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## **Trajectories in Argentine Children's Literature: Constancio C. Vigil and Horacio Quiroga**

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Constancio C. Vigil and Horacio Quiroga were Uruguayans who spent the majority of their working lives in Argentina. Born in 1876 and 1878 respectively, Vigil and Quiroga crossed the River Plate within a year of each other and continued to move in the same literary and publishing circles in Argentina. Vigil was a hugely prolific writer of children's stories and books, a number of which received recognition as official school texts across Latin America, and founded the Argentine legacy publishing house, Editorial Atlántida. Horacio Quiroga occupies a place in the pantheon of Latin America's great writers because of his short story collections aimed at an adult readership rather than for his substantial body of children's literature. Nevertheless, his most famous collection of children's stories, *Cuentos de la selva* (1918) [*Jungle Tales*], is today considered to be a foundational text of Latin American children's literature.

Vigil, Quiroga and their extraordinary contribution to the Argentine and Latin American cultural landscape in the first decades of the twentieth century provide an alternative starting point for examining the history of Argentine children's literature. It is alternative, in the first instance, because the notion of 'national' children's literature is immediately contested by the case of Vigil and Quiroga who are claimed by both Uruguay and Argentina. The intention here is not to define the Argentine children's literary canon, nor to judge whether Quiroga and Vigil are deserving of a place within it. Close-reading analysis is outside of the scope of this article which instead focuses on the changing critical and commercial trajectories of Quiroga and Vigil's works for children. Over time, the

perception of what Argentine children's literature can and should speak to has changed and the moralistic and didactic approach to writing for children which cemented Vigil's success is today seen as reactionary. Conversely, the moral ambivalence of Quiroga's children's stories, which previously barred his works from gaining official recognition in schools, is one of the factors that has secured their enduring appeal. Quiroga's works considered here, *Cuentos de la selva*, *Cartas de un cazador* [Letters from a hunter] and *Suelo natal* [Native soil], represent nearly all of his children's literature. From Vigil's far more extensive children's catalogue, a distinction can be made between his books which were accepted as school reading texts and those which were based on original, anthropomorphic characters. Of these, *La hormiguita viajera* [The Adventures of Hormiguita] and *El mono relojero* [The watchmaker monkey] remained in the public consciousness the longest.

It has been suggested that Uruguayan children's literature begins with *Cuentos de la selva*, a collection of stories written in Argentina, published initially in Argentine magazines and set in the Misiones 'jungle' of Argentina (Bavosi et al.) In contrast, there is broad consensus that Argentine children's literature has an established starting point with Ada María Elflein, the daughter of German immigrants, who, in 1906, published the first of her collections of stories for children, *Leyendas argentinas* [Argentine legends]. In 1924, five years after her death, the Argentine Teachers' and Students' Association petitioned the Consejo Nacional de Educación [National Education Council] to name a primary school after Elflein citing the merits of her children's literature: 'She taught whilst delighting: her books constitute an appreciable didactic contribution from which the most beautiful moral suggestions shine' (58). This evaluation of Elflein reflects the standard by which Argentine children's literature was judged until the 1960s when María Elena Walsh overturned preconceptions of what 'good' children's literature constituted by unleashing imagination,

fun and nonsense unconstrained by the need to deliver a moral message.<sup>2</sup> It was, according to Walsh, 'revolutionary' in the 1960s to produce work for children that was not linked to the school curriculum (Origgi and Walsh).

Public schooling in Argentina was established in 1884 as free, compulsory and crucially, secular. With the Bible absent from schools, children's literature became an essential tool through which moral values could be taught. In Argentina, the subject 'Moral and Civic Instruction' envisaged children as future citizens and aimed to instill patriotism and respect for the law, as well as values which would enable students to fulfil their future obligations as parents and workers (Lionetti 242-8). School reading books supported the instruction of civic morality, helping to fill the gap left by the displacing of the Catholic Church from its traditional position of imparting moral values (Cucuzza 22). In 1988, in her seminal work on Argentine children's literature, María Adelina Díaz Rönner wrote: 'For so long, didacticism – moral and religious – traversed the books destined for children to the extent that many writers and educators thought that it was an indispensable ingredient of children's literature' (26). On the commercial implications of this, Bajour and Carranza demonstrate how the "merchandising" of values' persisted into the 2000s, citing the absurd example of Argentine publishing houses marketing Roald Dahl to teachers by highlighting the values which are transmitted by each of his books (n. p.).

