



Spanish literature

Angel María García Gómez • All Britannica Editors History

Britannica AI

Ask Anything

Quick Summary

Table of Contents

Top Questions

What is Spanish literature?

Which language is primarily used in Spanish literature?

Who are some famous authors in Spanish literature?

What is a well-known work of Spanish literature?

Show more



St. Luke the Evangelist St. Luke, illuminated page from the Beatus Apocalypse, Mozarabic, 975; in the Ge...(more)

Spanish literature, the body of literary works produced in Spain. Such works fall into three major language divisions: Castilian, Catalan, and Galician. This article provides a brief historical account of each of these three literatures and examines the emergence of major genres.

Although literature in the vernacular was not written until the medieval period, Spain had previously made significant contributions to literature. [Lucan](#), [Martial](#), [Quintilian](#), and [Prudentius](#), as well as [Seneca the Younger](#) and [Seneca the Elder](#), are among writers in Latin who lived in, or were born in, Spain before the modern Romance languages emerged. Women were also writing in Spain during the Roman period: Serena, believed to have been a poet; Pola Argentaria, the wife of Lucan, whom she is thought to have assisted in writing his *Pharsalia*; and the poet and Stoic philosopher Teofila. For works written in Latin during this period, see [Latin literature: Ancient Latin literature](#). Later, the writings of Spanish Muslims and Jews formed important branches of [Arabic literature](#) and [Hebrew literature](#). The literature of the former Spanish colonies in the Americas is treated separately under [Latin American literature](#).

Castilian literature

Medieval period

The origins of vernacular writing

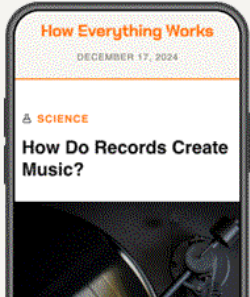
By 711, when the Muslim invasion of the Iberian Peninsula began, Latin spoken there had begun its transformation into Romance. Tenth-century glosses to Latin texts in manuscripts belonging to the monasteries of San Millán de la Cogolla and Silos, in north-central Spain, contain traces of a vernacular already substantially

developed. The earliest texts in [Mozarabic](#) (the Romance dialect of Spaniards living under the Muslims) were recovered from Hebrew and from [Arabic *muwashshaḥs*](#) (poems in strophic form, with subjects such as panegyrics on love). The last strophe of the *muwashshaḥ* was the [markaz](#), or theme stanza, popularly called the *kharjah* and transcribed in Spanish as *jarcha*. These *jarchas* provide evidence of a popular poetry begun perhaps as early as the 10th century, and they are related to traditional Spanish lyric types (e.g., the [villancico](#), “carol”) of the later Middle Ages and Renaissance. The *jarcha* was generally a woman’s love song, and the motif, in Romance, was a cry of passion on which the whole poem was based, providing a clear thematic relationship to Galician-Portuguese [cantigas](#) of the late 12th through mid-14th centuries. Women poets in the region of Andalusia writing in Arabic during the 11th and 12th centuries include al-Abbadiyya and Ḥafṣa bint al-Ḥājj al-Rukuniyya; the best known were Wallada la Omeya, Butayna bint ‘Abbād, and Umm al-Kiram bint Sumadih, all of royal blood.

 A Britannica Newsletter

How Everything Works

Discover how ordinary objects work, and expand your understanding of the familiar.



By clicking "Sign Up", you consent to the Britannica Privacy Policy and Terms of Use.

The rise of [heroic poetry](#)

The earliest surviving monument of Spanish literature, and one of its most distinctive masterpieces, is the [*Cantar de mío Cid*](#) (“Song of My Cid”; also called *Poema de mío Cid*), an epic poem of the mid-12th century (the existing manuscript is an imperfect copy of 1307). It tells of the fall from and restoration to royal favour of a Castilian noble, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, known as [the Cid](#) (derived from the Arabic title *sidi*, “lord”). Because of the poem’s setting, personages, topographical detail, and realistic tone and treatment and because the poet wrote soon after the Cid’s death, this poem has been accepted as historically authentic, a conclusion extended to the Castilian [epic](#) generally. The second and third sections of *Cantar de mío Cid*, however, appear to be imaginative, and the mere six lines accorded the Cid’s conquest of Valencia, taking it from the Muslims, show that the poet’s approach is subjective. Nevertheless, the Cid’s adventures lived on in epic, [chronicle](#), [ballad](#), and drama, reputedly embodying Castilian character.

Folk epics, known as *cantares de gesta* (“songs of deeds”) and recited by jongleurs, celebrated heroic exploits such as the Cid’s. Medieval historiographers often incorporated prose versions of these [cantares](#) in their chronicles, Latin and vernacular; it was by this process that the fanciful *Cantar de Rodrigo* (“Song of Rodrigo”), chronicling the Cid’s early manhood with elements of the later legend, was preserved. Fragments of the *Cantar de Roncesvalles* (“Song of Roncesvalles”) and *Poema de Fernán González* (“Poem of Fernán González”) rework earlier epics. Vernacular chroniclers mention many other heroic minstrel narratives, now lost, but, as a result of the incorporation of these narratives into chronicles, themes and textual passages can be reconstructed. Heroic narratives partially recovered include *Los siete infantes de Lara* (“The Seven Princes of Lara”), *El cerco de*

Zamora (“The Siege of Zamora”), *Bernardo del Carpio*, and other themes from Castile’s feudal history, subject matter that echoes remote Visigothic origins rather than French epics.



Britannica Quiz

Poetry: First Lines

The beginnings of prose

A major influence on prose was exercised by Arabic. Oriental learning entered Christian Spain with the capture (1085) of Toledo from the Muslims, and the city became a centre of translation from Oriental languages. An anonymous translation from Arabic (1251) of the [beast fable *Kalilah wa Dimnah*](#) exemplifies early storytelling in Spanish. A romance of the Seven Sages, the *Sendebär*, was translated likewise through Arabic, with other collections of Eastern stories.

By the mid-12th century, the Christians had recovered Córdoba, Valencia, and Sevilla. A propitious intellectual atmosphere fomented the founding of universities, and under [Alfonso X](#) of Castile and Leon (reigned 1252–84) vernacular literature achieved prestige. Alfonso, in whose chancery Castilian replaced Latin, mandated translations and compilations aimed at fusing all knowledge—Classical, Oriental, Hebrew, and Christian—in the vernacular. These works, some under his personal editorship, include the great legal code *Las Siete Partidas* (“[The Seven Divisions](#)”), containing invaluable information on daily life, and compilations from Arabic sources on astronomy, on the magical properties of gems, and on games, especially chess. The *Crónica general*, a history of Spain, and the *General estoria*, an attempted universal history from the Creation onward, were foundational works of Spanish historiography. The *Crónica general*, overseen by Alfonso to AD 711 and completed by his son [Sancho IV](#), was Spain’s most influential medieval work. Alfonso, sometimes called the father of Castilian prose, was also a major poet, and he compiled early Spain’s greatest collection of medieval poetry and music, the *Cantigas de Santa María* (“Songs to St. Mary”), in Galician.



Alfonso X Alfonso X, 13th-century manuscript illumination.



Explore Britannica Premium!

The trusted destination for professionals, college students, and lifelong learners.

[SUBSCRIBE](#)



Learned narrative poetry

The [*mester de clerecía*](#) (“craft of the clergy”) was a new poetic mode, indebted to France and the monasteries and presupposing literate readers. It adapted the French [alexandrine](#) in the “fourfold way”—i.e., 14-syllable lines used in four-line monorhyme stanzas—and treated religious, didactic, or pseudohistorical matter. During the 13th

century, [Gonzalo de Berceo](#), Spain's earliest poet known by name, wrote rhymed vernacular chronicles of saints' lives, the miracles of the Virgin, and other devotional themes with ingenuous candour, accumulating picturesque and affectionately observed popular detail.

The 14th century

Following the period of translation and compilation came brilliant original creations, represented in prose by Alfonso's nephew [Juan Manuel](#) and in poetry by [Juan Ruiz](#) (also called Archpriest of Hita). Juan Manuel's eclectic *Libro de los enxiemplos del conde Lucanor et de Patronio* (Eng. trans. [The Book of Count Lucanor and Patronio](#))—which consists of 51 moral tales variously didactic, amusing, and practical—drew partly on Arabic, Oriental, and popular Spanish sources. It was Spain's first collection of prose fiction rendered in the vernacular. Juan Manuel's seven surviving books treat such subjects as hunting, chivalry, heraldry, genealogy, education, and Christianity. The [frame story](#) that links *Count Lucanor's* tales anticipates novelistic structure: the young count repeatedly seeks advice from his tutor Patronio, who responds with exemplary tales.

Chivalric [romances](#) of the Arthurian or Breton cycle, which had been circulating in translation, partially inspired Spain's first romance of chivalry and first novel, *El caballero Cifar* (c. 1305; "The Knight Cifar"), based on St. Eustace, the Roman general miraculously converted to Christianity. [Amadís de Gaula](#)—the oldest known version of which, dating from 1508, was written in Spanish by Garci Rodríguez (or Ordóñez) de Montalvo, although it may have begun circulation in the early 14th century—is another chivalric romance related to Arthurian sources. It enthralled the popular imagination through the 16th century with its sentimental idealism, lyrical atmosphere, and supernatural adventure.

Juan Ruiz, an intensely alert, individual early poet, composed the [Libro de buen amor](#) (1330, expanded 1343; "Book of Good Love"), which combined disparate elements—Ovid, Aesop, the Roman Catholic liturgy, and the 12th-century Latin *Pamphilus de amore*, an anonymous elegiac comedy. The result mingled eroticism with devotion and invited readers to interpret often-equivocal teachings. Ruiz's Trotaconventos became Spanish literature's first great fictional character. Ruiz handled alexandrine metre with new vigour and plasticity, interspersing religious, pastoral-farcical, amorous, and satirical lyrics of great metrical variety.

More-exotic elements appeared in the [Proverbios morales](#) (c. 1355) of Santob de Carrión de los Condes and in an Aragonese version of the biblical story of Joseph, which was based on the Qur'ān and written in Arabic characters. Drawing on the Old Testament, the Talmud, and the Hebrew poet and philosopher [Ibn Gabirol](#), Santob's *Proverbios* introduced Hebrew poetry's grave sententiousness and aphoristic concision.

[Pedro López de Ayala](#) dominated poetry and prose during the later 1300s with his [Rimado de palacio](#) ("Poem of Palace Life"), the last major relic of the "fourfold-way" verse form, and with family chronicles of 14th-century Castilian monarchs Peter, Henry II, John I, and Henry III, which stimulated production of personal, contemporary history. An early humanist, Ayala translated and imitated Livy, Boccaccio, Boethius, St. Gregory, and St. Isidore.

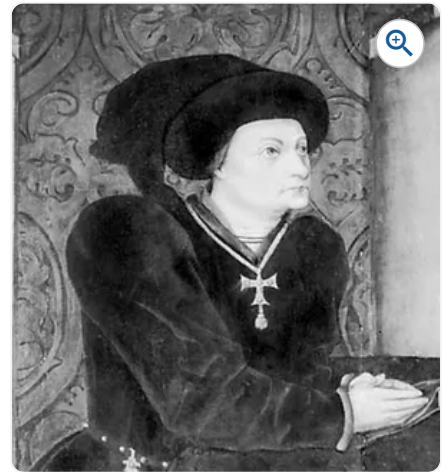
A subgenre vigorously cultivated was the [misogynistic](#) treatise warning against women's wiles. Rooted in works that condemned Eve for the [Fall of Man](#), they include such works as *Disciplina clericalis* (*The Scholar's Guide*), written in the late 11th or early 12th century by Pedro Alfonso (Petrus Alfonsi); *El Corbacho*, also known as *El Arcipreste de Talavera* (c. 1438; Eng. trans. *Little Sermons on Sin*), by Alfonso Martínez de Toledo; and *Repetición de amores* (c. 1497; "Repetitious Loves"; Eng. trans. *An Anti-feminist Treatise of Fifteenth Century*

Spain) by Luis Ramírez de Lucena. Numerous examples from medieval Spanish literature and folklore echoed the same themes (e.g., Juan Manuel's *Count Lucanor* and Juan Ruiz's *Book of Good Love*).

The 15th century

The early 15th century witnessed a renewal of poetry under Italian influence. During the reign of King John II, the anarchy of feudalism's death throes contrasted with the cultivation of polite letters, which signified good birth and breeding. The [Cancionero de Baena](#) ("Songbook of Baena"), compiled for the king by the poet [Juan Alfonso de Baena](#), anthologized 583 poems (mostly courtly lyrics) by 55 poets from the highest nobles to the humblest versifiers. The collection showed not merely the decadence of Galician-Portuguese troubadours but also the stirrings of more-intellectual poetry incorporating symbol, allegory, and Classical allusions in the treatment of moral, philosophical, and political themes. Other significant verse collections include the *Cancionero de Estúñiga* (c. 1460–63) and the important *Cancionero general* (1511) of Hernando del Castillo; among the latter's 128 named poets is Florencia Pinar, one of the first women poets in Castilian to be identified by name. Francisco Imperial, a Genoese who settled in Sevilla and a leader among new poets, drew on Dante, attempting to transplant the Italian hendecasyllable (11-syllable line) to Spanish poetry.

The [marqués de Santillana](#)—a poet, scholar, soldier, and statesman—collected masterpieces of foreign literatures and stimulated translation. His [Proemio e carta al condestable de Portugal](#) (1449; "Preface and Letter to the Constable of Portugal"), which initiated literary history and criticism in Spanish, reflected his readings in contemporary foreign languages and translated classics. Santillana's sonnets in the "Italian style" launched the formal enrichment of Spanish poetry. He is still acknowledged as a precursor of the Renaissance, though his sonnets and long poems, which reflect his Italian-influenced training, are often neglected in favour of his charming rustic songs of native inspiration. [Juan de Mena](#)'s vast allegorical poem dramatizing history past, present, and future ([El laberinto de fortuna](#), 1444; "The Labyrinth of Fortune"), a more conscious attempt to rival Dante, suffers from pedantry and over-Latinization of syntax and vocabulary.



