



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (062)

TEXT: *En la sangre*

AUTHOR: Eugenio Cambaceres (1843–1889)

EDITOR / INTRODUCTION & NOTES: María Eugenia Mudrovic

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

ARGENTINA IN THE 1880s: LIBERAL TRIUMPH AND DEEP CONTRADICTIONS

Second Industrial Revolution and agro-export model:

By the 1880s Argentina had become a classic agro-export country integrated into the European market: grain exports (first wheat shipment in 1876), massive incorporation of “desert” lands after the 1879 Conquest of the Desert, expansion of railroads (from 1,331 km in 1874 to 13,682 km in 1892), and shift from pre-modern *saladeros* to modern frigoríficos.

Roca and the “Liga de Gobernadores”:

After the federalization of Buenos Aires, Julio A. Roca’s first presidency (1880–1886) consolidated power through the **Liga de Gobernadores**, bringing together the traditional oligarchy and reconciled ex-opponents after Pavón. This “coalition,” as Josefina Ludmer notes, reaffirmed itself by “overcoming previous political differences,” enabling a relatively stable platform for aggressive modernization.

Birth of “modern Argentina”:

Critics like Noé Jitrik see the 1880s as a formative period: the emergence of Argentina’s modern economic, political, and cultural structures, and the crystallization of “national characteristics.” Buenos Aires, transformed under mayor Torcuato de Alvear, became the symbolic center of the liberal project: gas lighting, sanitation works, new public buildings, the Avenida de Mayo and future 9 de Julio, redesigned plazas, trams, and telephones—all part of a deliberate “Europeanization” strategy.

THE GENERATION OF 1880: GENTLEMEN WRITERS AND DANDIES

Elite culture and dandyism:

The **Generación del 80** combined active political roles with a cultivated, conversational, often fragmentary literature. Club del Progreso, Teatro Colón, Jockey Club were key social spaces where they discussed French and European trends (Lamartine, Hugo, Musset, Taine, Flaubert, Zola). A cosmopolitan dandyism—ostentation, afrancesamiento, snobbish “europeizing”—became a lifestyle and aesthetic, but often produced a literature detached from local social realities.

Two literary tendencies:

According to Jitrik, the 80s split between:

Essayistic, nostalgic prose (Cané, Wilde, Mansilla): causeries, travel writing, autobiographical sketches that avoid frontal engagement with political contradictions. Narrative naturalism (López, Cambaceres, Sicardi, Julián Martel): novels that confront decadence, luxury, hypocrisy, speculation, and post-1880 anxieties, especially around money and social mobility.

IMMIGRATION, RACISM, AND THE “CICLO DE LA BOLSA”

Liberal immigration policy and its discontents:

By 1889 Buenos Aires’s 500,000 inhabitants included ~300,000 immigrants; the national population quadrupled in 45 years. Guided by Alberdi’s motto “gobernar es poblar,” the liberal state actively recruited European immigrants, granted them citizenship rights



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(Constitution 1853), and created institutions like the Hotel de Inmigrantes and Oficina de Trabajo.

Unexpected outcomes:

Despite plans to settle immigrants on land, many ended up in Buenos Aires, forming a growing urban middle class and proletariat. The social structure shifted rapidly, undermining the elite's sense of stability and triggering xenophobic and racist reactions. Pseudo-scientific positivism (Spencer, etc.) helped legitimize a conservative, defensive turn: from Roca's first liberal government (laws like 1420 on secular public education) to his second, more conservative presidency and the 1902 Ley de Residencia expelling "undesirable" immigrants.

Crisis of 1890 and the "Ciclo de la Bolsa":

The speculative land boom, currency collapse (45% devaluation), massive bankruptcies, clandestine emissions, and state default turned the country into "an immense gambling hall." The so-called **novela de la Bolsa** (Ocantos, Martel, Sicardi) channels these tensions, depicting social climbing, stock speculation, anarchist agitation, and moral decay.

