

Towards a Modern Synergy: Cultural Massification and the Compartmentalization of Books and Publics in Argentina and Brazil (1920–1960)

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Around 1920, three small, emerging publishing houses made similar changes to their distribution models. Claridad and Babel in Argentina, and Monteiro Lobato in Brazil decided to link their growing catalogues of books, then largely sold in bookstores and by mail, to modern magazines sold in newsstands and by subscription. They accomplished this mainly by featuring the list of available book titles prominently in the magazines. Their main goal was to advertise a series of unique products—books catering to more or less specific reading interests—through general-interest, more accessible periodical publications. In this way, they also aimed to regularize demand for books by cultivating a loyal group of readers.

In so doing, these publishing houses also contributed to linking two highly divided circuits: newsstands and bookstores. This separation, however, was a structural one, and the incompatibilities between literary materials and publics that circulated in each of them were still a central organizing element in the literary sphere as a whole. The elite, who made books and book consumption a defining feature of its civilizing role, patronized a small number of exclusive bookstores. At the same time, growing groups of popular, working-class, and immigrant readers, made visible by the spectacular (and ongoing) expansion of the press, read periodicals almost exclusively. In fact, the early twentieth-century cultural spheres in Argentina and Brazil were defined in important ways precisely by the spatial nature of their forms of compartmentalization—to the extent that it is possible to speak instead, in this early stage, of spatial segregation.

This article discusses the process by which Claridad, Babel, and Monteiro Lobato sought to integrate the newsstand and the bookstore, thereby rendering these spaces increasingly complementary. This step, I argue, constituted a key transitional moment in the massification of the literary sphere, by which a space of cleaved circuits rapidly gave way to the model I call “the modern synergy.” Characterized by an increasingly tight discursive infrastructure—made centrally of reviews and advertising featured regularly in periodicals—the modern synergy further weakened the spatial divide and allowed for a defining feature of any massified cultural space to emerge: the coexistence of conflicting but mutually

visible modes of appropriation met with a developed discursive infrastructure through which forms and rationales of compartmentalization are elaborated and diffused—and also challenged.

The first section of this paper outlines the theoretical framework, situating the argument in the context of scholarship on cultural massification and appropriation. We have a great deal to learn from the history of the book, and especially from an approach that brings together the “close reading” often practiced by book historians and the more distant insights and debates of the sociology of culture. In the second section, I trace the decline of an all-encompassing institution, which I call the “Total Bookstore,” that played a central role in maintaining the divided circuits of the early twentieth-century literary sphere. In the third and fourth sections, I analyze the strategies by which Claridad, Babel, and Monteiro Lobato, blurring the spatial divide, attempted to decouple the circulation of books from their modes of appropriation. Finally, I briefly describe the synergy of advertisements and reviews achieved in the 1940s and 50s and argue that it served as a discursive infrastructure that provided a platform for the compartmentalization of books and publics more fitting for the age of cultural massification.

The Appropriation of Books in a Massified Literary Sphere

In recent years, as part of a more general interest in book history that this special issue reflects and encourages, there is an increasing focus on “políticas editoriales.”¹ In everyday use, the expression simply refers to the strategic decisions made by specific publishers or by the State within the realm of publishing. When taken up by scholarship, however, these definitions of “política” are conflated—it is often with an eye on history and politics that scholars approach the sometimes-minute decisions of one or several actors in publishing history.

My aim is no different. In discussing a specific change in a few publishers’ distribution models, I mean to explore a transformation I consider central to the process of cultural massification more generally. Much like “modernization,” the term “massification” seems to describe a flagrant historical reality—an intuitable phenomenon whose actual workings are often too readily assumed. It is the qualitative transformations brought about by this process that interest me the most. Put differently, I wish to highlight some of the infrastructural and behavioral transformations that this elusive term entails in the literary sphere.

It is no feat to consider these publishers in light of a process of expansion and diversification in readership, as this is indeed how they have always been understood by most observers.² These publishing projects were born towards the end of a decades-long period of intense, even massive foreign immigration and

¹ See, for instance, José Luis de Diego’s edited volume on Argentine publishing history, which quickly became the reference book on the topic, *Editores y políticas editoriales en Argentina*. The emphasis on “políticas editoriales” may also be an attempt to distinguish new, more analytical ways of understanding the history of the book from the more traditional, antiquarian-style histories common in the Spanish-speaking world.

² See Buonocore, De Sagastizábal, de Diego.

the subsequent growth and development of cities and of national infrastructure, during an upswing in schooling and literacy—significantly stronger in Argentina than in Brazil—unmatched by the growth of libraries (Giordanino). This all took place in the aftermath of a World War I, which encouraged, through an import-substitution effect, a slow increase in domestic production of printed materials. An expanding readership was becoming visible and appealing to a variety of actors, not least of which were the national newspapers. These new publics, however, seemed only reachable in the newsstands, through periodical publications.