The publishing trajectories of Vigil and Quiroga demonstrate how the link between children's literature and civic morality developed in the early decades of the twentieth century. Both writers sought official recognition from school authorities, recognising the agency of these bodies in the curation of a national children's literature and the income that could be generated in guaranteed sales to schools. The consolidation of Argentine children's literature as a recognised genre coincided with the consolidation of the mass market for

literature. The reading public expanded as compulsory public schooling improved literacy rates. At the same time, printing technology advanced and publications could be produced ever more cheaply. Serialised weekly novels in pamphlet-type publications (called *folletines*) met the demands of the mass reading public (Sarlo) alongside illustrated magazines, such as the pioneering *Caras y Caretas* [Faces and masks, 1898-1941], a first version of which was founded in Uruguay in 1890. This proliferation of magazines and popular literary publications increased the paid publishing opportunities for authors, contributing to the professionalisation of writing. Vigil was a leading publishing entrepreneur. Having established the magazine *Mundo Argentino* for Editorial Haynes in 1911 he started his own publication, *Atlántida*, in 1918. Shortly afterwards he established the publishing house, Editorial Atlántida, and in 1919 founded the children's magazine *Billiken* (published weekly until June 2018 when it moved to monthly publication). By 1925, Editorial Atlántida was publishing the sports magazine, *El Gráfico*, the women's weekly *Para Ti*, the family magazine *Iris* and the general interest magazine *El Gran Guiñol* ('Constancio C. Vigil y Editorial Atlántida').

Quiroga was one of a relatively new breed of professional writers in Argentina for whom writing was a job, rather than a gentleman's hobby or the miserable lot of the suffering artist (Adamovsky and Bombini n.p.). He held other jobs and was at different times a school teacher, a diplomat and an enthusiastic, if largely unsuccessful, farmer. Quiroga published in newspapers and magazines from 1897 every year until his death in 1937 and it was a story published in one such magazine, the Uruguayan weekly *La Alborada*, that gave Quiroga his breakthrough. In 1900 Quiroga won second prize in a Latin American short story competition for 'Cuento sin razón, pero cansado' [Story without reason but tired], submitted under the pseudonym Aquilino Delagoa. The competition had been organised by

*La Alborada*'s founder and director, Constancio C. Vigil (Rodríguez Monegal 39). Later, Quiroga contributed stories to *Mundo Argentino* both before and after Vigil left his post as editor in 1917 (Boule-Christauflour 115). Quiroga's first contribution to Editorial Atlántida's magazines came with the story *Juan Polti: Half-back* (*Atlántida*, issue 11, May 1918), today widely considered to be the first example of Latin American football literature. In 1922, Quiroga acted as *Atlántida*'s cinema critic, publishing twenty-seven reviews and articles over the course of the year (Rocca 30). Vigil and Quiroga were also connected through Leopoldo Lugones, one of Argentina's most influential and controversial writers. Lugones was the first author to be published by Atlántida's books division in 1919 and was a regular contributor to *Atlántida* magazine in 1922 (Bontempo 87; 174). It was Lugones who first introduced Quiroga to Misiones Territory (now Misiones Province) in the North of Argentina. Quiroga would later live there with his wife and two small children adopting a semblance of a rugged, isolated pioneer lifestyle, and setting many of his stories in the region's subtropical 'jungle'.

