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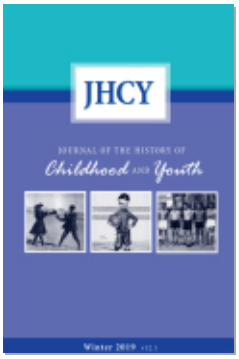
The Newsboy's Good Deed: *Billiken* Magazine's Construction of Argentine Childhood In 1942



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THE NEWSBOY'S GOOD DEED: *BILLIKEN* MAGAZINE'S CONSTRUCTION OF ARGENTINE CHILDHOOD IN 1942

A Well-Deserved Prize

The boy, Luis Román, student of School No. 14 of School Council IV, situated on 1136 Necochea Street, who sells newspapers after school, found a wallet containing 276 pesos which he swiftly handed in to Police Station No. 24. . . . This gesture, especially notable coming from a *canillita* (newsboy), has been duly rewarded by the President of the above School Council IV, Dr. Juan de Simone, who has sent the director of the aforementioned school the five volumes of *Vida espiritual* (*Spiritual Life*) by the well-known author Constancio C. Vigil, to reward the boy's pleasant attitude and to whom said prize has been awarded in the presence of all the school's students and of the director of the same, Juan P. Herrero.

—*El Nacional de Boca y Barracas*, *Capital Federal* (City of Buenos Aires).[1]

This story of Luis Román's good deed, published in *Billiken* magazine on September 14, 1942, in a small frame within a serialized story, opens a window onto the wider sociocultural significance of this children's weekly and its constructions of Argentine childhood. Taking Luis Román's story as a starting point, this article will analyze *Billiken*'s editorial construction of childhood at this time using historical contextualization to explore the competing discourses that are packaged within this commercial product. *Billiken*'s layout presents the magazine to its readers as an object of children's culture that is both ephemeral and material, and explicitly differentiated from the book-as-artifact. The magazine can be read as a vehicle for a specific editorial message that seeks to guide, or control, the child reader, yet it is also a multimodal text inviting

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reader exploration and interaction. This hybrid nature, further complicated by founder Constancio C. Vigil's complex trajectory of engagement with Argentine philosophical and pedagogical movements, reveals the magazine's multilayered approach to *Billiken*'s child readers, who are simultaneously imagined as subjects to be guided to their full adult potential, as autonomous participants in the making of their own culture, and as modern consumers. As a magazine that seeks to both entertain and educate, *Billiken*'s literary content becomes a site from which these different tensions emerge. While *Billiken*'s importance to Argentine cultural history has been duly recognized, the magazine's popular literary content has been overlooked, from both an editorial and academic point of view, in favor of the magazine's educational content. This article seeks to redress this balance and to uncover the contribution that *Billiken* can make to the study of Argentine childhood.[2]

Constancio C. Vigil, a Uruguayan children's writer and publishing entrepreneur, founded Editorial Atlántida in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1918 and began publishing *Billiken* the following year. *Billiken* has appeared nearly every week since November 1919 and holds a privileged—and sometimes divisive—place in the national consciousness, as it has accompanied generations of Argentine children in their schooling.[3] As a "revista para niños" (magazine for children), *Billiken* places as much value on entertainment as on education. *Billiken* was at the vanguard of the latest technology and printing techniques; it offered a visually innovative design, published the latest comics, and translated stories from popular European children's publications, even as critics have noted the tension between its modern presentation and its traditional or conservative content.[4] *Billiken* was founded as a literary publication in the spirit of other dedicated children's magazines published on both sides of the Atlantic as higher-quality alternatives to the dime novels in the United States and the penny dreadfuls in Great Britain. A note in *Billiken* in 1932, accompanying a story by M. Wynne, an author originally published in the British boys' magazine *Chums* (1892–1934), reassured parents that everything appearing in *Billiken* has been carefully selected from a moral and religious point of view, and "the fact that it 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." The leading example of children's literary publications in the United States, *St. Nicholas*, is also the most similar in outlook to *Billiken*. Edited by Mary Maples Dodge from 1873 to 1905, *St. Nicholas* distinguished itself as a high-quality publication that transmitted the belief that children's participation in consumer culture need not be a source of anxiety but could instead "facilitate moral and social progress."[5]

Figure 1. The cover of *Billiken*'s first issue, 19 November, 1919.

Although the influence of the United States is most visible at the time of *Billiken*'s founding, it is not clear whether Constancio C. Vigil was aware of or inspired by children's publications from that country. It was Kansas City illustrator Florence Pretz who patented the design for the Billiken figurine in 1908, and the craze for products in the image of this commercial "god" or

good-luck charm peaked in the first decade of the twentieth century. A less well-known connection to the United States is that J. C. Leyendecker provided, presumably unwittingly, the image for the now iconic cover of *Billiken*'s first issue. Leyendecker's rough-and-tumble boy, fresh from the football field, first appeared on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* in November 1914. In *Billiken*, both the name and the image are domesticated: "Billiken" is pronounced in Argentine Spanish as [biʒ'iken], and in the image the boy's hair has been darkened, the team flag changed, and the face guard, held in the original in the boy's left hand, has been removed, transforming the sport from football to soccer. The boy's defiant stance remains, however, and *Billiken* launched with an image of rebellious and modern childhood, and with a name that signals an outward-looking, popular approach.[6]

CHILDREN IN SCHOOL AND ON THE STREET: THE NEWSBOY AND THE DEBATE OVER CHILDREN'S "NATURE"

