# INTRODUCTION

## What Do Modern Men Want?

This book is the result of many years of research toward understanding the complex gendering of modernity and civilization in Argentina's history.[1] The existence of a tension that resulted from competitive ideas about masculinity in the context of building the modern nation was part of a revolutionary understanding of gender that began in the late colonial period. The new male subject that emerged in the last quarter of the eighteenth century was formed by contradictory views that arose from political, philosophical, and scientific ideas organized within a system that was understood as universal and encompassing all aspects of society. The failure of these systems to achieve political stability and coherence produced constant ideological renewals that are analyzed in the different chapters.

My goal in this book is to analyze how universal characterizations of masculinity shaped the politics of the River Plate Viceroyalty and later the creation of the Argentine Republic based on scientific and philosophical ideas that were considered modern and gendered. I need to clarify, though, that I did not write a history of masculinity, but the history of a relationship that involves masculinity. I am interested in analyzing how and why gender, knowledge, and politics were connected in the formation of Argentina to shape the modern culture that resulted after the end of colonialism. This historical process was characterized by a simultaneity made possible by networks that

allowed the spread of knowledge across multiple locations, lending credence to the notion of universality, a concept to which I return throughout the book.

The association between universality and Enlightenment culture is well established, but less understood is how the men who embraced its scientific and philosophical ideas experienced universality during a time of rapid change, including the failure of republicanism in Europe and the transformation of science, which eventually separated from philosophy. Despite these ideological collapses that exposed its limitations, this ideology remained relevant by fostering shared forms of association and sociability that supported political transformation grounded in ideas believed to be as precise as the science and philosophy that inspired them. This experience was tangible, widely communicated, and sustained by transnational networks of philosophers and scientists who also served as political leaders.

This book examines the history of that experience in Argentina, exploring the models followed by enlightened men over time in the Americas and Europe, as well as the failure to establish a stable national model due to the constant emergence and expiration of new ideas. This process explains the title *From Virile to Sterile*, which reflects Argentina's transition from a culture that embraced a feminized modern virility to one that cast the virile man as a sterile force in the formation of the modern nation.

This phenomenon cannot be fully understood by focusing solely on the internal political life of a single country. Instead, it becomes evident when examining the external context, which underscored the power of universality to make men equal through interconnected knowledge. The awareness that their actions mirrored those occurring simultaneously in Europe and the Americas offered the advocates of the Enlightenment compelling proof that humanity had entered a new historical age. This simultaneity profoundly transformed individuals and reaffirmed the existence of a new historical force that brought men up to date through knowledge and modern sociability. Each chapter of this book examines the simultaneous experiences that influenced the development of modern Argentina.

In brief, I do not assert the existence of a universal, uniform man, but demonstrate the concerted effort to forge one through the process of nation building, which gave rise to a new male identity grounded in a shared culture of sociability and association, allegedly emancipating men from archaic societal norms through the power of knowledge. As elucidated in various chapters, this masculinity was predominantly representational, and the associated representations were understood as universal, which over time clashed with the very

purpose of building a new nation. The formation of Creoles and Argentines that led the nation-building process was the result of experiencing the Enlightenment as a global culture. Each chapter analyzes the changing international context with which these men were interacting, and the resulting philosophical and scientific ideas that changed or were changed by different models of masculinity.

In the case of Argentina, the tortuous path to change began with the expectation of forming a republic based on a philosophical system that through science would regulate all aspects of society ended up in a civil war won by conservatives that banned the teaching of science and liberal ideas in the name of natural law, setting limits to what ideology could achieve on its own.