Marqués de Santillana Marqués de Santillana, detail of an oil painting by Jorge Inglés, 1458; in the Palacio del Duque...[\(more\)](#)

An outstanding anonymous 15th-century poem, the "Danza de la muerte" ("Dance of Death"), exemplifies a theme then popular with poets, painters, and composers across western Europe. Written with greater satiric force than other works that treated the [dance of death](#) theme, it introduced characters (e.g., a rabbi) not found in its predecessors and presented a cross section of society via conversations between Death and his protesting victims. Although not intended for dramatic presentation, it formed the basis for later dramas.

The era of the Renaissance

The beginning of the Siglo de Oro

The unification of Spain in 1479 and the establishment of its overseas empire, which began with Christopher Columbus's first voyage to the New World (1492–93), contributed to the emergence of the Renaissance in Spain, as did the introduction of printing to the country (1474) and the cultural influence of Italy. The early Spanish humanists included the first grammarians and lexicographers of any Romance tongue. [Juan Luis Vives](#), the

brothers [Juan](#) and [Alfonso de Valdés](#), and others were followers of Erasmus, whose writings circulated in translation from 1536 onward and whose influence appears in the Counter-Reformation figure of [St. Ignatius of Loyola](#), who founded the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), and in the later religious writer and poet [Luis de León](#). Nor did Spain lack women humanists; some exceptional women renowned for their erudition taught in universities, including Francisca de Nebrija and Lucía Medrano. Beatriz Galindo (“La Latina”) taught Latin to Queen Isabella I; Luisa Sigea de Velasco—a humanist, scholar, and writer of poetry, dialogues, and letters in Spanish and in Latin—taught at the Portuguese court.

Connecting the Middle Ages and the Renaissance is the masterful *Comedia de Calixto y Melibea* (1499), a novel of 16 “acts” in dialogue form published anonymously but attributed to [Fernando de Rojas](#). The dominant character, the procuress Celestina, is depicted with unsurpassed realism and gives the work the title by which it is commonly known, [La Celestina](#). The analysis of passion and the dramatic conflict that lust unleashes attain great psychological intensity in this early masterpiece of Spanish prose, sometimes considered Spain’s first realistic novel.

These figures and works of the early Renaissance prepared the way for the Siglo de Oro (“[Golden Age](#)”), a period often dated from the publication in 1554 of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the first picaresque novel, to the death in 1681 of dramatist and poet [Pedro Calderón](#). Comparable to the Elizabethan era in England, albeit longer, Spain’s Siglo de Oro spanned both the Renaissance and Baroque periods and produced not only drama and poetry that match Shakespeare’s in stature but also [Miguel de Cervantes](#)’s celebrated novel [Don Quixote](#).

Poetry

Surviving for centuries in the oral tradition, Spanish ballads ([romances](#)) link medieval heroic epic to modern poetry and drama. The earliest datable *romances*—from the mid-15th century, although the *romance* form itself has been traced to the 11th century—treated frontier incidents or lyrical themes. Anonymous *romances* on medieval heroic themes, commemorating history as it happened, formed everyman’s sourcebook on national history and character; they were anthologized in the Antwerp *Cancionero de romances* (“Ballad Songbook”) and the *Silva de varios romances* (“Miscellany of Various Ballads”), both published about 1550 and repeatedly thereafter. The *romance* form (octosyllabic, alternate lines having a single [assonance](#) throughout) was quickly adopted by cultured poets and also became the medium of choice for popular narrative verse.

The Catalan [Juan Boscán Almogáver](#) revived attempts to Italianize Spanish poetry by reintroducing Italian metres; he preceded [Garcilaso de la Vega](#), with whom the cultured lyric was reborn. Garcilaso added intense personal notes and characteristic Renaissance themes to a masterful poetic technique derived from medieval and Classical poets. His short poems, elegies, and sonnets shaped the development of Spain’s lyric poetry throughout the Siglo de Oro.

Fray [Luis de León](#), adopting some of Garcilaso’s verse techniques, typified the “Salamanca school,” which emphasized content rather than form. Poet and critic [Fernando de Herrera](#) headed a contrasting school in Sevilla, which was derived equally from Garcilaso but was concerned with subtly refined sentiment; Herrera’s remarkable verse vibrantly expressed topical heroic themes. The popularity of the short native metres was reinforced by traditional ballad collections ([romanceros](#)) and by the evolving drama.

Models for epic poetry were the works of Italian poets Ludovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso, but the themes and heroes of Spanish epics celebrated overseas conquest or defense of the empire and the faith. [Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga](#) achieved epic distinction with [Araucana](#) (published 1569–90), chronicling native resistance to Spain’s

conquest of Chile. A similar attempt at epic, [Lope de Vega](#)'s *Dragontea* (1598), retells Sir Francis Drake's last voyage and death.

Early drama

Spanish drama originated in the church. The *Auto de los reyes magos* ("Play of the Three Wise Kings"), dated from the second half of the 12th century, is an incomplete play of the Epiphany cycle. It is medieval Spanish drama's only extant text. The play's realistic characterization of the Magi and of Herod and his advisers and its polymetric form foreshadowed aspects of later dramatic development in Spain.

A reference in King Alfonso X's legal code suggested the existence of some popular secular drama in the 13th century, but no texts have survived. These *juegos* (short satiric entertainments given by traveling players) antedated the plays that constitute one of Spain's main contributions to dramatic genres: the *pasos*, *entremeses*, and *sainetes*, all short, typically humorous works originally used as interludes.

[Juan del Encina](#) helped emancipate the drama from ecclesiastical ties by giving performances for noble patrons. His *Cancionero* (1496; "Songbook") contains pastoral-religious dramatic dialogues in rustic dialect, but he soon turned to secular themes and vivid farce. His conception of drama evolved during his long stay in Italy, with native medievalism transforming into Renaissance experimentation. The work of Encina's Portuguese disciple [Gil Vicente](#), a court poet at Lisbon who wrote in both Castilian and Portuguese, showed a significantly improved naturalness of dialogue, acuteness of observation, and sense of situation.

Drama's transition from court to marketplace and the creation of a broader public were largely accomplished by [Lope de Rueda](#), who toured Spain with his modest troupe performing a repertoire of his own composition. His four prose comedies have been called clumsy, but his 10 *pasos* showed his dramatic merits. He fathered Spain's one-act play, perhaps the country's most vital and popular dramatic form.

The first dramatist to realize the ballads' theatrical possibilities was [Juan de la Cueva](#). His comedies and tragedies derived largely from Classical antiquity, but in *Los siete infantes de Lara* ("The Seven Princes of Lara"), *El reto de Zamora* ("The Challenge of Zamora"), and *La libertad de España por Bernardo del Carpio* ("The Liberation of Spain by Bernardo del Carpio"), all published in 1588, he revived heroic legends familiar in *romances* and helped to found a national drama.

Prose

Historical writing

Prose before the [Counter-Reformation](#) produced some notable dialogues, especially [Alfonso de Valdés](#)'s *Diálogo de Mercurio y Carón* (1528; "Dialogue Between Mercury and Charon"). His brother [Juan de Valdés](#)'s *Diálogo de la lengua* ("Dialogue About the Language") attained great critical prestige. The themes of history and patriotism flourished as Spain's power increased; among the finest achievements from this epoch was [Juan de Mariana](#)'s own translation into Spanish (1601) of his Latin history of Spain, which marked the vernacular's triumph for all literary purposes.

Major landmarks in historical writing emanated from the New World, transmuting vital experience into literature with unaccustomed vividness. [Christopher Columbus](#)'s letters and accounts of his voyages, the letters and accounts to King Charles V by [Hernán Cortés](#), and similar narratives by more humble conquistadores opened new horizons to readers. Attempting to capture exotic landscapes in words, they enlarged the language's

resources. The most engaging of such writings was the *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (1632; [True History of the Conquest of New Spain](#)) by the explorer [Bernal Díaz del Castillo](#). Friar [Bartolomé de Las Casas](#), sometimes called the “Apostle of the Indies,” wrote *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (*A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, or [The Tears of the Indians](#)) in 1542, criticizing Spanish colonial policy and abuse of the native population. His work helped to give rise among Spain’s enemies to the infamous *Leyenda Negra* (“[Black Legend](#)”).

The novel

Popular taste in the novel was dominated for a century by progeny of the medieval courtly romance *Amadís de Gaula*. These chivalric romances perpetuated certain medieval ideals, but they also represented pure escapism, eventually provoking such literary reactions as the [pastoral](#) novel and the [picaresque novel](#). The former, imported from Italy, oozed nostalgia for an Arcadian golden age; its shepherds were courtiers and poets who, like the knights-errant of chivalric romance, turned their backs on reality. [Jorge de Montemayor](#)’s *Diana* (1559?) initiated Spain’s [pastoral](#) vogue, which was later cultivated by such major writers as Cervantes (*La Galatea*, 1585) and Lope de Vega (*La Arcadia*, 1598).

Another reaction appeared in the [picaresque novel](#), a genre initiated with the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554). This native Spanish genre, widely imitated elsewhere, featured as its protagonist a *pícaro* (“rogue”), essentially an [antihero](#), living by his wits and concerned only with staying alive. Passing from master to master, he depicted life from underneath. Significant for guiding fiction to direct observation of life, the picaresque formula has long been imitated, up to such 20th-century writers as Pío Baroja, Juan Antonio de Zunzunegui, and Camilo José Cela.

[Miguel de Cervantes](#), the preeminent figure in Spanish literature, produced in *Don Quixote* (part 1, 1605; part 2, 1615) the prototype of the modern novel. Nominally satirizing the moribund chivalric romance, Cervantes presented “reality” on two levels: the “poetic truth” of Don Quixote and the “historic truth” of his squire, [Sancho Panza](#). Where Don Quixote saw and attacked an advancing army, Sancho saw only a herd of sheep; what Sancho perceived as windmills were menacing giants to the questing knight-errant. The constant interaction of these rarely compatible attitudes revealed the novel’s potential for philosophical commentary on existence; the dynamic interplay and evolution of the two characters established psychological realism and abandoned prior fiction’s static characterizations. In the *Novelas ejemplares* (1613; “Exemplary Tales”), Cervantes claimed to be the first to write *novelas* (short stories in the Italian manner) in Spanish, differentiating between narratives that interest for their action and those whose merit lies in the mode of telling.

[María de Zayas y Sotomayor](#), Spain’s first woman novelist, was among the few women writers of the period who did not belong to a religious order. She too published Italian-inspired short stories, in the collections *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (1637; Eng. trans. *The Enchantments of Love: Amorous and Exemplary Novels*) and *Desengaños amorosos* (1647; “Disillusion in Love”). Both employ framing structures in which, like Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, men and women gather to tell stories; many characters from the first collection appear in the second, including the protagonist, Lisis. The stories of *Novelas amorosas* are told during the nights, those of *Desengaños* during the days; most concern the “battle of the sexes,” featuring innocent victims and evildoers of both sexes, but plots turn upon men’s seduction, treachery, abuse, and even torture of defenseless women.

Mystical writings

The flowering of Spanish [mysticism](#) coincided with the Counter-Reformation, although antecedents appear, particularly in the expatriate Spanish Jew León Hebreo, whose *Dialoghi di amore* (1535; “The Dialogues of Love”), written in Italian, profoundly influenced 16th-century and later Spanish thought. The mystics’ literary importance derives from attempts to transcend language’s limitations, liberating previously untapped resources of expression. The writings of [St. Teresa of Ávila](#), notably her autobiography and letters, reveal a great novelist in embryo. In his prose as in his poetry, Fray Luis de León showed passionate devotion, sincerity, and profound feeling for nature in a style of singular purity; he also wrote a conservative tract on educating women, *La perfecta casada* (1583; [The Perfect Wife](#)), glossing Proverbs 31. [St. John of the Cross](#) achieved preeminence through poems of exalted style expressing the experience of mystic union.

Writings about women

Among the feminine voices that defended women’s interests during the Renaissance and Siglo de Oro were Sor Teresa de Cartagena in the 15th century and Luisa de Padilla, Isabel de Liaño, and Sor María de Santa Isabel in the early 16th century. They were champions of women’s rights to education and free choice in matrimony. Traditionalist reactions during the Counter-Reformation included treatises on the training of women, such as Fray Alonso de Herrera’s *Espejo de la perfecta casada* (c. 1637, “Mirror of the Perfect Wife”).

Later drama

The drama achieved its true splendour in the genius of [Lope de Vega](#) (in full Lope Félix de Vega Carpio). Its manifesto was Lope’s own treatise, [Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo](#) (1609; “New Art of Writing Plays at This Time”), which rejected Neoclassical “rules,” opting to blend comedy and tragedy with metrical variety, and made public opinion the arbiter of good taste. The new [comedia](#) (“drama”) advocated respect for the crown, church, and human personality. The last was symbolized in the theme that Lope considered best of all: the [pundonor](#) (“point of honour”), grounded in a gender code that made women the repository of family honour, which could be tarnished or lost by the woman’s slightest indiscretion. Lope’s drama was concerned less with character than with action and intrigue, seldom approaching the essence of tragedy. What this great Spanish playwright did possess was a remarkable sense of stagecraft and the ability to make the most intricate plot gripping.



[Lope de Vega](#)

Lope, who claimed authorship of more than 1,800 *comedias*, towered over his contemporaries. With his unerring sense of what could move an audience, he exploited evocations of Spain’s greatness, making its drama “national” in the truest sense. Two main categories of his work are the native historical drama and the *comedia capa y espada* (“[cloak-and-sword drama](#)”) of contemporary manners. Lope ransacked the literary past for heroic themes, chosen to illustrate aspects of the national character or of social solidarity. The cloak-and-sword play, which dominated drama after Lope, was pure entertainment, exploiting disguise, falling in and out of love, and false alarms about honour. In it affairs of the lady and her gallant are often parodied through the actions of the servants. The cloak-and-sword play delighted by the dexterity of its intricate plotting, its sparkling dialogue, and the entangled relationships depicted between the sexes.

