



CHAPTER 2

‘Especial Outrage to Humanity and Civilisation’. The Atrocities of General Juan Manuel de Rosas and the Pursuit of Empathy

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The terror and hatred inspired by Rosas were stronger than the means he invented. The emigration was growing by the hour, by the minute. All that was needed to make a whole family escape was to find a boat. When the boat was found, father, mother, children, brothers, and sisters piled into it in confusion, abounding in house, goods, and fortune, and every day some of these boats loaded with passengers arrived in the Oriental State [of Uruguay], with nothing remaining but the clothes they wore.¹ (Dumas 1850, 60–61)

Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers. (Sontag 2003, 101)

¹Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s own.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1824, French painter Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) completed the famous canvas entitled *The Massacre at Chios*, a painting epitomising the suffering of the Greeks in their struggle against Ottoman occupation. Philhellenism was a particularly strong sentiment in France but no less in Britain and Germany, raising a heated international humanitarian debate. In France, public interest for the Greek struggle was prompted by their fight against an absolutist despot, which resonated with the French Revolution and France's condition after the Bourbon Restoration. Furthermore, the Greeks were fellow Christians who were being oppressed by a Muslim power (Baldassarre 2015, 216–229).

The massacre of the Greeks bore a special meaning in Britain as well:

The massacre of Chios transformed the disparate philhellenic movement into a more focused and coherent advocacy community. Lord Byron and the Romantics led the campaign to challenge the British government's indifference to the Greeks. Their effort was not cast simply as an appeal to support the Greek insurgents but as a broader appeal to recast the Greek struggles as one in which humanity was fighting against both liberalism and conservatism. (Western 2016, 176)

Although, as noted above, Lord Byron (1788–1824) was at the forefront of the philhellenic movement in Britain, Delacroix's painting demonstrated that the Greek struggle was making sympathetic waves throughout Europe. Alexandre Dumas *père* (1802–1870), having observed Delacroix's work, described in his later memoirs the general enthusiasm for the heroic struggle of the Greeks as follows:

All eyes were turned towards Greece. The memories of our youth made propaganda and recruited men, money, poetry, paintings, concerts. One sang, painted, wrote poetry, begged in favour of the Greeks. Whoever dared to declare himself Turkophile would have risked to be stoned to death as Saint Stephen. (Cit. in: Baldassarre 2015, 223)

The struggle for Greek independence was not the only occasion on which Dumas was to show political commitment. Another conflict—one on a transatlantic scale—became the topic of an international debate on military intervention. Several decades before Henry Dunant's *Un Souvenir de Solferino*, and long before more notorious and highly mediated wars

such as the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) or the Vietnam War (1955–1975), an armed conflict in Latin America inspired a lively political debate in Europe—a debate where emotions helped to transform a distant struggle into a crisis of international dimensions. Approximately twenty years after the massacre at Chios, conservative Uruguayan generals, with the support of federalist leaders of the Argentine provinces, launched a siege against Montevideo, the capital of the independent Oriental Republic of Uruguay. In 1849, Uruguayan Ambassador and soldier Melchor Pacheco y Obes (1809–1855) approached Dumas in his desperate search for support for the Montevidean cause. This resulted in the 1850 book *Montevideo ou Une nouvelle Troie* (*Montevideo or the New Troy*), written by Dumas but chiefly inspired by Pacheco's accounts. Again, ancient Greece serves as a metaphor, although the roles were reversed from the Greek war of independence; the Greeks in this case were the Argentine aggressors (the troops of the Argentine Confederation, led by General Juan Manuel de Rosas), while the Trojans were the vulnerable people of Montevideo, a city under siege since 1843.

As with the philhellenic movement of the 1820s, European perception of the dichotomy was very much the same: Montevideo was perceived as a European-like city and a beacon of civilisation and freedom, under ruthless attack and oppression by despotic barbarians. Unlike the philhellenic mobilisation, however, in this case there was vocal European support for the aggressors as well, whose legitimacy they promoted by means of pamphlets.

This chapter aims to explore the realm of emotions and their relevance in shaping humanitarian sensibility in the context of the Siege of Montevideo. Hence, positive and negative sentiments, such as compassion and sympathy or horror and abjection, might provide a further layer of plausibility for the sake of legitimising or forcing a particular action. For this purpose, I will examine pamphlets, essays by anonymous or eminent anti-Rosists in exile—such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–1888) or José Rivera Indarte (1814–1845)—as well as newspapers and political drawings depicting the vulnerability of those suffering under the iron rule of Rosas and the cruelty of his regime. This chapter will focus on particular *topoi* such as the fate of widows, abandoned orphans and the copious number of victims. Those images, both literal and metaphorical, were passed from anti-Rosist dissidents in Buenos Aires and Montevideo to Europe, in an effort to garner political and military support. For Britain and France, the River Plate region, that is, the region surrounding the