Thomas Abercrombie affirms that by 1800, thinking through the "sex/gender system which separates gender as a performative social construct from 'biological' sex, did not exist," and it would be a mistake to apply it to this era.[2] While it is clear that during the period covered the normative social behavior and socialization for individuals of the masculine sex (*sexo masculino*) was believed to be either created by God or natural, it is also evident that a strict association between being a man and doing strictly manly things became more elusive due to the effect of the scientific revolution and the ideological changes that followed. In Latin America, the enlightened elite believed that nature was finally tamed by human will and that men were less natural as a result, because they had achieved an understanding and manipulation of its laws. As a result, in Spanish America, the natural world began to be treated as an instrument rather than a subject, and this included men's bodies. The emphasis on freedom and individualism, the rise of consumerism, new scientific ideas, and the adoption of feminine socialization collectively expanded the meaning of what it was to be a man.

Finally, I need to make some clarifications. While "Illustration" is the preferred term among scholars of Spain and Spanish America, I have chosen to use "Spanish Enlightenment" to align with the shared objectives of this intellectual movement across Europe and the Americas and to avoid narrative confusion. It is also important to explain that the chronological order followed in the book does not imply that the ideological changes described began and ended on precise dates and developed in vertical succession; ideas coexisted over time and, in some cases, emerged or reemerged in a complex, chaotic manner. Presenting them in a strict sequential order is a methodological choice to help readers identify trends, but a simple or linear development should not be assumed—on the contrary, continuities and discontinuities characterized each ideological path addressed.

## SCIENTIFIC, POLITICAL, AND GENDER REVOLUTION IN ARGENTINA

The chapters that follow this introduction are part of a contextual and cultural history of the ideas that formed a man aligned with the ideas of the Enlightenment in Argentina from the 1770s to 1850s. While I am a cultural historian and my understanding of masculinity is defined by this field, the definition of culture that guides me comes from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, whose work I started to read and apply to gender thanks to my friend, and a historian of masculinity, John Pettegrew. After many discussions, I came to agree with him about the advantage that Geertz's ideas presented for historians like us trying to determine the meaning of a very complex idea like masculinity. In John's words, in appropriating "this understanding of culture as humanly woven 'webs of significance,' the historian comes to the meaning of a symbolic act by 'uncover[ing] the conceptual structures' that inform it."[3] For Geertz, semiotics offered a much better vehicle to understand culture, but he was also interested in the dynamism of human action removed from causality. "As interworked systems of construable signs, (what, ignoring provincial usages, I would call symbols), culture is not power, something to which events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described."[4] Consequently, this work focuses on discovering, describing, and analyzing the networks developed through philosophy and science to guide the creation of a modern nation and its male citizen in Argentina within international contexts. My main purpose is to convey the simultaneity of events that connected different cultures, traditions, and continents. I believe that since nation-making was experienced at the same time in many places aligned with universal ideas, the communications that resulted needed to be considered to understand the double view that shaped the political environment. At the same time, I am not denying the historical specificity of the local experience, I am just focusing on the side developed through a belief in universality and through international networks.

The models of masculinity that will be analyzed in each chapter explain the different moments in the evolution of liberal and conservative cultures in global and local contexts, which resulted in the emergence of masculinities defined by sensibility and sentiment, revolutionary patriotism, citizenship, eclecticism and Romanticism, race, and sodomy. I am very aware that the masculinist nature of the project can raise eyebrows among feminist

historians, a group in which I include myself; but I must clarify that research on masculinity is not necessarily related to the supremacy of men or the erasure of women. Quite to the contrary, the narrative that emerges from the Argentina case exemplifies the struggle caused by defining the meaning of the masculinity of its male citizen. Also, the struggles between liberals and conservatives that tore the country apart during the period analyzed ended with a battle among men split between masculine and feminine roles, which provides a unique national narrative in Argentina, as we will see.

