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# Miracle cures: advertisements for various medications in the Santa Fe press, Argentina (1890-1918)

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## Abstract

In the late nineteenth century, as in other regions of Argentina and Latin America, the Santa Fe press featured a growing number of offers of health products such as tonics, pills and syrups. Aimed at a lay audience, these claimed to cure a series of conditions defined as belonging to “modern life.” This article analyzes the discursive dimension of the advertisements printed between 1890 and 1918: how they organized meanings associated with these conditions, an issue that is inscribed within a broad line of research aimed at analyzing social representations of health and disease, and how they participated in the different social spheres in the constitution of modern-day Argentina.

**Keywords:** sociocultural history; advertising; disease; representations; medications.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the press in Argentina was one of the main forums for debate on the public agenda (Alonso, 2002) and product placement, within an internal market that was turning to mass marketing and increasing consumption (Rocchi, 1998, p.535). The “new consumers” driving this market were largely European immigrants, many of them residents of the country’s coastal zone (Gallo, 1984; Míguez, 2011), who helped establish new modes and means of consumption. Researchers who have written about the different facets of the processes of consumption all point out that the phenomenon of consumption involved more than the acquisition and exchange of products on the market. On the contrary, consumption became established as a way of participating in public life (Pérez, 2015), as new social groups sought to assert their unstoppable right to take part in the public sphere represented by the new economy (Rocchi, 1998, p.542), within a national context of reform and increased political tolerance (Zimmerman, 1995).

As part of these transformations, the up-and-coming media sectors constructed a new imaginary (an aspirational set of values and knowledges) based on certain stereotypes; thus, establishing oneself as a person of consequence included being able to demonstrate certain conducts and features of respectability, which blended new values with more traditional virtues associated with respectable men and women. For men, this meant displaying signs of wealth and prosperity such as vigor and strength, and for women, increasingly, it meant displaying their fashion sense, their sensibility, their “independence,” refinement and modesty (Recéndez Guerrero, 2016). One of the star channels for this society in transformation, advertising discourse, provided a vehicle for these representations, disguised as the need to solve various complaints and offering the necessary products to do so.

The press took part in structuring these representations, as part of the structures of socially-constructed communication (Caimari, 2009, 2015). In this sense, it is useful to acknowledge the assumptions behind the presentation of certain topics (in this case, advertising discourse) that offer clues about their role in cultural processes (Saïtta, 2013). By analyzing commercial advertisements in the years when they proliferated as a means of a communication, we can see “how consumption relates to the analysis of different social transformations that exceed the strictly economic, ranging from the reorganization of social identities to the world of politics and civic life, including family and intimate relationships” (Pérez, 2015, p.97).

For these reasons, this article is situated at the intersection of two fields of historiographic interest: representations of disease and health, and consumption as a social relationship. As regards the first, it has been pointed out that in the context of the gradual process of medicalization (Armus, 2005; Suárez Escobar, 2004; Carbonetti, 2007; Rodríguez, Carbonetti, Andreatta, 2013; González Leandri, 2013), examining offers of non-regulated therapies and cures by doctors is still a blank field in our country (Di Liscia, 2008, p.22, 24). The sources offer a more complex portrait than that of an opposition between “traditional” and “modern” representations. The second field, while it responds to different questions, has recognized that healthcare advertising played a fundamental role in the development of habits and imaginaries of consumption. Within this spectrum, advertising has been more studied at critical moments like epidemics (Carbonetti, 2013) and its presence in publications by the medical profession (Rodríguez et al., 2014). Equally, the perspective most

present in Latin American studies that deal with the treatment of different conditions in the press has centered on the political and medico-scientific discussion of their definition and how to cure them (Armus, 2007). However, we are particularly interested in highlighting how, in studies such as those of Suárez Escobar (2004) and the anthology by Bongers and Olbrich (2006), a point emerges that we seek to test here: that the social installation of disease as metaphor (Sontag, 2003) and its use as a mechanism of identity classification were important in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Turn-of-the-century publications differed from their immediate predecessors by dealing with a wider variety of topics and by beginning to function as spokespersons for civil society against the state, rather than as mouthpieces for one faction against another (Sedran, 2015). Newspaper advertising increased and diversified, changes that have themselves been considered signs of modernization of the press (Lida, 2008).

