INTRODUCTION
The well-known Argentine writer and literary critic Leopoldo Lugones, in a series of public lectures in 1913, identified the long Poem *Martín Fierro* (1872, 1879) written by José Hernández (1834-1886) as "The Gauchesque Epic of Argentinean Letters" and as "An epic poem that expresses the heroic life of our race, like the [Cid] Campeador" (Carrino 1974, et. al. 7; Lugones 1962: 1237).

Both common readers of *Martín Fierro*, as well as academics and literary critics, such as Miguel de Unamuno (1884: 58), Leopoldo Lugones (1962: 1237), Ricardo Rojas, (Vol. II, 1948: 57), and Henry A. Holmes have gradually linked this poem with the origin of Argentine national identity, notwithstanding that this work tacitly underwrites the colonial exploitation, violent integration, and even eventual annihilation of the Gaucho peasant, the Indians, and the black population of 19th-century Argentina.

The fact that poets, novelists, journalists, critics, and the general public have embraced the interpretation of *Martín Fierro* as a work that defines Argentine national identity, has, in my opinion, diverted the attention of most critics from the real core of the analysis, which is that the very concepts of "literature," "history," "identity," and "nationality" are and have been cultural constructs. These have both entered and helped form nation-states, national identities, and literary cultures in Western societies and their former colonies.

The purpose of this essay is, then, to analyze *Martín Fierro* from the point of view of a non-canonical reading by using theoretical concepts of Benedict Anderson, Edward Said, and Irena Nikolova to explain the literary processes and ideologies involved in the formation of the official concept of national literature in Argentina. Anderson considered society and its institutions, among them history and literature, "imagined communities," that is, social and cultural constructions. Departing from Anderson's theory, Said and postcolonial critics in general aim, according to M. H. Abrams, at establishing "The critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France, and other European imperial powers" and, correlativey, to disestablish the traditional, "Eurocentric discourse that assumed the normality and preeminence of everything 'occidental,'… in which the colonial other is

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not only subordinated and marginalized, but in effect deleted as cultural agency” (Abrams 1999: 236). In its turn, Nikolova, traces the historical transformation of Epic as a genre and finds that “Romantic epic” has its legacy from the cultural (historical and literary) paradigms of Antiquity that are renewed during the Renaissance period: “The term Romantic epic is often applied to a number of these Renaissance epics, such as Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso and Tasso’s Gerusalemme Liberata, as well as Dante’s Inferno and Milton’s Paradise Lost. Romantic epic attests to the amalgamation of elements of the classical epic and of romance where the historical and the fanciful intersect in order to create a new genre” (Nikolova 2002: 163).

When applied to the literary analysis of Martín Fierro, the theoretical arguments of Anderson, Said and Nikolova can be relevant to identify in the poem central aspects related to nation formation in literature. Thus, the claim - adduced by Nikolova - that “The epic, poetry’s most public genre, is also an effort to imagine a nation, to construct a model for the intersection of the subject – political subject – and state” [Gregerson qtd. in Nikolova 2002: 164]) in which the flourishing of Romantic epic and the invention of national literatures in Europe in the Romantic era are linked, becomes a fundamental argument to ground the two working hypothesis put forward in this essay. As follows: 1) to determine to what extend 18th- and 19th century state’s ideologies and cultural politics that informed the literary models of nation building in Europe correspond to the national ideologies put forward in written texts by José Hernández and other 19th-century Argentine writers and intellectuals who, acting as political subjects, often endorsed official policies of literary nationalism, and 2) to argue that the interpretation of Martín Fierro both as a "foundational narrative," and as an "epic poem," was instrumental for establishing the official concept of national literature in Argentina, in spite of the textual evidence that in Hernandez’s narrative poem Gauchos, Indians and Blacks are represented either as “bon savages” or as “exotic barbarians”.

These questions are complex and there are, of course, not easy answers to them. However, to explore critically these cultural -literary and historical- issues, this study will analyzes the intratextual or internal components of the poem in order to verify if it is an epic work or not as well as the contextual relations the poem establishes between literary nationalism, authorial ideology, and national reception. Furthermore, the preliminary results of that analysis will be related to Said's critical concepts of "Hegemony / Dependency," "Strategic Locations," and "Strategic Formations" ([1978] 1995: 20) and also to Nikolova’s definition of Romantic epic (2002: 163-180) in an attempt

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2 I use here the concept of “Ideology” in a similar way that the historian Alun Munslow and the Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci understand it."Ideology. A coherent set of socially produced ideas that lend or create a group or consciousness. Ideology is time and place specific. Constituted as a dominant mode of explanation and rationalization, ideology must saturate society and be transmitted by various social and institutional mechanisms like the media, Church, Education and the law. In the view of certain commentators, ideology is to be found in all social artifacts like narrative structures (including written history), codes of behavior and patterns of beliefs” (Munslow 184). Ideology, according to Gramsci, is closely related to “hegemony.” “Hegemony is power achieved by a combination of coercion and consent. . . . Ideology is crucial in creating consent, it is the medium through which certain ideas are transmitted and more important held to be true” (Gramsci, qtd. in Loomba 1998: 29).
to uncover some of the ideological and literary processes involved in Argentina’s official invention of the nation as an epic narration.

II. INTRATEXTUAL LEVELS IN MARTIN FIERRO: STRUCTURE AND PLOT

A useful starting point for the analysis of *Martín Fierro* could be to comment briefly on the main technical and thematic aspects (structure, plot, lyrical voices, metrics, style, topoi, and epic elements) employed by Hernández's speaker to present and organize poetically his narrative poem.

*Martín Fierro* has 7206 verses, and it is composed of two parts: The Departure (*La Ida*) and The Return (*La Vuelta*). In the first part, Fierro narrates his misfortunes, which start when he is dragged away from his home and family by the military and is taken as a soldier to fight the Indians on the border line ("La frontera") that separated the Christian territory from the Indian lands. Fierro deserts and goes back to his former home and finds out that his house was destroyed by the military and that his wife and sons were thrown away; they were gone. Lonely and desperate, Fierro became a bad gaucho (un gaucho malo). He kills then two men: a black and a brave gaucho; and he continues to flee. When Fierro is finally cornered by the military police, he fights back, but a sergeant named Cruz, seeing Fierro's bravery, switches sides and joins forces with him. They eventually overcome the attackers and escape the police. The first part of the poem ends when the runaways Fierro and Cruz cross the border and go on to live with the Indians.

The second part of the poem, The Return, narrates the misery and subjugation that Fierro and Cruz experienced during the two years they stay with the Indians. Victim of some type of plague, Cruz dies, while Fierro -after killing an Indian to defend a prisoner, a Christian woman- flees with her back to his homeland. There he finds two of his sons as well as Picardía, the son of sergeant Cruz. In rural bars and/or general stores called "pulperías," where all of them recount their respective difficulties and misfortunes -of being gauchos constantly chased by the military and the Argentine state officials-, Fierro meets a black youngster, the son of the black man that Fierro had killed. The young man challenges Fierro to a payada, or verbal duel in verse accompanied by sad guitar music. Fierro, now an experienced and conformist man, beats the black youngster in the payada and avoids a physical confrontation with him. The second part of the poem ends when Fierro separates from his sons and friends, giving them valuable advice both to learn to suffer in silence the injustices of gaucho life and to learn to become good citizens properly integrated in city life.

II. 1. THE ORAL TRADITION CODE AND THE LYRIC VOICE

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The gaucho peasants lived in the 19th century in the vast Argentine valleys or pampas, where they worked and lived as cowboys and horsemen. The gaucho recreation and social rites included rodeos, horse riding competitions, knife-fighting, guitar playing and singing poetic songs or payadas for other gauchos around campfires in the plains or in the pulperias.

The payadas, or gaucho songs, were originally composed, improvised and sang by the payador or gaucho singer, but never written. Thus the genuine and primitive gaucho songs have been lost. It was only when educated men of letters recovered the lost history of the gauchos that the gaucho songs were recorded and reconstructed in writing. That happened when the leterati by means of that writing process created the books that compose the subgenre called la "literatura gauchesca " (see III).

José Hernández, one of these men of letters, represented in the poem Martín Fierro, a payador, or minstrel, who recounted lyrically in a stylized oral register the gaucho's way of living. In nearly all its stanzas, Martín Fierro is the lyric "I" of the gaucho singer who sings his story from his own point of view, as shown in the first stanza of the poem.

