

# Artificial Life in Horacio Quiroga: Commercial Advertisements, Cinema, and the Prompted Suspension of Disbelief

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## Abstract

The fictional works of the Uruguayan-Argentinian writer Horacio Quiroga allow for a case study on how media shape the image of artificial life. While “El hombre artificial”, one of his early novellas, follows a nineteenth-century scheme of electromagnetic transmission of consciousness, later texts choose “N-rays” (“El vampiro”) or cinematographic projection (“El espectro”) as grounds for spectral life. This is not, however, the only difference between his early and later fiction. On the one hand, the models of literary invention follow the history of technology and the author’s own passion for science and cinema; on the other hand, they can be related to forms of publication, such as the serialized novellas of the illustrated magazine, and the way illustrations and commercial advertisements pervade literary creation. The approach to artificial life in Quiroga’s work sheds light on his own constitution as an author: behind the making of the artificial being stands the making of the artist.

## Keywords

Quiroga; Publicity; Magazines; Illustrations; Fantastic Literature

# Artificial Life in Horacio Quiroga: Commercial Advertisements, Cinema, and the Prompted Suspension of Disbelief

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## I.

When Jean Baudrillard, in the early 1980s, coined the term ‘simulacrum’, he had a thriving industry of advertisements and mass media in mind that had already gained the attention of Marshall McLuhan a generation earlier. What characterizes Baudrillard’s approach is his interest in designing a comprehensive philosophy of the image, which he defines in terms of «successive phases of the image», each of which orbits farther off a centre that would be «basic reality»:

- [1] It is the reflection of a basic reality.
- [2] It masks and perverts a basic reality.
- [3] It masks the absence of a basic reality.
- [4] It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum (Baudrillard 1988: 170).

The result of world-making based on simulacra is «hyperreality», that is, a sign that is out of touch with this «basic reality». There are good reasons to link this idea to the dynamics of advertisement, and it has already been done by Baudrillard himself as well as by the theory of publicity (Grad - Frunză 2019: 250). While literary criticism has applied the concept of the “simulacrum” to recent fiction, such as that of César Aira or Esteban Sapir<sup>1</sup>, it might seem anachronistic to read modernist or avant-garde clas-

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Chauvin 2014 and Page 2016 respectively.

sics such as Horacio Quiroga in the light of this postmodern concept<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, we think that Baudrillard's analysis of cultural production helps grasp the links between the topic of artificial life in his novellas and short stories and their original context of creation, that is, illustrated magazines, the pages of which are ridden with commercial advertisements. Our thesis is that the production of simulacra not only threatens, as Joanna Page puts it, «the boundaries between the human and the machinic» as well as those between life and death (Page 2016: 111), but also challenges the boundaries of the literary work of art, along with those between fictional and non-fictional assertions. This, of course, has us reconsider the idea of "fantastic fiction" and even that of "scientific fantasy", which tend to blend out the commercial frames and the imaginary that surround Quiroga's stories in their first places of publication.

The first text we would like to consider is "El hombre artificial" ("The artificial man")<sup>3</sup>, which was published in 1910, at a time when Quiroga was not yet a well-known author. He was thirty-two years old, and he had published his first collection of short fiction as well as a quite impressive horror story, which would turn out to be one of the most famous texts of Latin American literature, "The feather cushion" ("El almohadón de plumas"). This story appeared in 1907 in *Caras y Caretas*, an illustrated magazine founded in 1898 which contained practical advice on drawings, photographs, and many advertisements. It also contained literary texts: its founder, José Sixto Álvarez (Fray Mocho), was a writer himself, and the editor in chief, Luis Pardo, a humorist. Much could be written about the post-autonomous<sup>4</sup> stance of the artists and authors who contributed to this

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it appears in the context of transhistoric comparison, for instance between Quiroga's cinematographic horror stories and Japanese horror films (El-jaiiek-Rodríguez 2018), or Adolfo Bioy Casares, *La invención de Morel* (Page 2016: 115). Rodés-Clericó (1998) is probably the first to use the term in her interpretation of "El espectro".

<sup>3</sup> "El hombre artificial" was first published in the section "Folletines de Caras y Caretas" in *Caras y Caretas*, Buenos Aires, XIII, 588- 593, 8 January to 12 February 1910, in six issues, with 12 illustrations by Josef Friedrich.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of «post-autonomous literature» has been coined by Josefina Ludmer in her famous article "Literaturas postautónomas" (2017). However, she uses it for a differentiation between contemporary Latin American literature and former modes of writing, especially that of the boom. In spite of the intuitive definition of this concept, which is probably at the basis of its success in recent literary criticism, the historical distinctions it posits do not hold true. The case of

magazine. Let us simply focus on Quiroga, who bought a farm in 1906, in the wilderness of Misiones, near the jungle of Brazil, and was in desperate need of money. This need explains why he conceived "The artificial man", together with six other short novels, as a prosperous serial, and why he did not dare to sign them with his own name.