estuary of the rivers Uruguay and Paraná, held a particular ‘geopolitical’ interest in terms of informal empire building. According to Juan Francisco Baroffio, the drama of the conflict attracted the attention of a vast public whose interest was sparked by tales of heroic battles, aberrant betrayals, the intervention of great powers, *pasquinades*, cruelties, ambitions, mercenaries and a plethora of other circumstances (Baroffio 2014, 67). Furthermore, the French were the largest foreign community in Montevideo, a fact which the government of the July Monarchy simply could not ignore (Shawcross 2015, 645). Hence, the configuration and the intertwining of political and economic interests, and the humanitarian cause *avant la lettre* favouring mainly (but not only) fellow citizens, became the focus of various discourses involving prestigious members of the European literary elite. If Alexandre Dumas understood Montevideo as the ‘new Troy’, as the title of his work suggests, we must in turn ask: who was the ‘Platine’ Agamemnon?

GENERAL ROSAS AND HIS THORNS

Juan Manuel de Rosas, still considered today a controversial figure in Argentine history,² was born in Buenos Aires in 1793 to a family of wealthy landowners called *estancieros*. After his marriage in 1813, he devoted himself to the expansion of his own *estancia* and to cattle-breeding. In the ‘anarchy year’ of 1820, Rosas’s military proficiency in repelling the armies attacking the Province of Buenos Aires gained him great prestige and governmental land grants (Lynch 1981, 29). By the end of the decade, Rosas was the wealthiest and most powerful landowner in the province.

In November 1829, he was proclaimed governor of Buenos Aires, giving him extraordinary powers. His ambition was to create a province with well-defined estates and a rigorous rule of law. He became the leader of the federalists, who fought to maintain the sovereignty of individual provinces. With a political programme consisting of a return to order (his epithet would be ‘the Restorer of the Laws’), Rosas targeted enemies of the State amongst the unitarians, the liberal party embodying European values of enlightenment and modernisation (Lynch 1981, 31–32). In 1835, he was again appointed governor, this time with complete power over the strategic province of Buenos Aires, thus becoming the *de facto* ruler over the Argentine Confederation. State terror became a particular trait of his

² For an alternative interpretation of Rosas’s dictatorship, see, for instance, Ruderer (2021).

second term, especially in the early 1840s. With the help of the governor's fanatical supporters, forming the *Sociedad Popular Restauradora* (Popular Restoration Society) and its armed wing, the *mazorca* (corn cob), Rosas was able to rid himself of his enemies and political opponents. After the defeat in the Platine War at the Battle of Caseros in 1851, he was exiled to southern England, where he died in 1877, at age 84.

The region of the River Plate became a contested territory in the decades after Latin American independence. Increasing hostilities between the urban and liberal elites of Montevideo and the conservative protectionists of the countryside led to the Uruguayan Civil War or *Guerra Grande* (1839–1851), in which Brazil, France, Britain and the Argentine Confederation were also involved. General Rosas supported the Uruguayan conservatives. The Great Siege of Montevideo, which lasted from 1843 until 1851, was a monumental event of the Uruguayan Civil War playing out between the conservative faction, led by generals Manuel Oribe and Juan Antonio Lavalleja, and the liberals, led by General Fructuoso Rivera, who controlled the city of Montevideo and who was supported by Argentine anti-Rosist dissidents and legions of European volunteers from France, Spain, Britain and even Italy, among them Giuseppe Garibaldi. Furthermore, the conflict took international proportions with the Anglo-French blockade of the River Plate in 1845. In terms of foreign policy, Latin America became the focal point of a clash between French and British imperial interests (Shawcross 2018, 37–39). From 1838 until 1852, the so-called *Affaire du Rio de la Plata* moved through various stages, including a naval blockade (1838–1840), as a means to pressure Rosas into equitable treatment for French and British commercial interests and citizens, especially concerning the exemption of military service (Avenel 1998, 16–27; McLean 1995, 20). Subsequently, between 1841 and 1845, the French took an active role in the Uruguayan Civil War, offering naval support to Montevideo, thus favouring Fructuoso Rivera against Manuel Oribe, who was supported by Rosas. Particularly during the Great Siege of Montevideo, the fate of the French expatriate community in the capital—numbering approximately 5000 in 1843 (Shawcross 2015, 645; Avenel 1998, 59)—justified frequent debates in the French Parliament, with proponents championing a bellicose intervention against Rosas in order to guarantee the security of French citizens. The failure of a united Anglo-French diplomatic mission to Buenos Aires in 1845 led to subsequent military action in order to secure open navigation on the rivers Paraná and Uruguay. After 1847, Britain lost interest in Montevideo,

while prestige forced France to justify its intervention in the name of humanity (McLean 1995, 128–146). According to Edward Shawcross, the liberal values which the Montevideans and the anti-Rosist dissidents embodied were a key argument for French support: ‘Thus, [...] the July Monarchy similarly backed factions in Mexico and the River Plate with the hope of bringing to power regimes that would be more favourable to French interests and influence’ (Shawcross 2018, 60). The affair continued to inspire French foreign policy during the Second Republic, when in April 1850 the government of President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte decided to bolster the French naval presence on the River Plate (Avenel 1998, 110–115; Lynch 1981, 291).