Beyond the opposing but complementary images of a democratic culture in the making and a massive lowering of standards, I want to point to the structural underpinnings that, while linking Claridad, Babel, and Monteiro Lobato to an ulterior reorganization of the literary space in 1940s-50s (the “modern synergy”), allow us to see the blueprint of cultural massification.

In structural terms what these publishers attempted to accomplish could be described as a decoupling of the circulation of modes of appropriation of literature from the material circulation of books—which the previous structure of the literary sphere, as I will show, kept entangled. By “modes of appropriation,” a common term in the sociology of culture, I refer to more or less socially-regulated uses of relatively specific goods.³ These entail ways of reading in the broadest sense—of projecting meaning onto everyday life (and back), of grouping and hierarchizing information or producing knowledge, etc. It also involves sets of practices associated with literature, such as forms of accessing, collecting, and sharing texts, as well as contexts and vocabularies to make sense of them.

When considered within a history of cultural massification, both the 1920s link and the 1950s synergy (or, more generally, the turn from material to discursive forms of compartmentalizing books and publics) are revealed to be strategies to make room for a proliferation of increasingly diverse and conflicting modes of appropriation. Furthermore, the modern synergy is a model that overcomes the previous one’s weaknesses. These transformations, as I will show in the last section, are representative of the development of an infrastructure for cultural consumption in the modern capitalist city, one that allows for an increasingly unified literary market and ever more heterogeneous repertoires of mutually visible modes of appropriation.

This is consistent with a marginal but important hypothesis of Pierre Bourdieu’s, which Douglas Holt deems key to understanding the social stratification of mass-produced cultural goods (Holt 5). According to Bourdieu’s classic *Distinction: Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984), consumption is always cultural and systematic in that it mobilizes forms of meaning that stem from a social interplay aimed at either preserving or challenging social inequality. Family and social class, as well as years of formal education, account to a large extent for differences in consumption patterns and preferences (endowed with uttermost singularity under the name of “taste”). In the French national surveys that served as the basis for *Distinction*, and in fact made it possible, an important emphasis

³ Insofar as such a use is recognizable by others—establishing more or less clear relations to other uses—it may fulfill an identitarian function.

was placed on the stratification of goods themselves, i.e. the relative appeal and prestige of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (Bach) versus the “Blue Danube” (Strauss) among different groups.

This emphasis allowed some cultural researchers to present the massification of culture (especially, Holt asserts, in countries like the US, where mass culture was deemed to cut across social classes much more thoroughly than in France) as an objection to Bourdieu’s model. The relative equalization of goods consumed by different groups allegedly entailed a more general weakening of consumption patterns in the social structure, and thus of strategies of cultural distinction. While there may well be some degree of French “exceptionality” in *Distinction*’s picture, it is hardly enough, according to Holt, to make it ill-suited to the Americas.

For Bourdieu also observes that the wider availability of certain goods—which makes it difficult to appropriate them exclusively—triggers a fragmentation and proliferation of the *modes* of appropriation. Using qualitative surveys, Holt attempts to show how similar goods or activities were experienced, understood, and described differently by different groups, purporting to serve heterogeneous personal and social functions. This, he claims, is central to making sense of the transformations brought about by the massification of culture: it is not only the goods themselves, but also the reasons and ways to use the same or similar goods that are socially distinctive and therefore potentially stratified/stratifying.⁴

For these functions to be fulfilled effectively in the literary sphere, a new articulation between books and modes of appropriation had to be created. In what follows, I will describe and analyze this development, underscoring some of the infrastructural and behavioral transformations that it entailed.

The Decline of the Total Bookstore

Readership expanded dramatically, though in a highly uneven fashion, around the turn of the nineteenth century in both Argentina and Brazil; books and bookstores, on the other hand, seem to have largely stagnated until the second

⁴ On this point, let me quote *Distinction* in extenso: “The dominant fractions do not have a monopoly of the uses of the work of art that are objectively—and sometimes subjectively—oriented towards the exclusive appropriation which attests the owner’s unique ‘personality.’ But in the absence of the conditions of material possession, the pursuit of exclusiveness has to be content with developing a unique mode of appropriation. Liking the same things differently, liking different things, less obviously marked out for admiration—these are some of the strategies for outflanking, overtaking and displacing which, by maintaining a permanent revolution in tastes, enable the dominated, less wealthy fractions, whose appropriations must, in the main, be exclusively symbolic, to secure exclusive possessions at every moment. Intellectuals and artists have a special predilection for the most risky but also most profitable strategies of distinction, those which consist in asserting the power, which is peculiarly theirs, to constitute insignificant objects as works of art or, more subtly, to give aesthetic redefinition to objects already defined as art, but in another mode, by other classes or class fractions (e.g., kitsch). In this case, it is the manner of consuming which creates the object of consumption, and a second-degree delight which transforms the ‘vulgar’ artifacts abandoned to common consumption, Westerns, strip cartoons, family snapshots, graffiti, into distinguished and distinctive works of culture” (282–83).

decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, between 1880 and 1910, according to Adolfo Prieto's "perplexing conclusion," the space of lettered culture in Argentina "apenas si modificó sus dimensiones en esos treinta años cruciales" (*El discurso* 15).

