



## STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (050)

TEXT: *Los misterios del Plata* (1846)

AUTHOR: Juana Paula Manso (Argentina, 1819–1875)

EDITOR: Stockcero edition based on the 1846 text and later interventions

### PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on the Author's Preface and modern critical commentary)

#### A POLITICAL "MYSTERY": ARGENTINA UNDER ROSAS

##### Title and Polemic Intention:

By choosing the title *Los misterios del Plata*, Juana Manso alludes to the hugely popular European "mysteries" novels—especially Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1843) and Feval's *Les mystères de Londres*—only to deny any simple imitation. For Manso, the true "mystery" is not the criminal underworld of a European metropolis, but the political and social reality of the Río de la Plata under the dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas. She declares that her country, its customs, its political events, and the "frightful dramas" it has suffered are a mystery to the so-called civilized world.

##### Denouncing Rosas: Tyrant, Not Hero:

The author's preface is openly accusatory. She insists that the world must stop seeing Rosas as a "brave old paladin of liberty" and recognize him as a "ferocious and bloodthirsty tyrant," as hypocritical as he is infamous. For Manso, the blood of Argentine citizens "cries out for vengeance," and literature becomes a means to strip the "mask of virtue" from crime so that both executioners and victims may be recognized. The novel thus situates itself firmly within the anti-Rosas literature of the period, alongside Echeverría's *El matadero* and Sarmiento's *Facundo*.

##### Historical Novel with a Political Purpose:

Published in 1846, just months after *Facundo*, Manso's novel anticipates José Mármol's *Amalia* (1851) and helps inaugurate the Río de la Plata tradition of historical novels with strong political content. It offers "faithful historical facts" and numerous explanatory notes to give readers "ample knowledge" of a country either unknown or slandered abroad. The work must be read as both a narrative and a political intervention addressed to an international audience.

#### MYSTERIES, PERSECUTION, AND THE "LOWER DEPTHS"

##### Valentín de Avellaneda / Valentín Alsina:

One of the central episodes in *Los misterios del Plata* is the persecution of Valentín Alsina, thinly veiled as "Valentín de Avellaneda," by Rosas's regime. Although Manso insists she is not copying Sue's *Mysteries of Paris*, the real story of Alsina's persecution closely resembles the intrigues and violence of the European "lower depths" novels: treachery, ignorance, clumsy brutality, and crude selfishness converge to determine the fate of a noble character.

##### From Open Ending to Later Intervention:

The novel was originally left open, ending on a bitter and unresolved note that echoed the atmosphere of oppression masterfully portrayed by Esteban Echeverría in *El matadero* (1838).



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Only later did Ricardo Isidro López Muniz, in his 1924 edition, add a new ending to close the narrative arc. For students, this editorial history raises important questions about authorship, reception, and how later editors reshape the meanings of politically charged texts.

### **Language, Realism, and National Colour:**

Manso explicitly notes that the language of the book is “almost the same as that used in the country,” and if it differs, it is “to its advantage, that is, less grotesque.” This signals her intention to capture contemporary Argentine speech and habits while slightly refining them for print. The combination of colloquial language, documentary notes, and melodramatic episodes places the novel at the crossroads of popular feuilleton fiction and politically engaged realism.

### **A FEMALE AUTHOR AND A FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN THE STRUGGLE**

#### **One of the First Women of Letters in Argentina:**

Juana Manso is among the earliest Argentine women to claim a public voice as a writer, educator, and journalist. In *Los misterios del Plata*, she does not limit herself to condemning tyranny; she also continues her broader project of “creating consciousness” and expanding women’s participation in public life. Writing a political novel at mid-19th century, she intervenes in a genre dominated by male authors like Sarmiento and Mármol.

#### **Adelaida Maza de Avellaneda: An Active Female Role:**

Criticism underlines that Manso gives Adelaida Maza de Avellaneda (the wife of Valentín) a central, decisive role in resisting fate. Far from being a passive victim, Adelaida shows energy, initiative, and moral strength that often surpass those of her husband. In doing so, Manso challenges the usual gender roles in political and historical fiction, where women typically appear only as allegories of the nation or as sentimental figures.

#### **Political Struggle and Gender Struggle:**

The novel thus stages a double fight: against the dictatorship of Rosas and against the social and cultural limits imposed on women. While the explicit surface is political—exposing “black mysteries” of tyranny—the narrative also encodes a quieter but persistent advocacy for women’s education, agency, and public voice. Adelaida’s involvement in the struggle suggests that national liberation and female emancipation are interconnected projects.