By 1942, when Luis found and returned the wallet, *Billiken* was a well-established presence in both the home and school life of its readers. From 1937 onward, *Billiken* transitioned into an unofficial partner of Argentina's National Education Council, with each educational page framed by the school grade to which it pertained, facilitating the magazine's use as a teaching resource. In the 1940s, its educational content included history, geography, science, and literacy, all attractively presented with numerous colorful illustrations. Each issue also contained craft-based activities, some of which involved using the magazine itself as material for cutting, sticking, and coloring in, alongside comic strips, short stories, and serialized stories. The paid circulation of 139,500 in November 1939 jumped to 200,000 by November 1943, with a total readership five times that, if *Billiken*'s own calculation is applied. Isabella Cosse uses documents from the National Education Council to determine that there were 2,259,010 Argentine children of school age (between six and thirteen) in 1938, 80 percent of whom attended school.[7]

Luis's story first appeared in a local newspaper, with Luis's reward of Constancio C. Vigil's *Vida espiritual* providing the only link to *Billiken*. It was sufficient for *Billiken* first to co-opt Luis and his story, and subsequently to promote the carrying out of similar good deeds to the readership. Luis's relationship to *Billiken* was omitted from the note and no information was offered regarding whether he read the magazine or whether he was pleased to have received *Vida espiritual* as a reward. The note states that Luis was in fourth grade, so if he had followed a normal progression through school, although this is by no means guaranteed, he would be around ten years old in 1942. That Luis

and his contemporaries were in school was the result of Law 1420 from 1884, which established the principle of free, compulsory, and lay public schooling, and aimed to legitimize the state while integrating the vast numbers of children from immigrant families. Following independence in 1810 and a civil war that only ended in 1860, the political and cultural struggle for Argentine national identity developed into a nation-building project that continued into the twentieth century.[8] Law 1420 was the work of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, president of Argentina from 1868 to 1874, and director of schools for the province of Buenos Aires from 1879 to 1882. In the following quotation from Sarmiento's foundational text *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* (1845), the use of an infancy metaphor reveals Sarmiento's position on actual children: "Nations, in their infancy, are children who foresee nothing, who know nothing, and men of much foresight and much knowledge must serve as their fathers." Elsewhere, Sarmiento considered the child to be an "incomplete being" due to a lack of reasoning capability. In an inversion of the Rousseauian idea of the innocent child, tied to nature and corrupted by society, Sarmiento's dichotomy identified children as inherently barbarous and in need of the civilizing and domesticating influence of school, which creates obedient students who will grow into disciplined citizens.[9]

It is likely that Luis had a family home, as he attended a regular (as opposed to an institutional) school but, as a newsboy, he did not conform to *Billiken*'s targeted readership. Paula Bontempo identifies *Billiken*'s readers as "hijos-alumnos" (schoolchildren with parents) as opposed to the "menores" (minors) who had developed as a separate category of children due to the very law that was passed to protect them. From 1919, the same year *Billiken* was first published, the law concerning the Patronage of Minors gave the state control over children living on the street or in institutions. Luis Román represented a third category, defined by Bontempo as the "niño-hijo trabajador" (working child with family), as he moved between school and work, and between the home and the street. By emphasizing Luis's identity as a "canillita" (newsboy), the article reprinted in *Billiken* referenced the complex cultural history of the newsboy in Argentina. The term "canillita" was popularized by Florencio Sánchez's 1904 one-act play of the same name. As the diminutive of *canilla* (shin), the most likely explanation of the term's origin references the poverty of the newsboys, whose shins were visible as they grew out of their trousers. The eponymous protagonist of *Canillita* was a lovable rogue, selling newspapers to support his family, as his abusive father did not work.[10]

Similarly favorable portrayals of newsboys were common in stories published in official school reading books for primary school children. Carolina

Zapiola identifies one such text—Felisa Latallarda's *Hogar y Patria* (*Home and Fatherland*) from 1916, and the story "Disinterest and Patriotism" in which a newsboy finds and returns a bulging wallet. Mariano Ben Plotkin cites a chapter included in Juan Jáuregui's *Sé bueno*—a third-grade reading book first published in 1930, with sixteen editions to 1945—in which a newsboy returned a briefcase full of money and was rewarded with a job as a messenger at the Jockey Club. What Plotkin does not tell us is that *Sé bueno* featured the real story of newsboy Antonio Sigimbosco, who found and returned the staggering amount of 10,000 pesos. The reading, entitled "Alma limpia" ("Pure soul"), offered a brief sketch that emphasized Antonio's "modest" family circumstances and the "purity" of his conscience. More details can be gleaned from *Billiken*'s two-page coverage of Antonio's visit to Editorial Atlántida, where Carlos Vigil spoke of the newsboy's honorable conduct when presenting him with a watch and gold chain, to add to the 400 pesos he had received from the money's owner. Both the *Sé bueno* and the *Billiken* accounts placed particular emphasis on the good example Antonio provided for other children.[11]

Luis Román, in returning the wallet, knowingly or unknowingly reenacted these real and fictional stories, inserting himself into a tradition of favorable representations of newsboys promoted by the educational establishment. The judgment made in the newspaper, that Luis's actions were all the more impressive as he was a newsboy, evoked the wider discourse on children's nature, and rejected the positivist link that had been made between the street and juvenile delinquency.[12] By placing Luis within the wider cultural history of the *canillita*, his story can be read as an exhortation of the value of schooling, which propelled Luis to engage in this act of civilized citizenry. *Billiken* promoted the magazine's engagement with this civilizing mission and Luis's story was presented as a morality tale compatible with *Billiken*'s didactic editorial line.