As advertising's influence on publications' financial welfare grew, medications and products known as patent medicines (Young, 1961) played an important role in the fate of daily newspapers and journals, where they were a major revenue-generator from 1890-1920 (Fernández Poyatos, 2011). Within this framework, we examine the particular way these advertisements proposed solutions for combatting certain ailments, and how their discursive strategies stressed that these conditions were effects of an agitated, unsettled life.<sup>1</sup> We are mindful that "advertising shows how, as individuals faced unfamiliar situations, the new times were generating distress and anxieties that inevitably upset the functioning not only of emotional life but also corporal life, [which] led to all kinds of complaints, from upset nerves to intense headaches or stomach pain" (FernándezPoyatos, 2011, p.4).

Most of the health-related advertisements – which, incidentally, constituted the majority of all advertising – promoted "broad spectrum" cures. Syrups, tonics, liquids, and pills that purported to cure physical ailments (principally stomach and head pain) were marketed differently for men and women, even though they were treating the same condition. These cures, which touted fantastical, illusory claims (but which, as we shall see, also purported to have "scientific" and "medical" backing), appeared side by side with advertisements by medical professionals (including surgeons, clinicians, dental surgeons, and midwives, among others) whose sober wording stood out in contrast.

However, considering the lexicon used in advertisements brings up the issue of social discourses in circulation and the interaction with them. In the newspaper advertisements we reviewed, the use of "scientific" language and the fact that they appeared alongside offers for medical and fashion services of all kinds, as well as the fact that their presence was maintained and even rose, suggest that the advertisements we analyzed were not a "holdover" from an earlier period, as has been argued was the case in Buenos Aires (Rocchi, 1998), but rather that they formed part of the modern imaginary, offering the "new consumers" a way to belong to modern society and its particular form of "respectability" (Devoto, Madero, 2006).

This article analyzes the representations linked to disease and health that were proposed in those advertisements as part of their discursive strategies; it also considers how these were involved in shaping the aspirations and identities of readers-consumers.

## Newspapers in a changing region

The newspapers<sup>2</sup> studied were published in Santa Fe and Rafaela, and our analysis covers the period from 1890 to 1918, the year in which another critical development, the influenza epidemic, marked a shift in health discourses in the media (Rodríguez, Carbonetti, Andreatta, 2013). These cities were spaces undergoing profound transformations, among them explosive population growth and the arrival of European immigrants (who, it was hoped, would boost the agricultural economy but would also bring with them the values of civilization). Immigrants also drove progress in the region, although with particular socioeconomic features in each location. Reading newspapers and journals (Fernández, 2008b) was one of the most palpable transformations, and was directly linked to emerging forms of cultural consumption and social interaction. In this sense, these local cases are ripe for inclusion in analysis, as these publications have been reviewed (Sedran, 2015) for other issues under the heading of the so-called “social question” (Armus, 2007) such as gambling, vice and drunkenness (Sedran, 2016). To this we can add, also, the value of proposing a counterpoint to homologous periodical sources for the south of the province, a space that has been more studied in terms of journalistic discourses (Pagni, Cesaretti, 2009; Damianovich, 2013). Thus, we propose an approach that will serve as a basis for a regional reading, paying attention to the development of one of the most thriving areas on the continent (Fernández, 2008a).

The population of the province increased from 89,117 to 220,332 according to the census figures for 1869 and 1887 (Carrasco, 1887, p.15). The 1887 census lists an adult population of 123,491. Furthermore, although in the capital there was a higher proportion of Argentines to foreigners, in the colonies, foreigners outnumbered the locals, and in Rafaela they amounted to 73.1% (Carrasco, 1887, p.4). This foreign population was mainly Italian (in Rafaela, they made up 1,021 of 1,470 inhabitants). There were also settlers from other provinces, mostly from Córdoba and Entre Ríos.

In addition to the city of Rosario, the spaces experiencing the most growth and vibrancy were the productive centers of the center-west of the province, in which the occupational structure was dominated by the rural workforce, followed by other artisanal trades. The statistician Gabriel Carrasco (1887, p.75) wrote in his prologue to the 1887 census: “Once again, it shows the enormous importance of the foreign element in the province of Santa Fe, where the majority of the population essentially devoted to production is European, in relative and absolute terms.” Meanwhile, the provincial capital showed its first notable signs of economic growth, thanks to its port activities and urban development (Cervera, 2010), and the diversification of public life.

Although it started out in economic crisis, Santa Fe stabilized over the turn of the century, and from 1880-1890 it occupied eighth place in a ranking of world growth (De Marco, 1993). In that context of population growth and economic expansion, some publications constructed their identity by posing as the voice of the most dynamic social sectors. From 1890 on, advertising – and, in particular, publicity for health products – increasingly became a revenue source.

