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## The maid as political spy in Argentine literature and historiography: the Rosas-Perón nexus (1846-1964)<sup>1</sup>

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In Argentina's literature, the maid has been relentlessly represented as a political informer on her benevolent employers to persecutionary political forces. This study offers a critical history of this representation, beginning with the works *Facundo* (1846) and *Amalia* (1852) and concluding with the novel *El incendio y las vísperas* (The Fire and the Nights Before It, 1964).<sup>2</sup> The latter is regarded by many critics as the *Amalia* of the twentieth century. Close attention is paid to the interplay and mutual borrowings between the realms of fiction and historiography. In its focus on the maid, this study elaborates on a figure largely missing from Argentine cultural history. The view underlying this study is that these works were ultimately about national identity and social order. The study leaps from the base provided by writer and philosopher José Pablo Feinmann, who referred in passing to the theme of the maid as political spy, but did not explore it.<sup>3</sup>

The writings of the so-called Generation of 37 are formative in the history of the representation of the maid as political spy in Argentina's literature. The Generation of 37 was the first post-independence Argentinean intellectual cohort; its members had an interest in constructing Argentina as a white nation of European culture, and they used their fictions to write this nation into being. Most members of this group were born in the period of the wars of independence (1810-1818), and had reached adulthood with the rise of Juan Manuel de Rosas, the leader of the Buenos Aires Federalists whom they opposed on the basis of his Hispanic traditionalism, his religiosity, his authoritarianism and his courting of the rural and urban poor in the province of Buenos Aires. Heir to the old-guard Unitarians,<sup>4</sup> the Generation of 37 espoused a strand of liberalism that stressed civil liberties, but the group was in no sense egalitarian (Shumway 144). Although in theory most members of the group supported the partial abolition of slavery, they did not consider black people their equals and felt discomfort at the practical changes that resulted from the gradual liberation of slaves.<sup>5</sup> Rosas, on the other hand, made a point of courting and gaining the respect of the black community, and abolished the slave traffic in 1839. While Rosas's actions may have spoken more of political interest than political ideology, the Afro-Argentine community perceived Rosas as its liberator (Reid Andrews 250; Salvatore 65).

A member of the Generation of 37, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento wrote *Facundo* in 1846, and published it in Santiago, Chile. Regarded as the founder of Argentine literature, *Facundo* remains “an honored member of the canon” (Sorensen Goodrich 23). There is no agreement amongst critics as to *Facundo*’s specific genre: it reads as essay, fable, poem, pamphlet, history, and biography, all at the same time. Diana Sorensen Goodrich has observed that “it is possible to consider *Facundo* as a work of fiction, thereby cutting off its links with the world of events” (47). Similarly, Argentine critic Ricardo Piglia considers *Facundo* a fictional book, more specifically, a work of fiction written as if it was a work of facts (122).

*Facundo* made the claim that Africans (slave or free) who worked as domestic servants in Buenos Aires were informers to Rosas regarding their masters’ political allegiances and activities: “The blacks, won over to the government ... put into Rosas’s hands zealous espionage within the bosom of every family, through servants and slaves” (223).<sup>6</sup> Although this claim of espionage in *Facundo* pertained to “blacks” employed in domestic service without distinction of sex, in the novel this claim followed immediately after a description of the alleged influence black women had on the government, particularly through Rosas’s daughter, Manuelita, said to be entrusted with enhancing relations with the black community (222). In the later widely read autobiographical *Recuerdos de Provincia* (Recollections of a Provincial Past, 1849), Sarmiento reinforced the link between black female household slaves and spying. Black slave Rosa was deemed “sly and curious as a monkey.”<sup>7</sup> Another maid of no given name denounced a relative of Sarmiento to the Federalists (28).

Like *Facundo*, the later novel *Amalia* (1851), by José Mármol, portrayed household slaves as mortal enemies of Unitarian masters. A “nation building narrative” (Hanway 20), *Amalia* is exclusionary of black people in general, but it is particularly hostile to black women.<sup>8</sup> *Amalia* was first published in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1851 and appeared in Buenos Aires in 1855. Its author had read *Facundo*, and was personally acquainted with Sarmiento. Like Sarmiento, Mármol was a member of the Generation of 37. Combining real and fictional events and characters, *Amalia* is a political novel set in the author’s very near past. It is a widely established view that Mármol “unquestionably” used literature for social and political ends (Foster, *Currents* 5). *Amalia*’s narrative mode is third person omniscient. As with *Facundo*, the novel leads readers to identify with those persecuted by Rosas. *Amalia* is crowded with slaves and servants, even if only a few of them are given names.

Set in Buenos Aires in 1840, dubbed the year of terror by Rosas’s detractors, *Amalia* tells the story of Daniel Bello, a twenty-five year-old aristocrat from commercial Buenos Aires. Daniel saves his Unitarian friend Eduardo Belgrano from being murdered by Rosas’s squad as he attempts to migrate to Montevideo to join in the resistance. Eduardo’s plans have been

frustrated because a black maidservant who worked in the home of a fellow escapee revealed them to authorities (69).

Eduardo survives Rosas's men thanks to Daniel, who hides him in the house of his beautiful white cousin, Amalia Sáenz Olabarrieta. Daniel instructs Amalia to dismiss all her servants, white and non-white, because, given the state of affairs, there is reason to doubt them all (25). Despite first asserting that both white and black servants were potential enemies (and, presumably, both male and female) as the plot unfolds, it becomes clear that the real, actual enemies, are black maids. Indeed, at one point the omniscient narrator asserts that: "blacks, and women of color in particular, were Rosas's principal informers" (550).

Firmly guiding readers, the narrator reported confidently the feelings and motivations of black female slaves/servants. These women were supportive of Rosas because of their "wickedness" (291). Black slaves/servants denounced their masters to Rosas because he flattered their instincts, "arousing feelings of vanity previously unknown to this class that occupied, by its status and by its very nature, the lowest rung of the social ladder (550). Under Rosas "the perverse instincts" of black people had come to light (550).

Black slaves/ servants in *Amalia* were deemed to be ungrateful. This was demonstrated by two things. First, although they naturally belonged to the bottom of the social scale, the Europeanised elite had passed the Freedom of Womb Act in 1813, which meant that those in slavery would remain slaves, but their children would be born free. Despite this, "the feeling of gratitude had no roots in their hearts" (550). Second, black servants/ slaves were ungrateful because the families they worked for had been indulgent of them to an extreme. Yet "calumny, misfortune and death" (551) was the way servants/ slaves repaid all the protection they had received from their benevolent masters.