### **Horacio Quiroga's *Cuentos de la selva*, *Cartas de un cazador* and *Suelo natal***

In 1917 Quiroga published the collection *Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte* [*Stories of Love, Madness and Death*] to public and critical acclaim, cementing his reputation as a master of the short story. Versions of the stories which comprised *Cuentos de la selva* appeared in 1916 and 1917 in the Argentine weekly magazines *Fray Mocho*, *El Hogar* and *Caras y Caretas* before the collection was published in book format in 1918 (Boule-Christauflour 126-8). The stories of *Cuentos de la selva* are concerned with survival in the jungle, bringing different types of animals into conflict or allegiance with each other and,

occasionally, with humans. Quiroga had written these with at least one eye on the 'negocio' [business opportunity] afforded by school reading books, an opportunity, he wrote to José María Delgado in July 1917, "that I would not at all like to see go cold". In his 1939 biography of Quiroga, Delgado relays the Uruguayan school inspectors' conclusions: "the book detracted from the purpose of children's fables: it lacked moral content" (quoted in *Todos los cuentos* 1071-2).

Only one story in the collection, 'La abeja haragana' ['The Lazy Bee'], in which the protagonist learns the value of hard work after being subjected to a terrifying night outside the hive, can be classified as a morality tale. In contrast, if 'El loro pelado' ['The Bald Parrot'] contains a message, it is that revenge is satisfying. Here a semi-domesticated parrot convinces the owner of the house to hunt and kill the 'tigre' [jaguar] who attacked him and stripped him of his feathers. According to Rodríguez Monegal the presence of violence and cruelty in the collection was also one of the reasons for its rejection by the Uruguayan school authorities (*El desterrado*, 188). 'El paso de Yabebirí' ['The Yabebirí Ford'] describes, in graphic detail, how hundreds of stingrays are mauled to death by jaguars hunting a man on an island across the river. In 'La guerra de los yacarés' ['The Alligator War'], the appearance of a steam ship frightens away the alligators' food supply so they build a dam to stop its passage. The men send a war ship to blast it away and, after an escalation of actions, the alligators deploy an old torpedo, killing most of the sailors. As González points out, however, the stories' cruelty is often tempered by their humour (86). The closing image of this story is of the alligators' ally, the catfish, parading around wearing a deceased officer's belt; a trophy he has wrested from the oldest alligator's two remaining teeth.

*Cuentos de la selva* is today primarily valued for its literary and diverting qualities but the stories were not devoid of didacticism. The stories teach about the natural world,

specifically the flora, fauna and animal life of a part of Argentina neglected by Buenos Aires-centric 'liberal' politicians who looked to Europe for a model for the country to follow. With these stories, Quiroga was making his own contribution to the Argentine nation-building project. According to Garth, Quiroga thought that Misiones was 'the only voice capable of reaching future generations of Argentine and Uruguayan children and lifting them out of the strictures and the dependency of modern bourgeois culture' (198). Quiroga's biography, and his experience of living in Misiones, has always loomed large in criticism of his writing. The stories which cemented his success were published after his first wife's suicide and it is his identity as widower and father which is most consistently evoked by early critics when discussing his work for children. That Quiroga had written the stories of *Cuentos de la selva* for his own children was the explanation of, and justification for, a 'great writer' producing children's literature. An early review of the collection published in the Uruguayan literary magazine *Pegaso* – a publication, incidentally, to which both Vigil and Quiroga contributed stories in 1918 – sets Quiroga apart from those who normally write for children:

Quiroga does not imitate those who today pass themselves off as teachers when it comes to narratives for children. He is himself. Having forgotten that he knows how to create stories for men, full of pain, passion and mystery, he sets himself to describe fables of which he has conceived whilst looking, perhaps, upon the little, precociously thoughtful heads of his progeny (V.A.S 239-40).

Decades later, a continuation of this theme is present in the prologue to the 1970 anthology *Los cuentos de mis hijos* [My children's stories]. Here, Ángel Rama, a prominent Uruguayan intellectual, talks of Quiroga's 'intense love for his children' which inspired him to write stories which did not shy away from depictions of suffering and cruelty, all the better to prepare them for their future as men and women. Rama states that the wider pedagogical value of Quiroga's children's stories is evident and there is no better way to learn a language



than through contact with the work of a great national (here Uruguayan) writer who is also internationally recognised (6). Once again, Quiroga's identity as a 'great writer' is what allows him to produce better children's stories than writers who dedicated themselves to children's literature. The tendency to evaluate Quiroga's writing for children in emotive terms has persisted. In 2015, Quintana Tejera stated that *Cuentos de la selva* reveals 'the other side of the writer [...] his immense tenderness for children' (237).

