



Nineteenth Century Spanish American Novels: A Search for Nationness and National Identity

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Abstract

The article explores the role of literature in the formation of national identity across Spanish America during the nineteenth century. In a time of political upheaval and social change following the wars of independence, novelists sought to define and construct the emerging nationhood of their respective countries. The historical novel, a dominant genre during this period, became a significant medium for reflecting on national origins, celebrating heroic struggles, and articulating the desire for unity and independence. At the same time, the costumbrista novel, rooted in the depiction of everyday life and regional customs, played a crucial role in shaping the cultural aspects of national identity, often through a nostalgic lens that sought to preserve traditional values amid modernization. As Spanish American societies continued to evolve, realist and naturalistic novels emerged, challenging idealized portrayals and instead focusing on the social realities and inequalities that hindered the formation of cohesive national identities. These works highlighted the tensions between the ideal and the real, offering a critical reflection on class struggles, economic challenges, and the tensions between indigenous, African, and European cultural legacies. Through these various novelistic traditions, Spanish American writers navigated the complex and contested terrain of nation-building, revealing the shifting contours of identity in a post-colonial context. This article analyzes these genres and their contributions to the ongoing search for "nationness" in the Spanish-speaking Americas during a formative historical moment.

Keywords: *Nation, nationness, identity, historical, costumbrista, realist, and naturalistic.*

Introduction

After gaining independence from Spanish rule, the former territories in the Americas faced challenges of political, social, and territorial fragmentation. Despite having a shared history, culture, and language, these nations struggled to form stable systems and were engaged in numerous conflicts, such as the British occupation of the Malvinas Islands in 1833 and territorial disputes with the United States and France. In this context, literature, particularly the novel, became a means for intellectuals to explore national identity and unity.

Historiography from the colonial period no longer suited the needs of the newly independent nations. It was written to serve the colonizers' purposes, and after independence, Spanish Americans sought to rewrite history in a new, more personal narrative form. Venezuelan scholar Andres Bello noted that with historical documents fragmented and incomplete, the narrative form became essential for expressing a nation's identity (Benitez-Rojo 417). Novels, thus, allowed writers to craft a new sense of national unity, representing the diverse demographic of indigenous, European, African, and mixed heritage. The novel became a tool for readers to connect with their national identity, experiencing the land through the characters' stories.

National identity emerged from the cultural consciousness shaped by indigenous, African, and European influences, as well as local customs, songs, and folklore. Writers, through their novels, were expected to shape and promote this national sentiment and contribute to the debate around nationalism. Intellectuals like Bello and Bolívar envisioned a unified Spanish America, and writers had the responsibility of strengthening both national unity and solidarity among Spanish-speaking nations. Spanish became the language of creativity and administration, but even as writers used European forms like the novel, the content was deeply rooted in local experiences, blending European ideas with Spanish American realities.

Three major intellectuals dominated 19th-century Spanish American literary thought: Andrés Bello, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and José Martí. While not all were novelists, their contributions to language, education, and political thought influenced the direction of Spanish American literature. Bello's work on Spanish grammar helped standardize the language across the continent, Sarmiento's *Facundo* explored national identity, and Martí's writings on independence shaped Cuban and broader Latin American thought. In the 19th century, Spanish American novelists expressed themselves primarily through four novel forms, and these forms: Historical, costumbrista, realist and naturalistic novels were experimented with in the search for Nationness and National Identity.

Historical Novels

To give their novels distinctive characteristics, 19th-century Spanish American novelists created historical novels based on past events, rewriting chronicles or historical texts in fictionalized forms. In their search for imagery and symbols, many novelists used Indian protagonists from Spanish American history. They often preferred setting their novels in the pre-Columbian era rather than the conquest or colonial periods, as they sought to find the identity of the new republics in the past. René Prieto supports this view, stating, "Having made a historical break from the Hispanic rule, authors begin to consider the mother cultures of America as an attractive lineage for the identity of the budding republics" (140). Writers idealized the aboriginal inhabitants with romantic fervor. Francisco Solares-Larate defines this historical approach as "counter historical discourse," as these narratives were subject to change and reinterpretation (59). Through romantic passion, these historical novelists aimed to reshape perceptions of history in their works.

