



Juan de la Rosa: Memoirs of the Last Soldier of the Independence Movement (Library of Latin America)

By Nataniel Aguirre

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Long considered a classic in Bolivia, *Juan de la Rosa* tells the story of a young boy's coming of age during the violent and tumultuous years of Bolivia's struggle for independence. Indeed, in this remarkable novel, Juan's search for his personal identity functions as an allegory of Bolivia's search for its identity as a nation. Set in the early 1800s, this remarkable novel is narrated by one of the last surviving Bolivian rebels, octogenarian Juan de la Rosa. He commits his memories to paper in order to pass on that uniquely personal understanding of the past "with which serious historians never busy themselves." Juan recreates his childhood in the rebellious town of Cochabamba, and with it a large cast of full-bodied, Dickensian characters both heroic and malevolent, from Juan's wise and self-sacrificing tutor, Brother Justo, to the ruthless colonial general Goyeneche. The larger cultural dislocations brought about by Bolivia's political upheaval are echoed in those experienced by Juan, whose mother's untimely death sets off a chain of unpredictable events that propel him into the fiery crucible of the South American Independence Movement. Outraged by Juan's outspokenness against Spanish rule and his awakening political consciousness, his loyalist guardians banish him to the countryside, where he witnesses firsthand the Spaniards' violent repression and rebels' valiant resistance that crystallize both his personal destiny and that of his country.

Few novels combine historical scholarship, operatic drama, comic detail, and political fervor so seamlessly. In Sergio Gabriel Waisman's fluid translation, English readers have access to *Juan de la Rosa* for the very first time.

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