BILLIKEN'S PEDAGOGICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND POLITICAL TRAJECTORY: FROM THE "NEW SCHOOL" MOVEMENT TO CATHOLIC NATIONALISM

Having co-opted Luis into *Billiken*, the magazine then took ownership over another child's good deed by publishing, the following week, on the same page and framed within the same serialized story, this note:

> **The Good Example Spreads**
>
> Juan Carlos Scandura, aged 10, student of School No. 8, 4th grade, afternoon session, of School Council IV, situated on 254 Benito Pérez Galdós street, found a bond certificate from the Argentine Anonymous Savings and Capitalization Society with a value of 1000 pesos, and handed it in to his

> teacher. The School management then sent it to School Council IV which oversaw its remittance to Police Station No. 24.
>
> In order to reward his honesty, Dr. Juan de Simone gave the boy Scandura the five volumes of *Vida espiritual* by Constancio C. Vigil.
>
> The lost bond certificate belonged to Mr. Juan Serabia of 1339 Necochea Street.
>
> This child is from the same School Council IV as Luis Román, of whom we spoke last week as he had handed in a wallet containing 276 pesos.
>
> Here we have evidence of the powerful influence of the good example and of the work that Dr. Simone is carrying out with children, another man convinced that, just as can be read in *El Erial* (*The Fallow Land*): "The problems of humanity have to be resolved in the child, because in the man, for good or for ill, they are already resolved."[13]

In this *Billiken*-authored note, Constancio C. Vigil's influence is extended through the citing of his work *El Erial*, first published in 1915, with thirty Spanish editions to 1985 and published in English in 1946. The closing quotation is consonant with the founding principles of the Argentine public school system, which placed its hope in the incoming generations that would benefit from a collective experience of schooling. Much of *El Erial*, however, keeps neither with these founding principles, nor with the contemporary political context of 1942. *El Erial* is a hybrid text divided into letters, parables, and prayers, and it was written as a pacifist response to World War I. Vigil was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1936, and other influences present in this text include the Pan-Latin Americanism of José Enrique Rodó, US political economist Henry George's theory of a single tax on land, and the spiritualism of German philosopher Karl Christian Krause. It was through Krause that Argentine pedagogues began to place children at the center of educational discourses, displacing the focus on the teacher. According to Sandra Carli, Krausism conceptualized children as subjects "linked to the divine order and to the goodness of nature." This was in contrast to the positivist-influenced principles of the teacher-training normal schools, first established by Sarmiento in 1869, that viewed children's nature as inherently savage.[14]

The Argentine version of the New School movement developed from concerns that the "nature" of children and their "spirituality" had been absent from pedagogic thought; it aimed to promote an alternative, child-centered approach to learning that valued child autonomy and spontaneity. Vigil is linked to this movement, which, in the 1920s, led to some localized experimentation in teaching methods and curricula but had little impact on educational reform. The

New School movement reimagined children as children, and as subjects within a family unit, rather than as future citizens valued in terms of their adult potential and subject to the authority of the teacher, the school, and the nation.[15] This movement was in dialogue with the political and social modernization that took Hipólito Yrigoyen of the Radical party to power in 1916. His election was thanks to the 1912 Sáenz Peña law, which guaranteed compulsory, secret, and "universal" suffrage (however, this excluded women and immigrants).[16] The first two decades of *Billiken* coincided with what Beatriz Sarlo has called Buenos Aires's "peripheral modernity," during which changes in the urban landscape affected the lived experience of the city. At this time, the rise in literacy rates coupled with advances in printing technology to fuel the expansion of the publishing market, and *Billiken* was one of many new publications that conveyed this increasingly modern and cosmopolitan Buenos Aires.[17] As the Argentine New School movement sought a more democratic role for children, advocating for them to be included in the cultural scene, *Billiken* answered the call, offering its child readers a commercial product through which to access and participate in Argentina's emerging modernity.

Constancio C. Vigil's understanding of children can be glimpsed in his 1930 manifesto, "El niño argentino" ("The Argentine Child"), which layered influences from the New School movement with competing pedagogical discourses. In Vigil's manifesto, the Argentine child was defined as belonging principally to the family rather than to the nation or the school ("brings constant joy to his parents"), was a child of nature ("loves the trees and the birds"), took responsibility for his own learning ("divides time for studying from time for playing"), and while the child was conscious of their future role ("intends to work hard when he is a man") and the need to be a disciplined citizen ("knows that to love the Fatherland is to be honorable and good"), there was no mention of religion.[18] This was a reflection of Vigil's Krause-influenced spiritualism and anticlericalism, but it was surprising given that Vigil was awarded the Gold Papal Lateran Cross in 1949 and is remembered today as a Catholic writer. "The Argentine Child" appeared only twice—just a few months after the military coup d'état of September 1930 that overthrew Yrigoyen and signaled a rupture with the nation-building discourse that liberal governments had been cultivating since 1860. The ensuing "infamous decade" (1930–43) was a period of conservative restoration characterized by electoral fraud. During this time, schools were once again charged with the creation of future citizens and the constitutional laicism of the public school system was overturned. The church was authorized to direct children's moral destiny in a move that reflected the rise of Catholic nationalism in the 1930s.[19] The pedagogical experimentation of

the 1920s, with its emphasis on child autonomy, was stifled and Vigil's manifesto was incompatible with the new political climate.

