

## Chapter 6

# REACTIONS AGAINST NEOCOLONIALISM

Even before Latin America's neocolonial order crumbled around 1930, the region's writers had begun to react against it. Their reaction took the form of new resentments against powerful outsiders and a new interest in what set Latin American countries apart culturally.

The War of 1898, fought by the United States against Spain, helped precipitate the reaction. The war began when the United States intervened in Cuba, still a Spanish colony at the time, to support Cuban insurgents in their war for independence. But the outcome—US occupation of Cuba, followed by continuing US intervention there and elsewhere in the Caribbean—led to anti-US feeling throughout the region. And, somewhat ironically, the trouncing that Spanish forces received in the war made many Latin Americans more sympathetic to Spain, as well. Therefore, the anti-US reaction often took on a Hispanist coloring that emphasized and positively valued the cultural legacy of Spain. In this mood, a number of influential Latin American writers contrasted “Latin civilization” and even the “Latin race” (associated with all countries that spoke languages descended from Latin) against an “Anglo-Saxon race” and civilization, embodied by England and the United States. Probably the most influential of these writers was José Enrique Rodó of Uruguay, for whom Latin culture represented spiritual values that should be cultivated while Anglo-Saxon culture represented an excessive materialism that should be resisted. Meanwhile, Colombian José María Vargas Vila penned a screed about the “Yanqui” threat subtitled *Behold the Enemy*.

A few Latin American authors began to reject the pessimism of “scientific racist” thinking that both devalued non-European bloodlines and also insisted that race mixture—long viewed as a basic element of Latin American demographic realities—led to biological instability and overall degeneration. While baseless in fact, scientific racism was the most up-to-date European thinking in the early 1900s, the prevailing conventional wisdom in the Western world, and rather than reject it wholesale (a tall order for people steeped and educated in European thought), Latin American thinkers reinterpreted it. Their reinterpretations insisted that people of African, indigenous American, and especially *mixed* descent (*mestizos* in Spanish, *mestiços* in Portuguese) constituted viable, valuable national populations. Euclides da Cunha's description of the *sertanejo* backlander of northeastern Brazil provides an excellent example. While still framing his argument in terms of scientific racism, da Cunha narrates the heroic resistance of the *sertanejo* religious community of Canudos, which defied the Brazilian army's repeated attempts to destroy it in 1897. The fourth expedition finally obliterated Canudos in a bloodbath that da Cunha witnessed personally. The *sertanejos* of Canudos might be backward religious fanatics, goes the powerful feeling that runs through da Cunha's prose, and they might not be white, but these are people one can be proud to call Brazilian.

Meanwhile, in Buenos Aires, another sign of national authenticity was coming to the fore, the tango. Tango music and dancing was urban popular culture, an Afro-Argentine music and dance genre of considerable funkiness around 1900. The black roots of the tango are hard to recognize in current styles of the dance, but they were no secret for Argentine readers at the early twentieth century, when Vicente Rossi wrote his study *Black Stuff*, excerpted for this chapter. Rossi obviously delights in the tango's sudden, powerful international fame, which was initiated by a tango vogue that took hold in Paris just before World War I. For the first time, or so it seemed to Rossi, a Latin American cultural product had attracted the admiration and imitation of Europe, reversing the general neocolonial orientation.

Other Latin American authors turned to “tradition” as an antidote to Progress based on European models. Like *costumbrista*

writers of an earlier day, the traditionalists of around 1900 were in search of national authenticity. Folklorists were busy exploring villages and the countryside, and what they found and called "tradition" was basically the rural popular culture of the mid-1800s, before the onset of Progress. No more idyllic traditionalist description of life in a Mexican village could be found than the one that appears in Francisco Gamboa's Naturalist novel *Santa* of 1903. An idyllic description of anything at all was rare in Naturalist fiction, and rarer still, in that bleak literary school, was Gamboa's fervent religiosity. So, while writing in a novelistic style that had originated in France, Gamboa gave his version of Naturalism a traditionalist Mexican twist.

## ARIEL

### José Enrique Rodó

*Uruguay's José Enrique Rodó was born in 1872. His book-length essay Ariel (1900), based on characters from Shakespeare, was read and respected throughout Spanish America. Rodó counterposed the spritely figure of Ariel, who personified the Latin American spirit, against the materialistic figure of Caliban, representing the United States. The elite young men of Latin America should resist imitation of the United States and cultivate their own, more spiritually inclined culture, argued Rodó. The following excerpts from Ariel introduce the wise Prospero, Rodó's imaginary spokesman, and provide an example of the sort of parables Prospero uses to teach his young elite disciples.*

The venerable old master whom they called Prospero, alluding to the wise wizard in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, was bidding farewell to his young disciples at the end of a year of study, gathering them about him for one last time.

SOURCE: José Enrique Rodó, *Ariel* (Madrid, n.p., 1919), pp. 19–21, 41–43.

He had taken them into his large library, decorated with an elegance that did honor to the noble presence of Prospero's most faithful companions, books. The most prominent object in Prospero's library, its inspiration and guiding spirit, was an exquisite bronze statue of the fantastical Ariel who appears in *The Tempest*. Prospero normally sat beside the statue and for that reason the students called him by the name of Ariel's master in the Shakespearean drama. But there may have been more profound reasons, as well, for their choice of names, something about the master's character and teachings.

Ariel, the winged spirit of the air, represents nobility and refinement in Shakespearean symbolism. Ariel signifies lofty and disinterested motivations, a graceful and vivacious intelligence, cultural spirituality, and the dominion of reason and sensitivity over irrationality and base impulse. Ariel represents all that human beings should aspire to become, the aspirational endpoint of their evolution, in which the vestiges of brute, instinctual sensuality, symbolized by Caliban, are purged, chiseled away by persistent effort.

The fine statue showed Ariel in the moment when, freed by Prospero's magic, the winged spirit is about to soar into the sky and disappear in a flash of light. Wings spread, his billowing bronze tunic gilded by the caress of reflected light, his ample forehead upraised, his lips slightly parted in a serene smile, everything about the figure of Ariel indicated his graceful, impending leap into flight. And, although conferring a sculptural firmness upon his winged subject, the inspiration of the artist had managed to retain Ariel's seraphic appearance, his idealism and loyalty.

