



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (163)

TEXT: La piedra angular

AUTHOR: Emilia Pardo Bazán

LITERARY EDITOR: Maria Luisa Pérez-Bernardo

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Emilia Pardo Bazán: A Pioneering Figure

Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921) stands as an unusual and highly influential figure in Spanish literature. Her success stemmed from extraordinary intelligence, skill, diligence, and vigor in her work as a novelist and journalist. Despite her privileged social background, being a woman presented challenges to her active participation in the cultural life of her century. Her prolific output includes 38 novels, 7 plays, 20 volumes of essays, 10 travel books, and numerous articles.

La piedra angular: A Critical Exploration of Justice

This edition brings to light *La piedra angular* (1891), a novel not widely analyzed, where **Pardo Bazán** delves into the burning issue of capital punishment and the figure of the executioner. The work profoundly analyzes the traditional Spanish penitentiary system, presenting the executioner's family as unjustly marked by his profession. The novel incorporates Pardo Bazán's study of penal doctrines and criminal anthropology of the late 19th century, reflecting the intense debate among jurists, philosophers, and theologians concerning the legitimacy of the death penalty.

Naturalism and Spiritualism: A Transitional Novel

La piedra angular is a transitional novel, marking a shift from the influence of **Émile Zola's** Naturalist school towards Pardo Bazán's "spiritualist" phase, which began after her contact with Russian literature (e.g., Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*). While it displays Naturalist elements—detailed descriptions of sordid environments, collective characters, and the brutal effects of poverty and alcoholism—it also incorporates a spiritual dimension through figures like Don Pelayo Moragas, who represents correction and the belief in education over punishment for societal transformation.

Influence of Criminology and Social Thought

Pardo Bazán's work reflects her engagement with contemporary criminological theories, including those of Cesare Lombroso, Raffaele Garofalo, and Enrico Ferri, as well as the work of Concepción Arenal. The novel presents a nuanced debate through different characters: Arturo Cádiz, who defends capital punishment based on "an eye for an eye"; Lucio Febrero, who, while influenced by Lombroso, refutes his sexist views on female criminality and advocates for rehabilitation; and Don Pelayo Moragas, who embodies the idealist school, emphasizing education and free will over deterministic views.

A Critique of Societal Ills

Pardo Bazán powerfully portrays the degradation, misery, and overcrowding of urban life, particularly in the marginalized neighborhoods surrounding the cemetery in A Coruña. She highlights the plight of women, such as Orosia, who suffer physical and psychological abuse due to societal inequalities. Through *La piedra angular*, Pardo Bazán champions the need for a fundamental change in Restoration Spain's approach to criminal justice, advocating for a more humane and corrective system that ultimately aims at moral and civil regeneration.



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PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Pardo Bazán's Feminism and Literary Engagement:

Discuss Emilia Pardo Bazán's role as an intellectual woman in 19th-century Spain. How did her gender influence the reception and content of her work, particularly in challenging societal norms?

Naturalism vs. Spiritualism in *La piedra angular*:

Analyze how Pardo Bazán integrates or contrasts Naturalist techniques (e.g., detailed descriptions, environmental determinism) with Spiritualist ideas (e.g., free will, moral redemption) in *La piedra angular*. Provide examples from the synopsis.

Critique of Capital Punishment:

Examine the different viewpoints on the death penalty presented by the characters Arturo Cádiz, Lucio Febrero, and Don Pelayo Moragas. Which arguments does Pardo Bazán seem to favor, and why?

Social Realism and Urban Degradation:

How does *La piedra angular* depict the social conditions of Restoration Spain, particularly the urban poor and the issues of misery and crime? What role does the setting (e.g., the neighborhoods bordering the cemetery) play in the novel's critique?

Influence of Criminological Theories:

Discuss the impact of contemporary criminological theories (e.g., Lombroso's "criminal born" concept) on Pardo Bazán's portrayal of characters and her exploration of criminal behavior. How does she both incorporate and critique these ideas?

The Executioner as a Social Victim:

Analyze the character of Juan Rojo, the executioner. How does Pardo Bazán present him as a figure who, despite performing a public duty, becomes a victim of social repulsion?

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Pardo Bazán, Emilia. *La piedra angular*. SpanishBookPress Edition.

Pérez-Bernardo, María Luisa. "Introducción." In Pardo Bazán, Emilia. *La piedra angular* SpanishBookPress.

Arenal, Concepción. *El reo, el pueblo y el verdugo*

Dostoyevski, Fiódor: *Crimen y castigo*

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Faus, Pilar: *La condesa de Pardo Bazán y el Naturalismo en España*

PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

1. What is the main theme of *La piedra angular* ?

- A) Romantic love in rural Spain
- B) The critique of capital punishment
- C) The life of Spanish aristocracy
- D) The impact of the Spanish Civil War

Correct Answer: B



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2. Which literary movement is most associated with Emilia Pardo Bazán's early work, and is reflected in *La piedra angular*?

- A) Romanticism
- B) Modernism
- C) Naturalism
- D) Surrealism

Correct Answer: C

3. The character Juan Rojo in the novel holds what profession?

- A) A lawyer
- B) A doctor
- C) An executioner
- D) A politician

Correct Answer: C

4. Emilia Pardo Bazán's "spiritualist" phase was significantly influenced by her reading of which country's literature?

- A) French
- B) English
- C) German
- D) Russian

Correct Answer: D

5. The novel features a debate about criminal anthropology, often referencing which Italian criminologist?

- A) Umberto Eco
- B) Cesare Lombroso
- C) Italo Calvino
- D) Gabriele D'Annunzio Correct

Correct Answer: B

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