Vigil may have jettisoned his 1930 manifesto, but by publishing two editions of *El Erial* in 1942 and three in 1943, Editorial Atlántida persisted in bringing Vigil's earlier philosophical and pedagogical influences to new generations of readers. *Vida espiritual* is another of Vigil's works that was potentially anachronistic post-1930. The content of this text, which constructed morality tales from examples of children's behavior, was based on Christian spiritualism rather than the increasingly nationalist Catholic orientation of the "infamous decade." Nevertheless, by 1942 Editorial Atlántida had ensured the collection's place in the new political context by marketing it as a gift both for the Day of the Virgin (December 8)—inserting it into the Catholic calendar—and for children's first communion, offering an alternative to the traditional gift of a Bible.[20]

In 1942, Argentina's neutral status in World War II was just one of the destabilizing factors precipitating the end of the "infamous decade." In 1940, conservative democrat president Roberto M. Ortiz had passed control onto his archconservative and nationalist vice-president, Ramón Castillo, due to ill health. The rise in nationalism during the "infamous decade" was another destabilizing factor, one that contributed to the rise of Perón, who was elected just three years after the 1943 coup. Matthew B. Karush successfully demonstrates how the "mass-cultural nation-building" of the 1930s achieved through domestic radio and cinema helped to shape the politics of the 1940s. According to Karush, Perón politicized the melodramatic discourses found in 1930s mass culture, casting urban workers in the role of the good poor, struggling against the evil rich, and empowering them to overcome through his program of "social justice."[21] Even though *Billiken* offered a different, middle-class worldview, it was not entirely incompatible with Peronism, a movement eclectic in nature and replete with unreconciled tensions. Elements of the Peronist program that could traditionally be found in *Billiken* included: the use of Argentine history for an explanation (or legitimization) of a contemporary political or social position; the identification of children as future citizens; the recognition of the role of education to guide children in a desired direction; and, initially at least, an elevation of the church to a more prominent role in a constitutionally lay society. *Billiken*, however, did not presage Peronism in the same way as other products of mass and popular culture. In the years immediately preceding the rise of Perón, *Billiken* maintained its conservatism, offering a paternalistic view of figures such as the newsboy unchanged since the 1920s, continuing to reference the anachronistic *El Erial*, and persisting in publishing fiction in the style of interwar stories found in British boys' story papers.

CONSTRUCTING HIERARCHIES OF LITERATURE: FROM THE POPULAR TO THE EDIFYING

Luis and Juan Carlos's good deeds were printed alongside one such popular story. The notes relating to both boys appeared in frames interrupting "El halcón negro" ("The Black Hawk"), a serialized story that ran for a year from December 1941.[22] Billed as an "emocionante novela de aventuras" (exciting adventure novel) and set in seventeenth-century England and the Caribbean, this coming-of-age story followed a young English hero, Martin Palmer, as he fought and ultimately vanquished the barbarous pirate known as The Black Hawk. "El halcón negro" had no acknowledged author and was typical, in both plot and writing style, of the adventure stories from the European publications that *Billiken* had been publishing for the previous two decades. From 1935 onward, author names were increasingly absent and the proportion of locally authored stories increased, particularly during World War II, when the procurement of European stories was hindered. The conclusion reached following extensive, although not exhaustive, research, is that this was a locally authored story.

"El halcón negro" exhibits themes that Kelly Boyd identifies in British boys' stories of the interwar years: setting abroad as a stage to test and then mold the young hero's character, serving as a "forge for manliness" and training him for his future role; the return home and the abandoning of boyhood adventures to enter into adulthood as a useful servant of the Empire.[23] After defeating the pirate, Martin embarked on a career in the Royal Navy but not before discovering that the treasure sought in the Caribbean had been hidden in the foundations of his family home in England all along. "El halcón negro" and the British stories it imitates are concerned with the formation of future citizens and loyalty to the motherland (or, in the case of Argentina, the "patria" or fatherland). While these themes were not out of place in the similarly patriotic *Billiken*, the setting of the story muddled the message and it was problematic that these British adventure stories, whether traceable or apocryphal, that promoted the values of the British Empire appeared in an Argentine children's publication at a time when Argentina's unequal economic relationship to Britain was fueling a rise in nationalist sentiment.[24]

Even if "El halcón negro" was politically and geographically incongruous for Argentina in 1942, its pirate theme was very much in vogue. The Hollywood pirate films *The Sea Hawk* (1940) and *The Black Swan* (1942, based on a Rafael Sabatini novel) were both shown in Argentina, and the pirate stories of Sabatini and Emilio Salgari were published throughout the 1940s.[25] It is precisely the popularity of these adventure stories that allowed *Billiken* to present them in the

most perfunctory manner. In "El halcón negro," no thought was given to natural breaks in the text, and the reader could be two lines into a paragraph when "to be continued" appeared. There was no attempt to engage in what Jesús Martín Barbero calls "forms of seduction of the reader," inherent in the weekly, episodic, and open structure of serial fiction, which allow the writer to create suspense and to modify the text in response to reader feedback.[26] Furthermore, there was no attempt to attract the reader through the story's visual placement on the page. The story was published in columns of tightly packed text and featured only one illustration—always the same—on the first page that it appeared in each issue. As such, the "visual power" of the pages dedicated to "El halcón negro" was very low. Paul Cleveland defines this as "the degree of visual stimulus emanating from a given design: the higher the stimulus, the greater the degree for attracting attention."[27]

The unappealing presentation of stories like "El halcón negro" was part of an editorial strategy that sought to direct children away from reading popular stories and toward more edifying literature. The recurring page "Iniciación literaria" ("Introduction to Literature"), framed as belonging to the magazine's educational content, was at the top of the literary hierarchy. Featuring poetry from named authors such as Chilean Gabriela Mistral, winner of the 1945 Nobel Prize in Literature, the layout of this page displayed high levels of visual power with a high ratio of images to text, placing short excerpts of poems among plentiful and colorful illustrations.[28] Written especially for *Billiken*, Arturo Capdevila's historical serialized stories were also presented in a layout that reflected their position in the magazine's literary hierarchy. The first of these, "La infanta mendocina" ("The Princess of Mendoza"), published in 1944, was the story of Mercedes, daughter of Argentina's founding father, José de San Martín. Each installment ran over only two consecutive pages and there was at least one unique illustration on each page, making the text visually appealing and straightforward to read. While this presentation certainly helped showcase the work of a named Argentine writer and longtime contributor to *Billiken*, it may have also revealed a tacit editorial acknowledgement that higher levels of visual power were necessary to compensate for a narrative that lacked the visceral excitement of adventure stories. Although "La infanta mendocina" occupied a slot normally reserved for popular serialized stories and was not part of *Billiken*'s educational content, its status in the literary hierarchy was cemented by its subsequent publication in book format as part of *Biblioteca Billiken* (the *Billiken* Library), Editorial Atlántida's series of world literature adapted for young Argentine readers.[29]

Figure 2. "A Well-Deserved Prize," *Billiken*, issue 1191, 14 September, 1942.