None of Quiroga's other works for children matched the success or critical acclaim of *Cuentos de la selva*. The 1978 anthology *Cartas de un cazador* comprises the two stories published in *Mundo Argentino* in 1922 and the ten published in Vigil's *Billiken* children's magazine in 1924 introduced there as 'El hombre frente a las fieras' [Man against beasts] (*Billiken*, issue 219, 28 January 1924) and later as 'El hombre frente a los animales salvajes' [Man against wild animals] (issue 224, 3 March 1924). In the *Billiken* stories, the epistolary narrator writes to his sons, signing the letters 'Dum-Dum' in reference to the bullets he uses and the fatherly tenderness expressed as he addresses them, and by extension all child readers of his letters, as 'my little ones' jars with the brutality of the stories told in his blood-stained letters. The stories are unsigned: 'At the insistent request of the hunter, an extremely well-known person, we omit his name' (issue 219). This was not unusual as in the project for the complete works of Quiroga, Boule-Christauflour lists fourteen groups of contributions to different publications in which Quiroga published anonymously or under pseudonyms (126-8).

Quiroga's hunting stories have none of the fable-like qualities of *Cuentos de la selva* and the interactions between humans and animals are concerned with the domination of the natural world by man (specifically by the male hunter). More often than not, this domination is necessary in order to survive, and the hunting – of the man-eating jaguar

(issue 219, 28 January 1924), of the alligator that killed the hunter's dog (223, 25 February) or of the deadly rattle snakes (224, 3 March) – neutralises a threat. The story with the most clearly didactic message is 'Los cachorros del aguará-guazú' [The maned wolf pups], in which the narrator tries to hand-rear three cubs. The cubs are not yet ready to be weaned by the time his supply of condensed milk runs out and the introduction of meat into their diet kills them. Dum-Dum warns his children never to separate such young animals from their mothers knowing that in doing so they will kill them (issue 228, 31 March 1924). The underlying moral of this story, promoting respect and care for animals, is forgotten in the next story of the series. 'El condor' recounts a daring escapade in which a young Chilean mountaineer scales a sheer rock face to capture three condor chicks from a nest for the Buenos Aires zoo. The tone of the narration switches from adventure story to tragedy and horror when the chicks' parents return and attack the mountaineer, pecking him, and their chicks, to death. Dum-Dum blames the condors for the loss of the chicks and there is no acknowledgement that the men's actions caused this tragic incident (229, 7 April 1924). In this collection, only 'Cacería del hombre por las hormigas' [The hunting of man by ants] contains the dark humour of *Cuentos de la selva* and the role reversal differentiates it from the rest of the stories. Dum-Dum writes that an army of flesh-eating ants is devouring his tent and all his belongings including his clothes. He is writing the letter naked as he awaits the dawn, hoping that the ants will not have time to eat him.

In a continuation of the didacticism of *Cuentos de la selva*, many of the *Cartas de un cazador* stories impart knowledge about the animal life of Misiones, exposing city boys and girls to the wonders and dangers of the natural world. The stories also make the link between father and teacher, subverting the female-dominated Argentine public school system in which young women were trained up to be substitute mothers at school. In an

attempt to finally gain acceptance by the school authorities, Quiroga adopted a more conventional approach. For *Suelo natal* (1931), Quiroga worked with the teacher Leonardo Glusberg, whose brother Samuel was a longstanding friend of Quiroga's and whose position within the teaching profession lent legitimacy to the project. This included new texts as well as some of the stories from *Cuentos de la selva*, and a number of the vignettes Quiroga had written for *Caras y Caretas* in 1924 and 1925 under the title *De la vida de nuestros animales* [Of the lives of our animals]. *Suelo natal* was tailored to meet the moral and didactic conventions of school reading books and was accepted by the Argentine National Education Council as a fourth-grade reading book in 1931. Even within these limitations, Quiroga was able to retain some of his own didactic objectives. According to Festini, Quiroga imagines the reader of *Suelo natal* as the urban child who can be convinced of the benefits of life outside the city (155). *Suelo natal* was used in classrooms for the next seven years, selling around 5,000 copies per year (Garth 185). This pales in comparison to the sales of *Cuentos de la selva* over the last hundred years which is now accepted as a school text in Uruguay and is read all over Latin America.