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## **PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION**

### **“Mysteries” and Political Reality**

Why does Juana Manso choose the title *Los misterios del Plata* in a moment when European “mysteries” novels are very popular? In what ways does she appropriate and transform that model to expose political rather than purely criminal “mysteries”?

#### **Rosas: Hero or Tyrant?**

Analyze how the Author’s Preface constructs the figure of Juan Manuel de Rosas. How does Manso’s portrait contrast with more favorable views that might have circulated in Europe or among some contemporaries? What rhetorical strategies does she use to dismantle the image of Rosas as a “paladin of liberty”?

#### **Historicizing the Novel: Between Facundo and Amalia**



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Place *Los misterios del Plata* alongside Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845) and Mármol's *Amalia* (1851). How does Manso's novel contribute to the anti-Rosas tradition? What is distinctive about her approach as a woman writer and as a novelist rather than an essayist?

#### **Adelaida's Role and Women's Agency**

Discuss the character of Adelaida Maza de Avellaneda. In what concrete ways does she act, decide, or intervene in events, rather than simply suffer them? How does her role challenge or confirm contemporary expectations of women in political and family life?

#### **Language, Notes, and the International Reader**

Manso states that her language mirrors Argentine usage, and she invites readers to pay attention to the notes. What image of Argentina and of its political conflict is she constructing for an international audience? How do the explanatory notes shape the way the novel is read as both literature and a political document?

#### **Open Endings, Editorial Changes, and Interpretation**

Consider the fact that the original novel ended on an open, bitter note, and that López Muniz later added a new ending (1924). How might an open ending affect readers' understanding of tyranny and resistance? What are the implications, literary and political, of closing the story later?

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## **PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Manso, Juana.** *Los misterios del Plata*. Original edition, 1846; later editions including Ricardo Isidro López Muniz's 1924 version with added ending.

**Echeverría, Esteban.** *El matadero* (written c. 1838; published later). Foundational anti-Rosas text depicting the violence of the regime.

**Sarmiento, Domingo F.** *Facundo o civilización y barbarie* (1845). Essay-novel analyzing the political and social structures that enable caudillo rule.

**Mármol, José.** *Amalia* (1851). Historical-political novel set during Rosas's dictatorship, often read as a canonical anti-Rosas narrative.

Critical studies on Juana Manso's life and works, including her pioneering role as educator, journalist, and feminist writer in 19th-century Argentina.



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## PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

**What is Juana Manso's main stated purpose in *Los misterios del Plata*?**

- A) To imitate Sue's *Mysteries of Paris* in an Argentine setting
  - B) To provide a purely romantic love story set in Buenos Aires
  - C) To reveal to the world the "black mysteries" of Argentina under Rosas and unmask a tyrant disguised as a defender of liberty
  - D) To promote Rosas as a national hero
- Correct Answer: C

**Which real historical figure is fictionalized in the novel as "Valentín de Avellaneda"?**

- A) Domingo F. Sarmiento
  - B) Valentín Alsina
  - C) Juan Bautista Alberdi
  - D) Esteban Echeverría
- Correct Answer: B

**How does *Los misterios del Plata* relate to the European "mysteries" novels?**

- A) It has no relation; the title is purely coincidental.
  - B) It copies *Les Mystères de Paris* scene by scene.
  - C) It echoes the structure and atmosphere of urban "mysteries" but applies them to political persecution and tyranny in the Río de la Plata.
  - D) It parodies European novels for comic effect.
- Correct Answer: C

**What role does Adelaida Maza de Avellaneda play in the novel?**

- A) A purely passive victim with no influence on events
  - B) A distant symbol who never appears directly
  - C) An active, energetic participant whose actions are crucial in the struggle against fate and oppression
  - D) The main antagonist working for Rosas
- Correct Answer: C

**Why does Manso emphasize that her language is "almost the same" as that used in the country, only "less grotesque"?**

- A) To claim that the novel is written in formal Latin.
  - B) To distance herself from Argentine reality.
  - C) To underline her effort to represent contemporary Argentine speech and customs while slightly refining them for print and for foreign readers.
  - D) To suggest that the book is a translation from French.
- Correct Answer: C

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