



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (159)

TEXT: *Navegar Pintoresco*

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Editor: Isabel Clúa Ginés

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I. OVERVIEW & SIGNIFICANCE

José María Llanas Aguilaniedo's *Navegar pintoresco* (1903) offers a fascinating entry point into the complexities of Spanish Peninsular Modernism. Often overshadowed by the canonical divide between "Modernismo" and the "Generation of '98," Llanas's work forces a re-evaluation of *fin de siècle* Spanish culture by demonstrating how deeply entwined literary aesthetics were with emerging scientific discourses—particularly psychiatry, criminology, and "hygienism."

As a pharmacist who co-authored treatises on the "mala vida" (the criminal underworld), Llanas Aguilaniedo brings a clinical yet highly stylized eye to his fiction. *Navegar pintoresco* traces the erratic, ultimately hermetic trajectory of its protagonist, Álvaro Pacheco. The novel is less a traditional narrative than a meticulous exploration of a "pathological subjectivity," charting Álvaro's descent from a hypersensitive *flâneur* navigating the modern urban space of Madrid, into a radical decadent dandy who, echoing Huysmans's *Des Esseintes*, constructs an artificial reality to escape the perceived vulgarity of the modern world.

Edited by Isabel Clúa, this critical edition contextualizes the novel within the widespread European anxieties concerning "degeneration" (as popularized by Max Nordau and Cesare Lombroso), making it an essential text for understanding how Spanish writers negotiated the terrifying and intoxicating arrival of modernity.

II. CONTEXT & CRITICAL APPROACHES

This edition provides a unique lens for examining the intersection of literature, science, and the construction of modern identity in late 19th and early 20th-century Spain.

The Discourse of "Degeneration" and the Decadent Artist:

Discuss the impact of Max Nordau's *Entartung* (Degeneration) and Cesare Lombroso's theories on Spanish intellectual life. How did the medicalization of culture create a framework where artistic genius and mental pathology were intertwined?

Analyze how Llanas Aguilaniedo, in his dual role as a scientist and a novelist, subverts the hegemonic, hygienist critique of "degeneration." How does the novel depict Álvaro's hypersensitivity not merely as an illness to be cured, but as a "superior," if tragic, adaptation to the shocks of modern urban life?

Compare Álvaro's trajectory with the classical model of the "héroe decadente" found in works by Azorín or Baroja.

The Dandy and the Rejection of the Bourgeois Order:

Examine Álvaro's evolution into a decadent dandy. How does his obsessive cultivation of artificiality, aestheticism, and extreme refinement function as a political act of rebellion against utilitarian bourgeois values and the pressures of modern capitalism?



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Analyze the intertextual presence of J.K. Huysmans's *À rebours*. How does Llanas adapt the tropes of absolute withdrawal and the creation of a bespoke, artificial paradise for a Spanish context?

Femininity, Pathology, and Artifice:

Discuss the characterization of Berta. How does she embody the fin-de-siècle paradox of the feminine: simultaneously representing the biological determinism of illness/nature (e.g., her hysteria, the fatal pregnancy) and acting as a blank canvas for extreme aesthetic manipulation?

Analyze the Pygmalion/Galatea dynamic in Álvaro's attraction to Berta's "statuesque" mineral beauty. How does this reflect the decadent anxiety surrounding female sexuality and natural reproduction?

The Urban Landscape and the *Mala Vida*:

Explore the novel's depiction of Madrid. How does the urban environment (tramways, boulevards, marginalized neighborhoods) act upon Álvaro's hyper-estheticized senses?

Discuss the role of the *flâneur* in the novel. How does Álvaro's aimless wandering contrast with his eventual withdrawal?

Analyze the presence of the *mala vida* (the criminal/marginal underclass), particularly through figures like Don Zenón. How does Llanas use radical naturalism to depict these "social illnesses" alongside the "spiritual illnesses" of the decadent elite?

III. ADVANCED DISCUSSION & RESEARCH PROMPTS

These prompts encourage deep engagement with the text, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary connections suitable for graduate-level seminars or research projects.

Aesthetics vs. Clinical Diagnosis: Clúa argues that Llanas's novel refuses to treat Álvaro purely as a clinical case while also refusing to fully exalt his radical dandyism. Conduct a close reading of the novel's ambiguous ending (the setting sun vs. the rising sun). How does this ambiguity reflect Llanas's own contradictory position ("un yo partido en dos," as Felipe Trigo called him) regarding science and idealist aesthetics?

The Aesthetics of Illness: Analyze the role of *synesthesia* in the novel. How does the text describe Álvaro's sensory overload (e.g., while reading Shakespeare or listening to Wagner)? Discuss how the novel appropriates medical terminology to describe aesthetic experiences, blurring the lines between art appreciation and neurological disorder.

The Symbolism of the Object: Focus on the extravagant piece of jewelry Álvaro designs after learning of Berta's pregnancy. What does this object symbolize about his relationship to reality, human connection, and the decadent preference for the artificial over the natural?

Interrogating the Canon: How does the recovery of authors like Llanas Aguilaniedo challenge the traditional historiography of Spanish literature, which often rigidly separates "Modernismo" from the "Generation of '98"? In what ways does *Navegar pintoresco* bridge the gap between aesthetic escapism and social critique?

The Hereditary Curse: Trace the theme of biological determinism and hereditary "taint" in the novel (e.g., Álvaro and his twin sister, Berta and her parents). How does the novel utilize the deterministic framework of Naturalism to explore the inevitable tragedy of the decadent subject?



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IV. SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

This section complements the study of *Navegar pintoresco*, providing avenues for deeper research.

Primary Text:

- Llanas Aguilaniedo, José María. *Navegar pintoresco*. Edited by Isabel Clúa. Stockcero. (TK ORDER: 159)

Key Secondary Scholarship (as referenced in the Introduction):

- **Baudelaire, Charles.** *El pintor de la vida moderna* (1863). (For the concept of the *flâneur* and modernity).
- **Broto Salanova, J.** *José María Llanas Aguilaniedo*. 1992. (The most comprehensive biographical/critical study).
- **Cardwell, Richard.** "José María Llanas Aguilaniedo and the *Mala Vida*." (For the intersection of literature and criminology).
- **Clúa, Isabel.** Editor's Introduction to *Navegar pintoresco*. Stockcero.
- **Dijkstra, Bram.** *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. 1986. (For the representation of women as artifice/illness).
- **Huysmans, J.K.** *À rebours* (1884). (The foundational intertext for the decadent dandy).
- **Llanas Aguilaniedo, J.M. & Bernaldo de Quirós, C.** *La mala vida en Madrid*. 1901. (For the author's sociological/criminological work).
- **Lombroso, Cesare.** *L'uomo di genio in rapporto alla psichiatria, alla storia ed all'estetica* (1894). (For the genius/madness connection).
- **Nordau, Max.** *Degeneration* (Entartung, 1892). (Crucial for the diagnosis of cultural pathology).
- **Pitarch, Pau.** Critical essays on Llanas Aguilaniedo's aesthetics.
- **Santiáñez-Tiό, Nil.** *Investigaciones literarias. Modernidad, historia de la literatura y modernismos*. 2002. (For the decadent hero in Spain).

Additional Resources:

- Studies on European Decadence and Symbolism.
- Research on the history of psychiatry and criminology in 19th-century Spain.

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