Prospero gently caressed the forehead of the statue, meditating. Then he gestured for the group of young men to gather around and, with his firm voice—a magisterial voice, able to lay out ideas with great clarity, able to insinuate itself into the depths of the human spirit, penetrating like a ray of light, shaping all it touched like a chisel striking marble, a paint brush daubing canvas, or a wave rippling the sand—with his firm voice, he addressed his attentive and affectionate listeners as follows.

*The ensuing parable taken from Prospero's final lesson illustrates Rodó's emphasis on the proper attitudes of social superiors toward the common*

people (summed up by the French phrase *noblesse oblige*) and on their need to hold spiritual values aloof from the hurly-burly of life. Here the master speaks:

I find an apt symbol of the human soul in this story retrieved from a dusty corner of my memory.

Once upon a time, in some vague and indeterminate part of the Orient where careless stories nest, there lived a kingly patriarch. The patriarch's kingdom dwelt in innocence and happiness, and he later came to be called, in the memory of men, the Hospitable King. The king's goodness and piety were antidotes to all sorts of unhappiness. Everyone sought his hospitality, which provided bread to feed the hungry and kind words to soothe the souls of the tormented. The king's kind heart was sensitive to every vibration in the hearts of others. His palace stood open to all his people. All was liberty and animation within its halls, and no guards ever barred the door. The open porticos of the palace sheltered groups of common shepherds who gathered there to listen to rustic music. Old men chatted there in the afternoons, and there, on mats of woven reeds, groups of fresh-faced women spread the boughs and flowers that constituted the only tithe ever required by the king. Merchants of Ophir and peddlers of Damascus could be seen coming and going through the wide doorways at all hours, and they vied to display their jewels, perfumes, and fabrics before the king's eyes. Those who had come on pilgrimages from afar rested their exhausted bodies beside his throne. At dawn, bands of cheerful children came to the king's bedside to see his silver beard and announce the arrival of the sun. After the midday meal, birds were invited to clear the king's table of crumbs.

His infinite generosity extended to humans and nonhumans alike. As in the myth of Orpheus or the legend of Saint Francis of Assisi, winds, plants, and birds seemed to respond to the call of human friendship in that oasis of hospitality. The tiny seeds that happened to lodge and germinate in cracks of the masonry or pavement were allowed to grow and blossom there. No cruel hand wrenched them out. No pitiless foot crushed them to a pulp. Curious

vines of ivy grew into the open windows of the palace seeking the interior chambers of the king. Winds rested, when they entered the royal precinct, and lavished upon it their cargoes of sweet aromas and pleasant harmonies. Waves that crested on the nearby seashore lunged toward the palace longingly, as though trying to embrace it, if only to refresh it with a few drops of froth. The atmosphere of liberty, the enormous and reciprocal confidence that all felt toward one another, filled the palace with a pervasive and never-ceasing celebration. . . .

But very deep inside the palace of the Hospitable King, totally hidden from the view of the vulgar throng, accessible only by secret passageways, lay a mysterious room that no one except the king was permitted to enter. Not a single echo of the outside world penetrated the thick walls of this chamber, where a religious silence held sway. The tenuous, filtered light entered languidly through thick, colored glass, illuminating the room with a soft, even glow. A more profound peace never reigned in any woodland solitude or undersea grotto. . . .

There the legendary king could liberate himself from the bonds of reality. There he could dream. There he became introspective and his thoughts could be gently burnished like pebbles tumbling in the foam. There the white wings of Psiquis could be spread open on his noble forehead. And when Death finally came to remind the king that he was, in fact, only another temporary guest in the palace that he called his own, the secret room was closed and silent forever more. No one ever set foot there again, because none of the king's former subjects was so irreverent as to profane the king's space of private dreams, the inner redoubt of his soul.

I liken the king's palace in this story to the interior life of each of you. It should be open, with the healthiest sort of liberality, to the currents of the world. At the same time, however, it should possess an inner sanctum that the rowdy guests never see or even know about, an inner sanctum that belongs to serenity and reason alone.

*Analyzing the Sources:* Relate the author's style, of which you have a good sample here, to his overall argument described in the headnote. If Rodó meant to inspire the more spiritual "Latin race" to resist crass

*Anglo-Saxon materialism, who exactly was he addressing, and what was their relationship to the majority of indigenous peoples and to those of African descent?*

## FACING THE BARBARIANS

### José María Vargas Vila

*José María Vargas Vila, born in Colombia in 1860, was an iconoclast whose penchant for "speaking truth to power" often got him in trouble. His tract Facing the Barbarians: The Yanqui, Behold the Enemy (1902) appeared in the wake of a string of US territorial acquisitions that began with the 1898 war against Spain, followed by further interventions in Central America. A sort of cross between prose and poetry, the book uses both "the Barbarians" and "the Eagle" as symbolic stand-ins for the United States. The elevated tone of the book is characteristic of the period, as is Vargas Vila's somewhat confusing application of the term raza, race, to designate something more cultural than physical.*

Everything, it seems, bends down beneath the formidable wing. The cloudiness of the horizon augments the horror of this tragic hour.

Livid sky, bloody raptor.

The imperial Eagle reigns supreme, omnipotent amid the desolation. Its wings block out the sun of Justice. The World trembles in the talons of the butcher bird. History records nothing more dreadful than this moment.

Today, nothing stands up against the Anglo-Saxon in our América Latina.

The winged horses of conquest drag their fiery chariot unimpeded. Four monstrous archangels blow their trumpets toward the four points of the compass announcing the apocalypse of Right, the

SOURCE: adapted from José María Vargas Vila, *Ante los bárbaros (los Estados Unidos y la guerra): El yanqui, he ahí el enemigo* (Barcelona: Maucci, 1917), pp. 45, 48, 62–65, 90, 114–15.

total devastation of the weak, the definitive triumph of raw might. Opportunistic hordes overrun everything, pillage everything, and the hounds that lapped the blood of Jezebel howl in the shadows beside the unburied, dismembered corpses of entire Peoples.

The ship of human Equality is sinking fast.

