Sarah Ann Wells, University of Notre Dame

Abstract:

**Leopoldo Lugones** (1874-1938). The author of short stories, novels, essays, and journalism, Leopoldo Lugones is best known as Argentina’s most famous *modernista* writer, with several volumes of influential and highly varied poetry that ultimately led to an exhaustion of *modernista* verse*.* His other major contributors to Argentine literature include his early contributor to the genre of fantastic fiction and his essays on Argentine identity and literary history. In the latter, he located the marginalized figure of the *gaucho* as a romantic origin for a national culture. Lugones’ legacy has been marked by the increasingly nationalist-fascist bent of his poetry and essays, beginning in the 1920s. However, the legacy of his earlier, audacious poetic experiments on the future poetic movements of the *avant-gardes*persists.

Encyclopedia Entry:

**Leopoldo Lugones** (1874-1938). The author of short stories, novels, essays, and journalism, Leopoldo Lugones is best known as Argentina’s most famous fin-de-siècle ***modernista*** poet (not to be confused with *modernist).* He is alsoknown for his early contributions to fantastic fiction and for his prose works on national identity and literary history, which would becoming increasingly nationalist beginning in the 1920s.

Lugones grew up near Córdoba, Argentina, and moved to Buenos Aires as a young man in 1897. At the beginning of his career, he wrote for the country’s major newspapers and co-founded of the socialist journal *La Montaña* (“The Mountain,” 1897). Beginning in the 20th century, he devoted himself almost exclusively to poetry, fiction, and essays.

Lugones’ poetry is characterized principally by its virtuosity, acute formalism, exaggeration, and interest in the grotesque. Like other *modernistas,* his work shows the influences of French poetic movements **Parnassianism**, **Symbolism,** and **Decadentism,** as well as the Spanish Baroque. He is also known for the dramatic changes in his style; all of his volumes of poetry are quite different in their formal structures and scope. Still, central themes emerge: the relationship between science and mysticism, eroticism, the role of the artist/poet in a modernizing world; the place of Latin America within a broader Western tradition, and language itself. Throughout his lifetime, Lugones also maintained an emphasis on metaphor and rhyme. Writers that influenced his earlier and most influential poetry include **Fredric Nietzsche**, Walt Whitman, Paul Verlaine, **Rubén Darío**, and the Franco-Uruguayan symbolist poet **Jules Lafourge** (1860-1887).

His most important poetic works are *Las montañas de oro* (“Mountains of Gold,” 1897), *Los crepúsculos del jardín* (“The Twilights of the Garden,” 1905), and *Lunario sentimental* (“Sentimental Lunar Calendar” 1909). *Twilights of the Garden* anticipates the latter’s experiments with language, particularly neologisms. The more radical experimentation of *Sentimental Calendar* pushed the tenants of *modernista* verse to its limits with its near-surrealist images, cacophony and simultaneity, anticipating the avant-garde poetic experiments of the early 1920s, despite their rejection of him. After the publication of this book, Lugones’ writings would take a more conservative turn, both in aesthetic and political terms. During his lifetime, he was praised and befriended by the foremost *modernista* poet **Rubén Darío** (Nicaragua, 1867-1916).

Lugones’ prose works also had a significant impact on early twentieth century Argentine literature and culture. *Las fuerzas extrañas* (“Strange Forces,” 1906)are early examples of fantastic literature in the River Plate region, anticipating works by Horacio Quiroga, **Jorge Luis Borges**, and Adolfo Bioy Casares.The varied influences of Darwinism, positivism, occultism, and theosophy all make appearances in these stories, which trace the limits of science and the quest for an underlying unity in the world. During this same period, Lugones also published *El tamaño del espacio* (1921)*,* among the first published commentaries on **Albert Einstein**.