EUGENIO CAMBACERES: DANDY, POLITICIAN, NATURALIST

Life and persona:

Cambaceres, of French descent, was a quintessential gentleman-dandy: tall, elegant, expressive, devoted to bohemian pleasures. He studied at Colegio Nacional, obtained a law degree (thesis on "Utilidad, valor y precio"), briefly practiced, then divided his life between politics, estancias, Buenos Aires high society, and frequent trips to Paris. Politics brought scandal: a failed project for Church–State separation (1871) and his denunciation of electoral fraud (1874) earned him the label "ateo, impío y masón" and eventual withdrawal from politics.

Turn to literature:

Beginning in 1880 (as "Lorenzo Díaz"), he wrote first *Potpourri* and *Música sentimental* (1884, under the subtitle *Silbidos de un vago*), then his most important novels, *Sin rumbo* (1885) and *En la sangre* (1887). Literature, for him, was a "privilege of rent," but also a means to denounce the disintegration of ideals and the "fiebre de riqueza" consuming Argentina.

Language and style:

Cambaceres jokingly claimed that to "enrich national literature" one needed only pen, ink, paper, and not knowing Spanish. Yet his intuitive ear captured local speech saturated with Italianisms, Gallicisms, sharp comparisons, and colorful idioms, culminating in a distinctive narrative voice.

EN LA SANGRE (1887): PLOT AND NATURALIST PROGRAM

Publication and reception:

Written at the height of liberal euphoria under Juárez Celman, *En la sangre* nonetheless anticipates the darker tone of the post-1890 "Ciclo de la Bolsa." Publishers competed for the manuscript; the officialist newspaper *Sud-América* acquired it for 5,000 pesos. It was serialized simultaneously in *Sud-América* (Buenos Aires), *La República* (Montevideo), *El Interior* (Córdoba), and *El Municipio* (Rosario).

Storyline:

Genaro Piazza, son of a "bruto y avaro" Neapolitan *tachero* (cab driver), inherits a small fortune. He quickly begins climbing: leaves the *conventillo*, moves into a house, enrolls in preparatory studies to enter university. A humiliating public reminder of his origins



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(“tachero”) triggers resentment described as hereditary taint. He cheats on his exam (stealing the exam ball), celebrates a fraudulent victory, then fails and abandons his studies.

Turning to social performance, Genaro seeks to enter the Club del Progreso and seduce **Máxima**, a young woman from the creole oligarchy. Though the club rejects him, he metaphorically “enters through the window”: he seduces and rapes Máxima, then marries her after she becomes pregnant. He later steals her father’s fortune and loses it in speculation. The novel ends with domestic violence and threats: “te he de matar un día de estos, si te descuidas!”

Naturalist determinism and pedagogy:

The text insists that Genaro’s behavior is “in his blood,” transmitted by heredity like syphilitic “virus.” *En la sangre* defines itself as an “Estudio,” using naturalist topoi—heredity, environment, race—to lend scientific legitimacy to a social and racial warning aimed at the elite. Redundancy, repetition, and over-explicit moralizing serve a didactic purpose: to teach the ruling class to recognize “false” social climbers and to highlight its own “carelessness” (open doors, misplaced trust).

IMMIGRANT STEREOTYPE AND CLASS RETRENCHMENT

From comic servant to serious threat:

Prior works treated immigrants as comic figures (Tainete the Galician servant in *Potpourri*, the returning wealthy Basques in *Música sentimental*). In *En la sangre*, humor disappears; the immigrant becomes a “serious” subject, central and threatening. Genaro is no longer a buffoon; he is an “invader” and “trepador” who infiltrates sacred spaces (university, Teatro Colón, aristocratic households).

Complex stereotyping:

The immigrant stereotype is not a simple copy of European “arriviste” figures (Rastignac, Jean Valjean). Cambaceres fuses the **social climber** with the **avaricious** and the **uncultured**, emphasizing superstition and lack of genuine thought. Italian ethnicity (and broader labels like *gringo*, *bachicha*, *nápole*) are coded as avarice, ignorance, brutality, while other ethnic labels (*china*, *mulato*, *gallego*) carry their own pejorative weight.