The greatest of Lope's immediate successors, [Tirso de Molina](#) (pseudonym of Fray Gabriel Téllez), first dramatized the [Don Juan](#) legend in his *Burlador de Sevilla* (1630; "The Trickster of Sevilla"). *La prudencia en la mujer* (1634; "Prudence in Woman") figured among Spain's greatest historical dramas, as did *El condenado por desconfiado* (1635; *The Doubter Damned*) among theological plays. Tirso's cloak-and-sword comedies excelled in liveliness. Mexican-born [Juan Ruiz de Alarcón](#) struck a distinctive note. His 20 plays were sober, studied, and imbued with serious moral purpose, and his *Verdad sospechosa* (1634; "The Truth Suspected") inspired the great French dramatist [Pierre Corneille](#)'s *Menteur* (1643). Corneille's famous *Le Cid* (1637) similarly drew upon the conflict between love and honour presented in *Las mocedades del Cid* (1599?; "The Youthful Exploits of the Cid") by [Guillén de Castro y Bellvís](#).

Although their names were suppressed and their works left largely unperformed for centuries, several women dramatists of the Siglo de Oro left extant plays. Ángela de Acevedo—a lady-in-waiting to Elizabeth (Isabel de Borbón), wife of King Philip IV—left three extant plays of unknown dates: *El muerto disimulado* ("The Pretending Dead Man"), *La Margarita del Tajo que dió nombre a Santarem* ("Margarita of Tajo Who Named Santarem"), and *Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción de la Virgen* ("Bliss and Misfortune in Gaming and Devotion to the Virgin"). Ana Caro Mallén de Soto, friend of the novelist María de Zayas, wrote *El Conde Partinuplés* ("Count Partinuples") and *Valor, agravio y mujer* ("Valour, Dishonour, and Woman"), both probably during the 1640s. Feliciano Enríquez de Guzmán—thought to have flourished about 1565 but whose identity is disputed—wrote *Tragicomedia de los jardines y campos Sabeos* ("Tragicomedy of the Sabaeon Gardens and Fields"). In the middle of the 17th century María de Zayas wrote *Traición en la amistad* ("Betrayal in Friendship"). Sor Marcela de San Félix was an illegitimate daughter of Lope de Vega; born Marcela del Carpio, she entered a convent at age 16 and wrote, directed, and acted in six one-act allegorical plays, the *Coloquios espirituales* ("Spiritual Colloquies"). She also penned short dramatic panegyrics, *romances*, and other books. Common denominators in these women's works are religious themes, honour, friendship, love, and misfortune.

Culteranismo and conceptismo

In poetry and prose the early 17th century in Spain was marked by the rise and spread of two interrelated stylistic movements, often considered typical of the [Baroque](#). Authors shared an elitist desire to communicate only with the initiated, so that writings in both styles present considerable interpretive difficulties. [Culteranismo](#), the ornate, roundabout, high-flown style of which [Luis de Góngora y Argote](#) was archpriest, attempted to ennoble the language by re-Latinizing it. Poets writing in this style created hermetic vocabulary and used stilted syntax and word order, with expression garbed (and disguised) in Classical myth, allusion, and complicated metaphor, all of which rendered their work sometimes incomprehensible. Góngora's major poetic achievement (*Soledades* [1613; "Solitudes"]) invited many untalented imitations of his uniquely elaborate style, which came to be known as Gongorism ([gongorismo](#)). The other stylistic movement, [conceptismo](#), played on ideas as *culteranismo* did on language. Aiming at the semblance of profundity, *conceptista* style was concise, aphoristic, and epigrammatic and thus belonged primarily to prose, especially satire. Concerned with stripping appearances from reality, it had as its best outlet the essay. [Francisco Gómez de Quevedo y Villegas](#), the greatest satirist of his time and a master of language, was, in *Sueños* (1627; "Dreams"), an outstanding exponent of *conceptismo*; similar traits appear in his picaresque satire *La vida del buscón llamado don Pablos* (1626; "The Life of the Trickster Called Don Pablos"; Eng. trans. *The Scavenger* and *The Swindler*). [Baltasar Gracián](#) reduced *conceptista* refinement to an exact code in *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* (1642, 2nd ed. 1648; "Subtlety and the Art of Genius"); he also tried to

codify in a series of treatises the art of living. Gracián's thought in his allegorical novel *El criticón* (1651, 1653, 1657; [The Critick](#)) reflected a pessimistic vision of life as “daily dying.”

The plays of Calderón

[Pedro Calderón de la Barca](#) adapted Lope de Vega's formula for producing tightly structured dramas wherein formal artistry and poetic texture combine with thematic profundity and unified dramatic purpose. One of the world's outstanding dramatists, Calderón wrote plays that were effective in both the public playhouses and Madrid's newly built court theatre of Buen Retiro, whose elaborate stage technology allowed him to excel in mythological drama (*La estatua de Prometeo* [1669; “The Statue of Prometheus”]). Calderón contributed to an emerging musical comedy form, the [zarzuela](#) (*El jardín de Falerina* [1648; “The Garden of Falerina”]), and cultivated many subgenres; his numerous secular plays encompassed both comedy and tragedy. His best comedies provide subtle critiques of urban mores, combining laughter with tragic foreboding (*La dama duende* [1629; *The Phantom Lady*]). His tragedies probe the human predicament, exploring personal and collective guilt (*Las tres justicias en una* [c. 1637; *Three Judgments at a Blow*]), the bathos of limited vision and lack of communication (*El pintor de su deshonra* [c. 1645; *The Painter of His Own Dishonour*]), the destructiveness of certain social codes (*El médico de su honra* [1635; *The Surgeon of His Honour*]), and the conflict between the constructive nature of reason and the destructive violence of self-centred passion (*La hija del aire* [1653; “The Daughter of the Air”]). His best-known plays, appropriately classified as high drama, include *El alcalde de Zalamea* (c. 1640; *The Mayor of Zalamea*), which rejects social honour's tyranny, preferring the inner nature of true human worth and dignity. Philosophical problems of determinism and free will dominate *La vida es sueño* (1635; [Life Is a Dream](#)), a masterpiece that explores escaping from life's confusion to awareness of reality and self-knowledge.

Calderón's overtly religious plays range from Jesuit drama emphasizing conversion (*El mágico prodigioso* [1637; *The Wonder-Working Magician*]) and heroic saintliness (*El príncipe constante* [1629; *The Constant Prince*]) to his [autos sacramentales](#), [liturgical plays](#) employing formal abstractions and symbols to expound the [Fall of Man](#) and Christian redemption, in which he brought to perfection the medieval tradition of the morality play. These liturgical plays range in their artistry from the immediate metaphorical appeal of *El gran teatro del mundo* (c. 1635; [The Great Theatre of the World](#)) to the increasingly elaborate patterns of his later productions (*La nave del mercader* [1674; “The Merchant's Ship”]).

After Calderón's death, Spanish drama languished for 100 years. *Culteranismo* and *conceptismo*, although symptoms rather than causes of decline, contributed to stifling imaginative literature, and, by the close of the 17th century, all production characterizing the Siglo de Oro had essentially ceased.

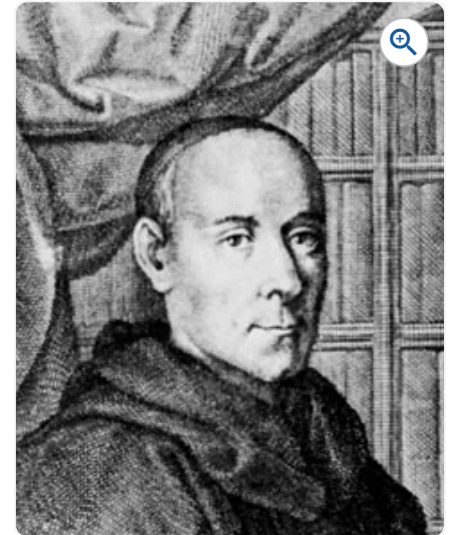
The 18th century

New critical approaches

In 1700 Charles II, the last monarch of the Habsburg dynasty, died without an heir, thereby provoking the [War of the Spanish Succession](#) (1701–14), a European conflict over control of Spain. The resultant establishment of the Bourbon dynasty initiated French domination of Spain's political and cultural life. Following patterns of the Enlightenment in England and France, numerous academies were created, such as the Real Academia de la Lengua Española (1713, now the [Real Academia Española](#) [Royal Spanish Academy]), founded to guard linguistic integrity. Men of letters began again to study abroad, discovering how far Spain had diverged from the

intellectual course of western Europe. New inquiries into the national heritage led scholars to unearth forgotten medieval literature. Gregorio Mayáns y Siscar produced the first biographical study of Cervantes in 1737, and church historian [Enrique Flórez](#), embarking in 1754 on a vast historical enterprise, *España sagrada*, resurrected the cultural backgrounds of medieval Christian Spain. Literary landmarks included the first publication of the 12th-century epic *Poema de mio Cid*, the works of Gonzalo de Berceo, and Juan Ruiz's *Libro de buen amor*.

Debates concerning values of the old and the new raged during the century's middle decades, compelling both sides to initiate new critical approaches to literature. Leaders included Ignacio de Luzán Claramunt, whose work on poetics launched the great Neoclassical polemic in Spain, and [Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro](#), a Benedictine monk who assailed error, prejudice, and superstition wherever he found them, contributing significantly to Spain's intellectual emancipation. Fray Martín Sarmiento (Benedictine name of Pedro José García Balboa), a scholar and friend of Feijóo, treated subjects from religion and philosophy to science and child rearing; much of his work remains unpublished. Feijóo's monumental *Theatro crítico universal* (1726–39; "Universal Critical Theatre"), a compendium of knowledge, exemplifies the interests and achievements of the encyclopaedists. Another major encyclopaedic talent, [Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos](#), produced streams of reports, essays, memoirs, and studies on agriculture, the economy, political organization, law, industry, natural science, and literature, as well as ways to improve them, in addition to writing Neoclassical drama and poetry.



Feijóo y Montenegro Feijóo y Montenegro, detail of an engraving by Joaquín Ballester, 1765

Pedro de Montengón y Paret introduced narrative genres then popular in France—philosophical and pedagogical novels in the style of Jean-Jacques Rousseau—with such works as *Eusebio* (1786–88), a four-volume novel set in America that exalted the religion of nature. Montengón also published *El Antenor* (1778) and *El Rodrigo, romance épico* (1793; "Roderick, Epic Ballad"). *Fray Gerundio* (1758) by [José Francisco de Isla](#), satirizing exaggerated pulpit oratory, reincorporated aspects of the [picaresque novel](#). This genre was also echoed in works of [Diego de Torres Villarroel](#), whose *Vida, ascendencia, nacimiento, crianza y aventuras* (1743–58; "Life, Ancestry, Birth, Upbringing, and Adventures"), whether a novel or an autobiography, remains among the century's most readable narratives. Torres Villarroel experimented with all literary genres, and his collected works, published 1794–99, are fertile sources for studying 18th-century character, aesthetics, and literary style. Josefa Amar y Borbón defended women's admission to learned academies, asserting their equal intelligence in "Discurso en defensa del talento de las mujeres y de su aptitud para el gobierno y otros cargos en que se emplean los hombres" (1786; "Discourse in Defense of the Talent of Women and Their Aptitude for Government and Other Positions in Which Men Are Employed"). Amar published on many topics, most frequently women's right to education.

About 1775 Diego González led the Salamanca poetry revival group seeking inspiration in Fray Luis de León; two decades later a group at Sevilla turned to Fernando de Herrera. [Juan Meléndez Valdés](#), a disciple of English philosopher John Locke and English poet Edward Young, best exemplified the new influences on poetry during this period. Employing Classical and Renaissance models, these reformers rejected Baroque excess, restoring poetry's clarity and harmony. [Tomás de Iriarte](#)—a Neoclassical poet, dramatist, theoretician, and translator—produced successful comedies (e.g., *El señorito mimado* [1787; "The Pampered Youth"] and *La señorita*

malcriada [1788; “The Ill-Bred Miss”]) and the satire *Los literatos en cuaresma* (1772; “Writers in Lent”), which attacked Neoclassicism’s foes. His fame rests on *Fábulas literarias* (1782; “Literary Fables”), a collection of fables and Neoclassical precepts rendered in verse. The fabulist, literary critic, and poet [Félix María Samaniego](#) published an enduringly popular collection, *Fábulas en verso* (1781; “Fables in Verse”), which—with Iriarte’s fables—is among Neoclassicism’s most enjoyable, best-loved poetic productions.

In drama, the second half of the century witnessed disputes concerning the Neoclassical “rules” (chiefly the [unities](#) of place, time, and action). *La Raquel* (1778), a Neoclassical tragedy by [Vicente García de la Huerta](#), showed the capabilities of the reformist school. Ramón de la Cruz, representing the Spanish “nationalist” dramatists against the *afrancesados* (imitators of French models), resurrected the earlier *pasos* and longer *entremeses* of Lope de Rueda, Cervantes, and Luis Quiñones de Benavente. Satires of the Madrid scene, Cruz’s one-act sketches neither transgressed the unities nor offended the purist; they delighted the public, bringing drama back to observation of life and society. [Leandro Fernández de Moratín](#) applied the lesson to full-length plays, producing effective comedies imbued with deep social seriousness. His dialogue in *La comedia nueva* (1792; “The New Comedy”) and *El sí de las niñas* (1806; [The Maiden’s Consent](#)) ranks with the 18th century’s best prose.

The work of the dramatist, poet, essayist, and short-fiction writer [José de Cadalso y Vázquez](#) (pseudonym Dalmiro) moves between Neoclassic aesthetics and Romantic cosmic despair. Scion of a distinguished noble family, he chose a military career and died in 1782, at age 41, during Spain’s unsuccessful attempt to recover Gibraltar from Great Britain. Banished from Madrid to Aragón in 1768 on suspicion of being the author of a sharp satire, he wrote the poems later collected in *Ocios de mi juventud* (1773; “Pastimes of My Youth”). In 1770 he returned to Madrid, where his close friendships with Moratín and leading actresses prompted his heroic tragedy *Don Sancho García* (1771) as well as *Solaya; o, los circasianos* (“Solaya; or, The Circassians”) and *La Numantina* (“The Girl from Numancia”). Cadalso’s most important works are two satires—[Los eruditos a la violeta](#) (published 1772; “Wise Men Without Learning”) and the brilliant [Cartas marruecas](#) (written c. 1774, published 1793; “Moroccan Letters”), inspired by the epistolary fictions of Oliver Goldsmith and Montesquieu—and the enigmatic [Noches lúgubres](#) (written c. 1774, published 1798; “Mournful Nights”), a Gothic and Byronic work that anticipates Romanticism.