For "The artificial man" Quiroga gives life to his alter ego, "S. Frago Lima", a composite alias that points towards Brazil (Fragoso sounds Portuguese) and the Andes (Lima, the capital of Peru) while keeping the first name, and thus making a mystery of his precise nationality. This invented author's unknown origin completes the multiple origins of the scientists represented in the serial novella – Donisoff, a Russian, Sivel, an Italian, and Ortiz, an Argentinian. Quiroga seems fascinated by the local colour every one of them brings to the laboratory, and the story of the individual destiny that leads them to Argentina takes up five of the twelve sections of the novella. For the two immigrants, their date of arrival is specified: Donisoff, an orphan Russian prince who reads the same books as Kropotkin, joins the revolutionary youth and is involved in a terrorist attack against his tutor, flees his country and ends up in Argentina in 1905. Sivel, an Italian from a poor family, is tortured and finally abandoned by his father; then, he becomes a surgeon and, by generously donating blood to a patient, suffers sepsis, survives horribly disfigured, *and* is left by his bride, while his patient, who has fallen in love with him and is disappointed by his frank denial, commits suicide. Sivel arrives in Buenos Aires in 1904. Thus, they have both recently arrived in South America, after experiencing a serious drama in their lives. The case of Ortiz is slightly less heart-breaking: he is a member of the 'porteño' bourgeoisie who studies electrical engineering in Buffalo, and then returns to his country; the hopes of his family had been that he would become the head of the family business, but he neglects business over research, and, when his father cuts his livings, he starts working as a math and English teacher. This leads to a total break-up with his family; after the death of his father, Ortiz rejects the inheritance.

The three stories do not only create suspense as they postpone the point of attack – the Faustian attempt at creating artificial human life – but they also portray three characters who all struggle with their fathers and with abandonment, thereby creating a psychological probability for the

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*Caras and caretas* is a perfect example of a fictional authorship that exits the realm of literature and enters foreign ground, such as that of the advertisement, political satire, travel reports, and the like.

will to substitute the laboratory as an artificial and clean birthplace to the family with its potential for toxicity. This outset provides three genre models for serious drama that point to possible negative outcomes of the experiment and showcase the narrative skills of the pseudonymous author. Donisoff's destiny is that of the noble tragic hero, who is torn up between two contradictory allegiances – his relationship with the Duque, his tutor, whom his friends attempt to assassinate, is truly oedipal, and his flight from prison to London and then, without further explanation, to Argentina leaves this conflict unresolved. Sivel's tribulations belong to a different genre, that of romantic melodrama – the kid that stands up to his abusive father, the surgeon who becomes a patient, the man who both loses his bride because of his generosity and kills the woman he has saved from death because of a gesture that is no less pure... This is a hero of a new kind, ethically perfect and crushed by this sinful world. Ortiz, finally, evolves into a realistic manner, and his quarrel with his family is the result of pride – on his side – and prejudice – on that of his father; the loss is considerable – he gives up his family's fortune – but voluntary and somehow deprived of tragic effect, especially if compared to the two life stories that have been told before. We can gather that the three do come not only from different nations, but indeed from different literary worlds – those of ancient tragedy, romantic melodrama, and the realistic novel. The order in which they are presented does not follow the chronology of their arrival in Argentina (for Sivel arrives one year before Donisoff, and Ortiz is born there), but rather that of literary history. One could argue that the main character comes first, or that there is a sociological dialectic that leads from the aristocrat to the marginal man, and then to the bourgeois; however, the functional hierarchy, as well as the social hierarchy of characters, ultimately leads back to the literary genre system showcased by Quiroga, which includes precisely these functional and social distinctions.

The three short background stories delaying the start of the proper artificial man-making could be considered as a spurious form of exposition. Although playing for whole pages might have been part of the authorial intention, Quiroga gets additional gains through this way of negotiating authorship. We have already mentioned the psychological motivation of the experiment – the struggle with fatherhood as an explanation of the intense concern with creation – , and the display of narrative proficiency in different genres, together with the advertisement of the unknown author's writing skills. There are two further approaches, maybe less compelling, and already better explored than the first two, for autobiography and technical imagination are long-standing paradigms in scholarship on Quiroga.

Obviously, the author has lent a few of his own traits to the three scientists. This Uruguayan man who had travelled to Paris and had lived in Buenos Aires before settling on the borderland between Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina, has a lot in common with Ortiz, of course – he is passionate about research and engineering, and he feels impoverished (Brignole-Delgado 1939: 203, 237). He shares Donissoff's sympathy for anarchists (Tarcus 2021: 9-26); and, just like Sivel, he has a tragical acquaintance with severe illness and suicide (Rodríguez Monegal 1968: 288). These biographical details can be read as hints connected with the identity of an author who hides behind a pseudonym but still wishes to declare who he is.

If we read this group of three as a figuration of Quiroga, this entails a very specific view of literary creation. For the artificial man to come to life, more than one father is needed, not only the romantic genius, but the modern group of scientists; this might be the most striking difference with respect to *Frankenstein* as a model. The novella portrays an ideal of creation which is not only international, but also interdisciplinary, as Donissoff is an expert in chemistry, Sivel is a physician, and Ortiz is an expert in electricity. The fact that engineering – in this case, biological engineering – becomes a model for the imagination and a metaphor for literature has been suggested more than once. Sarlo has discussed “El hombre artificial” as one of the first instances of “science fiction” in Argentina (1992: 41), a category called into question by Soledad Quereilhac, who rather considered it to be one of the last instances of the genre of “scientific fantasy”, which bloomed in the second half of the nineteenth century and up to 1910 (Quereilhac 2010: 17, 229). The heterogeneous combination of disciplines and backgrounds reflects the very blend of knowledge that Quiroga gathered through curiosity, conversation, reading, and solitary research rather than through academic study: unsystematic bits and pieces of science and technology that Quereilhac likens to the herbariums assembled by the author (*ibid*: 322).

