



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (084)

TITLE: *Blanca Sol*

AUTHOR: Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera

EDITOR: Oswaldo Voysest

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I. OVERVIEW & SIGNIFICANCE

Published in 1889, Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera's *Blanca Sol* was a resounding and controversial literary success, achieving four editions during the author's lifetime. The novel immediately triggered a scandal within the conservative elite of Lima, who believed the protagonist was a thinly veiled portrait of a prominent high-society woman. In response, Cabello de Carbonera added a prologue to the second edition, defending her work as a "social novel" that drew inspiration from reality without directly copying it. The novel traces the dramatic ascent and tragic descent of its titular character, Blanca Sol, who marries for convenience to save her family from financial ruin. After squandering her husband's fortune and driving him to an asylum, a destitute Blanca turns to prostitution to maintain her opulent lifestyle and feed her six children. Combining realist techniques with powerful melodramatic elements, Cabello de Carbonera delivers a scathing critique of late 19th-century Peruvian society—a world crippled by social climbing, vanity, and a ruthless materialistic drive. This edition, edited by Oswaldo Voysest, provides an essential platform for examining the intersections of class, gender, and morality in Latin American literature, as well as the early feminist interventions of one of Peru's most formidable intellectuals.

II. CONTEXT & CRITICAL APPROACHES

This volume provides a rich framework for exploring 19th-century Peruvian society, the aesthetics of early Latin American Realism and Naturalism, and the socio-economic vulnerabilities of women.

Marriage, Money, and Social Climbing (Arribismo):

- Analyze the institution of marriage as depicted in the novel. How does Blanca Sol's initial marriage of convenience reflect the limited economic avenues available to women in 19th-century Lima?
- Discuss the novel's critique of materialism. How does the author expose a society that "reduces everything to gold," equating virtue, knowledge, and honor with the creation of a fortune at any cost?

The Aesthetics of Scandal: Realism vs. Melodrama:

- Examine Cabello de Carbonera's stylistic choices. How does she blend the objective, observational techniques of Realism with the heightened emotional stakes of melodrama to convey her moral and social message?
- Discuss the public reception of the novel. Why did *Blanca Sol* cause such a scandal among Lima's elite, and what does the author's defensive prologue in the second edition reveal about the dangers of writing social critiques as a woman?



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Prostitution as Defiance and Defeat:

- Analyze Blanca's ultimate turn to prostitution. Rather than depicting her solely as a passive victim, the narrative shows her maintaining a defiant attitude, seeking revenge against the very society that worships money while despising true virtue. How does this complicate the traditional "fallen woman" trope?
- Discuss the juxtaposition of Blanca's moral decay with her husband's descent into madness and institutionalization. What do these parallel destructions say about the toxic nature of their societal environment?

III. ADVANCED DISCUSSION & RESEARCH PROMPTS

These prompts encourage deep engagement with the text, critical thinking, and research into historical and literary contexts.

- **Essayistic Thought vs. Narrative Practice:** Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera was a well-known essayist who advocated for women's education and independence (e.g., "La influencia de la mujer en la civilización", "Necesidad de una industria para la mujer"). Compare the arguments made in her essays with the fictional fate of Blanca Sol. How does the novel serve as a practical, cautionary illustration of her theoretical feminist essays?
- **The Positivist Influence:** Research the influence of Positivism on Latin American intellectuals of the late 19th century. How do the deterministic elements of Positivism and Naturalism manifest in the trajectory of Blanca Sol's life and the socio-economic forces that govern it?
- **Lima's High Society and Hypocrisy:** Analyze the portrayal of the urban elite in the novel. How does the author utilize the spaces of Lima (ballrooms, mansions, and eventually the streets) to map the moral geography of a decadent society?
- **The Female Author in the 19th Century:** Discuss the broader implications of Cabello de Carbonera's literary career. What were the specific cultural and political risks for a female author engaging in sharp social critique during this era, and how did her contemporaries attempt to silence or marginalize her voice?

IV. SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Text:

- Cabello de Carbonera, Mercedes. *Blanca Sol*. Edited by Oswaldo Voyses. Stockcero. (TK ORDER: 084)

Key Secondary Scholarship:

- Voyses, Oswaldo. Introduction to *Blanca Sol*. Stockcero.
- Cabello de Carbonera, Mercedes. *La novela moderna: estudio filosófico*. (For understanding her own literary theory).
- Tauzin Castellanos, Isabelle. "El positivismo peruano en versión femenina: Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera y Margarita Práxedes Muñoz."
- Ward, Thomas. "Matto y Cabello: más allá el naturalismo."
- Peluffo, Ana. *Lágrimas andinas: sentimentalismo, género y virtud republicana en el siglo XIX*.



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Additional Resources:

- Studies on 19th-century Peruvian literature and the post-War of the Pacific intellectual climate.
- Feminist readings of the "fallen woman" in 19th-century literature.
- Research on the transition from Romanticism to Realism and Naturalism in the Andes.

V. RELATED STOCKCERO RESOURCES

Female Emancipation & Literary Voices: 6-Book Bundle.

Other titles in the bundle: *La Emancipada*, *Una mujer de fin de siglo*, *Mujeres Peligrosas*, *Vida de la Madre Ines de la Encarnacion*, *La rosa muerta*.

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