



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (072)

TITLE: *La rampa*

AUTHOR: Carmen de Burgos

EDITOR: Susan Larson

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I. OVERVIEW & SIGNIFICANCE

Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932), a trailblazing journalist, author, translator, and feminist intellectual, was a formidable voice in early 20th-century Spain. Though chronologically part of the Generation of '98, her radical progressivism and modernity set her apart. *La rampa* (1917), her second full-length novel, stands as an indispensable urban narrative, dedicated to the "multitude of helpless and disoriented women" who sought guidance from her.

This novel offers a poignant, female-centric view of Madrid during its tumultuous modernization, revealing how the promise of urban freedom often proved empty for working-class women. The central metaphor of the "rampa" (ramp) ingeniously captures this duality: it signifies both a literal urban pathway and the protagonist Isabel's inexorable descent into poverty and humiliation, embodying the "fatalmente empujada por la rampa de su vida." Yet, the novel simultaneously portrays the allure of Madrid's new possibilities and the nascent independence sought by women.

Edited by Susan Larson, this critical edition provides rich contextualization of Carmen de Burgos's pioneering life and the urban development of Madrid. *La rampa* is an essential text for advanced courses in 20th-century Spanish Literature, Urban Studies, Social Naturalism, and Women's and Gender Studies, offering a vital lens into the socio-economic transformations and feminist struggles of its era.

II. CONTEXT & CRITICAL APPROACHES

This edition facilitates a profound exploration of modern Spain's social history, urban development, and the evolving role of women, through the unique perspective of a pioneering author.

The "Rampa" as Ambiguous Metaphor: Descent vs. Opportunity:

Analyze the central metaphor of the "rampa" (ramp) as presented in the novel. How does it represent both Isabel's descent into poverty and humiliation, and the physical pathways of a modernizing Madrid?

Discuss how this ambiguity reflects the paradoxical nature of modernity for working-class women, offering both promise of independence and the harsh reality of exploitation and vulnerability.

Examine the novel's philosophical roots in determinism and positivism, particularly how the environment shapes human destiny.

Madrid in Modernization: The Paradox of Unequal Modernity:

Explore Madrid as a character in itself. How does de Burgos depict the city's rapid urban development (Gran Vía, new transport, cultural centers) alongside its stark social inequalities and chaotic living conditions for the working class?



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Discuss "the process of destructive creation" (Marx) as applied to Madrid's urban planning, and how it benefited the bourgeoisie while exacerbating the struggles of the proletariat. Analyze the representation of public spaces (Calle del Carmen, Puerta del Sol, cinematógrafo) and how they offer moments of fleeting enjoyment or new forms of commodification for women.

Carmen de Burgos: Pioneering Feminist and the "New Woman":

Examine Carmen de Burgos's biography as a "New Woman." How did her professional life (first female journalist in Spain, war correspondent, educator, political activist) embody her feminist ideals of economic independence and self-realization?

Discuss how *La rampa* critiques the 19th-century ideal of the "Ángel del Hogar" and promotes the concept of the "Nueva Mujer Moderna," despite the limitations and harsh realities faced by women like Isabel.

Analyze de Burgos's didactic approach. How does the novel, through Isabel's experiences and the narrative's commentary, advocate for practical education and economic independence for women?

Social Critique and Documentary Realism in Working-Class Madrid:

Discuss *La rampa* as a work of social Naturalism. How does it meticulously document the lives of working women in Madrid, including their meager wages, their living conditions, and the challenges of single motherhood?

Analyze the portrayal of social welfare institutions (like the Casa de Maternidad). How does de Burgos use these settings to critique nascent social care systems and expose the tragic consequences of societal neglect for mothers and children?

Examine the "voices femeninas" within the novel, particularly the solidarity and mutual support among women, contrasting with the hostility and violence they often face from external society.

III. ADVANCED DISCUSSION & RESEARCH PROMPTS

These prompts encourage deep engagement with the text, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary connections suitable for graduate-level seminars or research projects.