Quereilhac uses the illustrations by Josef Friedrich to point out that the scientists look serious and – in contrast to naturalist fiction, which insists on the hereditary deficiency of immigrants – lack any flaw of character, which allows for the tragic finale (*ibid.*: 336-337). What her fine analysis misses, though, is that these images, together with the alias, weaken the writer's authority over this story and fragilize the text's unity and its capacity to distinguish itself from the signs that surround it. Indeed, the ideal of literature as an autonomous art is challenged by the way the novella is presented in the magazine. The illustrations may enhance the effects of the text, of course, and they are commissioned to excellent and renowned artists such as Friedrich (Ferrari 2020). However, they blur the borders of

the text and draw attention to other visually striking elements, such as the advertisement banners at the bottom of the page. It is difficult not to interpret the position of these ads as a strategic one: the first two episodes of the novella lead thus to a banner that functions as a commercial break after a cliff-hanger. While the following three episodes are free from that component, the last page of the sixth and last episode is divided between the dramatic final scene of the story and a large perfume advertisement.

It is not only their placement at the end of an episode that draws attention to the advertisements and makes it difficult to leave them out of the analysis. These advertisements also convey topics that are not entirely unrelated to the story. To push the anachronism further, they might be something comparable to the publicity that we receive through social media, although less clearly targeted as they are nowadays. What really strikes us is that they suit the subject of artificial life extremely well, and vice versa. While one would be tempted to view Quiroga's story as "science fiction" or "scientific fantasy", the promises at the bottom of the page or before and after the story give the reader a sense of a material possibility for biological engineering that is only different in degree from the creation of an "artificial man". The narrated simulacrum of life is framed by the non-fictional simulacra of the magazines. Or, to put it in a less Baudrillardian way, the willing suspension of disbelief when facing fantastic fiction blends in with the opportune suspension of disbelief that is the goal of commercial culture. If ads have us trust in barely everything, why not imagining the creation of an artificial man?

Let us look at the commercials in detail. Many of them address the artificial improvement of the human body. For instance, by making it brighter, whitening the skin and thus indirectly serving the obsession of Argentinians with the Caucasian look; an obsession that thrived precisely through the challenge of south European mass migration at the turn of the century (Ramos 1994). The advertisement stresses the ideal of classicist sculptural perfection – that is, spotless skin – that also pervades the novellas' Pygmalion-like approach to artificial life. Donisoff, the main character, is not only Caucasian and blond, but also angelic (he looks like an «arcángel», his beauty is a «belleza angelical», Quiroga 2019 [1910]: 57), and one of his first mentioned traits is his white hands holding a dead rat (which will be brought back to life). Later on, his white and contrived face («su rostro blanco y contraído», Quiroga 2019 [1910]: 51) shows his noble feelings (Chihaiia 2019). He is also compared to a sculpture («una estatua»: *ibid.* 41). Even Sivel, the Italian disfigured by a generalized infection that has attacked his skin and left him disfigured like a true romantic hero,

appears as «whiter than marble» («más blanco que el mármol»; *ibid.* 51) on one occasion. The first episode of the serial is framed between two advertisements that focus on skin perfection; while these attempts at altering the body are strongly gendered («especial para las damas»)<sup>5</sup>, the fiction leads the eye towards a fragile white masculinity that can be perceived just as much as a simulacrum as the four lady heads in the first ad.

Of course, the gender divide remains valid for the definition of authorship, or creatorship – that is, all-male –, while the reader of the magazine and addressee of the advertisements, and thus also of the story, is mostly female (Rocca 2007: 91-100). In the context of commercial framing, even the three professions of the inventors make sense, as Sivel can count as an expert in the field of medicine, while Ortiz contributes to the celebration of modern engineering such as it also appears in the presentation of the «invincible» Schacht automobile. From the invention of the automobile to the invention of self-moving limbs, there are no boundaries for the art of the engineer. Again, there is a sharp contrast between the universe of male authority – the Papas and the Professors that appear in the advertisements – and the scientists in the narrative, who are depicted as tortured and eventually as torturers.

On the one hand, the frame does not determine the content, but rather offers a backdrop of what would be socially acceptable, of what would be “real authorship”; on the other, it provides a discourse that shapes the idea of how simulacra could come into being. Not only do these therapeutic devices and machines seem hyperbolic, but the “world-famous” pills for breast enhancement and firmness that are imported from Paris already cross the line between cosmetic self-care and a fantastic approach to the human body. Even closer to the subject of “El hombre artificial” and its use of blood is the liquid that promises to restore human blood. The possibilities of biological engineering seem unlimited; one might say that those who have faith in such medicine are likely to believe in the creation of artificial life. The illustration by Friedrich focuses precisely on this element when it shows Donisoff in contemplation of a blood-filled vessel («Donisoff extrajo de las venas del animal unas gotas de sangre, y se hundió en su análisis», Quiroga 2019 [1910]: 35). Visual cues like this one establish the link between the universe of advertisements and that of fiction, and both stage the human body as a work of imaginative engineering, i.e. a work of art.

In addition to these thematic links that define “artificiality” through a

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<sup>5</sup> See Image 1.



non-fiction frame, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, literature and advertisement is further undermined through the genre of narrative ads that tell short stories related to the product, and are provided with illustrations just as artistic as the novel. A good example of this product placement is a specific soap that introduces the third episode of “El hombre artificial” through an entire story of commercial intent. Even the arrangement of the visual elements in the magazine pages seems calculated to combine stress and satisfaction. For instance, at the end of the story the bottom-up face of Donisoff, who died of torture and looks horrible, is framed by an image of pleasure and gratification: not only Cologne Water but also the gift that goes with it and belongs to the sphere of science, a thermometer. The divide in male authorship is brought to its climax by these two illustrations: in the upper part, fiction shows an image of suffering and madness, while the lower part promises real-life ideals, the royal gift («regalo regio»)<sup>6</sup> of sensual refinement and precision in measure. While it is not possible to create artificial life without causing death and despair, magazines and hardware stores offer artificial means to improve life just as much as necessary.