Thus, Montevideo became a stronghold for anti-Rosist dissidents attacking the *Porteño* dictator in pamphlets and newspapers which were disseminated outside Uruguay, even in Buenos Aires. Those newspapers were edited primarily by liberal intellectuals who promoted a thoroughly European idea of civilisation.

At that moment, Europe was experiencing an awakening of compassion and sympathy post-Enlightenment. Prior to the French Revolution, the *âme sensible*—the sensitive soul—became the ideal of the civilised bourgeois moral character (Reddy 2001, 154–161; Delon 2016, 11–20). Terms such as ‘irresistible compassion’, ‘sympathy’ or ‘humanity’, which became commonplace during the eighteenth century, demonstrate a nascent tendency towards humanitarianism, considerably impregnated by Christian values (Fiering 1976). Most prominent among expressions of humanitarian sensibility at this time were discourses in favour of the abolition of the slave trade. Voiced successfully at the Congress of Vienna (1814/15) (Klose 2016), abolitionist discourse was not only an unprecedented expression of compassion, it was also accompanied by new conceptions of capitalism (Haskell 1985, 353). These publicly expressed sentiments were underscored with pictorial representations of pain. In fact, according to Bertrand Taithe (2007, 126–127; 2017, 368), there is an intrinsic link between aesthetic representations of suffering and the emergence of humanitarian sentiment. Indeed, through a plethora of visual techniques in use during the eighteenth century, ‘suffering groups were brought to light as they had never been before’ (Hutchison 2019, 223–224).

Some of the visual techniques implied the use of drawings and cartoons in newspapers, such as *El grito argentino* (The Argentine Cry), which appeared in 1839 in Montevideo, followed shortly by another entitled

Muera Rosas (May Rosas Die!) between the years 1841 and 1842. *El grito argentino* comprised thirty-three issues, from 25 February until its suppression on 30 June 1839 (Pradère 1914, 163). Among its editors was the writer and unitarian dissident Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810–1884) who belonged to the intellectual movement called the ‘1837 generation’. In order to reach an illiterate public, both periodicals included full-page drawings or political cartoons, often depicting the atrocities of General Rosas (Fradkin and Gelman 2015, 266). Although there is no known record of their circulation in Europe, their powerful messages may well have inspired the writings of eminent dissidents such as Sarmiento and Rivera Indarte.

The first issue of *El grito argentino* features a drawing entitled ‘La Patria’ (The homeland or fatherland) depicting General Rosas on the left, in white and holding a poniard, along with his two cousins, the Anchorena brothers (Fig. 2.1).³ Rosas is standing on the flag of the Argentine Republic displaying two sky-blue stripes, which was forbidden under his rule. Here Argentina is allegorised as a young woman, gagged and bound by handcuffs and shackles, at the mercy of her three aggressors. Although the image’s caption does not specifically refer to rape, the drawing would undoubtedly have evoked sexual aggression in terms of nineteenth-century sensibilities and moral codes.⁴ The illustration depicts a scene of female vulnerability and bondage in the face of three marauding men, which recalls somehow an early modern scene of torment applied by the inquisition. The caption states: ‘Yes, I hate you, damn mother country ... Wait, mate, she still has some jewels to tear out—Then he will finish her off’. Further comments on the illustration clarify the identities of the figures:

There is the beloved homeland of the Argentines, bathed in tears and lying on the iron hook made by the tyrant. There is the unhappy one with shackles, handcuffs and a gag. Rosas and his worthy cousins the Anchorenas are going to finish tearing off the few clothes she has left, before the evil one gives her the last stab. Let the Argentines say if this is not the horrible and true image of the fatherland.⁵

³The Anchorena brothers actually numbered three in total: Juan José Cristobal, Mariano Nicolás and Tomás Manuel Anchorena. They belonged to one of the richest families of Buenos Aires and were related to Rosas through his mother (Lynch 1981, 12 and 97).

⁴On the other hand, Joanna Bourke (2007, 6) rejects the metaphorical allusion to ‘rape’, arguing the exclusively bodily implications as ‘the embodied violation of another person’.

⁵*El grito argentino*, no. 1, 24 February 1839.



Fig. 2.1 Unknown author, La Patria, *El grito argentino*, 24 February 1839 (Creative Commons 2.0)

A similar image appears in the issue from 25 May 1839, in a drawing structured with before and after examples. On the left side, it shows the state of the motherland in 1810, when independence was proclaimed. An allegorical Argentina sits on a throne, holding the national flag in one hand and broken chains in the other. A lion lays at her feet while General Manuel Belgrano (1770–1820) is crowning her with a laurel wreath. The right side then shows the situation as it stands in 1839, from the perspective of the unitarian enemies of Rosas. He is again depicted in the company of the Anchorena brothers, acting as his hangmen (Pradère 1914, 180).

