CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48737-5 — A History of Chilean Literature
Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo
Excerpt
More Information

# *Introduction*

*Ignacio López-Calvo*

Roberto Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes* (*The Savage Detectives*, 1998) restored Chilean literature to its glory days. Not since Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945 and 1971, respectively, had a Chilean writer reached such prominence. Bolaño's writing is internationally known, as evidenced by the 2018 documentary *Los desiertos de Sonora* (The Deserts of Sonora), a Spanish-Mexican coproduction in which characters of *Los detectives salvajes* are included. With the 2007 English translation of *Los detectives salvajes*, the Bolaño craze spread to all the English-speaking world. Such attention significantly increased his readership as well as critical studies on contemporary Chilean literature.

For decades, Chilean writers have played a central role in the articulation of a national consciousness. As such, the histories of writing, reading (including *tertulias* or literary salons), and printing (Chile did not have a printing press until 1811) lay bare important aspects of the intellectual development of the nation. After all, it is said that the Spanish poet-soldier Alonso de Ercilla "invented Chile" in his epic poem *La Araucana* (*The Araucaniad*, 1569, 1578, 1589). Of course, Ercilla's contribution to the national imaginary included the literary recreation of the indigenous *Mapuches* (the *Araucos* to Spaniards at that time) and these became a cornerstone of Chilean identity until the present.

Two major events defined the Spaniards' and *criollos*' historical and literary writing during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the conquest of Chile (1540–1598) and the War of Arauco, a prolonged and violent confrontation between Spanish soldiers and the Mapuche that lasted over two centuries (1536–1772).[1] Other cultural and sociopolitical circumstances marked the development of Chilean letters throughout their history, such as, for example, the CIA-backed coup by the Chilean Armed Forces under General Augusto Pinochet on September 11, 1973. This traumatic experience forced many Chilean writers into exile, thus creating an important cycle of *testimonios* and exile narratives.[2]



© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48737-5 — A History of Chilean Literature
Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo
Excerpt
More Information



One of the peculiarities of Chilean literary production is the traditional centrality of its poetry (Chile has often been considered "a country of poets"), more so than in the rest of Latin America, in part because of the prestige of its four great poets during the first half of the twentieth century: Mistral, Vicente Huidobro, Pablo de Rokha, and Neruda. Likewise, of the three Chileans awarded the most-prestigious Premio Miguel de Cervantes (Miguel de Cervantes Prize), two have been poets: Gonzalo Rojas in 2003 and Nicanor Parra in 2011 (the third recipient was novelist Jorge Edwards in 1999). And even in the fiction of authors like Bolaño, Antonio Skármeta, Isabel Allende, and Alejandro Zambra, poetry has a central role.

There are numerous Spanish-language histories of Chilean literature.[3] The latest attempt at editing a critical history of Chilean literature is the projected five-volume *Historia crítica de la literatura chilena* (Critical History of Chilean Literature, 2017) – of which only one volume, on colonial literature, has yet been issued. The present volume, *A History of Chilean Literature*, the only available up-to-date, English-language, critical history of Chilean literature, complements the aforementioned Spanish-language resources, as well as the Spanish-language website of cultural contents called *Memoria Chilena* (Chilean Memory). Its innovative thirty essays, covering more than five centuries of cultural production, were written by a host of leading scholars from Chile, the United States, and other countries who have left their mark on this academic subfield. The historiographical paradigm followed in this volume maps the heterogeneity of Chilean literature by incorporating, beyond the canonical, works by writers of indigenous, African, Asian, Jewish, Arab, and Croatian ancestries, always bearing in mind their relationship with hegemonic institutions. It also devotes separate chapters to women and LGBTQ authors, as well as to Chilean-American and Chilean expatriate writers living in the United States. In this way, thematic essays interrupt the mostly chronological sequence of chapters that run parallel to the cultural, sociopolitical, and historical developments in each period.