Female servants were portrayed as inconsiderate when it came to their actual domestic duties. On the eve of an attack against Rosas by Unitarian General Juan Lavalle (which did not eventuate in the end) black female servants in Buenos Aires "began to march to the [Rosist] camp, abandoning their jobs as domestics, obliging the families they served to take care of themselves" (551). For a family to be forced to look after itself was scandalous.

According to Mármol, Encarnación Ezcurra, Rosas's wife, was the first to lead a web of female slaves/ servants. She personified "the individual and social subversions created by Rosas's dictatorship" (290). After Encarnación's death, Doña María Josefa, her sister, had taken over this role. Non-white female household servants formed Doña María Josefa's domestic/political armies; through them, she reached into every household.<sup>9</sup>

Just as a black woman was the cause of the opening crisis in *Amalia*, so a black woman of no given name is the cause of the protagonists' final downfall in the novel. Thanks to an 18 year

old black servant who worked at an inn near Amalia's house, the Rosist government establishes Eduardo's whereabouts and uncovers Daniel's conspiratorial efforts. Doña María Josefa's comment that the young servant's spying did "a great service to the cause, which is the cause of you poor, because in the Federation there are neither blacks nor whites, we are all equal" (291) is important. Here, although avoiding the word "slavery," *Amalia* offered a clear explanation of why poor black people supported Rosas. In the narrator's opinion, the cause of equality was unnatural (93, 549, 525).

Mármol and Sarmiento occupied several government positions after Rosas's fall. Together with the other men who defeated Rosas, they organised the modern country (the process of national organisation began in 1852 and finished in 1880). Sarmiento was President of Argentina from 1868-1874, during which time he was actively involved in the design and building of the Argentine education system. From 1858 until his death in 1871, Mármol was director of the National Library. To disseminate their views (foremost amongst them was the idea that European immigration was the solution to Argentina's culture and racial composition) both men had the control of powerful instruments of diffusion such as the periodical press and the schools. Through these channels, they established the first liberal-official literary canon, and set the ways of reading it (Area 270).<sup>10</sup>

The Generation of 80, a group of late nineteenth century liberal writer-politicians, extended the plots articulated by Sarmiento and Mármol, and provided ever-more imaginative detail about black female slaves and maids through works of fiction, and especially through historiography. The context of the Generation of 80 was different to that of the Generation of 37. The men of the Generation of 80 were not fighting for power: Rosas was gone, and they were members of the liberal oligarchy. These men oversaw the murder and subjugation of Indian tribes in the so-called Desert Campaigns of 1878-1885 led by Julio Argentino Roca, and the start of European immigration which, against their desires and expectations, was predominantly low class, and Spanish and Italian. In the context of an ongoing inflow of immigrants from Europe, the men of 80 shared "a traditionalist lament" typical in times of accelerated change (Terán 114).

In the writing of the past produced by the Generation of 80, black menservants and gauchos became the embodiments of good, loyal servants. These figures were used to re-affirm the social order and confront the tensions stemming from the arrival of immigrants. Unlike gauchos however, black maids were not re-written by the Generation of 80, and thus their cultural significance was left unchanged—or, in fact, enriched. Stories about evil and destructive black maids were endlessly repeated, expanded and embellished, and presented as factual.<sup>11</sup> Why did "history" fail to rescue the black maids from the Rosist era? Writing about slaves in the United States, Deborah Gray White has explained that: "black men can be rescued from the

myth of the negro... they can be identified with things masculine, with things aggressive, with things dominant... [however] the black woman's position at the nexus of... sex and race mythology has made it most difficult for her to escape the mythology" (28). One example of a work by a member of the Generation of 80 which re-hashed the theme of spying maids is *La Dictadura de Rosas* (The Rosas Dictatorship, 1894) by Mariano Pelliza (1837-1902). In this work, Pelliza explained in detail the espionage system that had developed under Rosas. According to Pelliza, freed black women had sought employment as servants in the homes of Unitarian families in order to communicate their observations and findings to the police. Spying had unhappy consequences for employing families. But Pelliza was one of the few writers to acknowledge that Rosas was a protector of slaves, and that he had consecrated their definitive emancipation (88). In *Lecciones sobre la historia argentina* (Lessons about the History of the Argentine Republic, 1898), José Manuel Estrada (1842-1894), a Catholic deputy, repeated the trope of a sinister bloc of female servants acting against decent families. Estrada had no qualms in admitting that he had used *Amalia* as a source of information for his own work (451). Pride and praise, he claimed, had been the sole motivation of black female spies (434).

Vicente Fidel López (1803-1903), a personal friend of Sarmiento, was regarded in his own time as a respected historian, and is considered today the father of official Argentine history. López's *Manual de historia Argentina* (Manual of Argentine History), first published in 1904, was taken up as a dominant text by the oligarchy and educators of the time. According to López, black female servants "swore by their hero [Rosas] with the pride of armed barbarism and they were the vehicle for all kinds of gossip and denunciations ... about the neighbourhood families."<sup>12</sup> Despite his prejudiced look at both black women and black men, López occasionally included positive characterisations of black male soldiers who had fought against the English, participated in the revolutionary movement of independence against Spain, and who were often also the personal assistants and servants of white men.

*Buenos Aires desde setenta años atrás* (Buenos Aires Seventy Years Ago, 1881) by José Wilde (1813-1885), is a unique case in the historiography produced by the Generation of 80, because although the author claimed that masters had been benevolent, he engaged in an attempt at self-critique regarding slavery: "As for ourselves ... don't we also have something to blush about? May this serve to them [black women], the poor ignorant, at least as a palliative on their blame."<sup>13</sup> Although Wilde did not think that slavery was enough of an excuse for female slaves becoming spies for Rosas, he did consider it a mitigating circumstance. It is interesting to note that he did not actually mention the word "slavery" in his critique.

It was not only works of historiography that re-hashed the theme of maids as political spies for Rosas which had first appeared in *Facundo* and *Amalia*. Historical novels produced by

members of the Generation of 80 also used the theme. For example *La Mazorca* (The Cob, 1882), by Eduardo Gutiérrez is an historical novel which deals with the history of the Rosas government, and includes numerous characters of servants. While Gutiérrez was not an official member of the Generation of 80, possibly because he had offended the elite with *Juan Moreira*, an earlier work which blamed the government for the criminal actions of a gaucho, *La Mazorca* was well known across classes, and was used as historical reference by subsequent liberal writers such as José Luis Lanuza. Yet it is clear that *La Mazorca* weaves fiction into some historical facts. Gutiérrez quoted the inner thoughts of several of his “evil” characters and included lengthy dialogues between them (García 4).