Once again, the vulnerability of the country is symbolised by means of a woman's helplessness. Since the Age of Revolution, it was commonplace to utilise female figures such as *Britannia* to represent Britain, *Columbia*

for the United States or *Marianne* for Republican France (Braun 1999, 64–65); however, in this particular case, the female figure serves to draw attention to grievances and, in this way, functions to inspire humanitarian sensibility. As Taithe has shown in his focus on visual representations of the 1860s, ‘women and children had key symbolic roles in representations which sought to define open-ended humanitarian aims’ (Taithe 2007, 126; see also Hutchison 2019, 224). This aspect was emphasised in particular through the *topos* of widows and foundlings and their fate under Rosas’s rule. War casualties and the mass executions of opponents resulted in a considerable number of widows and orphans without means of subsistence. Rosas had closed foundling hospitals, apparently due to a budget shortage (Prieto 2021). *El grito argentino* raised this topic at least twice. In the second issue from 28 February 1839, an engraving represents the *Casa de expósitos* which women and children were forced to leave. The engraving shows toddlers lying in the street, naked (Fig. 2.2). The caption reads:



Fig. 2.2 Anonymous, *El grito argentino*, 28 February 1839 (Creative Commons 2.0)

[The] coward Rosas has not contented himself with tearing away from their ranches and from their homes so many of their fathers, to don uniforms, or to shoot them barbarously, but he has sworn that even the children of these poor people must perish.

Now the foundlings have lost the miserable corner where their unfortunate mothers could leave them, sure that they would not lack clothing to cover themselves. [...]

He shoots so many who have not committed any horrible crime! And while he takes away these poor people's bread in order to build a palace, and send ounces of gold to England to ensure his own life, he throws these creatures onto the street, disregarding the cries and appeals of a charitable priest.⁶

The last lines of this comment evoke the *Massacre of the Innocents* as narrated in the Gospels. As Francesco Zucconi (2018, 107, original emphasis) recalls, '[t]he Massacre of the Innocents is an iconographic theme that has persisted across centuries and styles, in the "high" and "decorative" arts alike'. In line with this biblical theme, Rosas here is being portrayed as a modern-day Herod. The topic of abandoned orphans re-emerges in the issue from 14 March 1839. This time, the illustration employs a shocking and macabre style, depicting naked toddlers on the street being bitten and eaten by stray dogs (Fig. 2.3).

How often have mothers preferred to die, not having that asylum in which to place their children, whom poverty or shame oblige them to abandon! How often have children in the streets been eaten by dogs! How often have these innocents perished without having received the water of baptism!

Meanwhile: that cruel and ferocious man takes pleasure in these disasters [...].

Evil Rosas! [...] Among your many victims, the most agonizing are the orphans: but the day will come when the wailing of those innocents will rend from heaven the lightning that will consume your infernal entrails.⁷

As an additional sinister element, the illustration depicts Rosas as watching the atrocious scene from the window of his headquarters while a watchman on the right observes the scene as well. Rosas appears to enjoy the

⁶ *El grito argentino*, no. 2, 28 February 1839.

⁷ *El grito argentino*, no. 6, 14 March 1839.

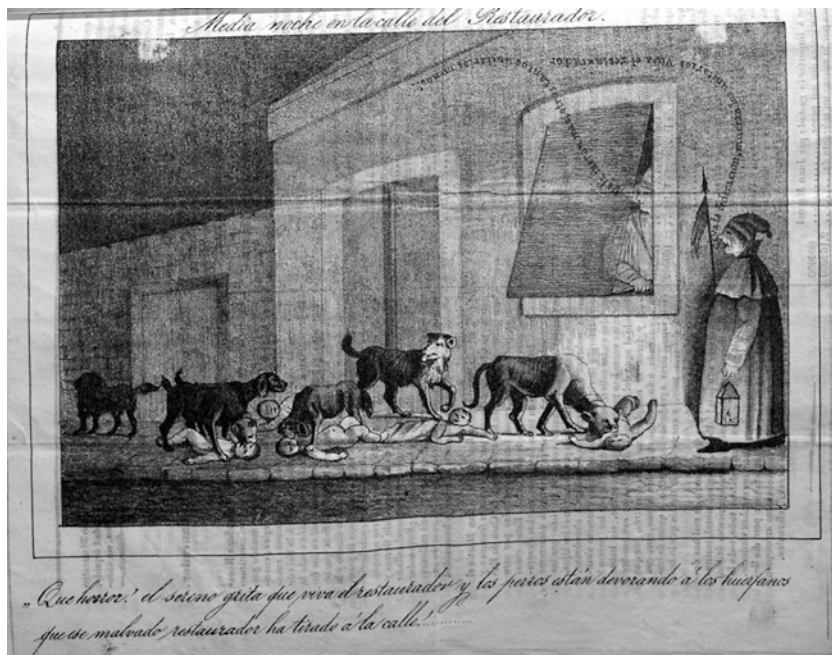


Fig. 2.3 Anonymous, Midnight in the street of the Restorer, *El grito argentino*, 14 March 1839 (Creative Commons 2.0)

