



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (126)

TEXT: *Fantoches 1926: Folletín moderno por once escritores cubanos*

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PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

1. "FANTOCHES 1926": A COLLECTIVE VANGUARD EXPERIMENT:

Published serially in the Cuban magazine *Social* throughout 1926, *Fantoches* is a unique collaborative novel written by eleven Cuban authors and illustrated by eleven artists, all associated with the Grupo Minorista. It blends the collective improvisation typical of Surrealist experiments (like *cadavre exquis*) with the structure of an English detective novel.

The novel serves as a "mosaic of intellectual attitudes and currents" during a pivotal moment in Cuban arts and letters, where European avant-garde movements and nascent socio-political concerns converged, foreshadowing the mature works of 1930s Cuban writers and artists.

2. THE MAGAZINE *SOCIAL* AND ITS ROLE IN CUBAN VANGUARD:

Social magazine (founded 1916 by Conrado Massaguer) had an ambiguous role. While catering to the desires of the new Cuban bourgeoisie (enriched by WWI sugar prices), it also became a platform for avant-garde ideas and social critique, particularly under Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring.

Fantoches was published as the Grupo Minorista began its politization, notably with the "Protesta de los Trece" in 1923. This context means that *Fantoches*'s "game" was not as trivial as its initial lighthearted tone might suggest, but rather a reflection of deeper social and political currents.

3. THE IRRUPTION OF THE AFROCUBAN THEME AND ITS CONTROVERSY:

A key moment in *Fantoches* is Alfonso Hernández Catá's abrupt and provocative introduction of the Afro-Cuban theme (specifically *ñáñiguismo*) in Chapter VI, linking a society crime to an Afro-Cuban rite. This "bilongo" element was a significant transgression for a magazine aimed at an elite audience, pushing boundaries beyond mere formal innovation.

This act triggered internal debates and revealed the deep-seated prejudices within Cuban society and even among the Minorista members. While some (like Martínez Villena) used it for social commentary, others (like Mañach) reacted negatively, reflecting the broader societal struggle with racial identity in Cuba.

4. INTERTEXTUALITY AND METAFICTIONAL ELEMENTS:

Fantoches blurs the lines between fiction and reality by featuring its authors as characters and including parallel essays that comment on the detective plot. This meta-narrative approach creates a self-referential work that analyzes its own creation and context.

The novel's structure, with different authors contributing chapters, highlights varying narrative styles, ideological stances, and even prejudices among the



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Grupo Minorista members, offering a unique document of collective authorship and intellectual ferment.

5. PRELUDE TO 1930s CUBAN CULTURE:

The discussions and controversies sparked by *Fantoques* and the Grupo Minorista anticipated the full integration of Afro-Cuban themes into Cuban high culture in the 1930s (e.g., in the works of Carpentier, Guillén, Roldán).

The novel effectively diagnoses the future political and artistic trajectories of its contributors, revealing the fissures and alliances that would shape Cuban intellectual life in the subsequent decades.

PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Collective Authorship and Experimentation:

Discuss the strengths and challenges of a collaborative novel like *Fantoques 1926*. How do the different authors' styles and perspectives contribute to (or disrupt) the narrative flow and thematic coherence?

Vanguardism in *Fantoques*:

In what ways does *Fantoques* embody vanguardist principles, both in its narrative structure (collective improvisation, metafiction) and its thematic content (social critique, challenging conventions)?

The Afro-Cuban Element:

Analyze the controversial introduction of the Afro-Cuban theme in Chapter VI. What does this reveal about racial attitudes and social tensions in 1920s Cuba? How do the different authors' reactions (or lack thereof) to this theme reflect their political and cultural leanings?

Fiction vs. Reality:

How does *Fantoques* blur the boundaries between fictional and real spaces/characters? Discuss the impact of including the authors as characters and integrating essays into the narrative.

Social Commentary and Political Engagement:

Beyond the detective plot, what social and political critiques does *Fantoques* offer about Cuban society in the 1920s? How does the magazine *Social* itself contribute to this commentary?

"Fantoques 1926"

in the "Exploring Narrative Styles" Bundle:

Compare the collaborative, experimental narrative style of *Fantoques 1926* with the more singular authorial voices in other stories in this bundle (e.g., Felisberto Hernández or Tibor Chaminad). How does it offer a different approach to storytelling?



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PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

What was *Fantoche* 1926 primarily?

- A) A collection of individual short stories by different authors.
- B) A serialized detective novel written collaboratively by eleven Cuban authors.
- C) A political manifesto against the Machado regime.
- D) A historical account of Cuban colonization.

Correct Answer: B

The magazine *Social*, where *Fantoche* was published, is described as:

- A) A purely academic journal for literary critics.
- B) A blend of bourgeois triviality and artistic/political avant-garde.
- C) A propaganda tool for the colonial government.
- D) A specialized publication for scientific discoveries.

Correct Answer: B

What controversial element did Alfonso Hernández Catá introduce in Chapter VI of *Fantoche*?

- A) A detailed description of Havana's high society.
- B) An explicit critique of European avant-garde movements.
- C) The theme of *ñáñiguismo* (Afrocuban rites) as a cause for the crime.
- D) A purely psychological motive for the murder.

Correct Answer: C

Rubén Martínez Villena's chapter in *Fantoche* is notable for its:

- A) Strict adherence to the detective plot.
- B) Abrupt break from the narrative to include socio-political digressions about Havana's cultural substratum.
- C) Humorous and lighthearted tone.
- D) Exclusion of any local Cuban references.

Correct Answer: B

The inclusion of imagery of "ancient Britons" (Picts) in Theodor de Bry's work, discussed in relation to *Usos y Costumbres de los Salvajes de Virginia*, finds a thematic echo in *Fantoche* 1926 through:

- A) The idealized portrayal of European settlers.
- B) The comparison of indigenous cultures with "primitive" European ancestors.
- C) The focus on detective methods for solving crimes.
- D) The exploration of Afrocuban culture as a "primitive" element within Cuban civilization.

Correct Answer: D (This is an inferential connection based on the broader context of how "primitive" cultures were viewed and compared in such works, even if not directly stating Picts. The key is how both texts address the "primitive" within their respective "civilized" contexts.)



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