In critic David Foster’s view, “Gutiérrez’s panorama ... is a confirmation of what had, by the 1880s, become an accepted interpretation of Argentina during the 1830s and 1840s” (21). *La Mazorca* portrayed female slaves/maids as women who wielded great power. “It only took the bad treatment by a mistress, or that she simply refused to put up the salary, for her [the mistress] to be denounced to the terrible María Josefa who immediately proceeded to take action in blood.”<sup>14</sup>

*La Mazorca* introduced a ‘type’ absent in *Amalia* represented by black Tía Joaquina, who is an intermediary between the maids in the city and María Josefa Ezcurra. Tía Joaquina sold chicha, an alcoholic drink, and this occupation gave her direct access to Unitarian homes. Though old and a drunkard, she had numerous black and mulatto women under her orders. Emphasising the sexuality of black women, Gutiérrez insinuated that Tía Joaquina led a promiscuous life (166). As a predictable and useful caricature, several subsequent historical novels and pseudo-historical works such as *La mulata del restaurador* (The Restorer’s Mulatto, 1938), by Héctor Pedro Blomberg, and *El espionaje en Argentina* (Espionage in Argentina, 1969), by Jaime Cañas, lifted the character of Tía Joaquina for their narratives.

A maid who is given much space in *La mazorca* is Luisa. She passes on information about the family she works for because Tía Joaquina has threatened to kill her if she refuses. This reason for informing avoided the essentialization/ demonization of black women, and was a palatable one for readers, for it did not connect with social vindication or liberation from slavery. Whilst innovative in one respect, the plot nevertheless associated domestic slaves or servants with destruction to the kind employing family.

From Gutiérrez onwards, overt references to sex increasingly characterised writings on black maids.<sup>15</sup> Liberal thinker José María Ramos Mejía took up the subject of black women who used their alleged hyper-sexuality for political gain in the bestselling history and sociological work *Rosas y su tiempo* (Rosas and His Time, 1907). In this work, which toned down the liberal critique of Rosas, Ramos Mejía added a new twist to the pre-existing claims made by Sarmiento and

Mármol: he claimed that during the conflict between Federalists and Unitarians, black maids had taken advantage of their own voracious sexual appetites in order to gain political secrets to empower the political party they supported (437, 441).<sup>16</sup> Here, Ramos Mejía articulated what Robert Young has described as “the central assumption and paranoid fantasy” endlessly repeated and folded within accounts of race: “the uncontrollable sexual drive of the non-white races” (181).

According to Ramos Mejía, the mulatto maid from the Rosist era had been very “dangerous” (437): she was sexually provocative, and she could elicit feelings of affection. She dared to assert the rights she thought she had, and believed herself to be the mistress of the house. The physical appearance of some upper-class members of the post-Rosas generation demonstrated her negative influence (439). Here, Ramos Mejía openly acknowledged the sexual attraction of the white for the non-white which, according to Young, can be found at the heart of racialism. In Ramos Mejía’s view, the consequences of interracial sex were detrimental to the identity of the upper classes, to boundaries and authority (Young 149, 181).

Although *Facundo* had not overtly sexualised the characters of black female slaves/servants, its imprint was clearly visible throughout *Rosas y su tiempo*. Diana Sorensen Goodrich has noted that: “it would seem as though Ramos Mejía’s almost exclusive source for the study of the Rosas period had been *Facundo*” (107). She also observed that Sarmiento himself was taken aback by the impact that his own writing had produced on Ramos Mejía’s writing, and he chided Ramos Mejía for his exaggerations: “I would advise the young author against faithfully accepting all the accusations made against Rosas in those days of strife” (qtd. in Sorensen Goodrich 107).

In the first decades of the twentieth century, works such as José Ingenieros’s *La evolución de las ideas argentinas* (The Evolution of Argentine Ideas, 1918) reproduced the theme of black maids spying for the tyrant Rosas, but also expressed reservations about the reliability of these works. Ingenieros wrote: “mulatto women... hybrid both in their souls and their blood... felt pleasure in slander and denunciation, avenging their humiliating native inferiority in their masters.”<sup>17</sup> After these assertions about black maids, Ingenieros retreated slightly, as if doubting his historical account of the time of Rosas. “It is possible that all that has been written about espionage and terror might not be true; but it is not licit to think that everything was made up” (62).<sup>18</sup> Ingenieros’s comments about black maids illustrate how ideas about the intrinsic superiority of certain racial groups were held not only by liberals but also by the traditional left. Ingenieros had co-founded the reformist Socialist Party. He was a positivist and a fervent believer in Social Darwinism. His writings, which advocated racial explanations of social phenomena, were extremely well-received by the oligarchy (Zimmermann 32).



It was not only liberal writers, or writers associated with the traditional left, who, in the early part of the twentieth century, offered representations of maids. In the 1920s and 1930s, a new nationalism that was admiring of Spain and its cultural legacy began to take shape amongst a dissident faction of the intellectual elite. The majority of these men came from white middle and upper class provincial families and claimed direct descent from the conquistadors, whom they glorified for their nobility and Catholic Spanish legacy. Unlike cultural nationalists, they much more decisively and radically attempted to demolish the foundations of the liberal model of Argentina, claiming that national history had been falsified by liberal anti-national oligarchies. They set out to revise the ideas associated with the nineteenth century project of liberal nation-building, attacking Sarmiento's versions of national identity and national history (Goebel 6). Thus, they set out to re-write the history of Rosas and rehabilitate him as a nationalist champion.

The one historical tale that right-wing nationalist revisionists did not revise, but actually emphasised, was the one pertaining to treacherous and over-sexed black maids. *La corbata celeste* (The Blue Tie, 1920), an historical novel by Gustavo Martínez Zuviría, exemplifies this. *La corbata* takes a retrospective look at Rosas's times through the voice of José Antonio Balbastro, who is writing fifty years after the occurrence of the events narrated. Balbastro is a young white man who belongs to a Federalist family. The Balbastro family are personal friends of Rosas, but they also have cordial relations with Unitarians. José Antonio respects Rosas, whom he sees as a nationalist hero, but he is appalled at the excesses of the Mazorca, Rosas's paramilitary police (151).<sup>19</sup>

Writing in 1924 and 1929 respectively, Herman Hespelt and Ruth Sedwich credited Martínez Zuviría with producing a balanced view of the Rosist period (Federalists are just as brutal as Unitarians) and of depicting more humane characters than those in *Amalia* (363; 121). However, while Benita, the eighteen-year-old slave in *La corbata*, informs to authorities on the political activities of José Antonio's girlfriend, because she herself is in love with him, she is still depicted as an informer and a liar whose actions destroy the family. Moreover, her sexuality is presented as a potential threat to the family's racial purity, and José Antonio's resistance to falling in love with her is presented as a triumph. For all the alleged humanity that both Hespelt and Sedwich attributed to Martínez Zuviría's writing, *La corbata's* ideology is clearly racist: black people are said to be biologically servile people, and whites biologically proud (161).

