

## The writer's conference in Buenos Aires (1880-1914). Representations of a cultural practice

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**ABSTRACT:** The cultural conditions of the end of the 19th century in Buenos Aires led to the appearance of a cultural practice: the writer's conference. From presentations in circles, athenaeums and the university, the writer's conference was transformed into a theatrical show with unexpected success. The Argentine periodical press was the space for the dissemination of this activity, since they were exhibitable events: a theater, a recognized speaker, an audience and a text. This article provides a definition and periodization of the conferences, and also analyzes the ways in which Argentine newspapers and magazines represented them and made them visible to the reading public between the years 1880 and 1914, when it became a cultural practice of fashion, which became popular, and which went from having great acceptance to receiving criticism from the press itself.

**KEYWORDS:** Conference; Writer; Modernization; Theater; press.

## La conferencia de escritor en Buenos Aires (1880-1914). Representaciones de una práctica cultural

**RESUMEN:** En Buenos Aires, las condiciones culturales del fin de siglo XIX condujeron a la emergencia de una práctica cultural: la conferencia de escritor. De presentaciones en círculos, ateneos y universidades, la conferencia de escritor fue transformándose en un espectáculo teatral con un éxito inesperado. La prensa periódica argentina fue el espacio de divulgación de esta actividad, ya que eran eventos exhibibles: un teatro, un conferencista reconocido, un público y un texto. En este artículo se definen y periodizan las conferencias, y también se analizan los modos en que diarios y revistas argentinas las representaron e hicieron visibles al público lector entre 1880 y 1914, momento en que se convirtió en una práctica cultural de moda, que fue popularizándose, y que pasó de tener gran aceptación a recibir críticas de la prensa misma.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Conferencia; escritor; modernización; teatro; prensa.

**TRANSLATION OF SUMMARY:** Laura Giaccio / Universidad Nacional de La Plata

### QUOTE

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## Introduction

The cultural conditions by the end of the 19th century in Buenos Aires led to a cultural practice: the writer's conference from presentations in circles, athenaeums and university, it became a theatrical performance with an unexpected success. During the time of literary modernization, the conference became a relevant activity on the cultural industry of Argentina, with which the writer could become closer to his audience and obtain an economic profit and recognition. Although the main figure was the speaker, also participated in the activities, from different stages from the production to the release, entrepreneurs, theater employees, literary critics, journalists, photographers, illustrators and others. For the periodical press of the time, these were displayable events: a recognized speaker, an audience and a text.

This article develops the first panoramic approach on the writer's conference throughout his definition, periodization and his position on the cultural field between 1880 and 1914, also the analysis on the representation that the magazines and newspaper provided to the reading audience. The aim is to make a contribution to a relevant period in the history of the argentinian literature that has been barely studied and which will allow us to continue reflecting about the writer, the relation among literature and theater, the public between the 19th & 20th century and also Buenos Aires as a cultural capital.

## Introduction to the conference

A conference can be described as a public speaking intervention, a scene where the speaker delivers a speech – previously composed for the occasion – in front of a particular audience. Not only is important the content he is transmitting but also the eloquence of the person who delivers, this means the speaker must use their words and voice, as well as gestures, mannerism and other expressive resources to attract and persuade the audience.<sup>1</sup> The second relevant aspect about conference is that it is related with other kind of public speaking, especially for its didactic and doctrinal character, like the political speech, the

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<sup>1</sup> The elocution was taught on the Europe schools in the 19th century. The art of speaking was part of the *honnête homme* culture. We will later talk about this topic, specifically in Argentina.

sermon and a debate between a teacher and his students, from then on the speaker must transmit ideas, knowledge and content.

Also, the conference is related to lectures or readings from well known writers who read to the public their renowned<sup>2</sup> works. The famous writer Charles Dickens was the one who took most advantage of this practice, he recited his favorite artwork for 12 years, between 1858 and 1870, not only on England but also on the United States, the country where he toured and carry through literary lectures to its reading public (Andrew's, 2008).

The writer conference can be perceived as an hybrid were the literary and the theater world converge: is a stating made by a writer on the theater stage, who is equally concerned about the text he is exposing, as the different aspects of his presentation (voice, expressions, beginning, ending, rhythm), since the success will be based in this 2 element. On this basis and depending on the writer's prestige and the relevance of the theater he will be presenting to, we could think of the conference as a cultural event broadly speaking.

In respect of the writer's conference history, one of the most important speakers of the 19th century was Oscar Wilde. The Irish writer performed a tour on The United States and Canada, hired by the theatrical producer D'Oyly Carte, on this tour the read his famous conferences "The English Renaissance", "The decorative Arts" and "The house beautiful", whose work were about "The first attempt to define the aesthetic of his ideas and a opportunity of having direct contact to the public" (Serrano de Haro, 1995, p. 321). Wilde wanted to entertain rather than illustrate the viewers and additionally establish itself as a brand (Gillespie, 2016). Besides to the unpublished cultural success of his conferences, they stand out for a reason, they were planned by an entrepreneur and not an institution dedicated to education or some writers society and on the other hand the idea of a conference as a form of entertainment, a event were we perceive the transformation of the writers conference to a show at the beginning of the 20th century.

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<sup>2</sup> The difference between conferences and lectures can be seen on the text productions made on this events: meanwhile the conference was especially made and written to a determined exhibition, the text on the lectures had already been seen on a book or periodical press, in addition as was often the case and depending on their success, after the event the conferences were published on booklets to be read.

In France the “golden era” of the conference tours was at the end of the 19th century. The poet Émile Verhaeren will make them famous after his visit to Germany, Switzerland and Russia, and Stéphane Mallarmé with his conference performed on Paris and also in Belgium where he was hired to release a tour on several cities<sup>3</sup>. Years before, in 1886 the writer Georges Rodenbach arranged with Villiers de l'Isle-Adam to give lectures in that country. In a letter to the organizer, the French poet introduced him to the material and economic requirements to undertake a tour of conferences-lectures of two different texts he was writing at that time (Goffin, 2011). In the letter he point out two important requirements used on the writers conferences, like the scenario and the compensation, on the other hand he suggested to talk in a room not in the theater, since the he knew he would have a large audience and wanted to discuss his payment, he asked for 250 francs for every 1 hour and a half duration lecture.

Due to the difficulty of accessing conference contracts since they have been lost, this negotiation data from Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's shows the writer's concern in respect to the conference as a commercial good, that that could provide him with a monetary gain, same as his books or texts published on the periodical press.

There is another aspect about conferences we might highlight: The intervention on the economic pole on the cultural field. The conference organization, clearly taxing the French and English market –in fact, entrepreneurs were involved– this was presented to the writer's as an alternative to the periodical press, and had an interesting plus, as it alludes to an immediate dialogue between the public and the author. As regards the finances, only the most prestigious (inside of the subfield of restricted production) could access the privilege of having conferences arranged for them and become the protagonist of the event.

At the beginning of the 20th century, one of the most important lecturers in Spain was Miguel de Unamuno, whose steps would be followed by José Ortega y Gasset. Both joined the trend of conference touring around Europe and America. In Argentina, around

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<sup>3</sup> On his extremely reduced production of only fifty copies Villier de L'Isle-Adam, published on Paris in 1890, Mallarmé explained his tour conferences: an evening in Paris in front of a private audience at the Madame Eugene Manet's salon, and six on Belgium (two in Brussels and one in Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, Bruges).

the 1880, following the process of state modernization, there was an early initiative to organize and deliver lectures and conferences, which increased with the arrival of the new century until its high point around the Centenary.