Here I sit and sing      Aqui me pongo a cantar (X)
to the beat of my guitar,     al compás de la vigüela (A)
'cause a man who's kept awaken    que el hombre que lo desvela (A)
By a heavy sorrow,              una pena extraordinaria,  (B)
Like a lonely bird              como la ave solitaria,  (B)
Consoles him by singing. (Lines 1-6).   con el cantar se consuela.  (A)

As critics have already noted, most gaucho singers (payadores) used ten-line or decima verse, but Hernández throughout Martín Fierro uses sextilla or six-line, octosyllabic verse with the first line unrhymed: XAABBA. The author preferred assonance to consonant rhyme. Each stanza is usually divided in three couplets: the first couplet presents the topic, while the second develops it fully, and the last concludes vigorously the stanza in the form of a synthesis, a proverb or a commentary which appeals for an answer.4 Martín Fierro's use of paramiology (the inclusion of proverbs in literature) is an element deeply rooted in Peninsular Spanish literary tradition. However, in Fierro, the proverbs are greatly modified by the gaucho's colloquial language and his way of life.

The contextual relation established in the poem between the intellectual author and his popular audience can be fully appreciated in the following verses that reveal the complete textual identification of the cultivated poet Hernández both with the illiterate gaucho singer Fierro and with the Gauchos living on the pampas:

I'm not a singer with learnin',     Yo no soy cantor letrao
but once I set myself to singin'    mas si me pongo a cantar
there's not stoppin' me             no tengo cuando acabar

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and I can go on and on,
the verses gushed out of me
like water from the spring.

(Lines 49-54)

I'm a bull in my corral
and a bigger one in someone else's; . . . .

(Lines 61-62)

So listen all of you
to the story of my woes
that I never fight or kill
unless I have to . . . . (Lines 103-106)

Now listen to a story
told by the gaucho on the run,
who as father and husband has been
hard-working and willing,
and still people
take him as an outlaw. (Lines 109-114)

II. 2. MARTIN FIERRO'S TOPOI: FROM NATIONHOOD ASPIRATION TO NATIONALISTIC EXALTATION. PATRIOTISM AS POETIC TOPIC

One of the main themes in Hernández's poem is the protest against injustice. It is specifically a complaint on how a good-hearted gaucho, who is unjustly and ill-treated, becomes a criminal and bad seed, after having been a good horseman.

Once, out my way, I had
children, cattle, and woman,
but things started to go bad;
I was shoved out to the frontier
and what I did find when I got back?
Nothing but ruins, and that's all.

(Lines 289-294)

I was gentle at first,
but now I'll be an outlaw (lines 1099-1100)

If he takes it, they say he's a fool;
if he doesn't, he is a bad gaucho.
Lash him, give him a clubbin'
since that's what he needs!
For anybody born a gaucho
this is his damned fate. (Lines 1379-1384).
What these lines suggest is that the lyric speaker has become a bad gaucho to take revenge on the authorities and military for the injustices and maltreatment they have inflicted on him. Revenge, however, articulated in a poetic lament of protest against institutionalized injustice, constitutes the unified voice and perspective of Fierro, becoming both the cause and self justification for the dehumanization of his own being. By selecting a universal theme, that of revenge, a central voice and focalization (the gaucho's lyric I), a stylized oral register (the aesthetization of a regional dialect of Argentina), and an appropriated poetic tone (lament), *Martín Fierro* emerges as a poem of protest, whose author has wisely ensured that it will be read or listened not only by the gauchos themselves but by 19th-century Argentinean intellectuals and politicians to whom the poem was also directed (see III. 2). What the author did not seem to be aware of was that his narrative poem would awake in both rural and urban Argentineans so great patriotic feelings of a nation united by language, territory and common ideals of goodness (i.e., nationhood), so that the poem would be interpreted to represent the national character and identity of "all" Argentineans.

Certainly, there is textual evidence in Hernández’s poem that articulates this kind of "essentialist" nationalism, wherein the lyric voice of the gaucho embodies the essence of the melancholic, Christian, brave, and noble Argentinean in his battle for liberty and social justice.

Singin' I'm gonna die  
singin' they'll bury me  
and singin' I'll get to  
the feet of the Eternal Father. (Lines 31-34)

I won’t step to the side  
even if they come slashin' my throat;  
I'm soft with the soft  
and tough with the tough,  
and in a tight spot no one  
ever see me flinch . . . . (Lines 67-70)

I'm a gaucho, so you'll know  
this is straight talk: . . . . (Lines 79-80)

My joy is to live as free  
as the bird in the sky;  
I make no nest in this earth  
where there is so much suffering (Lines 91-94)

Ever since I was a kid I earned  
Dende chiquito gané

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5 After analyzing how lament and challenge are components inherent to all Gauchesque poetry, and components even deeply associated with the Argentinean culture as large, which have appeared, for instance, in music (i.e., milonga and tango) and theatre (i.e., the theatrical-grotesque genre), Josefina Ludmer concludes that: “The lament constituted itself as a popular representation of the Argentinean people, reappearing in the suffering aesthetic of social realism, while the challenge was read as anti-popular representation” (Ludmer 1996: 619).
my own way with my work, la vida con mi trabajo,
and even though I've always been at the bottom y aunque siempre estuve abajo
and don't know what is to be on top. (Lines 973-976) y no sé lo que es subir.

The supposedly good gaucho's personality traits (of Christianity, bravery, freedom, individualism, hard work and justice) and the exaltation of the European Romantic paradigm (the whole idea of nostalgia, wishing for the a perfect, idyllic primitive life which never really existed in the first place) were the very cultural and literary topics Argentinian readers and critics were most attracted by in romanticizing gauchos’ former lifestyle.⁶ These Romanticism’s quintessential topics were often identified by critics and readers as the “spiritual essence” of Argentinean’s identity expressed in their aspirations to achieve nationhood. Nevertheless, these legitimate nationalistic aspirations appear in the poem side by side to a peculiar exaltation of nationalistic feelings and, ultimately, racist depictions of Indians, Blacks, women, and foreigners.

II. 3. NATIONALISTIC EXALTATION AS AN IDEOLOGICAL TOPIC
Critics and other readers have in general favored Martín Fierro as an exponent of nationalism in a form of nationhood based on the praise of Gaucho "spiritual" values. However, in their eagerness to enthrone Martín Fierro with the label of their national epic, some critics have failed to recognize both the unfavorable poetic representation of the "Other" (i.e., foreigners, Indians, and Blacks) and the peculiar exaltation of nationalistic manifestations articulated in Hernández's poem.⁷ An important exception to this kind of patriotic "essentialist" reading of Gauchesque literature is the interpretation of the gaucho genre put forward by critic Josefina Ludmer, in her article for the Cambridge History of Latin American Literature (1996). Here she rightly affirms that

Also present [in the gaucho genre] were various strains of Nationalism, each directed against different manifestations of "otherness," from a certain linguistic Nationalism, against other tones and against the threat of linguistic corruption by the new immigrants, to political Nationalism that constitutes the community's central nuclei against foreigners, to popular Nationalism, against an oligarchy that was affiliated with foreign interests, to a racist Nationalism, against Indians, Blacks and Immigrants. (Ludmer 1996: 620)

Although Ludmer’s commentary is not on Martín Fierro, there is hardly any doubt that she is alluding to the following kind of Nationalism that is present in Hernández's poem:

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⁶ The feelings of nostalgia for the supposedly good, old life of primitive gauchos and the lyrical tone of lament and suffering is conveyed in Hernández's poem. However, it is in the following two verses that nostalgia and lament are expressed in a poetic nutshell: "sólo queda al desgracio / lamentar el bien perdido" (all a poor hopeless one can do / is cry over the good things he has lost) (lines 299-300; my translation).

⁷ Andrés Avellaneda, in the prologue to his 1968 edition of Martín Fierro, analyzes the kind of criticism in which Martín Fierro is associated both with nationalism and epic poetry (see pages 7-11).
1) A popular nationalistic manifestation directed against foreigners and Argentinean immigration laws. The gaucho and, in a lesser degree, the poor rural people are portrayed in Fierro's poem as being against the Argentinean government and the landowners and oligarchy. These appear in the poem to be affiliated with foreign workers and settlers. Their cause of complaint was, in real life as well as in the poem, the fact that the government had passed favorable laws toward European settlers that gave them the right to colonize and own land in the pampas, as follows:

I don't know why the government sends to the frontier a bunch of gringos that don't even know how to come to a horse. They'd have you think that by sending a gringo they're sendin' something extra special. . . .