Simón Bolívar (1783–1830), Venezuelan freedom fighter and liberator of Spanish America, contributed to the development of a nationalistic prose narrative with his *The Jamaica Letter* (1815), written in the style of classical epistles. Bolívar justifies the revolutionary war and expresses his opposition to traditional monarchy, outlining his vision for the republic of Colombia, uniting New

Granada and Venezuela, with a grand idea of a world capital in Panama (Echevarria 32-33). Bolívar's nationalist feelings about Spanish America, leading the world, influenced other 19th-century writers.

La novia del hereje by Argentine poet Vicente Fidel López, set in the late sixteenth century, derives its subject matter from English voyager Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation of the world and the naval disaster of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Benitez-Rojo calls it "the first Spanish American historical novel. . . which through romance tries to reconstruct world history in depth" (449). López drew from scattered historical sources, aiming to prepare a history book. Both Benitez-Rojo and Solares-Larate agree that the novel rewrites Spanish American history. Like many other historical novels, its events are considered authentic historical events by Spanish American readers (Solares-Larate 64-65).

Amalia by José Mármol, an anti-Rosas novel published in 1851, tells the story of a widow in Argentina. Amidst the political turmoil of the time, the novel advocates for self-rule and portrays Amalia as a hero, with her repeated widowhood earning sympathy. Doris Sommer remarks that Mármol's *Amalia* addresses the political course of Argentina, adding, "This is precisely what many narrators did, producing novels that can be considered the classic novels of their respective countries" (114). The novel thus became politically significant for Argentina.

Cuban poet and novelist Gertrudis de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841) follows a Mulato slave named Sab, who falls in love with his master's daughter Carlota. The novel contrasts Sab's purity with the selfishness of a rich English businessman, raising questions about slavery and social roles in Cuba (Rodriguez 402). Avellaneda's second novel, *Guatimozin, the Last Emperor of Aztecs*, idealizes indigenous Indian themes and criticizes the conquest of the Aztecs, viewing it as an overthrow of the legitimate regime.

In Colombia, José Joaquín Ortiz's *María Dolores o la Historia de mi Casamiento* (1841) and Juan José Nieto's *Yngermína o la hija de calamari* (1852) are among notable early historical novels. Nieto's novel attempts to legitimize the mestizo origin of Colombia and establish the writer's identity as an interpreter of Colombian nationality (Benitez-Rojo 457). *María* by Jorge Isaacs, widely read throughout Spanish America, uses the romance between cousins María and Efraín as a metaphor for Colombia's identity. Benitez-Rojo notes, "It is no less necessary for Isaac's vision of Colombia than it was for Mármol's Argentina" (458).

The portrayal of Indians shifted in Spanish American literature from being seen as barbarians during the colonial period to being idealized in the 19th century as part of the emerging national identity. Writers critiqued the Spanish conquest, idealizing the pre-Columbian era. *La Peregrinación de Bayoán* (1863), by José Raron Yepes, written in Puerto Rico when it was still under Spanish rule, imagines the union of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. The novel praises Bartolomé de las Casas as the protector of the Indians.

Enriquillo by Manuel de Jesús Galván, based on Bartolomé de las Casas' chronicles, tells the story of a chivalric chieftain who led indigenous resistance against the Spanish from 1519 to 1533. José Martí praised the novel, noting its unique way of presenting Spanish American history (Sommer 116). This work stands as a powerful reminder of the indigenous struggle for justice and sovereignty in the face of colonial oppression.

Mexico, the most powerful viceroyalty in the colonial period, faced political instability post-independence, with conflicts between federalists and centralists and the loss of territory to the U.S. and France. Writers remained active amid these struggles. Juan Díaz Covarrubias's *Gil Gómez la Insurgenta*

focuses on Mexico's recent national past, using history to promote patriotism, rather than evoking a distant past like Walter Scott's historical novels (Brushwood 305). Through such works, Mexican writers sought to forge a collective national identity amid the turbulence of the nation's early years. Ignacio M. Altamirano, Mexico's most popular novelist in the late 19th century, believed the novel was key to national consolidation. His works, *Clemencia* and *El Zarco*, served both nationalist and didactic purposes (Benitez-Rojo 463). Vicente Riva Palacio's historical novels, though prolific, lacked artistic value.