The historiography on masculinity has greatly evolved since R. W. Connell's "hegemonic masculinity" was formulated, and the scholarship published today mostly avoids this kind of analysis. For example, many categories previously defined as sexual are today analyzed as part of cultural intersections.[5] More important, we need to recognize that gender and sexuality were very connected to science in the eighteenth century. For example, as Londa L. Schiebinger points out, plant sexuality "was not incidental to but indeed lies at the heart of the eighteenth-century revolution in the study of the plant kingdom."[6] Linnaeus's new botanical taxonomy recapitulated the sexual hierarchy of Western Europe and stressed the importance of sexual reproduction in plants, considering that male parts had priority in determining status. According to Schiebinger, this illustrates that the "scientific revolution and the revolution in sexuality and gender" were juxtaposed. She complains that historians seldom "brought the revolution in science to bear on another fundamental transformation of European society in this period: the revolution of sexuality and gender—the remaking of relations between men and women that began in the late seventeenth century and culminated in the French Revolution."[7] I agree with this assessment, and this study on masculinity within the context of Argentina considers scientific and gender revolutions as part of revolutionary politics that shaped Argentina during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The uses of feminine allegories to represent science, as Schiebinger explains, were common during early modernity and continued in philosophy and science until the end of the eighteenth century. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* presented "an elaborate allegory of feminine hegemony in science."[8] In England, though, a masculinist allegory of science had been associated with the development of the country's scientific community, particularly in the work of Francis Bacon, whose "masculine philosophy" involved being active, virile, and generative—an experimental science drawn from the "light of nature, not from the darkness of antiquity" (677). Thinkers like Bacon saw French intellectual culture as "effeminate, especially in light of

the highly visible role played by French noblewomen in Parisian salons." The rejection of a civilization represented by a woman, and civilized socialization as mediated by the creation of a feminine space, split those who were involved in the culture of the Enlightenment. In the case of Bacon, science needed "to be distinctively English (not French), empirical (not speculative), and practical (not rhetorical)" (678). The gendering of science as masculine or feminine according to national traditions continued in the nineteenth century.

Philosophically, the depiction of science as feminine was rooted in neo-Platonic ideas that defined masculinity as reason and body as feminine, while those like Bacon "invoked well-worn Aristotelian categories where masculinity signified hot active spirit and femininity signified cold sluggish matter." Bacon rejected "a passive, speculative, and effeminate philosophy," and called for "an active philosophy, one which would act as a formative principle upon feminine nature" (678). This tension surrounding the gender of science was also inseparably linked to the changes that emerged in the eighteenth century through the culture of sensibility that spread in Europe from both England and France. Syndy McMillen Conger observes that by the 1790s "it was equally possible to believe either that the sentimental ethic could precipitate the decline of established institutions or that it could reinforce the status quo."[9] She understands the eighteenth-century sensibility as the result of a new consciousness in the ideological and political sense.

Marina Benjamin has pointed out the tension that existed between notions of "refined" and "vernacular" in eighteenth-century Great Britain, which she transposed "to accommodate an illustration of the tensions between different modes of scientific discourse."[10] Many scholars have worked on this topic since Benjamin's publication, but there is still an absence of a comprehensive analysis of how philosophy and science influenced the notion of masculinity as a universal experience. More recently, Heather Ellis also noted that while the "scholarship exploring connections between the history of science and the history of gender in nineteenth-century Britain is not new," the resulting publications have been chiefly concerned "not with the formation of masculine identity *per se* as with the construction of narratives of female inferiority through the language, discourse, and practices of male-dominated science."[11] She explains this omission partly "by the apparent success of male scientists" who appeared to enjoy "not merely high socioeconomic status, but also the considerable advantages of intellectual and medical authority. Viewed superficially, the male scientist appears to be one of the most powerful and secure masculine identities" in modern British history.[12]

Ellis also noted that there has been "comparatively little interest shown in exploring the masculine identities of Victorian scientists," though she recognizes the contributions of Jan Golinski to the study of "the man of science."[13] Ellis argued that "modes of self-representation within the scientific community were intimately tied to models of masculinity," and called for investigation of how the natural philosopher's or scientist's identities were "formed from a variety of cultural resources, including those used to shape masculine identity in society at large."[14] Like Ellis, I was inspired by Golinski's observations; but while Ellis's project aims to bring together gender history and the mainstream history of science "to apply insights from both in investigating the construction of male scientific identities in nineteenth-century Britain," my project is not focused on scientists but on the creation of citizens who used science to represent the republic's new values.[15]