The Narrative's Didacticism: Carmen de Burgos was a self-proclaimed didactic feminist. Analyze how this didactic intent is balanced with the novel's artistic merits. Does *La rampa* ever feel like a mere thesis, or does its narrative power transcend its explicit social message?

Madrid as a Protagonist: Discuss how Madrid functions as an active force in *La rampa*, shaping the characters' destinies and embodying the paradoxical nature of modernity. Compare its portrayal with other urban novels of the period.

The "New Woman" and its Limitations: While Isabel embodies elements of the "New Woman," her story ends in despair. Analyze the reasons for her "defeat." Does the novel suggest that societal structures are too rigid, or that the "New Woman" ideology itself had inherent limitations for working-class women?

Intersections of Class, Gender, and Urban Space: Conduct a close reading of scenes depicting Isabel or Águeda navigating Madrid's public spaces (Calle del Carmen, cinematógrafo). How do their class and gender identities shape their experiences and interactions within these urban environments?

The "Creation Destructiva" of Urban Planning: Analyze the historical context of Madrid's urban development (Gran Vía, Paseo de la Castellana). How does *La rampa* critique the



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"haussmannización" model of urban planning, exposing its social costs and its role in marginalizing the working class?

Comparative Feminisms: Compare Carmen de Burgos's feminist approach in *La rampa* with that of other pioneering women writers of her era (e.g., Emilia Pardo Bazán in *La Tribuna* or *Memorias de un solterón*, or Teresa de la Parra in *Ifigenia*). What are the commonalities and specificities of their critiques of patriarchy and their visions for women's liberation?

The Cultural Politics of Popular Literature: De Burgos wrote for popular serial publications. Discuss how her engagement with "popular novels" (novelas cortas) allowed her to reach a wider audience and disseminate progressive ideas. How did the format influence her narrative strategies?

IV. SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

This section complements the study of *La rampa*, providing avenues for deeper research.

Primary Text:

- Burgos, Carmen de. *La rampa*. Edited by Susan Larson. Stockcero. (TK ORDER: 072)

Key Secondary Scholarship (as referenced in the Introduction):

- **Bieder, Maryellen.** Studies on women writers of the *fin de siglo* in Spain.
- **Castañeda, Carmen.** *Carmen de Burgos: Un compromiso con la modernidad*. 2008.
- **Gili Ruiz, Rafael, and Mercedes Velasco Medina.** "La salud de la infancia en Madrid a principios del siglo XX." *Revista Española de Salud Pública*, 2004.
- **Johnson, Roberta.** *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2020.
- **Larson, Susan.** Introduction to *La rampa*. Stockcero.
- **Marx, Karl.** *Das Kapital*. (For "destructive creation" concept).
- **Nash, Mary.** *Mujeres en guerra: Heroínas, víctimas y combatientes*. Ediciones Cátedra, 2017. (For "New Woman" concept).
- **Nelken, Margarita.** *La condición de la mujer en España*. 1922.
- **Nielfa Cristóbal, Gloria.** *Mujeres en Madrid: del siglo XIX al siglo XX*. 2003.
- **Núñez Rey, Concepción.** *Carmen de Burgos: Biografía y obra*. Renacimiento, 2012.
- **Pinto, Juan B.** *La Beneficencia General de Madrid (1850-1925)*. 2000.
- **Sambricio, Carlos.** *Madrid, 1898-1931: De la ciudad al ensanche*. 2000.
- **Terán, Fernando de.** *Historia del urbanismo en España: El siglo XX*. 1980.
- **Ugarte, Michael.** *Madrid: The Novel and the City*. Liverpool University Press, 2007.

Additional Resources:

- Studies on urbanism in early 20th-century Madrid.
- Research on Spanish Naturalism and social realism.
- Scholarship on early Spanish feminism and women's labor.

V. RELATED STOCKCERO RESOURCES

- **Desire and Decay: Transgressions in Spanish Narrative (1849-1920) (6-Book Bundle).**
- **Other titles in the bundle: Navegar pintoresco, El Cura. (Caso de incesto), La Regenta, Paula y Paulita, Género y sexualidad en tres novelas proletarias de la Segunda República Española.**



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