



## STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (130)

**TEXT:** Los amores de Hortensia. Historia contemporánea (1884–1887)

**AUTHOR:** Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera (Peru, 1842–1909)

**EDITOR:** Claire Emilie Martin , María Nelly Goswitz

### PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on the editors' note and the critical prologue)

#### A TEXT BETWEEN LIMA AND PARIS: EDITORIAL HISTORY AND RECEPTION

##### First Novel, Multiple First Editions:

Although later critics often called *Sacrificio y recompensa* Cabello's "first novel," Cabello herself states in the prologue to *Sacrificio y recompensa* that *Los amores de Hortensia* is her first. Modern biographical research (Pinto Vargas) confirms this: the novel was first published as a serialized text in Paris in *El Correo de Ultramar. Parte Literaria Ilustrada* (1884), then serialized in Lima's *La Nación* in 1887, and finally issued as a book by the Imprenta de Torres Aguirre that same year. In Peru, therefore, readers encountered *Sacrificio y recompensa* (1886) before *Los amores de Hortensia*, which contributed to the chronological confusion.

##### A Carefully Edited 19th-Century Text:

The Stockcero editors base their edition on the 1887 Torres Aguirre volume, collated with the *La Nación* folletín version. They preserve 19th-century spelling and accentuation (forms such as *fué*, *vió*, *á*, *é*, *ó*; *ageno*, *lijera*, *esquisita*, *exajorado*), intervening only to signal obvious typographical errors in the notes. Their editorial philosophy is to let the text "speak as it was read in its own time," even when orthography seems unstable by modern standards. This decision underscores the historicity of the language and invites students to consider the text as a product of its period's print culture.

##### A Novel Long "Lost" to Criticism:

For much of the 20th century, *Los amores de Hortensia* was difficult to access. Many critics either omitted it from bibliographies or mentioned it without dates, and several scholars explicitly note that they could not locate a copy in Peru or abroad. Only through the combined efforts of librarians and researchers in Peru, Spain, France, and the U.S.—and the eventual rediscovery of the *Correo de Ultramar* volume in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France—could the novel be re-inserted into Cabello's canon. Its recovery allows a fuller understanding of her development as a realist and of her feminist social critique.

#### "A CONTEMPORARY STORY": BETWEEN ROMANTICISM AND NATURALISM

##### Romantic Vestiges in a Realist Frame:

The subtitle "Historia contemporánea" situates the work within 19th-century realism: the novel promises to represent present-day social reality rather than purely "fantastic" tales. Yet the main plot—an intelligent, beautiful, virtuous young woman trapped in an unhappy marriage, and her tragic love for Alfredo—retains strong romantic traits reminiscent of Flaubert's *Emma Bovary*. Hortensia is introduced as a "dreaming imagination and ardent soul," a heroine of intense feelings, sensitive to art, music, and nature.

##### Naturalist and Positivist Tendencies:

At the same time, Cabello's narrative voice adopts a more analytical, almost naturalist stance. The novel dissects Lima's high society—materialistic, speculative, dominated by easy capital and corruption—as the true "environment" that shapes and destroys Hortensia. The text foregrounds economic structures (rapid enrichment, speculation, usury), social hypocrisy, and



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patriarchal institutions. The final pairing of Alfredo with the wealthy heiress of a ruthless moneylender, and the impunity of Hortensia's murderer, expose a capitalist and patriarchal order where moral values are subordinated to money and male privilege.

**Authorial Intervention and Moral Purpose:**

Cabello's omniscient narrator often comments directly on characters and situations, in the tradition of 19th-century realist and didactic fiction. The friend who urges the narrator to tell Hortensia's story insists that society learns more from "a true history" of a passionate heart than from invented legends. The novel thus presents itself as a "case study" whose function is to alert readers, especially women, to the dangers of marriages of convenience and to the systemic injustices that make women economically dependent and morally vulnerable.

**HORTENSIA AS FEMINIST VOICE: MARRIAGE, LAW, AND DOUBLE STANDARDS**

**Marriage as Trap, Not Sanctuary:**

Hortensia's tragedy begins not with adultery but with her decision to marry for social position and a return to Lima's pleasures, rather than for love. Cabello repeatedly frames this as a fundamental error, amplified by the Lima of the "golden bacchanal": a city flooded with corrupt money, luxury, and frivolity. From early on, the narrator and Hortensia herself identify the marriage as a "convenience contract" that violates the ideal of an equal, respectful union.

**Republican Ideals and Gender Inequality:**

Through Hortensia's reflections and letters, Cabello promotes the idea of marriage between equals, grounded in mutual respect and shared responsibilities. The character argues that duty in marriage must be reciprocal; if the husband systematically fails in his, the wife cannot be bound by an absolute moral obligation that ignores this asymmetry. This republican vision clashes with the legal and social reality the novel denounces: men enjoy broad rights (including social tolerance for infidelity and violence), while women's rights are reduced to asking God for consolation. The text explicitly notes that the law "authorizes, with impunity, the death of the guilty wife," revealing the brutal double standard encoded into legal and social norms.

**From Romantic Illusion to Critical Consciousness:**

Hortensia evolves from a dreamy adolescent into a woman capable of articulating sharp critiques of marriage and society. She writes warning letters to friends about the dangers of marrying without love, insists on the necessity of respect and equality, and recognizes that her true "duty" is often more to social appearances than to genuine conjugal intimacy. Her eventual affair with Alfredo is less presented as a mere romantic transgression than as a symptom of a system that denies women economic independence and emotional fulfillment. The murder that ends her life exposes a society that punishes female "sin" while excusing male crimes.