Women writers

Several women writers emerged during the Enlightenment and were active from 1770 onward in the male-dominated Spanish theatre. They wrote Neoclassic drama: *comedias lacrimosas* (tearful plays), zarzuelas (musical comedies), *sainetes*, Romantic tragedies, and *costumbrista* comedies. While some women wrote for small private audiences (convents and literary salons), others wrote for the public stage: Margarita Hickey and María Rosa Gálvez were both quite successful, with the former producing translations of Jean Racine and Voltaire and the latter composing some 13 original plays from opera and light comedy to high tragedy. Gálvez’s Moratín-style comedy *Los figurones literarios* (1804; “The Literary Nobodies”) ridicules pedantry; her tragedy *Florinda* (1804) attempts to vindicate the woman blamed for Spain’s loss to the Muslims; and her biblical drama *Amnón* (1804) recounts the biblical rape of Tamar by her brother Amnon. Neoclassical poet [Manuel José Quintana](#) praised Gálvez’s odes and elegies and considered her the best woman writer of her time.

Some women exerted influence during the Enlightenment through their salons; that of Josefa de Zúñiga y Castro, countess of Lemos, called the Academia del Buen Gusto (Academy of Good Taste), was famous, as were those of the duchess of Alba and the countess-duchess of Benavente. The number of periodicals for women increased

dramatically, and *La Pensadora Gaditana* (1763–64), the first Spanish newspaper for women, was published by Beatriz Cienfuegos (believed by some to have been a man's pseudonym). But the death of King Charles III in 1788 and the horror spread by the French Revolution brought an abrupt halt to Spain's incursion into the Age of Reason.

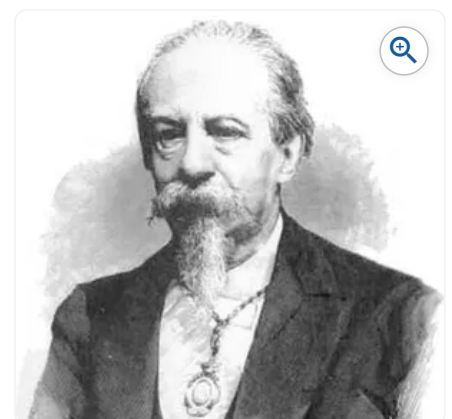
The 19th century

The Romantic movement

Early 19th-century Spanish literature suffered as a result of the [Napoleonic Wars](#) and their economic repercussions. Spain experienced soaring inflation, and manpower across the peninsula was at low ebb as a result of emigration and military service. Spain's agriculture was crippled, its cottage industries dwindled and nearly disappeared, and industrialization lagged behind that of other western European countries. These problems were further aggravated by the loss of its American colonies. Ferdinand VII's anachronistic attempts to restore absolutist monarchy drove many liberals into exile in England and France, both countries then under the sway of [Romanticism](#). Traditional scholarship has viewed Spanish Romanticism as imported by liberals returning after Ferdinand's death in 1833, the year frequently deemed the beginning of Spanish Romanticism. Some, however, recognize Cadalso and several lesser cultivators of Gothic fiction as 18th-century Spanish antecedents. Debates that prepared the way for Romanticism flourished from 1814 onward: in Cádiz in discussions of literary values initiated by Johann Niklaus Böhl von Faber, in Barcelona with the founding of the literary periodical *El europeo* ("The European") in 1823, and in Madrid with Agustín Durán's essay (1828) on Siglo de Oro drama and his *Colección de romances antiguos* (1828–32; "Collection of Ancient Ballads").

Romanticism in Spain was, in many respects, a return to its earlier classics, a continuation of the rediscovery initiated by 18th-century scholars. Important formal traits of Spanish Romantic drama—mingling genres, rejecting the unities, diversifying metrics—had characterized Lope de Vega and his contemporaries, whose themes reappeared in Romantic garb. Some have therefore argued that the native flowering of Spanish Romanticism was not a tardy import; its principles were instead already present in Spain, but their full expression was delayed by the reactionary, tyrannical monarchy's persecution of members of a movement that was, at its beginning, liberal and democratic. Production of Romantic dramas was also postponed until after Ferdinand VII's death.

Spanish Romanticism, typically understood as having two branches, had no single leader. [José de Espronceda y Delgado](#) and his works epitomize the "Byronic," revolutionary, metaphysical vein of Spanish Romanticism, and his *Estudiante de Salamanca* (in two parts, 1836 and 1837; "Student of Salamanca"), *Canciones* (1840; "Songs"), and *El diablo mundo* (unfinished, published 1840; "The Devilish World") were among the period's most celebrated subjective lyrics. The enormously successful drama *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino* (1835; "Don Alvaro; or, The Force of Destiny") by [Ángel de Saavedra, duque de Rivas](#), and the preface, by the critic Antonio Alcalá Galiano, to Saavedra's narrative poem *El moro expósito* (1834; "The Foundling Moor") embody the Christian and monarchical aesthetics and ideology of the second, more traditional branch of Spanish Romanticism, whose quintessential representative is [José Zorrilla y Moral](#), author of the period's most enduring drama, *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844). Prolific, facile, and declamatory, Zorrilla produced



Zorrilla y Moral, José José Zorrilla y Moral.

huge numbers of plays, lyric and narrative verse collections, and enormously popular rewrites of Siglo de Oro plays and legends; he was treated as a national hero.

One major Romantic theme concerned liberty and individual freedom. The late Romantic poet [Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer](#), in *Rimas* (published posthumously in 1871; “Rhymes”), expressed his own tortured emotions, suffering, and solitude but also celebrated love, poetry, and intimacy while experimenting with free verse. *Rimas* influenced more 20th-century Spanish poets than any other 19th-century work.

A number of notable women writers emerged under Romanticism. Carolina Coronado’s early fame rested on a collection of poetry, *Poesías*, first published in 1843. Her poems sounded many feminist notes, although she in later life became conservative. In 1850 she published two short novels, *Adoración* and *Paquita*. *La Sigea* (1854), the first of three historical novels, re-created the experience of the Renaissance humanist Luisa Sigea de Velasco; *Jarilla* and *La rueda de desgracia* (“The Wheel of Misfortune”) appeared in 1873. Poet, dramatist, and prose writer [Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda](#) was born in Cuba but spent most of her adult life in Spain. She was the author of a pioneering abolitionist novel, *Sab* (1841), as well as novels on Mexico’s Aztec past and a protofeminist novel (*Dos mujeres* [1842; “Two Women”]). She also wrote 16 full-length original plays, 4 of which were major successes. [Rosalía de Castro](#) is known primarily for her poetry and novels in Galician, but her last collection of poems, *En las orillas del Sar* (1884; *Beside the River Sar*), written in Castilian, brought her a wider audience.

While poetry and theatre claimed the major honours, Spanish Romanticism also produced many novels—but none that rivaled those of Scottish contemporary Sir Walter Scott. The best, *El Señor de Bembibre* (1844) by Enrique Gil y Carrasco, reflects Gil’s carefully researched history of the Templars in Spain. Other important novels are [Mariano José de Larra](#)’s *El doncel de Don Enrique el doliente* (1834; “The Page of King Enrique the Invalid”) and Espronceda’s *Sancho Saldaña* (1834).

Costumbrismo

[Costumbrismo](#) began before Romanticism, contributing to both Romanticism and the later [realism](#) movement through realistic prose. The [cuadro de costumbres](#) and *artículo de costumbres*—short literary sketches on customs, manners, or character—were two types of *costumbrista* writing, typically published in the popular press or included as an element of longer literary works such as novels. The *cuadro* was inclined to description for its own sake, whereas the *artículo* was more critical and satirical. *Cartas de un pobrecito holgazán* (1820; “Letters from a Poor Idler”) by Sebastián de Miñano points the way, but the most important *costumbrista* titles were by Larra, an outstanding prose writer and the best critical mind of his age, who dissected society pitilessly in *Artículos* (1835–37). [Ramón de Mesonero Romanos](#) in *Escenas matritenses* (1836–42; “Scenes of Madrid”) humorously portrayed contemporary life, and [Serafín Estébanez Calderón](#) depicted the manners, folklore, and history of Andalusia in *Escenas andaluzas* (1847; “Andalusian Sketches”). Such writings, realistically observing everyday life and regional elements, bridged the transition to realism.

Revival of the Spanish novel

For two centuries the novel, Spain’s greatest contribution to literature, had languished. Early revival novels are of interest more for their powers of observation and description (a continuation of *costumbrismo*) than for their imaginative or narrative quality. [Fernán Caballero](#) (pseudonym of Cecilia Böhl de Faber) essayed techniques of observation new to the novel in *La gaviota* (1849; *The Seagull*). The regional novel’s flowering began with *El sombrero de tres picos* (1874; *The Three-Cornered Hat*), a sparkling tale of peasant malice by [Pedro Antonio de](#)

[Alarcón](#). Andalusian regionalism prevailed in many of [Juan Valera](#)'s novels, but his remarkable psychological insights in *Pepita Jiménez* (1874) and *Doña Luz* (1879) made him the father of Spain's [psychological novel](#). He was a prolific writer, his works ranging from poetry and newspaper articles to critical essays and memoirs. Regionalist [José María de Pereda](#) produced minute re-creations of nature, which was depicted as an abiding reality that dwarfed individuals. His most celebrated novels, *Sotileza* (1884; "Subtlety") and *Peñas arriba* (1895; "Up the Mountains"), support a rigid class structure and traditional values of religion, family, and country life. [Emilia, condesa \(countess\) de Pardo Bazán](#), attempted to combine the aesthetics of [naturalism](#) with traditional Roman Catholic values in her novels of Galicia, *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886; *The Son of a Bondswoman*) and *La madre naturaleza* (1887; "Mother Nature"), sparking considerable controversy. Her 19 major novels also represent mainstream Spanish realism, experiments with [Symbolism](#), and spiritualism; she figures among Spain's major short-story writers with some 800 stories. [Armando Palacio Valdés](#) was the novelist of Asturias, his native province, while Jacinto Octavio Picón was more cosmopolitan; both experimented with naturalism. The reputed author of more than 100 works, María del Pilar Sinués y Navarro made women her primary subjects, treating marriage, motherhood, domestic life, and women's education. Ana García de la Torre (Ana García del Espinar), a more progressive contemporary, treated problems of class, gender, and the proletariat, writing especially on the "working girl" and portraying utopian workers' socialist movements.

[Benito Pérez Galdós](#), Spain's most significant novelist after Cervantes, perfected the Spanish realistic novel and created a new type of [historical novel](#), imaginatively reproducing many turbulent chapters of Spain's 19th-century history. His *Episodios nacionales* (1873–79 and 1898–1912; "National Episodes") comprise 46 volumes and cover the 70 years from the Napoleonic Wars to Spain's short-lived First Republic. Galdós's enduring fame rests, however, on what have come to be known as the *Novelas españolas contemporáneas* ("Contemporary Spanish Novels"), especially his portrayals of Madrid's bureaucracy and its middle class and *pueblo* (working class). Included among these many novels is his masterpiece, *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886–87; [Fortunata and Jacinta](#)), a paradigm of Spanish realism. This massive four-volume work presents the whole of Madrid's social spectrum via the families, loves, and acquaintances of the two women in the life of a wealthy but weak bourgeois: Fortunata, his mistress and the mother of his son, and Jacinta, his wife. The novel has been seen as an allegory of the sterility of the upper classes, but its complexity transcends facile summary. His later works represent naturalism or reflect turn-of-the-century spiritualism. Galdós was a liberal crusader whose criticism of the Roman Catholic Church's interventions in civic matters, of [caciquism](#) (*caciquismo*, or political bossism), and of reactionary power-grabs made him many enemies. He also wrote more than 20 successful and often controversial plays. Some have argued that his political enemies conspired to deny him the Nobel Prize, but today he ranks with such world-class realists as the English novelist Charles Dickens and the French novelist Honoré de Balzac.



Benito Pérez Galdós Benito Pérez Galdós, detail of an oil painting by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida.

In the late 1880s—a time of nascent industrialism, a growing proletariat, and an influx of international labour organizers—other naturalistic novelists followed, notably [Vicente Blasco Ibáñez](#). A crusader, adventurer, and short-story writer, he achieved enormous international success with novels widely translated and adapted for the screen and became Spain's

best-known novelist in the first third of the 20th century, though he was seldom well received at home. Contemporaneous with the [Generation of 1898](#) but belonging aesthetically to the 19th century, Blasco Ibáñez wrote regional novels of Valencia, crusaded for socialism, and treated contemporary social problems from an anarchist perspective in such novels as *La bodega* (1905; “The Wine Vault”; Eng. trans. *The Fruit of the Vine*) and *La horda* (1905; *The Mob*). He won international renown with *Los cuatro jinetes del apocalipsis* (1916; *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*), on World War I, and *Mare nostrum* (1918; *Our Sea*), on German submarine warfare in the Mediterranean.



Vicente Blasco Ibáñez

[Leopoldo Alas](#) (byname Clarín), like Valera a well-respected critic and author of volumes of influential articles, has long been considered a naturalist, but his works exhibit none of the sordidness and social determinism typical of that movement. Rich in detail, his writings abound in irony and satire as they expose the evils of Spanish Restoration society, most notably in *La Regenta* (1884–85; “The Regent’s Wife”; Eng. trans. [La Regenta](#)), which is today considered Spain’s most significant novel of the 19th century. Alas’s masterful short stories rank with the best in Spanish and world literature.

Post-Romantic drama and poetry

Realistic drama in Spain produced few masterpieces but established a bourgeois comedy of manners further developed in the 20th century. [Manuel Tamayo y Baus](#) achieved fame with *Un drama nuevo* (1867; [A New Drama](#)), whose characters, members of William Shakespeare’s acting company, include Shakespeare himself. Adelardo López de Ayala pilloried bourgeois vices in *El tejado de vidrio* (1857; “The Glass Roof”) and *Consuelo* (1870). The more than 60 plays of [José Echegaray y Eizaguirre](#) include both enormously popular melodramas lacking verisimilitude of character, motivation, and situation and serious bourgeois dramas of social problems. In 1904 he shared the Nobel Prize for Literature with the Provençal poet [Frédéric Mistral](#). Joaquín Dicenta utilized class conflict and social injustice as themes, dramatizing working-class conditions in *Juan José* (performed 1895).