América Latina trembles at this bloody, brutal Victory. Vile plunder and barbarous Insolence parade proudly forth, and behind them, the people of the World follow, silent and astonished. Thus did Gaul follow behind victorious Caesar. Thus were the defeated Numidians shackled to the chariots of Rome. The World has been enslaved by Fear, stupefied by the audacity of the Eagle. As if sudden and rudely awakened, the World trembles with horror. It has been criminally subjugated by naked Force, and it bows to the Barbarians on bended knee.

Behold how the victorious conquerors frolic on the smoking battlefield. Contemplate this Odyssey of pillage:

To the cry of "Liberty," the Barbarians hurled themselves on Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico and made them captives. They announced honorable intentions, appropriate to the sons of George Washington, but they behaved instead like offspring of the filibuster William Walker. They descended on their small neighbors like the foot of an elephant, crushing the heart out of them.

The Cuban Republic, the Dominican Republic, the Nicaraguan Republic, the Panamanian Republic, and the Philippine Republic all died drowned in their own blood, suffocated by the helping hand of the friendly republicans of the North.

Cuba became a protectorate, conquest in disguise. The Philippine Islands succumbed in battle, outright conquest. Puerto Rico became a US possession, conquest by acquiescence. Santo Domingo and Panama suffered intervention, shameless conquest.

Conquest always and everywhere. And the name of this despicable crime has been changed to Victory.

And writers and thinkers and journalists of our América Latina go along. Fooled by wishful thinking, many accept the distant mirage of noble pretext and actually applaud the Eagle's perfidious sham idealism. Dazzled by Victory, they are converts to the cult of naked Force.

And so, incredibly, they try to persuade us of the Barbarians' generosity and hold up the *Great Republic* of the North as a model for our countries, as if she were our friend, our sister!

A fatal error! Fatal! This error will doom us and lead to further CONQUEST.

Why not tell the truth to the people of our América, show them the truth behind the Eagle, the truth about the barbarian race and people?

An arrogant and voracious race, hungry for our territory, fixed on conquest. A numerous people, cruel, insolent, and disdainful towards us, hatefully convinced of their own superiority.

Why not depict this country the way it really is, this overweening mongrel country that threatens us?

Bolívar, at death's door, already half enveloped in the mists of immortality, pronounced the word that offers the key to our salvation. UNION! UNION! UNION! Thus spoke the dying hero.

Let there be union embracing Mexico and Central America, a great confederation uniting these with Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador, bringing Peru together with Bolivia, and Chile with Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Union for our entire continent, according to Bolívar's great and radiant vision!

A permanent Council should be established to unify all the countries populated by our race, a Council residing in Buenos Aires to counteract the so-called Pan American Conferences organized periodically by the Invader Nation of the North.

Let us join together to defend ourselves against Invasion and Extortion, against Europe and North America.

Let us admit the invasion of Progress, but stop the progress of Invasion.

Let us constantly tighten our diplomatic and commercial relations with other countries of Latin race, including Spain and Italy.

Let us attract Spanish and Italian immigration by all possible means. Such immigration to our countries will mix with and improve the quality of our indigenous lower classes, rendering them more conscientious, more laborious, better able to exercise the rights and fulfill the duties of citizenship.

For almost thirty years I have been warning the people of our América against THE YANKEE PERIL. And, amid the deafening clamor, their ears have not heard me. Their eyes, clouded by the fog of slavery, have not seen the danger.

In my ostracism and misfortune, stranded on foreign shores, wherever the winds of exile blew me, I have carried my message of warning. I have announced the peril and denounced the enemy and have never fallen silent.

Wherever I have set foot, I have shouted my message from the bow of my arriving vessel to the people of our América Hispana:

The Barbarians are coming!

And no one listened to me.

And now the Barbarians have arrived.

*Analyzing the Sources: How does Vargas Vila reverse the signs, positive and negative, that were applied to same events by US leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt?*

## THE BACKLANDS

### Euclides da Cunha

The *Backlands* (1902), by Euclides da Cunha (born in 1866) is one of the most influential books in Brazilian history. Along with most other educated men of his day, da Cunha believed that racial amalgamation led to biological instability and degeneration. And yet the Canudos community's incredible resistance against the Brazilian army, which he witnessed personally, convinced him of the inherent power of the particular race mixture characteristic of the backlands of Northeastern Brazil. In the following selections, da Cunha first describes the sertanejo, or backlander, as a racial type, and then narrates the army's brutal final assault on Canudos, where tens of thousands lost their lives.

Indian blood naturally predominated in the backlands populations that formed along the middle reaches of the great São Francisco River. After their initial mixture, these populations then evolved in isolation from the rest of Brazil, conserving the traditions of the past during three centuries, right down to our own day. Whoever travels through those backlands today will observe a notable homogeneity among the people who populate them. The physical characteristics of sertanejo populations vary only slightly, displaying a stable racial type that contrasts at a glance from the highly variable racial mixtures of our Atlantic coastal region. On the coast there is no single, modal type, and one encounters all shades of skin color according to the particular ancestry of each individual, whereas the backland populations seem produced from a single mold, exhibiting an athletic build, straight or wavy hair, and a narrow range of complexions indicating a well-amalgamated combination of European, Indian, and African ancestry. The sertanejos likewise share the same mental and moral makeup, the same vices and the same virtues. This uniformity is truly impressive and indicates that the northern backlander has undeniably become a stable and fully formed ethnic and racial type.

Here some parenthetical considerations are in order. A mixture of highly divergent races is, in the majority of cases, prejudicial. Extreme miscegenation leads to developmental regression, and the *mestiço*\* lacks both the physical vitality of his non-European ancestors and the intellectual vigor of the European ones. Racially mixed populations may exhibit a certain brilliance of mind, but they are almost always erratic and unstable. We do not possess unity of race, and it is possible that we shall never possess it. The backlands population offers reason for optimism, however: more stable, more robust

SOURCE: adapted from Euclides da Cunha, *Os sertões* (Rio de Janeiro: Laemmert, 1903), pp. 588–91, 593–94, 615–16.

