



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (115)

TITLE: *Escenas junto a la muerte*

AUTHOR: Benjamín Jarnés

EDITOR: Juan Herrero-Senés

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I. OVERVIEW & SIGNIFICANCE

Benjamín Jarnés's *Escenas junto a la muerte* (1931) is a cornerstone of the Spanish avant-garde novel. Positioned within the intellectual orbit of José Ortega y Gasset's *Revista de Occidente*, Jarnés represents the pinnacle of "Arte Nuevo" prose. This novel is a radical departure from 19th-century realism, offering instead a hybrid narrative of fiction, essay, autobiography, and lyrical intensity.

The work explores the internal crisis of a modern intellectual—the "opositor número 7"—who navigates a world of literary myths and existential angst. It serves as a profound meditation on the struggle between the "shackles of memory" and the pursuit of a "vitalist" engagement with the present. Jarnés utilizes a "slowly carved prose," cuajado of surprising metaphors and intertextual references (Homer, Cervantes, Calderón, Nietzsche), to construct a meticulous aesthetic universe. For graduate students, this novel provides an essential framework for studying the Spanish "Silver Age," the evolution of the modern subject, and the post-1898 aesthetic transformations in Peninsular literature.

II. CONTEXT & CRITICAL APPROACHES

This volume offers a rich multi-disciplinary framework for analyzing the intersections of aesthetics, ethics, and the modern urban experience.

Vanguard Aesthetics and "Integralismo":

Analyze Jarnés's concept of "integralismo"—the recognition of the human being in the totality of their expression (reason, imagination, instinct). How does *Escenas junto a la muerte* exemplify this project?

Discuss the novel's focus on "discourse" over "history." How does the emphasis on style and metaphor challenge traditional narrative expectations?

Explore the novel's relationship with the "deshumanización del arte" (Ortega y Gasset). Does Jarnés truly create a "dehumanized" novel, or does he infuse aestheticism with a "tenso resorte moral"?

The Modern Subject and "Letra-herido":

Examine the protagonist ("opositor número 7") as a prototype of the "letra-herido"—the individual who can only interpret reality through literary filters and myths. How does this "literaturización" of existence lead to his alienation and eventual crisis?

Discuss the role of the city (Madrid) in shaping the protagonist's hypersensitivity and his "desvío mental."

Time and the "Science of Forgetting":

Analyze the central theme of Time (Cronos). How does the novel depict the struggle to live in the "immediate present" vs. the burden of the past?



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Explore Jarnés's Nietzschean influences, particularly the "science of well-forgetting" as a necessary condition for a joyful life.

Intertextuality as Narrative Strategy:

Trace the literary and mythological "anteojos" through which the protagonist views the world (e.g., Juno, the "serranilla," the Romantic "delirio," the Baroque drama of *El alcalde de Zalamea*).

Discuss how Jarnés "cannibalizes" literary history to create new configurations of reality. How does he reinterpret the "eternal feminine" across different literary epochs?

III. ADVANCED DISCUSSION & RESEARCH PROMPTS

Aesthetics as Ethics: Jarnés argued that art's primary mission is to "alegrar la vida" (joyify life). Discuss how the highly refined, metaphorical style of *Escenas junto a la muerte* serves an ethical purpose. Is the pursuit of beauty, for Jarnés, a form of resistance against social and political decay?

The Problem of the Individual in the Mass Age: Written in 1929-1931, the novel coincides with the rise of mass politics and the decline of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. Analyze how the protagonist's radical individualism and "divine ensimismamiento" reflect the anxieties of a minority intellectual class facing the "rebellion of the masses."

The Metaphor as Shield and Prism: The protagonist uses metaphors as a mechanism for autoprotection against a painful reality. Conduct a close reading of a specific chapter (e.g., the description of letters in Chapter IV). How does the language itself become a "screen" that both reveals and obscures the "real"?

Intermediality: Theater, Cinema, and Novel: Analyze Chapter V, where Jarnés transposes Calderón's play into a Chaplin-esque film. How does this intermedial shift comment on the nature of honor, authority, and the "liberty of art"?

Death as a Negative Pole: Reflect on the novel's title and the protagonist's recurring "death scenes." How does Jarnés use death not as an end, but as a "negative pole" that clarifies the value of the vital spark?

Vanguard Narrative vs. Social Commitment: In the 1930s, Jarnés was accused of cultivating a "dehumanized" novel. Using the introduction's context, discuss how *Escenas junto a la muerte* can be read as a chronicle of a society in transition, even without explicit political partisanship.

IV. SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Text:

- Jarnés, Benjamín. *Escenas junto a la muerte*. Edited by Juan Herrero-Senés. Stockcero. (TK ORDER: 115)

Key Secondary Scholarship & Referenced Figures:

- Andújar, Manuel.** "Benjamín Jarnés en galería de espejos." (For the transformation of Jarnés's aesthetics).
- Fuentes, Víctor.** "La dimensión estético-erótica y la novelística de Jarnés." (On the rejection of bourgeois conventions).
- Herrero-Senés, Juan.** Introduction to *Escenas junto a la muerte*. Stockcero. (Crucial for the "integralismo" framework).



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- **Nietzsche, Friedrich.** *Thus Spoke Zarathustra / The Use and Abuse of History.* (For the vitalist and "forgetting" concepts).
 - **Ortega y Gasset, José.** *The Dehumanization of Art / The Rebellion of the Masses.*
 - **Santiáñez-Tiό, Nil.** *Investigaciones literarias.* (On the decadent/vanguard hero).
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V. RELATED STOCKCERO RESOURCES

- **Spanish Peninsular Modernism: 6-Book Bundle.**
- **Other titles by Benjamín Jarnés:** [Paula y Paulita \(TK 173\)](#), [Locura y Muerte de Nadie \(TK 097\)](#).

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