Peru, another major Spanish American viceroyalty, produced notable scholars post-independence. Juana Manuela Gorriti, an Argentine writer who settled in Peru, wrote novels like *The Queen* and *The Treasure of the Incas*, blending Argentine and Peruvian themes and seeking to correct the political course of her homeland (Beatriz Uraca 152). Narciso Arestegui's *El Padre Horan* (Father Horan) depicts a greedy priest exploiting Indian labor, calling for a new nation free from colonial structures. Benitez-Rojo describes it as one of the first political and social denunciations in Spanish American fiction (454). Luis Benjamin Cisneros wrote two novels, *Edgardo* and *Julia*, addressing social problems faced by Peru's indigenous population.

Costumbrista Novels

The advancement made in the methods of social sciences and anthropology led to the emergence of a new kind of writing style known as Costumbrismo. Costumbrismo prevailed in Spanish American writing, especially in short and long fiction, in the first half of the nineteenth century. The realm of costumbrismo, according to Echeverría, "is to depict the customs of the folk, particularly those living in the marginal neighborhood of the cities" (34). Elaborating on the definition of costumbrismo, Echeverría further notes:

Costumbrismo emerged from a combination of a romantic interest in the common people, in nature in all its detail, and the conventions of realism, which had been developing since the work of Cervantes. The tendency favored brief, highly focused descriptive texts that came to be known as cuadros de costumbres and in French tableau des moeurs; the development of newspapers encouraged this propensity. "Cuadro" and "tableau" reveal costumbrismo's kinship with painting, its effort to paint with words, as it were. "Costumbre" means custom, so costumbrismo concentrated on mores, habits, activities, often crafts and trades. (34)

Costumbrista writers in Spanish America depicted peasants, workers, and people inhabiting the countryside or the poor neighborhoods of the cities. The costumbrista writers paid attention even to the people's clothing, the tools they use, and the animals they keep. Costumbrismo became a central form in short stories and novels in the nineteenth century, identifying who the Spanish Americans actually were. Enrique Pupo-Walker adds, "The costumbrista narratives also blend autobiographical information with satirical remarks while incorporating quotations from journalistic sources, bits of poetry, and traces of popular culture" (492). In short, costumbrista novels are about people, places, and their customs.

José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, according to Benítez-Rojo, was the first Spanish American novelist as well as the first costumbrista writer, with his novel *El Periquillo* being the first costumbrista novel to express Spanish Americanness. Written in the European picaresque tradition, *El Periquillo*, in the words of Benítez-Rojo, reveals the aspiration of Spanish American Creoles. According to Benítez-Rojo, *El Periquillo* "tended to continue the theme of social marginality as well as its journalistic style,

its costumbrismo, its didacticism, and its melodrama” (437). Benítez-Rojo further explains that the Spanish American readers “experienced the illusion of accompanying Periquillo along the roads and through the villages and towns of the viceroyalty, which helped to awaken in them the desire for nationness” (438). As a picaresque hero, Periquillo goes through a varied career in his life: a student, monk, physician, barber, scribe, pharmacist, judge, soldier, beggar, thief, sacristan, and merchant. These professions, according to Benítez-Rojo, were the universal professions the readers could associate “with particularities native to the country” (438). Lizardi’s novel, thus, aroused the feelings of nationalism and national identity in Spanish American audiences by creating protagonists like them. The costumbrista tradition of Lizardi was continued in Mexico by Manuel Pyano in *El Fistol Del Diablo* and it found full expression in José Torna Cuéllar. His most accomplished costumbrista novels are *Ensalada de Pollos* and *Historia de Chucho el Ninfo*. The characters in his novels are spoiled children, ambitious military men, corrupt politicians, small merchants, dandies, and coquettes.

Esteban Echeverría (1805-1851), an Argentine novelist, is another successful costumbrista writer, whose novella *El Matadero* (The Slaughterhouse) is considered one of the most successful fictional works in Spanish America in the nineteenth century. The story denounces the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas. The plot is about a young man who is brutally assassinated by a group of thugs at Buenos Aires slaughterhouse. As González Echeverría points out, “the costumbrista element is the detailed gruesome description of the activities at the slaughterhouse and the role the institution plays in the city’s culture and economy” (37). Similarly, Benítez-Rojo remarks, “The piece begins with a series of descriptions that are noteworthy for their naturalism” (448). Chavarria’s use of costumbrismo is influenced by European naturalism in literature.

