



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (095)

TEXT: *Ifigenia: Diario de una señorita que escribió porque se fastidiaba* (1924)

AUTHOR: Teresa de la Parra

EDITOR: Elizabeth Garrels

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

A Landmark of Venezuelan Literature

Ifigenia (1924) by Teresa de la Parra marks a turning point in Latin American women's writing. It tells the story of María Eugenia Alonso, a young woman returning to Caracas after being educated in Paris, only to find her inheritance stolen by her uncle and her freedom curtailed by the rigid social norms of 1920s Venezuelan society. The novel is a critique of the limited options available to women—marriage or spinsterhood—and a study of the clash between modern aspirations and traditional constraints.

Structure: Letter and Diary

The novel is innovatively structured. Part I consists of a "very long letter" from María Eugenia to her friend Cristina in Paris, recounting her arrival and disillusionment. The subsequent parts take the form of a private diary, written because the protagonist is "bored" (*se fastidia*). This intimate format allows De la Parra to explore the protagonist's psychology, her literary pretensions (often ironic), and her struggle for self-expression within a domestic sphere.

Historical Context: The Gómez Era

Although never explicitly named, the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935) looms over the narrative. The novel captures the transition of Venezuela from an agrarian economy to an oil-producing state, represented by characters like the nouveau riche fiancé César Leal and the wealthy Monasterios. The tension between the old colonial aristocracy (represented by Abuelita) and the rising, often corrupt, political class reflects the shifting power dynamics of the era.

Feminism and "Bovarism"

De la Parra described her protagonist as suffering from "Hispanic American Bovarism"—an acute dissatisfaction caused by a sudden change in environment and a lack of "new air." While María Eugenia yearns for independence, she lacks the economic means to achieve it. The novel explores feminist themes, such as the need for financial autonomy and education, but does so through a protagonist who is ultimately trapped by her circumstances and her own inability to break free, leading critics to label it a "failed bildungsroman."

The Myth of Iphigenia and the Ending

The title references the Greek myth of Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon sacrificed for the success of the Greek fleet. The novel's controversial ending—where María Eugenia appears to accept a loveless marriage to César Leal—is often read as a spiritual sacrifice to social convention. However, De la Parra's nuanced writing leaves room for interpretation regarding the protagonist's ultimate fate and the nature of her "sacrifice."



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PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

The Clash of Cultures:

Analyze **María Eugenia's** perspective on Caracas versus Paris. How does her European upbringing influence her view of Venezuelan society? Is her critique valid, or does it reflect her own immaturity and "Bovarism"?

Narrative Structure:

Discuss the shift from the epistolary format (Part I) to the diary entry (Parts II-IV). How does this change in form affect the reader's relationship with the protagonist and the intimacy of the narrative?

The "Failed Bildungsroman":

Critics have called *Ifigenia* a "failed *bildungsroman*." Discuss whether **María Eugenia** matures or regresses throughout the novel. Does she gain self-knowledge, or does she simply succumb to social pressure?

Feminism and Independence:

Evaluate **Teresa de la Parra's** brand of feminism as presented in the novel and her lectures. How does the text argue for women's financial independence? Compare **María Eugenia** with **Mercedes Galindo**, the woman she admires.

The Sacrificial Ending:

Debate the ending of the novel. Is **María Eugenia's** decision to marry **César Leal** a tragic sacrifice akin to the Greek myth, a pragmatic survival strategy, or a moment of moral defeat?

Social Class and Political Context:

How does the novel portray the social hierarchy of Caracas? Analyze the character of **César Leal** as a representative of the new power structure under the **Gómez** regime versus the old aristocracy represented by **Abuelita**.

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Parra, Teresa de la.** *Ifigenia: Diario de una señorita que escribió porque se fastidiaba*. SpanishBookPress Edition.
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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

What city does María Eugenia Alonso return from at the beginning of the novel?

- A) London
- B) New York
- C) Paris
- D) Madrid

Correct Answer: C

The first part of the novel is written in the form of:

- A) A memoir
- B) A long letter to a friend
- C) A series of newspaper articles
- D) A third-person narrative

Correct Answer: B

Who is the dictator of Venezuela during the time the novel is set (though never explicitly named)?

- A) **Simón Bolívar**
- B) **Cipriano Castro**
- C) **Marcos Pérez Jiménez**
- D) **Juan Vicente Gómez**

Correct Answer: D

The title *Ifigenia* alludes to a Greek myth about:

- A) A woman who becomes a warrior
- B) A daughter sacrificed by her father
- C) A goddess of love
- D) A queen who rules Athens

Correct Answer: B

What is María Eugenia's primary reason for writing the diary, according to the novel's subtitle?

- A) Because she wants to be famous
- B) Because she is bored (*se fastidia*)
- C) To practice her Spanish
- D) To document political events

Correct Answer: B

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