Although there are numerous English-language articles on Chilean literature, *History of Chilean Literature* is the first English-language history of Chilean literature to bring together a comprehensive analysis of every period, from a variety of theoretical and thematic perspectives. The present volume therefore provides an accessible, thorough, and wide-ranging study within coherent chronological and thematic frameworks. Though many other Chilean authors, works, literary movements, and topics should have been included, space limitations do not allow for their inclusion.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48737-5 — A History of Chilean Literature
Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo
Excerpt
More Information



As with the rest of Latin America over the last quarter of a century, the subfield of Chilean literary studies has evolved by shifting its critical focus from a homogenizing national identity to a more nuanced, multifaceted, and transnational approach. Consequently, while still relevant, the emphasis on Chileanness has been pushed aside by the emergence of new analytic approaches and areas of study: several chapters in this volume focus on dialogues among ethnic, gender, and sexuality studies; neoliberalism and literary markets; intellectual and cultural history; citizenship, migration, and exile; transculturation and heterogeneity; and cultural studies (film and noncommercial, artisanal forms of book publication). Also, as in the rest of the Latin American studies field, a transpacific approach to Chile, a Pacific rim nation, has been emphasized. These East–West cross-cultural relations date from the colonial times of the Manila Galleon and have become significantly strengthened by China's global standing.

An important contribution of *History of Chilean Literature* is its emphasis on these paradigm shifts from the national to the transnational and from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. This volume showcases the full diversity and heterogeneity of Chilean literature (the fact that the Mapuche poet Elicura Chihuailaf [1952–] won the 2020 National Prize for Literature, the highest literary honor in Chile, should be an indication that diversity is also becoming important for this award, in spite of the dearth of women writers who have received it). Its contents also shy away from viewing Santiago de Chile, the country's capital, as the normative locus of enunciation or the only one deserving critical attention. Each of *History of Chilean Literature*'s three parts contextualizes works within the historical process, social practices, and cultural institutions of their corresponding period, including literary societies, publishing houses, journals, literary magazines, associations, state organizations, official awards, and intellectual debates of the time.

Besides charting the development of the national literary tradition, the present study examines the reception of Chilean literature by readers and critics alike. Literary production is thus viewed as a sophisticated sociocultural practice: there is often a direct connection between intellectual knowledge/practices and different manifestations of political power. Certainly, beyond aesthetic aspirations, literary works often respond to cultural and political intricacies (will to power, declarations of national belonging) that must not be overlooked. In certain cases, literature becomes a tool for empowering a community – or for imagining it – through its ethnic, religious, or national attributes; in others, literature

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48737-5 — A History of Chilean Literature
Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo
Excerpt
More Information



may empower by broaching gender, sexual orientation, and place of origin or residence-related topics. Thus, several of the following essays analyze community formation, cultural celebration, and historical memory.

Canonical authors and works are also central in this volume; however, they are examined through innovative approaches that challenge traditionally accepted interpretations. In addition, Chilean literature, as a discursive formation, is compared with other cultural practices, like feature and documentary films. It is also read in relation to the main structures of feeling and affect in each historical period; for example, wonder during the Spanish conquest, fear during the dictatorship, and nostalgia while in exile. From a linguistic perspective, *History of Chilean Literature* differs from previous histories of Chilean literature in its inclusion of works written in languages other than Spanish, including Mapuche and Huilliche.[4] By including marginalized and hitherto under-analyzed voices along with diasporic groups (bilingual exiles and émigrés), a "Greater Chile" of sorts, this approach expands the cognitive mapping of what is commonly understood as Chilean literature. Organized chronologically and thematically, *History of Chilean Literature* incorporates contributions grounded on feminist and queer theories. This focus appears not only in the chapters devoted to women and LGBTQ writing, but also in other essays that acknowledge these important contributions to Chilean writing.