'martyrdom' of those children—a massacre for which he is directly responsible—in a sadistic, voyeuristic or perhaps even pornographic way. The 'love of cruelty' assigned to Rosas has nothing to do with 'a view of suffering, of the pain of others, that is rooted in religious thinking, which links pain to sacrifice', as Susan Sontag (2003, 98–99) claims. Rather, the focus is entirely on his own personal, sadistic enjoyment of the atrocities he perpetrates, shown in an a-religious and even pathological light.

The topic of orphans and widows brings us to another common motif in the anti-Rosist propaganda: the assassinations and executions ordered by him or committed in his name. The weekly newspaper *Muerta Rosas*, which had Alberdi and other eminent liberal writers like José Mármol and Esteban Echeverría among its editors, appeared only thirteen times between December 1841 and April 1842. Like *El grito argentino*, this periodical was printed in Montevideo and secretly disseminated in Buenos

Aires. The illustrations were created by navy officer Antonio Somellera (1812–1889) (Pradère 1914, 189).

Its first issue opened with an unmistakable image of the governor of Buenos Aires, depicting a feline-faced Rosas on a pile of human bones with a poniard in his right hand. Death stands by his side, with the words ‘Rosas o Muerto’ [sic] on its black robe. The caption reads: ‘Buenos Aires and its horrendous tyrant Juan Manuel de Rosas’.⁸ As in the previous figures, Rosas wears informal attire, highlighting his role as *estanciero* and leader of the gauchos (Rosa 1972, 135–137). Just as with this opening illustration, the drawing that appears in the tenth issue once again evokes the iconography of skulls.⁹ Here, Rosas is wearing his general’s uniform, although a closer inspection shows that the fringes of this epaulettes are made of small daggers. The dictator is quite literally submerged in human skulls, while a disembodied arm holds a fistful of writhing snakes over his head. A third plate reiterates the illustrator’s macabre trend, as it shows both Rosas and Uruguayan general Manuel Oribe sitting at a table and drinking the blood poured from the heads of their decapitated enemies.¹⁰

All of the illustrations mentioned here take part in a larger discourse of otherness built upon a combination of textual and aesthetical arguments. Rosas’s ‘gauchoesque’ representation suggests his estrangement from European values of civilisation and progress. His tyrannical nature underscores his representation as a sort of oriental despot from the distant past. In particular, the horror of his deeds, his shockingly cruel behaviour as reported in the above newspapers and his lack of charity, pity or sympathy suggest that he exists outside of the emotionally enlightened community of Francophile and liberal *hommes de lettres*. This is particularly true for anti-Rosist dissidents, who base their judgements on an evaluation of their enemies’ emotional limitations (Rosenwein 2002, 842).

While these published illustrations certainly made a concerted effort to excite humanitarian sympathies among the popular masses, according to historians Fradkin and Gelman (2015, 266), the actual success of these ephemeral newspapers was very limited. While the drawings bear a somewhat elusive allegorical meaning with disappointing engagement on the part of the public, another *cause célèbre* later in the decade circulated widely and managed to penetrate the collective memory. Camila O’Gorman was a

⁸ *Muerta Rosas*, 23 December 1841.

⁹ *Muerta Rosas*, 5 March 1842.

¹⁰ *Muerta Rosas*, 9 April 1842.

nineteen-year-old daughter from a wealthy family of Buenos Aires. Her father was a supporter of Rosas. She fell in love with her chaplain Ladislao (or Uladislao) Gutiérrez, her elder by four years, and they eloped and escaped to the province of Corrientes. This scandal enraged the dictator due to the moral values he aimed to instil, while the unitarians blamed him for his bigotry. After some months, Camila and Ladislao were caught, arrested and imprisoned in Santos Lugares. The conservative society of Buenos Aires proclaimed the need for exemplary punishment, but they did not advocate for the death penalty. However, Rosas condemned the couple to the firing squad without trial. When Camila pleaded for the Governor's mercy, citing her pregnancy, Rosas remained firm (Graham-Jones 2014, 21–28).¹¹ Both were executed on 18 August 1848. This episode shocked even the governor's supporters (Fradkin and Gelman 2015, 336–337; Lynch 1981, 239–240). In the words of historian John Lynch (1981, 241): 'People were overcome not simply by sympathy for the victims but by the fear that [...] Buenos Aires was returning to the terror of more barbarous times'.