It should be pointed out there is some isolated research on the writer's conference in Argentina that analyzes the content of specific presentations but doesn't fully address it as a cultural practice (from their history, characteristics, relevant speakers, reception)<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, a first panoramic approach to the writer's conference was developed, that had its most important moment during the literary modernization, and continued for several decades of the twentieth century.

### **The writer and the conferences in Argentina in literary modernization**

The writer and the conferences in Argentina during the literary modernization, the period of literary modernization is considered by the critic as the moment on which the writer started to reflect about his image and his place in society and also to fight for the recognition of his work. During the nineteenth and twentieth century's, the writer became more professional in the environment of modernization and urban growth and the increase of a new and extensive reading public from the popular and middle class sector was coexisting in the traditional cult (Rivera, 1998a). Making a living from a pen was possible for some cases, in other cases the writer found himself working two jobs, generally the second job was from the professional field, politics or diplomacy this last two being the most desired (Rama, 1983). The literary production was distributed in two ways: on one side, they were texts intended for the publication of a book, on a period of gradual changes on the editorial market, between the rise (1880-1899) (Pastormerlo, 2006) and its organization (1900-1919), characterized by the diversification of the book related practices (Merbilhaá, 2006). On the other hand, most of the texts were published in newspapers and

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to the works that will be mentioned in the article, the following research can be mentioned: relations between oratory and literature (Ansolabehe, 2012); Juana Manso and her public lectures in schools and libraries (Zucotti, 1994; Pionetti, 2023); scientific lectures (de Asúa, 2018); lectures in the construction of national myths during the Centennial (Sorensen, 1998), Borges lecturer (Degiovanni & Toscano, 2010; Blanco, 2019, 2021; Lizalde and Fitzgerald, 2022).

magazines, resources were the writer could name for himself and increased his reading audience, these spaces were also of professional socialization (Román, 2009).

According to Rivera (1998b) the rising cultural industry in Buenos Aires caused various reactions, from alienation of some writers to the adapting to the new rules and requirements suggested by the cultural goods market. In this context the writer intended to set a new opportunity to sell his work, then the conference arise, a new activity that created an alternative to an economic retreat and visibility that started to establish on the Argentinian cultural field. Regarding the writer Ramón Gómez de la Serna was one of the writers to really capture the conference culture in Argentina during the centuries, specially the central place that held the capital city: "From America, some Spanish bravely returned as a lecturer, and Buenos Aires was the sublimation of the conference. It is well known that Argentina is the first consumer of lecturers in the world." (Gómez de la Serna, 1970, p. 146).

The historical development of the writer's conference is related to the economic condition, materials and cultural changes from the time. At the end of the twenty century, conferences were an unusual activity around social circles, athenaeums and other social spaces; it had a doctrinal or didactic aim, targeted to a restricted public. From being in semi-private spaces it moved out to the theaters, throughout the development of a consumption society not only of assets on a day-to-day life, but also on their cultural goods. This issue was reported in *La Nación* when it was Rubén Darío's imminent appearance at the Odeon theater in *Buenos Aires* in 1912. "We can say it's the first time that a poet is presenting itself in front of our public, as his conferences from twenty years ago were only heard by a small audience of the athenaeum" (*La Nación*, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1912). Indeed, there was an increase in the activity of the writer's conference since the end of the century there was a consumer audience that over the years transformed to a massive audience (Rogers, 2008) who demanded this kind of event. So then the local writers started to present conferences frequently<sup>5</sup>, while foreign writers were being hired to offer this type of presentation.

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<sup>5</sup> The emergence of this context of proliferating lectures is related, in certain aspects, to the education that young men from the upper classes received during the last third of the 19th century in school through prose anthologies. These anthologies were characterized by presenting selected excerpts of texts that were

The public who attended conferences had different reasons and motivations; to hear the writer who was holder of knowledge: then the conference can be seen as an event for personal education, entertainment and also to witness the presence of the speaker, a fact that shortens the gap between the conference and a show. Likewise these events must be considered -especially coming from the most prominent and dictated figures in theaters- as a window for social exhibition.<sup>6</sup> For that matter, at famous foreign writers conferences the first row was occupied by politicians and the elite,<sup>7</sup> in some cases by fellow writers and intellectuals.

Between centuries, the public consumed magazines such as *Caras y Caretas* (1898), *PBT* (1904), *El Hogar* (1904), newspapers with illustrated inserts like *Semanal de La Nación* (1902-1905) popular literature and book collections, different national and foreign theatrical productions (like Creole circus, national theater, opera and ballet), while the film was being developed. The progress in the visual culture is manifests and the appearance of new technologies, for the following Eduardo Romano ponders:

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required reading for secondary students, especially those in National Colleges, in three specific genres important for exercising political and cultural leadership: oratory, didactics, and history. In other words, boys were taught the "art of speaking" for functions in the public sphere (Degiovanni, 2007). In this way, the ground had been prepared for remarkable orators to emerge, and some of them would dedicate part of their time to giving lectures.

<sup>6</sup> In the Buenos Aires press, long lists were published of the families that attended, especially focusing on the women who had been spectators at the lectures. These were simple social notes listing surnames. Additionally, the periodic press not only reported who had attended but also described their clothing.

<sup>7</sup> This could be read symbolically as a staging of the ongoing civilizing process, in which the ruling classes were actively involved. At Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's third lecture in Buenos Aires, President José Figueroa Alcorta was present, and the speaker made note of it: "Mr. Blasco Ibáñez began his lecture yesterday—the third, on 'the great conquerors'—by addressing the President of the Republic, who occupied the lower avant-scène box to the speaker's right, and was accompanied, among others, by the Minister of the Interior, the President of the Senate, Mr. Villanueva, and the national deputy Mr. Llobet. The speaker said that he appreciated the president's attendance and greeted him as a living symbol of the nation, whose sovereignty is the abstract symbol of the flag, wishing him all kinds of greatness and prosperity in his government, certain that the honor and glory will be his and that of Argentina itself. He also greeted him, as a journalist, an acknowledgment of the pride of democracy among the monarchies of the sword and divine right Republic: the exaltation to the highest position, to supreme power, of a man who has built his political career and proven his ability through words and writing. The speaker predicts for the head of state a beautiful end to his government, sealed with that exposition which will mark the current level, in its truly astounding expansion, of Argentine industrial progress. Having concluded the opening remarks, which Dr. Figueroa acknowledged from his box with repeated greetings to Mr. Blasco Ibáñez, the latter began the announced lecture" (*La Nación*, June 9, 1909).

Auditions through the phone or phonograph and the images illustrated on magazines, the advertising and the film, before the end of the nineteenth century notoriously altered the perception and living for a extensive public, that wasn't restricted for the readers or in any cases this was the origin of the simultaneous readers of verbal and nonverbal messages, through a process of mayor intellectual complexity (Romano, 2012, p. 39).

In this context, the writer's conference was consolidated as a cultural consumer asset. The moment of maximum peak of the conference in Argentina was around the Centenary of the May Revolution (1910), this happened when the conference was established as a theatrical show and denoted its characteristics and functions. As will be examined, the periodical press was the space for the dissemination of this cultural practice, since it was an event worthy of exposure, both for conformed elements and for the interest it caused in the community.

