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Article:

Rea, L. orcid.org/0000-0003-1176-5108 (2018) Education, Popular Literature and Future Citizenship in Argentina's Billiken Children's Magazine (1919-1944). *Global Studies of Childhood*, 8 (3). pp. 281-291. ISSN 2043-6106

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610618797403>

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Education, Popular Literature and Future Citizenship in Argentina's *Billiken* Children's Magazine (1919-1944)¹

Introduction: Looking for gauchos and finding cowboys

I came to *Billiken* looking for gauchos. The gaucho; the Argentine plainsman, nomadic centaur of the pampas, now cemented as the hero of the Argentine nation-building project but previously imagined as a barrier to progress and 'civilization', had galloped his way through my PhD thesis. This had looked at narratives of nation-building in José Andrés González Pulido's 1930s series of radio dramas called *Chispazos de tradición* (*Sparks of Tradition*). From my home department of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies in an Arts and Humanities Faculty, I used a Cultural History approach to study the fictional representations of this historical and literary figure in a product of popular culture. Having exhausted the archive of surviving radio scripts, I began to look for gauchos elsewhere, and fully expected to find them in *Billiken* children's magazine. As *Billiken* heads towards a centenary of near continuous publication it is firmly established in the Argentine national consciousness.² *Billiken* has accompanied generations of children in their schooling and even today continues to follow the cyclical flow of the school calendar with issues led by key national historical dates. As *Billiken* is identified with promoting Argentine culture and history, I expected to find plenty of gauchos in amongst the short and serialised stories that formed part of *Billiken*'s entertaining content in the 1930s, reflecting the popularity of the gaucho not just in radio drama but across the popular literature of the decade. The only gauchos I found, however, were framed within the magazine's historical and educational content, in the illustrated 'Our History' and 'Introductions to Literature' pages (such as in issues 796, February 1935 and 1284, June 1944).³ Instead of gauchos I

¹ This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) and is part of 'The *Billiken* Centenary Project: Children's Literature and Childhood in Argentina, 1919-2019' (grant number AH/N010078/1). I would like to thank the anonymous readers for *Global Studies of Childhood* (GSC) and Professor Elizabeth Wood for their helpful critiques.

² *Billiken* appeared weekly from November 1919 to June 2018 when it moved to monthly publication. The magazine missed four weeks of publication in February and March of 1949.

³ All translations from *Billiken* and secondary sources are mine unless otherwise indicated.

found cowboys, and also detectives, explorers and pirates in serialised stories taken from, or inspired by, European children's publications. Whilst these stories were not explicitly marketed solely at boys, they appeared alongside stories about fairies and princesses framed by pink-toned illustrations.

The disconnect between the assumptions made and the reality of *Billiken's* popular literary content resulted from my failure to consider the specific ideological and social context in which *Billiken* operates as a product, not just of popular culture, but of children's popular culture or, to be more specific, a product of popular culture aimed at children and created by adults. This article focusses on the first twenty-five years of the magazine from its founding by Constancio C. Vigil in November 1919, pausing the analysis before the election of General Juan Domingo Perón. Perón's first two terms of government (1946-1955) had such a profound impact on Argentina that *Billiken* under Perón requires special consideration outside of the scope of this article. From 1919 to 1944, and indeed beyond, *Billiken* is the endeavour of a privately-owned, commercial publishing house, Editorial Atlántida, and engages with the Argentine nation-building project as a publication for children which constructs children as future citizens. *Billiken* is a multimodal text which changes over time in response to different political contexts, editorial priorities and consumer preferences but the multiple sections of *Billiken* can always be crudely divided into three basic categories: *what children need to know*, *what children want to read* and *what families can be persuaded to buy*.