At times the visual representation displaying an act of gross injustice appears not so much as a medium to transport a message for an immediate purpose, but rather as a consequence of the message's embedment in the collective memory or as a medium in the diachronic sense. Ten years after this unfortunate incident, Italian painter Francesco Augero (1829–1882) completed his canvas titled *The execution of Camila O'Gorman* in Turin (Fig. 2.4), prior to his relocation to Argentina (Graham-Jones 2014, 188, note 37). Augero's work represents Camila and Ladislao as Christian martyrs at the hands of a barbarian and sanguinary ruler. This portrayal recalls anew the religious roots of humanitarian sensibility. Particularly noteworthy is the soldier standing behind and to the right of Camila. He covers his face while holding the blindfolds for the two condemned. This gesture, displaying his desire not to witness the cruelty about to take place, renders him an antithesis to the voyeuristic Rosas who enjoys watching the children devoured by dogs (cf. Fig. 2.3). The soldier's chagrin recalls just how much the execution shocked even the staunchest supporters of the governor.

¹¹On the question of whether Camila was really pregnant, see especially Graham-Jones (2014, 26–28).



Fig. 2.4 Francesco Augero, *La ejecución de Camila O'Gorman* (1858), oil on canvas, 49 cm × 63 cm, courtesy of the Mario López Olaciregui Collection

‘ON GROUNDS OF HUMANITY AND PUBLIC JUSTICE’

If Augero’s canvas seems to imply a transfer of accounts and narratives from the River Plate to the River Po, we can assume that such a transfer occurred in other ways as well, for instance, through pamphlets, newspapers and dispatches. But what impact did those accounts about Rosas’s cruelties have on potential readers, on the consumers of this news? While the effect of the two Montevidean newspapers was notably modest, I nonetheless argue that the original images along with the figurative language in their accompanying commentary were given a ‘second life’ in later pamphlets and essays, reappearing as metaphors in various anti-Rosist texts.

In 1843, José Rivera Indarte, Argentine poet and a former supporter of the governor, published in Montevideo a pamphlet titled *Rosas y sus*

opositores (Rosas and his opponents); a *cabier de doléances* containing a compendium of crimes perpetrated by Rosas and his followers, including the famous *Tablas de Sangre* (Blood Tables), along with an appeal for the assassination of Rosas (Prieto 2020, 238–240). In his pamphlet, Rivera Indarte (1843, 38–39) recalls the former military interventions of France and Britain in the name of religion and humanity, as in the case of Greece. As for the fate of the orphans, the author quotes *El grito argentino* and refers more than once to the closure of the foundling hospitals (Rivera Indarte 1843, 140, 307–308 and 339).

The *Blood Tables* comprised the (disputable) alphabetical catalogue of Rosas's victims,¹² including macabre details of their deaths or the display of their bodies: 'At the base of it [the Plaza Mayor of Catamarca] stood a pyramid of 600 heads of slaughtered prisoners' (Rivera Indarte 1843, 329). The blood-drinking *topos* again finds mention in Rivera Indarte's libel:

There is not an act in the public life of Rosas, and few in his private life, which are undeserving of capital punishment; and the sum of one and the other place him in the category of atrocious tyrants, who are considered as dangerous and detestable as ferocious tigers fed with human blood, as serpents and venomous reptiles. (Rivera Indarte 1843, xxx)

The dehumanisation of the political adversary by means of his animalisation in texts and images seems to go hand in hand with what Julia Kristeva (1982, 12–13) argues of 'primitive' societies and their abjection of the animal 'as representatives of sex and murder'. In the anti-Rosist discourse, Rosas held the status of a pre-civilised brute, or what might be termed a 'relapse into barbarism' (Baberowski 2018, 60). The Argentine ambassador to Britain, Manuel Moreno, had already in 1843 approached a certain Alfred Mallalieu, asking him to write a defence of Rosas's policies against such calumnies (Lynch 1981, 279). In his open letter to the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Aberdeen, Mallalieu (1844, 8) presented General Rosas as a respectable ruler and a trustworthy partner of Britain. The author exhorts the chief of diplomacy not to interfere in the River Plate conflict by citing lessons learned from the recent past:

Popular sentimentalism exercises, doubtless, no small action in national policy for woe or for weal, as the case may be; but there is no denying, that,

¹² On the liability of the *Tablas de Sangre*, see Lynch (1981, 242–245).

for many years, and on many occasions, to begin only with Greece and the ‘untoward’ battle of Navarino, it has plunged this nation [Britain] in a sea of troubles. (39)

A response to Mallalieu came in the same year from an anonymous British citizen residing in Montevideo, reiterating the arguments against Rosas whose list of deeds showed ‘especial outrage to humanity and civilisation’ (Anonymous 1844, 23). The abandoned foundlings are mentioned as he alludes to the suppression of the national hospitals in Buenos Aires (32). The author states that ‘the object of the publication [...] is nothing more than an appeal to the moral and Christian sentiments of the British people on grounds of humanity and public justice’ (37). Unlike Mallalieu, he praises the ‘interference of Great Britain’, for the Oriental Republic of Uruguay ‘owes her political existence solely’ to this intervention (29). Liverpoolian journalist Thomas Baines (1845, 18) likewise justified English interference ‘not [...] merely on grounds of policy and humanity’.