(Yo no sé por qué el Gobierno nos manda aquí a la frontera gringada que ni siquiera se sabe atracar un pingo. Si crerá al mandar un gringo que nos manda alguna fiera.)

they act like sons of the rich. If it's too hot, they are good for nothin', and if it's cold, all they can do is shiver; . . . .

(Lines 889-894)

Hell! They are only fit to live with sissies. (Lines 900-908).

2) A linguistic Nationalism against other dialects and accents, and against the threat of linguistic corruption the new immigrant speakers impose upon the national language:

He was a gringo with a bad accent and no one could understand him. Who knows where he comes from! Maybe he wasn't even a Christian since the only thing he said was that he was a Papolitano. (Lines 847-852)

(Era un gringo tan bozal que nada se le entendía. ¡Quién sabe de ande sería! Tal vez no juera cristiano, pues lo único que decía es que era pa-po-litano.)

3) A racist Nationalism directed against Indians and Blacks:

(a) Indians are presented in the poem as stereotyped images of "exotic barbarians"—as in:

And the Indian is like a turtle when you try to finish him off; if you manage to spill his guts it doesn't seem to bother him: he'll stuff'em right back in, and hunch over to take off. (Lines 505-510)

(Y el indio es como tortuga de duro para espichar; si lo llega a destripar ni siquiera se le encoje, luego, sus tripas recoje, y se agacha a disparar)

The Indian Always thinks that one should kill anything,
'cause the blood one don't drink    pues la sangre que no bebe
is good to see spilled          le gusta verla correr.

(Lines 231-234, MF; Part II; my translation)

b) Indians are portrayed as "bon savages," who eventually could be converted to Christianity:

I know that out there the Indian chiefs    Yo sé que allá los caciques
take care of Christians,                     amparan a los cristianos,
and that they treat them like "brothers"     y que los tratan de 'hermanos'
when they go there on their own. (Lines 2191-2194)

The one who rescued us, upon our comin'
was the most hospitable of them all.
He appeared to have a good heart,
for he wanted to become a Christian.
(Lines 779-782, MF, Part II; my translation)

c) Correlatively, Blacks are portrayed as "erotic objects" and "demons":

"Black beauty" . . . I said,             -'Negra linda' -dije yo-.
"I'd like to have you . . . for my mattress,"    'Me gusta . . . para la carona.'
and I began hummin'                        Y me puse a talariar
this nasty little tune:                  esta coplita fregona:

"God make the whites;
St. Peter, the mulattoes;
but the devil makes the blacks
as coal for hell's fire." (Lines 1163-1170)

It is evident that in these verses and throughout the narrative poem, Hernández blends in the central voice and perspective of the gaucho Martín Fierro, with the diverse dialects and voices of nationals and foreigners; rich landowners and poor gaucho peasants; public officials and soldiers; and White, Black and Indians. From a Romantic conception of history and literature, Martín Fierro reveals an individual aspiration of nationhood on the basis of the unity of a common territory, language, religion and race. Whereas, from a postcolonial perspective, the poem can be seen as structured around the depiction of conflicts caused by "Otherness," that is, race, gender, social class, territoriability and Nationalism.8

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8 As mentioned in the introduction to this paper (see page 1), Postcolonialism (sometimes refer to as "Cultural Studies") is a set of theories stemming from diverse disciplines such as Sociology, Cultural Studies, History and Literary Criticism -whose object of research is to study how the image of the “Other” has been constructed and articulated in European cultural, historical, and political discourse. In other words, how, when, and why the non-European peoples and their cultures have become subordinated. As generally applied to literature, Postcolonialism is a poststructuralist theory and method aimed at dismantling the linguistic, cultural and social representation in literary texts which convey a perspective in which the Western "hegemonic discourse" dominates over the non-western worldview or "subaltern discourse." For
II. 4. MARTIN FIERRO: A CLASSICAL EPIC?

As critics have often acknowledged, Hernández's poem's generic classification is elusive. In Martín Fierro some of the technical and thematic elements refer, by way of resemblance or opposition, to those critics have often associated with the classical epic genre. Consequently, one way of verifying if the classification of Fierro's poem as classical epic poetry can be sustained, would be, by examining how and in what contexts the themes, style and structure archetypical of the classical epic appear in Hernández's poem:

**Epic poetry**

a) The literary presentation of a hero as a figure of great national importance, whose basic heroic attributes are: strength, bravery, nobility, and honesty (i.e., Achilles, Aeneas, Ulysses, and Ajax [Homer's Iliad, Odyssey; Virgil's Aeneid].

**Martín Fierro's poem**

a) These classical attributes of the epic hero appear in Martín Fierro in the form of dishonesty and even egoistic, male oriented attitudes which verge on machismo and criminality. As a result, Fierro becomes an antihero, a "bad gaucho" (see, lines 61-62; 105-106). However, it must be noted that before becoming a gaucho malo, Fierro displays some heroic personality traits, such as bravery, freedom, and justice. Nevertheless, the image of a "good-hearted" criminal prevails throughout Hernández's work, making it impossible for Fierro to gain a stature of an authentic classic epic hero (see section II. 2).

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10 Although there are many national and international critics who have associated Martín Fierro with a classical epic work, here, for practical purposes, I only refer to the most influential ones: The Spaniard Miguel de Unamuno and the Argentineans Leopoldo Lugones and Ricardo Rojas. For a discussion of their criticism, see section III. 2.
b) The action takes place in a huge geographical space and usually involves movements of people, often, a long journey in which a hero carries out superhuman deeds or searches an objective or ideal. The hero, after many hazards, overcomes the obstacles, reaches his objective and obtains greatness or "grandeur" (e.g. Homer's *Odyssey*).

c) The hero is involved in great battles, and sometimes, he is engaged in military actions directed against the traditional religious enemies (the Infidel) or he participated in a constant pilgrimage, which includes a symbolic or love quest (e.g. Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*).

d) Occasional injustice, but at the end, poetic justice (divine or humane) will always prevail (e.g. The *Mío Cid*).

e) The hero and the characters are bound to the same fate and involved in a common enterprise, often, directed to reach nationhood. Therefore, the epic text presupposes the existence of an ideological common ground between the literary characters and the public to whom the poem is addressed (e.g. Camoens' *Os Lusíadas*).

b) It is true that as an antihero, Fierro makes a long journey and overcomes many obstacles. Nevertheless, the journey he makes is against his own will, for he was recruited for compulsory military service and sent off to the border. Thus, in this poem there are not free "inspired movements of people" or "pilgrimage," but "compulsory mobilization of people" enforced by the laws of levas, which explains the growing anti-military feelings Fierro shows throughout the poem. Given that Fierro does not have any individual or common ideal to reach, he becomes deprived of (epic) glory.

c) As a conscript, Fierro was sent off to the border to fight a war against the Indians who, in real life as in fiction, were the traditional enemies (the Infidel) of the Argentinean government in 19th century. As he becomes a deserter, he flees to Indian Territory. Therefore, his flight can hardly be called a "pilgrimage" to sacred or national land.

d) Poetic justice (divine or humane) does not prevail in the poem as it does human injustice (see section II. 2).

e) Although neither the hero nor the characters are engaged in a common enterprise, it must be acknowledged that this poem shares with classical epics two common elements: first, there is a textual presence of the *topoi* of nationalism, either in a positive form of nationhood aspirations or in the negative form of nationalistic exaltation (see sections II. 2. and II. 3); secondly, in some ways, the poem shares an ideological common ground between the protagonist and the audience being addressed (see section III. 2).