I am not the first scholar interested in the topic of masculinity in Argentina. Since the publication of Jorge Salessi's foundational book, many other works have been published in the past thirty years.[16] But, as is the case in other countries, the study of masculinity in relationship to science has been less explored, even less so for the period covered in this book. Starting with the Republic of Letters as it was in the eighteenth century, I determine how philosophy and science were intrinsically linked with the creation over time of a new model of man, and how this dynamic worked both globally and locally. Steve Shapin provided me with an excellent guide to understanding the formation of the man of science and his culture; he explained the "characters of the men of science" through the figures of the Godly Naturalist, the Moral Philosopher, the Polite Philosopher, and the Civic Expert. Natural theology and the priest/scientist culture were more influential in Protestant cultures, supporting "a character of the man of science as godly and the doing of science as the acquittal of religious goals."[17] This was the science attacked in the eighteenth century by David Hume, Immanuel Kant, the philosophes, and the encyclopédistes.

The moral philosopher of nature is for Shapin the proponent of "a natural order bearing the sure evidence of divine creation and superintendence was understood to uplift those who dedicated themselves to its study." He was "virtuous beyond the normal run of scholars."[18] But it is the emergence of a "new natural philosophy whose products were socially useful and whose practitioners were suitable for membership in civil society" that are at the center of his book. They introduced "a new civility" that made "the practitioners of natural knowledge fit for the drawing room and the salon."[19] Here the

scientist was an example of a new way for men to conduct themselves, which introduced a new sociability, manners, and masculinity.

This interpretation coincides with George Sebastian Rousseau's evidence that by the beginning of the nineteenth century the treatment of man was "less as a fixed and final object of creation, an 'Adam'" and more often analyzed "as the product of time, circumstances, and milieu—the creature of education (as Locke, Condillac, and Helvetius especially stressed), of climate and physical environment (Montesquieu), of physical evolution (Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck), or of history (Vico, Boulanger, Ferguson, Miller, Herder)."[20] This provided a more dynamic notion of being that was also supported since the last quarter of the eighteenth century by the revolutionary culture that worked behind republicanism. "Man was thus a creature less of fixed being than of becoming."[21] This tension between stability and becoming appears clearly by the 1840s in Argentina.

Each chapter in this book introduces a different model of masculinity according to its chronological appearance. However, this does not mean that they emerged this neatly in real life. They coexisted and interacted with each other in a dynamic way that I had to separate clearly to explain the process. I start with the analysis of the Republic of Letters as it worked in the eighteenth century, and how it changed the culture of masculinity, followed by the French response to English Empiricism, and sensationism. The latter implied that the senses could reveal the new political subject's bringing possibilities that enhanced the role of imagination. Modern ideas during the 1800s disassembled the old definitions of man as a fixed creation, often fueled by the sensorial experience and shaped by a postcolonial reality. Education became a catalyst for social transformation, as environmental influences on human beings were increasingly seen as tools for self-improvement, particularly through the study of philosophy and emerging sciences. John C. O'Neal, understands sensationism as a crucial transitional phase between the spiritual rationalism of the seventeenth century and the early stages of modern scientific investigation in the eighteenth century. By combining the mind and body within the concept of the soul, which encompassed both spiritual and physical aspects, this view made the emerging idea of the mind as a physical brain and the nervous system as a material substance seem more acceptable to cautious and devout thinkers.[22] This is the point examined in the first three chapters. To be a man started to be less about acting according to the purpose of his creation and more about representing the civilized citizen of the modern nation that communicated new values through science and philosophy, which meant

that the modern man's selfhood was created and perfected over time. These chapters end with the creation of a scientific culture by the 1820s, which failed partly because of the development of a conservatism among those devoted to destroying the spread of philosophical and scientific radicalism associated with feminization and chaos.