Billiken's promotion of literature in book format was explicitly articulated through the notes and advertisements that interrupted the text of popular stories, such as the ones carrying Luis and Juan Carlos's stories. Luis's Román's note appeared on page thirty-seven in a red frame in the middle of three columns of text. The columns contained "El halcón negro" and in the bottom corner there was a small advertisement for *Los Chanchin*, one of twelve collections of Constancio C. Vigil stories sold at that time as the *Biblioteca Infantil Atlántida* (Atlántida Children's Library). On the facing page there was a full-page advert for *Biblioteca Billiken*. Juan Carlos's note was presented in the same way and on the same page in the following week's issue. It was the only interruption on the page, with the surrounding three columns of text dedicated exclusively to "El halcón negro." On the verso were two columns of the story, and the first column was an advertisement for a *Biblioteca Billiken* collection containing works by Cervantes, Molière, Dante, Schiller, Thackeray, and Homer. Elsewhere in the same story, the *Biblioteca Billiken* series was promoted indirectly through a series of frames containing anonymous, illustrated anecdotes about the importance of reading and of forming a library in order to improve one's future prospects. In one, an illustration of a little girl sitting on a bookshelf was captioned: "All

children should create their own Library and collect therein the best books of children's literature. Good reading is the guarantee of a happy future." Many Argentine editorials published book series in what can be seen as a continuation of Sarmiento's work with popular libraries, curating catalogs of useful and inspirational reading material (some of which was adapted and translated) in a nation-building initiative related to the formation of lettered citizens and their integration into the Argentine nation-state.[30]

Through their placement in the magazine, Luis and Juan Carlos's stories were embedded within a wider discourse established in *Billiken* concerning hierarchies of literature and the role of literature in the formation of future citizens. The boys' stories were included as part of an editorial strategy that retained readers by offering them what (the magazine thought) they wanted in the form of escapist adventure stories, while also reminding the reader that the popular story he or she was enjoying was of only limited value. These editorial interventions, which consistently reinforced the importance and status of books, constructed the popular stories within the magazine as inherently less valuable. Books were to be collected and displayed in home libraries; they were a gateway to a prosperous future because those children who eschewed toys in favor of books, who respected, preserved, and learned from them, would grow up to be useful and happy members of society. The popular serialized stories lived and died within the magazine and were not subsequently published in book format like those of Constancio C. Vigil or Capdevila, illustrating how these editorial interventions were also part of a commercial strategy that supported Editorial Atlántida's books division. Despite Luis and Juan Carlos's stories having had only a tentative link to *Billiken*, their stories were easily coopted into the editorial narrative thanks to the magazine's all-encompassing approach, which sought to guide children in all aspects of their lives: home, schooling, spiritual life, leisure time, and consumer choices.

CONCLUSION: THE PARADOXICAL STATUS OF *BILLIKEN*'S CHILD READER

Billiken in 1942, with its didactic content and moralizing discourse transmitted through a layout that sought to guide the reading process, appeared, at first glance, to fit perfectly with the political regime of the time, which saw children in terms of their future potential and the role of education in terms of its usefulness to the nation. However, both the editorial process and the wider pedagogical and commercial concerns of Constancio C. Vigil and Editorial Atlántida were arguably fluid, subject to multilayered influences, and in dialogue with multiple ways of thinking about children. In the pages featuring

Luis and Juan Carlos's stories, the simultaneous presence of Vigil's *Vida espiritual* (spiritualism masquerading as Catholic nationalism), *El Erial* (with its New School pedagogical influences) alongside affirmations of the benefits of reading (referencing Sarmiento and the educational tradition of the normal schools) reflected Vigil's rich and varied philosophical and pedagogical hinterland. The references to different genealogies of Argentine pedagogical thought within the same issue, and sometimes even within the same page, undermined attempts to pin down *Billiken*'s ideological approach to its readers. The relationship of the magazine to its readers was further complicated by the construction of the child reader as consumer, and by the tension between entertainment and education that emerged in the literary content.

Although page layout is used to guide the reading process, the very nature of a magazine undermines attempts at editorial control. Unlike a book, a magazine does not have to be read in a linear way, and not all of it has to be read. As Gunther R. Kress and Theo van Leeuwen explain, "Non-linear texts impose a paradigmatics. They select the elements that can be viewed and present them according to a certain paradigmatic logic . . . but leave the reader to sequence and connect them."[31] In the absence of testimonials from child readers, and with very few reader letters published in the 1940s, it is not possible to reconstruct how different children read *Billiken* at that time, although it is possible to imagine each reader exercising choice according to level of interest. While there was a premium placed on the recovery of children's voices, the often-frustrated desire to uncover historical readers' experiences extends to other contexts. Scholars working on Victorian periodicals, relevant to *Billiken* in terms of the magazine's republication of popular British fiction from their Edwardian and interwar descendants, are similarly restricted to reconstructing and imagining Victorian reading practices. As Deborah Wynne states: "Readers today, like historical readers, are invited by editors to read each magazine in a specific way. No doubt Victorian readers could potentially (and probably did) resist this invitation."[32]