After Echeverría, Lucio V. López, José María Miro, Eugenio Cambaceres, and Eduardo Gutiérrez are known as the major novelists of 19th-century Argentina. Among newly established Spanish American countries, Argentina achieved political stability earlier, and the country’s economy came under the control of wealthy individuals. The reflection of the economy appeared in the literary field as well. The development of press, publishing houses, libraries, and literary institutions motivated professional writers. *La gran aldea* by Lucio V. López discusses the transformation of Buenos Aires over twenty years. Julio, the protagonist of the novel, as an outsider, cannot adjust to the “priggish pseudo-patriotic and militarized society of his childhood nor with the bourgeois civilian and materialistic society of his adulthood” (Benítez-Rojo 469). The novel is a supreme example of costumbrismo.

The costumbrista trend appeared in Colombia after 1850, and Eugenio Díaz’s novel *Manuela* is a perfect example of this trend. Set in a small village in Bogotá in 1856, *Manuela* is the story of a U.S.-educated young scholar and an uneducated local woman, Manuela. Demóstenes, the scholar, dissatisfied by the political turmoil in the city, packs his things and goes to the village to radicalize the villagers. At that time, Colombia was in a tri-part confrontation among Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals. In the village, the people do not understand Demóstenes, and Manuela triumphs over Demóstenes’ bookish knowledge. The novel, thus, gives significance to the primitive knowledge and experience of the local people.

By 1830, when most of the Spanish areas of South America had gained independence from Spain, the idea of separatism did not gain support from local Creoles in Cuba because, as Benítez-Rojo understands, “the white Creoles thought a revolution of this kind could easily turn into a racial war” (440). The Creoles were afraid of the large number of black slaves on the island, and they feared that it

could turn into a black republic like Haiti. They wanted Cuba to remain white-dominant and gradually freed the black slaves, replacing them with cheap white laborers from Europe. Though not in favor of separatism, the creators and writers wanted certain autonomy on the island, and intellectual production was directed in that direction. Poet and critic Domingo Delmante started a private tertulia (a kind of club) for writing and publishing. Out of six renowned novelists in nineteenth-century Cuba, four of them belonged to Delmante's tertulia. The novelists Ramón de Palma y Romay (1812-1860), Cirilo Villaverde (1812-1894), José Antonio Echeverría (1815-1885), Anselmo Suárez y Romero (1818-1878), Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, and José Ramón de Betancourt (1823-1890) all wrote about Cuba and her people. Cirilo Villaverde, according to Benítez-Rojo, "was the most prolific and important storyteller of Delmante's group" (442). Villaverde was an erudite person, who had read preceding and contemporary European novelists. Along with the influence of European novels, in Benítez-Rojo's views, there is a "strong impact of costumbrista writers" (443). Villaverde's characters are like real people from Habana.

Realist Novels

Sometimes, it is very difficult to determine which particular form a novel belongs to because Romanticism, historiography, and realism often overlap in nineteenth-century Spanish American novels. Spanish Americans borrowed many elements from European literature, especially regarding novel writing. After independence, many Spanish American writers visited Europe and tried to introduce European literary fashions to their new lands. Some imitated Scott, others Balzac, and some even emulated Zola. Regarding the nature of realism in Spanish American novels, George Antony Thomas remarks, "It is important to recognize that Spanish American realism was part of the European tradition, although it was conditioned by American realities" (56). The novels written in nineteenth-century Spanish America served particular purposes, and according to Thomas, "European realism further influenced the development of nation-building novels" (56). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, like historical novels and costumbrista novels, realist novels also played a role in strengthening nationality and establishing national identity.

Jose Victorino Lastarria, Manuel Bilbao, and Alberto Blest Gana were three major novelists in nineteenth-century Chile. As the country was slowly entering the realm of literary scholarship after independence, Lastarria founded the Literary Society in Chile in 1842 and outlined the nature of Chilean literature in his inaugural speech. According to Benitez-Rojo, Lastarria honored Bello for enriching the Spanish language, Sarmiento for giving social orientation to literature, and both for referencing the nation, its history, and customs in literature. Lastarria's short story "El Medingo" deals with the life of a provincial youth. The most influential Chilean novelist was Alberto Blest Gana (1830–1920). The author of novels like *La aritmética en el amor*, *El pago de las deudas*, *Martin Rivas*, and *El ideal de lin Calavera*, Blest Gana's works are thoroughly realistic. His novels focus on urban and middle-class society, with an emphasis on money and the changing moral codes. Commenting on Gana's novels, Benitez-Rojo remarks, "Money is desired in order to dress elegantly, shine in social gatherings, possess mansions and luxurious furniture, eat and drink well, flirt and have lovers..." (455). Blest Gana was influenced by the French novelist Balzac in his interpretation of money and pleasure.