Our reading of “El hombre artificial” in its original context, which includes not only illustrations but also commercial advertisements, might be considered a distortion of the literary text *as such*. Indeed, the art of criticism itself is to establish relevant contexts, and it can be argued that the thematic resemblances of the commercials with Quiroga’s fiction are a result of pure coincidence or editorial strategy and that there is no need to take them into account when discussing the author’s literary work. This is a reasonable point, and it is not our intention to overinterpret thematic similarities. These do, however, draw attention to the functional similarity of the text as a selling product, and which therefore uses techniques that come from the world of advertisement, rather than that of literature: this is the case with the background stories of the three scientists’ characters, a showcase of different genres that are meant to provide the reader with specimens of Quiroga’s writing skills. It is this art that receives the alias “S. Fragoso Lima” as a trademark.

## II.

While the creation of the artificial man depicted in 1910 is mainly driven by the ideal of mechanical, biochemical and electrical engineering, later

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<sup>6</sup> See Image 2.

texts of Quiroga choose an entirely different model. Valeria de los Ríos has dedicated a book to the Latin American context of what she calls «spectral modernity», with Quiroga's fictions about photography and cinema as central evidence<sup>7</sup>, while Laura Utrera has emphasized the importance of cinema for the turn of the author towards literary realism (Utrera 2020). The pursuit of artificial life might well adapt itself to the new media. This might bring with itself a radical break with the sphere of goods and advertisement – as instruments and products of mechanical, biochemical and electrical engineering – and a turn towards a new model of fiction and authorship. However, this is not entirely so; while the possibility of artificial life fades from the realm of the visible, the author steps out onto the empty stage. This continuous fascination with publicity might have something to do with the fact that Quiroga kept writing for illustrated magazines and journals.

While the magazines themselves might not change in their essence, Pablo Rocca emphasizes the change in their audience: the two decades between the turn of the century and the twenties have seen an advance in alphabetization, and while *El Hogar* – the magazine that published “El espectro” in 1921 – has a similar look to *Caras y Caretas*, readers are different (Rocca 2007: 75). This is even clearer for *La Nación*, which combined serious information with entertainment and served as a magazine for the entire family. This is, then, the readership of “El vampiro” in 1927. Another change concerns the author, of course: instead of hiding behind an alias, he has become visible. In the wake of the First World War, Quiroga turns out to be one of the most fertile film critics in Argentina, and he also starts to work on a screenplay of his own. This visibility as a spectator goes as far as one caricaturist even showing the writer in front of the big screen<sup>8</sup>, overwhelmed by a close-up female emotion: an observed observer.

This *mise en scène* is not the whim of an illustrator, but simply an endorsement of the way Quiroga stages his authorial persona in his stories. The heterogenous identity that was embodied through the three scientists of “El hombre artificial” gives way to a unified alter ego named “Guillermo Grant” with homogenous initials and unambiguously Anglo-Saxon origins. This character is the narrator of “Miss Dorothy Phillips, mi esposa” (1919) as well as of “El espectro” (1919) and “El vampiro” (1927). While the first fiction ends reasonably well, the two others have catastrophic outcomes

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<sup>7</sup> De los Ríos 2011. The chapter dedicated to Quiroga is on pp. 141-174.

<sup>8</sup> See the vignette by Sirio for Quiroga's “Los estrenos cinematográficos” (Image 3).

(death and neurasthenia), which makes it difficult to read the stories as three episodes of one man's life. "Grant" thus functions as a simulacrum, an alias or – as we have suggested before – a trademark *within* the frame of narration, a playful way to suggest that an actor can die in a movie and come back to life for the next one. Indeed, as if to stress this interpretation of his return to the stage of fiction, in "El espectro", Grant is a professional actor.

Many of Quiroga's film essays emphasize the ability of the cinematographic technique to create "life itself" and thereby elude death:

As if in daylight, they run across the electric screen, so alive, so of the moment, that if they were to stretch out their lips or hands, they would reach out to touch us. They really live in that instant. They are not wardrobe photographs or old family albums: they laugh, undress, embrace each other with the carnal intensity of life itself, because Clarine and Harron really embraced and continue to do so despite the photographic illusion... Through the box, through the earth, through the beyond the dark mystery, the lovers meet night after night, vivid and blatant in the face of electricity. [...] Spectral as the screen itself ... they persist in running, in laughing, in embracing, just as they did once – and forever – in *Puro corazón*.

Como a la luz del día, corren por la eléctrica pantalla, tan vivas, tan del momento, que por poco que extendieran los labios o las manos, alcanzarían a tocarnos. Viven realmente en ese instante. No son ellos fotografías de ropero o de vetusto álbum de familia: se ríen, se desvisten, se abrazan con la intensidad carnal de la vida misma, pues Clarine y Harron se abrazaron de verdad y prosiguen haciéndolo a despecho de la ilusión fotográfica... A través de la caja, de la tierra, del más allá del tenebroso misterio, los amantes se encuentran noche a noche, vívidos y flagrantes ante la electricidad. [...] Espectrales como la pantalla misma ... persisten en correr, en reír, en abrazarse, tal como lo hicieron una vez–y para siempre–en *Puro corazón* (Quiroga 2007 [1922]: 286-287).

This magical ability to restore life is a topic of early film criticism and film aesthetics, and it already appears in Hugo Münsterberg's *Photoplay* (1916) as well as in the cinema of attractions such as in Méliès' short film entitled *Pygmalion et Galathée* (1898) (Chihai 2011: 62-69). The new medium replaces the old technology in its attempt to create new life. Cinematographic authorship is not imitation, but creation for Quiroga: this

fundamental conviction emerges in the stories, where the images on the screen are not simply likenesses or shadows of the actresses and actors, as platonic definitions of the cinema in the key of the cave myth would have it (García Bacca 1954), but have life in themselves. From here, it might be interesting to turn back to the introduction of the concept of the “simulacrum”, which had already been used by Mariel Rodés-Clericó to interpret “El espectro” in 1998. Indeed, the immortal appearances on screen are simulacra of light and not shadows of essential bodies.