In that period, an institution which I refer to as the Total Bookstore reigned supreme. For our interests, what is distinctive about it is the overlap of functions—import, print, distribution, visibilization—within a spatially defined unit.⁵ Bookstores, then, centralized almost all aspects of the social life of books.⁶

Embodied in the figure of their foreign owners, customarily spotted answering letters behind the register, bookstores were a source of overseas literary news, mainly European and, to a lesser extent, American. They selected which and how many books to import, often consulting with their most distinguished clientele (Velarde 39). Since the majority of local books, even the most popular ones, were still printed in Europe, they coordinated production through partners or proxies, usually in Paris. After delivering the printed copies to the author, or to whoever was paying the run, their duty as "publishers" was usually over.⁷

This centrality accorded their shop windows a first and influential power of legitimation (Sarlo 20)—a power which is always, at least at the outset, an ability to make things visible. As this role faded in the following decades, exuberant testimonies looked back to their heyday. In 1937, Brazilian editor Henrique Pongetti compared "a colocação de um exemplar das suas obras na vitrina do centro" of Garnier or Laemmert bookstores in Rio, around the turn of the nineteenth century, to a "verdadero Prêmio Nobel só concedido aos amigos do peito da casa" (Pongetti 10). And Roberto Giusti, one of the most important Argentine critics of the first half-century, likened the honor of being offered "una vidriera" at Moen's in Buenos Aires (that is, to be featured exclusively in their windows) to an invitation by William, the German Emperor, to his yacht, or one by Edward VII, the British monarch, to a hunt (Giusti 100). That these comparisons seem excessive even as hyperbole speak to the difficulties these observers faced when trying to convey, to their younger contemporaries, this institution's previous importance.

The small number of elegant, centrally located bookstores in Rio and Buenos Aires—which held a virtual monopoly—had another important spatial function. They allowed the political and the literary elites to cross paths and to mingle. Thus, they sanctioned an imaginary that was dear to both spheres, particularly as they became estranged by the relative autonomization of both: that of the civilizational nature of government, that of literature's stake in the nation's fate.⁸

⁵ Those functions, heterogenous in retrospect, were of course generally perceived as inherent to bookselling as a single activity.

⁶ I am referencing Erving Goffman's concept of the "total institution" in a slightly tongue-in-cheek manner. Goffman used the term for prisons, orphanages, or mental asylums, among other institutions that aspire to oversee its members' lives completely.

⁷ General concepts about this period of publishing can be found in Pastormerlo and Hallewell.

⁸ A Brazilian *jeu d'esprit* of that time captures this state of affairs quite accurately—and more effectively in that it serves to prove what it seems to mock. As they lingered around Garnier in the early evening, the joke goes, writers discussed politics and politicians talked about literature.

Uribatan Machado, biographer of Rio's bookstores, recounts a telling sequence of events in the history of Garnier. "Um dos motivos da glória da livraria é um grupo de mobília formado por sofá e quatro cadeiras, com assento e encosto de palhinha austríaca, onde Machado [de Assis] e seus amigos costumavam se sentar. . . . Quando chega a Rio de Janeiro, em 1912, [writer and journalist] Humberto de Campos já não encontra o sofá, mas apenas três ou quatro cadeiras" (169). The subsequent manager chose to get rid of "as peças ilustres" and instead set up a table for books on sale. Presumably, these attracted a very different type of clientele. "[Nos] últimos tempos, [Garnier] não era sequer a sombra do que fora outrora, na era de ouro em que os nossos mais ilustres homens de letras e de política lá se iam reunir para conversa, troca de impressões e mesmo de ideias," Augusto Frederico Schmidt recalled (qtd. in Machado 171).⁹