It was then Mallalieu’s turn to rebut those terrible accusations. In 1845, he insisted on Rosas’s reputation as the ‘constitutional chief [...] of a State maintaining friendly alliance and relations with [Britain]’ (Mallalieu 1845, 11). He further discredited the *Times* for its calumnious treatment of the governor and for relying on Rivera Indarte’s *Tablas de Sangre* (14–15). Mallalieu further claims: ‘Reams of the paper containing the series of these impostures were dispatched by every packet and trading vessel to Europe and the United States. Not a newspaper of any pretensions which was not inundated with packages of them’ (43).

That same year, unitarian dissident Domingo Faustino Sarmiento published what would become one of the most influential nineteenth-century Latin American works of literature, politics, sociology and geography. *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* portrays the life of Juan Facundo Quiroga, a ruthless Argentine caudillo murdered in 1835, and then provides an account of General Rosas and his regime.

Sarmiento (2003, 155) mentions the ‘pyramids of human heads’ when referring to the atrocious practices of Quiroga. The same *topos* reappears later in the text, when Sarmiento compares Rosas to Maximilien Robespierre: ‘The Terror in France in 1793 was not a means, but an effect. Robespierre didn’t guillotine nobles and priests to create a reputation for himself, or to elevate himself on top of the bodies he piled up’ (176). He then refers again to Rosas when he states that ‘no monster has risen up who surrounds himself with bodies, suffocates all spontaneity and all

virtuous feeling' (246). The use of this figurative language is meant to emphasise the regime's immense death toll. In fact, the pyramid does not only suggest the despotism of his rule, but the fact that he owes his own power and position to the masses of murdered civilians (cf. Constant 1988, 147).¹³ Hence, the reader-viewer would identify with those severed heads, thus experiencing compassion for the victims and contempt for the perpetrator.

The assassinations committed in the name of the governor inspired another anonymous Montevidean publication in 1849. The *Efemérides sangrientas* (Bloody Ephemerides) was a selection of Rosas's victims configured as a calendar, creating, thus, a sort of modern unitarian martyrology. The day of 18 August is devoted to Camila O'Gorman's execution.

The chief of the post, Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Cano, an Oriental, ventured to represent the state of the girl to the tyrant: he received a bestial reprimand and the order that, after a burlesque and horrible ceremony of baptism in the womb, the order should be carried out immediately. This was done, and today at 10 o'clock in the morning, Gutiérrez and Camila, *eight months pregnant*, were shot. [...] The horror of this great crime seized even the rude soldiers, in spite of being so accustomed to shooting and slitting throats. (Anonymous 1849, 61–62, original emphasis)

Such a dramatic account could not escape Alexandre Dumas's plume in his own account of *Montevideo or the New Troy*,¹⁴ a text completed in the middle of the year 1850, when the war was still ongoing (Rocca 2016, 124). He concludes the account on Camila and Ladislao: 'Now, how is it that France makes enemies like Garibaldi, makes friends like Rosas? It is because the friends and enemies of France are imposed on her by England' (Dumas 1850, 101). This final remark reveals in no uncertain terms Dumas's critical stance on French policies in the River Plate. There had been differences even between the two most influential politicians of the late July Monarchy, François Guizot and Adolphe Thiers. The first pleaded for a moderate commitment, while the latter was in favour of a more forceful intervention (Shawcross 2018, 59–60). Britain had withdrawn from all hostilities with the Argentine Confederation after the treaty of

¹³The same *topos* was used in an 1813 caricature of Napoleon Bonaparte (Mikaberidze 2020, xxxvii).

¹⁴Considering Dumas's notorious practice of resorting to ghost writers, it is plausible to believe that the book was (primarily) written by Pacheco y Obes himself (Rocca 2016, 127).

November 1849, leaving France to battle on her own. Finally, the newly republican France signed her own treaty with Rosas in August–September of 1850, stipulating the mutual demobilisation of troops in Montevideo (Lynch 1981, 291).

Several aspects of Dumas’s account show inspiration from Rivera Indarte’s *Tablas de Sangre*, including the *topos* of piled heads:

The carters who drove these deplorable remains announced their arrival with atrocious jokes, which shut down the doors and drove the population away. We saw them detach their heads from the corpses, fill baskets with them, and, from the usual cry to the country fruit merchants, offer them to the frightened passers-by, shouting;—Here are unitarian peaches! Who wants unitarian peaches? (Dumas 1850, 59)

The sixth and final chapter describes the deplorable situation of Montevideo as a consequence of the long-lasting siege, criticising the passivity and inefficiency of the French policies towards Montevideo and General Rosas, while in the same breath offering a panegyric of the besieged city: ‘[T]hey [the besieged people of Montevideo] have called civilization to the rescue of civilization. Shall we abandon them to barbarism? And shall the last cry they utter through my voice be a useless and lost cry? Yes, no doubt, useless and lost!’ (167).

