

[Murray on Shumway, 'A Woman, a Man, a Nation: Mariquita Sánchez, Juan Manuel de Rosas, and the Beginnings of Argentina'](#)

Review published on Friday, October 16, 2020

Jeffrey M. Shumway. *A Woman, a Man, a Nation: Mariquita Sánchez, Juan Manuel de Rosas, and the Beginnings of Argentina*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2019. xiv + 334 pp. \$34.95 (paper), [ISBN 978-0-8263-6090-8](#); \$95.00 (cloth), [ISBN 978-0-8263-6089-2](#).



Reviewed by Pamela Murray (University of Alabama at Birmingham) **Published on** H-LatAm (October, 2020) **Commissioned by** Casey M. Lurtz (Johns Hopkins University)

Printable Version: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=54980>

In *A Woman, a Man, a Nation: Mariquita Sanchez, Juan Manuel de Rosas and the Beginnings of Argentina* (2019), historian Jeffrey Shumway guides readers through Argentina's turbulent early national history by focusing on the experiences of two major protagonists of that history (c. 1806-52), both members of the same founding generation. His approach offers a close-up-and-personal view of the nation-making process that, combined with his readable narrative, should appeal to students and scholars alike, especially those new to the subject. It also allows him to broach larger issues crucial to an understanding of Argentina and nineteenth-century Spanish America generally such as the ideological conflict between liberals and conservatives that fueled chronic political instability; the role of caudillos as power brokers; foreign interventions and threats to national sovereignty; and the influence of elite women on public opinion, a potent factor in independence-era and early national politics.

Divided into twelve chapters, Shumway's study begins with a look at the late-colonial society that shaped both protagonists in childhood and in which Sanchez in particular, the older of the two, came of age as the privileged only daughter of a wealthy Spanish merchant and his wife, an equally wealthy native of Buenos Aires. Its first two chapters offer a glimpse of late-colonial elite family life and mores, highlighting the power of parents over children. They show how young Rosas and Sanchez both defied parental will when it came to choosing a spouse, in part reflecting the impact of new ideas about individual freedom and romantic love. (Rosas's later denial of the same freedom to his daughter Manuelita suggests that, at least in his case, that impact had been minor). Perhaps more important, these chapters also reveal the common elite social background and close personal ties between the Rosas and Sanchez families—ties that, years later, would shield Sanchez from the violent excesses of the Rosas dictatorship.

Chapters 3 through 5 narrate the convoluted saga of Argentine political independence starting with the 1806 and 1808 English invasions repelled by Buenos Aires militias and culminating with the 1810 "May Revolution," when militia leaders overthrew Viceroy Cisneros, symbol of a reviled Spanish authority. Chapter 4 highlights Sanchez's role in this revolution. It stresses the influence of her salon,

Citation: H-Net Reviews. *Murray on Shumway, 'A Woman, a Man, a Nation: Mariquita Sánchez, Juan Manuel de Rosas, and the Beginnings of Argentina'*. H-LatAm. 10-18-2020.

<https://networks.h-net.org/node/23910/reviews/6587785/murray-shumway-woman-man-nation-mariquita-s%C3%A1nchez-juan-manuel-de>

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.

a magnet for local leaders and foreign visitors and, together with its lesser-known counterparts around the city, a kind of crucible of creole patriot identity and opinion that would lead to new national policies. Chapter 5, meanwhile, examines the political Pandora's box opened by separation from Spain. It discusses the Argentine provinces' growing resistance to Buenos Aires leadership along with the uphill struggle to win foreign recognition of the infant United Provinces; this struggle is vividly portrayed in the story of Sanchez's husband, Martin Thompson, whose lonely mission to the United States in quest of official American recognition ended in failure and personal tragedy (descent into mental illness).

The next four chapters broadly explain the circumstances behind Juan Manuel de Rosas's rise to power at the end of the 1820s and his Federalist dictatorship of the 1830s-40s. Chapters 6 and 8 ("The Anarchy of 1820" and "The Tumultuous Year of 1829," respectively) highlight Rosas's emergence as the indispensable man—the only one capable of ensuring order and stability in a Buenos Aires province continuously threatened by foreign and domestic adversaries as well as by the incompetence or short-sightedness of leaders such as the otherwise brilliant Bernardino Rivadavia. While Shumway at one point compares Rosas to the U.S. president Andrew Jackson—both, after all, were famous frontier Indian fighters who appealed to the common man—the comparison breaks down on closer scrutiny. Rosa preferred negotiating with the Ranquel and other tribes; as Shumway shows in chapter 9, he won the Ranquels' trust. This chapter, moreover, is one of the most interesting in the book. It draws a thorough and nuanced portrait of the Rosas regime as the latter emerged in the early 1830s. Synthesizing the relatively recent research of Argentine scholars such as Gabriel Dimeglio, it reveals, for example, the roles played by some of Rosas's allies. Among these was Rosas's wife, the impressively fierce Encarnación Ezcurra. It was Ezcurra who ensured the triumph of the Rosista (or, "Apostolic") faction of Federalism in 1833 and who founded the Sociedad Popular Restauradora, some of whose members were willing to use violence to ensure conformity to the new Rosas regime; this small group, known as the Mazorca, would acquire a fearsome reputation among Argentines.