In line with other publications elsewhere in Latin American (Alonso, 2002), the press in Santa Fe exhibited a variety of political positions, except for some of the working-class

newspapers (Buonome, 2014). As regards order and morality, the press laid a common ground of understanding (Sedran, 2015). Thus, by the turn of the century, the press was “the main medium for disseminating ideologies and competing over the allocation of values, the creation of identities and the distribution of roles” (Alonso, 2002, p.207). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that in the roughly three decades covered by our analysis, the press underwent important modifications in its makeup and goals; however, in terms of advertising policies, there was a certain consistency in content and form in advertisements that were published regularly, as we shall see. Thus, as regards our topic, even though “the change from a politically partisan press ... towards one based fundamentally on commercial aspects is usually located in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century ... these categorical distinctions need to be loosened, since the lines between the nineteenth-century and ‘modern’ press are more blurry, vague and indefinite” (Ajmechet, Friedman, 2011, p.2).

Around 1890, there was a shift in the constructions of meaning in the Santa Fe press around another key topic: violence. Rather than focusing on the axis of intra-elite violence, the press began stressing more the “innate” violence of working-class sectors. *El Liberal*, published in Rafaela, belonged to the group of opposition papers that spoke for the settlers, “respectable, civilized citizens,” opposed to a government they characterized as oppressive. It began its political life in a context fraught with political struggle, as a mouthpiece for radicalism, the new related force whose symbolic universe was based on aspiring to a new, morally superior society (*El Liberal*, 22 nov. 1915, p.1).

The editors of *El Liberal* addressed a decent, hard-working citizen, embodied in the foreign settlers (*El Liberal*, 27 nov. 1892, p.2) and opposed to the creole police officials, who were violent and ignorant (*El Liberal*, 10 dic. 1900, p.2-3). The paper also responded to a readership that was indeed mostly foreign, since the literacy rates in Rafaela were markedly higher among foreign-born men than among Argentines,<sup>3</sup> which also suggests that they constituted the majority of the paper’s readership. In addition, there was limited access to newspapers from other cities, and even more so to papers from other provinces or the nation’s capital; in general, during this period they continued the practice of reproducing editorials from like-minded publications in support of particular causes, and of publishing telegraphed news items from Europe and the US. This was also influenced by the fact that the primary mode of distribution was by subscription. In any case, in the region, the daily paper that became a journalistic and also commercial reference point was *La Capital* (Pagni, Cesaretti, 2009).

Advertisements were divided into a few groups: agricultural supplies, professional services (attorneys, notaries, physicians, midwives, dentists, and professors, among others); alcoholic beverages; beauty and hygiene; fashion and cultural consumption, such as clothing, high-quality furniture, pianos and photography. Within this scenario, over-the-counter tonics, pills, syrups, elixirs and emulsions ranked first, on average, in terms of the number of advertisements, vying for importance with announcements by dressmakers and agricultural machinery.

Meanwhile, *La Revolución* (of Santa Fe) was devoted to encouraging urban development in the capital city. In addition to political struggles, its editorial concerns included problems relating to public spaces in two main areas: infrastructure (lighting, transport, logistics at

the port, widening streets and avenues, among other things) (*La Revolución*, 2 sept. 1886, p.1-4) and law and order issues, such as unseemly or scandalous behavior (24 abr. 1888, p.4-5) and police failure to control it (19 abr. 1888, p.2).

In terms of advertising, *La Revolución* used the same headings but devoted less space to it than *El Liberal*, although agricultural machinery did not feature significantly and there were more advertisements for professional services, bearing in mind that less total space was devoted to advertising. Medications were featured, especially those of two or three of the most famous brands.

It is noticeable that in these publications the civilizing imaginary was deeply connected to all things European. In one of many notes referring to customs in the capital city, *Nueva Época*, the pro-government Santa Fe daily paper, warned “florid youth” who imitated “the customs and even the vices of the uncivilized gaucho”: or the “models of the most distinguished society” who “wear a rakish fedora cocked low [and don] boots to walk on the pavement” (*Nueva Época*, 17 feb. 1900, p.5).