### **Constancio C. Vigil's School Reading Books, *La hormiguita viajera* and *El mono relojero***

In a reversal of Quiroga's children's literature trajectory, Vigil had no difficulties in attaining official recognition from school authorities, as well as significant commercial success, during his lifetime but is now considered to be a minor figure in Argentine children's literature.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Quiroga, Vigil was not a teacher. He never held an official position with the National Educational Council but counted many teachers, school directors and Council members amongst his personal and professional contacts. Shortly after arriving in Argentina, Vigil

founded the children's magazine *Pulgarcito* (1904-7) (see Szir) with his compatriot Enrique Antuña, the author of a school book on civic morality which explored 'themes regarding the duties of the citizen'. Vigil's second children's magazine, *Billiken*, featured, during its early years, collaborations from educators including Carmen S. de Pandolfini, who in 1924 became the first woman member of the National Education Council (Mannochi 22) and school director and children's author María Leonor Smith de Lottermoser. The number of women who worked with Editorial Atlántida during these years, and Vigil's membership of the Asociación Pro-Derechos de la Mujer [Association For Women's Rights] (Barrancos 61) should be noted, not only for standing in contrast to Quiroga's misogyny, reportedly both in his life as well as his fiction (Garth, 'Heroic Paradigm' 454, 457) but also because it complicates the image that is sometimes retained of Vigil today as ultra conservative and reactionary.

Quiroga published no more original stories in *Billiken* after 1925. From that year Vigil maintained his status as founder and figurehead of Editorial Atlántida and continued to contribute to *Billiken* but passed his operational roles on to his sons. *Billiken's* new director, Carlos Vigil, increased the magazine's educational content and reduced the stories provided by national or regional authors in favour of republishing serialised stories that had originally appeared in European publications (Rea 286-8). In 1941 Constancio C. Vigil wrote to Gabriela Mistral, the Chilean poet and children's writer who would be the first Latin American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, regarding plans to publish anthologies of her poetry and prose. Her work would, Vigil writes, be indispensable for a collection of Spanish-American writers aimed at the market of women readers because 'she reads something; men, nothing; children, a lot'. If Vigil thought that children were the most avid consumers of print culture, his own focus on writing for children makes commercial

sense. There was, nevertheless, a simultaneously ideological impetus behind Vigil's children's literature which aimed not just to reinforce the civic morality required by schools but, in some cases, to restore the spiritual dimension to these values. Whereas critics focused on Quiroga's identity as a father, Vigil evoked his own fatherhood in the prologue to one of his books, *Marta y Jorge* (1927) in which a series of objects 'talk' to impart moral lessons. Naming the book after his two children who died in infancy, Vigil writes that the author of this book sees Jorge in every boy and Marta in every girl (7).



'Ages and Books'. Vigil's primary school reading books. Advertisement from *Billiken*, issue 1435, 5 May 1947.

In addition to *Marta y Jorge*, four of Vigil's other books for children were accepted as official primary school reading books in Argentina: *La escuela de la Señorita Susana* [Señorita Susana's school] for first grade, *Compañero* [Companion] for second, *Mangocho*<sup>4</sup>,

for fourth and *Alma nueva* [New soul] for fifth and sixth grades. Vigil tailored these specifically for use in schools: they were broken down into manageable sections and targeted progressively competent levels of reading ability. This official recognition extended to other Latin American countries including Bolivia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay where Vigil's books were read in schools.<sup>5</sup> *Billiken* was used to promote Vigil's books in an advertorial strategy which consistently emphasised the vital role played by edifying literature in book format in the improvement of children's future prospects. It was sold in a number of different Latin American countries, ensuring Vigil's diffusion across the region, and also facilitated generational continuity of readership as mothers and fathers bought for their own children the magazine they had read as children along with their favourite Vigil stories. In employing these promotional strategies, Editorial Atlántida was not simply working to insert Vigil into an imagined future canon of Argentine children's literature but was shaping that canon around Vigil.