Some writers and intellectuals speakers during the period of 1880-1914 were: Domingo F. Sarmiento, Eduardo L. Holmberg, José Ingenieros, Ricardo Rojas, Leopoldo Lugones, Estanislao S. Zeballos, Manuel Ugarte and Belisario Roldán; Between the foreigners that came to Argentina during this times some of the most important names are Edmundo de Amicis, Enrico Ferri, Jean Jaurès, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Georges Clemenceau, Anatole France, José Ortega, Gasset, Rubén Darío, Alfonso Reyes, and others. Hereinafter chronological overview of the writer's conference will be done between the period of 1880 until 1914 with the purpose of perform a periodization considering some texts of the authors of that time and the methods the periodical press of Buenos Aires represented and made visible in its pages for the Argentine public.

### **The conference development in Buenos Aires (1880-1914)**

#### *The writer's conference in its early period (1880-1900)*

For the study of the development of the practice of the writer's conference in the period 1880- 1914, it has been decided to start from 1882, since, due to the death of Charles Darwin, several conferences were organized in Buenos Aires in his honor, which had as speakers important figures such as Florentino Ameghino, Eduardo L. Holmberg and



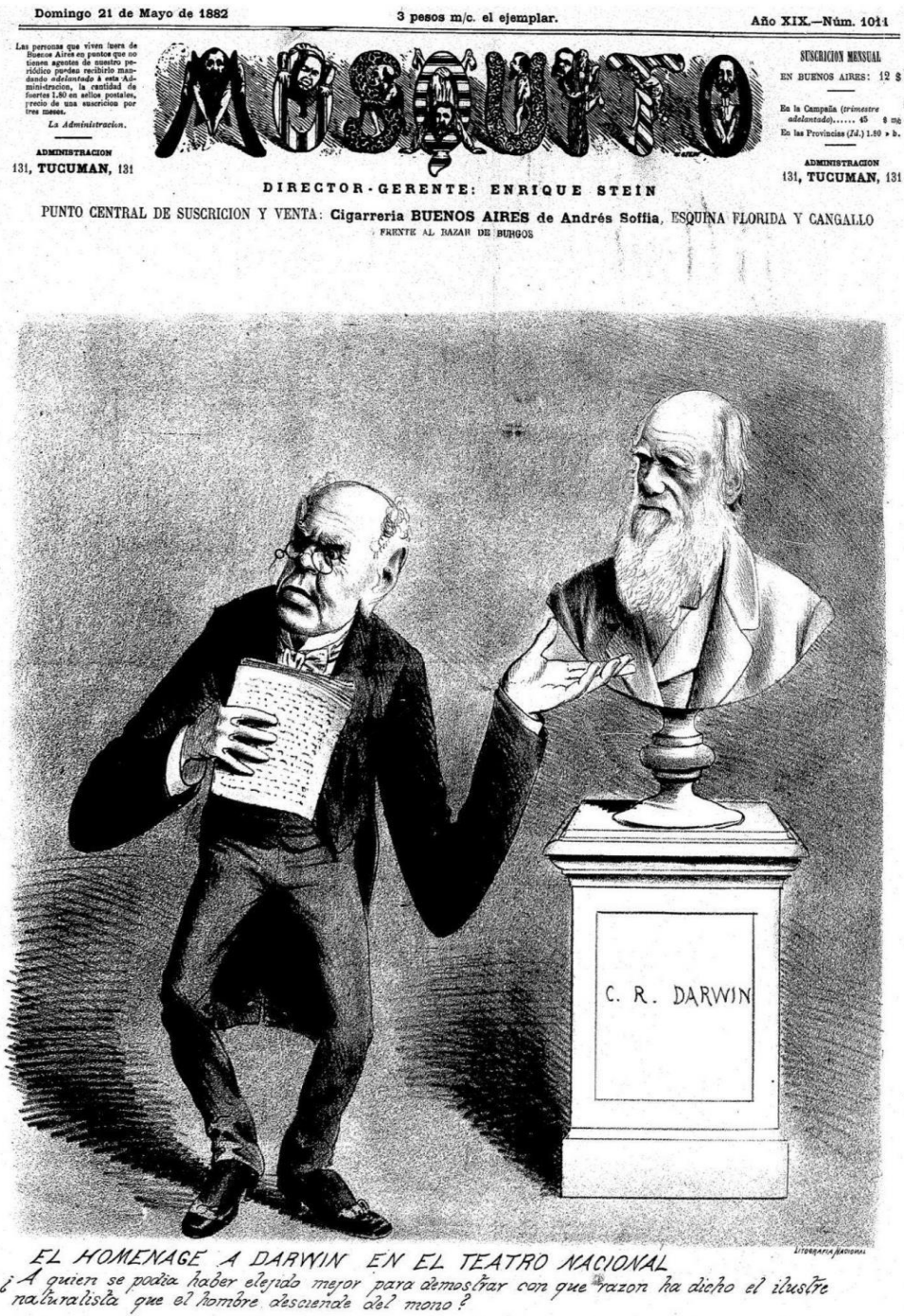
Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. This last two were the protagonist for the event which took place on May 19 of the same year on the National Theater, organized by the *Circulo Médico Argentino*.

The newspapers pointed out Holmberg eloquence and explanation of the discussed topics (Bruno, 2015). Afterwards the author published his conference on a leaflet titled Carlos Roberto Darwin (Holmberg, 1882). Then the press impulse Sarmiento's exposition, this was represented satirically in the newspaper *El Mosquito* (figured 1). On the front page of the newspaper Sarmiento is being displayed as a public speaker dressed with a frac and glasses, which in one of his hands is holding the sheets of his speech standing next to a bust of the English scientist.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The tribute to Darwin at the National Theatre. Who better could have been chosen to demonstrate the reason behind the illustrious naturalist's claim that man descends from the monkey?" (*El Mosquito*, May 21, 1882.

Figure 1. "The Tribute to Darwin at the National Theater"



Note: *El Mosquito*, May 21<sup>th</sup>, 1882.

In the illustration of Sarmiento's body is being animalized, his proportions and poses are similar to a primate, as well as their ears. While his caricaturing as a primate related to the theme of the conference and his repeated representations such as *animalis homo* (Román, 2011), the proportions on his body were made to stand out the gestures and movements he made during the conference, specially with his right hand, whose hand was pointing out the bust of the honored. The body parts the speaker can use the most during a conference performance are the torso, the arms and the hands. It is worth mentioning that this is probably one of the first illustrations published by the press in Argentina and it captures the writer's conference, by placing it on the front page turns it into an event worthy of representation.

The same year the writer Antonio Argerich also offered a conference, the conference was literary focus. Just as is presented on the leaflet from *Naturalismo* (Argerich, 1882) in a literary evening for the benefit of the poet Gervasio Méndez, that took place at the Politeama Theater of *Buenos Aires*, he spoke about the subject. Several texts of the event focused on the scene and the content exposed, they were published on *El Álbum del Hogar* between 1882 and 1883 (Romagnoli, 2023). It is interesting to see how the conference became a space for literary debate and also how it was part of the intense and 'polemic discussions regarding *Naturalismo* produced on the country (Laera, 2004; Esposito *et al.*, 2011).

Meanwhile Argentinian writers and intellectuals had already started presenting conferences, and in 1884 arrived to Buenos Aires probably the first famous foreigner public speaker: Edmundo de Amicis. Invited by Lucio V. López, the Italian writer who performed a number of expositions on the city of Buenos Aires and Rosario. In Argentina's capital city they were pronounced on the Colón and Politeama theater and discussed various topics and personalities such as life and ideas, Vittorio Emanuele y Giuseppe Garibaldi (Sardi, 2011).