In the context of the appearance of right-wing revisionism and the beginnings of *mestizo* immigration from the interior provinces, a new generation of liberal conservative writers also produced much historical fiction and historiography. In Blomberg's *La mulata del restaurador*, the black maid continued to be represented as a threat to the household she served, even though she was depicted as Unitarian. Set in 1840, the so-called year of terror, *La mulata* tells the story of

the Vegas family, a lower class mixed-race African-Spanish family whose coloured members oppose Rosas. Blomberg was a liberal Catholic writer who held a negative view of Rosas. In typical liberal style, he claimed that he had written his novel based on information gathered from newspapers and documents of the time. One of these “documents” was *Amalia*, which Blomberg called “imperishable” and “immortal” (2). *Amalia*, for Blomberg, was “the masterpiece in which the writers of historical novels have found inspiration during the last three quarters of the century.”<sup>20</sup> As other liberal Catholics, Blomberg shared a paternalist view on Indians, and he believed that Catholicism could “save” an Indian.

*La mulata* largely follows with liberal discourse in its representation of black maids. The work repeats the earlier tale of María Josefa and her bands of spying black maids. However, the main character in *La mulata* shows interesting divergences from the model established in *Amalia*. Paulina became known as “the Restorer’s mulatto” after Rosas’s daughter Manuelita hired her as her seamstress. Although Paulina was in love with a Federalist deserter, she was not interested in bringing harm to the household in which she was employed, but her beauty created sexual trouble in the Rosas household because she (unwittingly) drove men to madness. After she unintentionally caused the death of two of his men, Rosas decided to fire her. Unlike the standard plot of a Federalist maid who destroyed a Unitarian family, in *La mulata* a black maid who disliked Federalism brought death to the Rosas household, the Federalist household *par excellence*. While depoliticised, the meanings attached to the figure of the black maid remained in place.

A second maid in *La mulata* is Isabel Tagle, a fifteen-year-old Pampa Indian. Francisco Tagle had bought Isabel as a slave-child and had raised her with his daughters, giving her a religious education. With this story, Blomberg brought forth again the theme of the benevolent master and the contented slave. But the theme was briefly disrupted when Isabel disappeared-- Tagle immediately assumed she had run away and sent the police after her (32). Isabel however, had not run away: Tía Joaquina had placed her in another household as an informer. The figure of Isabel, like the figure of Tía Joaquina, was probably derived from that of Luisa, the black slave in Gutiérrez’s *La Mazorca* (1882), a work that, like *Amalia* and *Facundo*, was important in providing a template for future novels. Unlike Luisa though, Isabel was a maid of colour who, even after a beating, refused to denounce her masters to Rosas, because her employers were kind to her. Crucially, however, she was a Catholic maid who defined herself as no longer Indian (72).

Liberal historiography produced in the mid-twentieth century (pre-Perón) rehashed the theme of mid-nineteenth century maids acting as informers. *Vida de Aniceto el Gallo* (Life of Aniceto El Gallo, 1943) is an historical sociological work that embraced the plot of the evil black maid with Federalist ties who denounced her employers to political authorities. It is also the

biography of Unitarian poet Hilario Ascasubi (1807-1875), allegedly based on careful research, but peppered with the imaginative additions of the writer, conservative Manuel Mujica Láinez. In reference to an episode in which a black maid falsely denounced Ascasubi as a would-be deserter, Mujica Láinez directly referenced *Amalia*. In his words: “The episode of the informer maid has a very familiar flavour... it seems like something out of *Amalia*.”<sup>21</sup> One of the first works that sought to tell the story of blacks in Argentina, *Morenada* (1946) by liberal anti-fascist José Luis Lanuza, explicitly alluded to *Amalia* in its depictions of black people. Lanuza had no qualms in acknowledging *Amalia* as a source and referred to Mármol’s text constantly (117). Eduardo Gutiérrez’s novel *Dramas del terror* (The Tragedies of the Terror, 1882), was also mentioned as a source (136). *Facundo* was another influence: “Sarmiento... speaks of blacks and his lessons are like lessons of things that remain engraved forever.”<sup>22</sup> According to Lanuza, “[the history of blacks in Argentina] is the history of the female servants, who knew everything that happened in the neighbourhood ... and spent time spying behind the door.”<sup>23</sup> Despite his liberal leanings and sources, Lanuza did not agree with the standard liberal idea that slavery in Buenos Aires had been “soft”. Instead (and this time drawing on several early nineteenth-century newspapers) Lanuza explained that he had found histories of abuse which paralleled those in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (100). He noted that black women who dared cross the racial and class divide were brutally punished not only by men, but also by white women (31-32).

The advent of Peronism in 1945 triggered a strong response from Argentina’s writers. The events of Rosas’s times were fresh in Argentine minds, partly because of the appearance of right-wing revisionism. Perón’s appeal to the masses, his wife’s popularity, and the fact that his followers were predominantly *mestizos* who had recently arrived in the city, were all factors that led to claims that Perón was, figuratively speaking, the reincarnation of Rosas. Thus, under the first two Peronist governments (1946-1952 and 1952-1955), and in works produced thereafter set in Peronist times, the plot of the maid as spy was decisively articulated in Argentine literature. In several pseudo-historical (and widely read) tracts, contemporary maids of the Peronist era began to be represented as political informants for Perón. In other words, writers’ imaginings of maids in Perón’s times can be seen as having their roots in the fictional characterisation of the black maids of Rosist times.<sup>24</sup>

These representations can also be linked to the situation of real-life maids during the Peronist government since maids’ work opportunities had widened (they could seek factory work, for example) and many of those maids who stayed in their domestic jobs felt entitled to request wages, their extra months pay at Christmas (to which they were entitled by law) and their right to holidays. In other words, Peronism was perceived as a challenge to the system of domestic servitude. Yet Perón did not legislate the conditions of domestic workers in either of

his first two terms in office. According to Omar Acha, Eva Duarte de Perón endorsed a law that would regulate domestic service, but the initiative created enormous resistance amongst the employing classes, and she backed down. However, in 1955, Peronist Congresswoman Delia Parodi presented a bill to regulate domestic service. Whilst it was approved by the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate never discussed it because the government was ousted in September of that year (16).