Joanna Page has quoted Baudrillard in order to explain the uncanny dimension of this idea:

Reproduction is diabolical in its very essence; it makes something fundamental vacillate. This has hardly changed for us: simulation... is still and always the place of a gigantic enterprise of manipulation, of control and of death, just like the imitative object (primitive statuette, image of photo) always had as objective an operation of black magic. (Baudrillard 1988: 182, as cited in Page 2016: 115).

Page makes a fundamental point about the fact that «Quiroga’s stories attest to the power of cinema to reorganize perception and subjective experience, far beyond the simple recording or projection of images» (Page 2016: 112-113). There is also a shift, of course, that leads from sculpturally white flesh and skin to cinematographic projection: while “life itself” is represented as electrical energy in “El hombre artificial” as well as in scientific film fantasies such as “El vampiro”, the level of tactile materiality is being replaced by a new paradigm that also functions below the senses. Cinema opens the way towards a poetics of rays. The rays of lights that allow the projections on screen seem to suggest the existence of further types of radiation that can convey other facets of reality. Especially the context of “El vampiro” is not yet the material world of goods advertised in *Caras y caretas*, but the invisible universe of radiation.

Again, the magazines help to understand the bold techno-scientific assumptions of Quiroga’s stories. For the theosophists, such as Leopoldo Lugones, the discovery of X-Rays and almost any scientific innovation brought scientific proof for his convictions. Quereilhac emphasizes the importance of magazines as a heterogenous context: *La Nación* published articles on Röntgen’s rays together with other reports on spiritism and haunted

houses<sup>9</sup>. Likewise, *El Hogar* included almost as many articles on radiation as on film. Quiroga could rely on these contexts in order to interpret the technology of cinema as a model that might be used to suggest the possibility of soul-wandering and simulacra. While the rays of light reproduce flesh and the material parts of the body, there might as well be *other* rays that reproduce the soul and life and allow the spawning of artificial beings:

If the retina impressed by the ardent contemplation of a portrait can influence a sensitive plate to the point of obtaining a “double” of that portrait, in the same way the living forces of the soul can, under the excitation of such emotional rays, not reproduce, but “create” an image in a visual and tangible circuit.

Si la retina impresionada por la ardiente contemplación de un retrato puede influir sobre una placa sensible al punto de obtener un “doble” de ese retrato, del mismo modo las fuerzas vivas del alma pueden, bajo la excitación de tales rayos emocionales, no reproducir, sino “crear” una imagen en un circuito visual y tangible... (Quiroga 1996 [1927]: 719)

This analogy («del mismo modo») establishes a clear link between rays and creation; the fact that these «emotional rays» are invisible to the eye contrasts with the blunt visibility of the author and prompts us to ask about the place of fiction in the medium. The periodical that contains “El vampiro” is clearly less colourful than *Caras y Caretas*: the journal *La Nación* is a conservative tabloid that offers political news together with social and cultural journalism and entertainment. The text to image ratio is different, as the journal is text-centred. Although there are many illustrations and countless advertisements, they are less pervasive than those in Fray Mocho’s magazine. In addition to this quantitative divide, the commercials are directed towards a male, as well as female, readership – it is also about motors, gifts, spirits and ‘mate’, rather than, such as in *Caras y Caretas*, about beauty and household. Moreover, there is a neat separation between the parts that contain advertisements and the “serious” articles, there is less blurring of the difference between fiction and illustration, and there is no product placement.

For “El espectro” there is no need to share the page with publicity, to hide behind the trademark of a pseudonym, or to connect with the val-

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<sup>9</sup> See Quereilhac 2013.

ues of the cosmetic industry. The commercial drive of cinema is, in itself, sufficient to avoid the erosion of authority. Again, as for the alias “S. Frago Lima” that is sucked into the narrative and becomes the protagonist “Guillermo Grant”, the banners and commercials that burden “El hombre artificial” are ingested by a story that refers directly to films and film theatres such as the “Grand Splendid” on Santa Fe boulevard. In “Miss Dorothy Phillips”, the protagonist even fakes a magazine in order to impress the film star he loves; there could be no clearer way to show off the author’s mastery of advertisement.

This mastery also turned the prompted suspension of disbelief, which is characteristic of commercials, to his own advantage. Quiroga’s cinematographic narrative was not only a way to draw attention to male and female movie stars, films and cinemas he liked; it also sold a new model of fiction to the audience. “El vampiro” starts with a large explanation of this scientific hypothesis on the possible effect of «N-Rays». These had seemingly been discovered at the outset of the century by a physicist from Nancy (hence the letter ‘N’) in parallel with X-Rays and radioactivity – an emanation of light that is specific to certain bodies. However, the N-Rays turned out to be a result of observation errors, and the original experiment could not be reproduced (Klotz 1980)<sup>10</sup>. The inventor, Blondlot, had called for a gaze that was shaped by intention. In his Academy report he asks the observer to look at the experiment with the eye of an artist, rather than a scientist:

When viewing the screen or luminous object, no attempt at eye-accommodation should be made. In fact, the observer should accustom himself to look at the screen just as a painter, and in particular an “impressionist” painter would look at a landscape. To attain this, requires some practice, and is not an easy task. Some people, in fact, never succeed. (Blondlot 1905: 82-83)