In the decade of 1890, the writer's conference was already part of the literary life of the time. The Athenaeum was one of the most important places to witness this kind of events, which had a special room for its realization. Rafael Obligado was one of the persons

who impulse the writers conference on the institution during his time as a president since 1896. Part of his first project just like *La Nación* published before it appeared the name of Rubén Darío, Eduardo L. Holmberg, Leopoldo Díaz, Juan José García Velloso, Luis Berisso, Miguel Escalada as futures public speakers. The dissertation of the Nicaraguan poet in September 19 of 1896 opened the conference program and versed about the Portuguese writer Eugenio Do Castro.

This was a success that was not only due to the fact that the figure of Rubén Darío was gaining relevance, also "literature has reached a public dimension at the moment" (Bibbó, 2016). About Darío, Beatriz Colombi affirms that "the conference constitutes a defining moment of his consecration (his 'Justa gloria') in this capital [*Buenos Aires*]". (Colombi, 2004, p. 66) this helps thinking about how presentations influenced the writers placement in the literary environment of the time.

#### *Rise and popularity of the writer's conference (1900-1914)*

It is interesting, to start this section, to stop by one of the memories from youth of Manuel Gálvez on which he performs a brief overview of the conferences of this period:

During the years of 1903 to 1905 fashion rage did not existed, that came much later, by listening to the foreign speakers. The first to present in Buenos Aires in 1908 and 1909, achieve a large audience: a bourgeois and unintellectual audience, Blasco Ibáñez; and from the public of writers and professionals Valle-Inclán. Regarding the Argentinians, they only reached an audience if they spoke about politics. There was still some time left before the conferences or literary lectures of Iugones and "*Almafuerte*" made on 1913 crowds the theaters where they performed (Gálvez, 2002, p. 179).

On the conference's chronology in Argentina, due to the relevance of the public speakers and the themes, it might be considered Estanislao S. Zeballos performance that versed about the Argentinean journalism in 1901, as the one that started the 20th century.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> It took place within the framework of the Journalistic Congress. The complete conference transcript appeared in *La Nación* (June 2, 1901).

Due to his ability, the illustrator José María Cao caricaturized him as a public speaker in 1900 on the well-known serie “*Caricaturas contemporáneas*” from *Caras y Caretas* followed by a short text.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 2.** “Dr. Estanislao S. Zeballos, by Cao”



Note: *Caras y Caretas*, November 10th, 1900.

Keeping in mind that “this representations embodies many topics associated with this artistic practice” (Baldasarre, 2016, p. 83), On this cartoon we can observe a smiling Zeballo’s trying to connect through the gaze with the public who is watching and listening, together with a terrestrial globe that is related to the topic he is speaking.

<sup>10</sup> That text stated: “That talent and eloquence / are weapons with which he dominates, / he proved it beyond evidence / in his latest conference / on Chile and Argentina” (*Caras y Caretas*, November 10, 1900).



Another relevant conference during the same period was offered by Leopoldo Lugones about Émile Zola in 1902 in the theater Victoria, after the passing of the famous French writer, an event that caused worldwide repercussions. *Caras y Caretas* published a full-page report of the event (figure 3) to refer as “a literary event” that includes, thanks to the technical progress, a photo of Lugones on that roll, from there its relevance, keeping in mind that he was probably the most important speaker in Argentina.

In respect of the performance, the magazine rated it as a “remarkable performance” and pointed out that “Lugones shown all the resources of the fiery speech by snatching the public with his bold figures and deep thoughts and his manly art as a speaker bearly mellifluous and friend of broad and unequivocal truths” (*Caras y Caretas*, November 1st° of 1902) Related to what has been exposed before, it can be observed on the illustrated magazines, from *El Mosquito* with Sarmiento (1882) until *Caras y Caretas* with Zeballos (1900) and Lugones (1902), this, to capture the interest of the speakers performance, either through an illustration or photography, that will persist until the first decade of the twentieth century, as it will be shown.

Figure 3. "Tribute to Zola. The Evening at the Victoria Theater"



Note: *Caras y Caretas*, November 1st, 1902.

Just as Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo had mentioned, “the conference was the typical form of the cultural act in Argentina during the 90s” (Altamirano y Sarlo, 1997, p. 217). This had been warned before by Enrique Gómez Carrillo on his famous work “*La vida parisienne*” in 1909 that was periodically featured in *La Nación* with the subtitle “The conference’s popularity”, from Paris this cultural phenomenon was observed in every occidental field:

conferences, conferences everywhere, conferences at any time...on the theater, universities, in private households, the man that sits in front of a glass of water and states “*mesdames, messieurs*”, is something that is essential...Before the comedians begin to perform a classic tragedy, a professor speaks: before the tenor appears, a critic speaks. Before the newly arrived, glamorous girl from the provinces shows her bare shoulders, a young poet speaks. The scale covers all kinds of personalities. On the top we perceive princes, ministers and academics, below, far below, we see teenagers, literary enthusiasts, modest journalists or unknown actresses (Gómez, 1909).

On the occasion of Anatole France’s visit to Argentina as a speaker in 1909, Gómez Carrillo analyzed in his text the invasion of the lecture in theater and in various spaces.<sup>11</sup> For the Guatemalan writers the famous speakers of the time were Georges Lemaître, Émile Faguet, Paul Bourget and Anatole France, putting aside the women, whom they believed were not virtuous for this cultural activity,<sup>12</sup> loyal to this French mindset, it didn’t make a reference to any Latin American or Spanish speaker. In that chronicle, it also showed how this trend required a troop of speakers to meet the demands in an almost global order: “On the general madness that led the entire world to a free chair position, there is a bit of everything. The professionals would not be sufficient for the demand of Paris and there’s ten cities in France and a hundred cities in the world who demand French speakers” (Gómez, 1909).

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<sup>11</sup> The trend of conferences in the French context was not only described by Gómez Carrillo but was also depicted during these same years by Georges Rouault, who dedicated two of his paintings to the representation of the French lecturer. The works are titled “*Le conférencier*” (ca. 1908-1910), which is on display at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and “*L’homme au pince-nez (Le conférencier)*,” dated 1913.

<sup>12</sup> This is related to the praise Lugones received for his lecture on Zola, in which it was said that his art of oratory was virile. It can also be linked to the training of men in oratory.



The unusual demand for public speakers also occurred in Argentina: especially during the first decade of the twentieth century since it had an exponential growth which was extended to the next century and provoked a diversification of topics and individuals who dictate them. The newspapers and magazines of the time continued to be the space for divulgation, hoarding its pages: from advertising and chronicles, going from –more serious illustrations to more humorous–, fotografies, jokes, graphics, essays and transcribed conferences. They were displayable events: a famous speaker, a theater, a public and a text, attracted readers who were interested in the cultural novelties, but also in getting to know famous figures, which explains the emerging celebrity culture. Just like Gómez Carrillo and Gómez de la Serna perceived at the start of the century that developed a trend for conferences which in Hispanic America initiated in Buenos Aires.

An example of this is the Illustrated magazine *PTB* who launched in 1904 (Figure 4) Titled "Speakers", Undersigned by Tartarín, who presented a typology of public speakers which showed the variety of characters who took the podium: The politician, the economist, the ecclesiastic, the lawyer, the literary man, the anarchist and the speaker. They are two specific figures that show the actual condition of the conferences in the emerging cultural industry of Buenos Aires. On one side the younger writer on which the text said: "Number four: Juan Peza,/ literary, polemicist/ and decadent poet/ from head to toe / It's outrageous/ to the extent that their mind can conceive/ and what he writes/ will go down in history" *PBT*, 23 de octubre de 1904); On the other hand, The charlatan, the chatterbox. "Number six: Longofiume/ Demosthenes in a tube/ that pays tribute to knowledge/ and who boasts of being an aesthete/ sells cheap eloquence/ and in the streets and at the plaza,/ takes out stains, extracts teeth/ polishes and makes money" (*PBT*, October 23th, 1904). The text criticized these opportunistic figures and also judged them due to the quality of the presentation's content. With the same theme and intention *PBT* made two similar articles. (Figure 5 and 6) who pointed out the lack of knowledge of the speakers.