As mentioned, *History of Chilean Literature* is divided into three chronological parts. While the initial four chapters of Part 1 pay particular attention to the indigenous presence, the fifth chapter includes writing by nuns and enslaved women of African ancestry. Part 2 covers the period that begins with Chile's independence in 1810 and encompasses the rest of the century. Its six chapters address women's writing, the feuilleton and historical novel traditions, intimate writing, literary markets, and modernization. The third and final part covers the twentieth century up to the present. Its nineteen chapters cover different literary genres, the main literary figures, ethnocultural writing, works by women and LBTQ authors, film, digital literature, and literary criticism.

The opening part of this volume covers three centuries of Spanish colonialism. Since Chile's indigenous people had no written tradition, their cultural production is not included in the first two parts – to make up for this dearth of information, two chapters in the third section focus on twentieth- and twenty-first-century indigenous literature. For this reason, the volume's initial part begins with an examination of Spanish and *criollo* writing in the remote and isolated Capitanía General de Chile (the General Captaincy of Chile), encompassing what is today most of Chile and the

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48737-5 — A History of Chilean Literature
Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo
Excerpt
More Information



southern part of Argentina, and belonging to the Viceroyalty of Peru, a territory of the Spanish Empire. As Stefanie Massmann points out, the purpose of writing during the colonial period was to "provide an account of the feats of the conquest, request favors, and *encomiendas*,[5] discuss public policies in relation to the War of Arauco, make the homeland known to the European reader, etc."[6] These letters, travel diaries, official chronicles of the conquest of Chile and the War of Arauco, and other compositions were mostly intended to provide testimony or keep a mandated historical record; yet they provide valuable, though mediated, representations of indigenous cultures and their worldviews.

Over time, while trying to convert native people to Christianity and teach them Spanish, missionaries (many of them Jesuits) became interested in their cultures – and some published their findings. Their different interpretations of the period would later be reflected in Chilean letters. Consequently, the impact of colonial literature on Chileanness, nation building, and on the literary canon after independence cannot be overlooked. Part 1 considers how these changing cultural interpretations have affected contemporary understandings of indigenous peoples in Chile, at times fomenting prejudice and stereotypes. Despite the fact that the literate population in colonial Chile was an elite minority, there was a sustained literary production during the period. This is impressive if we consider that, as Massmann observes, the few existing libraries had mostly religious and juridical books and that cities, the ultimate locus of culture in the Spanish colonies at the time, had small populations: for example, in 1575 Santiago (founded in 1541 by Pedro de Valdivia, who named it Santiago de Nueva Extremadura) had only 375 inhabitants, and the city of Valdivia a mere 230.[7] And, as evidenced here, today new colonial voices continue to be unearthed in the archives of convents, together with depositions by enslaved women of African descent, and letters and other writings by other women. All of them dared to challenge the patriarchy's racialized mechanisms of control and subjugation.

Colonial texts move from the early Spanish and *criollo crónicas de conquista* (chronicles of conquest) and *cartas de relación* (letters or dispatches with a personal account of the conquest or exploration) – which blend literary and historical discourses – on to works influenced by Renaissance, Baroque, and Neoclassical literature from Europe, all the way to the preamble to national independence. Out of the vast preserved corpus of colonial works, the first four essays in this volume concentrate on seven key texts by Pedro de Valdivia, Gerónimo de Vivar, Alonso de Ercilla, Pedro de Oña, Alonso de Ovalle, Diego de Rosales, and

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48737-5 — A History of Chilean Literature
Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo
Excerpt
More Information



Francisco Núñez de Pineda y Bascuñán. However, many other colonial texts (see endnotes) could also be analyzed in depth in future histories of Chilean literature.

