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## Introduction

The Latin American Novel encompasses a rich body of literary works written primarily in Spanish and Portuguese. Its main corpus is drawn principally from the over twenty Spanish-speaking countries of the Western Hemisphere and from Portuguese-speaking Brazil. The *Companion to the Latin American Novel* is intended to underscore literary contributions while offering a broad overview of the novel's history, and a sense of its heterogeneity, highlighting regions whose cultural and geopolitical particularities are often overlooked in general reference or introductory works. This volume should make it evident that there are as many commonalities and differences between Spanish- and Portuguese-language novels as between those of different regions and ethnic constituents in Latin America, and it includes women writers throughout while also recognizing the significance of the gender and sexuality approach which has become fundamental to many critics and literary historians. It also recognizes the growing interest in translation studies in Latin American literary and cultural studies.

### On “Latin America”

The term “Latin America” has been controversial since it was first coined by the French to justify their colonial designs on the Western Hemisphere after the Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1807. It became useful, especially in the twentieth century, to group together historical, political, cultural, and artistic phenomena that cut across national boundaries.<sup>1</sup> The label is readily used today in the United States, the Commonwealth, France, and Germany, while in Spain there is a preference for the term *Hispano América* (“Spanish America”) to single out literary works in the Spanish language. Outside Latin America, therefore, even specialists of national literatures – those who work primarily on Argentine or Mexican literature for instance – usually teach within the academic confines of the broader Spanish American or Latin American label at their institutions. It is not surprising,

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on the other hand, that in Spanish America and in Brazil, the local novel is primarily studied in the context of national literatures. That being said, the more inclusive approach – advocated by Emir Rodríguez Monegal, Angel Rama, Bella Jozef, Gerald Martin, Earl Fitz, Antonio Candido, and others – has gained considerable ground. In recent years universities in Argentina, Peru, Brazil, and elsewhere have begun to offer degrees in Latin American literature as an alternative to the study of their respective national literatures.

An essentialist view of “Latin America” would be as misguided as a view that rejects the label altogether. The notion of Latin America as a literary category has been constituted by unresolved tensions between nationalistic imperatives, political considerations, and personal preferences, as they play themselves out in academic institutions, journalism, and the publishing world. Even though the numerous approaches to the Latin American novel that abound – the esthetic, political, postmodern, gender, ethnic, ethnic, culturalist, postcolonial, etc. – are not always reconcilable, there is a general agreement, all the same, regarding the benefits of studying the novel across national boundaries. An engagement with the Latin American label, of course, does not preclude the study of national or regional literatures. Most scholars of the Latin American novel move effortlessly from national to broader geographical or theoretical concerns, and there are good reasons to approach the same novel from more than one perspective and in different contexts. It is illuminating, for example, to read *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967) by Gabriel García Márquez, as Raymond Leslie Williams has proposed in *The Colombian Novel 1844–1987*, in the context of the historical and regional peculiarities of a nation.<sup>2</sup> This reading highlights the significance of García Márquez’s novel as the culmination of a long tradition of writing in Colombia’s Caribbean coast, and of the novelist’s take on historical events addressed by other Colombian authors. But it is equally enriching, as Williams has also done in *The Twentieth-Century Spanish American Novel*, to read the works of García Márquez in the context of a literary moment in which the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, the Mexican Carlos Fuentes, the Brazilian Clarice Lispector, and the Argentine Julio Cortázar are concurrently making substantial contributions.<sup>3</sup>

It is productive to think of the Latin American label as an umbrella for a process – involving ongoing debates and controversies – whereby pasts are invented and recovered as the various literary genres are rehearsed.<sup>4</sup> It was not until the twentieth century that the notion of Latin American literature was championed by Latin American intellectuals themselves, but as soon as it was, literary critics began looking back to the nineteenth century, and even to the Colonial past, for works of literature that might be construed

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as legitimate expressions of Latin America's literary heritage. The notion of literary continuity in Latin America can be misleading if one claims that every literary development led to every other one in a necessary causal chain, or even in a strict chronological sequence; but it would be just as misleading to ignore the fact that many novelists, including García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, Guimarães Rosa, Alejo Carpentier, Darcy Ribeiro, and Juan José Saer, willfully rewrote historical or anthropological works in the fiber of their novels to stress real, imagined, ironic, or playful continuities with the Spanish, Portuguese, indigenous, or African heritage of the heterogeneous populations that comprise their visions of Latin America. The typologies and concepts with which literary historians have organized their overviews have shifted and changed in the light of new kinds of novels and new critical approaches that have urged a reconsideration of the canon.