Figura 4. "Speakers"



Note: *PBT*, October 23<sup>th</sup>, 1904.

Figure 5. "Speech"



Note: PBT, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1904.

Figure 6. "Let no one hear it!"



Note: (PBT, November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1904).

The trend for conferences entailed countless personalities dedicating themselves to giving these types of presentations, mostly men of letters, such as writers, intellectuals, and professionals (doctors, lawyers, among others). One of the most prolific from the 90s was Belisario Roldán also known as “silver-tongue” due to his talent for public speaking in diverse contexts:

Belisario Roldán is, above all, the tribune. He is remembered speaking in front of the monument to the fallen in the Revolution of the 90's, together with very eloquent and popular speakers such as Bartolomé Mitre, Aristóbulo del Valle and Leandro Alem, when, almost as a teenager, he stunned the audience. He is remembered speaking at the inauguration of the statue of San Martín in Boulogne-Sur-Mer or at the Ateneo in Madrid during the Centennial, alongside Castelar, Salmerón, and Cánovas. His oratory is reminiscent of the Castelar style but is unique and original. He uses it with the same astonishing ease in the Chamber of Deputies as in theaters, public events, and political gatherings, where the announcement of his words draws enthusiastic audiences (Pagés, 1959, p. 84)

On the first number of *PBT* appeared on the serie “*De Mi Guignol*”, a cartoon of Belisario Roldán, signed by Francisco Navarrete (Figure 7), that referred to his talent as a public speaker, showing him as a gramophone: The “*rodalnofono*”, an instrument that reproduce sounds. The accompanying text said: “He is given a reputation for his knowledge/and as an speaker, few will surpass him Belisario Roldán (son).” (*PBT*, September 24th, 1904). This type of representation of the speaker as a machine will re-emerge years later.



Figure 7. "Parliamentary Kids" (PBT, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1904).



Note: PBT, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1904.

It was normal for writers to be entrusted with the task of the lecture dictation, a situation that Florencio Sánchez had gone through, for this reason he suffered from what he called the “conference sickness”. In a presentation about the theatrical theme he performed before his artwork *Barranca abajo* at the theater Florida in Buenos Aires in July of 1907, he expressed his regret:

Rarely my mental activities get distracted from the main objective. But I have the flaw of being too accessible to engagement with others and myself and when I least expect it, I see myself overwhelmed by the fulfillment of a task incompatible with my actions and beyond my resources, for example [...] Such as my case. The idea of a conference as a tribute owed for my gratitude to the kindness of the people; that idea transformed into a promise by your benevolence and the approaching fatal deadline filling me with confusion and distress at my inability to meet it.

Yes, sir, I regret promising to perform at a conference (Sánchez, 2011, p. 47).

After this statement, Florencio Sánchez was performing a differentiation between two professions, writer and public speaker: “I am drama author not a public speaker, this means I am a person who writes stories for the theater, thank you” (Sánchez, 2011, p. 48). Further on, he felt discomfort by having to perform a conference, which paradoxically, was delivering at that moment:

Just like for cooking hare stew, the main ingredient is hare, to perform a conference, even assuming of having all kind of sauces and literary condiments (which, by the way, are quite scarce). It's still missing the essentials: A theme, arguments, ideas. What should I do?

I must confess I have been close to getting sick. This isn't my first time suffering from conference sickness. Not long ago and not far away, in the theater Urquiza de Montevideo, made me suffer for the impossibility of fulfilling another promised conference. But the problem was I couldn't think of what to be sick of, not even fake a cough, without a doubt due to the amount of work there is in the city, to notice an outsider (Sánchez, 2011, p. 48).

In spite of what Florencio Sánchez expressed he was missing a subject, an argument or ideas for the exposition, the theme for his presentation was focused in the phenomenon

of the conferences of that time, the hiring of the writers, speakers, the challenge of being on stage, and the sickness of those who dedicated themselves to them. In other words, what makes a subject valuable to perform at a conference.<sup>13</sup> He ends his very brief presentation with a denial and a promise:

What to do, then?... It's better that I don't perform at my conference. You will be left without it, then.

But, I promise that for the inconvenience of this informality of mine, I will not pronounce the *sí a fior di lavio* again, which so many women... and men have regretted so many times. (Sánchez, 2011, p. 49)

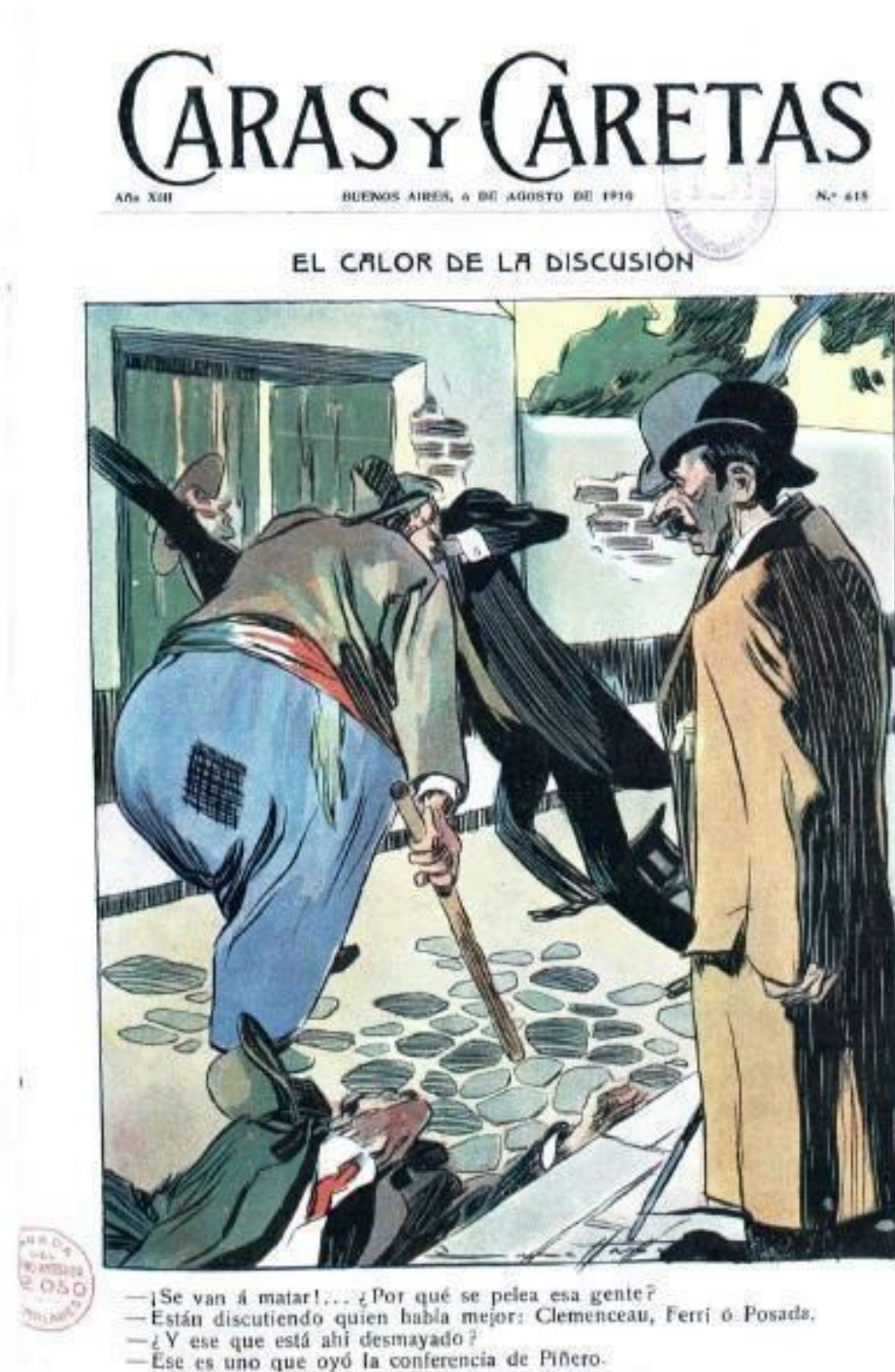
This promise would not be fulfilled, since Florencio Sánchez performed at least one more conference at *El Ateneo* in Montevideo in 1908. This had national theater as the main subject. This case is key to understanding the situations many writers had to face during the literary modernization, as stated in the previous section: The challenges, the discomfort, anyways, the adaptation (or not) to an incipient cultural industry with defined rules and organization. Although many writers suffered from "conference sickness" this cultural practice was part of the other activities that a writer could engage in from the 19th until the 20th century in Argentina and this generated a larger economic retribution than writing, also: the social recognition for the performance.

