
Ana Moraña 2016, *La fiesta de la modernidad: La revista argentina Caras y Caretas entre 1898 y 1910*, Buenos Aires, Argentina: Corregidor.

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Ana Moraña examines the popular and pioneering magazine *Caras y Caretas* from its establishment in Argentina in 1898 through 1910, the year of that nation's centenary. It had briefly been published earlier in Uruguay. She does this through the lens of cultural studies and examines the magazine's contents through a focus that sees it as celebrating a fiesta of modernity in which Moraña sees much of the Argentine society participating.

Caras y Caretas was an interesting and important weekly magazine during the years of its existence, 1898 to 1939. It has since been revived. The original run is available on the internet, having been scanned by the Biblioteca Nacional de España as part of its hemeroteca digital. The magazine contained social news, national and international news, short stories, advice, and more. Many of the stories were written by famous authors, both Argentines and others. For many of these authors, the magazine was an important source of income. Moraña stresses that the era was one in which authors became increasingly dependent on their writings for their livelihood. The magazine was well illustrated with drawings, in color and in black and white. Photographs were also included. The book does contain images of a few of the illustrations that she discusses, although it is frequently necessary to consult the online version of the magazine.

Caras y Caretas was inexpensive and circulated among a large audience, which appears to have included a wide segment of the population. However, from the information presented in the text it is not clear who read the magazine. Articles discussing certain groups do not mean that they read the magazine or that a significant number did. Certainly, the magazine's success and its wide readership can be seen in

the rapid increase in the number of pages in the average issue over the 12-year period. When it was first published, the number of pages was usually in the 20s, by 1901 it was frequently in the 60s and by 1910, issues were often over 120 pages long. The special number for the centennial had 400 pages. Many of the pages were consumed by an ever-increasing number of advertisements, as the country became part of the consumer culture in the North Atlantic fashion. Stores and producers found ways to encourage (or at least try to encourage) wider consumption of the new products. *Caras y Caretas* is clearly an excellent window to observe the rapidly changing society and the elites that wanted to transform the country into a “modern” place. One can also see some of the impacts of the giant wave of immigrants coming from Europe and how they were transforming Argentina. The magazine, not surprisingly, reflects this changing world. In most ways, *Caras y Caretas* embraced it and at the same time helped induce the changes.

Moraña decided to concentrate on the first 12 years of the magazine in order to “...enfocarme en los procesos de modernidad, la modernización y el modernismo en Argentina, tal como esta revista los reflejó, y analizaré de qué manera contribuyó a su desarrollo.” (22) She looks at this through the lens of the idea of a fiesta, a celebration of these kinds of concepts. Although she makes very clear that many of the articles, illustrations, and even advertisements were supportive of these concepts, it is not at all clear how the pages spent on discussing fiestas and types of celebrations helps the reader understand what *Caras y Caretas* was doing and more importantly what was occurring in Argentina. This emphasis seems to be a distraction from the much more solid and thoughtful examination of what was appearing in the magazine’s pages and how it reflected and perhaps shaped some of the tendencies existing at that time. For example, the author shows how the magazine participated in the push to make the city more “modern”: installation of electricity and trolley cars, breaking up the traditional grid pattern of Buenos Aires and so on.

It would have been useful for the reader to have some idea, however brief, of what other publications were saying and how they differed from *Caras y Caretas*. A good choice might have been the popular magazine *El Hogar*, which was started a few years after *Caras y Caretas* but was aimed principally

at women. However, its mixture of content, superficially at least, bears some resemblance to *Caras y Caretas*.

The author makes an extended and important attempt to tie what she is discussing in the magazine to the larger trends and events going on in Argentina, consulting the works of a range of historians. I find this a very welcome and important tendency. However, her bibliography fails to reflect the tremendous revolution in the writing of history in the years since the end of the last dictatorship. Most of the works cited were written decades ago and while they are important, they obviously cannot reflect the vast amount of recent research. So the ties between what Moraña has found in *Caras y Caretas* and what was going on in the larger society is not as clear as it should be. Still, it is obvious that the editors of the magazine sought out articles that reflected the mood of a significant portion of the elite. Argentina was and should be a progressive society (at least in social and economic senses, although not so much in the political arena). It should be increasingly geared to the new world of mass consumption. In other words, Argentina should be open to the ideas and trends sweeping much of Western Europe and the United States. One of the questions that hangs there, perhaps unfairly, since in all probability a study of a magazine cannot answer it, is whether the advertisements and the like reflect the growing world of consumer demand or in some way helped foster it. It is most likely a combination of both.

What Ana Moraña has given us is a close analysis of an important and successful magazine geared to a popular audience during the first 12 years of its existence, which coincided with major societal changes. She successfully uses the lens of cultural studies to make her study. The reader can see how at least in certain sectors of the society there existed a strong belief in progress as defined by the dominant cultural influences on the society (those coming from abroad). We can also see a strong belief in the future of Argentina. Moraña has been successful in carrying out her goals and has made an important contribution to our understanding of the very beginning of the last century, a crucial period in the history of Argentina.