In any case, these customs, which continued to be signs of civilization, stopped being the exclusive domain of the traditional elite. They were claimed by new actors on the rise (Fernández, 2008b) as a strategy for membership in distinguished, civilized society and as a way to differentiate themselves from the traditional elites. Of course, the main tension involved in this type of expression lay in the political world (Alonso, 2012). However, there are traces of how this cultural horizon appeared in the advertisements (proposed as ideals of health and success). These characteristics contributed to replace a climate produced in these newspapers that saw their main interlocutors a broader, more varied group of readers, thereby establishing belonging to the in-group, on cultural matters, as a matter of being Europeanized and civilized. These people were offered products based on the assumption that they were suffering the ailments of civilization, of modernity, and, of course, that they were in a position to acquire such products. In this sense, consumption of these remedies can also be interpreted as a mechanism of belonging and cultural identity.<sup>4</sup>

## **Miracle and scientific cures**

As in other branches of the market, in the area of healthcare products, advertising offered a direct link between the consumer and the producer that transcended the objective of offering a product to promote its consumption (Kalifa, 1999). In this context, advertisements for over-the-counter medicines and cures (but also for seers, fortune-tellers, and spiritualists) belonged within another major shift in consumer culture.

In a competitive market, as industries relied more on advertising for their survival, it became imperative to rid advertising discourse of the fantastical aura that had characterized it, and to provide a pitch of seriousness and reliability. Medicines were part of this discursive shift, offered “simultaneously” as miracle cures and as serious products that had the backing of medico-scientific discourse.

In the case of the Santa Fe newspapers, some products, such as ointments, elixirs, syrups, and tonics, among others, stood out, firstly, because they remained on the market for years and occupied a dominant share of advertising space; and secondly, because

they coincided in their message: curing ailments that people were not ashamed to have (we shall see that the messages did not contain euphemisms or substitutions). One can deduce, as we said earlier, that this was because these ailments were a sign of belonging to modern, respectable society. The majority of the advertisements refer to the daily lives of their readers, listing the conditions and ailments suffered, supposedly, precisely because the individual “is” civilized.<sup>5</sup>

We would like to make an initial observation about the gender difference seen in the advertisements (Recéndez Guerrero, 2016). In general, given the same ailment (such as the lack of energy seen in the following example), different causes or aspects are stressed, depending on whether the advertisement is aimed at men or women. A distinction is made between the physical and emotional causes in each sex. In dealing with a lack of strength in men, the same product from the same brand, spoke in physical language and the traces of medical discourse are explicit:

Men who Lack Strength

Do not let this growing weakness, this ever-growing malaise envelop you more and more, like a fly trapped in the strands of a spider's web.

Start taking Dr. Williams' Pink Pills today, the best fortifying tonic, and then note how quickly you regain your strength, how your nerves are toned and fortified, your muscles invigorated and your whole body recovers that lost sensation of well-being. These well-known pills provide an abundance of rich, pure, red blood, and that is the secret of their success. They train the blood to absorb large amounts of oxygen, the great maintainer of life, and this rich, pure blood as it circulates around the body carries to all its parts the nutrition necessary to carry out its functions appropriately.

Ask your pharmacist for them today, since they are for sale in all good pharmacies (El Liberal, 10 oct. 1915, p.3).

In contrast, women who lost strength were “frail” and suffering from “fantasies” that distanced them from reality:

Vanished fantasies

The frail young woman is doubly to be pitied. Her physical sufferings are compounded by emotional ones.

For the frail young woman has fantasies, just like her more fortunate sisters, regarding her health. And when, returning to reality, she thinks twice and realizes that her future is shaky, she weeps and sees all her fantasies dissolve one by one.

To the frail young woman we say, “Do not imagine you lack a cure, if you have not yet tried Dr. Williams' Pink Pills, the best fortifying tonic. These pills have cured many who, like you, had lost hope of seeing their dreams come true. Why not be cured?” (El Liberal, 10 oct. 1915, p.3).

The advertisement is striking, thanks to the illustration of a woman lying on a couch, looking melancholy. While such ailments were abundantly represented in nineteenth-century advertisements (Baker, n.d.), by resetting the context in which this one appeared systematically, it stressed an idea of modernity. On either side are advertisements for a “governess”; a class on the “Mendia system” of dress-making and “Feminine elegance ... a fashion house.”



Thus, the advertisement for this tonic actually integrated a “series of messages” aimed at the needs and aspirations of the civilized modern woman. Studying the advertising sections, we see a mix of this type of large, flamboyant announcement with others that reinforce the idea of belonging to a group of modern, fashionable, successful, chic people: “Chic folk smoke Reina Victoria cigars Habana – Enrique Martínez – Buenos Aires” (*El Liberal*, 10 oct. 1915, p.4).

Returning to this particular advertisement, the feminine imaginary it evokes is clear: women’s physical weakness not only brings emotional suffering, but both types are mingled as causes of disease. This is so marked, that the young woman loses her sense of reality (“when, returning to reality...”); furthermore, her true ailment is not lack of strength, but the loss of “hope of seeing her dreams come true.”