The traditional left regarded Perón, who first came to power in 1945, as a fascist and a demagogue who resembled Rosas. On 22 February 1946, with elections looming, *El País*, the official organ of the foreign ministry, published an interview with socialist Congressman Nicolás Repetto. In the interview Repetto complained that it had become common for maids to falsely accuse their employers of lack of payment. “In order to avoid claims for wages which have already been paid, at present all Argentine families make their maids sign a receipt. But there is always the feeling that one has a spy or an enemy inside the home,” he stated (qtd. in Machado 151). For Repetto, Argentina in the 40s was on the verge of returning to the times of Rosas.

It should be noted that university-educated Repetto came from a middle class family. However unwillingly and unconsciously, Repetto’s bias might have reflected his social position and the values and norms of his social grouping. In a comment made in 1982, historian and politician Jorge Abelardo Ramos noted that under Perón, maids were in short supply due to the demand for female workers in factories, and many left-wing intellectuals learnt to hate Peronism at the family table from the mouths of their mothers, who were suddenly deprived of service (122).<sup>25</sup>

Another man who publicly spoke for the cause of poor women but felt troubled by the changes under Perón was Manuel Gálvez (1882-1962). A prolific and widely-read nationalist right-wing revisionist Catholic writer of aristocratic background, Gálvez had initially turned to Peronism. In many ways Peronism fulfilled Gálvez’s ideals: its stance was anti-liberal and anti-imperialist, and it endorsed real changes for the workers, without resort to a full-scale class war/social revolution. But Peronism gave its lower-class supporters access to luxuries that had previously been exclusively reserved for the privileged classes. Many Catholics found this to be intolerable (Acha 165). By 1955, Gálvez considered that Perón had become a demagogical and arbitrary man. Perón had allowed the burning of the aristocratic Jockey Club as well as the persecution of the Church, and these were sins Gálvez could not forgive (*En el mundo de los seres reales*) (In the World of Real Beings, 80).

As did most right-wing nationalists, Gálvez admired Rosas, but, as he clarified, this was solely because he had defended the motherland’s sovereignty (*En el mundo* 75). *Bajo la garra anglofrancesa* (Under the Anglo French Claws, 1952) is a historical novel set during Rosas’s times.

It is written in the guise of the memoirs of adventurer Prudente Wells (Lichtblau 108). Gálvez drew an unsympathetic character. Prudente lacked manhood on two counts: first, he was a Unitarian *vendepatria* (someone who sells the motherland); second, and perhaps worse, he was controlled by Cleofé, a black Federalist maid who, unbeknownst to Prudente, worked as a spy for Rosas. Despite this secret activity, Cleofé never harmed Prudente, a Unitarian, because she was in love with him.

Even though Gálvez was a Nationalist whose views had evolved towards truly historical revisionist positions that deemed Rosas to be a champion of Argentine sovereignty, he depicted Cleofé, an agent of Rosas, as perverse. After Cleofé realised that Prudente was in love with a white woman called Deidamia, likened to the Virgin Mary, she became increasingly controlling. Cleofé resorted to sex to keep Prudente by her side. Prudente considered Cleofé an excellent lover: “Would it be the black blood that runs through her veins in strong proportion?”<sup>26</sup> But, like Benita in *La corbata celeste*, she could not be imagined as a potential wife for him.<sup>27</sup>

When Prudente and Cleofé returned to Buenos Aires from Uruguay, Cleofé hired some servants, effectively enacting the role of mistress of the house and ceasing to maintain her social difference (211). It became Cleofé, and not Prudente, who figured as the ultimate power in the household. This was a dangerous transgression of domestic and racial order. “Cleofé... constituted in absolute mistress of the house, ruled with dictatorial powers that I, certainly, had not given her... Now I laugh thinking that I was a white enslaved by a black woman: the world upside down!”<sup>28</sup> Black men who worked for Cleofé began to surveil Prudente’s activities. “What terrible woman! Where did she find so many blacks and mulattoes who obeyed her?”<sup>29</sup> Harry Shaw argues that historical novels are ideological screens onto which the preoccupations of the present can be projected for disguised expression (qtd. in Elder 78). In this respect, Cleofé’s character can be read as an allegory of the person of Evita. As with Evita’s powers, those of the maid became progressively more intrusive and dictatorial. Like Evita, whose rightful place, according to anti-Peronist discourse, was the kitchen, Cleofé had usurped the role of mistress and taken over the household. When Cleofé fell pregnant, Prudente’s anguish increased. When his son was born, Prudente sorely lamented that the child’s mother was a woman of color (236).

After Cleofé tried to kill Deidamia, she was imprisoned. Prudente gave his son to a respectable white couple who agreed to raise him. Cleofé approved of Prudente’s decision. “Your son has to be white... I will cease being his mother” (267).<sup>30</sup> Not long after, Prudente received news that Cleofé had committed suicide. “I resigned myself to the news, thinking that, for me, and especially for my little child, it was best for her to die.”<sup>31</sup> Cleofé’s death appeased Prudente’s concerns for his child’s character, upper-class identity, and sense of racial identification. It also overcame the domestic revolt implied in a female slave dominating and

controlling a master, further instructing that for a maid, aspiring upward could be dangerous, possibly fatal.

Also in 1952, a double biography of Juan Manuel de Rosas and Encarnación Ezcurra/Juan Domingo Perón and Eva Perón, was published by American writer Fleur Cowles. Written in English, *Bloody Precedent* was widely read in elite anti-Peronist groups. In my view, Cowles transformed and adapted *Amalia* to suit her anti-Peronist political agenda. Before drawing a comparison between Encarnación and Evita, Cowles claimed that Encarnación Ezcurra had run a spy system or “Washerwoman’s Brigade” that “functioned entirely through the uneducated, ill-bred and sometimes half-witted members of the lowest class of Argentine society... female Peeping Toms of no mean scale invaded the privacy of every dwelling” (67).

Cowles, who was a journalist, had briefly met the Perón couple, and she directly compared Evita to Encarnación Ezcurra:

A “washwoman’s brigade” of sorts did function in the earliest days of the Perón movement, but it was impulsive... with the wild women of the *descamisado* [the shirtless ones] turning up, but without certainty, with their information for the uncrowned queen... some of them, being of shady reputation, wooed men, and led them by all manner of appeals to Perón’s side, as Evita counselled. (157-58)

Cowles’ approach to “history” was to mix and match elements taken from different sources. She updated the fantasies of the Rosist era evident in the works of Mármol and Ramos Mejía, among others, in her depictions of Perón, Evita, and their supporters.