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<sup>13</sup> In this case, the rhetorical device of false modesty might also appear as a way to legitimize oneself, with the effect of emphasizing the audience as the true consecrator, meaning that the audience would be the one to evaluate their performance.



Figure 8. The Heat of the Debate



Note: *Caras y Caretas*, August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1910.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The text accompanying the image reads: "They're going to kill each other!... Why are those people fighting? / -They are arguing about who speaks better: Clemenceau, Ferri, or Posada. / -And that one there, fainted? / -That's someone who listened to Piñero's lecture."



In relation to the centenary of the May Revolution (1910) and in the context of the emerging literary field (Altamirano y Sarlo, 1997), was produce the moment of shining for the conferences in Argentina, the “golden age”, this is the result of two special events: The vast amount of famous foreign speakers who arrived to the country, on the other hand, Lugones’s conferences about Martín Fierro in 1913.

Between 1909 and 1912, theaters on Buenos Aires brought to their stages the conferences of the writer Anatole France (1909), Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1909), Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1910), Eduardo Zamacois (1910) y Rubén Darío (1912). The first two on the list traveled to the country with a contract in hand as speakers, while the other three were offered a contract once they were already in the city. Likewise other intellectuals arrived to the city and gave conferences just like Rafael Altamira (1909), Georges Clemenceau (1910), Enrico Ferri (1910), Adolfo Posada (1910), Jean Jaurés (1911). The press followed the steps of the travelers during their visit in Buenos Aires and reported in various ways on the reception of their performances, an example is the front page published by *Caras y Caretas* in 1910 that makes reference to the conference phenomenon (Figure 8).

One of the cases of foreign writers and speakers Ruben Darío’s who visited the country for the last time in the year 1912 to promote his world wide magazines during his visit, and due to his personal finances was low at the time, he agreed to perform a conference entitled “*Mitre y las letras*” in exchange for compensation (Giaccio, 2016). The illustrated press would send the would send its photographers to portray him: in the “*Archivo Caras y Caretas*” which is located in the general archive of the nation, a photograph is preserved of Darío seated holding with his speech in hand, during a performance or posing as if he were doing it. The newspaper *La Nación* published a notice about his presentation that said: “Our public can’t wait to see this new facet of his talent” (August 30th)<sup>15</sup> and two days later the whole exposition was joined by a brief overview of its reception. The event and Lugones conference were rated as a “literary event” in 1902 and it was stated that Darío had “talent for public speaking” (*La Nación*, September 1st).

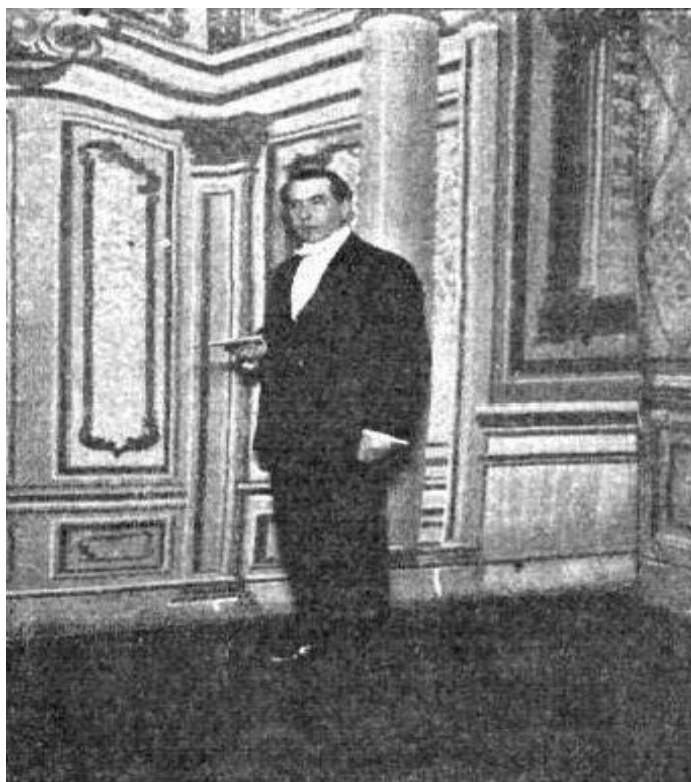
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<sup>15</sup> It is clearly evident here that, at that time, a distinction was made between activities: that of the writer and that of the lecturer.

These are the only records left from Dario's conferences.

Each of the presentations from the European travelers were about the centenary of the May's revolution it has particular characteristics regarding the institution that promoted the event, where the event would take place, the theme of the exposition, the public, the intellectuals and the Argentinian writers involved in the organization and the development of the conference. It is reception in the periodical press, among other matters. However, it can be stated that the success of most of these writers' conferences was related to the fact that they brought to the country the European novelties in the fields of literature and the arts, and also that there was a latent interest for the visit of foreign writers, a fact that made them attractive public figures.

**Figure 9.** Eduardo Zamacois delivering his conference on modern theater at the National Theater of Buenos Aires in 1910.



Note: *Caras y Caretas*, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1910

In 1913 the highlight of national conferences occurred during the literary modernization, when Leopoldo Lugones performed a series of conferences on the Odeon theater, hired by the theatrical producer Faustino Da Rosa which would take place from May 8 to May 24. The exposition theme was *El Martín Fierro* of José Hernández, of whom he had completed a series of works that he planned to publish in Paris, but in the end they will end up being published in Buenos Aires under the title of *El Payador* in 1916 (Conil, 1985). Lugones already has experience at conferences, with his intervention, he not only canonizes Hernández's poem, but also establishes himself as the speaker who possesses knowledge and is capable of educating about the nation and art (Dalmaroni, 2006).

