



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (085)

Title: *Una Excursión a los indios ranqueles*

Author: Lucio V. Mansilla

Editor: Saúl Sosnowski

Subject Areas: Latin American Literature, 19th-Century Argentine History, Ethnography & Frontier Studies, The "Generation of '80".

I. Academic Justification & Context

Lucio V. Mansilla's *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* is a cornerstone text for understanding the geopolitical and cultural consolidation of the Argentine State prior to the "Conquest of the Desert". As Dr. Saúl Sosnowski expertly delineates in the critical prologue of this edition, Mansilla was the ultimate *dandy* and causeur of the "Generation of '80". He ventured into the Pampas not merely as a military colonel, but as an intellectual observer, weaving a complex narrative that blends the epistolary genre, ethnography, and political manifesto.

For university curricula, this text serves as an indispensable counterpoint to Sarmiento's *Facundo*. While Sarmiento theorized about the "barbarism" of the plains from the city and exile, Mansilla immerses himself in it, engaging in a physical and intellectual dialogue with the Ranquel caciques (Mariano Rosas, Baigorrita, etc.). The text documents a fleeting moment of peaceful, albeit tense, negotiation before the definitive expropriation and ethnic cleansing of the indigenous populations.

II. Core Thematic Axes for Lecture & Syllabus Integration

1. The Rhetoric of "Civilization" and the Irony of the "Excursion"

Mansilla subverts the military nature of his mission by labeling it an "excursion"—a term implying a leisure trip or tourist adventure. Professors can analyze how this rhetorical choice minimizes his insubordination (signing a peace treaty without authorization) while establishing his persona as a cosmopolitan traveler judging the frontier through European cultural lenses (quoting Shakespeare, Rousseau, and Voltaire in the middle of the Pampas).

2. The Ethnographic Gaze and the "Other"

Unlike the demonized depictions of natives common in the era's political discourse, Mansilla offers a detailed, almost anthropological account of Ranquel society. He documents their kinship systems, diets, legal proceedings, and diplomacy. However, as Sosnowski notes, this gaze is highly ethnocentric: the indigenous people are ultimately judged by how closely they approximate "civilized" behaviors, and Mansilla does not waver in his fundamental belief that their way of life must eventually yield to the railroad and the national economy.

3. The Gaucho and the Frontier Ecosystem

Mansilla uses his letters to classify the inhabitants of the frontier, making a strict distinction between the useful "paisano" and the obsolete "gaucho neto" (similar to the evolution seen in José Hernández's *Martín Fierro*). The text provides a rich socio-economic map of the outcasts, political refugees, and captives (*cautivas*) who inhabit the blurry line between the Argentine Republic and the indigenous territories.



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III. Classroom Discussion Topics

1. **The Epistolary Performance:** Mansilla addresses his letters to his friend Santiago Arcos, but his true audience is the urban elite reading *La Tribuna*. How does the conversational style (*causerie*) and the constant presence of Mansilla's "yo" (ego) shape the narrative's verisimilitude?
2. **The Paradox of the Liberal Dandy:** Mansilla admires the Ranqueles' political system—often finding their adherence to principles superior to the chaotic factionalism of Buenos Aires—yet he later advocates in Congress for their assimilation or extermination. How do students reconcile his literary empathy with his political pragmatism?
3. **The Destiny of the Land:** Analyze the dialogue where Mansilla justifies the expansion of the borders to the caciques ("Todos somos hijos de Dios, todos somos argentinos"). How does the text expose the underlying economic motives (railways, agriculture, foreign markets) of the civilizing mission?

IV. Research Prompts & Essay Assignments

- **Comparative Analysis Essay:** "Analyze the representation of the 'Barbaric Other' in Domingo F. Sarmiento's 'Facundo' and Lucio V. Mansilla's 'Una excursión a los indios ranqueles'. How does Mansilla's direct, conversational encounter with the Ranquel leadership deconstruct or reinforce Sarmiento's earlier dichotomies?"
- **Cultural Studies / Historical Essay:** "Using Saúl Sosnowski's prologue, evaluate Mansilla's role as a representative of the 'Generation of '80'. Discuss how his literary performance as a cosmopolitan traveler in the Pampas reflected the broader national project of integrating Argentina into the global capitalist market while neutralizing internal frontiers."

V. RELATED STOCKCERO RESOURCES

Southern Cone Collection: 6-Book Bundle. (Includes *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* alongside *1804 - 1810 - Las Brevas Maduras*, *El Chacho - Ultimo caudillo de la montonera*, *Rozas*, *Ensayo Histórico-psicológico*, *The Emancipation of South America*, and *Indios Guaranies y Jesuitas Misiones de la Compañía de Jesus en el Paraguay*).

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