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11 The Spanish term *Levas*, a poetic topic as well as an Argentinean 19th-century judicial regulation, meant: the enforced recruit of vagrants who were sent off to fight wars often against the Indians, whose territory were situated within Argentina's borderlines: *La Frontera*. 
f) "An epic is a ceremonial performance, and is narrated in a ceremonial style which is deliberately distanced from ordinary speech and proportioned to the grandeur and formality of the heroic subject and architecture" (Abrams 1999: 76).

f) The lyric voice does not articulate an elevated language and style conveying a solemn tone in Fierro's poem. On the contrary, the poet transcribes plainly and directly the gaucho's regional and popular oral dialect. As the gaucho's language is colloquial, simple, and straightforward, it is foreseeable that in the poem the use of popular simile (in relation to geography) is more frequent than the use of cultivated metaphor (in relation to abstract thinking). Certainly, imagery in a form of simile is more related to the gaucho's real habitat - the pampa, the rodeo, the bulls and corral (see lines 61-62; 93-94) - than to the ideal nature (locus, amoenus) of the classical epic.
g) The use of epic conventions, such as:
-- The intervention of a divinity, who by praising the hero, extols in him and the reader, the feeling that a mission, inspired by supernatural powers, is commanded to a chosen people (e.g. Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*).

-- The use of oral appeals to a divinity, a muse, and to the listener, in a form of epic questions or an invocation to a muse or a divinity to inspire him in his heroic undertaking and also in a form of harangues or sermons directed to the "people" or to the soldiers of an army in a war situation (e.g. Ercilla's *La Araucana*). 

-- The use of *in medias res*, as an epic technique, which enables the poet to initiate the narrative, not at the beginning but in the middle of the narration or just in the critical point of the action. (i.e., Milton's *Paradise Lost*, I). (See "epic conventions" in Abrams 1999: 78).

-- Although classical epic conventions (i.e., harengues and sermons) are not present in *Martín Fierro*, there is in the poem some other kind of appeals to the listener, in a form of quarrels and verbal duels (see lines 103-106; 109-114; and section II. 1). The use of questions or appeals to an inspiring muse or divinity - appears at the beginning of *Martín Fierro* in a form of an invocation to God and saints (Part I, stanzas 2-10): "I beg the saints in heaven / to help me with my thoughts / [...] / as I begin to sing my story, / to refresh my memory / [...] / and since everybody sings / I want to sing too" (Part I, stanza 2, lines 7-8; 10-11 and stanza 5, lines 29-30). However, the invocation to a muse and to a divinity as a classical epic element in Hernández’s poem is very attenuated, if not undermined. This happens because: a) Fierro's calls to God and the saints are not solemn, but rather, presented in a simple and direct language; and those appeals give the impression of being "picaresque" in the literary sense (see the opening stanzas), and b) It is a convention of the Gauchesque genre that the gaucho singer, as any other popular singer, sings more by virtue of inspiration than by learning. As the singer Fierro asserts in his song, "I'm not a singer with learnin', /" (see stanza 9; line 49).

-- *Martín Fierro's* poem starts by the beginning, i.e., *ab ovo* and not in *medias res*.

-- In *Martín Fierro*, a divinity does not intervene and the hero is not by any means inspired by supernatural powers.
The preliminary conclusions that can be drawn from the above comparison follow:

1) Critics who interpret Martín Fierro relating it to classical epic models must be quick to acknowledge that the rhetorical resources associated with the erudite classical epic are hardly found in Hernández's poem. The only modest classical epic element in this poem is the use of the biblical topic of the human suffering on earth as a sad and tearful “valley.” These references appear in lines such as, "I make no nest in this earth / where there is so much to suffer" (lines 93-94), and they may correspond to the Latin maxim: "hac lacrimarum valle.”

2) As the commentary on the stanzas cited in this article may show, the artistic value most notable throughout the poem is Hernández's poetic talent to create, metaphors and similes in a concise and colloquial language that accurately depicts Fierro and other gauchos' inner emotions of loneliness and suffering; and, to describe poetically the various chores and social rites the gauchos perform daily in the vast pampas.

3) Fierro as a brave man and a bard or singer of justice, loss, and faith could vaguely resemble an epic hero, yet his conformity with the injustice of the laws of his country and the fact that he is portrayed as a Romantic outlaw make him a kind of antihero - indeed, strange to the classical epic. Paradoxically enough, these apparent anti-epic characteristics neither diminish the lyricism nor undermine the character's heroic actions. On the contrary, the figure of Martín Fierro as a Romantic outlaw, the questionable hero's (gaucho's) "ethic," the popular speech articulated in the poem, an the quest for individual freedom are quintessential topics of European literary Romanticism.

4) Giving the similarities Martín Fierro shares with popular epic poetry, such as the Mío Cid (i.e., the lyric voices of both poems are addressed "to all the people", the two works retain a colloquial use of language, a scenic setting, a realistic tone, and even a touch of humor). Hernández's narrative poem could easily be defined as a elegy or as an elegiac song because the poem emphasizes lament, mutability and loss as well as a quest for freedom and poetical justice. Furthermore, Martín Fierro expresses a popular and sustained lament in verse (Part I, La Ida), and consolation (Part II, La Vuelta) for the loss of a gaucho's (Fierro’s) former viril, and independent lifestyle. Nevertheless, from a modern perspective, it would be more appropriated to associate Martín Fierro to a Romantic epic genre.

To sum up, one might accurately say that giving the literary fact that Martín Fierro’s lyric speaker emerges as popular and illiterate bard whose legend (not a historical reality) has been "stylized”

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12 Colin Smith, in his studies of the Spanish medieval epic Mio Cid finds adequate to classify epic works in two main categories: "erudite epic" and "epic poetry." By the term "erudite epic" he refers to classical Greek, Roman, and Italian epic from antiquity to Renaissance. By "epic poetry" he means a kind of popular epic, for instance, the Mio Cid, in which he locates some of the popular epic characteristics that I have mentioned. See the “Introduction” to his edition of Poema de Mio Cid 1978: 15-133.

13 For the explanation of the literary term "elegy" the way I use it here, and the transformation of its literary meaning from classical literature up to the modern times, see M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms 72-73.
(turned into literary style) by the cultivated poet José Hernández, and as a result of this stylization process the poem becomes a “Romantic epic.” In other words, by superimposing the European “Romantic imagination” upon the popular legend of a virile hero of the South American pampas, Hernández both follows and rejects in Martín Fierro the fixed structure and literary conventions of the classical epic genre and, by doing so, he manages to create a Romantic epic in Argentine that articulates, as it will be shown, his Romantic vision of nationalism. Indeed, Martín Fierro can not be considered a “classical epic,”¹⁴ but a “Romantic epic”, because just as Irena Nikolova explains: “one of the main differences between the classical and the Romantic epic [is that]: whereas the classical epic is based on an epic truth, itself an imitation and assertion of a historical reality, the Romantic epic is a product of poetic vision, of the Romantic imagination, which in the context of Romantic aesthetics becomes the one and only truth” (Nikolova 2002: 169). Therefore, in a literary sense, Hernández's poem can be conceived as essentially "Romantic", while in an ideological sense it is openly political (see III. 1). Thus, Martín Fierro is deeply rooted in the Romantic imagination (individual freedom) and the political will (nationhood) that impregnated European Romanticism.

III. EUROPEAN ROMANTICISM AND ARGENTINEAN NATIONALISM: "HEGEMONY AND DEPENDENCY"

In order to understand how the gauchos' images presented in Martín Fierro and in another texts have been instrumental in the formation of Argentine national literature, the reader has to inevitably examine the historical period in which the gauchos emerged as an ethnic group as well as literary characters in the Río de la Plata region. The first part of this period (1808-1888) corresponds politically both with the Struggle for Independence (1808-1826) and with a relative political stabilization of most of the republican nations in the Río de la Plata region (1826-1888). Whereas, culturally, this period coincides with the establishment of European Romanticism in Latin America.¹⁵ The second part of this period (1888-1964) may correspond, politically, to the consolidation of the nation-state in Argentina and, literally, to Modernism, that is, the Spanish Modernismo poético and Vanguardia.

The political and economic independence of the colonies did not mean, in any real sense, ideological (cultural and literary) independence from Spain and Europe. The political and military

¹⁴ The well-known Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges, who has written critical essays and fictional narratives on the Gauchesque genre and also on Martín Fierro, is against any interpretation of Fierro as an epic. He considers it as being more of a novel than an epic. He explains his critical position in "La poesía gauchesca," published as an introductory article in his book Discusión (1964). See specifically the pages 28-29; 33. Likewise, the prominent Spanish critic Américo Castro is against the interpretation of Martín Fierro as an epic poem (see La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense y su sentido histórico [1960] 76-77).