In the decade following Vigil's death in 1954, there is barely an issue of *Billiken* which does not feature photographs of an event paying homage to Vigil somewhere in Latin America. Although Vigil's books were eventually dropped from the school curriculum, a second group of his stories continued to be read. *La hormiguita viajera* and *El mono relojero* were first published in the 1920s and although the core plot of each story remained largely unchanged, these, and many of Vigil's other stories, appeared in different versions over the years as Vigil and Editorial Atlántida adapted texts to suit changing markets and ensure their continued relevance, in the same way that Quiroga had changed and adapted his stories when they moved from publication in magazines to inclusion in anthologies. In *La hormiguita*, a scout ant is swept up by accident in a napkin and taken far away from her home. After many adventures she returns to the Queen who praises her 'heroic will' and

hopes that the little ant will serve as an example to others to never give up in the face of adversity (36). In *El mono relojero*, the monkey escapes his imprisonment in the watchmaker's shop and suffers a series of unfortunate encounters as he tries to sell stolen watches to different animals. In the end he returns, preferring the comfort of captivity to the hardship of life outside. Whilst Helguera contrasts this with *La hormiguita*, interpreting *El mono's* message as repressing freedom and initiative (115), the difference in the two characters' fates can instead be set within the wider moral framework present throughout Vigil's work which prizes honesty and hard work. Here it follows that the little ant is praised for her industriousness and resilience while the dishonest monkey, who tries to cheat all the animals he meets, does not deserve the freedom he craves.

According to a 1977 critical overview of the Uruguayan children's literature canon, the characters of the watchmaker monkey and the little travelling ant had by then 'gained archetypal status, living, fully justifiably, in the interest of generations of children from [both sides of] the River Plate' (Neira and Obaldía 141-2). Tellingly, the timing of this evaluation immediately succeeds Editorial Atlántida's campaign to protect the legacy of Vigil's characters by introducing them to new generations of children in a coordinated cross-media strategy which sent the little ant to the stage (1964-69) and the watchmaker monkey to the television (1973), released records of the monkey's songs and published newly edited versions of both stories in book format. *Billiken* which, in the 1970s, was also sold in Uruguay, Paraguay, Venezuela and Puerto Rico, featured the watchmaker monkey as its cover star for most issues from 1973 to 1975 and published new comic strip versions of both characters' stories.<sup>6</sup>

## **Conclusion. Trajectories of inclusion and exclusion**

Both Quiroga and Vigil were professional writers, working with knowledge of the contemporary literary market and publishing context. Their efforts to engage with the school system show their awareness of the role of the educational authorities in the curation of national children's literatures. Vigil was able to put the weight of his own publishing house behind his children's books and *Billiken* promoted a literary hierarchy with some stories – like Vigil's – living beyond the magazine as they are republished by the books division, and other stories – such as Quiroga's *Cartas de un cazador* series – intended never to transcend the limits of the magazine. Quiroga was also highly aware of the marketing responsibilities of the modern writer. He too engaged in self-promotion, perpetuating the image of the pioneer, jungle-dwelling writer, posing for photographs for an interview in Misiones at a time when he had already moved back to Buenos Aires (Garth, 'Heroic Paradigm' 462).

The qualities that made Vigil's stories for children so relevant for so long are the same qualities which led to them falling out of favour. The transmission of clear moral messages, even in stories designed to live as commercial entities beyond institutionally-approved frameworks, and the prioritisation of didacticism over creativity, imagination and entertainment would today exclude Vigil from any attempt to define an Argentine children's literary canon. In contrast, *Cuentos de la selva* is valued today for its creativity and ambiguity, the very qualities which had denied Quiroga official school recognition and its associated income stream. In the case of *Cartas de un cazador*, contemporary sensibilities regarding hunting, zoos and also race, in the collection's representation of indigenous characters, render many of these stories problematic. The collection has not been reedited since the 1970s and is primarily of interest today because it is by Quiroga and not as a



collection of children's stories.

