



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (179)

TITLE: A Dead Rose

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ISBN: 978-1-934768-95-2

Subject Areas: Early 20th-Century Latin American Literature, Modernism, Decadentism, Gender Studies, Transatlantic Studies

I. OVERVIEW & SIGNIFICANCE

First published in Paris in 1914 as *La rosa muerta* and so audacious that nearly a century elapsed before its rediscovery, *A Dead Rose* by Peruvian cosmopolitan intellectual and feminist organizer Zoila Aurora Cáceres (1877–1958, also known as "Evangeline") stands as a singular landmark: the most prominent modernista novel authored by a Latin American woman.

Set in turn-of-the-century Paris and Berlin, the narrative follows Laura, a wealthy, aesthetically refined young widow suffering from a life-threatening uterine illness, who embarks on a passionate sexual relationship with her gynecologist, Dr. Castel.

Defying both nineteenth-century codes of feminine modesty and positivist medical scripts that reduced female patients to passive clinical specimens, Cáceres depicts pelvic examinations, uterine hemorrhaging, panic attacks, and extramarital eroticism from the vantage point of a woman who treats her own marble-white body as a self-fashioned work of art.

Refusing medical mandates of celibacy even at the cost of her life, Laura controls her aesthetic legacy to the very end.

Translated into English with a comprehensive critical introduction and notes by Laura Kanost (and complementing Stockcero's Spanish-language critical edition of *La rosa muerta* edited by Thomas Ward), this volume is an extraordinary resource for courses in Latin American Literature in Translation, Medical Humanities, Fin-de-Siècle Decadence, and Transnational Feminism.

II. CONTEXT & CRITICAL APPROACHES

• Subverting the Male Modernista Fraternity from Within:

Canonical Spanish American modernismo (Rubén Darío, Amado Nervo, Enrique Gómez Carrillo) fetishized the feminine as a decorative swan, an immobile marble statue, or a destructive femme fatale while excluding women writers from its bohemian networks—an exclusion exemplified by Nervo's condescending prologue to *La rosa muerta* and Darío's remarks on Cáceres's *Oasis de arte*. Instructors can pair *A Dead Rose* with Cáceres's 1899 short story "¿Mujer o mármol?" and poems by Delmira Agustini ("La estatua") and Luisa Luisi ("A la Victoria de Samotracia") to examine how Laura conflates artist, muse, statue, and femme fatale to reclaim female agency within "hyper-modernista" prose.

• Medical Humanities, Gynecology, and the Positivist Gaze:

Engaging scholarship by Nancy LaGreca, Gabriela Nouzeilles, and Francine Masiello, courses can analyze how Cáceres rewrites naturalist clinical case studies.



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By contrasting the brutal, filthy office of the butcher-like Dr. Blumen—where Laura feels treated like "rotten meat" during a humiliating pelvic exam—with the jewel-like surgical instruments and maternal tenderness of Dr. Castel, the novel exposes the gendered power dynamics of turn-of-the-century gynecology while demonstrating the ultimate inability of modern medicine to master the female body.

• **Intertextual Sexual Politics (Aurora Cáceres vs. Enrique Gómez Carrillo):**

Daughter of Peruvian President Andrés Avelino Cáceres and educated at the Sorbonne, Aurora Cáceres endured a tumultuous ten-month marriage (1906–1907) to Guatemalan modernista chronicler Enrique Gómez Carrillo, later documented in her memoir *Mi vida con Enrique Gómez Carrillo* (1929). Students can explore how *A Dead Rose* explicitly winks at Gómez Carrillo's scandalous novel *Del amor, del dolor y del vicio* in its opening chapter, rewriting his male libertine fantasy to reveal the high physical and social stakes of erotic autonomy for early twentieth-century women.

• **Cosmopolitan Feminism and the Emerging Intellectual Woman:**

Author of the 1896 essay "La emancipación de la mujer" (published in Clorinda Matto de Turner's *El Búcaro Americano*) and *Mujeres de ayer y de hoy* (1909), as well as founder of Peru's Centro Social de Señoras (1905), the first telephone operators' union (1911), and *Feminismo Peruano*, Cáceres embeds her feminist vision into the novel's conclusion: as Laura perishes as a tragic modernista artifact, Dr. Castel's intelligent young daughter steps forward to switch on the electric light, heralding a new generation of women intellectuals.

• **Bilingual & Comparative Pedagogical Options:**

Because Stockcero publishes both Laura Kanost's English translation (*A Dead Rose*) and Thomas Ward's Spanish critical edition (*La rosa muerta*, 2007), instructors can seamlessly integrate this text into English-taught World Literature, Medical Humanities, or Gender Studies seminars, as well as bilingual translation workshops.

Classroom Discussion Questions:

- How does Laura's disciplined sculpting of her own body—through gymnastics, corsetry, perfume, and artistic dress—transform her from a passive modernista object into an active creator? Does her refusal to let doctors leave surgical scars on her corpse represent feminist self-determination or, as critic Rebecca Mason suggests, internalized patriarchal aestheticism?
- Compare Laura's traumatic gynecological examination under Dr. Blumen with her clinical and erotic encounters with Dr. Castel. How does Cáceres use these medical spaces to critique positivist authority over women's bodies?
- Why does Dr. Castel's daughter literally turn on the electric light for the grieving men at the end of the novel ("a new bud opens into a new blossom, just as intense as that dead rose before it")? What does this shift from the dying modernista muse (Laura) to the educated young woman (Miss Castel) signify?
- In what ways does *A Dead Rose* dialogue with Juana Manuela Gorriti's *Peregrinaciones de una alma triste* (1876), whose ailing protagonist is also named Laura, regarding travel, female illness, and medical authority?



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III. ADVANCED DISCUSSION & RESEARCH PROMPTS

- **The Statue Awakened—Women Rewriting Modernismo:**

Write a comparative research paper analyzing how Zoila Aurora Cáceres (*A Dead Rose* and "¿Mujer o mármol?"), Delmira Agustini ("La estatua"), and Alfonsina Storni ("La fina crueldad") subvert the Parnassian and modernista trope of the marble-white female body and the beautiful female corpse.

- **Illness, Eroticism, and Intertextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris:**

Drawing on Nancy LaGreca's study in *Hispania* and Vanesa Miseres's scholarship on *Mi vida con Enrique Gómez Carrillo*, analyze *A Dead Rose* as a feminist counter-text to Enrique Gómez Carrillo's *Del amor, del dolor y del vicio*. How does Cáceres navigate the tension between her public persona as a devout Catholic president's daughter and her sympathetic portrayal of Roman courtesans (*Imperia*) and extramarital passion?

- **Gynecology and Naturalism Across the Americas (Cáceres & Garbalosa):**

Pair Aurora Cáceres's *A Dead Rose* (1914) with Stockcero's edition of Cuban writer Graziella Garbalosa's *La gozadora del dolor* (1922). Compare how both novels break literary taboos by depicting gynecological procedures (pelvic exams, uterine fibroids, and induced abortion) to expose the material and bodily consequences of female sexual desire in patriarchal societies.

IV. SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

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V. RELATED STOCKCERO RESOURCES

A comprehensive collection focusing on female protagonists, writers, and the shifting societal roles of women in Latin America. Included titles:

Sacrificio y Recompensa, Stella, La gozadora del dolor, Mecha Iturbe, Eleodora - Las consecuencias, A Dead Rose, La Vida manda, y otros textos, and Roque Moreno.

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