Among the founding literary documents in Chile are the conquistador Pedro de Valdivia's *Cartas de relación* (1545–1552), twelve letters that he addressed to the Spanish emperor Charles V, Prince Philip II, the conquistadors Gonzalo and Hernando Pizarro, the Consejo de Indias (Council of the Indies), and his representatives at the Spanish court during his expedition. Along with early descriptions of the country's natural wonders, these letters provide a point of departure for *criollo* self-definition and identity, as well as for future representations of the native population of the land that is now Chile. While the conquistador presented himself, in heroic terms, as the emperor's most faithful servant, his indigenous adversaries (the natives of Copiapó in northern Chile as well as the Aconcagua and Mapocho peoples of the Central Valley) were portrayed as villains. Perhaps this was a strategy to claim his right to the land.

In 1558, after reading Valdivia's letters, Gerónimo de Vivar published his *Crónica*, another eyewitness account in which he uses different rhetorical devices and narrative techniques to change the image of the conquistador to his own liking as well as the interpretation of the conquest itself: Vivar now justifies the various indigenous groups' brave struggle in defense of their homeland, praising in particular the Araucanians' heroic willingness to fight to the death. Coinciding with Ercilla in the first canto of *La Araucana*, by exalting the bravery of the mighty Araucanian enemies and by comparing them to the Numantians in their resistance against the Romans, Vivar indirectly ennobles and praises the epic bravery of the Spaniards who triumphed over them.

Years later, in the very battlefield of the Arauco War (according to the first lines of his epic poem), the Spanish foot soldier Alonso de Ercilla would write what is often considered the first epic poem of the Americas: *La Araucana*. Like Vivar before him, Ercilla praises the bravery of both the Spanish conquerors and the native Araucanians. Mixing, in hendecasyllabic verse, first-person testimonial experience of the battle with fantasy, in line with the period's European literary conventions, he created one of the most important texts of the Spanish Golden Age and perhaps the highlight of the Chilean colonial canon. Hence, the empathetic tradition of positive descriptions of the indigenous enemy started by Vivar and continued in counternarratives by Ercilla and later by the *criollo* soldier Pineda y Bascuñán in *Cautiverio feliz*, exposes tenuous cracks within the imperial project of conquest and colonization: like Bartolomé de las Casas

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48737-5 — A History of Chilean Literature
Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo
Excerpt
More Information



in the north, in Chile several Spaniards and *criollos* were beginning to recognize the injustice of conquering someone else's land and the right of indigenous nations to resist the invasion.

To continue with other colonial chronicles, in 1594 Pedro de Oña, subsequently considered the first Chilean *criollo* author, published *Arauco domado* (*Arauco Tamed*), another epic poem describing these confrontations between the Mapuches and the conquistadors. *Arauco domado*, which emulates Ercilla's *La Araucana*, was written in Lima at the request of the Viceroy of Peru, García Hurtado de Mendoza, who was unhappy with the way Ercilla had portrayed (or silenced) him in *La Araucana*. Incapable of replicating Ercilla's sympathy for and identification with the indigenous Other's bravery, heroism, and humanity, however, Oña distanced himself from them, thus offsetting Ercilla's idealization of the Mapuche. In any case, according to José Antonio Mazzotti, *Arauco domado*, through its creation of illustrious ancestors and of the symbolically prestigious space of the city, participates – while avoiding a direct confrontation with Peninsular Spaniards – in the founding of an embryonic, ambiguous, and problematic ethnic *criollo* nationalism and identity.[8]

The *criollo* Jesuit Alonso de Ovalle's goal in *Histórica relación del reyno de Chile* was to educate novices about a region that was completely unknown to them, making it intelligible via comparisons with spaces, stories, and actors. Ovalle created a historical, foundational narrative of Chile as a nation that draws its positive qualities from its beautiful and bountiful local landscape. He also framed the glory and success of the Spanish Empire within the context of the dissemination of Jesuit achievements, as a way to recruit new volunteers to the Christianizing mission of the Jesuits in Chile.