\*Portuguese *mestiço* is mostly equivalent to Spanish *mestizo*, although *mestiço* refers to any race mixture, whereas *mestizo* generally refers only to Spanish and indigenous mixtures. Da Cunha's discussion of degeneration in race mixture goes on for pages. Only the key points are represented here. [Translator's note.]

physically and therefore more capable of superior moral and mental development. Let us conclude this unappealing parenthetical digression, however, and proceed to a direct consideration of the unique figure presented by our backward fellow countryman, the sertanejo.

The sertanejo's gait is gangly, sinuous, swaying, and loose-jointed. His slouching posture aggravates the effect and gives him a beaten-down air of humility. When standing, he invariably slumps against a nearby wall or doorway. When on horseback, if he stops to exchange a couple of words with someone he knows, he slips his weight into the stirrup on a single side and reclines against the saddle. When walking, even when walking rapidly, he does not advance firmly in a straight line, but rather, meanders in a manner reminiscent of backland trails. And whenever he stops on foot for any reason, to roll and light a cigarette, for example, he immediately drops—and drops is precisely the word—into a squatting position and sits on his heels, where he can remain for long periods perfectly balanced on his two big toes, with a charming but also slightly ridiculous ease.

The sertanejo has a characteristic air of fatigue expressed in his invincible sluggishness, his perennial lack of muscular vitality, his lazy speech, his awkward gestures, his unsteady gait, his constant tendency to immobility, even in the languid cadence of the songs he habitually sings.

But this air of fatigue is entirely misleading, and nothing is more surprising than seeing it suddenly vanish. The sertanejo's apparently rickety organism undergoes a complete transmutation in an instant whenever anything requires that he unleash his slumbering energies. The man is transfigured. Swiftly, he straightens up and his movements and profile take on entirely new contours. His head, now firmly erect atop his powerful shoulders, flashes with a fearless and piercing gaze. A charge of energy courses through his nervous system, galvanizing his formerly relaxed body, and from the awkward rustic figure of the backlands emerges a potent bronze titan endowed with extraordinary force and agility.

In his normally indolent posture on horseback, the sertanejo rides along behind his herd of cattle, swaying gently in the saddle almost as if he were lying in the hammock where he spends most of his time at home. But let some steer stray into the tangled scrub

some distance up the trail, the horseman suddenly digs his spurs into the flanks of his mount, and off they go, like a shot. Nothing can stop the sertanejo in hot pursuit. Gullies, ravines, dry riverbeds lined by thick and thorny brush do not even slow him down. Anywhere a frightened steer can go, a mounted sertanejo can follow. Leaning forward, glued to his horse's back, his legs clamped to the animal's sides, rider and horse become one, a powerful centaur. Now they burst into a clearing, now they plunge once more into the undergrowth, galloping at full speed. Now the rider twists his body to dodge low boughs, now he leaps off his mount with acrobatic ease to avoid collision with a tree trunk that would otherwise send him sprawling, but, holding firmly to his horse's mane the whole time, he returns to the saddle with single bound, and all this at an undiminished gallop.

No sooner has the unruly steer been retrieved, however, than the sertanejo slouches once again in the saddle, and sways along with the inert appearance of a semi-invalid.

\* \* \*

At dawn on the first of October 1897, the artillery began to prepare for the army's final assault on the rebellious settlement of Canudos. The artillery barrage consisted of converging fire from a semicircle of cannon on the high ground surrounding the cluster of poor huts that remained. The barrage lasted merely forty-eight minutes, but the effect was annihilating. The aim of the guns had been carefully calibrated the night before and they simply could not miss the immobile target. The army was determined to teach the impenitent rebels a fulminating, implacable lesson with a final bayonet charge. So, to eliminate any obstacles to the advancing soldiers, the artillery pulverized and leveled everything on the ground over which the assault would pass.

The tortured stretch of territory was visibly transformed under the withering fire. Roofs caved in, crushing the people huddled in tiny rooms underneath them, walls of mud-daub construction exploded in a rain of splinters and clods, and here and there amid the cluster of crumbling dwellings, tongues of flame licked out, iso-

lated at first, then quickly joining together in a major conflagration. Above the flames, explosive artillery shells arched across the overcast sky of that luminous morning, and not one failed to deliver its deadly payload. They exploded in the ruins of the church, in the town square, on the roofs of the houses, or sometimes passed through the roofs and exploded inside. They exploded in the twisting alleyways blowing rubbish everywhere. The guns ranged back and forth across what remained of Canudos, demolishing it house by house.

No screams were heard, meanwhile, no one was seen fleeing, nothing. And when the last shot was fired, when thunderous noise finally ceased altogether, the quiet of the stricken settlement gave the impression that the population had somehow inexplicably fled. There was a brief silence, then a bugle sounded atop Favela Hill, and the assault began.

By prior arrangement, the waiting troops sprang forward from three points to converge on the ruined church. Most were invisible as they advanced through the alleyways or along the bottom of the dry streambed. Only one battalion, the Fourth Infantry, was visible to the other combatants, who watched it march forward in quick step and close formation, bayonets at the ready, all the way to the entrance of the town square. It was the first time that an army unit had managed to get there intact.

The Fourth Infantry entered the square in heroic style. But within a few steps the formation started to break apart, instantly off balance. Some soldiers dropped to the ground, as if to take up sheltered firing positions behind the wreckage of the ruined church. Some could be seen scattering backwards, others, charging forward. Dispersed groups milled about in confusion. And then, in the air that still hung silent over Canudos, rose a dull rumble as if from an underground explosion.

The sertanejos were coming to life, suddenly and surprisingly, as always, barring the way to the aggressor with theatrical glory. The Fourth Infantry, which was now absorbing the full fire of the ambush, was brought to a halt, and so were the Twenty-Ninth and Thirty-Ninth Infantry, just arriving. All prearranged maneuvers were now abandoned. Rather than converging on the church, the various

battalions fragmented as the troops sought shelter in narrow alleyways.