Of course, these last sentences are tinged with scepticism, as they expect an audience that is willing to be prompted to watch experiments with a specific attitude and endorse the responsibility for failure: this is a scientific version of *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. It is noteworthy that Quiroga chooses a description of the spectral appearance of the actress that appeals

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<sup>10</sup> See also the excellent work on Quiroga’s reception of Blondlot by Boule 1970.

to the observer in a similar way to that described by Blondlot. The female body is *thought* to leave the surface of the screen and approach the beholder. The narrator *thinks* that the death of the actress has turned her projection into a vampire and that the mad scientist has been sucked dry by his creation. However, there is no objective observation that can confirm these thoughts. This new form of authorship is all words and no evidence, all imaginary projection and no material goods. The prompt works because it addresses a male gaze that appreciates the new Pygmalion as a creator of female beauty (while “El hombre artificial” is closer to the tragical myth of Prometheus) – the fiction contains its own advertisement.

We can conclude that Quiroga’s passion for cinema is in two ways decisive for his self-shaping authorship. On the one hand, the new technique qualifies as new art, and on the other hand, scientific progress leads back to artistic techniques of observation, such as the impressionistic gaze. In contrast to “El hombre artificial”, this means a gain in control which is coherent with the visibility of the author and his use of an alter ego as a recurrent protagonist. However, the new model of fiction does not embrace an autonomous aesthetics or a return to a romantic ideal of production but uses a form of control over the reader that is inherited from the practice of commercial advertisements. This vision of literary creation and artificial life is being prepared by its commodification in *Caras y Caretas*; for in “El hombre artificial” there are no original and copy anymore, but a circulation of vital power through mass media that can be condensed and unleashed in literary fiction.

terrama sintió, al saberlo todo, un impulso agradecido-  
mente hacia el padre gran hombre que había sacrificado  
su felicidad por dar vida a una desconocida. Su  
agradecimiento había llegado muy pronto al más extremo  
grado amor.

La joven, en una convulsión entera de su cuerpo,  
apretó contra su boca la mano de Sivel. Pero éste la  
retiró vivamente.

—No, no! Levántese.—le dijo, mientras allá en el  
fondo de su corazón la gran herida de su amor se re-  
abría ante aquella presencia amargamente evocadora...

—¡Perdón! ¡Perdón!...—soltaba la joven, de ro-  
dillas siempre.

—Si no tengo nada que perdonarle,—tuvo fuerzas Sivel  
para sonreírse.—Pero levántese.

—No, no... Yo tengo la culpa...  
Sivel tuvo entonces la sensación de que una mano  
indiferente, una mano cualquiera, estaba arañando su  
corazón. Su dolor era suyo y no de aquella extraña.

—¡Perdón!... ¡Yo tuve la culpa!... Fue por mí...  
—¡Ah, no! Le pido perdón a mí vez.—exclamó Sivel.

—No lo hice por usted.

Los ojos de la joven se alzaron lentamente hasta Sivel.  
—Si, no lo hice por usted; me compadecí de su ser,  
de una existencia condenada a morir, como la suya, de  
su vida, en fin... pero no de usted, ¡oh no!



—¿Qué vas á hacer con eso? ¡Es una vergüenza pa-  
ra un ingeniero como tú!

Cuando una esperanza de amor, lógica ó no, se quiebra;  
cuando enanos de lo alto, un sueño de grandeza,  
como el que consiste en habernos creído inspiradores  
de un gran sacrificio, la caída es siempre terrible.

La joven, fijos los ojos desmesurados en aquel es-  
pectro, también de su amor, se levantó. Retrocedió has-  
ta la puerta y antes que Sivel pudiera darse cuenta  
plena de la desesperación que aqueja á aquella alma  
exaltada, la joven desapareció. Media hora después se  
hacía destrozado bajo un automóvil.

Escuchido así en las más hondas fibras de su ser,  
Sivel consideró su vida rota para siempre. Pasó quince  
días enerrado en su laboratorio, vagando en la semi-  
obscuridad de un lado para otro.

Decidido al fin á arrancarse á aquello, su pasión  
por la ciencia lo cogió de nuevo, esta vez con inmenso  
ardor. Parecía que todas sus facultades hubieran rena-  
cido violentamente orientadas hacia los estudios anató-  
micos. Mas, como á pesar de todo, su rostro desfigurado  
tomábase odiosa su permanencia en Roma, abandonó la  
ciudad eterna, llegando á Buenos Aires, en 1904.

IV

Ricardo Ortiz era argentino, y había nacido en la  
capital federal. Su familia, de cuantiosa fortuna, dedi-  
cóle á la ingeniería eléctrica, para la cual Ortiz mos-  
trara desde muy pequeño fuerte inclinación. Hizo sus  
estudios en Buffalo, con brillante éxito. Volvió á Bu-  
enos Aires, y en vez de ejercer su profesión, dedicóse  
al estudio de pilas eléctricas; creíase estar en la pista  
de un nuevo elemento de intensidad y constancia asom-  
brosas. Como no frecuentaba el mundo, y sus manos  
solían estar poco menos que imposibles, su familia con-  
sideró que muy poca carrera haría, malgrado su ciencia.  
En consecuencia el padre le comunicó que, á d-  
jaba sus ácidos á le privaba de su mensualidad. Ortiz optó  
por sus ácidos, y súbitamente se encontró en la calle.  
Como no era en absoluto hombre de negocios, ofrecíase  
desde el día siguiente como profesor de inglés y ma-  
temáticas. Su familia halló mal esto, y el padre fué á  
verlo.

—¿Qué vas á hacer con eso? ¡Es una vergüenza pa-  
ra un ingeniero como tú!