In turn, the Jesuit chronicler Diego de Rosales was one of the Spaniards who lived among the Mapuches, learned their language and customs, and did everything in his power to end the War of Arauco. His *Historia general del reino de Chile* (1655?–1674?) is yet another colonial text that points at a nascent national identity. Like Ovalle before him, Rosales celebrates Chile's beauty and fertility, providing along the way firsthand information about Mapuche life and customs, and summarizing the history of Chile from the arrival of the Spanish conquistador Diego de Almagro to the indigenous rebellion in 1655. Rosales also wrote *Manifiesto apologético de los daños de la esclavitud en el Reino de Chile* (Apologetic Manifesto of the Damages of Slavery in the Realm of Chile, 1670), which is considered the most important antislavery treatise written in Chile. In the Jesuits' view, there were so many wars precisely because of the existence of slavery, as it

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48737-5 — A History of Chilean Literature
Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo
Excerpt
More Information



justified indigenous rebellions. This opposition to indigenous slavery by members of the clergy and *criollo* intellectuals suggests that the hegemonic official discourse of the 1608 royal decree legalizing the enslavement of the Mapuche rebels, as well as the legal distinction between "indios amigos" (friendly Indians) and "aucas" or "indios de guerra" (Indians at war) were not always well received.

Several other chronicles enriched Chilean letters during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the *criollo* soldier Francisco Núñez de Pineda y Bascuñán's autobiographic *Cautiverio feliz y razón individual de las guerras dilatadas del Reino de Chile* (Happy Captivity and the Single Reason for the Protracted Wars of the Kingdom of Chile, 1673). *Cautiverio feliz* is another text that uncovers a more empathic side of the invaders, its *criollo* author siding with the Arauca tribes and bemoaning the cruelties they suffer. Like Rosales in *Manifiesto apologético*, Bascuñán openly condemns the enslavement of Mapuches, which he sees as the main cause of the never-ending war. In *Cautiverio feliz*, Bascuñán narrates (or romanticizes, as some historians maintain) his positive experience as a captive of the Mapuche chief Maulicán for more than six months during the War of Arauco in 1629. In this way, he reveals the key role of slavery as a Spanish strategy for the domination of the Mapuche.

In his seminal study *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973), the historian Hayden White argued that historical texts resort to literary techniques, including explanation by argument, emplotment, and ideological implication. Since rather than a simple list of chronological events, meaning in historical discourse is successfully constructed through narrative, he argued, it cannot truly be objective, scientific, or value-free. White's theory is proven true in these colonial texts, in which the literary and historical are often difficult to tell apart. This trait makes archival and historical research even more essential for their analysis than it is for the literature of other periods.[9]

The closing chapter of Part I attends to the marginalized voices of both enslaved women of African ancestry and religious women in convents, such as sisters Tadea de San Joaquín, Úrsula Suárez, and Josefa de los Dolores, who deserve equal attention. During the eighteenth century, these nuns would exercise their limited agency by writing poems, diaries, autobiographies, epistles, and spiritual letters for different reasons, among them to strengthen their faith (often by recommendation or mandate of their confessors or other religious authorities) or to express dissatisfaction with their conventual life. In like manner, indigenous and black enslaved women would produce wills, testimonials, and demands for freedom.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48737-5 — A History of Chilean Literature
Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo
Excerpt
More Information



These women tried by all available means to escape their subaltern condition in colonial society: refusing to remain silent, they demanded freedom in Chilean courts, where they resorted to rhetorical strategies including the use of witness testimonies and the denunciation of physical abuse.

Part 2 focuses on the published cultural production from the time of Chilean independence (1810) to the end of the nineteenth century. Independence meant an end to the imposition of limitations or censure on published materials by the colonial government. Although other Spanish possessions in the New World had universities and printing presses from the mid-sixteenth century on, Chile founded its first university (Universidad de San Felipe) in 1747 and its printing press after the country's Independence, in 1811.[10] And though an underground circulation of fiction existed, reading unauthorized material was forbidden. In 1810, however, independent Chile had no clear understanding of what its national culture was. Literature became, out of necessity, a vital heuristic tool for intellectual autonomy, a sort of flagship of national identity. Several chapters of Part 2, therefore, explore early efforts to find a specifically Chilean literature, at times through memory, imagination, and even collective amnesia.