In 1955, when Perón went into exile, Mary Main published a biography of Evita entitled *La mujer del látigo: Eva Perón* (The Woman of the Whip: Eva Perón). Born in Argentina of British parents, Main had left Buenos Aires in 1946, soon after Perón’s election as President, and spent time living in the United States. There, she was commissioned to write Evita’s biography. An Argentine citizen, Main returned to Argentina in 1951 to conduct her research, and claimed to have spoken with those who had known Evita intimately.

Main’s biography of Evita included passages that lamented the new attitude of maids and the improvement in the salary of female household cooks under Perón (9). But the servant problem allegedly went further. According to Main, Evita had so-called listeners: many maids were approached with the suggestion that they might double their salary by reporting on conversations they had overheard, and few of them dared refuse (123-24). Feinmann has argued that Main’s history was the history of the fears of the propertied classes (292). It is a significant coincidence that the decree N 326 of 1956 signed by the military government that deposed Perón demanded that maids be loyal and respectful towards employers, and that they be reserved about any knowledge that they might obtain on the employing family as a result of their job. Maids had to “keep family secrets, whether political, moral or religious, inviolable.”<sup>32</sup>

Although Perón was ousted in 1955, maids continued to be represented as his political spies for over a decade.<sup>33</sup> Anti-Peronist Héctor Murena produced such representation in his novel *Las leyes de la noche* (The Laws of the Night, 1958). Murena was a disciple of Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, a left-wing anti-Peronist intellectual who in 1956 had chosen to disparage Perón by claiming that “his ideas... are the same... as those of a thirty-three- year old maid” (202).<sup>34</sup> The comment clearly alluded to Evita, who was thirty-three when she died. *Las Leyes* tells the story of a white, lower middle class woman, Elsa, who decides to seek work as a maid in order to escape her ex-husband and his criminal associates. Elsa finds work as a maid in the anti-Peronist Demonte household. There, she befriends Clara, a mixed-race cook who supports Perón. Clara detests all employers and warns Elsa about the risks to be run with them (177).

Clara asks Elsa to relay to her all that she hears at the Demonte’s dinner table. Clara knows that Demonte, the owner of a factory, often complains about Perón and his social policies (rises in taxes, Christmas bonuses for workers, El Plan Quinquenal) (179). When inebriated, Clara regularly threatens to storm the dining room to dare Demonte to repeat his criticisms of Perón in front of her. Whether Clara passes on information about Demonte’s political views to authorities is not specified, but she is clearly characterised as a political enemy living within the household, and capable of effecting violence against its members. Moreover, her excessive alcohol consumption casts her as inferior.

Elsa is apolitical, and Clara tries to persuade her that Perón is the workers’ saviour. Clara explains to Elsa that before Perón’s rule, employers had all the power. They could even rape their maids, and, if maids complained, they simply fired them. “Now they know they cannot abuse us” (180).<sup>35</sup> This compelling point is sabotaged by Murena in presenting Clara as a promiscuous woman who had lost her virginity to an employer, something which “had certainly not bothered her much.”<sup>36</sup> Clara had had seven abortions which, together with the alcohol that she consumed had “slowly deformed her both internally and externally.”<sup>37</sup> Clara rejoices when she finds out that the Peronist government is pressuring Demonte for money. “It was as if she herself had forced the employers to comply... She was facing Elsa with her legs slightly apart and her head down, like an animal getting ready to charge.”<sup>38</sup> The depiction of Clara reactivated the theme of the maid as political spy. In her alcoholism and promiscuity, Clara resonated for readers with the character of Tía Joaquina, Rosas’s black female chief of spies, who first appeared in the late nineteenth century novel *La Mazorca*.

Elsa discovers she is pregnant, and certain that she will be fired, quits her job. After her son is delivered, she finds another job as a maid, this time in the house of another anti-Peronist. Unbeknownst to Elsa, Nicolás, one of her ex-husband’s criminal associates, has been watching her for some time. Nicolás now works as a private investigator for Perón. It does not take long

for Nicolás to discover that Elsa's employer is planning a coup to overthrow Perón (216). Elsa's connections with the criminal world, a world that in the novel is directly associated with the Peronist world, destroy her employer's political plans.

Another image of a maid as a potential political informer produced in the first decade after Perón's ousting appears in *El incendio y las vísperas* (The Fire and the Nights Before It, 1964). Politics filters through many of Beatriz Guido's (1924-1988) novels and short stories, but aside from the admission of anti-Peronism, she never openly discussed her political views (Mizraje 256). According to Arturo Jauretche, *El incendio* "is a historical novel that aspires to be the *Amalia* of the Second Tyranny and contemporary readers have accepted it as such."<sup>39</sup>

*El incendio* maps out the life of the oligarchic Pradere family – Alejandro, his wife Sofía, and his children, José Luis and Inés, from 17 October 1952, the Peronist Day of Loyalty, to 15 April 1953, when the Jockey Club is burnt down by Peronist supporters. The Peronist regime forces Alejandro to collaborate with it by threatening to confiscate his *grand estancia* and turn it into a public park that will pay tribute to Evita.<sup>40</sup> Pradere accepts a post as Ambassador to Uruguay in order not to lose his *grand estancia* (71). *El incendio* characterises the Peronist government as right-wing and persecutionary of both the conservative oligarchy and non-Peronist labour forces.

Amongst the main characters in *El incendio* is Antola Báez, presented as an object of physical repulsion, as blunt and confrontational. For some years, however, she had chosen to be seen as little as possible, hiding in her humid room. But, seeing the Praderes cornered by Perón, Antola had reappeared, victorious. "Now she penetrates in rooms; in offices, in party salons; her ugliness has turned aggressive, and... makes her upright and defiant... to see the Praderes defenceless, destroyed, insecure, was the most exquisite of satisfactions."<sup>41</sup>

On the Peronist Day of Loyalty, all Sofía's maids abandon the house to attend the celebrations planned by Perón. Reflecting a social fact of the time, Sofía complains that "now, [maids] come up with this idea of finding employment in factories" (54).<sup>42</sup> Although under Perón Sofía loses most of her maids, Antola remains in the household, and with her remains the family's fear that she might manipulate her knowledge of the family for her own ends. For Antola knows all secrets; she knows that Sofía is unfaithful to Alejandro, and that Inés has had many lovers. But Guido clarifies through the character of Inés that "women of a certain condition have the virtue of always looking virginal, after having been possessed by various lovers" (64).<sup>43</sup> Instead of demonstrating pride in the house she serves, teaching the heirs of the family its past glories, Antola destroys the family's myths of heroism/superiority: the family's patrician forefather, General Gastón Pradere, had, according to Antola, murdered defenceless Federalists. Moreover, according to Antola, there had been incest in the family (63). Antola



exposes as a chimera the tales upon which the family base their superiority. Guido's overt anti-Peronist plot is undermined by (probably unconscious) elements such as this, which obviously yield a dissident reading. The threat that Antola can disclose these secrets to outsiders is ever-present, particularly in a political context in which the Peronist forces would have been more than willing to humiliate a conservative oligarchic family. Soon Antola discovers a greater secret: that a terrorist who is plotting the destruction of Perón is hiding in the attic (57). It is too dangerous for the Praderes to let Antola go because this secret is not merely domestic but political, and can imperil the life of the family.