The black people and the indigenous population felt the significance of independence in Peru during the early decades, as black slavery was abolished outright after independence and the Indian tribute system was gradually abolished. However, deep down, Peru was not transformed into a prosperous

nation. Soon, the oligarchy of landowners and entrepreneurs held control of the economy. The railroad network burdened the country with foreign debt, and the war with Chile resulted in the loss of coastal regions producing guano and nitrate. The most influential Peruvian intellectual in the later part of the nineteenth century, Manuel González Prada, criticized the government-oligarchy relationship and argued that the education and social improvement of the indigenous people were essential to uplift the nation. Clorinda Matto de Turner wrote the novel *Aves sin nido* (Birds Without a Nest), set in the Andes with numerous characters from indigenous backgrounds, written to expose the deplorable treatment of indigenous people by their Peruvian landlords. The novel advocated for the education of indigenous people “as a means of integrating the nation while denouncing at the same time the immorality of the institutions which regulated the Indians' lives” (Benitez-Rojo 486). Similarly, Wade and Archer view the novelist as “boldly realistic in her condemnation of village bosses and priests” (211). Two other novelists, Narciso Aresteguí and Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera, also wrote novels of national consciousness. Cabello de Carbonera’s serial urban novels contributed to spreading positivist ideas among the audience.

Argentine novelist José María Miró published *La bolsa* under the pseudonym Julián Martel in 1891. *La bolsa* tells the story of a lawyer's rise and fall. Dr. Glow, a celebrated lawyer, becomes rich through stock market investments but falls into poverty when the market crashes. Finally, the bankrupt lawyer goes mad and believes he is constantly threatened by a monster—none other than the stock market itself. Ericka Beckman comments on the novel’s depiction of Dr. Glow’s rise and fall, “Glow's prosperity, the novel notes from the chapter, is not meant to last: after depicting the free-flowing, easy money of the stock market boom, the novel follows him down the ‘maelstrom’ stock market” (21). The novelist’s purpose was to show how people suffer in the race for easy money. Eduardo Gutiérrez wrote more than 35 novels, which were published by prestigious newspapers. His work contributed enormously to spreading a very different image of the Argentine nation to the humble sectors of society, including immigrants. Benitez-Rojo characterizes Gutiérrez as a pure realist nationalist writer.

La Emancipada (The Emancipation) was the first novel written in Ecuador during the ultra-conservative dictatorship of Gabriel García Moreno. It can be read as an allegory for the liberal alternative rule in the country, advocating “the equality of women within the nation” (Benitez-Rojo 460). *La Emancipada* tells the story of a woman who revolts against her father’s decision for her marriage to an old man and follows an independent life. To survive in a male-dominated society, she dresses as a man. *Cumanda* by Juan León Mera was admired by contemporary readers and critics. León was a follower of García Moreno, and he tried to justify his dictatorship by giving an intellectual rationale, relating it to the missionary activities of the Jesuits in the eighteenth century, arguing that they were necessary for the wellbeing of the country, just as the Jesuits were in 18th-century Americas.

Eduardo Acevedo’s *Ismael*, Carlos Reyles’ *Beba*, and Javier de Viana’s *Gaicho* were three major realist novels written in Uruguay at the turn of the century. These writers, who had lived through civil wars and military dictatorship, wrote about their nation, suggesting ways for its betterment. According to Benitez-Rojo, these writers believed that the novel “should contribute to the development of national consciousness” (474). *Ismael*, Díaz’s best novel, is both a historical and political work advocating for the federalist cause. Reyles’ *Beba* and Viana’s *Gaicho* offer different depictions of the country. Benitez-Rojo explains this difference: “In reading *Beba* by Carlos Reyles and *Gaicho* by Javier de Viana, the reader has the impression of being in a different country than the one portrayed by Acevedo

Díaz” (475-6). The differing perspectives of these novelists resulted from their social and economic backgrounds, as well as their attitudes toward their country.