Susan Sontag (2003) identifies this discursive strategy in literature, in relation to the construction of which subjects could fall sick with tuberculosis: men and women who, possessed of the more powerful sensitivity that was the hallmark of a civilized, refined person (in its extreme version, the archetype of the Romantic genius), were more likely to contract a disease associated with an “excess of life,” of strength, of sexuality, of vigor, that led to eventual collapse. Through analysis of the metaphors that sustained the myth of Romantic tuberculosis (as a way to reframe the social meaning of disease), Sontag draws a contrast between the bright red blood on consumptives’ handkerchiefs and their final pallor, which resembles, to a certain extent, modern ailments, which were only suffered by those who found themselves in a group of subjects who, paradoxically, had all they needed to stay afloat in the vertiginous world of the early twentieth century. This framework of references is present in the advertisements we studied.

In contrast to the extravagance and size of the advertisements for patent medicines and the grandiloquence of the promises they made, which reflected those seen in advertising for clothes and other stars of the consumer firmament, such as cigarettes,<sup>6</sup> advertisements for medical services were crisp and succinct, listing merely the professional’s specialty and office location: “Dr. Eliseo Soaje, Medical Surgeon, offers his professional services. He makes house calls at all hours. Consults from 10-11 a.m. and 4-5 p.m. – Rafaela” (*El Liberal*, 10 nov. 1895, p.4).

In some cases, doctors also listed their credentials: “Dr. Soulajes, Medical Surgeon with degrees from France and the Argentine Republic. Office hours: from 12-3 p.m. at home: opposite the mill belonging to Mr. Avanthay and Sons – Rafaela” (*El Liberal*, 27 oct. 1892, p.3).

Supplies were also presented this way. On the same page,<sup>7</sup> we read, “Boston Orthopedics: Jujuy Street, 645 465 – Santa Fe. Medical Supplies. Varicose vein stockings. Girdles for young ladies, jock straps, pessaries, injections, various, syringes, etc. Elastic cushions for patients. Hernia trusses, wholesale or retail. Devices for Correcting Bodily Defects” (*El Liberal*, 27 oct. 1892, p.3). “Luis Median’s Franco-Argentine Pharmacy. Pharmacists from universities in Paris and Buenos Aires. This establishment carries the best supply of pure medications from Paris, chemical equipment, syringes, hernia trusses, etc. Requests from landowners handled with care and the most favorable terms” (*El Liberal*, 27 oct. 1892, p.3).

It has been pointed out that medical advertising adhered to concise, serious, professional language, one of the features that distinguished it from the modern advertising language

used by “holdovers” from an earlier period, such as the products we are analyzing (Rocchi, 1998). However, if one considers the terms used in each type of advertisement for the period 1890-1918, what stands out are the “loans” between science and fantasy, rather than a clear boundary between one discourse and the other, one genre and the other (Quereilhac, 2010). Some examples of this are the non-medical advertisements that nevertheless aimed to share the meaning-universe of medicine while, paradoxically, promoting “old-fashioned” products: “Weakness is Lack of sufficient Nutrition for the body’s needs. The true remedy is more “nutrition” and this can be obtained with the true Scott’s Emulsion (pure cod liver oil with hypophosphites), a concentrated food and tonic in one” (*El Liberal*, 15 nov. 1915, p.3).

Some of the long-established brands, like Scott’s Emulsion, added medical warnings about “unknown” products, seeking to position themselves as reliable, well-known treatments: “Health, Strength and Energy are the most precious things in life. If you have lost them, do not seek to regain them with unknown drugs or alcohol. Strengthen your body from the inside with the best tonic, the best-known medicinal food, Scott’s Emulsion. You will soon notice its fortifying effects, and improvement will be lasting. Always Demand Genuine Scott’s Emulsion (*El Liberal*, 22 nov. 1915, p.4).

“Sugar water is ‘agreeable to the palate.’ But no one would pay half a peso or a peso for a bottle, even if it were labeled ‘tonic or medicine’ with or without alcohol. That is exactly what happens with ‘emulsions’ of unknown ingredients and cod products ‘without oil.’ They are medicines ‘for the palate.’ This is one of the many reasons never to give up on a remedy proven by three generations of success, Scott’s Emulsion. Effective. Perfected. Inimitable” (*El Liberal*, 29 oct. 1915, p.2; emphasis in the original).