The novel ends with Alejandro Pradere committing suicide after witnessing the fire at the Jockey Club. Two days after the suicide, the estancia is expropriated. Antola basks in the family's destruction. Perhaps like no other novel, *El incendio* highlights the discomfort felt by the employing classes at the perceived empowerment of maids, and also at the figure of Evita. Antola was powerful not only because during Perón's rule she could choose other employment options, but because, like the maids in *Amalia*, she could use the family's political secret to her advantage.

## Conclusion

This study has tracked the genesis and trajectory of the representation of non-white maids as political informers on their kind employers in Argentine literature and historiography from 1846 to 1964. Through canonical classics such as *Facundo* and *Amalia* the Argentine liberals contributed to a legend that was reinforced during the rule of Juan Domingo Perón. The reason why the image of the maid as treacherous and over-sexed was (and, arguably, remains) so ubiquitous can be seen as related to issues pertaining to identity and social order. The mythology of Argentine national identity was built on images of non-white maids as the Other: the maid tradition is entrenched in Argentine white bourgeois male and female identity, and has served to legitimise the exploitation of maids, which remains a feature of middle and upper class Argentine social structure and lifestyle.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Catherine Kevin, Barbara Baird, Susan Sheridan and María Elena Lorenzín for their support.

<sup>2</sup> All translations are my own, unless credited otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> Albeit very briefly, Feinmann links the claims made in *Amalia* of servants spying for Rosas, with claims of servants spying for Perón made in Mary Main's *Evita, the woman with the whip* (1952) (58-59, 291-292).

<sup>4</sup> Unitarians were economically and culturally inspired by England and France, and wanted Buenos Aires to dominate the country. Federalists were more in tune with Hispanic American customs and culture, and favoured a looser system of confederation. Prieto has described the conflict as one "between the heirs to power" (41). I would like to note that this is the broad description of positions; during Rosas's rule, it is more useful to envisage the conflict as one between Rosistas and anti-Rosistas.

<sup>5</sup> For an example of the discomfort felt by the liberal elite, see the writings of Mariquita Sánchez de Thompson 72.

<sup>6</sup> The claims about *en-masse* servant espionage articulated in *Facundo*, *Amalia*, and subsequent history books, have not been proven. US scholar George Reid Andrews notes that there is no evidence at all in police or government documents to support the view that servants belonged to spy networks working for Rosas (*The Afro Argentines of Buenos Aires* 100). At the same time, there is evidence that Federalist propagandists encouraged black people to come forward with information. For example on 27 October 1833, Rosist propagandists published a fictitious dialogue in the newspaper *El Gaucho* in which black Juana told black Antuco that if she heard Unitarians speaking against the Federalists, she would denounce them. Juana urged Antuco to do the same. The writers of the dialogue aligned Rosas with freedom, and Unitarians with slavery. Informing on Unitarians was presented as a strategy for resisting slavery (qtd. in Soler Cañas 66). The dialogue may have also responded to Rosas's interest in promoting an overwhelming sense of "being watched" by lower class people, an interest which he openly articulates elsewhere (see, for example, Rosas qtd. in Lobato 77). Ultimately, what is more important than whether there is any truth to the charge of *en masse* household slave or servant spying is the way both *Facundo* and *Amalia* explained this activity, the way it was historicised.

<sup>7</sup> "ladina y curiosa como un mico" (38).

<sup>8</sup> The same can be said about *El matadero* (The Slaughterhouse), a short story written in 1838 by Esteban Echeverría, a chief member of the Generation of 37. *El matadero* represents black women as vicious and animalistic offal collectors. Following its publication in 1871, *El matadero* became canonical, a status it retains to this day.

<sup>9</sup> In 1915, Marcos Ezcurra, Doña Josefa's nephew, emphasised the fantastic nature of Mármol's plot (50).

<sup>10</sup> Black maids in *Facundo* and *Amalia* remain a blind spot for many critics. For example, contemporary Argentine historian María Sánchez Quesada described Mármol as "an intuitive feminist who knew how to inquire into the soul of women" (70). Quesada's comment is illustrative of what counts as a woman: black and non-white women are excluded from the category of *Women*, and, also, from the category of *Argentines*.

<sup>11</sup> The black community's strategy for survival in the post-Rosas order was to distance itself as much as possible from any association with him. In their numerous publications, the Afro-porteños did not discuss their community's support for Rosas, and constantly attacked Rosas's "barbarity," particularly his recourse to political terror. However, the community did denounce the horrors of slavery, the racial prejudice they faced, whites' lack of acknowledgement of the role they had played in the country's independence, their present disadvantaged social and economic opportunities, and the representation of black women as women of loose morals (Cirio 21; Castro 97).

<sup>12</sup> "juraban por el héroe con el orgullo de la barbarie armada y eran vehículos de toda clase de chismes y delaciones... contra las familias del vecindario" (390).

<sup>13</sup> "Pero, y nosotros... ¿no tendremos también algo de qué sonrojarnos?... Sirva esto para ellas, pobres ignorantes, siquiera como un lenitivo en su culpa" (96).

<sup>14</sup> "Bastaba el mal trato de una señora, o que ésta se negara simplemente a aumentar el jornal, para que fuera en el acto delatada a la terrible María Josefa, que procedía inmediatamente a tomar sus medidas de sangre" (49).

<sup>15</sup> The idea that black women were promiscuous was already present in *Amalia* in the character of Doña Marcelina, a Unitarian black woman who owned a brothel. The theme had also appeared in *Episodios Sangrientos* (Bloody Episodes, 1856) by Federico Bárbara, who mentioned *Amalia* in the prologue to his work. Bárbara described black washerwomen as gossipy, drunk, orgiastic, and sharing an inappropriate relationship with Manuelita Rosas akin to that of children and their wet-nurses (37). The condemnation of the relationship between white children and their black wet nurses appears in many canonical texts, for example, the historical *La Ciudad Indiana* (1900) by Juan Agustín García, a member of the Generation of 80 (106). This condemnation can be seen as stemming from anxieties about the blurring of social boundaries implicit in such close relationship.