What children need to know encompasses *Billiken's* identity as an educational magazine concerned with the promotion of patriotic education and with a focus on Argentina's founding fathers and the anniversaries of significant historical events. This content was rooted ideologically in the Argentine liberal tradition and promoted the version of Argentine history ensconced as 'official' since the Constitution of 1853 (see Shumway 1991). The educational material may have been traditional but *Billiken* innovated in its graphic presentation whilst employing up-to-date printing technology (Ulanovsky et al. 1997: 34). *What children want to read* is concerned with *Billiken's* identity as a 'magazine for children' and the editors' attempts at giving children the entertaining

content that (they think) children want. In so doing, the editors recognise their readers' power choose how they spend their leisure time. Whilst *Billiken's* entertaining content includes comic strips, graphic novels and craft activities, this article will focus on the magazine's popular literary content in the form of short and serialised stories. *What families can be persuaded to buy* encompasses the advertisements within the magazine for a range of products and services. This third section will be considered in terms of advertising strategies for Editorial Atlántida's books and the construction of the child reader as future citizen that emerges in these strategies. The overlapping ideological, pedagogical and commercial frameworks of these three sections are, ultimately, the reason why gauchos are restricted to the educational sections of the magazine and are excluded from the popular literature offered by *Billiken*.

There is a growing body of work which seeks to uncover children's agentic engagement with the cultural products made *for* them, from Jacobson's (2004: 183-214) study of children's radio clubs in Depression-era United States, to Curia's (2006: 295-319) analysis of the marketing of music to children and adolescents in 1990s Argentina. Whilst it would be possible to undertake a partial reconstruction of the different ways in which children read, used and engaged with *Billiken*, this article is not a study of the historical reception of *Billiken* and proposes a different, but no less valuable, focus on the editorial (adult) construction of Argentine childhood that emerges in *Billiken*. This construction invites questions regarding the role ascribed to popular culture for children in the context of the Argentine nation-building project whilst also exploring how the historical constructions of childhood that recent research has come to refute were constructed and contested at the time.

Popular Culture in Argentine Nation-Building

Billiken's founder, Constancio C. Vigil, born in Uruguay, and radio drama writer, González Pulido, born in Spain, were both immigrants working in commercial industries which emerged alongside, and gave expression to, Argentina's modernity. The popular press expanded around the turn of the

twentieth century as advances in printing press technology enabled publications to be produced more cheaply. The market for such publications expanded as the effects of the introduction of compulsory public schooling were felt in the increase in literacy rates (Sarlo 1988: 26). Mass European immigration to Argentina peaked in the 1890s and the industrialisation of the following decades led to an increase in rural migrants moving to Buenos Aires. Overcrowding, poor factory working conditions and high infant mortality rates were all features of Buenos Aires in the early decades of the twentieth century, and the increased affordability of radio technology was one of the modest benefits. As radio programmes and magazines reached audiences across the country, popular culture circulated shared listening and reading experiences, contributing to the nation-building project by forming, to use Anderson's term, 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983; see also Martín-Barbero 1993).

Despite the similarities between Vigil and González Pulido's cultural and commercial endeavours, the two men do not generally invite comparison, not least because their legacies are vastly different. González Pulido died, penniless and alone (or so his critics would have us believe), just one year after concluding the most successful drama series of the Golden Age of Argentine radio. *Chispazos de tradición* (1932-1935) comprised five individual series transmitted to a family audience in a prime evening slot. The series was rooted in the culture of the gaucho, the ultimate expression of Argentine national identity, and evoked nostalgia for the listeners' lost rural past whilst simultaneously encouraging immigrants to integrate and to place the needs of the Argentine nation above their own. At the heart of the gauchesque literary canon is José Hernández's *The Gaucho Martín Fierro*, first published in 1872 with *The Return of Martín Fierro*, appearing in 1879. Over these two instalments the poem's gaucho protagonist moves from lawlessness and rebellion to advocating a positive message of integration and unity. The character Martín Fierro was installed as the symbol of Argentine national identity following Leopoldo Lugones's lectures in 1913, marking the centenary of Independence (Ludmer 1999: 230). By this time, the threat to the liberal consensus that real, nomadic gauchos had posed had been replaced by the destabilising effects of the huge increase

in the immigrant population.