In 1914, after the Lugones event and the usual conference performance from national and foreign writers, an institution was created with the objective of organizing these events: the *Instituto Popular de Conferencias*, which was part of the cultural project of the newspaper *La Prensa*. Its first Director was Estanislao S. Zeballos. He expressed his desire to

[...] establish a center for diffusion and culture that, while attesting to the intellectual prowess of our race, would also contribute to promote the spiritual education of the people in an engaging and concise manner through select conferences. In this way, it would provide solace and recreation in the noblest and purest realms of science and the arts for those eager spirits seeking disinterested emotions, after the turmoil of daily struggles (*Instituto Popular Conferencias*, 1914, p. 4).

Paz's purpose was to offer popular education through the conferences—held in the building of the newspaper located at *Avenida de Mayo 575*—which would later be published in the pages of *La Prensa*. The act also defined who could be speakers:

[...] it will maintain a high standard for the conferences through a fair and strict selection of their authors, a selection that, while reducing the influx of *improvised and mediocre speakers*, will also encourage studious youth [...] as well as provide lectures by *distinguished visitors* from other nations, *as long as they come unassociated with any commercial enterprise* (*Instituto Popular de Conferencias*, 1914, p. 5) (Italics mine).

It is observed here how this institution would carry out a meticulous selection of the speakers who would stand before the audience, in a context where, as previously mentioned, speakers multiplied and diversified, many of whom, as Paz noted, were improvised and mediocre. Furthermore, it clarified the conditions for inviting distinguished travelers: they should not be associated with any commercial enterprise, a common situation for foreign speakers in the early 20th century who arrived in Buenos Aires with a contract in hand. This requirement not only reflects the significance that this cultural practice had gained but also the intention to give it a more autonomous sense, distinguishing it from mere market interests related to symbolic goods.

In the section "Purposes of the Popular Conference Institute," the regulations were stipulated. It is worth pausing at point V: "The Institute will decide [...] on the future character of the conferences, in order to give them, if deemed appropriate, the nature of a true university extension, with a magazine, its own organ, for compiling the works of notes produced on its platform" (*Instituto Popular de Conferencias*, 1914, p. 8). Here we have a cultural object derived from the conferences: the publication to disseminate the presentations that took place at the institution. In this way, with the publications and their transcription in the newspaper, the dissertations could transcend the restricted audience that attended the events in the palace of *La Prensa*, reaching a wider readership.

Additionally, there is another interesting point, VII, which focuses on the distinguished travelers who frequently gave lectures during their stays in Buenos Aires. They would receive special treatment: "The Institute will also honor the eminent travelers visiting the country by holding public events in their honor, on which occasion they will be offered their platform to give lectures" (*Anales del Instituto Popular de Conferencias*, 1914, p. 8).

The trend of conferences was one of the activities that brought about a flourishing cultural life in early 20th-century Buenos Aires, but like all trends, it received criticism. Indeed, with the saturation of conferences, they ceased to be a distinctive cultural consumption for the elites attending and a legitimate, exclusive way for writers and intellectuals to establish themselves. One voice that reflected this situation was that of the

immigrant journalist Francisco de la Escalera in his 1914 essay “*El hombre cotorra*,” published in *Caras y Caretas*:

The speakers, orators, lecturers, and other derivatives of cotorra-ism abound. A Castelar fever is heating up Buenos Aires. A pseudo-Demosthenian storm has risen over Argentina in recent years. Verbiage presents epidemic characteristics.

How many men, women, and children of some prestige arrive from Europe, casting their series of speeches to the benevolent winds of publicity, whether about the excellences of electricity, the Trojan War, Columbus’s egg, or the causes of the decline of shoe polish. About anything; about whatever. The point is to rent a theater, a tent, or a cinema and launch into stringing together more or less interesting words” (de la Escalera, 1914).

With a sarcastic lens, de la Escalera (1914) focuses on two issues within the world of conferences at that time: fashion and the market. He noted that the orator’s eloquence was more important than the quality of the discourse, as one could captivate the audience solely with gestures and voice, to the detriment of intellectual formation. He further deepened his critique regarding the consumption of conferences, particularly the prestigious position granted to any speaker arriving from abroad. In other words, he observed the performative nature of the conference and also noted its distinctive function during times of social complexity:

A distinguished cook arriving from Paris who gives a lecture on the twenty-nine different ways to fry asparagus immediately gains popularity among us and earns the prestigious title of ‘intellectual’ along with the fame of an eminent asparagus expert. And she is now in a dignified position to associate with literati, authors, members of literary societies, and poets, because she is not just a personality, but an entity. And the case of the asparagus expert can extend to the dressmaker, the juggler, the businessman, the tooth puller, the shopkeeper... To all of them, because anyone can set barriers in the vast sea of fame!

Figure 10. Illustrations accompanying the text "El hombre cotorra"



Note: Illustrator: Redondo. "Caras y Caretas," June 13, 1914.

The broad audience, eager for conferences, sought to access a cultural activity that, in its early years, was characterized by being restricted. This led to the emergence of a conference market, not only in Buenos Aires but also in the provinces of the country, which is why theater entrepreneurs organized tours for speakers to meet the demand. Regarding this issue, de la Escalera remarked:

And now cotorra-ism in Argentina has become an honorable *modus vivendi*.

When the speaker in Buenos Aires is no longer in demand, as the eminent figures who parade here soon wear out, they have the option to go on a 'tour' through the interior! And the countryside is so vast!... From Chivilcoy to Tierra del Fuego, there is ample opportunity to deliver a thousand speeches" (de la Escalera, 1914).

Another aspect that stands out within the universe of conferences is the figure of the intellectual speaker, no longer the improvised one mentioned earlier, but the one who presents before the audience to give lectures and who earns economic benefits: "I know half a dozen doctors and one doctor or quasi-doctor who make a good living giving conferences. They are already professionals of cotorra-ism" (de la Escalera, 1914).

In this brief and concise essay, de la Escalera used an interesting image: that of the speaker as a "cotorra man." Related to this idea, but even more suggestive, is the proposal by Nicolás Granada, who also wrote an essay about conferences in which he characterized the speaker as a gramophone, a machine capable of reproducing indefinitely, an image reminiscent of Belisario Roldán as a gramophone.

In "*Conferencistas y grafófonos*," which appeared half a month after the aforementioned text by Francisco de la Escalera, Nicolás Granada addressed the emergence of the "era of conferences." From this perspective, he described the conference of that time as a spectacle, within the offerings of entertainment from the nascent cultural industry:

The conference is a new monological spectacle that competes with so-called 'public diversions'—musical, dramatic, cinematic, and even pantomimic—among which we can include street or parliamentary proclamations, religious talks, and even funeral prayers or obituary notices" (Granada, 1914).

After describing the types of speakers, he questioned whether orators needed to be talented, learned, and eloquent. In fact, he answered no, arguing that "a moderately intelligent person, endowed with common sense, good taste, and above all a powerful memory, can be successful and truly effective" (Granada, 1914). He then referred to the performance that the speaker conducts on stage as a way to engage the audience, regardless of the quality of the discourse, an idea he shared with de la Escalera:

I forgot to mention that the main quality of the speaker consists of great audacity and perfect composure. This, which constitutes the reinforced concrete of the pose, is essential for any speaker who wishes to win over the audience's mood.

A calm gaze, a gesture of mnemonic concentration followed by a hint of a serene and confident smile; a slight posture adjustment, a gentle gesture with the right hand, briefly stroking the beard, and then the standard 'Gentlemen,' followed by a graceful action extending that same hand with the palm turned upward and the fingers slightly arched toward it, is irresistibly effective.