In poetry, realistic trends produced little of note. [Ramón de Campoamor y Campoosorio](#) wrote *Doloras* (1845; “Sufferings”), *Pequeños poemas* (1871; “Little Poems”), and *Humoradas* (1886; “Pleasant Jokes”), works that attempted to establish a poetry of ideas. The poet, playwright, and politician [Gaspar Núñez de Arce](#) published *Gritos del combate* (1875; “Combat Cries”), patriotic declamatory exhortations defending democracy. He used a realistic approach to treat contemporary moral, religious, and political conflicts in his works, although his work also shows Romantic and medieval themes.

The modern period

The Generation of 1898

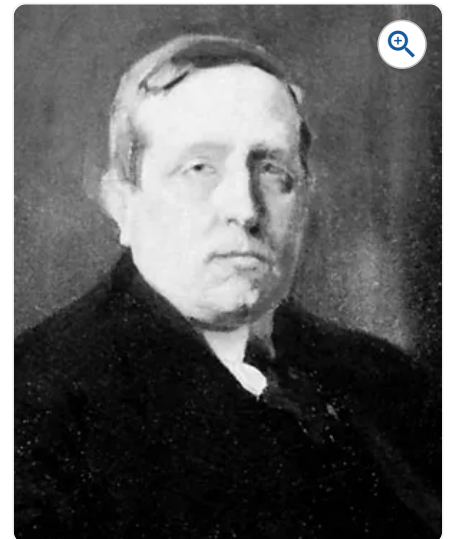
Novels and essays

For some two decades before 1900, political and social unrest grew in Spain, conditions that inspired [Ángel Ganivet](#)’s influential *Idearium español* (1897; [Spain, an Interpretation](#)), which analyzed Spanish character. The Spanish empire, founded in 1492, ended with defeat in the [Spanish-American War](#) of 1898, which prompted

Spanish intellectuals to diagnose their country's ills and to seek ways to jolt the nation out of what they perceived to be its *abulia* (lack of will). The novel acquired new seriousness, and critical, psychological, and philosophical essays gained unprecedented importance. Novelists and essayists constituted what [Azorín](#) (pseudonym of José Martínez Ruiz) named the [Generation of 1898](#), today considered an “Age of Silver,” second only to Spain’s Siglo de Oro (Golden Age).

[Miguel de Unamuno](#) studied national problems perceptively in *En torno al casticismo* (1895), a collection of essays whose title—which means, roughly, “Concerning Spanishness”—reflects its analysis of the “essence” of Spanish national identity. In *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* (1905; *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*) Unamuno explored the same subject by way of an examination of Cervantes’s fictional characters. He despairingly questioned immortality in his most important work, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (1913; [The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Peoples](#)). A provocative, somewhat unsystematic thinker, Unamuno aimed at sowing spiritual disquiet. The novel became his medium for exploring personality, as in *Niebla* (1914; *Mist*), *Abel Sánchez* (1917), and *Tres novelas ejemplares y un prólogo* (1920; “Three Cautionary Tales and a Prologue”), with his final spiritual position—Kierkegaardian existentialism—revealed in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* (1933; “San Manuel Bueno, Martyr”). Unamuno was an influential journalist and an unsuccessful but powerful dramatist who also ranks among Spain’s greatest 20th-century poets.

In novels such as *Don Juan* (1922) and *Doña Inés* (1925), Azorín created retrospective, introspective, and nearly motionless narratives that shared many of the qualities of works by his contemporary Marcel Proust. Azorín’s essays—in *El alma castellana* (1900; “The Castilian Soul”), *La ruta de Don Quijote* (1905; “Don Quixote’s Route”), *Castilla* (1912), and numerous additional volumes—reinterpreted and sought to eternalize earlier literary values and visions of rural Spain. An artistic critic and sensitive miniaturist, he excelled in precision and ekphrasis (description of a visual work of art). Philosopher [José Ortega y Gasset](#) developed themes from criticism and psychology (*Meditaciones del Quijote* [1914; “Meditations on Quixote”]) to national problems (*España invertebrada* [1921; *Invertebrate Spain*]) and international concerns (*El tema de nuestro tiempo* [1923; *The Modern Theme*], *La rebelión de las masas* [1929; *The Revolt of the Masses*]). He and Unamuno were Spain’s intellectual leaders during the first half of the 20th century.



Azorín Azorín (pseudonym of José Martínez Ruiz), detail of an oil painting by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, 1917; in the collectio...(more)

Novelist [Pío Baroja](#) repudiated tradition, religion, and most forms of social organization and government, initially advocating something approaching anarchism but later turning more conservative. A neonaturalist, he saw the world as a cruel place, and many of his works—including the trilogies *La raza* (1908–11; “The Race”) and *La lucha por la vida* (1903–04; “The Struggle for Life”) and the two-part *Agonías de nuestro tiempo* (1926; “Agonies of Our Time”)—portray squalid, subhuman conditions, prostitutes and criminals, and ignorance and disease. His most-read work is *El árbol de la ciencia* (1911; *The Tree of Knowledge*), which tells the story of the education of the protagonist, a medical student; it depicts the shortcomings of those teaching medicine, the callousness of many doctors treating Spanish society’s most vulnerable, and the abject poverty and filth in the village where the protagonist first practices. Baroja also wrote adventure novels that glorified the “man of action,” a type that recurs throughout his novels. In his later works he experimented with Impressionism and Surrealism.

Sometimes omitted from the Generation of 1898, given his Modernist beginnings, [Ramón María del Valle-Inclán](#)—a poet, journalist, essayist, short-story writer, and profoundly influential dramatist and novelist—suffered critical neglect following his death in 1936 when the Francisco Franco regime prohibited studies of Republican writers. The three stages of his literary evolution exhibit radical aesthetic change, beginning with exquisite, sometimes decadent, erotic [Modernista](#) tales, as in his four *Sonatas* (1902–05; Eng. trans. [The Pleasant Memoirs of the Marquis de Bradomin: Four Sonatas](#)). Each represents a season (of the year and of human life) corresponding to the youth, plenitude, maturity, and old age of the narrator, a decadent Don Juan; intertextual allusions, nostalgia for an idealized past, aristocratic posing, melancholy, underlying parody, and humour abound. The trilogy *Comedias bárbaras* (1907, 1908, 1923), set in an anachronistic, semifeudal Galicia and linked by a single protagonist, is in dialogue form, which gives these novels the feel of impossibly long cinematographic dramas. This series initiated Valle’s aesthetic movement away from *Modernismo*’s quest for beauty, which continued with his violent trilogy (1908–09) on the 19th-century Carlist wars (see [Carlism](#)). Valle’s third artistic stage, characterized by his invention of the [esperpento](#) style, is expressionistic, involving deliberate distortion and calculated inversion of heroic models and values. “Esperpentic” visions appear in the novels *Tirano Banderas* (1926; Eng. trans. *The Tyrant*), *La corte de los milagros* (1927; “The Court of Miracles”), and *Viva mi dueño* (1928; “Long Live My Lord”), the last two belonging to another trilogy, *El ruedo ibérico* (“The Iberian Cycle”). Valle’s works usually treat his native Galicia; *Tirano Banderas*, satirizing desultory revolutions and set in a fictional Latin American country, is sometimes considered his masterpiece.

Poetry

[Rubén Darío](#), Latin America’s greatest poet, took [Modernismo](#) to Spain in 1892. *Modernismo* rejected 19th-century bourgeois materialism and instead sought specifically aesthetic values. Darío greatly enriched the musical resources of Spanish verse with the daring use of new rhythms and metres, creating an introspective, cosmopolitan, and aesthetically beautiful poetry.

[Antonio Machado](#), one of the 20th century’s greatest poets, explored memory through recurrent symbols of multiple meanings, the dimly drawn boundaries of dream and reality, and time past and present. A consummate creator of introspective Modernist poems in *Soledades* (1903, augmented 1907; “Solitudes”), Machado abandoned the cult of beauty in [Campos de Castilla](#) (1912, augmented 1917; “Fields of Castile”), producing powerful visions of the Spanish condition and the character of the Spanish people that became a guiding precedent for postwar “social” poets. In his anguished grappling with Spain’s problems—a characteristic of the Generation of 1898—Machado correctly foresaw the coming Civil War.

[Juan Ramón Jiménez](#), recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1956, practiced the aesthetics of *Modernismo* during his first two decades. Anguished by transient reality, Jiménez next sought salvation in an absorbing, manic dedication to poetry stripped of adornment—what he called *poesía desnuda* (“naked poetry”)—as in *Eternidades* (1918; “Eternities”) and *Piedra y cielo* (1919; “Stone and Sky”). Seeking Platonic absolutes in his final years, he produced measured, exact poetry that increasingly exulted in mystical discoveries of transcendence within the immanence of self and physical reality. Jiménez’s voluminous output—*Rimas* (1902; “Rhymes”); *Sonetos espirituales* (1914–15) (1917; “Spiritual Sonnets [1914–15]”); *Diario de un poeta recién casado* (1917; “Diary of a



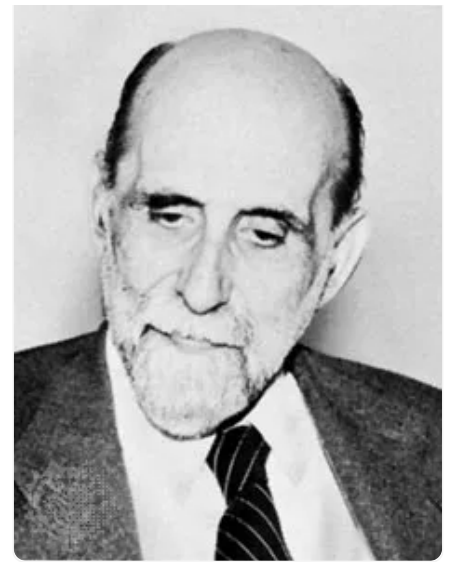
Poet Recently Married”); *Animal de fondo* (1947; “Animal of the Depth”) —springs from his lifelong pursuit of poetry and its modes of expression. Sofía Pérez Casanova de Lutoslawski, a successful early Modernist poet, spent her married life outside Spain. A pioneering feminist and social worker, she was also a prolific novelist, a translator, and an author of short stories, essays, and children’s books. She became a foreign correspondent during World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Drama

Contemporaneous with the Generation of 1898 but ideologically and aesthetically distinct was [Jacinto Benavente y Martínez](#). A prolific playwright noted for his craftsmanship and wit, he profoundly altered Spanish theatrical practice and fare. Excelling in the comedy of manners with sparkling dialogue and satiric touches, Benavente never alienated his devoted upper-class public. *Los intereses creados* (1907; [The Bonds of Interest](#)), echoing the 16th-century [commedia dell’arte](#), is his most enduring work. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1922. The poetic, nostalgic drama of Eduardo Marquina revived lyric theatre, together with the so-called [género chico](#) (light dramatic or operatic one-act playlets). [Serafín and Joaquín Álvarez Quintero](#) appropriated the latter’s popular [costumbrista](#) setting for comedy, while [Carlos Arniches](#) developed it in satirical pieces (often compared with the 18th-century *sainete*) and Pedro Muñoz Seca used it in popular farces. More-intellectual theatrical experiments by Unamuno attempted the drama of ideas; Azorín renewed comedy, introducing lessons from vaudeville, and produced experimental Surrealist works.

Although undervalued during his lifetime because his radically innovative, shocking works went mostly unproduced, Valle-Inclán is today considered Spain’s most significant dramatist since Calderón. This brilliant, original playwright attempted, often futilely, to overcome Spanish theatre’s bourgeois complacency and artistic mediocrity. His dramas inveighed against hypocrisy and corrupt values with mordant irony. *Luces de Bohemia* (1920; *Bohemian Lights*) illustrates his theory and practice of *esperpento*, an aesthetic formula he also used in his fiction to depict reality through a deliberately exaggerated mimesis of its grotesqueness. His work sometimes recalls that of Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí, or Picasso. Jacinto Grau, another would-be reformer, attempted tragedy in *El Conde Alarcos* (1917), adding dignity to his pessimistic view of an absurd reality in *El señor de Pigmalión* (1921). Generally overlooked is [María de la O Lejárraga](#), who collaborated with her husband, [Gregorio Martínez Sierra](#), and wrote most of the essays, poems, short stories, novels, and newspaper articles they published jointly, plus the more than 50 plays on which their fame rests. She continued writing his plays even after he abandoned her for another woman. Their best-known plays include *Canción de cuna* (1911; *Cradle Song*) and *El reino de Dios* (1916; *The Kingdom of God*), which feature strong, resourceful, maternal women who represent an idealization of motherhood, a typical feature of their plays. Brothers Manuel and Antonio Machado collaborated on several lyric plays during the 1920s and early 1930s.

Novecentismo



Juan Ramón Jiménez Juan Ramón Jiménez, 1956



Benavente y Martínez, Jacinto Jacinto Benavente y Martínez.

The term *novecentistas* applies to a generation of writers that fall between the Generation of 1898 and the vanguardist Generation of 1927. The *novecentistas*—sometimes also called the Generation of 1914—were more classical and less revolutionary than their predecessors. They sought to renew intellectual and aesthetic standards while reaffirming Classical values. [Ortega y Gasset](#) exerted influence over the novel as a genre with *La deshumanización del arte* (1925; *The Dehumanization of Art*), which analyzed contemporary “depersonalized” (i.e., nonrepresentational) art. [Ramón Pérez de Ayala](#) made the novel a polished art form and a forum for philosophical discussion. *Belarmino y Apolonio* (1921; *Belarmino and Apolonio*) examines the age-old debate between faith and reason, utilizing symbolic characters and multiple narrative viewpoints, while *Tigre Juan* (1926; *Tiger Juan*) dissects traditional Spanish concepts of honour and matrimony. [Gabriel Miró](#)’s polished descriptive prose slowed and nearly displaced the novelistic action; like Pérez de Ayala, he dealt repeatedly with ecclesiastical intrusions into civil life and satirized the lack of sexual education in Spanish culture. [Benjamín Jarnés](#) and others attempted to apply vanguardist and experimental techniques to the novel, emphasizing minimal action, alienated characters, the psychological probing of memory, and experiments with internal monologue. Vanguardism’s paradigmatic exponent, [Ramón Gómez de la Serna](#), was the author of some 100 novels, biographies, dramas, collections of articles and short stories, books on art, and works of humour.