For almost an hour, the army units that watched from the hill-tops around the settlement could detect nothing more happening in the square below, other than the mounting din of distant shouting and rifle fire, a muddled uproar punctuated only by constant, successive, muffled, and anguished bugle calls. The two attacking brigades simply vanished, completely swallowed up by the jumble of splintered houses around the square. Nor did the sertanejos appear, as one might have expected, running toward the square. Assaulted from three directions, the sertanejos were hypothetically to be driven together toward the massed formations of bayonets that were supposed to be waiting for them. But the army's plan had failed totally, and that failure spelled defeat. Encountering unexpected resistance, the troops had stopped and entrenched themselves defensively in a manner entirely contrary to their assigned mission. And now, spilling out of the maze of huts and smoking rubble around the square, the sertanejos descended invisibly on the soldiers who were pinned down there.

Shortly before nine o'clock, the beleaguered army units were encouraged by an illusion of victory. Several reserve battalions reached the square, and one of their members managed to unfurl a Brazilian flag and spread it out on a remaining wall of the ruined church by tucking its corners into the cracks. Dozens of bugles sounded a tribute, and thousands of throats joined them, shouting "Long Live the Republic!"

Surprised, the sertanejos ceased firing, and the square was filled for the first time with jubilant troops. Many spectators, including three generals who had been watching from a safe distance, poured down the slope to join them in square. Hats and swords waved in the air as the joyful soldiers abandoned their positions in a delirious tumult and ran to embrace one another in celebration.

The cruel struggle had finally ended, or so it seemed.

Then, just as the generals began to fight their way through the noisy throng, they were startled to hear bullets began to whine loudly just above their heads. The battle was on again, and the square was suddenly swept clean once more.

And, returning in disarray to their sheltered positions, slipping down along the high banks of the dry streambed, crouching and running for cover wherever they could find it in the grip of sudden terror, bitterly disappointed, feeling singularly cheated by the disappearance of the victory that had appeared so imminent, mocked again by the sertanejos in the very moment when they had thought them vanquished at last, the would-be victors began to understand that the final battle was not going to be over until it had devoured them all, one by one. Their six thousand modern rifles, their six thousand sabers would not be enough. The blows of twelve thousand arms, the stamp of twelve thousand boot heels, untold numbers of shrapnel-producing shells, all the executions, all the destruction by fire, thirst, and starvation, all the ten months of fighting with its pulverization of the settlement during a hundred days of continuous cannonading under the impassive, clear blue skies of Canudos, all the devastation of its churches, with their altars thrown down and their holy images reduced to ashes—all this had been to no avail. To no avail had they attempted to extinguish the ardent religious vision, consoling and powerful, that had called the settlement into existence.

Other measures would be required to deal with an enemy so impervious to the most violent and destructive forces of nature. Fortunately, the army had foreseen the need for such measures and provided itself with dozens of dynamite bombs. Dynamite filled the need precisely. Somehow, the sertanejos had inverted the usual psychology of warfare. Their reverses only stiffened their resolve. Hunger made them stronger. Defeat made them as hard as rocks.

It made perfect sense. The army's final assault had struck solid rock, the bedrock of our nationality and our race.\*\* Dynamite,

\*\*Readers who have followed my logic and evidence concerning our national genesis, and thus recognize our unfortunate current lack of racial unity, will appreciate the significance of my having identified a remarkably stable ethnic subtype in the sertanejo population. It is only natural that, once I accepted the bold and inspiring conjecture that we in Brazil are destined to achieve racial unity eventually, I should have



therefore, was precisely the thing. Its use was appropriate and necessary. It was a consecration.

The firing ceased, and an anguished silence descended on the firing line as the dynamite was deployed. Then, a convulsive earth tremor shook the settlement and radiated out toward the overlooking hills with their encampments and artillery batteries. Seismic shocks rippled across the ground as the last standing fragments of church walls, like rows of jagged teeth, finally tottered and fell, as roof after roof was blown into the air, creating a low-hanging cumulus cloud of dust. Terrified shrieks were heard in the brief intervals between the thunderous explosions that rocked the earth. Now, it seemed, the end had indeed come as the very last bit of Canudos was blasted apart.

Outside of the zone of destruction, the troops waited for the flaming thundercloud to subside in order to renew their definitive assault.

But they would have to wait still longer. Rather than advancing, they found themselves reeling back as, incredibly, incomprehensibly, the smoldering rubble began to spit bullets at them once more. The would-be attackers had to dive for shelter. Barely did they glimpse, amid the smoke and flames, the movement of a few figures, women carrying children or pulling them along by the hand deeper into the collapsed rubble, figures fleeing randomly or writhing on the ground, their clothes on fire. And other figures, coming at them through the smoke, leaping over flames, making no attempt now to hide, standing up on the few remaining rooftops: the last defenders of Canudos. Their faces and naked torsos singed and smudged, boldly, suicidally, on they came . . .

*Analyzing the Sources: Da Cunha worked within the overall paradigm of the racist thinking of his time, yet he tried to reinterpret the implications of scientific racism for the development of the Brazilian nation. What was the gist of his reinterpretation?*

identified the sturdy backlander as the physical nucleus of our future development, the veritable bedrock of our race. [Author's note.]

## SANTA

### Federico Gamboa

*Santa (1903), by Federico Gamboa (born 1864), is yet another Naturalist novel. Their interest in the urban underclass led many Naturalist authors to write about prostitutes. In Latin America, the most important such novel is Gamboa's Santa, which has been made into a movie four times in Mexico. Gamboa was a Conservative traditionalist who ran for president, at one point, for the Catholic Party. Gamboa's traditionalism can be gauged in the following excerpt that describes Santa's idyllic life as a village girl before she was seduced and fell into a life of prostitution in Mexico City. This passage, with its rosy overtones of costumbrismo, contrasts with Santa's later life of urban decadence.*

Santa tried to drive the memories away by waving her hands in front of her, the way that back in her good times as a decent girl she had occasionally waved away the bees upon approaching their hive or fended off the most amorous doves when visiting the dovecote. But her memories did not go away. To the contrary, as if provoked by the snores of the drunk beside her, they rioted all around her, flitting in and out like fairy workers busily trying to reconstruct the temple of her innocence and the stronghold of her adolescence, both desolate and in ruins, but they only managed to make a knot in her throat, fill her eyes with tears, and wound her heart, a heart still much more virginal than her splendid young prostitute's body.

And that is why the sad, dark room was suddenly inundated with the light of her memories.