Then, with a soft voice, slightly emotional, clear diction, slow, brief, concise, and suggestive phrases, begin the speech, as if evoking thought, gradually accelerating the movement; emphasizing, moment by moment, the words, gradually raising the pitch, preparing the climactic moment, and when it arrives, delivering it—clear, expressive, vibrant, in a well-studied inspiration, until the triumphant concept is submerged in the flowery and resounding applause; this is the first lesson, the mother lesson, on which all other observations and circumstances that must form the artistic spirit of the speaker are grouped" (Granada, 1914).

Nicolás Granada, who was involved in dramaturgy and had awareness regarding occupational hazard and actor training, offered a sharp observation by comparing the lecturer to a machine. He claim that once the study of eloquence was mastered, the next step was to build a repertoire of topics to present. For Granada, if the lecturer is like a phonograph, then the repertoire becomes 'records that must pass under the needle of this human mechanism' (Granada, 1914). With these records—the lecturer's memory—prepared, he can give repeated presentations, not only in Buenos Aires but also in other cities across the country, as previously mentioned. Once this is practiced,

[...] the lecturer is now fully prepared to set off across the world, with peace of mind and hands in pockets, soon to be filled with jingling sterling pounds, thanks to the phonograph like performances he'll deliver with the same records, wherever there's an entrepreneur and a theater ready to be host. (Granada, 1914).



After highlighting the economic gains that the presentations brought to the theater entrepreneur and the speaker, Granada continues to compare the latter to a machine, envisioning a future in which, with technological advancements, this character will evolve:

The day will come when the speaker will be a perfectly dismountable being, capable of laryngeal replacements, marrow substitutions, and the adaptation of new organs of sound and breath, the latter quality corresponding to the steel spiral spring that provides impulse and durability to the cord" (Granada, 1914).

These reflections by Nicolás Granada regarding technology highlight the novelty of conferences as a phenomenon of entertainment, particularly in relation to the role of mediating cultural life in modernized Buenos Aires.

While the press took on the task of criticizing and parodying the trend of conferences, it also featured advertisements in its pages, including one for hair products that starred a female speaker (Figure 11). Published in *Caras y Caretas*, it reflects the cultural relevance and popularity of the speaker figure in the early 1910s, and in this case, it stands out because it features a woman. It also showcases the phenomenon of this cultural practice: "We are in the midst of a conference craze," the advertisement stated (*Caras y Caretas*, October 18, 1913).

Figure 11. "The Lecturer"



### LA CONFERENCISTA

Estamos en pleno furor de las conferencias.  
Desgraciadamente, no podemos decir que éstas tengan por tema cosas prácticas y útiles. Generalmente, tratan de idealidades, cuando no se arrastran sobre asuntos triviales y "usadas hasta la cuerda", como dicen los franceses.  
Ultimamente, una mujer de talento y de inventiva, anunció una conferencia que tituló: "El primer manto real".  
Se creyó que se trataba de telas, botulados, pieles y piedras preciosas, y el teatro se llenó. Estaba previsto.  
Pero resultó que la conferencista disertó

sobre el cabello, haciéndolo con tal brillo y eficacia, que fué ovacionada más que si hubiera hablado de la poesía decadente, del Rey Pepino o de sus viajes por Europa.  
El final de su disertación encerraba una revelación y un consejo.  
— Usad — dijo — el muy célebre y eficientísimo Tricótero de Barry, único reparador y conservador del cabello, y si de aquí a dos meses no habéis probado una feliz reacción en los defectos de vuestras cabelleras, me deo rapar al ras, que sería para mí, peor que la muerte.  
A su salida, fué ovacionada de rosillas por todos los calvos presentes, que eran izón.

Note: *Caras y Caretas*, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1913.

Returning to the issue of criticism, some intellectuals also spoke out against the custom that led to the proliferation of so many conference professionals around the Centenary. This was the case for Ricardo Rojas in a letter to Miguel de Unamuno, who was planning to travel to the country in 1916, a visit that never materialized, as the Spanish writer never set foot on Argentine soil. In the letter, he wrote:

I remember that during the Centenary of 1910, I advised you not to come, because the public was fatigued from receiving visitors, and the matter of conferences was very discredited, especially due to the actions of some compatriots of yours.

These good people here, having been led to believe that all the prominent newcomers were geniuses, had come to suspect frauds in all those who arrived later. Fortunately, all that has been forgotten. Our childish people are easily impressed and easily forget.

(Buenos Aires, February 25, 1916, in the Miguel de Unamuno Fund, Documentary Repository Gredos, University of Salamanca).

It is clear that in this case, Ricardo Rojas is not referring to the Spanish writers Vicente Blasco Ibáñez and Ramón del Valle-Inclán, who arrived in Buenos Aires between 1909 and 1910, as he was part of both delegations welcoming these travelers. Instead, he alludes to a kind of astute individual turned professional speaker, someone who could talk about any topic, the “hombre cotorra” that de la Escalera depicted in his essay in *Caras y Caretas*. It’s important to underline Rojas’s mention and characterization of the audience: innocent but intelligent enough to question the wave of speakers arriving in the country.

The writer Rafael Barret also judged the attitude of some European writers regarding the activities they conducted during their visits, particularly the conferences, which he viewed as mere opportunities for monetary gain or personal success: “Look at Blasco Ibáñez and Anatole France, patting the porteño colt, shod in gold; see them making syrupy faces so that the ladies will go to the conferences, or even pay for the seats...” (Barret, 2009, p. 68).

This phenomenon of conferences occurred widely in the Spanish-speaking world and lasted for a relatively long period. While in Argentina its expansion took place during the first two decades of the 20th century and, as analyzed, began to decline after 1914, this does not mean that the activity disappeared. Rather, it continued to maintain considerable popularity and stability, albeit to a lesser extent.

## Conclusions

This article presents a preliminary panoramic approach to the writer's conference, which, it should be noted, is part of a broader ongoing research project that analyzes the figures of prominent speakers, significant performances, the themes of their presentations, as well as the institutions, theaters, and entrepreneurs who supported this practice. It also aims to contribute to the studies on the writer, the relationships between literature, theater, and the press, and the audiences in the Argentine transition from the 19th to the 20th century

At the end of the 19th century, the writer's conference emerged in Argentina as a new cultural practice. In its development during literary modernization, two distinct moments can be observed. The period roughly between 1880 and 1900 can be considered the initial phase, in which conferences took place in semi-private spaces and cultural institutions, aimed at a restricted audience (cultured, specialized, and also elite). As audiences expanded and the consumption of cultural goods grew, a second moment occurred between 1900 and 1914, during which the conference became popularized.

It is in this period that the number of topics increased, and various types of speakers emerged, including the writer-speaker, who became established in early 20th-century Buenos Aires. In response to this phenomenon, writers had two reactions: they either adapted or resisted. Through conferences, writers gained: first, economic profit; second, visibility; and third, a closer connection to their reading audience. However, this activity was novel and, to some extent, distanced them from their central practice of writing. When on stage, the writer transformed into a speaker.

In the production of conference performances, not only the star—the writer—participated, but also other agents such as entrepreneurs, theater workers, journalists, photographers, illustrators, and literary and theatrical critics, among others. In particular, the periodical press in Buenos Aires played a key role in disseminating news about the conferences, presenting representations ranging from serious to humorous and contributing to the emergence and consolidation of the phenomenon of the writer's conferences.

In various spaces, but especially on theater stages, both local writers and foreign speakers attracted by the market that had developed around this activity presented their work. Thus, in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, Buenos Aires gradually became the world capital of conferences.

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