¹⁵ As Latin American critics have often noted, the 19th century European literary movements of Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism not only arrived late to Latin America (for instance, ca. 1830 arrived Romanticism in Argentina), but also lasted till long after they have ceased to exist in Europe (i.e., until the decade of 1910). Besides, the aesthetics of these literary movements appear to have been so intertwined that it becomes a difficult task for literary historians to make a clear-cut distinction between their literary characteristics.
background which characterized Latin American 19th-century history -the wars of independence, idealistic constitutions to govern the new created republics, uneven distribution of wealth and education, national and international wars, and military dictatorships- was ideologically shaped by the imperfect imitation of the European Romanticism as expressed in its two main constituent parts: as a political discourse of liberalism based on the ideas of Voltaire, Rousseau, Locke, Montesquieu, Darwin, Bentham, Spencer and Conte, and as a literary project of considering nations (national and historical narratives) as epic narrations directed to found national identities. Thus: "foundational literature [...] those works which seek to explain and evoke in imaginative terms the birth of the modern nation-state, in a concealed way its function is therefore political and historic" (Brookshaw 1997: 318).

According to E. Herman Hespelt, one of the political factors and social and cultural attitudes that "tended to prevent national political solidarity" and "helped to keep Spanish America intellectually a European colony for an unduly long time" (Hespelt 1946: 45) was the fact that:

In most of the countries there was little or no free public education. The percentage of illiteracy was very great; the reading public was correspondingly small and was made up almost exclusively of the wealthy landholding families, government officials and employees, army officers, priests, and an occasional merchant. These were the people for whom books were written [...] Many of them were educated in Europe; all of them felt themselves more closely related in taste and in breeding to the cultural classes of France and Spain than to the Indians and mestizos who worked in their states or in their mines; and all of them were accustomed to import books and magazines from Europe along with other luxuries which gave novelty and interest to their lives. It was very natural, therefore, that they should accept European style in thought as well as in dress, and that each prevailing European literary mode should be copied in its turn by Spanish American writers. (Hespelt 1946: 45)

Hespelt's social and cultural arguments as well as the economic, political, and military factors mentioned above, were undoubtedly the main causes for the uprising of an unequal relation between Europe and Latin America in the 19th century. A relation in which the West would establish its commanding position as a hegemonic culture while Latin America would be reduced to be a dependent or "sub-culture." This "consented" intercultural relation of "supremacy-subordination" is, generally, studied in the social sciences under the terms "hegemonic discourse" and "subaltern discourse," and within the spheres of literature and culture under the terms of "Postcolonialism" or

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16 The notion of "European liberal discourse" stems from the atheist and materialist ideals (trust in reason, science and progress) of the so called "encyclopaedists" (mainly Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot), and it was nourished by the doctrine of "Positivism" (mainly grounded by Comte and Spencer), which only admitted as "scientific" the methods that could be tested by experience and induction. Inspired by the encyclopaedist and positivist thought, liberalism emerges as a political and economic doctrine that demands the absolute independence of the state from any religion, and are against any form of state's intervention in the economy of a nation. The European liberal discourse and its influence in Latin American intellectuals and politicians is explained by Beatriz González Stephan both in her book La historiografía literaria del liberalismo hispano-americano del siglo XX (1987) 52-55; and in her article: "The Early Stages of Latin American Historiography" (1989) 291-320.
"cultural studies" (see footnote 8). Departing from Gramsci's Marxist theories, Edward Said explains the concept of "hegemony" as follows:

Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons, works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent. In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West (Said [1978] 1995: 7).

From these Marxist arguments, it follows that "cultural dependency" would be the opposite of "hegemony," that is, the "subaltern discourse" or the ideas which play an insignificant role in the formation of any culture. Thus, the ideas of social minorities may inevitably be subject to the influence and power of the prevailing dominant ideology of the ruling classes in any society.

Hespelt and Gramsci-Said's arguments are very telling to understand the relations of the cultural dependency Latin America has developed toward Europe. In the case of 19th-century Latin American literary history, these arguments are central to explain why the four main European central literary trends -Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Spanish "Costumbrismo," Realism- which dominates the literary activities of 18th and 19th century Europe (see footnote 15) were, precisely, the same ones which were imitated in the literatures of the Latin American countries.17

Romanticism, however, was the most important movement for the literary history of Latin America. Its importance derives from the already studied fact that it served as an ideological vehicle for the European liberal discourse articulated by Latin American and Argentinean official intellectuals in the formation of their respective national identities and foundational literatures. Romanticism -in Europe and by way of imitation in Argentina and Latin America- was not only associated with literary and political Nationalism, but with the liking for popular culture (i.e., regional dialects, songs, folktales paramiology, freedom, individualism, the exaltation of rustic or exotic nature and primitive man, as spiritual source of poetic inspiration).

Literary Nationalism was manifested in the European literary traditions by the enthroning of texts as being foundational in origin (i.e., a text which originates a culture of a nation), national in essence (i.e., a text whose contents are believed to represent the spiritual and aesthetic character of a people), and literary in form (i.e., a text which alleges that aesthetic quality makes it eligible for canonization

17 It is important to note, however, that before the 19th century two modes of writing that originated in Latin America had emerged and therefore were authentic literary expressions of that continent, and they constitutes the only exceptions in the tendency to imitate European literary trends. The first is the subgenre of the "Tradiciones," or sketches of historical or legendary events from colonial times, narrated in colloquial language and tone. It was the colonial writer Juan Rodríguez Freyle (1566-1640) of the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada (today, Colombia), who initiated this literary subgenre in his book El Carnero (1636). He was followed by the 19th-century Peruvian writer Ricardo Palma (1833-1919) in his Tradiciones (1872-1910). The second original Latin American literary subgenre was the "Gauchesque Literature" (see section III.1.). It is original because, among other aspects, it introduced to world literature unique types of characters (the gauchos), setting (la pampa), and language (the rural oral dialect of the Río de la Plata region).
as a classical epic poem or narrative). Political Nationalism was manifested in the assimilation of liberal doctrines that prompted the rise of the bourgeoisie as a social class and the emergence of modern democratic nation-states, and along with them, the cultural independence related to Western republican models of government.

The ideological and literary path that the Argentinean Romantic writer Miguel Hernández follows does not show any clear-cut distinction from European Romanticism. For example, as the other European Romantic writers did, Hernández, not only incorporated in his poem the topics of freedom, individualism, the exaltation (romanticizing) of the primitive man (the gaucho), their folktales and popular songs, but also the aspirations of nationhood, especially by articulating the attachment the poet and his protagonist felt to their territory (la pampa) and their people (the gaucho way of life). In other words, with his poem, Hernández contributed to culturally create or "invent" the Argentine nation.

In relation to the gaucho's identity and social reality, there have been numerous studies and controversies about his origins. Although it is not a close controversy by any means, it can be said, generally speaking, that the concept of the "gaucho" entails semantically ethnical, psychological and social categories and not a racial or biological category, as critics such as Lugones and Rojas believed (see section III. 2). As an ethnic group, the primitive gauchos can be defined as illiterate peasants who were often the sons or descendants of an Indian or Afro-American mother and an Andalusian father. Thus, gauchos may racially be Indian, black, mestizo or white-or a mixture of these races. As a psychological and sociological concept, the gaucho is the combined result of a geographical territory (the vast pampa valley) and a cultural milieu (a gaucho way of life). In that sense, one can generally say that the gaucho is shaped by his surroundings, configured by the horse and the horsemen's chores, fed with cattle, and spiritually nourished by popular songs and folktales.

As previously stated, in real life as well as in 19th-century Argentine literature, the gauchos were landless and sometimes vagrant, and therefore the state and military authorities, enforcing

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18 18th and 19th centuries European intellectuals under the influence of French Romanticism and its political corollaries of liberty, independence, revolution and patriotism, "created" -"invented-," in Benedict Anderson's theoretical terms, the foundational, national and classical literature of their countries, when they first selected (include and exclude) and, subsequently, enthroned certain texts to be the source and presence of their respective national literature. In this canonization processes works like the Chanson de Roland, Das Nibelungenlied, Ossian, and El Mío Cid became the only "foundational", "national", and "classical" literary texts which "qualified" to be representative of the national literature of, respectively, France, Germany, Scotland-Great Britain, and Spain. Imitating this European ideological paradigm, 19th-century Latin American intellectuals, in their turn, found their "foundational," "national" and "classical" texts in La Araucana, associated with the origin of Chile, Grandeza Mexicana, with the origin of Mexico; the Comentarios Reales, with the origin of Perú; Espejo de paciencia, with the origin of Cuba; Facundo and Martín Fierro with the origin of Argentina, and the juridical discourse of Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, with the origin of Colombia. For the study of European literary paradigms and its articulation in the emergence of the national literature in Colombia, see: “Formación del concepto oficial de la literatura e historia nacional en Colombia” and “Construcción de un canon literario nacional: Jiménez de Quesada ¿fundador de la literatura colombiana? (González Ortega 1992: 36-180).