The last decades of Venezuela were marked by military dictatorship and confrontation between the military regime and conservatives. This period of dictatorship was characterized by authoritarianism and corruption. The most important Venezuelan novelist of this period was González Rincón Febres, whose novels *Fidelia*, *Nieve y lodo*, and *El Sargento Felipe* are considered his best works. The action of *El Sargento Felipe* takes place during the dictatorship of Guzmán Blanco, and the novel portrays how the dictator’s army crushed the rebellion of conservatives. The novel also describes life in the countryside, with coffee farms, cows, and livestock breeding. Benitez-Rojo comments on the novel: “He takes the side of the rural peasants, who have been and will continue to be the losers, regardless of which strongman emerges victorious” (487). The novel seems pessimistic and conveys the message that the people in Venezuela will never be liberated from power-hungry rulers.

Naturalistic Novels

Most of the novelists in Spanish America in the second half of the nineteenth century appeared to be influenced by realism; however, towards the end of the century, the influence of the naturalistic school began to be seen in some writers. Realism in Spanish America should not be understood as a mere Xerox copy of the European model, but rather in relation to the local conditions. According to Antonio M. de la Torre, Spanish American realism presented the social problems of the young republics as reflected in the upper levels of society, and naturalism did the same. He defines naturalism in the Spanish American context: “The naturalistic novelist was also typically a member of the upper social levels, but in his search for a character to be studied as a genuine product of environment, he got away from the cosmopolitan upper classes and found his ideal character among the colorful humbler folk” (147). In contrast to realist novelists, Torre argues, the naturalistic novelists focused on the lives of common people.

Eugenio Cambaceres, a follower of the French novelist Zola, introduced naturalist fiction to Argentina. An educated and wealthy individual, Cambaceres caused a scandal among the upper class of Buenos Aires with his novel *Pot-Pourri*. Commenting on the novel, Benitez-Rojo writes, “Cambaceres criticizes the hypocrisy of politics and marriage; for him social life is undermined by lies, opportunism, and immorality” (471). In his next novel, *Música Sentimental*, Cambaceres imitates Zola’s model. The action of the novel takes place in Paris, where the main character, Pablo, falls in love with both a countess and a prostitute named Loulou simultaneously. The count dies in a duel with Pablo, and Pablo dies of syphilis infection, while the prostitute continues working in the brothel, aborting Pablo’s child. It is the characters’ environment and their physical drives that shape their actions. Two more of Cambaceres’ novels, *Sin rumbo* and *En la sangre*, are also well-known. Writing about social values, customs, and mores, Cambaceres also registered his name among the group of costumbrista writers.

After independence, Uruguay suffered from devastating civil wars and a confrontation between the Blancos (federalists) and the Colorados (centralists). This conflict led to the military dictatorship of Lorenzo Latorre, which lasted until 1890. It was during the 1890s that some important novels were written in Uruguay. Eduardo Acevedo Díaz wrote seven novels, among which three stood out: *Soledad*, *Ismael*, and *El grito del Gloria* and *Lanza y sable*. *Soledad* tells the story of an ostracized gaucho who has a clandestine love affair with the daughter of a wealthy rancher. Most of the minor characters are

from the upper-class society, but the novelist chose a gaucho as the hero. Calling it a true naturalist novel, Torre writes, "What better subject could a naturalistic novelist find for the study of a man as a product of a given environment than the colorful Argentine and Uruguayan cowboy, that proud and indomitable master of the pampas..." (148). Díaz made a daring effort to present a cowboy as the hero of the novel, a choice not often expected during that period.

Conclusion

To sum up, the 19th-century Spanish American novel played a crucial role in shaping national identities through its exploration of historical events, social structures, and indigenous themes. By blending fiction with historical narratives, these novels both challenged colonial legacies and reimagined the future of the emerging republics, contributing to the ongoing discourse on nationhood and cultural identity in Spanish America. The costumbrista novel emerged as a vital literary form in 19th-century Spanish America, reflecting the social customs, struggles, and cultural dynamics of everyday life. Through vivid depictions of common people and their environments, these works contributed to a deeper understanding of national identity and the complex realities of post-independence societies. The realist novel in 19th-century Spanish America became an essential tool for exploring social issues, national identity, and the realities of post-independence societies. Writers across the region used realism to reflect on the complexities of economic, political, and social changes, ultimately contributing to the formation of national consciousness and the development of distinct literary traditions. Finally, the influence of naturalism in late 19th-century Spanish American literature brought a shift in focus from the upper classes to the marginalized and common people, reflecting their environments and struggles. Writers like Cambaceres and Díaz challenged societal norms, using the naturalist approach to critique social systems and explore the darker sides of human nature shaped by environment and heredity.

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