To imagine the reading practices of Victorian adults and of *Billiken*'s child readers as "akin" to one another is to evoke Marah Gubar's "kinship model" as a way of thinking about children and their agency. Gubar proposes this as an alternative to the "difference-model," which imagines children as (colonized) "Other," and the "deficit-model" that sees children as lacking or incomplete as they are on their path to adulthood. The kinship model advocates "maintaining that children and adults are fundamentally akin to one another, even if certain differences or deficiencies routinely attend certain parts of the ageing process." Just as some of Wynne's Victorian readers would have been more receptive to

editorial guidance than others, *Billiken*'s child readers would have responded in various ways as individuals and not as a heterogeneous group. *Billiken* does, of course, engage adult producers of children's culture in the "risky business" of deciding what children want, and it is beyond the scope of this article to analyze the vast body of work that problematizes this.[33] However, it is possible that Editorial Atlántida's own conception of their child readers was that they were akin to, and not necessarily deficient or different from, their adult readers. Constancio C. Vigil's publishing empire produced what Bontempo has called a "continent" of publications that aimed to reach different members of the household. Beginning with the general interest magazine *Atlántida* in 1918 (published until 1970), Vigil also founded the women's weekly *Para Ti* (1922 to present), and *El Gráfico* (from 1919 until it was sold in 1998). The latter was initially a men's magazine and only became exclusively dedicated to sport in 1931. Mirta Varela notes that when *Billiken* was launched, its striking appearance and use of modern graphic techniques made it look similar to the magazines sold to adults at the time. At twenty cents, it was also the same price as most magazines for an adult readership.[34] By catering to different sectors of the population, Editorial Atlántida constructed both adults and children as consumers, seeking to respond to their interests in order to increase circulation, and offering them a way of participating in Argentina's emerging modernity while guiding them in their consumer choices.

A further paradox is that *Billiken*'s editors presented a carefully crafted editorial message while literally inviting readers to take scissors to it. The same editorial message that encouraged the reading of books constructed the magazine as an object to be used, shared, and ultimately disposed of; not a precious object to be read at home and then safely stored on a shelf. *Billiken* was and is a multimodal text, defined by Kress and Van Leeuwen as "any text whose meanings are realized through more than one semiotic code."[35] This magazine has invited active, engaged readers to participate in meaning making as they cut out, color in, and make models from its pages. If the editorial team's intention has been to control the reading experience and guide the reader toward becoming the ideal future citizen/consumer, it is surely paradoxical that in doing so it has handed creative control over to that reader. As readers have engaged with the materiality of the magazine, they inevitably use it in unanticipated ways. In a rare example of a child's voice found in *Billiken* around this time, a letter from ten-year-old Colombian Irilita describes cutting out the dolls in the advertisements so that she can play with them with her little sisters.[36] Readers like Irilita constructed their own experience of the magazine, which has been, to varying degrees, in dialogue or tension with the overall editorial message.

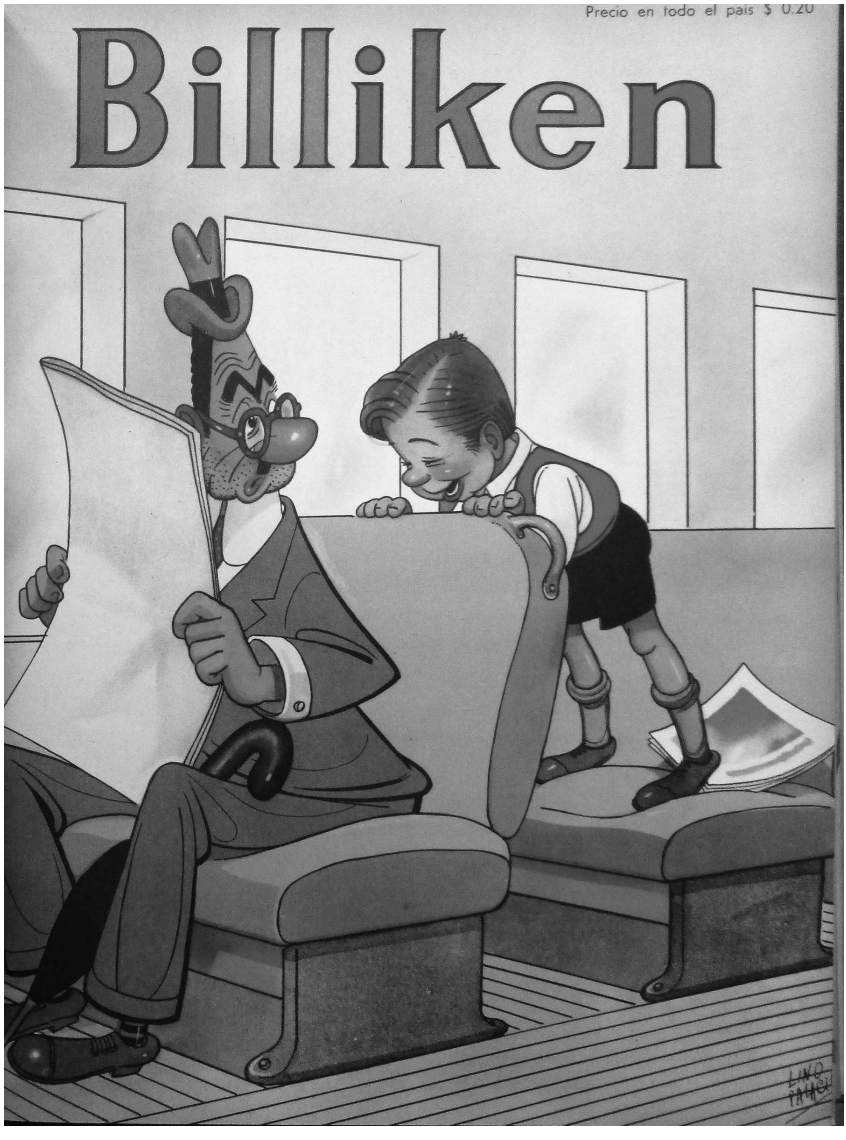

Figure 3. Cover of *Billiken*, issue 1191, September 14, 1942. Artwork by Lino Palacio.