As in all Latin America, much of Chilean nineteenth-century literature was influenced by a Romantic movement that was beginning to wane in Europe. Romanticism's interest in individualism, nationalism, and freedom fortuitously coincided with the desire for emancipation of many colonies held by Spain in the Americas, including Chile. Consistent with this viewpoint and with the impetus to undo Spain's cultural influence, there were multiple attempts to Americanize the Spanish language (many texts of the time replace the "y" by an "i"). The Chilean literary critic Cedomil Goić distinguishes three separate generations of writers who were influenced by Romanticism.[11] Toward the end of Romanticism, the Chilean "Generation of 1837" adopted Spanish *Costumbrismo*. These authors tried to interpret the mannerisms, customs, folklore, and daily life of the Chilean people, often from a moralizing, critical, or satiric perspective. The arrival in Chile of the Venezuelan Andrés Bello, the Argentine Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and the Spaniard José Joaquín de Mora would propitiate the advent of the Generation of 1842, which strove to create an authentically Chilean national literature by radically attacking social problems and by reintroducing the past as a model to be followed.

Although it lasted only one year, among the main nineteenth-century literary and cultural institutions in Chile was the Sociedad Literaria de 1842 (Literary Society of 1842), which was led by José Victorino Lastarria. Ana

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

Cambridge
Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48737-5 — A History of Chilean Literature
Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo
Excerpt
More Information



Silvia Rábago Cordero analyzes the liberal Lastarria's concept of social literature, pointing out his emphasis on it being free, moderated, and original, without imitating other countries, and on making literature a vehicle to educate the government about the needs of its people: "Literature should represent the entire people, meet their needs, and bring them to the legislators."[12] The first literary institution founded in the new republic, it was responsible for the creation of the *Semanario de Santiago*, a pioneering literary magazine in the country. The main goal of the Sociedad Literaria was to promote education among Chilean youth and to create an original national literature independent from foreign models and focused on social issues.

Romantic writers like Alberto Blest Gana, Daniel Barros Grez, Eduardo de la Barra, and Liborio Brieba would lean progressively closer to literary Realism. Alberto Blest Gana, like other writers of the Generation of 1867 (Daniel Barros Grez, Eduardo de la Barra, Zorobabel Rodríguez, José Antonio Soffia, Moisés Vargas, Liborio Brieba), portrayed the daily life of an urban, middle-class society, notably in his novel *Martín Rivas* (1862). By contrast, Luis Orrego Luco lamented the loss of local traditions, a loss that would have negative moral consequences. The arrival in 1886 of Nicaraguan Rubén Darío, the most prominent member of the Modernista movement, had a considerable influence on Chilean poets like Manuel Magallanes Moure and Carlos Pezoa Véliz, among others.

Nineteenth-century literature continued to engage with society in Chile's nation-building project while maintaining bonds with European and North American intellectuals. Part 2 thereby addresses how Chilean literary production articulated different political agendas related to class, nation, race, and gender, covering the following topics: women authors and the advancement of women's rights; popular types of literature like the feuilleton or *novela de folletín*; the historical novel as a tool for patriotism; intimate types of writing such as autobiographies, letter collections, memoirs, and diaries; literary markets; as well as modernization and culture. Chapters pay special attention to the oft-silenced discourse of women authors and their demands for their rights, as contained in poems, novels, short stories, love letters in different languages, newspaper and magazine articles, travel narratives, confessional ballads, theatrical reviews, translations, and even in literary *tertulia* (literary salon) sessions. One of the most distinguished voices was that of Rosario Orrego Castañeda (pen name "Una madre" [A Mother]), considered the first Chilean woman novelist and the first to join a literary academy. Her novels, poems, and essays, all dealing with domestic as well as national issues, were published in

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org