



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (157)

TEXT: *Pityusa*

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PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Llanas Aguilaniedo and the Fin-de-Siècle Crisis José María Llanas Aguilaniedo (1875-1921) is a key figure for understanding the Spanish fin de siècle, yet his work has been largely overlooked. A pharmacist by training, Llanas embodies the eclectic spirit of the era, combining scientific positivism with aesthetic Modernism.

His literary production, though limited to three novels —*Del jardín del amor*, *Navegar pintoresco*, and *Pityusa*— and numerous articles, offers a deep dive into the anxieties of degeneration, neurosis, and the crisis of scientific models. **Scientific Decadentism** Llanas's work is deeply influenced by the medical and criminological theories of his time, particularly those of Max Nordau (*Degeneration*), Cesare Lombroso (*The Born Criminal*), and the French alienists.

Pityusa reflects the “degeneration theory,” portraying characters marked by hereditary taints, hysteria, and weak wills. However, Llanas subverts these discourses: instead of merely diagnosing pathology, he explores the aesthetic possibilities of decay and the “superior degenerate” who possesses a refined, if morbid, sensibility.

“Emotivism” as Aesthetic Therapy

In his essay *Alma contemporánea* (1899), Llanas proposes “emotivism,” an aesthetic theory designed to soothe the nerves of the modern, exhausted reader. He argues that modern life creates a need for emotion as a “vice,” akin to drug addiction. *Pityusa* puts this into practice, using color (especially red and violet), atmosphere, and sensory details not just to describe, but to provoke emotional responses in the reader, challenging the objective gaze of Naturalism.

Menorca: A Landscape of Degeneration

Set largely on the island of Menorca, the novel treats the setting not as a picturesque backdrop but as a deterministic force of degeneration. The island's climate and isolation foster abulia (lack of will) and weaken the characters. It is a space where traditional gender roles blur: the male characters (Nikko and Tinny) are feminized and weak, while Pityusa displays a dangerous, masculine agency. Nature here is not healthy but morbid and artificial.

The Hysterical Woman and the Crisis of Control

Pityusa, a high-class prostitute and hysteric, embodies the era's fascination with and fear of the “artificial woman.” She is described as a doll or automaton, seemingly malleable to Tinny's hypnotic control. However, her ultimate rebellion and murder of Tinny symbolize the failure of patriarchal science (psychiatry, hypnosis) to fully dominate or classify the female subject. Her act of violence is a rejection of both the medical discourse that pathologizes her and the aesthetic gaze that objectifies her.



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PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Science vs. Aesthetics:

Discuss how Pityusa integrates scientific discourses (criminology, psychiatry) with Modernist aesthetics. How does Llanas use medical concepts like "degeneration" or "hysteria" for literary purposes?

Gender and Decadence:

Analyze the gender dynamics in the novel. How are Nikko and Tinny portrayed as "feminized" or weak men? How does Pityusa challenge traditional notions of femininity despite being labeled a hysteric?

The Role of Environment:

Examine the depiction of Menorca. How does the island setting influence the characters' behavior and psychological states? Contrast this "morbid nature" with the Romantic ideal of nature.

Artificiality and the "Femme Fatale":

Discuss Pityusa as an artificial construct (doll, statue, automaton). How does this relate to the Decadent fascination with artificiality and the myth of Pygmalion? What does her rebellion signify?

"Emotivism" in Practice:

Llanas proposed "emotivism" as a therapy for the modern soul. Can you identify elements in Pityusa (use of color, sensory descriptions) that align with this theory?

The Crisis of Masculinity:

How does the novel reflect the fin-de-siècle crisis of masculinity? Consider Tinny's failure to control Pityusa and Nikko's inability to act.

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

1. *Llanas Aguilaniedo's aesthetic theory, designed to address modern neurosis, is called:*

- A) Naturalism
- B) Emotivism
- C) Surrealism
- D) Costumbrismo

Correct Answer: B

2. The novel *_Pityusa_* is primarily set in which location, depicted as an agent of degeneration?

- A) Paris
- B) Madrid
- C) The island of Menorca
- D) The island of Ibiza

Correct Answer: C

3. The character Pityusa is associated with which medical condition popular in 19th-century psychiatry?

- A) Tuberculosis
- B) Hysteria
- C) Melancholia
- D) Schizophrenia

Correct Answer: B

4. *Tinny attempts to control Pityusa using what method derived from psychiatry?*

- A) Psychoanalysis
- B) Drug therapy
- C) Hypnosis and suggestion
- D) Isolation

Correct Answer: C

5. *The novel reflects the influence of which scientific theory on literature?*

- A) Germ theory
- B) Degeneration theory
- C) Quantum mechanics
- D) Relativity

Correct Answer: B

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