Yet, not even in France was solidarity with the besieged Montevideans and those discourses aimed at instilling compassion towards them completely free of controversy. For instance, Auguste Bourguignat, a judge at the *Cour de Cassation* in Paris, questioned the common arguments deployed in favour of Montevideo and against Rosas, whom he called the constitutional ruler of Argentina and the defender of French citizens residing in Buenos Aires (Bourguignat 1850, 34–36). Furthermore, two eminent newspapers—the *Journal des débats* and the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*—had argued that agents from Montevideo had forged fake news in order to compromise the treaty between France and Buenos Aires. These allegations led to a libel suit at the *Cour d’Assises* (Pacheco y Obes 1851). The mutual accusations reveal that the search for compassion had entered the realm of public honour, and the news of suffering in distant Montevideo was far from being considered indisputable.

The discourses, which were based on humanitarian arguments, yet often not free of political interests, also failed due to political calculations, thus unleashing a dispute spanned over a global public space. Nevertheless,

many still believed passionately in the humanitarian cause, and sympathies still ran high, as Dumas's impassioned pleas reveal.

CONCLUSIONS

For the purposes of soliciting compassion and sympathy in British and French public opinion, the enemies of General Rosas in Buenos Aires and Montevideo resorted to a Manichaean dichotomy, presenting the governor as a brutal and barbaric despot, and the suffering victims as enlightened and civilised people at his mercy. Particularly powerful were the gendered representations of vulnerability which they used to great profit: allegorical iconographies of women in bondage, helpless widows forced to abandon their children or the martyrdom of a pregnant woman in the case of Camila O'Gorman, flanked by the representations of human beings with unspecified gender such as children and skulls. Hence, the more innocent and helpless were his victims, the more guilty and depraved was the dictator who violated the most sacred taboo. Robespierre, who served as a model of comparison for Rosas in terms of bloodlust, also provides a consistent logic for compassion: to feel compassion for the victims inevitably means to be inflexible with the perpetrators.¹⁵ This line of thought would explain both Rivera Indarte's appeals for Rosas's tyrannicide and Pacheco y Obes's demands for a more decisive military intervention in the River Plate region. This dichotomy results in a moral double standard in terms of political violence. As Margrit Pernau (2014, 256) has convincingly demonstrated, the concept of civilisation implies that war is 'one of the most important elements of civilization'. Therefore, it would be too simplistic to take for granted the dichotomy within these sources. If the liberal and enlightened unitarian party abhorred Rosism for its tyrannical character, its use of physical violence and the moral corruption of its leader, there were among its enemies those who supported a less physical but no less terrible structural violence, truly one of the darkest sides of the Enlightenment. Like many European liberals of his time, Sarmiento himself was an adherent of racist theories and regarded racial mixing as a serious problem (Hooker 2017, 70; Garrels 1997). One may wonder at Dumas's own sentiments on the topic, having grappled all his life with

¹⁵I am referring here to Robespierre's plea for Louis XVI's execution. See Arendt (2006, 81).

racist offenses from friends and adversaries for being the grandson of a black slave from St. Domingue (Martone 2011, 4–6).

Although the memory of the Greek Revolution from the 1820s was evoked both by Rosas's detractors (Rivera Indarte) and sympathisers (Mallalieu), the parallels were uneasy at best, for the conflict in the River Plate was at its core a civil war between two ideological parties, both of which found support among players in Europe. Within this war of ideals, the anti-Rosists utilised the strategies of resemblance and detachment in order to generate public sympathy for their cause. Resemblance—inducing the public to feel a strong sense of empathy and commonality with one particular group—worked to strengthen compassion by emphasising shared values, racial orientation and ideology between the victims and the public. Detachment, on the other hand, had the opposite effect and depicted the enemy in terms of his otherness, making him thoroughly unworthy of compassion or mercy (Frevort 2016, 82–83). Consequently, the anti-Rosist propaganda was not free of moral contradictions. The mobilisation of these sentiments of compassion for the victims and of horror towards their tormentor pursued a clear political goal, that is, providing arguments and legitimisation for (renewed) European military action, which came to a definitive end in 1849 (Britain) and 1850 (France). This fact raises a fundamental point. Despite the consideration that a lack of empathy in fact belongs to the realm of pathology (Taithe 2017, 366), it is important to point out that humanitarian sensibility and empathy are frequently a matter of choice (Berlowitz 2016, 41–42). Readers and spectators choose to call one party the aggressor and the other the victim, to frame the first as barbaric and the second as civilised. It is, in the end, a political rather than an emotional distinction.

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