The Total Bookstore's centrality depended on a relatively clear material divide between the lettered circuit we just briefly described and a popular one. The composition of the latter included popular texts like Brazilian "literatura de cordel," cheap artisanal chapbooks, and Argentina's "criollista" and "cocoliche" poem collections, whose existence was "revealed" (and denounced) by essayist Ernesto Quesada in his 1903 "El criollismo en la literatura argentina." However histrionic we may want to consider the Argentine lettered circuit's response to Quesada's revelations—epitomized by Miguel Cané's vow *not to* read any of that, and his call to have it destroyed by schooling (Rubione 231–32)—it is a fact that a certain incommensurability between these popular editions and the "literary" ones was maintained in practice. Most of the titles mentioned by Quesada were ignored by both public libraries and the contemporary press, partially surviving only by virtue of the anthropological inclinations of particular individuals. Today it is not possible to study Argentine popular literature of the turn of the nineteenth century without consulting Ernesto Quesada and Robert Lehmann-Nitche's collections, preserved at the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, in Berlin.¹⁰

The changes in Garnier's layout described above are exemplary of the spatial transformations brought about by the process of massification in the Total Bookstore. This process rendered the old, spatially segregated structure of the literary sphere almost unrecognizable in a short period of time.

In and Out of the Newsstand: Babel & Claridad in Argentina

The popular circuit also included cheap editions of European literature, both high and lowbrow, sold in newsstands and general stores. For almost twenty years (1901–1920), this development was given momentum by one of Argentina's most traditional newspapers. Using idle printing machine time, *La Nación* released hundreds of translations, mostly of nineteenth-century European classics, which

⁹ On Schmidt as an editor, see Sorá, "Livraria Schmidt." Schmidt's quote is from *O Galo Branco* (1957).

¹⁰ Adolfo Prieto's *El discurso criollista en la formación de la Argentina moderna* is the unavoidable reference.

would later be taken up by other popular publishers (Abraham 40). A new development, represented by small publishing houses like Claridad and Babel, arose from this niche—part of the phenomenon of import-substitution triggered by the First World War.

As I mentioned, I want to discuss a specific element in these publishers' trajectories.¹¹ Their beginnings, in fact, were akin to a series of previous popular undertakings, aimed at reprinting complete works in a cheap "cuadernillo" (chapbook) format, and offering them periodically in newsstands (Buonocore 98). Unlike some of their precursors and competitors, however, both *Cuadernos Selectos-América* (later renamed *Babel*) and *Los Pensadores* (later *Claridad*) emphasized lettered values like collectability and durability; an understanding of culture as a cumulative good—as a treasure. From early on, buyers who reached a certain number of "cuadernillos" were invited to bind their collections into a thick volume.

To target new readers for literature in the newsstand was only natural, for the disjuncture between the remarkable growth of the press and the relative stagnation of book publishing during the turn of the century must have been clear to any interested observer. For those who had first-hand experience of non-lettered reading practices, and of the circulation of printed matter among some of the growing groups of new readers, it must have been indeed striking.

Both Antonio Zamora, founder of Claridad, and Samuel Glusberg, of Babel, were immigrants with humble backgrounds and no formal education beyond high school. They were both socialists, an inclination that informed their publishing projects in divergent ways.¹² Both, however, were undoubtedly guided by the insight that the reality of popular reading practices found an obstacle in the current structure of book publishing. Having distributed exclusively in the newsstands for some time, Zamora and Glusberg split their activities into two, seeking an articulation between different spaces and circuits.

Glusberg and his brother launched *Cuadernos Selectos-América* in 1919. Two years later he released a more modern periodical called *Babel*. It was composed of shorter pieces, many of which were commissioned and often bore a stronger connection to current affairs. In 1922, having reached fifty "cuadernillos" with reprints of complete texts, many of them by local authors, *Cuadernos Selectos-América* turned into a collection of unpublished books bearing almost the magazine's name (BABEL in capital letters, now an acronym for Biblioteca Argentina de Buenas Ediciones Literarias), meant to be sold also in bookstores and, later, by mail.

Zamora started publishing a periodical, thirty-two-page-long "cuadernillo" called *Los Pensadores* in January 1922, offering reprinted complete texts in the newsstands. He was a proofreader for *Crítica*, one of the national newspapers credited with reinventing print journalism for a mass audience. Decades later, Zamora recounted how he realized one day that the 380-page-long book by Tolstoy he was reading, a comparatively expensive work, could in fact fit in a tight

¹¹ For a more general description and/or analysis, see Buonocore; Delgado; and Espósito.

¹² About Zamora, see Ubertalli; about Glusberg, see Tarcus.