Ricardo Güiraldes's novel, *Don Segundo Sombra*, published in 1926, further cemented the place of the gaucho in the national imaginary and triggered the 1930s boom in popular gauchesque culture. Popular publishing houses such as Editorial Tor reedited collections of nineteenth-century gauchesque plays, poems and serialised novels, González Pulido's gauchesque radio dramas spawned a raft of imitators, and new gauchesque novels with original gaucho characters appeared on the market. González Pulido was initially a source of benign amusement for radio magazine critics who found it extraordinary that a Spaniard was transmitting an approximation of gaucho dialect over the airways and anachronistically setting his radio serials in the present day (Colt 1933: 78-80). Within a year, however, González Pulido's serials had become too popular – in the dual sense of having too many listeners and of appealing to the popular classes - to be celebrated by the self-appointed gatekeepers of Argentine (radio) culture. Emilio Karstulovic, writing in *Sintonía* magazine, and Homero Manzi, writing in *Micrófono*, took every opportunity to deride the series as a poorly-written and inauthentic representation of Argentine rural life. In a particularly biting attack, Karstulovic (1934), writing anonymously, condemned González Pulido for sacrificing artistic concerns for the vulgar objective of making money 'by the bucketload' (see also Rea 2013: 161-164).

Constancio Vigil died in 1954, at the age of seventy-eight, at his desk at Editorial Atlántida, the publishing house he had founded in 1918. In addition to *Billiken*, Vigil had founded two of Argentina's other major magazines: the women's weekly, *Para Ti* (1922-present) and the weekly sports magazine *El Gráfico* (founded in 1919 and sold on in 2002). Vigil passed the directorships of Editorial Atlántida's magazines to his sons in 1925 and increasingly devoted himself to writing for children, publishing around eighty-five children's books to add to his more theoretical works and advice manuals including *El Erial (The Fallow Land, 1915)* and *La educación del hijo (Your Child's Education, 1941)*. Bontempo (2012: 209) states that Vigil's work as a whole was concerned with the 'moral regeneration' of Latin America based on the pillars of love, spirituality and peace, and reflects on Vigil's belief that children needed to be steered towards these values in order for the project to

succeed. Vigil was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1934 for his mediation in the Chaco War, and was a recipient of the Papal Lateran Cross in 1949. His works for children received national and international recognition during his lifetime and today there are hundreds of schools, libraries and classrooms across Latin American which bear his name. Amongst other accolades, *Mangocho*, Vigil's autobiographical account of his childhood, was approved by the National Education Council as a fourth grade reading book (issue 1136, August 1941) and the educational authorities in Uruguay acquired Vigil's story collection *Marta y Jorge* for primary schools (issue 1175, May 1942). Later, the Dominican Republic adapted Vigil's books for use as text books (issue 1327, April 1945) and Bolivia officially recognised *El Erial* for use in schools (issue 1429, April 1947).

News of Vigil's growing acclaim was published in *Billiken* to reassure readers, their parents and their teachers that *Billiken* was a high-quality publication founded on solid pedagogical principles. These notes also function as advertorials, raising awareness of the books sold by Editorial Atlántida. In a similar dual-purpose strategy, *Billiken's* high circulation figures are showcased in the magazine to reassure readers that they are buying into a successful and relevant publication, and also to attract and retain advertisers. In 1931, *Billiken's* readers are presented to potential advertisers as 'tomorrow's parents' whom businesses can teach to 'buy intelligently tomorrow by showing them the goodness and value of your products today' (issue 592, March 1931). Evidence is provided here of *Billiken's* weekly paid circulation of 103,000, which by 1944 had risen to 325,000 (issue 1283, June 1944). In 1931, advertisers are further informed of the calculation of five readers per copy sold, stretching the estimated weekly readership to around half a million. Editorial notes in *Billiken* encourage readers to pass their copy on to someone who cannot afford it, reinforcing *Billiken's* identity as a middle-class magazine promoting charitable giving in the absence of a welfare state (Brafman 1992: 74) and obscuring the commercial benefit that such a practice lends to Editorial Atlántida. The tendency to downplay commercial ambitions brings *Billiken* into the sphere of journalism which was seen as an academic, rather than commercial endeavour, and identified journalists, printers and illustrators as intellectuals and artists, rather than workers (Cane 2011: 81,

121). Writing for the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Billiken*, Vigil explicitly rejected the notion that the magazine was a commercial venture. It had, rather, been created out of love ('*Billiken* is made as though for one's own children, more with the heart than with the hands') and not 'with the vile motive of profit' (issue 1304, November 1944). Both González Pulido and *Billiken's* editors were essentially concerned with the Argentine nation-building project and both guided commercial enterprises. However, whilst González Pulido was punished for his commercial success, *Billiken* was identified with the noble task of educating children and forming future citizens.

