



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (105)

TEXT: *Jovel (serenata a la gente menuda)*

AUTHOR: Heberto Morales

EDITOR: F.M. Rodriguez-Arenas

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

1. HEBERTO MORALES AND CHIAPAS: A LIFE DEDICATED TO CULTURAL PRESERVATION:

Heberto Morales Constantino (1933-present) is a pivotal figure in the cultural and academic landscape of Chiapas, Mexico. His life journey, from his early education in a handwritten newspaper to extensive studies in Europe (Rome, Germany, France, London), deeply informed his commitment to understanding and promoting the rich, complex identity of his native region.

As a novelist, essayist, poet, and former rector of the Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas (UNACH), Morales dedicated his career to the recovery of indigenous histories and the forging of a collective Chiapanecan memory, a task he undertakes with profound personal and intellectual investment.

2. "JOVEL": A SERENADE TO THE "GENTE MENUDA":

Jovel (serenata a la gente menuda) (1992) is a landmark novel that explicitly aims to represent the "gente menuda" (common people) of Chiapas—a diverse group often overlooked or misrepresented in traditional Mexican narratives. This includes not only indigenous communities but also mestizos and other social strata.

The novel's ambition is to give voice and image to this marginalized majority, showcasing their essential role in the consolidation of Chiapanecan society and economy through their daily lives, work, and cultural practices.

3. HISTORICAL HYBRIDITY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY:

Morales Constantino explores the concept of "hybridity" at multiple levels. Historically, the novel traces the intricate mix of indigenous cultures (Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Chol, Tojolabal) and European influences (from 13th-century La Mancha to 16th-century Spanish colonizers) that shaped Chiapas.

Discursively, *Jovel* blends the genres of historical novel and indigenous-referent novel, incorporating ethnographic research, popular traditions, and mythical elements. This hybrid approach allows for a nuanced portrayal of cultural identity as a dynamic, evolving construct, rather than a monolithic entity.

4. DECONSTRUCTING OFFICIAL HISTORY AND FORGING COLLECTIVE MEMORY:

The novel deliberately challenges hegemonic historical narratives, which often marginalize indigenous voices and present a unilateral view of events. By foregrounding the experiences of the "gente menuda," *Jovel* acts as a form of resistance, contributing to the dismantling of official memory and reconstructing a more inclusive collective memory for Chiapas.



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Morales's use of historical texts (from archives of complaints and lawsuits) for fictional purposes, even for "insignificant" events like a locust plague, emphasizes that true history is often found in the daily lives and struggles of ordinary people, not just in grand official records.

5. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES: MULTI-VOCALITY AND INTERTEXTUALITY:

Jovel employs a polyphony of voices and languages, intertwining Spanish with indigenous languages (e.g., Tzotzil), reflecting the linguistic hybridity of the region. This multi-vocal approach highlights the cultural tensions and diverse points of view within Chiapanecan society.

The novel uses intertextuality to connect with mythical traditions (like Xpak'inté / La Llorona) and historical documents, making the text a rich tapestry where past and present, myth and reality, constantly interact to shape the contemporary Chiapanecan identity.

PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

The "Gente Menuda": Who are the "gente menuda" that Heberto Morales aims to represent in *Jovel*? How does the novel challenge traditional literary representations of these groups in Mexican literature?

Hybridity as a Defining Feature: Discuss the concept of "hybridity" as explored in the introduction and in *Jovel*. How does the novel illustrate the cultural, ethnic, and narrative hybridity of Chiapas and its people?

Historical Memory and Official Narratives: How does *Jovel* engage with and deconstruct official historical narratives of Chiapas and Mexico? What role does the novel play in reconstructing a more inclusive collective memory?

The Author as Investigator: Morales Constantino explicitly states his use of archival research and direct contact with indigenous communities. How does this research process inform the novel's realism and its fictional world? What does it suggest about the relationship between literature and ethnography?

Multivocality and Language: Explore the "polyphony of voices" and the use of multiple languages (Spanish and Tzotzil) in the novel. How does this linguistic choice contribute to the representation of Chiapanecan identity and culture?

"Jovel" in the "Caribbean & Central America" Bundle: How does *Jovel*, a novel set in Chiapas, Mexico, contribute to a bundle focusing on Caribbean and Central American voices? What common themes or literary approaches connect it to other works in the bundle?



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PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

What does the title Jovel (serenata a la gente menuda) signify in the context of the novel?

- A) A love song to the wealthy elite of Chiapas.
- B) A tribute to the powerful political figures of the region.
- C) A serenade to the common people, including indigenous communities, often overlooked in narratives.
- D) A historical account of the Spanish conquest of Chiapas.

Correct Answer: C

The editor's introduction highlights "hybridity" as a key concept in Jovel. How is this hybridity manifested in the novel?

- A) Through the exclusive use of European literary traditions.
- B) By focusing solely on the pure indigenous cultures of Chiapas.
- C) As a complex intermingling of indigenous and European cultures, languages, and narrative systems.
- D) By depicting a society completely isolated from external influences.

Correct Answer: C

Heberto Morales Constantino's research for Jovel involved:

- A) Extensive armchair theorizing without direct engagement.
- B) Detailed studies of European literature exclusively.
- C) Direct contact with the geography, people, and historical archives of Chiapas.
- D) Relying on official government reports and statistics.

Correct Answer: C

The novel challenges hegemonic historical narratives by:

- A) Ignoring historical facts altogether.
- B) Presenting a strictly linear, objective account of events.
- C) Giving voice to marginalized social sectors and reconstructing an inclusive collective memory for Chiapas.
- D) Supporting the dominant political powers of the time.

Correct Answer: C

In Jovel, the characters, particularly those in the "Primera parte" and "Segunda parte," are primarily identified and characterized by:

- A) Their unique psychological complexes and internal conflicts.
- B) Their specific family lineage, chosen occupation, and the honor associated with it.
- C) Their extensive education in European universities.
- D) Their political affiliations and revolutionary activities.

Correct Answer: B



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