Indigenous and African cultures are prominently represented in the Latin American novel, and in the current scholarship there is an influential approach – pioneered by Angel Rama, Antonio Cornejo Polar, Regina Harrison, and others – in which novelists such as José María Arguedas in *Los ríos profundos* (*Deep Rivers*, 1958), Rosario Castellanos in *Balún Canán* (*The Nine Guardians*, 1958), and Miguel Angel Asturias in *Hombres de Maíz* (*Men of Maize*, 1949), are understood as “translators” of indigenous cultures. This approach is represented in several places in the *Companion*, especially in the essays devoted to the regional novel, the Andean novel, the Caribbean novel, the Brazilian novel, and the Central American novel.

## A note on the significance of Brazil

Many accounts of the Latin American novel either exclude Brazil (as with Stephen Hart's useful and informed *A Companion to Spanish-American Literature*) or include it in a separate section (as with the monumental *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* edited by Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo Walker).<sup>5</sup> The main barrier to the smooth incorporation of the Brazilian novel in general studies of Latin American literature is linguistic. And yet, the unique historical events that shaped the Brazilian nation, its cultural peculiarities, and the fact that its literature is written in Portuguese rather than Spanish, hardly justify excluding the Brazilian narrative from a study of the commonalities of the Latin American novel. The historical and cultural differences between any two Spanish American nations can be just as great or even greater; and Brazil's commonalities with certain Spanish American regions can be illuminating. Given the shared heritage of slavery, for example, the literatures of the Caribbean may have more in common with Brazil than with Chile.

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It should be of interest to any reader of the Latin American novel to learn that the Brazilian South (and not just the Argentine or Uruguayan Pampas) had a tradition of literary works featuring the gaucho, including *O gaúcho* (“The gaucho,” 1870), a novel by José de Alencar, Brazil’s premier Romantic novelist. Brazilian novels that feature distinct regional landscapes can be fruitfully studied next to Spanish American novels that do the same. Writers like Jorge Amado, who shared a similar kind of commercial and literary success as his Spanish American counterparts in the 1960s, can offer an eye-opening perspective on the period in which the Latin American novel came into world prominence. It should be interesting to readers of the *Companion* to notice that in Brazil – as in the Caribbean, Central America, and the Andean region – African and indigenous themes, cultures, and literatures play a considerable role in the novel. Any study on gender theory and on queer studies in Latin America will certainly be enriched by taking into account both Brazilian and Spanish American texts. Finally, any account of the Latin American novel in English translation should cover both Brazilian and Spanish American novels. Indeed, publishers in the USA and the UK include Brazilian and Spanish American titles in their Latin American lists as a matter of course.

Notwithstanding the commonalities, the Brazilian novel is also informed by distinct phenomena that require separate treatment: unlike Spanish America, Brazil was the seat of an empire (when the Portuguese court moved to Rio de Janeiro after the Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula); unlike Spanish America, Brazil became a monarchy on seceding from the Portuguese Crown; and unlike Spanish America, the transition from aristocratic to Republican rule took place without a war of independence. These historical events inform themes, events, and even literary structures in Brazil. If a masterplot of the Spanish American novel involves the brother–sister incest motif, an equivalent masterplot in the Brazilian novel is the absent father motif.<sup>6</sup> Brazil also developed some distinct literary phenomena that do not have counterparts in Spanish America such as a peculiar brand of Romanticism with indigenous themes, its own brand of modernism, or narratives in which national identity is represented as a fusion of European, African, and indigenous cultures and ethnicities.

### Historical overview

Hundreds of novels have been published in Latin America since the early nineteenth century, when the ban against the Romance of Chivalry and other secular narrative genres was first loosened, and finally abolished, by virtue of independence from Spain and Portugal. That being said, there are important

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narrative works published before the Republican periods of Spanish America and Brazil that can be studied as antecedents to the Latin American novel. Indeed, a number of major works from the Colonial period have been read as novels, at least in part, even though they were not written as such.<sup>7</sup>

In the nineteenth century most Latin American novelists, from José Marmol in Argentina and Alencar in Brazil to Clorinda Matto de Turner in Peru, wrote with the awareness that their novels would contribute to establishing their respective national literatures, and with openly acknowledged feelings of inferiority regarding the European novel. Two exceptions are the Colombian Jorge Isaacs, and the Brazilian Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis. Isaacs's *María* (1867), a precursor to Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*, was the only Latin American novel in the nineteenth century to gain a sizeable reading public beyond its national boundaries. The saga of two chaste star-crossed lovers, set in the agricultural heartland of Colombia, was edited many times, and acclaimed both in Spanish America and in Spain. Machado de Assis, the grandson of freed slaves, is another exception, not because he was well known outside Brazil, but because of his extraordinary literary qualities which set him apart as the only world-class nineteenth-century Latin American novelist. He was recognized as a force in Brazilian literature from the outset, but it took over a century before he was acknowledged as a writer of international stature. In recent years he has been celebrated by prominent intellectuals including Susan Sontag, Jorge Edwards, Roberto Schwarz, and Carlos Fuentes.

