



## STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (104)

TEXT: *Potpourri*

AUTHOR: Eugenio Cambaceres

EDITOR: Claude Cymerman

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### PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

#### 1. THE "GENERATION OF '80" IN ARGENTINA:

*Potpourri* is a foundational text of Argentina's "Generación del '80," a group of elite, European-educated intellectuals, politicians, and writers who shaped the nation during a period of rapid economic and social transformation (1880-1889).

This generation, while often embracing liberal and positivist ideals, also displayed conservative tendencies, a profound sense of class superiority, and a complex relationship with Argentina's burgeoning modernity, particularly the influx of European immigration.

#### 2. SATIRE AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE OF "HIGH SOCIETY":

Cambaceres (1843-1889), a scion of the oligarchy, was a dandy, politician, and misanthrope whose disillusionment fueled his acerbic literary output. *Potpourri* is a scathing satire of Buenos Aires's "high society," exposing its hypocrisy, amorality, and obsession with appearances.

The novel challenges traditional notions of marriage and gender roles, portraying women as victims of a flawed educational system and men as equally complicit in the societal decay. It employs sharp irony and sarcasm to denounce political corruption, false patriotism, and the ineffectiveness of the nascent Republic.

#### 3. NATURALIST INFLUENCES AND LITERARY INNOVATION:

Cambaceres's work is deeply influenced by French naturalism (especially Émile Zola), adopting its focus on social pathology and unsparing realism. However, he adapts these influences to the Argentine context, transforming the critique of the bourgeoisie into an indictment of the "new rich" and the social climbing fueled by rapid economic change.

*Potpourri* is stylistically innovative, blending literary forms (essay, theater, pamphlet) and linguistic registers. Cambaceres incorporates French expressions, Lunfardo (Buenos Aires slang), and local idioms, creating a vibrant, polyphonic prose that was unconventional and provocative for its time.

#### 4. THE URBAN VERSUS RURAL LANDSCAPE:

The novel vividly portrays Buenos Aires as a dynamic, Europeanized metropolis, a "shop window" of modernity, albeit one plagued by superficiality and vice. Cambaceres, as an urban dandy, shows a deep, albeit critical, affection for his city. In contrast, the depiction of the Argentine countryside is largely negative and caricatural, aligning with Sarmiento's "civilization vs. barbarism" dichotomy, where the rural is seen as crude and uncultured. This underscores Cambaceres's aristocratic bias and his critique of a changing social order.



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## 5. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DIMENSIONS AND MODERNITY:

*Potpourri* is largely autobiographical, reflecting Cambaceres's own life experiences—his political disillusionment, scandalous love affairs, and misanthropic tendencies. He projects his "incorruptible honesty" and critical temperament onto his narrative persona.

Its stylistic audacity, unconventional language, and questioning of traditional literary forms mark *Potpourri* as a precursor to modern Argentine narrative, positioning Cambaceres as a foundational figure whose work anticipates later avant-garde movements.

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## PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

### **Satire of "High Society":**

How does Cambaceres use satire in *Potpourri* to critique the Argentine high society of the 1880s? Discuss specific examples of hypocrisy or moral decay portrayed in the novel.

### **Naturalism and Its Adaptation:**

While influenced by French Naturalism, how does Cambaceres adapt its tenets to the Argentine context? What social pathologies or issues specific to Argentina does *Potpourri* highlight?

### **Language and Style as Innovation:**

Analyze Cambaceres's use of language. How does the blend of French idioms and local Argentineisms (including Lunfardo) contribute to the novel's unique voice and its social critique?

### **The Author's Persona:**

*Potpourri* is noted for its autobiographical elements. How does Cambaceres's own life and worldview (as a dandy, politician, misanthrope) inform the narrative and his critique of society?

### **Gender Roles and Relationships:**

Discuss the portrayal of women and marriage in *Potpourri*. Does Cambaceres exhibit misogyny, or is he critiquing a patriarchal society that limits women's roles and opportunities?

### **"Potpourri" in the "Summer Reading" Bundle:**

How does this novel, despite its critical depth, fit the criteria of a "short and accessible work" suitable for a summer reading course? What unique perspective does it offer compared to other titles in the bundle?



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**PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- **Cambaceres, Eugenio.** *Potpourri*. Ed. Claude Cymerman. Stockcero, [Year of publication].
  - **Cymerman, Claude.** *La obra política y literaria de Eugenio Cambaceres (1843-1889): del progresismo al conservadurismo*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2007.
  - **Baquero Goyanes, Mariano.** *El cuento español en el Siglo XIX*. Madrid: Revista de Filología Española, 1949.
  - **Zola, Émile.** *La novela experimental*. París: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971. (For Naturalism context).
  - **Cané, Miguel.** «Los libros de Eugenio Cambaceres. A propósito de Sin rumbo». *Sud América*, 30 de octubre de 1885. (Contemporary critique).
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**PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)**

*What primary social class does Eugenio Cambaceres satirize in Potpourri?*

- A) The rural peasantry.
- B) The working-class immigrants.
- C) The Buenos Aires "high society" or oligarchy.
- D) The military and religious elite.

**Correct Answer: C**

*Cambaceres's Potpourri is considered stylistically innovative for its blend of:*

- A) Traditional epic poetry and historical chronicles.
- B) Scientific treatises and philosophical dialogues.
- C) European literary influences (especially French) and local Argentine idioms/slang.
- D) Religious parables and moral fables.

**Correct Answer: C**

*The introduction suggests that Cambaceres's critique of women in Potpourri is best understood as:*

- A) Direct misogyny aimed at all women.
- B) A critique of women as products of a misguided society that fails to educate them.
- C) An endorsement of women's traditional roles in the domestic sphere.
- D) A purely personal attack on his former lovers.

**Correct Answer: B**

*How does Potpourri reflect Cambaceres's own biographical experiences and disillusionment?*

- A) It promotes his successful political career and happy marriage.
- B) It details his misanthropic tendencies, political failures, and a shift towards pessimism.
- C) It serves as a neutral, objective observation of society without personal input.
- D) It celebrates the economic prosperity of Argentina during the 1880s.

**Correct Answer: B**

*According to the introduction, what makes Potpourri a "precursor to modern Argentine narrative"?*

- A) Its strict adherence to classical literary rules.
- B) Its innovative use of language, satirical approach, and breaking of conventional narrative structures.
- C) Its focus solely on historical events.
- D) Its complete rejection of all foreign literary influences.

**Correct Answer: B**



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