2-column 32-page chapbook (Corbière 38). Soon after, he also started publishing cheap books under the Henri Barbusse-inspired name *Claridad*.¹³ (At the time, securing copyright was not much of an issue.) In November 1924, having reached one hundred “cuadernillos” with complete works, *Los Pensadores* turned into a more modern magazine, featuring short articles of a strikingly heterogeneous nature. It bore the following subtitle: “Revista de selección ilustrada, arte, crítica y literatura. Suplemento de la editorial *Claridad*.” In 1926 the magazine’s name also changed to *Claridad*, while the subtitle now read: “Revista de arte, crítica y letras / Tribuna del pensamiento izquierdista.”¹⁴

Regardless of the order of steps, the goal was the same. After fulfilling their customers’ reading needs entirely in the newsstands through book-to-be periodicals, both Glusberg and Zamora created cheap, heterogeneous, general-interest, ephemeral periodicals to complement a series of autonomous, longer-selling, more traditional books.¹⁵ The “lettered” values of the latter—the durable, cumulative, collectible, aspirational nature of the work of culture—were already present in the binding option offered to loyal “cuadernillo” buyers. This was a new step in the process of developing a distribution structure better suited for the conditions of a massified readership, while training customers along the way.

In both magazines, *Babel* and *Los Pensadores/Claridad*, the catalogue of books available for purchase was featured prominently. In July 1925, next to the list, *Los Pensadores* stated: “Estas ediciones estarán en venta en todos los Kioscos, puestos de periódicos, librerías del interior y estaciones de ferrocarriles y subterráneo”—an overstatement underscoring its multi-spatial ambition. Soon after they were also sold by mail.

Claridad’s books were organized in simple collections according to genre or topic: “Los poetas,” “Biblioteca científica,” “Teatro nuevo,” “Los contemporáneos,” “Clásicos del amor,” etc. The value of these categories was entirely practical. They meant to circumscribe a generic reading interest in order to help customers navigate a large and rapidly growing catalogue, punctuated by side “Sold Out” notes. Indeed, the collections created series of roughly interchangeable texts, as can be inferred by the following note in a mail-in order form: “Con frecuencia se agotan algunas de las obras en existencia. Cuando haga su pedido, indique varios títulos para reemplazar las que se hubieran agotado” (*Claridad* 242, n.p.).

For readers used to doing all their reading in one space, this reading *out of the newsstand* encouraged by *Babel* and *Claridad* should indeed be considered a training in lettered values, as Ubertalli rightly notes:

¹³ A veteran of World War I, Barbusse wrote a novel, released a magazine, and founded a pacifist movement under the name “Clarté.”

¹⁴ The location of *Claridad*’s office and bookstore, in the middle-class, proverbially *tanguero* neighborhood of Boedo, would soon become an aesthetic tag, roughly synonymous with “social realism.” Their counterparts in this famous 1920s polemic, subsumed under the name of Buenos Aires’ most elegant street, Florida, were the upper-class contributors to the avant-garde magazine *Martín Fierro* (1924–27).

¹⁵ A similar intention can be recognized in the “revistas bibliográficas” of the period. These were catalogue/house organ style publications offered by publishers like Jacobo Samet (*Noticias Literarias*, 1923–24) and Lorenzo Rosso (*La Literatura Argentina: Revista Bibliográfica*, 1928–1937).

[un] acercamiento paulatino por parte de estos sectores a un objeto distinto; un objeto que es entendido como portador de determinado status social del que adolecían los soportes de alta circulación como las publicaciones periódicas o los folletos: el objeto libro. No solo se trata tan solo [sic] de difundir determinados contenidos propios de la “alta cultura universal” sino además, un hábito más ajeno a estos sectores como el de la lectura de libros. (79)

Readers formerly unaccustomed to books and excluded from bookstores gradually acquired a new “habit,” thereby diversifying the audience of the book and eventually that of the bookstore. This diversification—presupposed by any process of massification—both required and brought about a major transformation in the circulation of books and the organization of publics. Monteiro Lobato recognized it with pioneering clarity.

The Independence of Books and Motives: Monteiro Lobato in Brazil

There were only about 30 proper bookstores in all of Brazil around 1920 (Halliwell 245), then a huge and poorly connected country of 30 million people and only six cities over 100,000 inhabitants. Most bookstores were located in Rio de Janeiro, the hypertrophied metropolis that served as the nation’s bureaucratic, political, and cultural capital. In important regional centers like Porto Alegre in the south or Recife in the north, and also in the rapidly growing São Paulo, only a few hours away from Rio, “os mercados do livro eram organizados por forças centrípetas aos Estados” (Sorá, *Brasilianas* 30). In 1918, in search for new outlets for his publishing project, Monteiro Lobato wrote a letter from São Paulo to store keepers across the country. Although in fact lost and later reconstructed, this letter has become a sort of literary masterpiece in its own right.