19 Fernando Asunçao in his book Génesis del tipo gaucho en el Río de la Plata (1957) and Ricardo Rodríguez Molas in Historia social del gaucho (1968) analyze the emergence of the gaucho as an ethnic and social group.
Argentinean laws of levas, forced them to comprise the military, political, and labor force needed to eradicate Indians, Blacks, and the gaucho themselves from the pampa territory so that this territory could be given to European settlers. These Argentinean expropriation laws and the gaucho's reaction to them as well as Hernández's cultural appropriation of European Romantic epic models make Martín Fierro stands up as one of the best exponents of the Romantic epic genre in Latin America. In other words, Martín Fierro's the literary topic constituted by the lyric subject complaints about injustice, in the form of oppression, cohercion, and dispossession of land, together with the hero's quest for freedom and the poetical and political tone of lament and revolt employed by the lyric voice to demand justice (divine and humane) is what gives poetic coherence and renders universal thematic to the otherwise local and personal woes of the gaucho Martin Fierro.

To further explain the reading of Martín Fierro as a Romantic epic as well as Hernández's political and literary project of founding in Argentina a nation as a product of an epic narration of the Gauchos ways of life, it now becomes necessary to place the author José Hernández in the cultural and socio-historical context of the Gauchesque literature from which the poem Martín Fierro stems.

III. 1. AUTHOR AND AUTHORITY IN MARTÍN FIERRO: THE GAUCHESQUE GENRE, "STRATEGIC LOCATIONS" AND "STRATEGIC FORMATIONS"

As it is informed in biographies (Garzanti 1991: 446-447; Borgeson 1997: 415-416; Zorraquín Becú (1972); José Hernández (1834-1886), the Argentinean author of Martín Fierro (1872, 1879) was "essentially self taught" and "[w]orked also as a soldier, politician, civil servant, and journalist." As a soldier, "Hernández was recruited into the federalist army. … fought against the Unitarians, who wanted to fashion a centralized nation state, with all the power radiating from Buenos Aires." As a civil service employee, "he worked as a lawyer and teacher of Spanish literature at a secondary school" (Borgeson 1997: 415, 416). As a politician, Hernández was elected to the Camara de diputados (congress) and to the Congreso (senate). "Hernández's political intentions, conveyed in his Martín Fierro," were "to launch an attack against president Sarmiento, who ordered both that the gauchos fight the Indians and that the plains should be repopulated with Italian immigrants, modifying, in this way, the social order in detriment of the gauchos" (Garzanti 1991: 446; my translation). This political and literary project of Hernández, according to the critic John E. Englekirk, "was part of a crusade which he had also carried on through the newspaper El Río de la

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20 An Argentinian land regulation, which was passed in 1865, seven years before the publication of Martín Fierro (part I, La Ida), reads: "The one who has neither a permanent home address nor known sustenance means, and may damage the public moral through his bad behavior and habitual vices, will be declared vagrant." "The ones who are declared vagrants will be conscripted for three years" (Código Rural de 1865. Título IV, sección 3a., Artículos 272 y 275; cited in Avellaneda, 1968 [11]); my translation.)
Plata " (Englekirk 1968: 227). Hernández was the founding editor of Buenos Aires’ newspaper El Río de la Plata (1869-1870).

Based on this biographical data, it can rightly be claimed that José Hernández was an "official intellectual." Indeed, as the other official intellectuals writing in 19th-century Argentina -and Latin America, Hernández was alternately a politician, civil servant, state official, head or active member of the military, political, and cultural institutions, and -at the same time- a writer of fiction and poetry. As Antonio Gramsci has pointed out, the typical Latin American official intellectual was often associated with the state as a civil servant, and thus depended ideologically on the different 19th century governments he worked for. As such, he often articulated by "coercion" or "consent" an official national discourse in state institutions and texts.21

The life and work of eminent official intellectuals in Argentina during the 19th century is closely linked to the formation of the literary subgenre known in Latin America as “La gauchesca”. In fact, literary critics use the term “la gauchesca” to refer to a group of texts whose main characters and motifs are the gaucho, their way of living, and the pampas (the valleys of Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil). There are more than thirty of these texts and they were composed and written in a form of songs, poetry, essays, short stories, plays, and novels between 1787 and 1964.

Here are the most representative authors and works of the Gauchesque genre: (anonymous) El amor de la estanciera (1787) (a comic sketch "sainete"); Bartolome Hidalgo (1788-1822), Cielitos (song); Esteban Echeverría (1805-1895), "El Matadero" (short story); Hilario Ascasubi (1807-1875), Santos Vega (poem); Domingo F. Sarmiento (1811-1888), Facundo (essay); Estanislao del Campo (1830-1880) Fausto (dramatic poem); José Hernández (1834-1886) Martín Fierro (poem); Ricardo Güiraldes (1886-1927) Don Segundo Sombra (novel); and Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), "Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)" (fiction).

But, why have so many cultivated writers and eminent intellectuals for longer than a century and a half incorporated the popular gaucho image and motifs in their works? To explore possible answers to this question I will turn to Edward Said's theory of "Postcolonialism," which the critic has presented in his book Orientalism, first published in 1978. Here Said introduces the concepts of "strategic locations" and "Strategic formations" as follows:

My principal methodological devices for studying authority here are what can be called strategic location, which is a way of describing the author’s [ideological?] position in a text with regards to the … material he writes about, and strategic formation, which is a way of

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21 In general, the notion of official discourse is discussed by Frank Burton and Pat Carlen in their book Official Discourse (1979). In particular, the term "intellectual" has been used in reference to Latin America to indicate the existence of a minority that is dependent ideologically on the regional oligarchies, the Church, as well as on 18th and 19th centuries European liberal discourses (Gramsci 1971: 22). Correlatively, the attribute "official" usually means "something that is related to the state or, above all, which serves the state's interests" (Anderson 1983: 145). As the previous footnote indicates, the most influential official intellectuals who were contemporary of José Hernández were Alberdi, Sarmiento, and Mitre.
analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in culture at large. (Said [1978] 1995: 20)

The concepts of "strategic location" and "strategic formations" are critically "productive" here to illustrate the processes involved in the creation of Gauchesque literature. *Martín Fierro* and the "group of texts" which compose "the textual genre" Gauchesque were generally written by Argentinean educated urban writers who also wrote neoclassical and Romantic poetry as well as realistic and fictional prose. These Gauchesque texts have acquired extensive "referential power" and "mass density" throughout the 19th century, because they were written by "official intellectuals" who enjoyed great authority in Argentine society, given that they were involved in the army, in politics, or even as heads of the state's cultural institutions. These official intellectuals acting, sometimes as politicians and at other times as poets wrote political essays or fictional works in which they promoted an official view of Argentine national history and literature.

This brief account of the existence of both official intellectuals and the Gauchesque literature in Argentina and Latin America shows that José Hernández as well as other official intellectuals who wrote in 19th-century Argentina frequently appropriated in their texts the character of the gaucho singer or Payadores, together with many tones and themes of their songs, the payadas. Following this literary trend, Hernández in his *Martín Fierro* appropriates also the rustic language and oral register of the gaucho and politicized (nationalized) it to create a kind of elegiac narrative poem that adopts the archetypical literary and historical conventions of the European Romantic epic in order to articulate Argentina state’s cultural policies of literary nationalism. The above described process of textual appropriation derived from the literaturalization of gaucho language, themes, songs and folktales, and it responded to the special need fostered by some Río de la Plata writers and intellectuals, among them José Hernández, whose political and poetical authority was articulated in their literary texts contributing strongly to the creation of the official concept of the national literature in Argentina.