Another type of “crossover” is seen in the tonics and patent medicines that claimed to cure ailments like dyspepsia, weakness and lethargy (Fernández Poyatos, 2011):

Wampole’s Preparation, which by fortifying, enriching and cleansing the blood of its impurities, stimulates the appetite, gets the digestive system up and running, and quickly renews everything ... This effective remedy is as tasty as honey and contains the nutritious and curative principles of pure cod liver oil, which we extract from fresh cod livers, combined with a syrup of combined hypophosphites, malt extract and wild cherry. Dr Juan I. Iriarte, of Buenos Aires, says: ‘I certify that I have prescribed Wampole’s Preparation for many patients suffering from weakness due to multiple causes, who have benefited noticeably from using this powerful tonic’. ... On sale in pharmacies (*El Liberal*, 26 nov. 1915, p.6).

The advertisements for “miracle cures” shared the page with announcements by physicians, midwives, and dental surgeons, among others. Our objective is not merely to consider the strategies in this advertisements – since, as contemporaries pointed out, the explicit messages had been part of the strategies of such advertisements since they arose in the eighteenth century (Nock, 1918, p.150) – but the conjunction of their explicit messages and their tacit spatial grouping within a set of “serious” advertisements, which one can argue were offering cures for the ailments of modern life.

Therefore, it was in the framework of the overall set of announcements about lifestyle and health that these advertisements were reconfigured along new lines by their promoters. For example, a full page in *El Liberal* devoted to advertising included announcements

from insurance companies, photography, commissioners and consigners; a fire insurance company, a whitewash producer, plants and seeds, agricultural insurance; a land and agricultural loans bank, a storage facility for wholesalers and retailers, a French restaurant, a store, shop and hardware business, and the restaurant El Globo (El Liberal, 19 jul. 1894).

However, on the previous page, we find an example of another group of advertisements, the last set we will consider in this article. The somnambulist seer Borsani is an example of a practice that was very much in vogue at the time, but also questioned (Bubello, 2010):

Over 100,000 People Saved – 100,000 – By the famous and powerful Somnambulist seer Borsani. Those who rely on the prodigious methods of ‘magnetism’ for treatment of all ‘chronic’ diseases of the nerves and ‘conjunctives,’ even those reputed to be incurable, should seek out Prof. Borsani, Buenos Aires. Individuals who for cannot attend a personal consult for any reason may send a certified letter with a money order for 5 pesos, naming the principle symptoms of the illness and enclosing three strands of hair from the person who requires the consult. The answer will contain a detailed explanation of the disorders and type of disease the patient suffers, and indicate the appropriate remedies needed to recover the person’s precious and much-desired health (El Liberal, 27 nov. 1892, p.6).

Advertisements offering such services were featured in smaller numbers. However, they appeared regularly; they took up a large space and included illustrations. They were offered without gender differences and their promises of a cure were more vague – in reality, more all-encompassing. Even though this article does not deal with spiritualism and magnetism, we would like to point out that public opinion on those topics was ambivalent: they were attacked as charlatanism as well as explored by conspicuous members of the medical profession and the scientific world.<sup>8</sup>

One of the key aspects of medicalization was the way medical discourse was used to endorse certain practices, such as acceptable treatment methods. Other discourses emerged in the process; their advertisements used a language that the medical profession sought to monopolize, thereby calling into question its ability both to regulate the circulation of certain products and to persuade the population to reject them. Thus, we come across cases like the ones shown earlier, in which a product adopted terms that the public associated with medicine, as a form of endorsement. We also find occasions when the advertisements claimed to be “prescribed by the best physicians,” from “universities in France,” alongside an infinite number of announcements for clinics, consults with physicians and surgeons (El Liberal, 10 feb. 1895); dental surgeons, pharmacies, and municipal announcements about mandatory vaccinations (El Liberal, 8 oct. 1911), among others.

Along those same lines, announcements sprang up about products that were not presented as medications but as aperitifs and other alcoholic beverages (the emblematic case was Bagley’s Hesperidin), which promised beneficial effects for people’s health and energy-level: “Fernet Staudt – Hygienic liquor, aperitif and anti-choleric, the ‘best’ of all ‘similar’ liquors – sole vendors and proprietors” (La Capital, 21 dic. 1892, p.4).