What children need to know: Education for nation-building

Argentine children were indelibly linked to the nation-building project because they were conceptualised as the future of the nation. As López-Alves (2011: 10) states, the nation in Latin America 'could not be solely constructed upon a glorious past' but was also 'constructed upon the modern notion that the future of the national community is part of the definition of the nation'. *Billiken* was targeted at children of primary school age (6 to 13) and as such was intertwined with the nation-building impetus behind public education. In late nineteenth-century Latin America, as pedagogy developed as a new field, children and education were at the heart of political debate. Across the continent, public education programmes were initiated to 'create a citizen as a "disciplined pedagogical subject"' (Torres and Puiggrós 1995: 5). In Argentina in 1884, Law 1420 established provision for compulsory, free and lay schooling, which aimed to consolidate the nation-state by creating a common experience that could bind together new generations of citizens, whether native-born or children of immigrants (Carli 2002: 37). As the mission of public schooling was 'the integration and political socialisation of individuals in a community of citizens' (Lionetti 2011: 68), the understanding of children shifted accordingly. Children were no longer viewed as individuals within a family unit but instead as future citizens, the responsibility for whom lay with the State. Attention turned to how best to protect and develop the nation's 'human capital' threatened by high levels of infant mortality, abandonment and child delinquency (Colángelo 2011: 102).

Domingo F Sarmiento, President of Argentina from 1868 to 1874, and Director of Schools for the Province of Buenos Aires from 1879 to 1882, was instrumental in developing public schooling in Argentina. Influenced by Horace and Mary Mann in the United States, Sarmiento's ideas underpinned the pedagogical direction of national teacher-training in the Argentine normal schools, the first of which came into operation in 1869 (Dorn 1993: 80-83). Sarmiento (1899: 194) considered the child to be an 'incomplete being' due to a lack of reasoning capability and viewed education as part of a wider drive to 'civilize' the population. He encouraged women to train as teachers and recognised their role in the raising of future citizens, even when they themselves were denied basic civil rights, such as the right to their own earnings, until a reform of the Civil Code in 1926 (Jeffress Little 1978: 237-239, 248). Whilst Sarmiento retains, even today, his status as the Father of Argentine public education, with his birthday still celebrated as the 'Day of the Teacher', his pedagogical approach was being challenged as early as the 1920s. Alternative pedagogical discourses, centred on the New School movement, recuperated Rousseau by emphasising children's natural tendency towards benevolence, and promoted a child-centred approach to learning (Carli 2006: 397, 390).

The New School influences present in *Billiken* are not surprising given that Vigil's extensive professional and personal networks included teachers and school directors, members of the National Council of Education and children's writers, some of whom became *Billiken* collaborators. *Billiken* engaged with the New School movement by understanding the role of play in learning, encouraging readers to engage with the materiality of the magazine by including pages for colouring-in and use in craft projects. Pages dedicated to educational content were attractively illustrated and presented with high levels of 'visual power' (Cleveland 2005) in recognition of the child reader's right to exercise choice over which sections of *Billiken* to read. Even before 1936 when *Billiken*'s first competitor, *Figuritas*, appeared, *Billiken*'s editors made an effort to engage with and retain their readers. The editors identified children as modern consumers, in much the same way as the adult consumers of the other Editorial Atlántida magazines. To reinforce the message that

Editorial Atlántida placed equal value on *Billiken*, it was priced at twenty cents, the same as *Para Ti* and *El Gráfico*. For all its New School influences and its construction of children as modern consumers, *Billiken* still engaged in the Sarmientian construction of children in terms of their future potential and Vigil presided over a magazine which was both innovative and traditional.

Billiken formalised its educational content in issue 911, May 1937 with the addition of eight extra pages dedicated to material following the school curriculum, and with each page framed by the grade and subject to which it pertained. There was no systematic approach and different topics, ranging from literacy to numeracy to history and geography, were tailored to different grades on different weeks. Beyond the specifically curricular content, *Billiken's* focus on the school calendar encouraged teachers to incorporate *Billiken* into their lessons, setting homework which required cutting out relevant material from the magazine. In the rare instances in which gauchos appeared in *Billiken*, they did so within the parameters of the educational content, either in themed history sections or in the form of excerpts from canonical gaucho poems including *Martín Fierro*. From 1939, Hernández's birthday was celebrated nationally as the 'Day of Tradition' allowing *Billiken* to incorporate its gaucho content into sections reserved for the school calendar. *Billiken* excluded gauchos from its popular literary content, not just because new fictional gauchos, such as González Pulido's characters, had become associated with a perceived vulgarisation of popular culture, but also because *Billiken* looked beyond Argentina for its popular literature.