Among [women](#) writers, Carmen de Burgos Seguí (pseudonym Colombine) wrote hundreds of articles, more than 50 short stories, some dozen long novels and numerous short ones, many practical books for women, and socially oriented treatises on subjects such as divorce. An active suffragist and opponent of the death penalty, she treated feminist themes (*La malcasada* [“The Unhappily Married Woman”], *En la cima* [1915; “On Top”], *La rampa* [1917; “The Ramp”]) as well as spiritualism, the occult, and the supernatural (*El retorno* [“The Reappearance”], *Los espirituados* [1923; “The Possessed”]). Concepción (Concha) Espina, often considered the first Spanish woman writer to earn her living exclusively from her writings, enjoyed tremendous popularity and was twice nominated for the Nobel Prize. Her novels, with their detailed descriptions, most nearly approach the regional novel as epitomized by Pereda; their melodrama and moralizing also show Espina’s independence from *novecentismo*’s influence. *El metal de los muertos* (1920; *The Metal of the Dead*), a work of social-protest fiction, was among her most successful works, as were *La esfinge maragata* (1914; *Mariflor*) and *Altar mayor* (1926; “High Altar”).

The Generation of 1927

The name [Generation of 1927](#) identifies poets that emerged about 1927, the 300-year anniversary of the death of Baroque poet Luis de Góngora y Argote, to whom these poets paid homage and which sparked a brief flash of neo-Gongorism. These outstanding poets—among them [Rafael Alberti](#), [Vicente Aleixandre](#), [Dámaso Alonso](#), [Luis Cernuda](#), [Gerardo Diego](#), [Federico García Lorca](#), [Jorge Guillén](#), and [Pedro Salinas](#)—drew upon the past (ballads, traditional songs, early metrical structure, and Góngora’s poetry), but they also incorporated vanguardism ([Surrealism](#), [Futurism](#), [Ultraism](#)), producing intensely personal poetry. Images and metaphors—frequently illogical, hermetic, or irrational—became central to poetic creation. Most of these poets experimented with free verse or exotic forms drawn from the Japanese, Arabic, and Afro-Caribbean literary traditions. By the end of the Spanish Civil War, in 1939, many writers of the Generation of 1927 were dead or in exile.

[Lorca](#), a consummate artist, musician, dramatist, and poet, captured the stark emotions and powerful effects that characterize traditional song and ballad forms. In *Romancero gitano* (1928; *The Gypsy Ballads*), he blended popular styles with sophisticated mythic and symbolic elements evoking mysterious, ambivalent visions of nature. Symbols and metaphors turn hermetic in *Poeta en Nueva York* (1940; *Poet in New York*), a Surrealist

reflection of urban inhumanity and disorientation written during his visit to the United States in 1929–30.

[Salinas](#) sought [pure poetry](#) through clearly focused poems and a heightened sensitivity to language. In *La voz a ti debida* (1934; “The Voice Inspired by You”; Eng. trans. *Truth of Two and Other Poems*), profoundly personal love experiences inspire subtle observations on the solidity of external reality and the fleeting world of subjective perception. [Guillén](#)’s lifelong poetic effort, *Cántico* (*Cántico: A Selection*), first published in 1928 and repeatedly enlarged in successive editions, constitutes a disciplined hymn to the joys of everyday reality. Later works (*Clamor* [1957–63; “Clamour”] and *Homenaje* [1967; “Homage”]) displayed keener awareness of suffering and disorder.

[Aleixandre](#), influenced by Surrealism, dabbled in the subconscious and created his own personal myths. In *La destrucción o el amor* (1935; *Destruction or Love*), he evoked human despair and cosmic violence. With his postwar “social” poetry, Aleixandre moved beyond pure poetry, broadening his focus without abandoning a cosmic vision (*Mundo a solas* [1950; *World Alone*], *Historia del corazón* [1954; “History of the Heart”], *En un vasto dominio* [1962; “In a Vast Dominion”]). He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1977. Like Lorca, [Alberti](#) initially incorporated popular forms and folk elements. The playful poetry of *Marinero en tierra* (1925; “Landlocked Sailor”) yielded to stylistic complexities in *Cal y canto* (1927; “Quicklime and Song”) and to the sombre, introspective mood of *Sobre los ángeles* (1929; *Concerning the Angels*), a Surrealist collection reflecting personal crisis. Alberti joined the Communist Party in the 1930s, and during the Civil War and his subsequent exile in Argentina, he wrote poetry of political commitment; later he resumed personal, intimate themes. Cernuda’s poetry, as suggested by the title of his collected works *La realidad y el deseo* (first published 1936; “Reality and Desire”), contemplates the gulf between harsh reality and ideal personal aspirations. The tension, melancholy, and sense of alienation resulting from the unbridgeable gap between these realms pervade Cernuda’s work.

This generation of Spanish poetry also includes Emilio Prados and Manuel Altolaguirre. [Miguel Hernández](#), a younger poet of the Civil War, bridged the gap between the Generation of 1927 and the post-Civil War poets.

Women poets

Several significant women poets belong chronologically to the Generation of 1927, including [Rosa Chacel](#), a major essayist, poet, and novelist. Her polished, intellectual verse appeared in *A la orilla de un pozo* (1936; *At the Edge of a Well*), a collection of neo-Gongoristic sonnets, and in *Versos prohibidos* (1978; “Prohibited Verse”), a mixture of unrhymed pieces that resemble in their metre blank verse and alexandrines and in their form epistles, sonnets, and odes. Frequent themes are philosophical inspiration, faith, religiosity, separation, menace (echoing the Civil War), friendships, and her wanderings. Concha Méndez published four major poetry collections before the Civil War drove her into exile. Drawing upon traditional popular forms and the oral tradition, Méndez’s prewar poetry—such as that in *Vida a vida* (1932; “Life to Life”)—exudes optimism and vitality, recalling the neopopular airs of Lorca and Alberti. Her exile poetry expresses pessimism, loss, violence, horror, anguish, uncertainty, and pain (e.g., *Lluvias enlazadas* [1939; “Interlaced Rains”]). Her last book was *Vida; o, río* (1979; “Life; or, The River”). Marina Romero Serrano spent three decades in exile in the United States teaching Spanish and writing poetry, critical works, and children’s books. *Nostalgia de mañana* (1943; “Nostalgia for Tomorrow”) reflects her generation’s predilection for traditional metrics; her other works represent pure poetry and avoid the confessional and autobiographical mode. Her most personal collection, *Honda raíz* (1989; “Deep Roots”), treats lost love remembered, moving from joy to loss and infinite longing.

Ernestina de Champourcin published four volumes of exuberant, personal, intellectual poetry before going into exile (1936–72) with her husband, José Domenchina, a minor poet of the Generation of 1927. *Presencia a oscuras* (1952; “Presence in Darkness”) reacted to the marginality she felt while in exile and commenced a spiritual quest intensified by Domenchina’s death in 1959. *El nombre que me diste* (1960; “The Name You Gave Me”), *Cartas cerradas* (1968; “Sealed Letters”), and *Poemas del ser y estar* (1972; “Poems of Being and State”), collected with poetry written 1972–91, appeared as *Poesía a través del tiempo* (1991; “Poetry Across Time”). Characterizing her mature writing are religious preoccupations and mystic language. Champourcin ranks with the truly significant poets of her generation. Lesser figures include Pilar de Valderrama and Josefina de la Torre.

Carmen Conde Abellán, a socialist and Republican supporter, suffered postwar “internal exile” in Spain while her husband was a political prisoner. She was contemporaneous with and involved in Surrealism, Ultraism, and prewar experimentation with prose poems, but she is rarely included with the Generation of 1927; her preoccupation with issues of social justice—especially education of the poor—is often taken as a pretext for this exclusion, even though survivors of that generation remaining in Spain also produced “social” poetry. A novelist, memorialist, biographer, anthologist, critic, archivist, and author of juvenile fiction, Conde published nearly 100 titles, including nine novels and several plays. She became the first woman elected to the [Royal Spanish Academy](#) (1978) and was the most honoured woman of her generation. Conde assiduously cultivated poetry’s universal themes: love, suffering, nature, dreams, memory, solitude, death, estrangement, religious questing, grief. Her most important works include *Ansia de la gracia* (1945; “Longing for Grace”) and *Mujer sin Edén* (1947; *Woman Without Eden*). The latter implicitly equated the fall of the Spanish Republican government with the [Fall of Man](#), also using Cain and Abel motifs to symbolize the country’s Civil War. Slightly younger, María Concepción Zardoya González, who wrote under the name Concha Zardoya, published 25 poetry collections between 1946 and 1987. She was born in Chile of Spanish parents and lived in Spain in the 1930s; she later spent three decades in the United States before returning in 1977 to Spain, where she remained until her death. Rich in personal experience and spiritual intimacy, her poetry ranks among the best women’s lyrics in 20th-century Spain; it records a personal history of war and loss, exile and nostalgia, pain, solitude, and existential doubt.

Reform of the drama

[Lorca](#) towered above his contemporaries with intense poetic dramas that depict elemental passions and characters symbolizing humanity’s tragic impotence against fate. His dramatic poetry was modern yet traditional, personal yet universal. The tragic trilogy *Bodas de sangre* (1933; [Blood Wedding](#)), *Yerma* (1934; Eng. trans. [Yerma](#)), and *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (1936; [The House of Bernarda Alba](#)) depicted extremes of passion involving the traditional Spanish theme of honour and its violent effects on women.

[Alberti](#)’s contribution to dramatic reform imaginatively adapted classical forms of Spanish drama. In *El hombre deshabitado* (1931; “The Uninhabited Man”), a modern allegorical play in the manner of Calderón’s [autos sacramentales](#), he created poetic, fatalistic myths out of realistic themes and folk motifs. The renovation of the drama attempted by Azorín, Valle-Inclán, Grau, and others of the Generation of 1898 and continued by the Generation of 1927 (especially Lorca and Alberti) had little effect on the commercial theatre, their efforts ending abruptly with the outbreak of the Civil War.

The Spanish Civil War and beyond

The novel

The [Spanish Civil War](#) (1936–39) drove into political exile some promising novelists whose narrative art matured abroad. Max Aub analyzed the civil conflict in the artistically and thematically impressive cycle of novels *El laberinto mágico* (1943–68; “The Magic Labyrinth”). [Ramón José Sender](#), whose pre-Civil War novels had been realistic and overtly sociopolitical, developed an interest in the mysterious and irrational. While *Crónica del alba* (1942–66; “Chronicle of the Dawn”), a series of novels, dwelt realistically on the Civil War, the magical, myth-dominated worlds of *Epitalamio del prieto Trinidad* (1942; *Dark Wedding*) and *Las criaturas saturnianas* (1968; “Saturnine Beings”) reflected more universal concerns. Prolific, tendentious, opinionated, and arbitrary, Sender produced some 70 novels of unequal quality, the most esteemed being *Mosén Millán* (1953; later published as *Réquiem por un campesino español*; Eng. trans. *Requiem for a Spanish Peasant*). After more than three decades in exile, Sender returned to Spain to a hero’s welcome from younger compatriots. The diplomat, legal scholar, and critic [Francisco Ayala](#) showed a youthful vanguardism early in his career; in later short stories (the collections *Los usurpadores* [1949; *Usurpers*] and *La cabeza del cordero* [1949; “The Lamb’s Head”]) and novels (*Muertes de perro* [1958; *Death as a Way of Life*, 1964] and its sequel *El fondo del vaso* [1962; “In the Bottom of the Glass”]), he cultivated themes that allowed him to obliquely re-create aspects of the Civil War as well as to address more-universal social concerns. These works offer devastating appraisals of the Spanish political scene from multiple perspectives and with complex narrative techniques. Considered by some to be the best prose writer of his era in the Spanish language, Ayala has published many volumes of essays on philosophy, pedagogy, sociology, and political theory.

The Civil War decimated Spanish intellectuals, artists, and writers, and the country’s culture went into decline, uninterrupted by a brief spate of *triunfalismo* (“triumphalism”) that lasted through the 1940s, when the victorious [Falange](#), the Spanish fascist party, engaged in propagandistic self-glorification. *Triunfalismo*’s literary expression produced works that were monothematic and repetitive and that insulted the vanquished, showing them as animals. Psychologically perceptive despite its violence, *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (1942; *The Family of Pascual Duarte*) of [Camilo José Cela](#) popularized a harsh, sordid, unsentimental realism (tempered by expressionistic distortion) known as *tremendismo*. Continuing his literary experimentation, Cela attained greater technical heights in *La colmena* (1951; *The Hive*), portraying divided Madrid society during the harsh winter of 1941–42. By his death, in 2002, Cela—who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989—had published by his own count more than 100 books, including a dozen novels, numerous story collections, travel books, critical essays, poetry, and literary sketches. Joining Cela in reviving Spanish fiction during the 1940s was [Carmen Laforet](#), whose *Nada* (1945, “Nothing”; Eng. trans. [Andrea](#)), with its bewildered adolescent’s perspective of war’s aftermath, became an instant best seller.

The sociopolitical trauma of civil conflict with its cultural and economic uncertainty revived outmoded forms of realism. Conservative craftsmen such as [Juan Antonio de Zunzunegui](#) and Ignacio Agustí produced conventional realistic novels. [José María Gironella](#) scored great popular success with his controversial epic trilogy on the Civil War: *Los cipreses creen en Dios* (1953; *The Cypresses Believe in God*), *Un millón de muertos* (1961; *The Million Dead*), and *Ha estallado la paz* (1966; *Peace After War*).