There it is . . . the little white house, hidden away on one of the narrow, unpaved lanes of her village, lanes flanked on both sides by thick foliage, flowers, and ivy that scales the high walls constructed

SOURCE: Federico Gamboa, *Santa: A Novel of Mexico City*, ed. and trans. John Charles Chasteen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 25–31.

here of brick and mortar, there of gently crumbling adobes. One enters—through a rustic wooden gate that presents no resistance to the slightest push—into a yard adorned only by the overarching sky and six orange trees, their boughs bending under their load of golden fruit or covered with white flowers that swoon with the power of their own fragrance. There is the well, deep, dark, echoing faintly with tiny mysterious sounds like a fairy cave, its water crystalline to the eye and icy to the taste, the nooks and crannies of its ancient stone rim colonized by daisies, its pulley whining terribly whenever the bucket descends into the depths. On one side of the smoky kitchen, with its wide-mouthed little chimney, is the bee hive, and on the other, higher up, the dovecote, although the doves prefer to spend their time in the branches of the nearby woods or the ruined tower of the chapel of San Antonio, also nearby. In back, a fat pig lies wallowing lazily in the mud, tethered by a leg; hens and their chicks scratch the dirt, looking up at the sky with a single eye, from time to time, by tilting their heads almost horizontally to the ground; and a large yellow and black dog, Coyote by name, dozes tranquilly in the thick shade of the orange trees. On the covered walkway that runs along the side of the house, to the left of the entrance, are various rustic chairs and stools, and there, too, hang the cages of various songbirds that fill the air with their harmonies and arpeggios each day from the first glimmer of light. On the wall, bull's horns serve as hooks from which to hang the bridle and other riding tack of the family's only horse, taken out each day to pasture along with cows and calves belonging to the owner of the local store. Tied to the posts that support each extreme of the covered walkway are two fighting cocks, one of them jet-black and the other sporting yellow feathers on its wings and around its neck, both crowing and flapping their challenges to each other when not sharpening their beaks on the ground always wet, sooner or later, with drinking water from the rusty sardine can placed beside each bird, overturned in the course of some abortive practice attack.

Inside the house, only four rooms:

First, the living room, which is also the dining room, to judge by the square table in the center of it and the massive water jug along the wall under shelves crowded with plates and dishes, cups, and

glasses of the most ordinary sort of materials. Along the other walls, wicker chairs. In a corner, a somewhat worm-eaten triangular piece of mahogany furniture that displays—along with a conch shell, a ceramic piggy bank (though shaped like an apple), and a pair of vases with silk flowers—the family's most treasured possession: a sculpture of middling quality representing the Santo Niño dressed in sequins and fringed silk, his right hand raised in blessing, seated on something one cannot quite see, and imprisoned in a large niche of leaded glass. On the floor, straw mats of various sizes; and hanging from a large nail beside the window, a guitar whose lack of dust and full set of strings testify to regular use.

Next, the bedroom of mother and daughter, who sleep in the same bed, a bed without springs or headboard, but spacious and spotless and defended by three things on the wall above it: a monochrome lithograph of the Virgin of Soledad fixed with four tacks; a colored one of the Virgin of Guadalupe in a frame that was once gilded; and a yellowed palm leaf that is replaced every Palm Sunday, whose Christian virtue protects the humble home from lightning strikes. During the day, the bed is the domain of a cat that passes the hours there, curled up in a ball.

Then, the bedroom of the two grown brothers—the breadwinners of the family, Esteban and Fabián—with two ordinary cots, a seed bin, two large trunks covered with half-cured cowhide, a piece of furniture always hung with recently and not-so-recently worn clothes, and on the walls, arranged with a certain care, an infinite number of small colored images, celebrity portraits including dancers, circus performers, and professional beauties, that come in packages of La Mascota Cigarettes. Leaning in a corner, the shotgun, with a powder horn and a bag of shot small enough to use for hunting in the woods and large enough to defend the house with, or to patrol the village with, on the nights when the brothers were assigned to do so with other young men of the village.

At the end of the house, the kitchen, with its interior cooking area and small brazier closer to the door, between two rough stone *metates*, on which mother and daughter grind corn to make tortillas.

Everywhere there is pure air, the perfume of the roses that peep over the walls, the sound of wind rustling the leaves in the trees and

water spilling softly over the village's two mill dams. During the day, the hum of insects in the sun; during the night, fireflies lit up by love, pursuing each other until, meeting, they go dark. Behind the house, myriad maguey plants, with their unvarying shade of green; on both sides, gardens and orchards; across the way, the property of their parish priest, Padre Guerra; and a few paces away, the chapel, tiny and poor, but furnished with saints who comfort the farmers in their grief and, occasionally, grant their wishes. A bit further on, the cemetery, open and silent, without marble statuary or poetic inscriptions, but offering a comfortable, protected spot for eternal slumber with its carnations and heliotropes that greedily cover the gravestones, the names of the disappeared, and the dates of their disappearances. And there is the bank of the small river, flanking the village square, shaded by ancient ash trees, the bridge hewn from a single enormous trunk, the three wash stands of crude tile where village women do laundry, and starting at the edge of the two mill ponds and their big dam, the road paved with fat, deeply seated stones that leads to the lava flow called the Pedregal.

Here, Santa is a young girl, and later, a young beauty. The little house belongs to her, the pampered daughter of old Agustina, at whose warm side she sleeps night after night. She is the idol of her brothers Esteban and Fabián, who watch over and protect her, the pride of the village, the ambition of its young men, the envy of its young women, healthy, happy, and pure. What innocence in her spirit! What loveliness in her nubile body! But why have her hips grown broad and her flesh grown so silky soft? Why have her bosoms, oh, so much more marked than they were—and not so long ago—grown these rosebuds, and why do they tremble and ache with the curious explorations of her own fingers? Why does Father Guerra not allow her to describe these worries to him in the confessional, but instead, counsel her only not to look at her own breasts?

"You don't worry like that about the flowers, do you? You don't examine them every day to see how much they've grown, do you? Well, be like them, grow and become more beautiful without even realizing it. Be fragrant without knowing it. And so that you won't lose your virginal beauty and purity, pray, confide in me, adore your mother, take care of your brothers . . . and *live*, breathe deeply, laugh

by yourself, and above all, love your guardian angel, the only male who will never deceive you."