III. 2. RECEPTION: THE "NARRATEE" AND THE REAL READER-LISTENER

As Hernández has stated in the tree prologues written for his poem *Martín Fierro* (Borello 1987: 350), he had in mind mainly two groups of people to whom his poem should be directed: 1) Buenos Aires' literate readers, specifically, the official intellectuals and politicians who he hoped to influence so that they would change their harsh political laws against the gauchos. This group was

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22 The term "Official intellectuals" is meant here to refer to influential Argentinean and Latin American intellectuals who as civil service employees and men of letters by coercion or consent articulated the official national ideology of the governments they worked for. The most important official intellectuals of Argentina at the time *Martín Fierro* was published were: José Hernández, Juan Bautista Alberdi, Domingo F. Sarmiento, and Bartolomé Mitre (Mitre and Sarmiento were also presidents of Argentina.)
made of cultivated readers who assimilated Hernández's text as a poetical work or as political manifesto, upon whose contents they could agree or disagree. 2) rural illiterate gauchos to whom the author wanted to give moral lessons that could help them to improve their social conditions in order to try to make them accept willingly integration into the urban life and institutions. This group was composed of thousands of illiterate gaucho peasants who did not know any other kind of literature than that which was expressed in the form of popular songs and folktales.23 Most gauchos could enjoy Martín Fierro only through recitals organized around campfires in the middle of the plains, in which a person read aloud or recited parts of the poem to them.24

Hernández who, subsequently to the publication of the first part of Martín Fierro, La Ida (1872) was very aware of his poem's great popularity,25 wisely chose to introduce in the second part, La Vuelta (1879), the well known literary technique of metafictionality. That is, the fictional interplay between author, reader and text. Indeed, as it happens in Cervantes's Don Quixote, in Hernández' La Vuelta, the protagonist Fierro meets with gauchos and other "people" who have already heard or read about him.

To summarize, the reception of Martín Fierro one may, in narratological terms, characterize the diverse readers/listeners of the poem in three main groups: 1) the "real reader," the cultivated urban intellectual and the common reader who recited the poem to gauchos; 2) the "real gaucho listener," who was illiterate and therefore had to listen to the poem when it was read aloud by a literate reader; and 3) the "narratee," the gaucho as a literary character, when is fictionalized as a reader or "listener" within the poem.

The manifold interpretation that Martín Fierro posits could explain, to a certain extent, the broad reception it enjoyed when it was first published: "El gaucho Martín Fierro became an immediate success, perhaps no much by his literary qualities as for its portrayal of real conditions. By 1878 the poem has gone through eleven printings, with more than 50,000 copies that circulated both at home and abroad" (Carrino 1974: 9). The political interpretation of the poem as a song of protest which is aimed at "denouncing" Gaucho's "real conditions" and expect the readers to help improve was greatly attenuated by the year 1879, when the second part of the poem was published (Avellaneda 1968: 8). Although specialized critical reaction had its ups and downs, Hernández's poem enjoyed unprecedented success among the general public toward the end of the 19th century. Actually, by the

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23 As a critic has put it: "[Martín Fierro] was perhaps the only book that ever appeared on the rough-hewn countertop and shelves of the pulperías o country stores (Carrino 1974: 6).

24 The fact that Hernández's authorial intentions determined the structure of the poem have already been noted by some critics, among them Paul W. Borgeson, Jr, who summarizes this kind of dual reception with these words: "The first part of the poem the Ida [Departure] … would represent gaucho life and values to the city-dwelling reader and vindicate a tradition Hernández considered as valuable as it was unknown. The second and final part of the poem, the Vuelta [the Return] was explicitly aimed at the gaucho as well as the reader of Buenos Aires, for the advice Fierro gives his sons, is also clearly given to the latter-gaucho for his survival and integration into Argentina's future" (Borgeson 1997: 416).

25 "It is part of the popular tradition that the gauchos believed the poem to have been written by one of themselves" (Borgeson 1997: 416), and as a result of that belief, the author Hernández himself was popularly called "Senador Fierro."
year of 1894 the circulation of Martín Fierro (the two parts) was estimated at 62,000 printed copies (Avellaneda 1968: 8).

At the end of the 19th century, Miguel de Unamuno -who as a philologist and as a Spanish writer of the 1898's generation was torn by the ambivalent thought of either making Europe more traditionally Spanish or making Spain more progressively European- was of the opinion that: "Martín Fierro is impregnated in its expressions of españolismo in its language, in its proverbs, and in its soul" (Avellaneda 1968: 9. my translation). Praising the supposed epic characteristics of Hernández's poem, Unamuno holds that "In Martín Fierro appears the epic and lyric element closely fused and interpenetrated" (Avellaneda 1968: 58; my translation).

By the first decade of the 20th century, the Argentine literary critic reaction toward Martín Fierro was very positive and inclined to interpret Hernández's poem both as a founder and representative of Argentine national literature, and its protagonist Fierro as a popular hero who expressed the national identity of "all" Argentineans. This process of mythifying and nationalization of Martín Fierro is explained by the Argentinean critic Andrés Avellaneda:

Towards 1910, coincidental with the Fiestas del Centenario [Centenary celebrations], the literary statements of Leopoldo Lugones and Ricardo Rojas crystallized Martín Fierro as a national myth. The poem ceased to be analyzed to become instead an object of moral and patriotic exaltation. The gaucho's virtues represent virile attributes of the race and its history. The tradition -subsequently canonized in the wall calendar with its day and rite- … mixed the literary work with the historical document and the patriotic feeling in a whole strongly colored by affection and passion. … There is a desire to attribute to it the characteristics of a national poem and, consequently, epic traits. According to this selective and totaling point of view, the poem is a national epic with a human type authentically Argentinean who acts in a milieu -the pampa- considered the race's melting pot and the milestone of nationality (Lugones Rojas). Or, even, it is associated with the origins of the Argentinean nation (Avellaneda 1968: 9; my translation).

In fact, at the beginning of the 20th century, the most distinguished Argentinean intellectuals and writers Leopoldo Lugones and Ricardo Rojas, through their participation in two important cultural acts, greatly contributed to establish the official interpretation of Martín Fierro as being the quintessential Argentinean text, completely epic in design, foundational in nature, and national in essence. These cultural acts were, firstly, the organization by Lugones in May 1913 of "a series of public lectures in which he defined Martín Fierro as the Gauchesque "epic" of Argentinean letters," and secondly, "A month later … Ricardo Rojas established the Chair of Argentine Literature at the University of Buenos Aires, where Martín Fierro became an integral part of the literary program" (Carrino 1974: 7).

26 Andrés Avellaneda considers that with these kinds of interpretations, Unamuno has initiated a critic tendency that is "hypertrophied" or distorted by exaggeration (Avellaneda 1968: 9).
A half a century later, in his article "Gauchesque Poetry," which opens the book Discusión (1964), Jorge Luis Borges would corroborate the kind of official reading his contemporary Lugones had initiated, when he stated that "Lugones' nationalistic purpose was to exalt Martín Fierro" (Borges 1964: 22; my translation).

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, Martín Fierro's reception -both the specialized and the popular one- is manifold and still increasing throughout the world. The richness and diversity of specialized literary reception prevents me to even try to summarize it here. However, it can generally be said that there still are some critics who are inclined to identify the fictional personae Martín Fierro with Argentine national character, and the text with the foundational text of the country's national literature.

The popular reception is still increasing and still values greatly the literary images of the gaucho and the pampas as being exponents of the national identities of the countries which compose the Río de la Plata region (mainly Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil). The unchallenged popularity of Martín Fierro is attested by these two concluding and factual statements from Frank G. Carrino, who has himself translated Hernández's poem into English: "It has been translated into nineteen languages, making it available to more than half of the world's people."... "Now, after several hundred editions in Spanish and other languages, Martín Fierro is recognized as a masterpiece of world literature" (1, 8).

