe Pigna's best-selling *Mitos de la historia argentina*.<sup>19</sup> It is this second vision of Moreno that most closely parallels Santos Iñurrieta's narrative on the *prócer*, with Felipe Pigna even obtaining a mention in the text (Scene 7, 31).

Moreno's revolutionary commitment has become an important contemporary narrative, as highlighted in a discussion preceding a performance of Santos Iñurrieta's *Moreno*, where Juan Carlos Junio, the director of the CCC and Horacio González, director of Argentina's National Library, described how contemporary rereadings of Moreno tie into the politicised

19 See O'Donnell 11–13 and Pigna 322. Moreno can also be presented as an 'extranjerizante' liberal enthralled to the needs of foreign investment, but this has not been a prominent neorevisionist trope.

historical landscape described above. In his account of this discussion, Jorge Dubatti notes that ‘para Juan Carlos Junio en la revisión actual de Moreno se rescatan su pensamiento revolucionario y su sentido americanista’, and cites González’s observation that ‘la memoria pública popular reconoce en Moreno la imagen de lo que fue: un militante’ (Dubatti, 13–14). This second description in particular illustrates the ‘updating’ of the Independence narrative in popular history to reflect twentieth-century definitions of revolution, evoking the militant experience of 1960s and 1970s Argentina which plays such a crucial role in *kirchnerista* political discourse. The presentation of Moreno as Jacobin has been transformed from character flaw into his most valuable legacy through this reconsideration, couched in the rhetoric of a left-wing revisionist narrative. Santos Iñurrieta’s play combines a discourse of democracy and revolutionary militancy that overtly embraces this contemporary politicised rendering of the idea of left-wing political commitment. Significantly, this is explicitly tied into ideas of a class-based revolutionary struggle, retaining the ideological inflections of the ‘traditional Left’ whilst participating in a much broader contemporary left-wing discursive context.

The idea of popular revolution that emerges from the text is fundamentally linked to the shifting definition of Independence over the late 1990s and 2000s. In Scene 10, ‘Actriz’ pronounces a speech supposedly by Juana Azurduy, a *mestiza* guerrilla leader in the Independence wars who, the director claims, left no written records.<sup>20</sup> The words Actriz attributes to Azurduy are actually taken from a speech given by Eva Perón on 1 May 1952 (‘Discurso de Evita’). This inclusion of a ‘voiceless’ nineteenth-century revolutionary woman, speaking through the words of Eva Perón, reflects the tendency in contemporary neo-revisionist discourse to carve out a space for female historical protagonists as one of the groups ‘excluded’ by the traditional liberal narrative. The insistence on the solidarity between Latin American nations through their shared Independence history is also key to the discourse of inclusion that permeates the text.<sup>21</sup> One of the most solemn moments of the piece, the moving monologue delivered by Actriz in Scene 18, charts the significance of history for the present by weaving together significant Latin American events and figures from the past two centuries around variations of the refrain ‘tiene que ver conmigo’. The individual who inherits the

20 As a lower class *mestiza*, Azurduy received little education, learning only basic literacy (Davies 137, 162).

21 Juan Carlos Junio makes the connection between Independence and contemporary discourses of Latin American integration explicit in his prologue to *Moreno*, emphasising the significance of this context for an interpretation of the play: ‘Aquellas ideales de libertad continental que encarnara Moreno y tantos otros, hoy se ven plasmados en los logros de la integración, de Unasur, del Banco del Sur, etc.’ (9).

legacy of May 1810 is portrayed as equally indebted to Bernard O'Higgins and Salvador Allende, to the defence of human rights undertaken by the Madres and Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo, and to the rich multi-cultural heritage of the region as a whole. The incantatory effect of the listing of these events, often alluded to through oblique references appealing to the complicity of the audience as a knowing 'owner' of these shared cultural references ('Salvador y la Moneda' for the overthrowing of Allende in Chile's 1973 coup, or 'el cáncer en la lengua' to refer to nineteenth-century revolutionary leader Juan José Castelli, for example), builds a tender portrait of an inspiring and painful past to be honoured by those in the present. History has been adapted to reflect contemporary values, but it retains the ability to envisage steady progression towards a glorious future.