The dawn of Santa's young adulthood simply prolonged her childhood, without troubles graver than the death of a favorite hen or a plant that she tended and watered, such as the carnation that she found withered one morning after a hard frost, its stem broken and its petals strewn—hemorrhaged like strange drops of blood—on the ground. Aside from these small sorrows and others like them, hers was an existence without dark clouds, as she grew and developed, becoming more beautiful, adoring her mother, taking care of her brothers, and breathing deeply, but not laughing by herself, because the birds, envious no doubt, laughed with her, as did the orange trees and the river and—why not admit it?—even the bell in the little chapel, that laughed with her when announcing mass at 6:30 on Sunday mornings, the mass attended with equal devotion by the villagers and by the rich families from the capital who came to summer at San Angel, and attended, too, by various officials and personages of local importance such as the pharmacist, who sometimes entertained the villagers in the evenings by employing who-knows-what mysterious arts to set several large bottles aglow with purple, red, and yellow lights. . . .

How lovely to awaken on workdays before the early rising sun! In a moment, the impotent silence of night, which is soothing in its way, would be interrupted by the crow of a rooster to which other roosters would respond, and then others and still others, ever farther away, in locations impossible to know exactly, and Santa would half open her eyes but see only her mother, toward whom she had moved, timidly, ever closer in the darkness. Half asleep, she felt herself caressed and sensed her mother's warm breath under the sheets:

"Go back to sleep, *hija*," the soft voice says. "Go to sleep. It's still dark!" It takes a while for sleep to return, and in the meantime she cannot really hear or see straight, and everything is confused, impalpable, except for a physical well-being so intense that it totally immobilizes her. She perceives that above, on the roof, the doves are fanning their tails and cooing, that the pig is grunting outside, and that in the next room Esteban and Fabián are out of bed, pouring water in the washbasin. They cough and strike matches to light a

cigarette or the stove for breakfast. Santa is going back to sleep now, losing a sense of the passage of time between noises that she hears, and she barely registers the entrance of her brothers into the bedroom, on tiptoes so as not to awaken her, for which she smiles in somnolent gratitude. They have come to say goodbye, to receive the daily blessing that will protect them and give them, the family breadwinners, strength to continue as workers at the Contreras textile mill miles away from their house. The brothers remove their hats, kneel, and bow their heads very low so that their mother will not need to sit up and can stay under the blanket, and, following the ancient custom, they reverently implore:

"Your hand, mother . . ."

Agustina's outstretched hand blesses each of them, and feeling blindly, she pulls them to her together and embraces them together, confusing the two heads that she loves equally, and the two big men softly kiss the old hand that makes the sign of the cross in the air. They leave, on tiptoe again, and in the yard Coyote barks at them jubilantly. They close the front gate, and in the silence that covers the sleeping village, the sound of their footsteps, loud at first, disappears little by little, like the rhythm of a distant pendulum. Santa's mother sighs and raises her voice as though to be better heard by the Almighty:

"Lord, take care of my sons!"

Rays of pallid light begin to poke their way in the cracks around doors and windows, the noises get louder, and the bells of dawn begin to ring at the old Carmelite convent, and ding dong, ding dong, their music flies down the roads, by houses, orchards, and newly sown fields. Agustina rises and tucks the blanket carefully around Santa, who, reconquered by slumber, sleeps for another hour and dreams that life is good and that happiness exists.

Overflowing with health and tranquility, Santa rises and sings in the early morning as she cleans the cages of her birds, draws chilly water from the well, and washes her face, neck, arms, and hands with soapsuds that caress her skin as they slowly slide off it, making her smile with contentment. Her young blood races through her veins, colors her cheeks, and fills her red lips, as if kissing them

gluttonously. Soon she is dressed for the day and has fed the chickens and doves, who crowd around her and follow her gently like devoted subjects. The pig, grunting with satisfaction, has buried his snout in the little pile of corn that she carried to him in her apron, and Coyote has greeted her, bounding and barking. The store owner's young helper has come to take their old horse out to pasture with the animals belonging to his master, don Samuel: melancholic cows, recently milked, their calves ravenous, turbulent, and protesting. Cows and calves depart down the lane in a slow procession, sticking their faces into the leaves and flowers on the walls, examining the maguey plants, even swirling into the always-open cemetery, where graves thick with green offer them a delicious breakfast.

"Santa! I'm leaving, get the chestnut horse out here!" shouts the boy from the lane, without looking at her or at the cattle, who continue their lazy march, because he is so intensely occupied untangling his sling with teeth and fingernails. Santa shoos the chestnut through the gate, unencumbered by saddle or bridal, and says to the boy:

"Careful, Cosme! Don't gallop him or get him too hot. . . . Want some milk?"

"Just give me some and you'll see! Don't you have any honey from your bees? It makes stale bread taste wonderful," says Cosme, as he takes a length of cord from around his waist to improvise a lead for the horse.

Santa goes to the house and returns with a glass of frothy milk in one hand and, in the other, a slice of bread spread with honey that hangs off its edges in transparent threads that never reach the ground. Cosme drains the glass of milk, runs his tongue around his lips, seizes the honeyed crust of bread, and throws himself on to the chestnut, squeezing its flanks with his bare heels. The old horse responds with a canter despite its years, and the boy, prodigiously balanced atop the bounding animal, twists his upper body back toward Santa as he takes a bite of the bread.

"Don't get mad, Santa. I'm only going fast now because the cows are getting away from me. As soon as I catch up . . ."

The rest of his sentence is inaudible as he disappears around a bend in the lane, the horse now at a full gallop, Cosme leaning far forward the way circus riders do in the ring.

It is not yet seven o'clock, and yet the sun leaning over the mountain ridge turns the treetops golden, peers here and there into the houses, and casts absurdly long shadows of everything that it finds, making a rose bush seem antediluvian, an ordinary dog appear a hulking dinosaur, and a tree trunk, many leagues in length. With the glinted reflections of the river and the floral aroma exuded by all nature—even leaving aside the ripple of water, the singing of birds, and the rustle of the wind in the trees—there is something impalpable that floats on the air and rises like a wordless prayer that the earth, eternally wounded, thinks and utters upon awaking each morning, a profound prayer of thanksgiving for having escaped, for one more night, the cataclysm that hangs over it and that will finally, treacherously come to mutilate it and annihilate its sacred, infinite, maternal fecundity. . . . Full of these impressions, Santa lifts her eyes to the heavens, her nostrils flaring, and stands motionless, almost ecstatic, herself an unconscious part of the earth's wordless prayer of thanksgiving.