This local conservatism expressed concerns like those in Europe that resulted at the same time in the defeat of Napoleon and the restoration of monarchical authority, which, by the 1830s, caused a reassessment of the idea of virility as it had been conceived. The end of Jacobinism's politics favored a philosophy and science that promoted the value of reconciliation, harmony, and a masculinity conceived as more spiritual and linked to aesthetics and a historical science that produced a sense of origin and continuity after revolutionary and republican failures, which led to an adjustment of the humanist model. More conservative positions led to the identification of modern man according to race, a "natural" division that more scientifically separated the different human populations to identify those that better facilitated the development of the modern nation's goals. At the same time, the influence of French Romanticism contradicted the more materialist conceptions of science, also promoting a more universal culture and subjectivity.

As I will discuss, Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793–1877) replaced Manuel Dorrego (1787–1828), a citizen of the Republic of Letters, as leader of the Federalist Party in the Argentine Confederation after Dorrego was killed by Unitarians fighting a united central power to administer the nation. The radicalism of the decision changed the country's politics; Rosas organized a movement that would not fight for the establishment of constitutional ideology to rule the country. His fight consisted in destroying any symbol of liberal ideology, including the modern representation of gender in society through philosophy and science.

This masculinist culture was a radical departure from the scientific liberalism that dominated the 1820s; this led to competitive models of masculinity: the federalists promoted a masculinist culture and rejection of political speculation, while the liberals defended the identification of the culture of civilization associated with the feminine and based on spiritual ideas, both sides clashing about the levels of virility that needed to be expressed in society. This explains the narratives of sodomy that were popular among those liberals who fought Rosas from exile in the 1840s, and the uses of science to defend such an ideology.

From the 1770s to 1852, the period covered in this book, the contact with scientific and philosophical knowledge became one of the signs used to divide

or unite the nation. The federalists saw in liberal science an irrational force that limited the capacity for maintaining rigid categories required for good government; they believed in change created over time, the way it happened in nature. Unlike what their enemies claimed, they did not hate science per se, but its uses in politics. In their view, the formation of a new nation could not be based on ideology and speculation alone, it needed to evolve rooted in a place.

The fact that the leaders of this conservatism were cattle ranchers interested in the study of nature as an applied field explains how they saw nation-building as if it were a natural organism that needed to grow in the soil. Ironically, this position would be closer to post-Darwinian notions of civilization, which explains the changes in liberalism in the 1870s in Argentina. In terms of gender, liberals struggled to demonstrate that their project would lead to the emergence of a virile and dominant citizen (a "natural" created man in conservative terms) because of their interest in representation and the notion of becoming, which were coded as feminine. Their supporters' embrace of this culture made the popularization of this kind of politics more difficult, which led to the polarization between civilization and barbarism with a clear gendered component.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY AND METHODOLOGY

Since the identity of the modern/civilized man was conceived as universal, the case of Argentina can only be understood when analyzed with the same simultaneity that originated its development, which explains why each chapter locates Argentina in the global context to which it belonged first; it is also examined through the life of the country's main intellectuals of each generation. In the different chapters, I pay attention to how the politics of emancipation were related to evolving philosophies and scientific ideas, and how they are linked to the root of gendered politics in Argentina. My goal is to indicate that science was not a field that secured the supremacy of man; on the contrary, the evolution of philosophy and science in this period weakened the notion of modern masculinity as a stable category that could provide a foundation to the nation.

My analysis of simultaneous historical processes and their impact on Argentina's notions of nationhood and citizenship was made possible by consulting secondary sources authored by experts in the history of the United States and Europe. These sources illuminated parallel developments occurring concurrently. I selected these sources based solely on their utility in reconstructing how individuals in Argentina perceived the international context,