Overall, readers learn that while Rosas was indeed a tyrant, ruthless in his use of violence (including tools of state terror like the Mazorca) against opponents, he also was conscious of his larger political aims and purposes. He saw himself as the country's savior, that is, its guarantor of order and stability and protector of its sovereignty, so often challenged by the British and the French. To fulfill these roles, he gave the lower classes a stake in his government, catering to them and turning himself into their idol while simultaneously making them the bulwark of his dictatorship; he became a sort of populist king, complete with jesters like Eusebio.

Shumway seeks to help us understand Rosas the dictator by comparing him in the abstract to Simon Bolivar, the first major Latin American leader to articulate the dilemma of postcolonial governance in an age of revolution and republicanism ("liberty, equality, and fraternity"). It is worth noting, however, that while both men indeed faced the same question—how to restore order and reconfigure authority after the fall of monarchy—they approached it differently. Even with his undeniable authoritarian impulses, Bolivar was a cosmopolitan son of the Enlightenment who understood the importance of constitutional order; in this sense at least, he had more in common with Mariquita than with Rosas. In short, it might have been more fruitful for Shumway to compare Rosas's experience to that of some of his peers, other caudillos of the post-Bolivar generation such as General Juan Jose Flores of Ecuador, Jose Antonio Paez of Venezuela, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna of Mexico, or Rafael

Citation: H-Net Reviews. Murray on Shumway, 'A Woman, a Man, a Nation: Mariquita Sánchez, Juan Manuel de Rosas, and the Beginnings of Argentina'. H-LatAm. 10-18-2020.

<https://networks.h-net.org/node/23910/reviews/6587785/murray-shumway-woman-man-nation-mariquita-s%C3%A1nchez-juan-manuel-de>

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.

Carrera of Guatemala. Like “el Mulatto,” these not only favored autocratic (or, at least, firmly centralized) government but sought to appeal to the mass of ordinary citizens less through laws and speeches than through practices reflecting respect for popular traditions and religious-cultural sensibilities.

Undoubtedly due to the fact that so much more has been written about Rosas than about Sanchez, moreover, Shumway’s narrative is uneven. After chapter 7’s discussion of her important role as a founding member of the Sociedad de Beneficiencia—an institution through which the leading ladies of Buenos Aires took charge of public education—Sanchez tends to disappear. Toward the end of chapter 8, for example, we learn that she was elected president of the Sociedad right after Rosas’s own election as governor of Buenos Aires (December 1829). Yet Shumway has little to say about it afterward—or about the nature of her relationship with her old friend over the next six or so years, crucial ones in the making both of the Rosas dictatorship and of the Sociedad that depended on it, now under Mariquita’s leadership. In chapter 9, beyond a brief account of circumstances contributing to Sanchez’s “disillusion with the state of things in Buenos Aires” (p. 181), including tensions related to the choice of a new French consul, it is not quite clear why Sanchez ultimately chose a voluntary exile in Montevideo in 1836. It is clear that she did not have to leave and that she remained free to return. One cannot help but wonder what other disagreements she had with Rosas.

While chapter 10 (“The Rosas Regime under Fire”) touches briefly on Sanchez’s connections to elements of a growing international and transnational opposition to Rosas in the 1840s, including other exiles and the French, it is not until chapter 11 (“Mature Exile, Mature Tyranny”) that readers catch up with her. Here we learn of how she recreated her salon in exile, gathering around her members of a rising new generation of Argentine leaders, the Generation of 1837. Shumway makes good use of Sanchez’s published personal correspondence to discuss her relationship with young men like Juan Bautista Alberdi and Esteban Echeverria. We thus begin to see this remarkable woman’s political legacy: Sanchez not only met and corresponded with men destined to guide Argentina after Rosas’s fall from power (1852), but nurtured them, serving simultaneously as a friend, muse, and surrogate mother.

Given her elite social credentials and ongoing personal connection to the dictator and his family, moreover, one might speculate that Sanchez also functioned as a kind of gatekeeper—a role assumed by salonnières in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France. But that is another story. For now, Shumway has given us a tantalizing peek into the role of personal and familial relationships within postcolonial Argentine society and political life. In the case of Juan Manuel and Mariquita, despite their great differences in taste, cultural orientation, and politics, these relationships apparently managed to survive the rigors of dictatorship.

Citation: Pamela Murray. Review of Shumway, Jeffrey M., *A Woman, a Man, a Nation: Mariquita Sánchez, Juan Manuel de Rosas, and the Beginnings of Argentina*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. October, 2020. **URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=54980>

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Citation: H-Net Reviews. Murray on Shumway, 'A Woman, a Man, a Nation: Mariquita Sánchez, Juan Manuel de Rosas, and the Beginnings of Argentina'. H-LatAm. 10-18-2020.
<https://networks.h-net.org/node/23910/reviews/6587785/murray-shumway-woman-man-nation-mariquita-s%C3%A1nchez-juan-manuel-de>

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.