The ability to present these products as beneficial to health was likely related to the fact that a “striking [feature] of the branded health remedies was their diversity: liquids, balsams, soaps, purgative syrups, ointments, soft drinks, tonics, health powders, toothpastes,

granules, powders, lotions, hair-growth products, elixirs ... any disease could potentially be relieved and even eradicated by these miracle products” (Fernández Poyatos, 2011). That is, within the discourse of these announcements, it “made sense” that a wine or aperitif could have curative powers. Besides, health benefits appeared among lists that included other virtues of the product, more related to “respectable” consumption than specifically to health benefits: “[Kalisay wine with quinine] superb, fortifying, excellent, delicious, refined” (El Liberal, 15 oct. 1910, p.4).

What we have shown so far raises questions about the tension between representations of disease and cures recognized to be legitimate. As we said, while maintaining that they were miracle formulas (many of them secret) and continuing to aim at ailments that were now predominant in the nineteenth century, these products also became the most widely promoted at the time; also, they incorporated scientific language as one of their principal marketing strategies. This opens up two interrelated, though separate, lines of questioning.

Firstly, how was “medical” discourse – that is, what advertising discourse proposed as medical – consolidated in the media (and specifically in advertising) as a way of endorsing products on offer? On this subject, we should acknowledge that in Santa Fe there was a strategic shift in the promotion of these products, which consolidated “scientific” arguments. However, it is interesting to draw a double distinction: one the one hand, in medications intended for women, this shift was less noticeable. They were promoted using language that was predominantly and undeniably literary in tone, constructed on the conditions attributed to the female gender in the nineteenth-century Romantic imaginary, such as frailness, weakness and melancholy. On this point, there is indeed a noticeable contrast between these advertisements and ones for home appliances and other products for modern women. However, a broader view of the period and the category under analysis shows more similarity than transformation in the content and the discursive strategies used in these advertisements.

The second line of questions is subsidiary to the first. Namely, in this context, what were the representations on disease and the ideals of health that this discourse was contesting in the public arena? This question arises mainly because it has been proven that certain sectors of the market “opposed” to the medical and scientific idea of health, like miracle products and esoteric services, did not decline in this period, and were assigned a significant amount of advertising space. Furthermore, they were able to withstand effective regulation by the medical profession of their production and sale, whilst promoting themselves by appealing to the very same medical discourse that condemned them.

Lastly, the very classification of these terms is complicated, since even the same product could be promoted with different advertisements (and language sets), so that it is inadvisable to pigeonhole them, since their strategies and endorsements in some cases directly conflicted, but at other times converged. One of the most widely-publicized, Williams’ Pink Pills, alternately appealed to emotional deficiencies, as we saw, but also alluded to medical knowledge:

Cure your headaches. ... Restore the components your blood lacks, tone and fortify your nerves, and they will disappear forever ... Mrs. Alfonsina Culreaux, a well-

known dressmaker from Mar del Plata, Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, residing at 1592 Santiago del Estero Street, has this to say: 'Overwork caused disorders that often manifested as headaches. I started taking Dr. Williams' Pink Pills and gradually recovered my health to the point where I am completely cured, both of the headaches and also of the disorders I suffered for quite some time.' In *Pharmacies* (El Liberal, 3 dic. 1911, p.2).

To summarize, if anything is clear from these sources it is the need to analyze them in more depth; this example shows aspects of the commingling of the medical and the esoteric, the mystic and the distinguished, that this article seeks to highlight. On the one hand, the topic of blood as a discursive strategy should be explored as a case by itself. It was a versatile and polysemic symbol of life. It is often mentioned in cases of "scientific" explanations such as this one, but its importance at the time is undeniable in other public discourses such as politics, forensic medicine and criminal law (Ruggiero, 2004; Caimari, 2009), and literature (Ferro, 2015). Thus, it is vital to reinstate a broader discursive, symbolic context when dealing with representations of health and disease and the context in which apparently mutually exclusive notions coexisted.

## Final considerations

The newspapers studied treated their main interlocutors as a broad, varied readership which they established as belonging to a pro-European and civilized group in terms of social and cultural issues. We saw how those readers were offered certain health products based on the assumption that they were suffering ailments of civilization and modernity. This article is a first attempt to explore the advertising universe of publications in this region. Unlike other studies, which have analyzed the products offered at critical moments such as epidemics, the ones considered here were intended for regular consumption and aimed at a broad audience, which relativizes their status as luxury items (at least in the terms offered in treatments for diseases like influenza or cholera, available only for wealthy sectors). In contrast, Williams' Pink Pills, Walcott's Tonic, and Wampole's Preparation, among others, were advertised as aids for daily management of conditions of modern life and, in the same movement, they contributed to strengthening a certain idea of subjects who, "because of" their civilized nature, suffered certain ailments.