What children want to read: Popular literature in Billiken

Until 1937 *Billiken* was primarily a literary magazine publishing as many as eight short stories and three episodes of serialised stories each week. The number of stories had already started to decrease before the onset of the Second World War and the consequent difficulties in obtaining the latest European stories made *Billiken* turn to local authors but not immediately to local themes. Throughout the war, *Billiken* continued to publish adventure stories with pirates, cowboys, detectives or air pilots, retaining the style of the European stories but commissioning them from

local authors. An examination of *Billiken's* literary content teases out the complexities of *Billiken's* construction of childhood. *Billiken* does not construct children as passive consumers of adult-curated culture and in striving to give children what they want to read, constructs them as modern consumers. It does not appear, however, that the concept of adults deciding what children want to read is problematized at any point. Furthermore, *Billiken's* editors recognise children's agency, only to see that agency as a problem to be solved or an opportunity to be acted upon. The popular literature in *Billiken* reflected the cultural tastes of cosmopolitan, middle-class Argentines by featuring predominantly European-authored or European-inspired stories. Herein lies the paradox that foreign-authored adventure stories dominated the popular literature of a magazine otherwise concerned with the promotion of national content.

In the first three decades of *Billiken*, the European origins of stories are repeatedly used to generate interest amongst the readership, cultivating a cultural understanding amongst child readers that if a story comes from Europe, it must be worth reading. In Sarmiento's (1845) foundational novel, *Facundo*, Europe is the civilization to America's barbarism. With the aim of Europeanising Argentina, the Constitution of 1853 set out the principles for encouraging European immigration. The cultural influence of Europe could be seen in Buenos Aires's Paris-inspired architecture (Wilson 207: 26, 132) and the prevalence of British-branded department stores including the only foreign branch of Harrods. *Billiken* largely favoured European authors whose work required translation into Spanish. Italian authors included Emilio Salgari, prolific author of pirate adventure stories, and Milly Dandolo, children's writer and literary translator. The majority of the French authors whose works appeared in *Billiken* had been originally published in Éditions de Montsouris's 'La Collection Printemps' series of adventure novels for children and included Nobert Sevestre, León Lambry and Maria de Crisenoy.⁴ Most of the British stories published in *Billiken* were originally published in the boys' magazines owned by Amalgamated Press, in particular *Chums* (1927-1941), *The Boys' Friend* (1895-1927) and *The Ranger* (1931-1935). The latter was a specialised

⁴ See the website dedicated to illustrator Étienne le Rallic featuring the covers of 'La Collection Printemps'.

Western publication and provided many of *Billiken's* cowboy stories from authors such as Ivan Storm (pseudonym of Reginald G. Thomas), GC Glover and GM Bowman. The tendency to source stories from a select group of European publications meant that it was for practical, rather than ideological, reasons that the cowboys in *Billiken* did not come from US authors or US publications but instead were British versions of US cowboys.⁵

In one of the clearest examples of *Billiken* aiming to attract readers by offering the latest, most popular series from Europe, in 1928 *Billiken* began to publish the stories of Baker Street's second most famous detective, Sexton Blake. Sexton Blake was created in 1893 by Harry Blythe for *The Halfpenny Marvel*, a magazine which bore the slogan: 'No more penny dreadfuls! These healthy stories of mystery and adventure will kill them!' (Turner 1975: 102). By 1915, the character had moved to Amalgamated Press and to 'The Sexton Blake Library' which published book-length individual Sexton Blake stories written by different authors (Hinrich n. d.). In Argentina, Editorial Tor began publishing translations of many of these stories in its own Sexton Blake Library in 1930. To take one example, *The House of Silence* by GH Teed, first published in the UK in 1930 is then published by Editorial Tor as *La casa del silencio*. Between November 1930 and February 1931, this same story is serialised in *Billiken*, in a different translation from Editorial Tor, and under the title *La mansión del silencio*. By the 1930s, the Amalgamated Press Sexton Blake stories had moved on from being a genteel alternative to the Penny Dreadfuls and were more suited to a crossover adolescent-adult readership. The level of violence in the stories conflicted with *Billiken's* promise to publish only material carefully selected 'from a moral and religious point of view', and the editors' assertion that 'the fact that [any given story] appears in this magazine is the best guarantee that it contains nothing which could be harmful to thrill-seeking children drawn to highly harmful reading' (issue 649, April 1932). As Editorial Tor had no such commitment and did not publish specifically for children, it was problematic that both houses were publishing the same Sexton Blake stories at the same time. To