José Bento Monteiro Lobato (1882–1948) is customarily credited with pioneering most things “modern”—or retrospectively held so—in literary publishing in Brazil, an excess already noted by Gustavo Sorá (*Brasilianas* 52). It is usually claimed that he expanded and reinvented the market for books in Brazil in the 1920s, giving it a national scope (Ênio Silveira, qtd. in Ferreira 43; Koshiyama 10). As a writer, he has even been deemed a sort of Brazilian Luther, who revolutionized an ossified literary language to make it accessible to all (Travassos 177). He has been praised specifically as a pioneer of children’s literature. He also contributed to raising the material standards of Brazilian books, by importing better paper and printing machines. In addition, he spearheaded the use of advertising to sell books, at a time when it was still perceived as rather undignified.

Until he ventured into publishing, Monteiro Lobato was a coffee grower in the interior of the state of São Paulo, and not a very successful one by all accounts. He inherited most of his land from his grandfather, the Viscount of Tremembé in 1911 (Koshiyama 54, 56–57). Starting in 1915, he began contributing short pieces to several small magazines, then to the state’s main journal, *O*

Estado de São Paulo, and from 1916 to its magazine, *Revista do Brasil*. He had both financial and literary ambitions; his exceptionality was the seemingly outlandish and most certainly unapologetic aspiration to fulfill them in one and the same blow. In letters and testimonies penned with Lobato's characteristic zest and abrasive charm, this overlap is conspicuous. Offering periodic contributions while already cherishing the idea of a book, he acknowledged: "Para quem pretende vir com livro, a exposição periódica do nomezinho equivale aos bons anúncios das casas de comércio" (Koshiyama 55). A writer's signature is already seen as a brand.

In 1917 he finally sold his farm. Before the year was over he printed his first book, *Saci-Pererê: resultado de um inquérito*, with promising results (Hallewell 240). In June 1918 he published a selection of twelve stories, *Urupês*, that met with quick success by extending distribution from the usual 30 bookstores to *Revista do Brasil's* network of some 200 outlets.

In December Monteiro Lobato made a key strategic move, similar to Claridad and Babel's a few years later: he bought *Revista do Brasil*, "um órgão de prestígio entre os literatos e que serviria de veículo de divulgação para uma editora de livros" (Koshiyama 68). Like Glusberg and Zamora, he was convinced that the structure of book distribution had become an artificial obstacle amid the reality of reading practices. 200 points of sale were not enough. Setting out to offer his products around the country, he wrote letters to thousands of shopkeepers. "[O]s únicos lugares em que não vendi foi nos açougues, por temor de que os livros ficassem sujados de sangue" (qtd. in Hallewell 245).

Monteiro Lobato's choice of words conveys a proverbial, albeit retrospective awareness when describing the book as a commodity, as well as the new relationship between bookseller and consumer.¹⁶

Vossa Senhoria tem o seu negócio montado, e quanto mais coisas vender, maior será o lucro. Quer vender também uma coisa chamada "livros"? Trata-se de um artigo comercial como qualquer outro; batata, querosene ou bacalhau. É uma mercadoria que não precisa examinar nem saber se é boa nem vir a esta escolher. O conteúdo não interessa a V.S., e sim ao seu cliente, o qual dele tomará conhecimento através das nossas explicações nos catálogos, prefácios etc. E como V.S. receberá esse artigo em consignação, não perderá coisa alguma no que propomos. (qtd. in Hallewell 245)

Among literary aficionados, it has become a commonplace to complain that today's bookstore employees know very little about the books they sell.¹⁷ Yet as early as 1918, Monteiro Lobato extended the invitation to potential booksellers to spurn any knowledge of books, arguing that buyers could (and should) seek

¹⁶ According to Hallewell, Monteiro Lobato offered two versions of the 1918 letter, one in 1943, the other quoted in Edgard Cavalheiro's biography in 1962. Hallewell created a third version based on both, which I partially transcribe. See Hallewell 266, note 8.

¹⁷ Bookseller's of yore ("los libreros de antes") have thus been often nostalgically praised as giants, as patriots. "El librero era un erudito, visitado y respetado por los intelectuales" (Trenti Rocamora).

what they needed to know elsewhere, namely in other publications. He later claimed to have thus secured a network of almost 2,000 stores¹⁸ (Hallewell 245).

It is the very heterogeneous nature of the massified readership that weakens the figure of the bookseller, just as it diminishes the figure of certain undisputed leading critics. As bookstores, together with publisher's catalogues, became increasingly eclectic spaces, a bookseller's identification with his clientele's tastes and needs—a defining feature of the Total Bookstore—was hardly feasible, and in any case an unpromising business strategy.¹⁹

Similarly to Claridad and Babel, Monteiro Lobato was encouraging a mutual independence between the material circulation of books and that of the spaces where the reasons and ways to use them get elaborated and diffused. This is a condition of possibility for the modern synergy of books, advertising, and reviews that would dominate the organization of books and the compartmentalization of readers in the decades to follow.