A second postwar current, “social literature,” or “critical realism,” arrived with the so-called Midcentury Generation, who were adolescents during the war; it expressed more vigorous, if necessarily covert, opposition to the dictatorship. In such works as *La hoja roja* (1959; “The Red Leaf”), which examines poverty and loneliness among the elderly, and *Las ratas* (1962; “Rats”; Eng. trans. *Smoke on the Ground*), which depicts the miserable existence of uneducated cave dwellers, [Miguel Delibes](#) conveyed critical concern for a society whose natural values are under constant threat. Greater technical expertise and thematic originality are evinced in his *Cinco*

horas con Mario (1966; “Five Hours with Mario”), a powerful novel wherein domestic conflict represents contending ideologies in the Civil War, and *Parábola del naufrago* (1969; “Parable of the Shipwrecked Man”), which examines the individual’s plight in a dehumanized technocracy. A publisher, lawyer, teacher, and journalist, Delibes was the author of more than 50 volumes of novels, memoirs, essays, and travel and hunting books and received the prestigious [Cervantes Prize](#) in 1993. *El hereje* (1998; *The Heretic*), perhaps his masterpiece, depicts the abuse of power by the Spanish Inquisition. Elena Quiroga, a conscientious stylist, experimented with varying forms and themes, employing a dead protagonist in *Algo pasa en la calle* (1954; “Something’s Happening in the Street”) to examine domestic conflict aggravated by Franco’s outlawing of divorce. Quiroga’s novels typically portrayed women and children. Her crowning achievement is the novelistic cycle of Tadea: *Tristura* (1960; “Sadness”), *Escribo tu nombre* (1965; “I Write Your Name”), and *Se acabó todo, muchacha triste* (“It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue”), begun in the late 1960s but left unfinished at Quiroga’s death in 1995. The cycle portrays the difficulties of growing up female under Franco through the character Tadea, the novels’ protagonist. In 1983 Quiroga became the second woman elected to the [Royal Spanish Academy](#). [Social realism](#) also characterizes the largely testimonial, semiautobiographical novels of Dolores Medio, who frequently depicted working girls, schoolteachers, and aspiring writers as positive feminine role models opposing the dictatorship’s discouragement of education for women: *Nosotros los Rivero* (1952; “We Riveros”), *El pez sigue flotando* (1959; “The Fish Stays Afloat”), *Diario de una maestra* (1961; “A Schoolteacher’s Diary”).

Often deprived of access to 19th-century realist and naturalist models, some post-Civil War writers reinvented these modes. Others more closely followed (usually via translations) the Italian Neorealists or the theories of Hungarian critic György Lukács in his *The Historical Novel* (1955). The Spanish Neorealist variants with their testimonial thrust subjected aesthetic considerations to their content, exhibiting the pedestrian style, simplistic techniques, and repetitive themes traditionally attributed to *engagé* (socially committed) literature.

During the 1950s, several competent, committed younger novelists strengthened intellectual dissent. [Ana María Matute](#), among the most honoured novelists of her generation, typically employed lyric and expressionistic style with fictions set in mountainous areas of Old Castile, as in *Los hijos muertos* (1958; *The Lost Children*), which sought to reconcile war-born hatreds by showing irreparable losses on both sides. Her trilogy *Los mercaderes* (“The Merchants”)—*Primera memoria* (1959; *School of the Sun*, also published as *The Awakening*), *Los soldados lloran de noche* (1964; *Soldiers Cry by Night*), and *La trampa* (1969; *The Trap*)

—divides humanity into heroes (considered idealists and martyrs) and merchants (motivated only by money). Matute’s greatest popular success, *Olvidado rey Gudú* (1996; “Forgotten King Gudú”), is an antiwar statement disguised as a neochivalric adventure. [Juan Goytisolo](#), long an expatriate in France and Morocco, moved from an impassive, cinematographic style in his fiction of the 1950s and early 1960s to [New Novel](#) experimentalism in his Mendiola trilogy—*Señas de identidad* (1966; *Marks of Identity*), *Reivindicación del conde don Julián* (1970; *Count Julian*), and *Juan sin tierra* (1975; *Juan the Landless*), all filled with literary borrowings, shifting narrative perspectives, nonlinear chronology, neo-Baroque complexities of plot, and an emphasis upon language rather than action. His brother Luis Goytisolo, a novelist and short-story writer, dissected the Catalan bourgeoisie and chronicled Barcelona’s history from the war through the Franco years. His most significant accomplishment, his tetralogy *Antagonía*, comprises *Recuento* (1973; “Recounting”), *Los verdes de mayo hasta el mar* (1976; “May’s Greenery as Far as the Sea”), *La cólera de Aquiles* (1979; “The Rage of Achilles”), and *Teoría del conocimiento* (1981; “Theory of Knowledge”), which reveal him as a consummate practitioner of



Matute, Ana María Ana María Matute.

metafiction, pushing the limits of the self-conscious novel while destroying Francoist myths and creating new, liberating ones. Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio's *El Jarama* (1956; "The Jarama"; Eng. trans. *The One Day of the Week*), masterfully utilizing pseudoscientific impassivity and cinematographic techniques, depicts the monotonous existence of urban youth via their aimless conversations and exposes postwar apathy. Other young writers who first emerged in the 1950s were Jesús Fernández Santos, Juan García Hortelano, Jesús López Pacheco, and Daniel Sueiro.

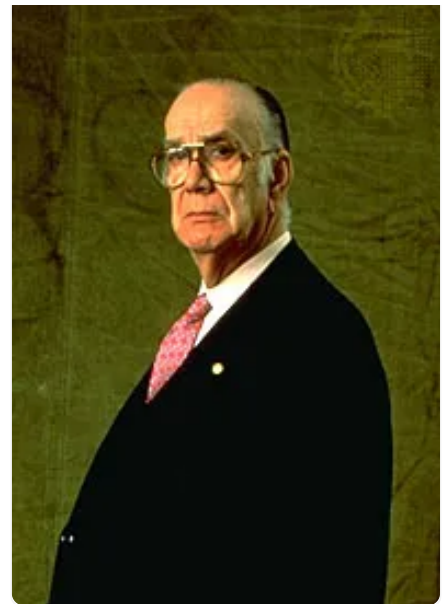
By the 1960s, gray, pedestrian critical realism had run its course. [Luis Martín-Santos](#) broke the mold with his epoch-making *Tiempo de silencio* (1962; *Time of Silence*), which revisited the familiar topic of life in post-Civil War Spain via conscious artistry, psychoanalytic perspectives, and narrative techniques—such as [stream of consciousness](#) and [interior monologue](#)—that echoed James Joyce. Had Martín-Santos not died at age 39, Spanish fiction in the 1970s and '80s might have reached greater heights. [Ignacio Aldecoa](#) was the most gifted short-story writer of his generation and among the most talented exponents of [objectivism](#) with his novels *Gran sol* (1957; "Great Sole") and *Parte de una historia* (1967; "Part of a Story"). Significant innovation appears in [Juan Benet Goitia](#), a novelist, critic, dramatist, and short-story writer whose *Volverás a Región* (1967; "You Will Return to Región") combined density of form, myth and allegory presented in tangled neo-Baroque syntax and lexicon, and scathing sarcasm. These features were typical of the numerous subsequent novels of his Región series. Described in minute topographical detail, Benet's Región is an area that resembles Spain's northern mountains, perhaps León. It is isolated, almost inaccessible, and terribly provincial; critics have seen it as a microcosm of Spain. Preferring British and American paradigms that devoted more attention to style, subjectivity, and psychological narrative than did the dominant trends in Spanish literature of the period, Benet condemned *costumbrismo* and social realism as unimaginative. Carmen Martín Gaité, a gifted observer of contemporary mores and a methodical observer of gender roles and conflicts, portrayed the constraints upon women in patriarchal societies. Her novels, from *Entre visillos* (1958; *Behind the Curtains*) to *El cuarto de atrás* (1978; *The Back Room*) and *La reina de las nieves* (1994; "Snow Queen"; Eng. trans. *The Farewell Angel*), trace the consequences of social conditions in Franco society on individuals. She also documented these conditions in essays such as *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* (1987; *Courtship Customs in Postwar Spain*), which describes the ideological indoctrination to which the Falange subjected girls and young women. Although he published his first novel in 1943, Gonzalo Torrente Ballester came to prominence only in the 1970s. He moved from Joycean models to realism to fantasy before achieving astounding success with his metaliterary, postmodern romps *La saga/fuga de J.B.* (1972; "J.B.'s Flight and Fugue") and *Fragmentos de apocalipsis* (1977; "Fragments of Apocalypse"). He received the Cervantes Prize in 1985.

Established writers of the Franco era continued producing until the new millennium—Cela, Delibes, Matute, Martín Gaité, Torrente, the Goytisolos—nearly all evolving and reflecting the impact of postmodernism, with some writing in the New Novel mode. During the 1980s and 1990s, new fictional paradigms emerged as exiles returned; new subgenres included detective fiction, a feminine neo-Gothic novel, science fiction, adventure novels, and the thriller. Despite this proliferation of modes, many novelists continued producing what might be considered "traditional" narrative. José Jiménez Lozano investigates Inquisitorial repression, recondite religious issues, and esoteric historical themes drawn from a variety of cultures in such novels as *Historia de un otoño* (1971; "History of Autumn") and *El sambenito* (1972; "The Saffron



Tunic”). He received the Cervantes Prize in 2002, as had Delibes (1993) and Cela (1995) before him. Francisco Umbral, a prolific journalist, novelist, and essayist often compared to 17th-century satirist Francisco Gómez de Quevedo y Villegas for his style and to 19th-century journalist Mariano José de Larra for his biting critiques of contemporary society, won the Cervantes Prize in 2000.

The Generation of 1968 was recognized in the 1980s as a distinct novelistic group. It includes Esther Tusquets, Álvaro Pombo, and Javier Tomeo, together with nearly a dozen others who belong to this group chronologically if not by reason of aesthetic or thematic similarities. Tusquets is best known for a trilogy of thematically related but independent novels: *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* (1978; *The Same Sea As Every Summer*), *El amor es un juego solitario* (1979; *Love Is a Solitary Game*), and *Varada tras el último naufragio* (1980; “Beached After the Last Shipwreck”; Eng. trans. *Stranded*), all of which explore the solitude of middle-aged women and their deceptions in love. Pombo, originally known as a poet, turned later to the novel; *El metro de platino irradiado* (1990; “The Metre of Irradiated Platinum”) is considered by many his masterpiece. He was elected to the Spanish Academy in 2004. Tomeo is an Aragonese essayist, dramatist, and novelist whose works, with their strange, solitary characters, emphasize that “normal” is but a theoretical concept. His novels include *Amado monstruo* (1985; *Dear Monster*) and *Napoleón VII* (1999). He is also known for his short stories, anthologized in *Los nuevos inquisidores* (2004; “The New Inquisitors”).



Camilo José Cela

Theatre

Post-Civil War Spain suffered no lack of skillful playwrights to provide politically acceptable entertainment; Edgar Neville, José López Rubio, Víctor Ruiz Iriarte, Miguel Mihura, and Alfonso Paso added variety to the ingenious, parodic farces of Enrique Jardiel Poncela and the soul-searching dramas of Alejandro Casona and Joaquín Calvo Sotelo. The period’s most significant dramatist was [Antonio Buero Vallejo](#), a former political prisoner; *Historia de una escalera* (1949; *The Story of a Stairway*), a symbolic social drama, marks the rebirth of Spanish theatre after the war. Subtle and imaginative, Buero used myth, history, and contemporary life as dramatic metaphors to explore and critique society in such works as *En la ardiente oscuridad* (1950; *In the Burning Darkness*), *Un soñador para un pueblo* (1958; “A Dreamer for a People”), and *El concierto de San Ovidio* (1962; *The Concert at Saint Ovide*, 1967). Later works exhibit increased philosophical, political, and metaphysical concerns: *Aventura en lo gris* (1963; “Adventure in Gray”), *El tragaluz* (1967; “The Skylight”), *El sueño de la razón* (1970; *The Sleep of Reason*), and *La fundación* (1974; *The Foundation*). Written in the 1960s, *La doble historia del doctor Valmy* (“The Double Case History of Doctor Valmy”) was performed in Spain for the first time in 1976; the play’s political content made it too controversial to stage there during Franco’s rule. Alfonso Sastre rejected Buero’s formula, preferring more-direct Marxist approaches to social problems, but censors prohibited many of his dramas. A dramatic theorist and existentialist, Sastre in his works presents individuals ensnared in Kafkaesque bureaucratic structures, struggling but failing while the struggle itself endures and advances (as exemplified in *Cuatro dramas de la revolución* [1963; “Four Revolutionary Dramas”]). Sastre’s first major production, *Escuadra hacia la muerte* (1953; *Death Squad*), a disturbing Cold War drama, presents soldiers who have been accused of “unpardonable” offenses and condemned to stand guard in a no-

man's-land where they await the advance of an unknown enemy and face almost certain death. Other plays demonstrate the socially committed individual's duty to sacrifice personal feeling for the sake of revolution (*El pan de todos* [1957; "The Bread of All"], *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes* [1960; *Sad Are the Eyes of William Tell*]).

Sastre's plays are examples of the social realism practiced by the Grupo Realista (Realist Group) during the 1950s and '60s. Epitomizing this group's realist style is Lauro Olmo's *La camisa* (1962; *The Shirt*), which depicts unemployed workers too poverty-stricken to seek employment because doing so requires a clean shirt. Like the social novel, social theatre featured generic or collective protagonists, economic injustices, and social-class conflicts, their depictions calculated to suggest Franco's responsibility for the exploitation and suffering of the underprivileged. Carlos Muñiz Higuera's plays convey social protests via expressionist techniques: *El grillo* (1957; "The Cricket") portrays the plight of an office worker who is perpetually overlooked for promotion, and *El tintero* (1961; "The Inkwell") depicts a humble office worker driven to suicide by a dehumanized bureaucracy. Muñiz Higuera depicts individuals who must adapt to dominant reactionary values or be destroyed; his work recalls Valle-Inclán's *esperpento* manner and German playwright Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. Other exponents of social-protest theater include José Martín Recuerda, whose subject matter is hypocrisy, cruelty, and repression in Andalusian towns and villages, and José María Rodríguez Méndez, a novelist, story writer, essayist, and critic whose dramas expose the plight of common people, especially the youth, portrayed as victims (soldiers recruited to serve as cannon fodder, students forced to compete in sordid, degrading conditions for posts in a dehumanizing system). Long-censored members of the Realist Group were compared to contemporaneous British playwrights and novelists called the [Angry Young Men](#).