**REAL LIFE AND FICTION: WHO WAS HORTENSIA?**

**Roman à Clef and Social Critique:**

The opening chapter, "Who Was Hortensia?", presents the narrative as based on a real Lima woman whose story has been partially silenced by high society. Cabello uses the device of the *roman à clef*: fictional names mask recognizable figures, while the narrator is urged by a friend—who claims privileged information—to write the "true" story for its moral value. This framing blurs the boundary between fiction and social document, and aligns Cabello with European realists and naturalists who turn real cases into narrative laboratories of social analysis.

**A Case Study in Patriarchal Violence:**

The final crime—Hortensia's murder by her husband Montalvo on the "Hill of Delights," the lovers' meeting place—is treated not as a sensational anecdote but as the logical outcome of



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patriarchal and legal structures. The subsequent “farce” of justice, Alfredo’s marriage into a corrupt fortune, and Montalvo’s unpunished flight to Europe underline that the true scandal is not the affair but a social order that normalizes male violence and erases female victims. For Cabello, narrating Hortensia’s life and death means restoring historical and ethical visibility to a woman whom Lima society preferred to forget.



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## PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

### *First Novel? Debating Chronology and Literary History*

How does the debate over whether *Los amores de Hortensia* or *Sacrificio y recompensa* is Cabello's "first novel" affect the way we read her development as a realist writer? What does it reveal about the construction of literary canons and the role of access to texts in shaping critical narratives?

### *Romantic Heroine in a Naturalist World*

In what ways is Hortensia a classic romantic heroine (sensitive, passionate, artistically inclined)? In what ways does the novel place her in a more "naturalist" environment (economic forces, social gossip, legal structures)? How does this tension between character and milieu shape the tragedy?

### *Marriage, Gender, and Double Standards*

Analyze Hortensia's reflections on marriage and duty. How does she redefine "obligation" in relation to a husband who fails his responsibilities? How does the novel question the legal and social asymmetry that allows men broad freedoms and "authorizes" violent punishment of women?

### *Lima as Character: Capitalism and Moral Corruption*

Discuss Lima in the novel as more than a setting. How does the description of the city as a "voluptuous bacchante" living off corrupt wealth contribute to the critique of capitalism and patriarchy? How do urban spaces (streets, salons, gossip networks) participate in Hortensia's downfall?

### *Fiction, Reality, and Moral Purpose*

The narrator is urged to tell a "true" story so that society may learn from it. To what extent does *Los amores de Hortensia* function as a "case study" or moral experiment? How does this ethical dimension relate to Cabello's essays on women's education and social reform?

### *Comparing Female Protagonists: Hortensia and Laura*

Compare Hortensia with Laura from Gorriti's *Peregrinaciones de una alma triste* (if students have read it). How do both characters embody feminist critiques of marriage and gender roles? How do their different endings (death vs. open, mobile future) reflect distinct possibilities for women in 19th-century Latin American fiction?

## PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Cabello de Carbonera, Mercedes.** *Los amores de Hortensia. Historia contemporánea.* – Serialized in *El Correo de Ultramar. Parte Literaria Ilustrada* (Paris, 1884). – Serialized in *La Nación* (Lima, July–August 1887). – Book edition: Lima: Imprenta de Torres Aguirre, 1887.

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**Pinto Vargas, Ismael.** *Sin perdón y sin olvido. Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera y su mundo.* Lima: Universidad de San Martín de Porres, 2003.

**Cárdenas Moreno, Mónica.** "La fisiología del matrimonio en el Perú decimonónico según la obra de Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera" and "Escritura femenina y discurso bélico en el Perú decimonónico."

**Voysest, Oswaldo.** "El naturalismo de Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera: un ideario ecléctico y de compromiso."



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**La Greca, Nancy; González-Muntaner, Elena; Ferreira, María; Moreano, Cecilia.** Studies on Cabello's fiction and essays, including the difficulty of accessing *Los amores de Hortensia* prior to recent editions.



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## PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

*According to the most recent research, why is *Los amores de Hortensia* considered Cabello de Carbonera's first novel?*

- A) It was the first to be printed in Lima.
- B) The author herself refers to it as her first novel, and evidence shows it appeared in Paris before *Sacrificio y recompensa*.
- C) It is the shortest of her novels.
- D) It won a literary prize before any of her other works.

**Correct Answer: B**

*What is the main cause of Hortensia's tragic fate, as presented by the novel?*

- A) An impulsive decision to elope with Alfredo.
- B) A purely individual moral failing unrelated to society.
- C) A marriage of convenience within a patriarchal, materialistic society that offers women little economic independence or legal protection.
- D) A misunderstanding created by false letters.

**Correct Answer: C**

*How does the novel characterize the double standard between men and women in 19th-century Lima?*

- A) Men and women are treated equally by law and custom.
- B) Women have more legal protection than men in cases of adultery.
- C) Men enjoy broad liberties and even legal impunity for killing an "unfaithful" wife, while women are strictly judged and punished.
- D) The novel avoids commenting on legal or social differences between genders.

**Correct Answer:**

**C**

*What is the function of the friend who asks for Hortensia's story to be written?*

- A) To serve as a romantic rival to Alfredo.
- B) To justify the novel as a moral, realist narrative based on a "true" case, blurring fiction and social document.
- C) To provide comic relief in a tragic narrative.
- D) To represent the official voice of the Peruvian government.

**Correct Answer: B**

*How does the ending of *Los amores de Hortensia* critique Lima's elite society?*

- A) By showing that justice is swift and impartial.
- B) By rewarding the murderer with political office.
- C) By having Alfredo marry into a fortune accumulated through exploitation and allowing Montalvo to escape punishment, thus exposing social and legal hypocrisy.
- D) By sending all the main characters into exile.

**Correct Answer: C**



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