—Tal vez,—repuso tranquilamente Ortiz.—Seguiré  
trabajando.

—¿En eso?—señaló desdeñosamente el taller.

—Sí, en eso.

—¿Vamos á ver! Si te propongo...

—No me propongas nada; no aceptaré.

—¿Y vas á hacer eso toda la vida?

—Toda la vida.

—¡Inventando, ¿eh!

—Sí.

—¿Pero es que nos vas á deshonrar á todos con  
estas porquerías!—exclamó el padre indignado.

—Oye,—le miró fijamente Ortiz.— Para decirme  
estas cosas, podrías no haber venido.

—¿Es que me da vergüenza!

—A mí también; pero no de esto...

—¿De qué?

—¿De la vergüenza de ustedes! ¿Se acabó! No les  
pido un centavo, y quiero que me dejen en paz.

Su padre, entonces, profundamente irritado, le lanzó  
señalando el taller:

—Para tener tanto orgullo, podrías abandonar tam-  
bién esto, que no compraste con tu dinero.

—Perfectamente,—repuso Ortiz levantándose—hi-  
ciste bien en recordármelo. Mánime me voy de aquí.

—Muy bien; es lo que debías haber hecho hace  
tiempo—contestó el padre, cada vez más irritado.—  
¡Pero que no se te ocurra!...

—¿Quieres irte, por favor!—saltó Ortiz, livido.

A la mañana siguiente, Ortiz enviaba á su padre,  
junto con las llaves, el inventario de todo el taller.

Una semana más tarde, un primo de Ortiz hallábase  
por fin el nuevo domicilio de éste.

—¿Por fin te encuentras! Ya no tienes el taller, ¿es  
cierto?

—Sí.

—¿Y qué vas á hacer!

—No sé todavía.

—¿Sabes lo que haría yo? Hablaría á tu padre...

Ortiz, que desde el primer momento había conocido  
que el primo venía enviado por su padre, lo detuvo,  
poniéndole la mano en el hombro:

—Mira; si fueras otro, te habría echado ya. ¡No  
quiero cuentos de ninguna especie!

El primo se irguió altivamente:

—¿Eh, qué!...

—Esto; si no fueras también un idiota, te echaría  
á bofetadas de aquí. ¡Fuera!

Un año después el padre de Ortiz moría, y el hijo  
renunció á todos sus derechos—medio millón de pesos.

V

Así estos tres hombres de carácter habían unido sus  
energías, asociándose para prestarse su mutua fuerza,  
y en estas circunstancias realizaron la más alta obra  
de genio que cabe en la humanidad: hacer un ser or-  
ganizado.

Para el laboratorio, montado con los tipos más per-  
fectos de máquinas ó instrumentos que encargaron ex-  
presamente á Estados Unidos, Sivel había entregado  
su fortuna entera. Ortiz cooperó en la obra común con  
sus conocimientos de química; Sivel, con los suyos de  
anatomía, y Doussoff, con su profunda ciencia en-  
ciclopédica, y sobre todo bacteriológica.

A pesar del magnífico laboratorio y el talento de los  
tres asociados, la empresa había sido profundamente  
desalentadora por su dificultad, y más de una vez Dou-  
ssoff, Sivel y Ortiz habían caído por semanas enteras  
en el más hondo desaliento.

*Dib. de Friedrich.*

*(Continuará.)*

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Image 1





Pero Donisoff había vuelto á caer hacia atrás, con un ronco suspiro, muerto....

—Sí.  
—¡Apenas sienta dolor, Donisoff!

Sivel se reincorporó entonces, tranquilo. Con esa sugestión perentoria, nada había que temer; sería imposible el menor trastorno.

Lo que pasó entonces fué tan terrible que ni Sivel ni Ortiz han podido después reconsiderar el tiempo justo que tardó en efectuarse la terrible catástrofe. Sivel había concluido apenas de enderezarse, cuando Biógeno se agitó violentamente. Era menester a toda costa evitar que se despertara *normalmente*.

—¡Ligero, Ortiz!—exclamó Sivel.—¡Tortúrelo!  
Ortiz se dobló sobre el desgraciado con su instrumento de horror, y un segundo después un alarido horrible, sobrehumano, como nunca lo hubieran oído, una verdadera expresión de dolor llevado á su paroxismo, resonó en el lúgubre laboratorio. Y tras él otro grito, pero ronco, de corazón que estalla, enloqueció á los operadores.

Donisoff acababa de incorporarse violentamente, con los ojos fuera de las órbitas y la boca espantosamente abierta.

—¡Donisoff!—gritaron á un tiempo Ortiz y Sivel, precipitándose sobre él. Pero Donisoff había vuelto á caer hacia atrás, con un ronco suspiro, muerto, destruido por aquella abominable máquina de dolor que había creado con su genio, y que colecciona de degustar de golpe todos sus sufrimientos acumulados: había estallado, matando á Donisoff.

Ortiz y Sivel, mudos de horror, quedaron anonadados. Su compañero, el más grande y noble de todos los hombres, aquella criatura de genio y sacrificio, fulminado para siempre! ¡estaba allí, muerto, aquel arcángel de genio que había creado lo más grande que es posible crear en este mundo! ¡Y perdido para siempre!

Sivel, con un ronco y profundo sollozo, cayó sobre el pecho del héroe.

—¡Donisoff, niño querido!—exclamó.—¡Qué hemos hecho de ti!

Ortiz no tenía fuerzas para secarse las gruesas lágrimas que rodaban por sus mejillas. ¡Todo estaba concluido! ¡Jamás, jamás volverían á aspirar á nada! ¡Nunca más entrarían en el laboratorio! Su porvenir entero estaba muerto ya, como había muerto el hombre de las manos vendadas; como había muerto su creación abominable; como allí—criatura sublime, arcángel de genio, voluntad y belleza—estaba muerto Donisoff.