Towards a Modern Synergy

Berto (showing a display table filled with books in an open-door bookstore on Corrientes Avenue in Buenos Aires): ¿Ves? Acá tienen todos los libros que vos quieras.

Flavia: Uy, ¡cuántos! ¿Vos leíste algún libro alguna vez?

Berto: Yo no. ¿Y vos?

Flavia: Yo sí. Unas revistas.

Berto: ¡Unas revistas! ¡Pero eso no son libros! Vení, sonsa . . . (they leave)

(*El secuestrador*)

Within a couple of years, Babel, Claridad, and Monteiro Lobato took similar actions on the basis of a common diagnosis. In order to overcome obstacles in the structure of book distribution, which were impeding access to new groups of existing or potential readers, they set out to find more effective vehicles to reach and attract them. They achieved this by establishing periodicals to stimulate readers' interest in their autonomous publications, but also to improve the publishers' understanding of those interests.

The goal of this link, as I have shown above, was to promote their more specific but longer selling printed materials (books) through a general-interest but ephemeral one (a periodical) in order to stabilize the demand for the former,

¹⁸ Koshiyama has disputed this figure. "Em 1919, escrevendo a Lima Barreto, Monteiro Lobato declarava ter 200 distribuidores em todo o Brasil para os livros de sua editora. Mais de vinte anos depois, Lobato afirmava que, em 1918, tinha formado uma rede de 1,200 distribuidores em todo o Brasil" (13).

¹⁹ In the total bookstore this identification was in fact of a functional nature, as can be seen in many testimonies and memoirs. Booksellers rarely, if ever, belonged to the same social or cultural group as their distinguished customers, and their most common virtue was to have a remarkably discreet, often somewhat opaque presence. See for instance Manuel Mujica Láinez and Francisco Romero's tribute to bookseller Tomás Pardo.

riskier investment. This was achieved by attempting to create an audience: a loyal group of readers who may have had different specific interests—as illustrated by Claridad’s varied collections—but who would buy and read a single periodical publication.

Both the strength and the weakness of this model reside in this last element, for such a strategy is more effective the more homogeneous the readership a publisher is trying to target. Perhaps the best example of such a strategy—particularly telling in that it was not for profit—is *Sur*’s famous elite publishing venture, first (and foremost) a magazine from 1931, then also a book publisher from 1933. *Sur*’s books were not organized in collections; they were not even numbered. In 1966, *Sur*’s director and soul, Victoria Ocampo, stated what Patricia Willson has read as one possible explanation for this complete indistinction between the books: “I chose (because I liked them) works that other publishers did not dare to publish” (qtd. in Willson 232). Just as there was an indivisible taste (or *interest*) at the origins of all that *Sur* published, their intended reader was equally conceived as a plausible individual, otherwise as a more or less homogeneous group. Given *Sur*’s highbrow cultural ideology, the idea of a compartmentalized readership had to be met with contempt.

This does not mean that their books had any inherent commonality, but that they were understood as mediums of a single mode of appropriation, or at least of several commensurable ones; modes of appropriation that did not serve as each other’s limits—in the sense that entertainment-for-entertainment’s-sake, for example, may be said to be the limit for a morality-building ideology of reading. While this may seem a fairly obvious assertion for a highly sophisticated, not-for-profit collection like *Sur*, it is however no less true of Claridad—one of the most popular and prolific publishers of the first half of the twentieth century. In a classic article, Graciela Montaldo explores the puzzling heterogeneity, both generic and ideological, of the materials chosen by a publisher, seemingly driven by social and political goals. Zamora, as I mentioned, was a socialist after all, and his magazine a “tribuna del pensamiento izquierdista.” *Claridad* often republished translated texts with which the editors strongly disagreed, annotating them profusely with disclaimers and clarifications. But if that was the case, Montaldo claims, it was due not only to its massive output, which compelled them to include whatever they had “at hand,” but also because the act of reading *as such* was granted a formative function, hence a progressive one (46).

Much easier to spot is the common thread behind Babel’s hundred-something books in ten years, most of them by contemporary well-respected, if now unevenly remembered Argentine authors (Buonocore 99). Clearly more eclectic is Monteiro Lobato’s, who, as I mentioned, pioneered the use of advertising for books. As Hallewell pointed out, Monteiro Lobato “percebeu que já não era suficiente depender da cortês recomendação verbal do livreiro a cada freguês potencial, que se baseava no conhecimento íntimo de uma clientela muito limitada [this is the model of the Total Bookstore] e lançou-se a uma ampla publicidade nos jornais” (250).