CONCLUSIONS: TEXTUALIZATION OF LITERARY NATIONALISM
The postcolonial reading I undertook in this essay has, I hope, helped to show that it was the Argentinean cultivated urban intellectuals -among them the author José Hernández himself, the literary critics and writers Leopoldo Lugones and Ricardo Rojas- who have appropriated the gaucho's body, rural space, rustic language, and social representations in order, firstly, to mythify them (i.e., to turn the gaucho's virile and psychological attributes into "essential" virtues supposedly shared by most Argentineans); secondly, to literaturalize them (i.e., to put the gaucho's and the pampa images in a form of a literary text: a Romantic epic); third, to politicize them (i.e., to articulate in the text a "civilizing" authorial political program); fourth, to nationalize them (i.e. to turn, through hegemonic and authoritative interpretation, a regional elegiac song of protest into a national Romantic epic); and, finally, to invent a nation through narration (i.e., to enthrone a kind of reception in which national history is substituted for a narrative Romantic epic poem) in order to associate a popular poem -whose mode of discourse despises minority groups- with the emergence of the Argentine nation.

As an alternative history, Martín Fierro conveys authorial and official ideology, in a form of literary nationalism, rather than offering any textual evidence, which could make tenable the official
interpretation of the poem as being the quintessential Argentinean epic, completely classical in design, foundational in nature, and national in essence.

These reading assumptions were, in fact, the result of ideological (cultural and historical) constructions made by some critics and the sympathetic popular and middle class reception of both *Martín Fierro* and the additional texts that compose the Gauchesque literature. In fact, the popular image of the gaucho as a national hero articulated in oral songs and written Gauchesque literature asserted in readers the notion of a "spiritual continuum"; a (literary?) tradition based on a common unity (community) of ideas, a common territory (the pampas) and common aspirations of nationhood. These aspirations derived from the kind of literary nationalism most European countries have embraced a century earlier, when their nations were culturally (in)formed or "invented" through the very acts of writing and reading Romantic epic narrations as exponents of national literatures (see footnote 18).

Therefore, from a postcolonial perspective, it can be said that *Martín Fierro*, as a text and as a protagonist, is an assertion of popular history; a poetic vision in which the literary subject (the lyric speaker and protagonist) remorsefully relates his personal "dubious" past, with no awareness of, that with his relation, he was creating an (historical?) text that would be interpreted by specialized and common readers as being both typically Argentinean, and to constitute the origin of their literature and history, as a foundational text.

*Martín Fierro’s* author, José Hernández, -as the tree prologues to the edition of his poem show (Borello 1987: 350)- was certainly aware of the official ideology or the "civilizing" political program he wanted to convey in his work. However, to emphasize the ideological intentions of the author against the unawareness of the lyric speaker and protagonist is to enter in the realm of the phenomenology of literature, given the literary convention that lyric speakers and protagonists are fictional characters (paper people) and as such, they are solely the creation of the author. In our case, it was an author who has metaphorized the popular folktales of 19th century Río de la Plata's gauchos in order to articulate in his text the national ideological project he posited in real life as an Argentinean senator and political journalist (see III. 1.). This kind of literary and political national project (as 19th century Argentinean law-making and enforcement shows [see footnote 20]) was officially aimed at turning nomads and horsemen into peasants, peasants into readers, and readers into citizens -hopefully well adjusted- to cope with the emergent industrial nation which Argentina was becoming at the end of the 19th century.

As commented, it appears that critics and readers of *Martín Fierro*, by reinforcing "essentialist nationalism," have neglected to notice the other kind of nationalistic poetic manifestations, which object to and defy different expressions of "otherness." That is, the literary representation of Indians, Blacks and women as erotic and exotic subjects reified (i.e., treated as irrational beings and/or objects of both sexual desire and sexual scorn) by the masculine and logocentric lyric "personae" of
Hernández's poem who deprives them from being more verisimilar characters in which they could display their own volition.

Over and above all these considerations, it is difficult to see how the fictional character of Martín Fierro can "represent the national spirit" of "all" Argentineans if the work exalts nationalistic manifestations directed toward foreigners and their speech -and also underwrites labor as a sexual exploitation of the "Other" (i.e., Indians, Blacks and women)- who are portrayed as living in the same community. A reason, but, by no means a justification, could be, that Argentinean 19th century's official intellectuals (among them, the author of the poem, himself) and readers, in general, felt a need to "invent" the culture of their own nation, and in order to fulfill these cultural and psychological aspirations of nationhood they did engage themselves in a ideologically "interested" (biased?) reception of the poem Martín Fierro.

To express this argument in Neo-Marxist and postcolonial theoretical terms (Forgacs 1997: 199; Said 1995: 20) it would be appropriate to say that the author, reader and critic were "positioned as a legitimating subject by the text, in other words, invited to act as guarantors of the obvious truth of what it say about reality" (Forgacs 1997: 199). In the case of Martín Fierro, the author himself as well as the readers -who embraced a "nationalistic" interpretation of the poem- appear to be "guarantors" both of the "truths" of nationhood and of nationalistic literary manifestations.

Correlatively, it must be said that the postcolonial reading of Martín Fierro suggested here has implied to lay bare the "concealed" textual strategies of positioning and legitimating, and by doing so, it is also ideologically intended or "interested" in achieving a more effective political criticism of Martín Fierro. Ultimately, then the ideological interest expressed here -that of the critic who has related some postcolonial theories to the reading of Martín Fierro- has been primarily directed to dismantle the official interpretation of Hernández's poem. That is, to read Martín Fierro, as literary anthropology, to understand and uncover the modes of discourse writers and critics have used to render their representations of the "Other." In this case, the literary representation of minority groups and their regional or national identity.

Positioning my critical interpretation within a postcolonial context, I have tried to read Martín Fierro as a metaphor of cultural colonialism, given that the intellectual writer José Hernández articulates in his work a European "signifiant" (i.e., Romanticism's literary nationalism) to introduce to world literature a hitherto unheard-of Latin American "signified" (i.e., the gaucho as a literary type and the pampa setting) in order to recreate a conflicting cultural hybrid "sign" (i.e., the literary representations of La América Mestiza ). Thus, the poetical construction of a new kind of mestizaje or "hybridity" in Martín Fierro constitute, from my postcolonial investigative perspective, the most powerful aesthetic aspect in Hernández's poem, for hybridity, as an ever-changing cultural signifiant,
has always been articulated in the signifying chain that has informed Latin America's (post)colonial history and literature.27

It is relevant then to pinpoint that the examination of Martín Fierro in the context of the classical and Romantic epic conventions as well as in the national context of Argentina, has shown, I hope, that the author of Martín Fierro, has deviated from the archetypical structural, stylistic and thematic convention of the classical epic, in order to use instead an epic form strongly influenced by the European Romantic imagination, manifested by the revival of national ideologies that informed the state’s official projects of nation building in Latin America during the 19th century. In the particular case of the literary composition and reception of Martín Fierro, two great cultural elements were intertwined: the European Romantic imagination and the political aspirations of founding a national literature expressed by 19th century Argentinean official intellectuals and writers. Likewise, at the continental level, it is also pertinent to recall here that the conflicting "hybridity" manifested in the attraction of these two great forces (i.e., the European cultural paradigm of romanticism and the topic of Latin American national and continental identity) was initially posited in the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's (1539-1616) life and work (Los Comentarios Reales [1609, 1617]) and, subsequently, has appeared not only in the political and poetical works of José Hernández but also in the political and literary writings of other eminent 19th and 20th centuries intellectuals and writers, such as Simon Bolívar (Venezuela), Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Cuba), Clorinda Matto de Turner (Peru), José Enrique Rodó (Uruguay), José Martí (Cuba), Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina), Pablo Neruda (Chile), José María Arguedas (Peru), Rosario Castellanos (Mexico), Miguel Angel Asturias (Guatemala), Alejo Carpentier (Cuba), Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia), and Diamela Eltit (Chile).28 Thus, cultural hybridity has, from colonial to postcolonial times, been both a polemical and "diseminating" cultural sign that has always accompanied Latin American letters.

27 "Postcolonial studies have been preoccupied with issues of hybridity, creolization, mestizaje, in-betweeness, diasporas and liminality, with the mobility and cross-overs of ideas and identities generated by colonialism. ... Alterity, or a binary opposition between colonizer and colonized is an idea that has an enormous force and power in the construction of anti-colonial narratives, by subjects who are themselves complex, mixed-up products of diverse colonial histories. ... The point, then, is not to simply pit the themes of migrancy, exile and hybridity, against rootedness, nation and authenticity, but to locate and evaluate their ideological, political and emotional valencies, as well as their intersections in the multiple histories of colonialism and postcoloniality" (Loomba 1998: 173; 182; 183).

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