The nineteenth century did produce classic novels within national contexts. *Cecilia Valdés, o La Loma del Angel* (*Cecilia Valdes, or Angel's Hill*, 1882) by the Cuban Cirilio Villaverde, *Iracema* (1865) by the Brazilian Alencar, *Enriquillo* (*The Cross and the Sword*, 1882) by the Dominican Galván, *Aves sin nido* (*Birds Without a Nest*, 1889) by the Peruvian Clorinda Matto de Turner, *Cumandá* (1979) by the Ecuadorian Juan León de Mera, and *La peregrinación de Bayoán* ("Bayoan's pilgrimage," 1863) by the Puerto Rican Eugenio María de Hostos are examples of works that continue to be read by school children in their respective nations today.

In the 1920s, with an upsurge of novels exploring regional themes and local customs, it became possible, for some critics and observers, to begin to discuss the Latin American novel as a meaningful concept. It is worth noting, however, that the first major literary history devoted to the Spanish American novel, written by Fernando Alegría, was not published until 1959.<sup>8</sup> Before the first histories of the Latin American novel were written, therefore, the regional novelists believed they were making original contributions to literature by depicting geographical regions, ways of life, and social predicaments

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germane to Latin America, never before explored in literary works. Jean Franco generalized this rationale for the originality of Latin American literature in her early books – which introduced the history of Latin American literature to the English-speaking world – as perhaps its most distinguishing feature.<sup>9</sup> The regional novel proper left indelible visions of the landscape on the Latin American imagination, whether in the depiction of the Amazonian jungle in José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* (*The Vortex*, 1924), the endless and rugged plains of Venezuela in Rómulo Gallegos's *Doña Bárbara* (1929), the Brazilian backlands (known as the sertão) in Graciliano Ramos's *Vidas secas* (*Barren Lives*, 1928), the Argentine Pampas as the home of the gaucho in Ricardo Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926).

Even though they shared similar concerns, the regional novelists did not write with a sense of collective purpose. It was the pioneering Puerto Rican literary critic, Concha Meléndez, who recognized the significance of the regional novel in retrospect. The label “regional” was reconsidered by some literary critics to accommodate works such as Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* (*The Underdogs*, 1915), set in harsh terrains during the Mexican Revolution, or Ciro Alegría's *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (*Broad and Alien is the World*, 1941), set in the Peruvian Andes.<sup>10</sup> Even as the regional novel gained prominence in Latin America as its most representative contribution to literature, many writers, such as Juan Carlos Onetti in Uruguay and Martín Adán in Peru, were producing a kind of experimental novel whose significance was not recognized in its own time.<sup>11</sup>

Before the 1960s, the Latin American novel was considered a marginal literary expression. Latin American poetry, on the other hand, had not been banned during the Iberian Colonial period, and had been in the limelight since the beginning of the twentieth century. Remarkable poets such as Rubén Darío, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Gabriela Mistral, and César Vallejo had received the sort of international recognition which had eluded even the most locally prominent of Latin American novelists. With few exceptions, therefore, Latin American novelists wrote for national audiences even when writing against the nationalistic grain; and few Latin American novels found an audience beyond their own national borders. The situation changed dramatically in the 1960s when Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and José Donoso burst onto the international literary scene. Inspired as much by Joyce, Woolf, Mann, Conrad, Faulkner, and Proust as they were by the Cuban Revolution, many of the greatest exponents of the new Latin American novel wrote convinced that their narrative fiction had come of age artistically, and was poised to play a role in the social and political transformation of the Western Hemisphere. These European-based

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writers knew each other, read each other's manuscripts, and wrote essays about each other's novels with a sense of common purpose. They even mentioned each other and included one another's characters in their novels. Their self-confidence was accompanied by an unprecedented level of critical and popular success that made it possible, for the first time, to think of a Latin American novelist as a world-class writer who could measure up to or surpass the greatest contemporary exponents of the genre in literary quality and commercial reach.<sup>12</sup> After influential books by Emir Rodríguez Monegal and José Donoso, these writers came to be known as the novelists of "the Boom," a term suggesting both an explosion in literary riches and an economic phenomenon of unprecedented proportions for any literary genre in Latin America.