*Analyzing the Sources:* How does this selection relate to the idea of Progress? Remember that Santa's eventual life as a high-society prostitute is characterized by the latest in European fashion and urban luxury (along the lines of Doctor Glow's life in *The Stock Market*).

## BLACK STUFF

### Vicente Rossi

*Black Stuff* (1926) by Vicente Rossi (born in Uruguay, 1871) demonstrated that the tango has roots in the dancing of nineteenth-century social organizations formed by slaves and free blacks. The book was an iconoclastic slap at prevailing Eurocentrism, and its argument has never been popular in Argentina or Uruguay. In the following excerpt, Rossi recounts the tango's famous diffusion to Paris, the launching pad for its

*international dissemination and rise to global celebrity on the eve of World War I. This is a famous example of a general pattern whereby elements of Latin American popular culture receive acceptance among the middle class of their home countries only after gaining recognition abroad.*

The tango finally showed up in Paris, the great marketplace of dances from all over, the place from which dance fashions are exported around the world.

And if Paris expected to laugh at our "black stuff," it was terribly mistaken, because, as things turned out, our blacks got the last laugh. The tango, good Río de la Plata *criollo* that it is, shrewd and resourceful from its long experience on the streets of Buenos Aires, took the measure of the situation and immediately applied the limitless animal energy of its warm, silky, redolent flesh. It made the Parisians dizzy with its languid sensuality of a pampered woman gently stretching her limbs. The tango's suggestiveness reenergized the hearts and minds and feelings of people who believed that they had already exhausted all the strong sensations capable of enlivening human existence without endangering it.

Parisian annals record no greater choreographical triumph than the advent of the tango in the City of Light, and the same can be said about all the other European cities that, observing the excitement of Paris, hastened to extend their own invitations for a visit from the provocative Argentine traveler.

According to an Argentine chronicler, the tango arrived in Paris initially "carried there by lily-white hands," meaning that the first to introduce it were female members of Buenos Aires high society. They kept it hidden away in luxurious surroundings, and the street-wise tango felt ill at ease amid their tapestries and fancy furnishings. It was incapable of really showing its stuff until much later, when

SOURCE: adapted from Vicente Rossi, *Cosa de negros: Los orígenes del tango y otros aportes al folklore rioplatense, rectificaciones históricas* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Argentina, 1926), pp. 181, 190–94.

true tango-dancing Argentines, delegates of the common people, travelled to Paris and offered more authentic demonstrations.

These more authentic demonstrations occurred in unpretentious settings like popular taverns where the dance felt much more at home and which, quickly infatuated by the newcomer, invited it back night after night. Glad tidings flashed through the city, and other, more prestigious venues made attractive offers to the jaunty newcomer, adding the tango to the programs of music halls, cabarets, and places of diversion frequented by the pleasure-seeking upper class.

By 1912, our humble black stuff was rising to fame, not only in Paris, but also in the other cities of France and neighboring countries. By 1913, all Europe had become intensely preoccupied with the tango. It occasioned a general commotion, a scandal, a public issue that, for a time, absorbed the social and intellectual energies of the Old World, occasioning opinion surveys, journalistic discussions, and the creation of new Europeanized versions of the dance. Aristocrats, princes, and emperors, the entire hereditary ruling caste of the decrepit Old World weighed in.

By 1914, the popular triumph of our inimitable black stuff had reached delirious heights in societies that had once, in a now-forgotten past, burdened the ancestors of the black creators of the tango with the heavy chains of slavery. One could hardly imagine a more refined and amusing form of vengeance. In Europe, everyone could intuit the black stuff hidden in the irresistible twists and turns of the suggestive dance. But European intellectuals insisted on proposing the most farfetched sorts of tango origins, firmly discarding the memory of black people, as always, after having thoroughly exploited them. The intellectuals discussed the influence of Thebans, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Babylonians, and Lacedemonians. They noted remarkable similarities with dances of the much-cited Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. They offered tribute to their own ancestors, the barbarians of northern Europe, and evoked the mysteries of Asia. Finally, they waxed metaphysical, the last resort of an intellectual who cannot identify the truth or simply wishes to avoid it.

This European consternation echoed across the Atlantic to the surprise of the Río de la Plata press, which ignored the tango's

merits, and, if it paid the dance any attention at all, did so unfavorably. Our journalists could never understand how the five letters of the African word *tango* had achieved such prominence in a region of the world usually reserved, in our newspapers, for editorials and in-depth reportage on momentous matters.

No one, absolutely no one in Europe knew the geographic location of Argentina until only a few years ago. The European press never published a single thing about us, as if we did not even exist. The telegraph only transmits news in one direction, after all: from there to here. No European intellectual ever registers anything positive about us. Our América figures not at all in the curriculum of European schools. All anyone in Europe knew or cared about us is that we pay well and in hard currency and offer a lucrative market.

And now our black stuff has promoted international fraternization and cultural exchange between Argentina and Europe more efficaciously than the labors of white diplomats ever did. Here's what an English correspondent wrote to me from London in 1914:

It would be an injustice to deny that the tango, the craze that has currently seized all Europe, has had a markedly educational influence. Because of it, the great mass of the public has learned the name and whereabouts of the Argentine Republic during the last six months. We now know more about Argentina than we cared to learn from many years of reports on crops and railroad construction. The tango, then, must be accounted Argentina's peaceful weapon of Old World conquest.

And ten years after that, we sent them boxers and soccer players who expanded European awareness of us further. In other words, we are educating Europe by means similar to those that Europe applied when supposedly *civilizing* us centuries ago, with punches, kicks, and black stuff.

*Analyzing the Sources: Despite Rossi's precocious embrace of black cultural influences as a sign of Argentine identity, Europe retains an important role in this thinking. What is that role?*