Among other aspects of interest to social and cultural history, this "coexistence" leads us to wonder how these publications dealt with the struggle over endorsement in the health field, since these products and services claimed different sources of legitimacy. Also, these advertisements all offered the promise of an infallible, universal cure guaranteed by the brand. In this sense, we can see there was an area of conflict over the coordinates of legitimacy (accusations that all other products, except for one's own, were quack remedies; appeals to direct quotes by supposedly prestigious medical professionals).

However, it would be wrong to summarily categorize advertisements for over-the-counter medicines and other products as merely "traditional," since, in a period of gradual but perceptible medicalization evident in certain aspects of social life, they were enmeshed

in a modern mass imaginary on disease and health that upheld values such as vigor, forcefulness, determination, and success. But they also showed a recognizable continuity in terms of the refinement and frailty that were desirable in women, for whom suffering certain ailments was not altogether undesirable. Patent medicines also constituted one of the most up-and-coming segments of the advertising market, in that their visibility in periodical publications grew continually during those years.

As we have said, these advertisements combined representations on health (not least of which was a counterweight to the undeniable process of medicalization: the direct relationship they set up with consumers, who held in their hands a treatment not mediated by physicians, as well as a way of belonging to civilized society), on individuals and, overall, the place that health and disease would occupy in the archetype of the successful citizen.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Reflections on the uncontrollable effects of modern life were present at the turn of the century in Argentina (Bruno, 2011) and as a corollary of the preeminence of Romantic ideas, in art (Ferro, 2015) and intellectual life (Terán, 2009) and its particular mode of interaction with scientific and medical thought in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Huertas, 1991). Since the mid-1800s, literature had been denouncing the disastrous effects of industrial capitalism on human life, identifying diseases that were “typical” of capitalism as a consequence of certain lifestyles (Sontag, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> We consulted *La Revolución*, *Unión Provincial* and *Nueva Época*, from Santa Fe; *El Liberal*, from Rafaela; *El Comercio*, from Cañada de Gómez and *La Capital*, from Rosario, from 1874 to 1920, to get a broad overview of the presence of these advertisements in the central and west-central part of the province.

<sup>3</sup> In Santa Fe, 66.2% of the population aged 6 years and above were of Argentine origin. Out of 3,772 Argentine men, 64.5% were literate, and out of 4,821 women, the figure was 59.3%. 33.8% of the population was foreign-born. Within that group, out of a total of 3,218 men, 67.7% were literate; out of 1,160 women, 54.14% were literate. In Rafaela, the most striking difference was between Argentine and foreign-born men, whose literacy rates were 31.25% and 66.34%, respectively. For the women, the situation was more similar to that in the capital, with 47.42% of literate foreign-born women as opposed to 37.86% of Argentine women (we calculated these figures ourselves, based on the data in the 1887 provincial census).

<sup>4</sup> However, this process can be considered repetitive/recurrent since, as Fernando Rocchi (1998) has shown for another marketing niche, consumers in turn-of-the-century Argentina did not hesitate to be active “judges” of the quality of mass products, in terms of their fashionableness and distinction.

<sup>5</sup> This notion can be traced from the mid-nineteenth century in Tanchou’s explanation of the “diseases of civilization,” understood to be the consequence of a certain lifestyle (Lewis, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> It has been pointed out that in Buenos Aires, cigarettes were one of the areas where advertising discourse most noticeably adapted to a local audience that was not only growing but imposing some of its own standards, such as the presence in the advertisements of some reference figure, a star, or someone distinguished, unlike the marked American tendency to address the common man (Rocchi and other articles on consumption). In *El Liberal* (15 oct. 1915, p.1), among other examples, is the following quote: “You’ll be what you must be or you’ll be nothing. José de San Martín – Cigarettes for 80, 50 and 40 cents. – We’re free because we’re born free.”

<sup>7</sup> Some examples are: “Colonias Vila, Fidela, Bigand, San Antonio, Terrosa and Ramona”; Licor Store, Carpentry and Furniture; Tailor’s Shop; land sales; Store and Warehouse; Cigarettes; Vermouth Giacometto; “Argentine National Bank” (*El Liberal*, 27 nov. 1892, p.6); “Young man seeks position as grain dealer; Italian liquor store”; house for sale; business consultancy; lots for sale in Lehman; “Italian hardware store and scales repairer; notary public; liquor store (*El Liberal*, 10 feb. 1895, p.4).

<sup>8</sup> For an exploratory analysis of a practical case of magnetism and spiritualism in the province of Santa Fe, see Sedran, Carbonetti, Allevi (2018).

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