The historical place of Claridad, Babel, and Monteiro Lobato’s parallel strategies, as well their relation to the ulterior synergy, will now hopefully become clearer. To make the circulation of books and that of modes of appropriation

independent from one another was a key step towards overcoming the limiting features of a still strongly spatially-determined literary sphere. But whatever the benefits of linking a periodical to a series of autonomous publications, as attempted by our publishers in 1918–24, the strategy was hardly effective for later publishers like Sudamericana or Emecé (in Argentina), José Olympio or Editora Globo (in Brazil). Founded (or reinvented) in the 1930s, these modern companies organized catalogues of unmitigated heterogeneity, targeting a purposefully eclectic range of readers. They incorporated works and genres hitherto considered incompatible—classics from all origins, European masters, new releases preceded by an astonishing success in several countries, the local literary establishment but also some “social” writers, novels already adapted to the screen, novels from emerging countries already mediated by the metropolis, avant-garde authors sanctioned by international criticism, detective stories of all kinds, self-help books.

One of the most revealing episodes in this respect took place in Sudamericana, founded in 1938 in Buenos Aires by a mixed group of Spanish immigrants and figures of the local establishment. Unlike Claridad or Babel twenty years before and similar to other publishers of the late 1930s, including Losada or Emecé, Sudamericana received important investments to take advantage of a very specific international context, that of the Spanish Civil War that prevented Spanish books from reaching Latin America. In 1940, Sudamericana’s main editor, Antoni López Llausàs, launched a collection of “lo que hoy llamaríamos libros de ‘autoayuda’” (De Diego 96) by Dale Carnegie, preceded by huge sales in their original English versions: *Cómo ganar amigos e influir sobre las personas*, *Cómo hacer un hogar feliz* and *Cómo adelgazar comiendo*, among others. López Llausàs, however, decided to publish them under a different imprint created for that purpose: Ediciones Cosmos. According to his granddaughter and heiress, Gloria López Llovet, he made that decision “por considerar que no se ajustaba a la línea de la editorial. Ante el éxito formidable del título sintió que estaba actuando en forma equívoca con los lectores y fue así que lo incluyó en Sudamericana” (López Llovet 40). From exclusion to inclusion, however, his very conception of “línea editorial” must have changed. At first, he considered Carnegie’s books not only unworthy of a serious publisher but also potentially damaging to Sudamericana’s good name. Carnegie’s readers, he thought, were incompatible with the rest of his catalogue’s—their coexistence seemed impossible. When he finally included them, either he was, conversely, attempting to infuse Sudamerica’s brand with the lure of Carnegie’s success, or simply embracing the essential heterogeneity of a modern publisher’s catalogue, thus of its readership. Published only four years after the English original, *Cómo ganar amigos* was reprinted 18 times until 1950, 41 times until 1966 (three times in 1953 alone). According to López Llovet, it reached one million copies.

To reach and attract such diverse audiences, a periodical of its own would have been at best a very restricted solution for a publisher like Sudamericana. The modern synergy of advertising and reviews seeks a similar outcome by encouraging the opposite. Instead of a loyal, more or less homogeneous group of readers through a necessarily limited number of periodical publications, it welcomes the consolidation of diverse and potentially heterogeneous reading audiences by fueling a variety of publications, supplements, and sections through

advertising. An analysis of these companies' advertising strategies is beyond the limits of this article, but one thing is immediately apparent: they publicize different books and promote them differently depending on the magazine, supplement, or section where they appear.²⁰ These spaces grew, diversified, and became more regular in this period.

It is, in fact, these publications' *raison d'être* to re-elaborate and diffuse more or less defined, more or less distinct modes of appropriation—by breaking the continuum of the publishers' collections and creating new “series” or groupings for different reading audiences mainly through reviews but also through other forms of criticism, interviews, etc. A new synergy was slowly established. Its newness did not reside in the novelty of its elements—for advertisements and reviews were already quintessential instruments of the capitalist market and the profit-oriented modern press—but in its increasingly infrastructural function. Increasing material and spatial indistinction was thus mitigated by minute discursive distinctions.

Consequently, the quintessentially “modern” bookstore, like the one depicted in Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's 1958 film *El secuestrador*, stands opposite to the Total Bookstore. Filled with “all the books you may possibly want,” as Leonardo Favio's character aptly asserts despite having read none, it does not attempt, unlike the latter, to cater to any specific public. Mirroring modern publishers' omnivorous catalogues, which had engulfed genres and works hitherto considered incompatible, they became just as impersonal and heterogeneous as newsstands, and equally patronized by an eclectic assortment of buyers. Their struggles—which constitute the engine of modern literary history—took place elsewhere for the most part, precisely in the discursive platforms that made their apparently peaceful coexistence plausible.

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²⁰ María Julia Blanco's is one of the few pieces of research I have come across on this problem.

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