Discourse strategies:

The novel’s free indirect discourse exposes Genaro’s thoughts while denying him a fully autonomous voice: his interior monologue is saturated with clichés, refrains, and stock phrases, reinforcing his status as simulacrum rather than rational subject. The constant theatricalization (masks, carnival, performances) underscores both his mimetic powers and the artificiality of his ascent.

Class paideia:

En la sangre functions as a **class paideia**, a didactic fable for the oligarchy. It critiques liberal ideals (open immigration, unrestricted education, faith in Europeanization) as so permissive that they risk the autodestruction of the ruling class. The novel ultimately offers a substitute myth of aristocratic self-defense based on exclusion, homogeneity, and self-valorization—recasting liberal discourse through positivist, pseudo-scientific notions of race and heredity.



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PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. **Naturalism and Social Warning**

How does *En la sangre* use naturalist concepts (heredity, environment, race) to build its argument about the immigrant Genaro Piazza? In what ways is the novel less a neutral “study” and more a warning pamphlet directed at the elite?

2. **Immigration and Class Anxiety**

Discuss the representation of the immigrant in Cambaceres’s work (from *Potpourri* and *Música sentimental* to *En la sangre*). How does the tone shift from humorous to paranoid? What historical realities of immigration and social mobility underpin this change?

3. **Spaces of Invasion: University, Club, Home, Theatre**

Identify the key spaces Genaro “invades” (university, Club del Progreso, Máxima’s home, Teatro Colón during carnival). How does the novel code these spaces as “sacred” to the elite, and what does their invasion symbolize in terms of power, purity, and national identity?

4. **Narrative Technique and Ideology**

Analyze Cambaceres’s use of free indirect discourse. How does it serve to mock or distance Genaro, and how does it shape readers’ sympathies? To what extent does the narrative voice control and limit the representation of the immigrant’s interiority?

5. **Comparing Naturalist Approaches: Cambaceres and the “Ciclo de la Bolsa”**

In what ways does *En la sangre* anticipate the later “novela de la Bolsa”? Compare its treatment of money, speculation, and moral decay with a later text from the cycle (Ocantos, Martel, Sicardi). Does Cambaceres offer any viable alternative or only diagnosis?

6. **Liberalism, Positivism, and Racism**

How does the novel reflect the tensions between liberal ideals (immigration, equality, education) and the emerging racist, xenophobic attitudes of the period? Discuss how pseudo-scientific language is used to legitimize class retrenchment and racial hierarchy.

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

1. *In En la sangre, Genaro Piazza is primarily portrayed as:*
- A) A heroic defender of immigrant rights
 - B) A comic servant with no ambitions
 - C) A social climber and “invader” whose ascent is coded as dangerous and illegitimate
 - D) A disinterested intellectual

Correct Answer: C

2. *Which historical period and political climate frame the writing of En la sangre?*
- A) Colonial Buenos Aires under the viceroyalty
 - B) The Peronist era
 - C) The liberal triumph and euphoria of Juárez Celman’s government in the late 1880s
 - D) Post–World War II Argentina

Correct Answer: C

3. *According to the introduction, the novel’s heavy emphasis on heredity (“en la sangre”) serves mainly to:*
- A) Promote scientific education in universities
 - B) Legitimize, through naturalist rhetoric, a class-based and racialized warning about immigration and social mobility
 - C) Encourage immigrants to pursue higher education
 - D) Celebrate the mixing of races in Argentina

Correct Answer: B

4. *How does Cambaceres’s treatment of immigrants change from earlier works to En la sangre?*
- A) Immigrants are always idealized as heroes.
 - B) They move from harmless comic figures (servants, buffoons) to central, threatening protagonists like Genaro.
 - C) They are never mentioned in his earlier works.
 - D) They are treated identically in all novels.

Correct Answer: B

5. *What pedagogical function does En la sangre seem to serve for the elite, according to the introduction?*
- A) It invites the elite to welcome all immigrants unconditionally.
 - B) It teaches the ruling class to relax its vigilance and embrace liberal ideals to the fullest.
 - C) It operates as a class paideia, warning the elite about the dangers of excessive openness and urging a more exclusionary, self-protective stance.
 - D) It advocates abolishing private property.

Correct Answer: C**

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