Dib. de Friedrich.

FIN:

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**Mae Marsh-William Hart.**

— Muy poco nos ha revelado la última semana, si no es restar un poco de gloria a los grandes ases del film. Mae Marsh y William Hart han hecho lo humanamente posible para salvar sus respectivas cintas; pero la inutilidad del empeño pone una vez más de relieve esta verdad absoluta: de un buen drama siempre queda algo, a pesar de la medianía de sus intérpretes; pero no hay estrella ni sol capaz de salvar un film, si éste no tiene otro exclusivo objeto que lucir a tal o cual actor. Así hemos visto decaer y caer del todo a otros de innegable valer, por el malsano concepto de que un intérprete de arte pueda dar sensación de arte allí donde no lo hay. Y lo lamentable en estos casos es que actores de la talla de la Marsh y de Hart, no marquen una honrosa excepción.

**El Honor del Sur - Goldwyn.** — Perteneció esta cinta al género de films deportivos, que parecen haber sucedido a los policiales. Con menos recursos de efecto que éstos, las ya numerosas cintas de *sport* no han encontrado hasta ahora más que dos resortes de emoción: el boxeo, en menor escala, y las carreras, que aseguran un éxito momentáneo al final de dichas



cintas. Ya se ven escenas de hipódromo, desfile de caballos, bolteos, vértigos de velocidad en los cracks, todo esto dice bien claro que el género deportivo no ha hecho hasta hoy sino explotar una debilidad internacional, y tan a flor de emoción que el público, excitado en un instante, cruza apuestas y rompe en exclamaciones de pista. Hasta hoy, repetimos, los productores de cintas

deportivas se han contentado con este fácil y flaco triunfo.

**El Jugador Convertido - Triangle.** — Estrenada en 1916 en Nueva York, han pasado tres años antes de hacerse conocer aquí. ¿Por qué? No lo sabemos. Acaso por su pobreza extrema, sin que la presencia de Charles Ray, secundando a William Hart, mitigue aquélla en lo más mínimo. Un jugador en los poblachos del Oeste, cuya dureza de alma se ha templado en su infancia en el odio a la religión y sus ministros, y que al primer tropiezo con un pastor protestante, cae convertido. No hay otra cosa en el film entero, ni es otro, como se ve, salvo variante, el asunto de otra cinta del mismo Hart, estrenada últimamente: *Yates el egoísta*. El mismo ambiente, los mismos tipos, igual finalidad. Pero mientras en *El Jugador convertido* ni el ambiente ni los tipos tienen relieve alguno, en *Yates* hay lo que se llama un carácter sostenido, del principio al fin. Esta personalidad de gran energía, y no otra cosa, es la que autoriza el desarrollo del drama. Por donde se ve que William S. Hart hace un deslucido personaje en *El Jugador*, porque el drama es malo; y el mismo

reconocemos de buena fe que la Dalton, la Burke, la Harris, no podrían soportar sin esfuerzo un parangón con la adorable personita que pasó hace un momento a nuestro lado.

¿Por qué, pues, la profunda ola de amor por las estrellas mudas en que se ahoga y continúa ahogándose el alma masculina de las salas de cine?

Por esto, y he aquí la razón: porque la hermosa chica que toma el tranvía se lleva con ella el tiempo que hubiéramos necesitado para adorarla. Fué nuestra estrella de Belén un solo segundo, y la adoración, ya a puerta de alma, se extinguió con su breve llama.

Pero la estrella de cine nos entrega sostenidamente su encanto, nos tiende sin tasa de tiempo cuanto en ella es turbador: ojos, boca, frescura, sensibilidad arrobada y arranque pasional. Es nuestra, podemos admirarla, absorberla cuarenta y cinco minutos continuos. Ni un rincón de su alma nos queda oculto. Sabemos de cuánto es capaz y descubrimos los más íntimos hilos de su seducción. Vive para nosotros, nos adelanta un entero poema de amor (las cintas de las actrices preferidas son siempre de amor), a la distancia que media entre nuestras pestañas y la extremidad de las de ella. Nada, pues, más natural que salgamos de la sala con la cabeza cálida, y el corazón, el viejo corazón de los engaños, latiendo lentamente un compás de tardía dicha.

Pero — Dios nos perdone esta constante preocupación — nada distinto acaecería si la hermosísima chica que pasa, que cruza, que baja del tranvía, nos otorgara noche a noche el inefable don de prestarse cuarenta y cinco minutos a nuestra contemplación, vidrio de por medio. Con muchísimo menos tiempo que el que nos depara el cine, podríamos, aquí en Buenos Aires, dejar dichosamente quemar nuestra alma, ala por ala, ante los celestes ojos de modestas estrellas particulares.



Hart, con idéntico juego de escena, crea un tipo admirable en *Yates*, porque el drama es bueno. No es otro el motivo de las tres cuartas partes del éxito o fracasos en la pantalla del film.

**Varietades.** — ¿A qué se debe el particular encanto que despiertan y ejercen las estrellas del cine? ¿A su hermosura?

Sin duda; son, en su mayoría, muy bellas. Pero debe de intervenir otro factor, que vale la pena aclarar.

Alrededor nuestro, a nuestro lado, viven y laten mujeres de inexpressible encanto, que un día cruzaron la calle o pasaron en tranvía, dejándonos en el alma el relámpago de una demasiado breve dicha. Día a día, hora a hora, el deslumbramiento se reproduce, y



EL ESPOSO DE D. PH.

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