By 1942, *Billiken* was replete with modern images of children similar to the "New Kid" of the United States, identified by Gary Cross as "naughty but nice" and just rebellious enough to be "cute."[37] In *Billiken*, the Argentinean version of the "New Kid" can be found in advertisements, comic strips, and in the covers illustrated by Lino Palacio. However, the treatment of Luis and Juan Carlos shows that when it came to real (as opposed to illustrated) children,

more traditional representations were favored. In the early 1940s, it was quite rare for real children to appear in *Billiken* and it is notable that even as Luis and Juan Carlos's stories were featured, so little information is offered about them. Their motivations for carrying out their good deeds and their experience of the subsequent reaction were unrecorded. In the notes that contain their stories, the names and addresses of the adults involved, and the school and police structures to which they pertained, crowded out references to the boys. Luis and Juan Carlos are visible but silenced; caught up in an editorial project that attempts to satisfy multiple stakeholders—children, parents, teachers, and school authorities—while balancing the attainment of commercial success with the transmission of a multilayered philosophical worldview in a repressive political context. These boys became subsumed in a wider cultural discourse and were presented in the same way as the newsboys in school reading books or the fictional children whose morality parables illustrate *Vida espiritual*. It is clear that *Billiken*'s editorial team placed children at the heart of the magazine at that time, but it is also apparent that these children existed as an idea, a concept, or a construction that decentered real children like Luis and Juan Carlos.

NOTES

I would like to thank Professor Elizabeth Wood and the anonymous reader for JHCY for their helpful insights and critiques.

1. *Billiken*, issue 1191, September 14, 1942. All translations from the magazine are mine.

2. 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).

3. In 1925, Constancio C. Vigil (1876–1954) became director general of Editorial Atlántida, and his son, Carlos Vigil, took on the directorship of *Billiken*. Whilst it is difficult to ascertain Constancio C. Vigil's level of direct involvement in *Billiken* after this time, the editorial team referred to in this article includes both father and son.

4. Mirta Varela, *Los hombres ilustres del Billiken: héroes en los medios y en la escuela* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 1994); María Paula Bontempo, "Editorial Atlántida: Un continente de publicaciones, 1918–1936" (PhD dissertation, University of San Andrés, Argentina, 2013); Laura Vázquez, "Imágenes de la niñez en *Anteojito* y *Billiken*: héroes y blancas palomitas," *Revista de Historia Bonaerense* 21 (2014): 38–46. On earlier Argentine children's magazines, see Sandra M. Szir, *Infancia y cultura visual: los periódicos ilustrados para niños (1880–1910)* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2007).

5. "[E]l hecho de que aparezca en esta revista es la mejor garantía de que nada hay en ello que pueda perjudicar a la niñez, tan ávida de emociones, y, por lo mismo, propensa a lecturas altamente perjudiciales" (issue 649, April 1932). M. Wynne is listed in Steve Holland's "British Juvenile Stories and Pocket Libraries Index," which has been used to identify the original publication contexts of the British stories published in *Billiken*. Fiction Mags Index

Family, accessed September 23, 2017, http://www.philsp.com/homeville/BJSP/0start.htm. On the shift from penny dreadfuls to boys' story papers, see Ernest Sackville Turner, *Boys Will be Boys: The Story of Sweeney Todd, Deadwood Dick, Sexton Blake, Billy Bunter, Dick Barton et al*., 3rd ed. (London: Michael Joseph, 1975). Also see Vicki Anderson, *The Dime Novel in Children's Literature* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004). On *St. Nicholas*, see Paul B. Ringel, *Commercializing Childhood: Children's Magazines, Urban Gentility and the Ideal of the Child Consumer in the United States, 1923–1918* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 132.

6. Dorothy Jean Ray, "*Billiken* Lore," *The Alaska Journal* (1974): 25–31. The original Leyendecker image is reproduced in Michael Oriard, *The Art of Football: The Early Game in the Age of Illustration* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 140. Within Editorial Atlántida, the origin of *Billiken*'s first cover image had been forgotten until illustrator Pablo Sapia brought it to the attention of *Billiken*'s director, Euhen Matarozzo, in 2014.

7. At that time, *Billiken* was also sold in Uruguay and Colombia and had international agents. See issue 1042, November 1938, for circulation figures and issue 592, March 1931 for the readership calculation; Isabella Cosse, "La infancia en los años treinta," *Todo es Historia* 37, no. 457 (2005), 52–53.

8. On education in Argentina prior to 1884, see Mark D. Szuchman, "Childhood Education and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Argentina: The Case of Buenos Aires," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 70, no. 1 (1990): 109–38. On Law 1420, see Sandra Carli, *Niñez, pedagogía y política: transformaciones de los discursos acerca de la infancia en la historia de la educación argentina entre 1880 y 1955* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2002). On nation building, see Nicholas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

9. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* (1845), trans. Kathleen Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 141; Sarmiento, "Disciplina escolar" (1853), in *Obras de D. F. Sarmiento. Vol 28, Ideas pedagógicas* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Gutenburg, 1899), 194.

10. Paula Bontempo, "Los niños de *Billiken*. Las infancias en Buenos Aires en las primeras décadas del siglo XX," *Anuario del Centro de Estudios Históricos Profesor Carlos S. A. Segreti* 12, no. 12 (2012), 207–8; Florencio Sánchez, *Canillita. Sainete en un acto* (Buenos Aires: Librería Teatro Apolo, 1915).

