



## TEACHING KIT (132)

**TITLE:** *Manuela. Novela bogotana*

**AUTHOR:** Eugenio Díaz Castro

**ISBN:** 978-1-934768-49-5

**Editor:** Flor María Rodríguez-Arenas

### I. OVERVIEW & SIGNIFICANCE

First serialized in Bogotá between 1858 and 1859, *Manuela. Novela bogotana* by Eugenio Díaz Castro is widely celebrated as a masterwork of mid-19th-century Latin American realism. Long mislabeled by traditional literary historiography as a mere "costumbrista" text, recent scholarship—ably championed by editor Flor María Rodríguez-Arenas—demonstrates that *Manuela* is a rigorous social critique deeply indebted to European realist models such as Honoré de Balzac, Eugène Sue, and Alexandre Dumas.

Set in the Provincia de Bogotá (stretching from the cold Andean cordilleras to the hot plains of the Magdalena River) around 1856, the novel offers an expansive, unvarnished look at the socio-political tensions, agrarian power structures, and cultural life of New Granada (Colombia). Through the contrasting worlds of the rural parish and the capital, the novel exposes the harsh realities of rural servitude (*concertaje*), political factionalism between Liberals and Conservatives, and the pervasive vulnerability and exploitation of women across all social strata.

### II. CONTEXT & CRITICAL APPROACHES

This text provides an exceptional framework for examining the evolution of realism, agrarian economics, gender dynamics, and political ideology in 19th-century Latin America.

#### Deconstructing the "Costumbrista" Label:

Examine how Díaz Castro transcends local color and picturesque typologies. Analyze how his narrative employs the tenets of French social realism—meticulous documentation of daily life, detailed physical and social environments, and scientific-rational observation—to expose the structural flaws of the republic rather than merely celebrating folklore.

#### Agrarian Servitude and Social Inequity:

Explore the economic and labor backdrops of the novel, particularly the systems of debt peonage and land exploitation in estates like the sugar mills (*trapiches*) and tobacco fields. Discuss how characters like the indigenous veteran Marcelino Cogua or the oppressed young workers (Pía, Rosa) reveal the failure of the post-independence state to protect its most vulnerable populations.

#### Gender, Violence, and Power:

Analyze the pervasive presence of gender violence, sexual coercion, and the systemic degradation of women in the novel. Contrast the idealized romantic tropes with the bleak realities faced by characters like Manuela, Cecilia, Marta, and the various women trapped in domestic or economic subjugation by powerful landowners and corrupt officials (*tinterillos* like Tadeo).



The Stockcero Guarantee

SpanishBookPress Editions.

Printed in the USA. Never backlisted. Always available.

Copyright © 2025 Stockcero, Inc.

3785 N.W. 82nd Avenue, Suite 302, Miami, FL 33166, USA

### Political Ideology and the Social Novel:

Discuss Díaz Castro's explicit alignment with liberal-socialist currents of the 1850s (such as the utopian socialist theories circulating in New Granada at the time). Examine the ideological function of characters like Demóstenes (the urban *gólghota* intellectual) and how the narrative contrasts elite political theories with the messy, lived realities of rural folk participating in local uprisings and the Melo dictatorship era.

### III. ADVANCED DISCUSSION & RESEARCH PROMPTS

These prompts encourage deep engagement with the text, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary analysis suitable for advanced undergraduate and graduate seminars.

**The Influence of Eugène Sue:** Compare *Manuela* with Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris*. How does Demóstenes function as a rural/provincial equivalent of Rodolphe—an elite reformer moving through dark, dangerous social underworlds to rectify injustices? Where does this reformist model succeed or fail in the context of Andean Colombia?

**Language and Sociopragmatics:** Address the common misreading of terms of endearment in the novel (such as calling characters *negra* or *negrita*). How does a contextual understanding of regional sociopragmatics and diachronic sociolinguistics change our interpretation of racial and social dynamics in the text?

**The City vs. The Parish:** Analyze how space is mapped and contrasted. How do the moral codes, gender expectations, and political loyalties shift when moving from the urban center of Bogotá to the rural parish of La Mesa and the hot lands of Ambalema?

**Realism as Reform:** Discuss the novel's ultimate political objective. Does Díaz Castro offer a viable solution to the socioeconomic chaos of mid-century New Granada, or does the tragic, unresolved nature of the narrative serve primarily as an indictment of a broken system?

### IV. SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

This section complements the study of *Manuela*, providing avenues for deeper research into Colombian literature, mid-century realism, and agrarian history.

#### Primary Text:

- Eugenio Díaz Castro. *Manuela. Novela bogotana*. Introduction by Flor María Rodríguez-Arenas. Stockcero. (TK ORDER: 132)

#### Key Secondary Scholarship:

- Colmenares, Germán.** *Partidos políticos y clases sociales en Colombia*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1968.
- Kalmanovitz, Salomón.** *Economía y nación: Una breve historia de Colombia*. Bogotá: Editorial Siglo XXI, 2003.
- Pineda Botero, Álvaro.** *Líogenicis: La novela colombiana 1836–1986*. Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 1999.
- Rodríguez-Arenas, Flor María.** *Eugenio Díaz Castro y el realismo social de medio siglo*. (Consult introductory study in the Stockcero edition).
- Samper, José María.** *Historia de un alma (1834–1881)*. Bogotá: Editorial ABC, 1946.



The Stockcero Guarantee

SpanishBookPress Editions.

Printed in the USA. Never backlisted. Always available.

Copyright © 2025 Stockcero, Inc

3785 N.W. 82nd Avenue, Suite 302, Miami, FL 33166, USA

## V. RELATED STOCKCERO RESOURCES

***Origins, Picaresque & Costumbrismo (6-Book Bundle).***

Other titles in the bundle: *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*, *El lazarillo de ciegos caminantes*, *Infortunios de Alonso Ramírez*, *La Quijotita y su prima*, *Don Catrín de la Fachenda*.

[Browse Collection](#)

---

Interested in adopting this text for your course?

[Request an Evaluation Copy](#)

or [Browse our Full Catalog](#)



**The Stockcero Guarantee**

*SpanishBookPress* Editions.

Printed in the USA. Never backlisted. Always available.

Copyright © 2025 Stockcero, Inc

3785 N.W. 82nd Avenue, Suite 302, Miami, FL 33166, USA