The text employs these recognisable contemporary historical discourses to foreground ideas of solidarity and equality in its narration of Independence. Yet it does not lambast the traditional tale as 'liberal y extranjerizante' as we find in much contemporary neo-revisionist discourse. The concept of popular revolution that underpins the work evidently draws on Marxist theory, stressing the fundamentally economic nature of the class relations in the text. The *próceres* that populate its pages are cast as pioneers of this vision, primarily through citation of excerpts from their written works, such as this statement from Belgrano published in the *Gazeta de Buenos Aires* in 1813 and reproduced in Scene 10 of *Moreno*:

Se han elevado entre los hombres dos clases muy distintas; la una dispone de los frutos de la tierra, y la otra es llamada solamente a ayudar por su trabajo. Los unos se someten invariablemente a las leyes impuestas por los otros. El imperio de la propiedad es el que reduce a la mayor parte de los hombres a lo más estrechamente necesario. (35)

In this sense, the traditional balance of a 'pueblo' led by an enlightened class of ideological visionaries is undisturbed, but the radical quality of the May Revolution is drawn to the fore.

Over the course of the play, however, a gradual transfer of power from Moreno to 'pueblo' takes place. The boundaries between the present and the historical narrative the company seeks to represent become increasingly blurred. The director adopts the persona of Cornelio Saavedra, sending Moreno to his death among the baying mob outside the theatre door in a clear parallel of Saavedra's alleged assassination of the young revolutionary. The action also depicts a symbolic takeover of the creative process by the company, positioned as a popular collective. As mentioned above, the director lectures his cast on the conventions of epic theatre in Scene 4, attempting to impart his dramatic wisdom to those under his authority. By Scene 18,

however, the director's control has disintegrated and the actors repeat the Brechtian lessons of the earlier scene for the audience, but this time performed as a collective, ensemble piece rather than dictated by a controlling authority figure. This symbolic appropriation of power by the 'workers', the cast, is a metatheatrical reproduction of the revolution the company seek to depict. As the 'dictatorial' director emerges, the collectivised 'pueblo' joins together in resistance.

The individual therefore gradually gives way to a powerful collective force, encapsulated in the transfer of revolutionary potential from Moreno to the company of actors at the text's end. After Moreno is shot, the rest of the cast walk towards the front of the stage as the lights fade. The continuation of a truly popular uprising is therefore expressed through this striking stage picture, echoed in the words of the poem that closes the piece:

Y otra vez la imagen, del hecho, del acontecimiento.  
Y otra vez mi voz, jugando entre mil voces.  
Y otra vez, allí los rostros, del rostro,  
Del protagonista multiplicado, multiforme.  
-¿Y Mariano Moreno?  
-*Mariano Moreno ganando nombres.* (Scene 28, 62)

The name of Moreno is repositioned as a collective force embodied in the 'protagonista multiplicado, multiforme' of the people. The revolutionary-democratic spirit he is depicted as representing throughout the work is transformed into an active, living political force, inciting us to believe in a new period of change. The liberal narrative is therefore not overthrown but subtly rewritten for contemporary times: a carefully selected *prócer* leads the charge, but no longer as a hymn to a glorious past, confirming the legitimacy of the state engendered by this period. Instead *Moreno* carries forward a recurring Marxist interpretation of the Independence tale in Argentina by celebrating its revolutionary example, but the play's specific presentation also reflects salient elements of contemporary discourse on the period as outlined in the introduction to this article. *Moreno's* Independence narrative is therefore primarily a didactic exploration of the tale, reconfirming rather than negating the potential of history as a tool for forging meaning about both the present and the past.

### **Conclusion: History and the Popular**

By analysing a play and a novel through their depiction of a particular historical moment, their different constructions of the contemporary concern with the role of the *pueblo* in the nation's past come to the fore. *Moreno's* retelling



emphasises the people as political actor and social force, capable of bringing about revolutionary change. Within 1810, Marxist constructions of the proletariat are entirely absent, replaced by a raucous, exuberant popular world that embraces the hierarchical inversion of the carnivalesque. In Cucurto's text the concept of the people as a conscious political actor disappears, the battleground transferred instead entirely to the cultural realm. Revelling in the traditionally Peronist concept of 'incultura', the text imagines a world free of any form of restraint, uninhibited by order, political correctness or traditional ideas of what constitutes literature.

The interplay between these contemporary rewritings of Argentina's founding revolution and ideologically bound public discourses of history highlights a dimension of the relationship between literature and history that is often ignored. In reimagining this tried and tested national tale, these texts engage with historical versions that have played a visible role in public life and have functioned as a political tool, being rewritten to suit the aims of competing projects and ideologies. The self-reflexive play with history in these texts therefore goes beyond an ambiguous blurring of 'fact' and 'fiction' to become a self-conscious engagement with the political traditions that have shaped Argentina's past and present. They do not merely dismantle epistemological certainties, but instead engage in constructing alternatives that imagine a different vision of the nation, built upon a self-aware foundation. Rather than dismissing meaning as an elusive impossibility, therefore, they present meanings that acknowledge their own ideological positioning, transcending false claims to 'neutrality' or 'objectivity' and clamouring to fill the vacant space left by the demise of the status of 'official' history.

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