⁵ The original publication contexts of the British stories published in *Billiken* have been traced using Steve Holland's (2015) British Juvenile Stories and Pocket Libraries Index.

remedy this, *Billiken* replaced the original Sexton Blake stories in 1933 with a series of locally-authored, and presumably unauthorised, shorter serialised stories with simplified plots under the title 'Hazañas de Sexton Blake' ('Exploits of Sexton Blake', from issue 696, March 1933).

This compromise enabled *Billiken* to continue to harness the power of the Sexton Blake brand, whilst retaining parental approval. The view held across Latin America was that classic detective fiction was a 'foreign form' and translations were preferred to locally-authored stories. Local writers generally adopted pseudonyms and set their stories in Britain or the United States to gain this perceived legitimacy (Simpson 1990: 16).⁶ Around this time, another detective is added to *Billiken's* roster. A note signed by 'La Dirección' ('The Management') at the top of the first column dedicated to *Chang, El detective más joven del mundo* (*Chang, The World's Youngest Detective*), introduces this series 'with the certainty that everyone will be pleased with it' and states that *Billiken* has acquired the exclusive rights for the series' publication in Spanish (issue 825, September 1935). Searches into this did not uncover the original, European publication but did reveal that the Chang series had first been published by *Billiken* a decade earlier (from issue 283, April 1925). In marketing this Argentine series by giving the impression that it was a translation of a European publication, *Billiken's* editors responded to the cultural expectations of the readership that they themselves had helped to generate.

What families can be persuaded to buy: Literature in the formation of the future citizen

The European-authored or European-style stories published in *Billiken* may have been deemed tasteful but they were still part of the magazine's popular entertainment content and were not to be taken seriously. The pages dedicated to these stories had low levels of 'visual power' and the stories were presented in columns of densely packed text with very few illustrations. They were interspersed with advertisements for books published by Editorial Atlántida as a reminder that the

⁶ One exception to this was Editorial Tor's locally-authored Sexton Blake stories set in Buenos Aires (Abraham 2012: 165)

stories in the magazine may have constituted what children wanted to read but what they really *should* be reading was literature in book format. As Vázquez (2014: 39) argues, *Billiken's* self-imposed educational remit also included educating children as consumers who could be guided to make the 'right' choices. In 1929, Editorial Atlántida launched *Biblioteca Billiken*, a children's book series that excluded children's literature in favour of adaptations of world literature and biographies of, more often than not, great men. With such a remit, even Constancio C. Vigil's books for children were excluded from *Biblioteca Billiken* and were published separately in the *Biblioteca Infantil Atlántida* (*Atlántida Children's Library*, advertised in 1181, July, 1942). Advertisements for the *Biblioteca Billiken* emphasised the superiority of literature in book format and the importance of building a 'biblioteca', a library, or collection to ensure one's future prospects. Some of these bore the strapline, 'With *Biblioteca Billiken*, school is a home and home is a school' (issue 173, May 1944) further emphasising that these products fell into the category of *what children need to know*.