The Silenced Group, also called the Underground Theatre (Teatro Subterráneo), includes playwrights repeatedly censored under Franco and avoided thereafter by the theatrical establishment for their radically subversive political allegories questioning the legitimacy of power, capitalism, and other "contemporary fundamentals." Their extravagant farces and mordant satires demythologized Spain and its "glorious" past. This group includes Antonio Martínez Ballesteros, Manuel Martínez Mediero, José Ruibal, Eduardo Quiles, Francisco Nieva, Luis Matilla, and Luis Riaza.

Antonio Gala, a multitalented, original, and commercially successful playwright, debunked historical myths while commenting allegorically on contemporary Spain via expressionistic humour and comedy. Jaime Salom, like Gala, defies ideological classification. His psychological drama of the Spanish Civil War, *La casa de las Chivas* (1968; "House of the Chivas"), holds Madrid box-office records. His later works pose political, social, or religious questions; *La piel del limón* (1976; "Bitter Lemon"), a plea for divorce reform, was among the longest-running plays of the 1970s. Salom is often compared to Buero Vallejo and American playwright Arthur Miller. The most important woman dramatist of the last decades of the 20th century, Ana Diosdado, gained national recognition with *Olvida los tambores* (1970; "Forget the Drums"). Other woman dramatists are Paloma Pedrero, Pilar Enciso, Lidia Falcón, Maribel Lázaro, Carmen Resino, and María Manuela Reina.

Some relaxation of censorship in the 1960s prompted interest in the [Theatre of the Absurd](#), its main exponent in Spain being longtime expatriate [Fernando Arrabal](#), a playwright, novelist, and filmmaker who has drawn some of the raw material for his works from his traumatic childhood. Critics have identified a violent resentment of his conservative, pro-Franco mother and innumerable Freudian complexes in Arrabal's plays, and his childlike characters—both innocent and criminal, tender and sadistic, all existing within a Kafkaesque atmosphere—afford these plays enormous individuality. Using black humour and grotesque and Surrealist elements, Arrabal creates nightmarish works.

Following Franco's death, several new, younger dramatists gained recognition in the 1980s. Acclaimed by critics and audiences alike were Fernando Fernán Gómez, Fermín Cabal, and Luis Alonso de Santos. Replete with intertextual references and cinematographic staging techniques, these playwrights' works treat contemporary problems but approach them more playfully than their socially committed predecessors. Other playwrights who emerged in the closing years of the 20th century include Miguel Romeo Esteo, Francisco Rojas Zorrilla, Angel García Pintado, Marcial Suárez, Jerónimo López Mozo, Domingo Miras, and Alberto Miralles.

Poetry

The Civil War and its traumatic aftermath prompted the abandonment of pure poetry for simpler approaches. Formal discipline, devotion to clarity through direct imagery, and a reduced vocabulary were stressed, and the social and human content increased. Leaders of postwar *poesía social* (social poetry) are sometimes referred to as a "Basque triumvirate": Gabriel Celaya, a prewar Surrealist who became a leading spokesman for the opposition to Franco; Blas de Otero, an existentialist writing in the vein of Antonio Machado's *Campos de Castilla*; and Ángela Figuera, a teacher, writer of children's stories, feminist, and social activist, best known for poetry celebrating women and motherhood and denouncing the abuse of women and children. "Social" poets shared utilitarian views of their art: poetry became a tool for changing society, the poet being merely another worker struggling toward a better future. These altruistic writers renounced artistic experimentation and aesthetic gratification in favour of propagandistic goals, sociological themes, and authorial self-effacement. Some describe poetry's trajectory during this period from "pure" to "social" as a move from *yo* to *nosotros* ("I" to "we"), from personal to collective concerns. Aleixandre and Alonso, survivors of the Generation of 1927, wrote poetry in the social vein after the Civil War, as did Jesús López Pacheco and many younger poets.

Yet, notwithstanding the predominance of social poetry during the 1950s and '60s, many important poets—such as Luis Felipe Vivanco and Luis Rosales—did not share its concerns, and social poetry as a movement suffered desertions even before the much-publicized launching of the *novísimos* in 1970. Some, such as Vicente Gaos and Gloria Fuertes, preferred existential emphases. Others made poetry an epistemological inquiry or method, including Francisco Brines, Jaime Gil de Biedma, and [José Ángel Valente](#).

The "newest" poets (*novísimos*)—among them Pere Gimferrer, Antonio Colinas, Leopoldo Panero, and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán—rejected social engagement, preferring experimental modes from Surrealism to camp. Their poetry, often neo-Baroque, self-consciously cosmopolitan, and intertextual, was a late 20th-century variant of *culteranismo*; it emphasized museums, foreign films, international travel—anything but contemporary Spain with its problems. Paralleling the New Novel of the 1970s, they cultivated language for its own sake and showcased their individuality and culture, abandoning social poetry's authorial invisibility.

Among poets who gained prominence after Franco are Guillermo Carnero, whose work is characterized by a plethora of cultural references and centred upon the theme of death; Jaime Siles, whose abstract, reflexive poetry belongs to Spain's so-called *poesía de pensamiento* ("poetry of thought"); and Luis Antonio de Villena, an outspoken representative of Spain's gay revolution. Prominent women poets during the closing decades of the 20th century include [María Victoria Atencia](#), known for poetry inspired by domestic situations, for her cultivation of the themes of art, music, and painting, and for her later existentialist contemplations; Pureza Canelo, known especially for her ecological poetry and feminist volumes; Juana Castro; Clara Janés; and Ana Rossetti, noteworthy for her erotic verse.

Catalan literature

The [Catalan language](#) is a branch of peninsular rather than of southern Gallo-Romance. It shows, nonetheless, many traces of kinship with Provençal, and the literature in its origins used the Occitan language (*langue d'oc*, the dialects of Old French spoken south of the Loire River) and the poetic forms cultivated by troubadours north of the Pyrenees.

Medieval period

Poetry

The early Catalan [troubadours](#) Guillem de Bergadà, Hug de Mataplana, Guillem de Cervera, and others were genuine Provençal poets. About 100 years later, in the late 14th century, Provençal influence apparently lessened, and poets turned to northern France for inspiration. They took over the long French narratives on romance themes such as the Arthurian cycle and used the *noves rimades* metre, a sequence of octosyllabic rhymed couplets. Several poets working in this tradition carried the new interest in the *langue d'oïl* (the dialects of Old French spoken north of the Loire) to the extent of incorporating passages of French poetry in their poems.

The great period of Catalan poetry was the 15th century, after [John I](#) of Aragon had established in 1393 a poetic academy in Barcelona on the model of the academy in Toulouse with *jocs florals* (“floral games,” or poetry congresses), including literary competitions. This royal encouragement continued under Martin I and Ferdinand I and helped to emancipate the literary style from foreign influences. As the century advanced, Valencia emerged as a new focus of literary activity: a school of poetry developing there was noted for its characteristic use of eight-line decasyllabic verses with crossed, or “chained,” rhymes and final four-line refrain, illustrating a turning away from French models and a new inspiration from Italy. The *cants d'amor* and *cants de mort* (“songs of love” and “songs of death”) by [Ausiàs March](#) contained the finest verses ever written in Catalan, exerted influence in 16th-century Castile, and continue to influence modern Catalan poets. Jaume Roig's *Lo spill o llibre de les dones* (c. 1460; “The Mirror or Book of Women”) was very different—a caustic satire on woman, written in more than 16,000 four-syllable lines, portraying contemporary Valencian life vividly. Johan Roig de Corella, a Valencian lyricist, was perhaps the best representative of the Renaissance.

After the union of Aragon with Castile, the Castilian language predominated throughout Spain, spelling a long eclipse of Catalan literature. Nevertheless, [Juan Boscán Almogáver](#) inaugurated a new Castilian school of poetry, and Castilians regard him as a landmark in the history of their Renaissance; by the time Boscán's works were published (1543), Catalan poetry had been dead for 50 years.

Prose

Though the oldest document (the text of an oath by a bishop of Urgel) dates from c. 1100, literary prose did not begin until the end of the 13th century. It was written in the everyday speech found in charters from the time of James I's accession to the Aragonese throne in 1213; four great chronicles that survive represent the peak of medieval Catalan prose. The anonymous *Llibre dels feyts del rey en Jacme* (“Book of the Deeds of King James”), compiled after James I's death in 1276, and Ramon Muntaner's account of the Grand Catalan Company's expedition to the Morea in southern Greece and of James II's conquest of Sardinia were distinguished by skill of narration and quality of language. Bernat Desclot's chronicle deals with the reign of Peter I the Great; though the account of Peter IV the Ceremonious is ascribed to Bernat Desclot, it was planned and revised by the King himself.

[Ramon Llull](#) was unequaled in his encyclopaedic production, in Catalan, Arabic, and Latin, covering every branch of medieval knowledge and thought. His exhaustive theological treatise *Llibre de contemplació en Déu* (c. 1272; “Book of the Contemplation of God”) began Catalonia’s golden age of literature, providing incidentally a mine of information on contemporary society. The *Llibre d’Eust e Blanquerna* (c. 1284; *Blanquerna; a Thirteenth Century Romance*) founded Catalan fiction. It included the *Llibre d’amic e amat* (*Book of the Lover and the Beloved*), a masterpiece of mysticism, while his *Fèlix* (c. 1288) and *Llibre de l’orde de cauaylería* (between 1275 and 1281; *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*) were instructive works in a narrative framework.

[Bernat Metge](#) began the “classical age” by translating Boccaccio’s story of Griselda from Petrarch’s Latin version and, clothing his scholastic learning with poetic imagination, achieved the stylistic masterpiece of Catalan prose. The chivalric romance *Tirant lo Blanc* (c. 1460) by Joanot Martorell was notable of its kind for the theme, drawn from Muntaner, of the real adventures of the Catalans in the Middle East. The anonymous late 14th-century *Curial e Güelfa* draws on Desclot and is the only other Catalan romance in this vein.

The beginnings of drama were represented by a 15th-century Assumption play, *Misteri d’Elch*, which is still performed annually at Elche on the Feast of the Assumption.

Decline: 16th–18th century

With the loss of political independence, literary and linguistic independence was also lost, and Catalan fell to the level of a patois, kept alive only in the countryside and in the pulpit. The 16th century furnishes a single poet worthy of the name: Pere Serafi, some of whose *Cants d’amor* (1565), written in imitation of Ausiàs March but less obscure, are graceful enough to merit remembrance. In prose, only scholars, chiefly antiquaries and historians, still wrote in Catalan. Forty years of research and abundant documentation give interest to the *Crònica universal del principat de Cathalunya*, a history of the Catalan kingdom, of Jeroni Pujadas, of which only the first part (1609) is in Catalan. Thereafter, the eclipse was almost complete. Catalan remained only as the language of folk song and ballad; in these—first collected in the *Romancerillo catalán* (1853; “Little Collection of Catalan Ballads”) by Manuel Milà i Fontanals, the historian who played a considerable part in the Catalan revival—it lived on until the reawakening.

The Renaixensa and after

In 1814 appeared the *Gramática y apologia de la lengua catalana* (“Grammar and Apology of the Catalan Language”) of Josep Pau Ballot i Torres, a forerunner of the literary and linguistic renaissance (Renaixensa) that marked the Romantic period in Catalonia. The pioneers, however, saw the inadequacies of the ancient language for the expression of spiritual and intellectual ideas. The Institut d’Estudis Catalans, founded in Barcelona in 1907, has played a notable part in the deliberate enrichment and purifying of Catalan as a vehicle for contemporary thought.

Bonaventura Carles Aribau’s patriotic *Oda a la pàtria* (1832; “Ode to the Fatherland”) and the poems of Joaquim Rubió i Ors and Victor Balaguer prepared the way for the mysticism of Jacintó Verdaguer Santaló, a great epic poet (*L’Atlántida* [1877], *Canigó* [1886]). Miguel Costa i Llobera cultivated a classical perfection of form. In Joan Maragall i Gorina, Catalonia found its first great modern poet who, in spiritual quality, exerted a powerful influence on later poets.

The foundations of modern Catalan prose were laid by the critical writings of Rubió i Ors, Francisco Pi i Margall, one of the four presidents of the Spanish Republic of 1873, and Josep Torras i Bages (*La tradició catalana* [1892;

“The Catalan Tradition”]). One of the best and most influential writers in prose was the essayist [Eugenio d’Ors](#) (pseudonym “Xenius”), whose philosophical novel *La ben plantada* (1911; “Firmly Rooted”) was one of the most notable works in modern Catalan literature.

Catalan dramatists have produced plays of considerable originality. [Àngel Guimerà](#) achieved a European reputation with *Terra baixa* (1896; “Lowlands”), which inspired a German and a French opera and was widely translated. The many social dramas of Ignasi Iglésias, inspired by the early works of Gerhart Hauptmann, included one near-masterpiece, *Els Vells* (1903). Adrià Gual, author of several works of fantasy, did his best work as director of the Teatre Intim, founded in Barcelona in 1898, which familiarized the public with the great drama of all countries and ages.

Further development of modern Catalan literature was delayed by the dictatorship (1923–30) of Miguel Primo de Rivera, who banned the use of any language other than Castilian, and by the Civil War of 1936–39. Many Catalan men of letters fled abroad, and those who remained found the political climate hardly conducive to productive literary activity.

Conditions in Catalonia improved only slightly during the postwar years as the government of Gen. Francisco Franco adopted a generally repressive policy toward Catalan culture. Although some Catalan writers chose to ignore the prevailing realities and cultivated what could be construed as a literature of artistic escape, the most influential poets of the period, Salvador Espriu and Pere Quart (pseudonym of Joan Oliver), began writing poetry that dealt with social issues in a decidedly Realistic mode. Other recent Catalan authors of note, such as the prose writers Mercè Rodoreda and Josep Maria Espinàs, also have largely grounded their works in contemporary social life.