Julio Cortázar wrote a sophisticated brand of novel that challenged the generic conventions of narrative fiction, and even the assumptions regarding the way a reader may progress from one chapter to the next.<sup>13</sup> In *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*, 1963), considered by many to be the most experimental of all Latin American novels, Cortázar invites readers to jump from one chapter to another according to alternative schemes that produce different readings of the same work. Cortázar also engaged in a subtle dialogue with surrealism, existentialism, the musical forms of jazz, and the Western fascination with oriental philosophy.

Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Carlos Fuentes expanded the possibilities of Faulknerian techniques in novels where spatial and chronological planes are superimposed, where a single story can be narrated from various contradictory points of view, and where mystery and intrigue depend not only on the plot but also on intentional ambiguity, and on the fact that information may be concealed from the reader. This arsenal of technical refinement allowed for some of the most memorable depictions of social conflict, in settings as distinct as the Amazonian jungle in Vargas Llosa's *La casa verde* (*The Green House*, 1964), the Mexican Revolution in Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (*The Death of Artemio Cruz*, 1963), or the invented region of Macondo in the novels of García Márquez, where the commonplace has the feel of the extraordinary and the fantastic the feel of the ordinary.

José Donoso wrote novels in which the everyday was transformed into grotesque and even nightmarish worlds, as he explored the decline of Latin American aristocracies with a Proustian sensibility, and the rise of contemporary dictatorial regimes with bitter detachment. *Casa de campo* (*A House in the Country*, 1978), for example, is an oblique allegory about Pinochet's dictatorship in the guise of a rewriting of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954).

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Most of the first accounts of the Boom were generated by the novelists themselves. They tended to agree with the prevailing critical views that disparaged their predecessors, especially the regional novelists. It must be said, however, that the Boom novelists went to great personal lengths to recognize some writers of quality or cultural significance who had been widely ignored outside their national contexts. It is worth noting therefore that, by and large, the most important writers of narrative fiction before the Boom gained their international acclaim only in the afterglow of the Boom. Among these writers one could cite Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, Guimarães Rosa, José María Arguedas, Juan Rulfo, and Juan Carlos Onetti who were admired in their respective countries, but overlooked elsewhere except in rarified contexts.

Borges never wrote a novel, and yet he had a transforming effect on the way the Spanish American novel was written.<sup>14</sup> Years before his international fame, he was a writer's writer. Borges was studiously read by many who followed in his footsteps, introducing fantastic touches, irony, philosophical ideas, technical sophistication, literary self-reflection, and a mixing of genres, many of which he was personally responsible for introducing to a wide reading public (Borges was the editor of the pioneering and most influential anthologies of fantastic and detective fiction in Spanish America). Borges also raised the once rhetorical, stylized prose of Latin American narrative fiction to standards that are yet to be surpassed. García Márquez famously acknowledged that despite loathing Borges's political views, he read him every night.

Borges's fictions were not focused on the historical and political predicaments of Latin America in ways García Márquez could have appreciated, but the same cannot be said of the Mexican Juan Rulfo. His *Pedro Páramo* (1955) is considered by many critics and writers to be a landmark of the Spanish American novel due to its disarming pathos, technical sophistication, mythological underpinnings, persuasive mixture of realistic and otherworldly elements, psychological insights, and relevance as a work of social criticism. The tale of an illegitimate son seeking his father across a devastated landscape in the wake of the Mexican Revolution was hailed by a poll of literary critics in the Spanish newspaper *El País* as the most important book (not just a novel) written in the Spanish language in the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

The Cuban Alejo Carpentier, a premier novelist of Latin America, was responsible for the exploration of the apparently fantastic elements in Latin American reality.<sup>16</sup> He was masterful in handling narrative time to suggest the simultaneity of contradictory experiences. He pioneered the mode of writing fiction that came to be known as "magical realism." Carpentier did not coin the term as such but did identify the concept in the original prologue

