The Romantic movement: Literature in Spain in the first third of the 19th century was still affected by the Napoleonic Wars and their long aftermath. Many liberals driven into exile by Fernando VII after 1823 sought refuge in France; and, when they returned to Spain after his death in 1833, they had been so influenced by French Romanticism that this date has been taken as the beginning of the Romantic movement in Spain. The ground had been prepared in Cádiz from 1814 onward in a debate initiated by a German, Johann Niklaus Bohl von Faber, on literary values; in Barcelona with the founding in 1823 of a review, El europeo; and in Madrid with Agustín Durán’s essay in 1828 on the drama of the Siglo de Oro and his Colección de romances antiguos (1828-32). Romanticism in Spain was, in many respects, a return to the spirit of its own earlier classics. The formal characteristics of Spanish Romantic drama—mingling of genres, rejection of unities, metrical variety--- had characterized the drama of Lope de Vega and his contemporaries, who had treated many of its themes.

The movement arrived in Spain a generation later than elsewhere and had a short life. It never became a school or had a particular leader. José de Espronceda was the one Romantic who lived his Romanticism. His Estudiante de Salamanca (appeared in two parts, 1836 and 1837; “Student of Salamanca”), Canciones (1840; “Songs”), and an unfinished work entitled El diablo mundo (1840, “The Devilish World”), were the only subjective lyrics of value that the period produced, and they marked a milestone in the development of poetic form. A play, Don Alvaro o la fuerza del sino (1835; “Don Alvaro or, The Force of Destiny”) by Angel de Saavedra, duque de Rivas, and the preface, by the critic Antonio Alcalá Galiano, to Savvedra’s narrative poem El moro expósito (1834; “The Founding Moor”), expressed well a
philosophy of Romanticism. Later, three poets revealed one of Romanticism’s concerns, which was **liberation of the individual personality**. Gustavo Adolfo Becquer, in *76 Rimas* (1871, “Short Rhymes”), expressed his own tortured emotions, such as solitude, disillusion, hopeless on love, etc. Ramón de Campoamor wrote *Doloras* (1845; “Suffering”), *Pequeños poemas* (1871; “Little Poems”), and *Humoradas* (new poetic forms of his invention in 1886), attempting to bring poetry back into the realm of ideas; Gaspar Núñez de Arce wrote *Gritos del combate* (1875; “Combat Cries”), patriotic, declamatory exhortations defending democracy.

**Costrumbrismo**: *Costumbrismo* was a movement that started earlier than Romanticism and flourished at the same time. It concerned **realistic prose writing**, often within a narrative framework. Both the *cuadro de costumbres* and the *artículo de costumbres* were short literary sketches on customs, manners, or character, but the *cuadro* 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, was probably the first work of this kind, but the most important were by **Mariano José de Larra**, outstanding prose writer and most critical mind of his age, who dissected society pitilessly with irony and humor in *Artículos* (1835-37); by Ramón de Mesonero Romanos, whose *Escenas martiritenses* (1836-42; “ Scenes of Madrid”) gave a vivid picture of contemporary life; and by Serafín Estébanez Calderón, who portrayed the manners, folklore, and history of Andalucía in *Escenas andaluces* (1847; “Andalusian Sketches”). These writings and other similar pieces, with their **realistic** and **regional elements**, helped to prepare for a revival of the novel.

**Revival of the Spanish novel**: For more than two centuries the novel, with which Spain had made its greatest contribution to literature, had been almost extinct. Most
of Spain’s novelists in the 19th century chose to escape rather than confront the reality around them.

The first novels of the revival were more interesting for powers of observation and description (a continuation of costumbrismo) than for imaginative or narrative quality. Fernan Caballero (Cecilia Bohl de Faber, 1796-1877) used the technique of observation that was to rehabilitate the novel in La gaviota (1849; “The Seagull”), which depicted the picturesque and pious customs of the Andalucian villages, in danger of destruction by urban liberalism. In 1874 the great period of the regional novel began with El sombrero de tres picos (“The Three-Cornered Hat”), a sparkling tale of peasant malice by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón. Also in El escándalo (“Scandal”, 1875) where Alarcón, with excessive action and a moralizing attitude, examined the quality of human life in its inner complexity. The greatest regional writer was José María de Pereda, whose Realism was a powerful re-creation of nature as the abiding reality, more important than the individual. Sotileza (“Subtlety”, 1884) and Peñas arriba (“Up the Mountains”, 1893) revealed his support for traditional values of religion, family, and country life. Juan Valera, the most elegant, open-minded, cosmopolitan literary figure in 19th century Spain, limited himself to the pleasures of plot manipulation and a fine analysis of the psychology of love was expressed in the most highly polished style of the period, Pepita Jiménez (1874). To a slightly younger generation, distinguished from the older one by the abandonment of superficial romanticism and by the absorption, in some degree, of doctrines of French Naturalism, belong Emilia Pardo Bazán (1852-1921), Clarín (Leopoldo Alás, 1852-1901), and Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867-1928). Emilia, condesa de Pardo Bazán, in her novels of Galicia, Los pozos de Ulloa (1886, “The Son of Bondwoman”) and La madre naturaleza (1887, “Mother of Nature”), attempted to combine a Spanish Christian outlook with French Naturalism that made clear their
incompatibility, and in later novels, she returned to a genuinely Spanish Realism. Clarín stood out for his long novel, *La Regenta* ("The Governor’s Wife", 1884), a penetrating study of the interaction between individuals and institutions in a tired old city in Asturias.

**Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920):** But the greatest figure who created his world against the general mediocrity of the 19th century novel is Benito Pérez Galdós, who had the intellectual power, breadth of vision, and artistic imagination, and with profound human sympathy he achieved two enormous tasks. The first was to show Spain what it was. He did it in his panoramic “contemporary novels” of bourgeois city life (for example, *Fortunata y Jacinta*, 1886-1887). The picture revealed was of something close to social and political chaos, in which human dignity had to be salvaged by charity and understanding. The second task was to show Spain how it had come to this state of affairs. Galdós did this in his 46 volumes of novelized history, the *Episodios nacionales* ("National Episodes", 1873-1879; 1898-1912), which depict the entire turbulent course of events from the battle of Trafalgar (1895) to the end of the century.