The trajectory of Quiroga's children's literature has undoubtedly been affected by Quiroga's identity as a 'great writer' (as opposed to a 'children's writer') and his uncontested place in the Uruguayan and Argentine literary canon from which children's literature has traditionally been excluded. As Albala (197-8) noted, there is a contradiction in the treatment of *Cuentos de la selva* in the 1993 Critical Edition of Quiroga's complete works (*Todos los cuentos*). Despite being heralded as one of the 'most original and enduring' aspects of Quiroga's oeuvre (1072), *Cuentos de la selva* is then relegated towards the end of the volume, coming after essays which were never anthologised in books. The critical uncertainty regarding *Cuentos de la selva* persisted in line with the uncertain status of children's literature in Argentina. In 1988, Díaz Rönner cited the lack of articles about children's literature in Argentina's mainstream newspapers as indicative of the genre's perceived lack of prestige (*Cara y cruz* 16). Even in 2005, in the prologue to the reedition of *Cara y cruz*, fellow Argentine academic Susana Itzcovich felt the need to state that 'children's literature is literature' (3). It is in this context of the longstanding marginalisation of children's literature in Argentina that some critics of Quiroga have valued the stories of *Cuentos de la selva* because they are written by Quiroga and despite the fact that they constitute children's literature. It is also possible that Horacio Quiroga's identity as a children's writer is seen as incongruous and problematic from a children's literature point of view, as suggested by a 2014 edition of *Cuentos de la selva* published by Sigmar in Buenos Aires which omits Quiroga's name from the front cover.

Whilst new editions of *Cuentos de la selva* are continuously published ensuring the collection's enduring presence in the public consciousness, Editorial Atlántida only publishes four of Vigil's children's books today.<sup>7</sup> Vigil may not be an author in need of rescuing but

there is, however, scope for the academic and publishing communities to champion the contributions of lesser-known Argentine children's writers to the curation of a national children's literature. A useful starting point would be *Billiken's* many contributors, many of whom were women who maintained parallel careers in education and journalism whilst writing for children. These include Mercedes Dantas Lacombe (issue 750, April 1934), poet, journalist and co-founder of the Club Argentino de Mujeres [Argentine Women's Club] (Maubé and Capdevielle 179) and Margarita Rothkoff (issue 999, November 1938), playwright and an editor of the feminist magazine *Unión y Labor* (Gallo 17). The work of such authors may not be compatible with more recent trends in Argentine children's literature but it is vital for understanding the revolutionary nature of the 1960s shift in attitudes towards children's literature, as well as for mapping out the pedagogical and professional networks of the Argentine publishing industry in the first half of the twentieth century.

## Notes

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2. For an essential discussion on the move from didacticism to the new currents in Argentine children's literature pioneered by Walsh see Díaz Rönner ('Literatura infantil').
3. For an overview of Vigil's children's publishing trajectory and critical reception see Bontempo 'En la escuela'.

4. The title of this semi-autobiographical work refers to Vigil's childhood nickname.
5. The references are to *Billiken* magazine: Bolivia, issue 1429, April 1947; Ecuador, 1465, December 1947; the Dominican Republic, 1327, April 1945; Uruguay, 1176, May 1942.
6. All references are taken from *Billiken*. The comic strips were only loosely based on the original stories. *El mono relojero* (1972-1976) was written by Enrique Pinti and illustrated by Daniel Branca and Oscar Fernández. *La hormiguita viajera* (1974) was written by Eugenia Calny and also illustrated by Oscar Fernández. Both comic series were collected and sold by Editorial Atlántida's books division in 1975.
7. As part of my AHRC-funded research project I have worked with Editorial Atlántida on a bilingual parallel text edition of *Cuentos de la selva* for the *Biblioteca Billiken* book series. In addition to *El mono relojero* and *La hormiguita viajera*, *El bosque azul* [The blue forest] and *Misiá Pepa* [Miss Pepa] are still in print from 2005 editions. Additionally, Vigil's manual for early readers, *¡Upa!*, has been continuously published since 1934 selling over two million copies.

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