<sup>16</sup> Ramos Mejía asserted that "abundant" evidence in police records proved the claims of *en-masse* slave espionage (415). However, as I noted above, contemporary historian Reid Andrews found no evidence at all to support this claim (*The Afro Argentines of Buenos Aires* 100). Ramos Mejía claimed that Rosas granted freedom to those female slaves who came forward with information (445). But, according to Ramos Mejía, this was not the main reason why these women supported Rosas; rather, it was their instincts and sexuality that led them to support the tyrant.

<sup>17</sup> “las mulatas... híbridas de alma como de sangre, sentían el placer de la calumnia y la delación, vengando contra sus amos blancos la humillante inferioridad nativa” (61).

<sup>18</sup> “Es posible que todo lo que se ha escrito sobre el espionaje y el terror no sea verdad; pero no es lícito pensar que todo ha sido invención” (62).

<sup>19</sup> The word *mazorca* means cob, but it sounds the same as “más horca”, that is, “more hangings,” and that is how Rosas’s enemies referred to it.

<sup>20</sup> “la obra maestra en la que se inspiraron los escritores de novelas históricas durante tres cuartos de siglo” (2).

<sup>21</sup> “El episodio de la negra delatora tiene un sabor familiar... Parece salido de una página de *Amalia*” (74).

<sup>22</sup> “Sarmiento... habla de los negros, y sus ejemplos son como lecciones de cosas que se quedan ya grabadas para siempre” (41).

<sup>23</sup> “[la historia de los negros en Argentina] es la historia de las criadas... que sabían todo lo que pasaba en la vecindad... y se quedaban espiando detrás de la puerta”(10).

<sup>24</sup> The charges that maids passed information to Perón are dubious. Unlike the evidence relating to the work of block captains, to my knowledge there is no evidence that maids took part in denouncing their employers’ political allegiances. In an interview by Frieria, for example, historian Felipe Pigna characterised the claim that servants spied for Perón as belonging to middle class anti-Peronist “mythology.” Pigna used the term myth in a pejorative way. Similarly, Feinmann links this fear to anti-Peronist paranoia. However, Feinmann has noted that fear of maids was very real and recalled a personal anecdote from his childhood that illustrated this (*Peronismo*, 59). It should also be noted that, in at least one recorded speech, Evita incited maids to resistance against employers; she literally asked maids to hit their mistresses on the head if, once they had finished their domestic duties, mistresses did not allow them to attend rallies at Plaza de Mayo (Dujovne Ortiz 227).

<sup>25</sup> In 1957, Repetto went back to posing as a champion for the rights of maids. He highlighted that the origins of a law that finally regulated domestic service were to be found in socialist (and not Peronist) proposals. Repetto also denounced the sexual exploitation of maids by the sons of upper class families, an exploitation that often had the tacit consent of mistresses (140). The Socialist Party had been the first party to demonstrate an interest in improving the lot of maids, denouncing in 1919 the low wages paid to maids, (Guy 107) and presenting projects to regulate domestic service in 1926 and 1938 which did not however, prosper. The trade association *Liga Internacional de Servicio Doméstico*, created in 1901, had strong links to the Socialist Party trade union, *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT), until 1946 when it began to move closer to Peronism (Acha 10).

<sup>26</sup> “¿Sería la sangre negra que por sus venas, en fuerte proporción, corría?” (109).

<sup>27</sup> These works teach that maids are not suitable as a gentleman’s wife. And yet, this is precisely the overwhelming theme in the extremely popular genre of soap operas, consumed by all classes since the 1950s. But images of maids in soap operas do not really contradict those in literature, because the maid is revealed as the daughter of the family. Thus, when she weds the aristocratic master, there is no real cross-class or racial intermixing, no real transgression. In the imaginations of the public, “real maids” remain class, racial, and cultural/moral “Others” and thus unsuitable as emotional partners/friends.

<sup>28</sup> “Cleofé... constituida en absoluta dueña de casa, mandaba con poderes dictatoriales que yo, por cierto, no le había dado... Ahora me río pensando en que fui un blanco esclavizado por una negra: ¡el mundo al revés!” (221).

<sup>29</sup> “¡Qué mujer terrible! ¿De dónde conseguía tantos negros y mulatos que le obedecieran?” (227).

<sup>30</sup> “Su hijo tiene que ser blanco... Yo... dejaré de ser su madre” (267).

<sup>31</sup> “Me conformé pensando en que para mí, y sobre todo para mi hijito, era mejor que ella muriera” (273).

<sup>32</sup> “guardar la inviolabilidad del secreto familiar, en material política, moral y religiosa.” Dora Barrancos has argued that the intention behind the 1956 law was to provide minimum concessions to maids in order to restore them to their place, which Peronism had disturbed. The decree remained the legal framework that regulated the working conditions of some domestic workers until April 2013, when a new law amended it to encompass all domestic workers, regardless of days or hours worked. Interestingly, however, Law 26.844 did not amend the subsection on political secrets.

<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it is possible to find representations of maids as political spies/agents for repressive forces in contemporary fiction. See, for example, Valenzuela.

<sup>34</sup> “sus ideas... son las mismas... de una mucama de treinta y tres” (202).

<sup>35</sup> “Ahora saben que no pueden abusar” (180).

<sup>36</sup> “a ella, por cierto, no le había importado demasiado” (180).

<sup>37</sup> “irían deformándola por dentro y por fuera” (184).

<sup>38</sup> “como si hubiese sido ella misma quien había obligado a sus patronas a ceder... estaba frente a Elsa, con las piernas un poco abiertas y la cabeza gacha, como un animal que se preparase a embestir” (191).

<sup>39</sup> “Se trata de una novela histórica que pretende ser la “Amalia” de la “Segunda Tiranía”, pues como tal la han aceptado sus lectores” (207).

<sup>40</sup> Feinmann has noted that Perón did not dispossess the oligarchy. What Perón did, however, was force the oligarchy to deal with a working class that was insolent and insubordinate (58). However, as noted by writer Alicia

Dujovne Ortiz, Evita did confiscate the *estancia* of the Pereyra Iraola family, and turned it into a Park for the Rights of the Elderly (228), a fact which might have inspired Guido.

<sup>42</sup>“ahora se les ocurre emplearse en las fábricas” (54).

<sup>43</sup>“Las mujeres de cierta condición tienen la virtud de parecer siempre vírgenes, después de ser poseídas por varios hombres” (64).

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