



"Women and Print Culture in Post-Independence Buenos Aires, by Iona Macintyre, Woodbridge, UK, Tamesis, 2010, 216 pp, £50.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-18-5566-196-7".

Author

Hortiguera, Hugo

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Iona Macintyre. *Women and Print Culture in Post-Independence Buenos Aires*. Woodbridge (UK), Tamesis, 2010, 216 pp.

What was the status of women (white, wealthy and leisured) in early nineteenth-century Buenos Aires? How did they position in society, in relation to the critical opinions and the journalistic and literary debates in the country after independence from Spain? How did some of these concepts influence the book trade and the axis translation-adaptation of European texts of the time? How were formats and conventions of the European cultural tradition -French and English in particular- adopted and adapted in Buenos Aires? These and other similar questions are the main focus of the recent book by Dr. Iona Macintyre, Lecturer in Hispanic Studies from the University of Edinburgh.

The study begins with an introduction and a first chapter where the author proposes a brief outline of the debate on the role of women during the first decades of the nineteenth century, its links with the political transition in print culture and a general overview of the social, political and cultural context during the studied period. She also describes the attraction provoked by English and French customs and ideas among the revolutionary elites. This historical framework is followed by five chapters which analyse six different publications circulating in Buenos Aires between 1820 and 1830.

Chapter two reviews *Defensa del bello sexo*, an anonymous translation of an original English text written in the late eighteenth century by (Irishman?) Joseph A. Cantillon and published in 1820. After a detailed analysis, the author concludes that the significance of Cantillon's translation is the promotion of European models of "civilization". His text always stresses, says Macintyre, the white Christian superiority over other European cultures and religions, while criticizing the lower and marginal place assigned to women in those other civilizations. The importance of Cantillon's text lies on two key elements. On the one hand, it evidences the social concern of the literati for the place women should have in the new emerging post-colonial society. On the other, this publication makes obvious, for Macintyre, the ideological influences of English thought in the debates on this issue in the region.

The satirical pamphlets *Doña María Retazos* and *La matrona comentadora*, both written by the Franciscan friar Francisco de Paula Castañeda and published in Buenos Aires in 1821, are the object of study in chapter three. Challenging the view of some critics, who see a feminist or anti-feminist position in Castañeda, Macintyre discusses how the author hid himself behind the creation of "fictional female editors" that served to attack the inability and the ineptitude of the writers and politicians of the time to do their job properly, and who were perceived by him as a "group of women, unmanly in their failure to protect the region from Federalist chaos. (...) Castañeda was not concerned with women's role in society, but rather sought to thwart the liberal voices contesting the authority of the Catholic Church" (112). Briefly, Castañeda used the image of women writers and thinkers to ridicule, always through them, male public figures and political opponents.

Chapter four focuses on *Cartas sobre la educación del bello sexo por una señora americana*, attributed to the Spaniard José Joaquín de Mora, and published in London in 1824. The text

in question, says Macintyre, was specifically written and edited for export to the new Spanish American states, which were taking shape in the continent at the time. In it, de Mora describes, always within an English perspective, "moral rules" and notions of etiquette, behaviours and civic obligations expected from young women in the new Hispanic republics. As in previous texts, a transvestite narrative voice takes over the discourse. In effect, the narrative voice –a woman allegedly Catholic, Spanish American and revolutionary, writing from exile- condenses the English liberal ideas that tried to be implemented during the government of Bernardino Rivadavia (1826-1827). Once again, according to the author, the text illustrates the significant British influence in a city trying to be part of the modernization projects of Rivadavian liberalism. In short, the manual lays bare the aspirations of a political class that rejected Spanish traditions and considered women's education in English customs as a strategic and inescapable option to socially transform the region.

Chapter five deals with the satirical periodical *La Argentina* (1830-1831), edited by Manuel de Irigoyen. In a detailed analysis, the author contrasts the misinterpretations caused by inaccurate and superficial readings made by national scholars about the intentions of this publication. While renowned critics have misread it either as a "feminist publication" (Maria Esther Vázquez and the historical magazine *Todo es Historia*, for instance), or as "a fraud" (a hoax) to the reader, due to the creation of "fictional editors" (Tomás Néstor Auza), Macintyre's thesis suggests something different. She states that the editor did not intend at any time to deceive the public as a genuine women's publication but, thanks to its light-hearted satirical and hyperbolic claims, criticized the Unitarian culture and women's behaviour (defined as "consumers with a lack of taste"). According to Macintyre, *La Argentina* openly draws attention to its artifice, while ridiculing the notion of "innate female virtue" (140), presented in other more serious periodicals of the time, as *La Aljaba*. And once again, for the author, one could argue that the mockery of this periodical would be inscribed within a long tradition that has its roots in other eighteenth century English publications, such as those published by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele (*The Spectator* and *The Tatler*).

Meanwhile, *La Aljaba* (1830), a biweekly periodical for women, attributed to the Uruguayan poet and teacher Petrona Rosende de Sierra, is the subject of chapter six. Once again, Macintyre questions the "feminist label" scholars have given to the text, and highlights its advocacy for traditional female values that keep women in a domestic position. Indeed, in *La Aljaba* the only roles expected from women were those related to their position as wives and mothers who could participate in nation-building, but always from domesticity. As Macintyre concludes, their ultimate goal as Republican mothers is "to raise patriotic sons disposed to obey the laws of the land and prepare to sacrifice themselves for the republic, and to establish the foundations of a strictly moral and virtuous society" (191).

Finally, the text comes to a close with a brief conclusion that summarizes the key aspects of each chapter, and a profuse bibliography.

With a perceptive analysis, Macintyre's book will motivate the interest of specialists and non-specialists, so as to understand how the cultural landscape of Buenos Aires was shaping up

during the post-independence years. It is certainly a substantial contribution that will help to better comprehend the debates on the role of women in this period, their relationship to print culture and, in particular, the influence of English culture as an exemplar model to emulate.

Dr. Hugo Hortiguera
Griffith University