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to his novel *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*, 1949).<sup>17</sup> The novel depicts the slave revolts that ushered in Haiti's independence, in such a way that historical events often feel like wild imaginings. The prologue is considered a manifesto for a phenomenon Carpentier identified as "*lo real maravilloso*" ("the marvelous real"): Latin America as a place where the real has the feel of the marvelous. Inspired by his ideas, and using his novels as prime examples, other literary critics used the term "magical realism" to suggest either a peculiar Latin American sensibility to realism, or the sense that Latin American reality seems fantastic to those who see it with the conventions of other lands. Today the term has been rejected by many Latin Americans, and by some postcolonial critics, as the internalization of demeaning exoticizing tendencies by Third World writers. It has also been questioned, and even parodied, by a new breed of novelists, including the Chilean Alberto Fuguet and the Bolivian Edmundo Paz Soldán, for whom the realities of Latin America in a globalized world ought not to be taken as exotic or extravagant. The characters in their novels include worldly cosmopolitan denizens of the polluted and overcrowded Latin American cities: they are often travelers or expatriates well versed in more than one language, in popular culture, and in the new technologies. That being said, "magical realism" remains a label with significance to many, and it is still the most distinctive term applied to the Latin American novel. Writers from Salman Rushdie to John Updike have underscored magical realism as a distinct contribution by Latin American authors to the contemporary literary idiom; and Fredric Jameson has argued that this literary mode broke new ground, making it possible to reintroduce historical considerations into the world-novel after an impasse brought about by the modernist aesthetic framework with its emphasis on heightened subjectivism.

After the initial "Boom," a second wave of worldwide interest in the Latin American novel was generated, almost single-handedly at first, by Isabel Allende whose critical and commercial success opened the way for the recognition of women writers. The interest in contemporary writing by women was due in part to the literary quality achieved by writers such as Clarice Lispector from Brazil, Elena Poniatowska from Mexico, and Rosario Ferré from Puerto Rico; but also by the scholarship of feminist critics who have unearthed many works of consequence by unrecognized or underappreciated female writers. Many women writers of the recent past, such as María Luisa Bombal from Chile and Rosario Castellanos from Mexico, are now standard reading in courses of Latin American literature. Critics have also been underscoring forgotten contributions by many women novelists of the nineteenth century, such as the Argentine Juana Manuela Gorriti and the Peruvian Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera. The latter's *El conspirador*

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(“The conspirator,” 1892) was probably the first novel about a Latin American dictator, a theme that has inspired major novels including Miguel Angel Asturias’s *El Señor Presidente* (1946), García Márquez’s *El otoño del patriarca* (*The Autumn of the Patriarch*, 1975), the Paraguayan Augusto Roa Bastos’s *Yo el Supremo* (*I, the Supreme*, 1974), and Vargas Llosa’s *La fiesta del Chivo* (*The Feast of the Goat*, 2000). All fictional depictions of the Latin American “strong-man,” it must be noted, have an important antecedent in Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s *Facundo* (1845), a work written as a sociological treatise. Its depiction of the brutal life and pathetic solitude of a dying despot has become a prominent staple of Latin American narrative fiction until today; and even novels that mix personal and political intrigue – such as Edmundo Paz Soldán’s *La material del deseo* (*Matter of Desire*, 2002) about the political coming of age of a young Bolivian who has to come to terms with the Hugo Banzer Suárez dictatorship, or Alonso Cueto’s *Grandes Miradas* (“Lofty gazes,” 2003), a novel exploring the dilemmas of a judge caught in the miasma of Alberto Fujimori’s regime in Peru – owe an indirect debt to the Argentine classic.

By the time the significance of women writers was recognized, the relative sense of collective purpose shared by the writers of the Boom had become diffused. The harmonious relationship of these writers with each other, and with the Cuban Revolution, was irreparably damaged in the aftermath of a controversy that followed the 1971 incarceration, and subsequent public humiliation, of the Cuban poet Heberto Padilla.<sup>18</sup> Vargas Llosa, Fuentes, García Márquez, and many others deplored the fate of the poet, but some were reluctant to embarrass the Cuban regime by making public their dissatisfaction. As a result of the controversy, Cuban cultural institutions and literary journals reconsidered their enthusiasm for the Boom novel and began to promote a kind of testimonial novel based on interviews with the exploited peoples of America. Roberto Fernández Retamar’s essay *Caliban* constituted the manifesto of this proposal, and Miguel Barnet’s *Biografía de un Cimarrón* (*Esteban Montejo: Biography of a Runaway Slave*, 1966) – based on taped interviews with the protagonist of the book – became its model. Rather than displacing the more imaginative Latin American novel, the novel of testimony extended the range of possibilities open to Latin American writers.

The rift between the cultural leaders of the Cuban Revolution and some of the Boom writers generated divergent literary responses which coincided with the ambition of other novelists to explore new possibilities. Donald Shaw points to Antonio Skármeta’s *Soñe que la nieve ardía* (*I Dreamt the Snow Was Burning*, 1975) as a novel that signals a departure from a Boom to a Post-Boom esthetic.<sup>19</sup> Shaw has also argued that it is no longer possible to privilege any single dominant tendency. Indeed, since the 1980s the