The coyness with *Billiken* approached notions of commercial gain also formed part of the marketing strategy for books published by Editorial Atlántida. These were an investment in a child's future that need not necessarily be out of the economic reach of lower-earning parents. Vigil's books were available in both a luxury version, priced at two pesos, and an economic version, priced at one peso twenty cents (issue 1204, December 1942), and payment plans were offered to build one's own collection of the *Biblioteca Billiken* (issue 1085, September, 1940). Other framed editorial notes which interrupted the reading of popular stories extolled the virtues of reading the 'right' kind of literature and promoting it as 'the guarantee of a happy future' (issue 1173, May 1942). These notes recognise the power of what Jacobson has called the 'child lobbyist' (2004:52-53.) One such note, which rhymes in the original, is: 'If they ask you to choose a gift/Choose the best, discreetly and calmly/ A book can enrich your mind/ A book can enrich your soul!' (issue 1156, January 1942). In another, asking parents and relatives for books is 'to nobly arm oneself for the battle of life' (issue 1213, February 1943). The boys and girls pictured in another note will, we are told, grow one day into men and women and 'it is desirable, for the good of the nation and for they themselves, that

they grow in intelligence and in goodness, that their minds be nourished and their hearts beautified by the best books written especially for them' (issue 1231 June, 1943). The thread running through these editorial notes is that exposing children to the right kind of reading material will help them to fulfil their full potential. Upon turning the page, the reader inevitably finds an advertisement for Editorial Atlántida books and with that, the key to ensuring the future prosperity of the nation.

Conclusion

After 1925, Constancio Vigil was no longer involved in the commercial day-to-day running of *Billiken* but his influence was still felt in the magazine. It is likely that the notes promoting edifying literature were authored by Vigil as they are consistent with his writing style and the themes he expounds in signed contributions to *Billiken*. Vigil is largely remembered today as a reactionary, right-wing Catholic writer, rather than as an innovative entrepreneur. His moral and didactic writing style has fallen out of favour and only four of his children's fiction books are still published by Editorial Atlántida. Vigil's Catholicism developed in accordance with the Argentine political landscape. Following the military coup of 1930, the newly repressive political atmosphere created the conditions for the rise of Catholic nationalism and the overturning of the constitutionally lay orientation of public schools. At the time of *Billiken's* founding, however, Vigil was anti-clerical and his Krause-influenced spiritualism brought him into contact with the more progressive nature of the New School movement. During Vigil's lifetime, *Billiken* continued to be imbued with the Romantic notion of childhood and a belief in children's inherent benevolence, retaining New School influences even as Argentina's pedagogical climate shifted. This resulted in different, and sometimes opposing, ideological and pedagogical influences being simultaneously present in *Billiken*. These are especially visible in Vigil's messages to the child reader.

On the eighteenth anniversary of *Billiken's* first issue, Vigil thanked readers for accompanying the magazine on its journey 'to turn these pages into the most faithful reflection of everything that the child may find interesting for his scholarly life, his health, his pastimes and his

moral elevation'. Although 'niño' can mean both 'child' and 'boy', the end of Vigil's message is more specific as he identifies *Billiken's* work as geared towards 'making into kinder and better instructed children these men of tomorrow for whom the fatherland has such high hopes' (issue 939, November 1937). Vigil's 1952 New Year message, written towards the end of his life, reveals a continued preoccupation with the child as future citizen. The child reader Vigil addresses must be both obedient and self-reliant. Vigil states that he will not wish the reader a 'Happy New Year' as the child is responsible for his (or her) own happiness as it is only through 'goodness' ('being good to ones parents, a good student at school and a good servant of the fatherland') that happiness is achieved. Vigil expresses his faith in his reader's inherent capacity for goodness: 'Prepare to persevere, my friend, in the coming year, and always, in the desire to be better each day' (issue 1672, December 1951). This message underscores *Billiken's* place at the intersection of different pedagogical discourses and the contradictions that this will inevitably elicit. Here the child is simultaneously envisaged as a future citizen with a duty to the fatherland (revealing a Sarmientian influence) and a member of a family unit with a duty to his or her parents (retaining a New School influence). *Billiken* is, at this time, caught between modernity and tradition; of being a modern product for child consumers and simultaneously a repository of educational material and taste-forming culture charged with the formation of the ideal future citizen. It is also a product of Argentine popular culture which is out of step with popular tendencies when it excludes gauchos from its popular literature. I started my investigation into *Billiken* with the Cultural History puzzle of why this product of popular, national Argentine culture favoured cowboys over gauchos; a puzzle that has been solved by working at the intersection of Childhood Studies and Popular Culture. I may not have found the hoped-for gauchos in *Billiken* but I did find a new way of engaging with Argentine Cultural History by seeing it through the lens of culture produced specifically for children.

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