His nationalist speeches and essayistic texts are highly controversial, as they became increasingly fascist in his later years. In his “Ayacucho address” of 1924, declaimed the need for “the hour of the sword,” a violent nationalist turn of the State; he would go on to support the Argentine military coup of 1930. On the other hand, despite their nationalistic and elitist undertones, his works canonizing the figure of the *gaucho* are pivotal in Argentine literary history. His historical novel *La guerra gaucha* (“The Gaucho War,” 1905) later became a well-known film (1942). Perhaps of greater impact were a series of conferences he gave in the Odeon Theatre in Buenos Aires in 1913, subsequently published in *El Payador* (“The Guitar Player,” 1916). In them, Lugones argued that the gaucho constituted the centre of an Argentine poetic tradition with both national and broader Western implications, and urged Argentines to look to this figure to create a national literature. His speech inspired debates and, along with contemporaneous texts, was effectively responsible for the canonization of the gaucho and the 19th century *gauchesca* literature. At the time, Buenos Aires was being reshaped by immigration, rapid urbanization, and new classes and reading publics; in this context, Lugones sought to fashion the poet as an oracle for a national essence. In this sense, he expressed a modernist anxiety about the role of the masses found later, for example, in the Spanish essayist **José** **Ortega y Gasset**.

This broader project to define and shape Argentine national identity was a constant until Lugones’ suicide in 1938. The last book published was the volume of poetry, *Romances de Río Seco* (“Romances of the Rio Seco,” 1938). Like the volumes published throughout the 1920s, it marked a turn away from his earlier, more audacious experiments.

List of Selected Works

*Obras completas* (1999), Buenos Aires, Pasco (Spanish)

*Obras poéticas completas* (1959), Madrid, Aguilar (Spanish)

*Obras en prosa* (1962), Madrid, Aguilar (Spanish)

*Leopoldo Lugones: selected writings* (2008)*.* Gwen Kirkpatrick and Sergio Gabriel Waisman, eds., Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press (English)

*La guerra gaucha* (1954)*,* Buenos Aires, Emecé Editores (Spanish)

*Romancero* (1941), Buenos Aires-México, Espasa-Calpe argentina, s.a. (Spanish)

*Odas seculares* (1923), Buenos Aires, Editorial Babel (Spanish)

*Antología poética* (1982), Madrid, Alianza (Spanish)

*Romances del Río Seco* (1938), Buenos Aires, Francisco A. Colombo (Spanish)

*Lunario sentimental* (1988), Madrid, Cátedra (Spanish)

*Cuentos fatales* (1967), Buenos Aires, Huemul (Spanish)

*Las fuerzas extrañas* (1996)*,* Madrid, Cátedra (Spanish).

*El Payador* (1961),Buenos Aires, Ediciones Centurion (Spanish)

[*Las montañas del oro. Poema, tiene tres ciclos i dos reposorios* (1919)*,*](http://firstsearch.oclc.org.proxy.library.nd.edu/WebZ/FSFETCH?fetchtype=fullrecord:sessionid=fsapp5-43443-hp03pb0l-8jvb07:entitypagenum=5:0:recno=19:resultset=1:format=FI:next=html/record.html:bad=error/badfetch.html:entitytoprecno=19:entitycurrecno=19:numrecs=1)Montevideo, Editorial ríoplatense (Spanish)

*El ángel de la sombra* (1926)*,*Buenos Aires: M. Gleizer (Spanish)

*Strange Forces* (2001)*.* Translated by Gilbert Alter-Gilbert, Pittsburgh, PA : Latin America Literary Review Press (English)

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Further Reading

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## Kirkpatrick, Gwen (1989). *The Dissonant Legacy of* Modernismo*: Lugones, Herrera y Reissig, and the voices of modern Spanish American poetry,* Berkeley, University of California.

## Speck, Paula (1976). “*Las Fuerzas Extranas:* Leopoldo Lugones y las Raíces de la Literatura Fantástica en el Río de la Plata.” *Revista Iberoamericana* XLII (96-97): 411-426.

Terán, Oscar (2002). “Lugones: arielismo y modernidad.” *Cuadernos Americanos* 96: 140-145.

Washbourne, R. and Sergio Gabriel Waisman, eds (2007). “Leopoldo Lugones.” *An Anthology of Spanish-American* ModernismoNew York, Modern Language Association Texts and Translations: 203-223.