

Eduardo Gutiérrez, *The Gaucho Juan Moreira. True Crime in Nineteenth-Century Argentina*. Trans. John Charles Chasteen. Edited, with an Introduction, by William G. Acree, Jr. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. September, 2014. Cloth ISBN 978-1-62466-137-2 £33.50, Paper ISBN 978-162466-136-5 £10.99.

Literary history has not been too kind to Eduardo Gutiérrez. Whilst his near contemporary José Hernández and his creation *Martín Fierro* are widely celebrated, Gutiérrez and his gaucho outlaw receive at best a footnote in the history of Latin American literature. In his day, though, Juan Moreira leapt from the pages of Gutiérrez's serial novel or *folletín* to become a cultural phenomenon. In his detailed and insightful introduction, William Acree lays out the political and social context in which *Juan Moreira* not only sold astonishing numbers of copies, but also claimed new life in song, on stage, and in gaucho clubs. Only in the twentieth-century, with the backing of intellectuals like Leopoldo Lugones and Miguel de Unamuno, did *Martín Fierro* come to displace Moreira as king amongst *gauchos*.

Set in the 1870s with occasional flashbacks to the 1860s, *The Gaucho Juan Moreira* was originally published in instalments in *La patria argentina* between 1879-80. The novel recounts the travails of an honest rural worker who, victim of powerful figures envious of his success and covetous of his wife, loses everything. Moreira is forced into a life of crime on the margins of society. Blessed with ferocious fighting ability, innate cunning, and a network of friends and occasional allies, he defeats local toughs and the forces of law and order time and again, only falling finally to massive firepower and low treachery.

Gutiérrez, a former military man turned journalist, struggles to balance the political promiscuity of his subject with the need for a simple, honest hero. The real-life Moreira was a well-known knife-fighter, one-time bodyguard of the *autonomista* politician Adolfo Alsina (whose party the author supported) and later "man of action" for the rival, *nacionalista* faction, led by Bartolomé Mitre. Gutiérrez makes curious ideological twists to support his narrative thrust, in particular when Moreira changes sides from Alsina's party to Mitre's. This, the narrator claims, is because Alsina's successor, Avellaneda is less charismatic and successful than Moreira's former boss. The reader might instead think that Moreira is just cannier than the narrator wants us to believe. Even at the beginning of the novel, Moreira, portrayed as a simple, hardworking man, carries the knife and rides the horse that were gifted to him, years earlier, by Alsina. His rural idyll has its basis in his political violence; he is never an innocent.

As Juan Pablo Dabove and others have argued, Gutiérrez tries to paint Moreira as a Romantic and popular hero. But despite all the purple prose, he cannot write over Moreira's real role. He is not a social bandit, to use Hobsbawm's term, but a frontier soldier, a hired thug and a casual killer. His death has a ring of inevitability about it: for all its populist trappings and entertaining incidents, this is a novel about the nascent state claiming a monopoly on violence.

Gutiérrez wrote quickly to tight deadlines, and by most accounts never knowingly corrected a proof. The serial format required recapping, regularity, and what Borges called *ripio*, or padding. Formulaic and predictable encounters recur. Gutiérrez's melodramatic style becomes tiresome at length. He commits gaffes, not least the varying name of Moreira's wife.

In response to some of these less appealing features, the editor Acree and the translator, John Charles Chasteen, prune and rework the text. Gone are stock sentences used to create suspense, repetitive action sequences, and the occasional recapitulation. Political side-play is reduced. Rural customs are explicated for uninformed readers. Dialogue is recast with more modern ears in mind.

Much of this works well in creating an accessible Moreira for the Anglophone reader. But "hazing" for "remojó" sounds anachronistic. Some terms are explained parenthetically but also appear in the helpful glossary. A term like "comadre" could do with a note, and it is difficult to see why "abrazo" stays in Spanish. The use of terms like "salvaje" and "indio" is reduced, making Moreira more politically correct than ever.

Acree states that the novel features a "bromance", but the original includes a section, omitted here, in which Moreira and his *amigo* Julián kiss each other on the lips, "como dos amantes", a "beso", furthermore, that is "apasionado". It is also a shame that Moreira's memorable "décimas" are glossed but not translated. Perhaps strangest is what Moreira and others do with *mate* gourds: it should be passed back to the server for refilling, not to the next drinker.

These gripes aside, this is a valuable volume and a very readable translation, which should do much to recuperate Moreira for today's readers in English. Alongside the Penguin Classics edition of Sarmiento's *Facundo*, Eva Gillies rendering of Mancilla's *Excursion to the Ranquel Indians*, and the recent translation of Echeverría's "El matadero" (as *Slaughteryard*), it adds to a growing corpus of nineteenth-century Argentine works available in English. For that, and for the energy and enthusiasm that shine through, Acree and Chasteen deserve much praise.

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