11. Carolina Zapiola, "Niños en las calles: Imágenes literarias y representaciones oficiales en la Argentina del Centenario," in *Formas de historia cultural*, eds. Sandra Gayol and Marta Madero (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2007), 316–20; Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: A Cultural History of Peron's Argentina* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 116; Juan Jáuregui, "Alma limpia," in *Sé bueno: texto de lectura para tercer grado* (Buenos Aires: Kapelusz, 1930), 155–57. The report of Antonio's visit to *Billiken* appears in issue 425, January 1928.

12. See leading positivist intellectual José Ingenieros's essay on newsboys and delinquency: "Los niños vendedores de diarios y la delincuencia precoz," *Archivos de Psiquiatría y Criminología aplicadas a las Ciencias Afines* no. 7 (1908): 329–48. On the positivist movement in Argentina, see Julia Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine and the Modern State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

13. Issue 1192, September 1942.

14. Constancio C. Vigil, *El Erial* (Buenos Aires: Talleres Heliográficos de R. Radelli, 1915). On Rodó's foundational essay *Ariel* (1900), see Gustavo San Román, ed., *This America We Dream of: Rodó and Ariel One Hundred Years On* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2001); Carli, *Niñez, pedagogía y política*, 94–95, my translation; Andrea Alliaud, *Los maestros y su historia: los orígenes del magisterio argentino* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1993).

15. Sandra Carli, "The New School Movement in Argentina," *Paedagogica Historica* 42, no. 3 (2006): 385–404.

16. David Rock, *Argentina, 1516–1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 190–202.

17. Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1988), 26.

18. "Constituye un motivo de continua alegría para sus padres" . . . "Divide el tiempo dedicado al estudio del tiempo dedicado a jugar" . . . "Ama a los árboles y a los pájaros" . . . "Piensa ser trabajador cuando sea hombre" . . . "Sabe que amar a la patria es ser honrado y bueno" (issue 576, December 1930 and issue 582, January 1931). The word "niño" can mean both "child" and "boy," as the masculine gender takes grammatical precedence. Although both "niños y niñas" are encouraged to cut out and place this manifesto somewhere visible, the "niño" described here is understood in terms of his future identity as a man.

19. Carli, *Niñez, pedagogía y política*, 229. On the "infamous decade" more generally, see David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, its History and its Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

20. *Vida espiritual* first appears in *Billiken* in excerpts from issue 977, August 1938. See issue 1045, November 1939 for a Day of the Virgin advertisement and issue 1193, September 1942 for a first communion advertisement.

21. David Rock, "Argentina, 1930–1946," in *Argentina Since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 208; Matthew B. Karush, *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920–1946* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 179, 207–8. For education under Perón, see Mónica Rein, *Politics and Education in Argentina, 1946–1962* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

22. "El halcón negro," issue 1153, December 1941 to issue 1203, December 1942.

23. Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855–1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 46–49, 128.

24. See Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina*, 116–20. For an example of anti-British intellectual pronouncements, see Julio Irazusta and Rodolfo Irazusta, *La Argentina y el imperialismo británico. Los eslabones de una cadena, 1806–1833* (Buenos Aires: np, 1934).

25. Michael Curtiz, dir., *The Sea Hawk* (Warner Bros, 1940); Henry King, dir., *The Black Swan* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1942); Carlos Enrique Abraham, *La Editorial Tor: medio siglo de libros populares* (Buenos Aires: Tren en Movimiento, 2012).

26. Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations*, trans. Philip Schlesinger (London: Sage, 1993), 131–32.

27. Paul Cleveland, "How Much Visual Power Can a Magazine Take?" *Design Studies* 26, no. 3 (2005), 271.

28. See, for example, the Mistral poem "Dulzura" (issue 1145, October 1941), aimed at the lower school grades.

29. Arturo Capdevila, "La infanta mendocina," *Billiken* (issue 1280, May 1944 to issue 1294, September 1944). On Capdevila as founder of the Georgist Liberal Party in 1921 and member of the spiritualist movement, see Bontempo, "Editorial Atlántida: Un continente," 96, 106.

30. "Todos los niños deben formar su Biblioteca y reunir en ello los mejores libros de la literatura infantil. La buena lectura es garantía de un porvenir feliz" (issue 1173, May 1942); on *Biblioteca Billiken*, see Carolina Tosi, "La emergencia de las colecciones de literatura infantil y juvenil, y su impacto en la industria editorial. Los casos *Robin Hood* y *Biblioteca Billiken*," *Catalejos. Revista sobre lectura, formación de lectores y literatura para niños* 1, no. 1 (2015): 132–58. Similar in outlook to *Biblioteca Billiken* in the United States is Horace Scudder's canon-forming *Riverside Literature Series for Young People*, which he edited from 1882 until 1902. Like Constancio C. Vigil, Scudder was an author of children's books and an editor of magazines for both children and adults. See Beverly Lyon Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004): 52–56; Javier Planas, "Para un catálogo atractivo: libros y políticas editoriales para las bibliotecas populares. La propuesta de Domingo Faustino Sarmiento," *Información, cultura y sociedad* 20 (2009): 63–81.

31. Gunther R. Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (New York, Routledge: 1996), 208.

32. Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 20.

33. Marah Gubar, "The Hermeneutics of Recuperation: What a Kinship-Model Approach to Children's Agency Could Do for Children's Literature and Childhood Studies," *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 8, no. 1 (2016), 299; Gubar, "Risky Business: Talking about Children in Children's Literature Criticism," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2013): 450–57. See, for example, Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); and Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008).

34. Bontempo, "Editorial Atlántida: Un continente," 186; Varela, *Los hombres ilustres*, 24.

35. Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 177.

36. "Una linda carta de una niña colombiana" (issue 1243, September 1943).

37. Gary Cross, *The Cute and The Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 51–53, 67.