



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (184)

TEXT: *Los judíos de Las Acacias (Cuentos de la vida campesina)*

AUTHOR: Rebeca Mactas

EDITOR: Darrell B. Lockhart

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

1. REBECA MACTAS: A FOUNDATIONAL VOICE IN JUDEO-ARGENTINE LITERATURE:

Rebeca Mactas (1910-1997) emerges as a pivotal figure, offering a unique literary perspective on the Jewish agricultural colonization in Argentina, specifically the colonies established by the Jewish Colonization Association (J.C.A.). Her work provides a crucial female lens on a historical period often dominated by male narratives.

The author's family ties (her grandfather, Mordejai Alpersohn, was a pioneer in Colonia Mauricio) deeply influenced her work, creating a rich intertextuality with Yiddish literature and personal history.

2. THE ETHOS OF HASKALÁ AND THE LAND:

Mactas's work is infused with the ideals of the Haskalá, or "Jewish Enlightenment," which emphasized the revitalization of the Jewish spirit through a renewed connection with the land. This is reflected in the characters' deep, almost reverent, love for the earth, despite its harshness.

Unlike the more bucolic portrayal in Alberto Gerchunoff's *Los gauchos judíos*, Mactas's stories depict the agricultural colonies during their decline, presenting a more stark and realistic view of the struggle against an often hostile and indifferent nature.

3. FEMALE PERSPECTIVES AND THE PATRIARCHAL TRADITION:

A standout element is the consistent female perspective, illuminating the secondary, yet central, roles of women within a patriarchal society. Mactas sensitively portrays their efforts, sacrifices, and the limited options available to young women in isolated rural communities.

The stories highlight the unique challenges faced by pioneer women, balancing their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters, often driven by a sense of duty and sacrifice rather than personal fulfillment.

4. THE DECLINE OF THE COLONIES AND THE CITY VS. COUNTRY DICHOTOMY:

Mactas's narratives are set during the decline of the colonies, focusing on aging colonists who stubbornly cling to their properties. The "city vs. country" dichotomy is presented as an irreconcilable conflict, with younger generations abandoning rural life for the city's opportunities.

This conflict is not primarily generational or about assimilation, but rather about the economic failure of the J.C.A.'s agrarian experiment and the harsh realities of



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making a living from the land. The stories often explore the bittersweet tension between tradition, community, and the allure of modern life.

5. LITERARY STYLE: POETRY AND NARRATIVE:

Mactas ingeniously integrates poetry into her short stories, using introductory poems for each narrative. These poems set the central theme and showcase her poetic skill, utilizing formal versification with consonantal and assonantal rhymes, and traditional meters.

Her romantic sensibilities are evident in her lyrical language and her symbolic system rooted in nature. This blend of poetry and narrative enriches the thematic depth, allowing for a multifaceted exploration of the human condition within the specific context of the Jewish colonies.

PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Female Voice in Judeo-Argentine Literature:

How does Rebeca Mactas's female perspective in *Los judíos de Las Acacias* offer a unique understanding of the Jewish agricultural colonization in Argentina, especially when compared to male authors like Gerchunoff?

The Haskalá and the Land:

Discuss the influence of the Haskalá movement on the characters' relationship with the land in Mactas's stories. How is the land portrayed (hostile, nurturing, sacred), and what role does it play in their identity and struggles?

Conflict between Tradition and Modernity (City vs. Country):

Analyze the dichotomy between city and country life as depicted in stories like "La casa" or "La vuelta del hijo." How do the characters navigate the pull of urban opportunities versus the ties to their rural heritage and family?

Symbolism and Literary Devices:

Examine the use of poetry as an introduction to each story. How do these poems foreshadow or deepen the themes explored in the prose? Discuss other symbolic elements (e.g., animal imagery in "Fuego" or "Primaveras") and their effectiveness.

Critique of the J.C.A. and Economic Realities:

How do Mactas's stories subtly (or overtly) critique the administration of the Jewish Colonization Association and the economic hardships faced by the colonists? Use examples from the texts to support your analysis.

"Los judíos de Las Acacias" in the "Exploring Narrative Styles" Bundle:

Compare the narrative style and thematic concerns of Mactas's work with one of the Romantic short stories (e.g., from *Trece cuentos del romanticismo español*) or Felisberto Hernández's stories. How do they represent different "narrative styles" or historical periods?



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PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

What was the primary purpose of the Jewish Colonization Association (J.C.A.) in Argentina? A

- A) To promote industrial development in Buenos Aires.
- B) To establish agricultural colonies for persecuted European Jews.
- C) To fund artistic and literary projects in the capital.
- D) To support political movements for Jewish autonomy.

Correct Answer: B

A distinguishing characteristic of Los judíos de Las Acacias compared to Los gauchos judíos is:

- A) Its exclusively bucolic and idealized portrayal of rural life.
- B) Its focus on urban Jewish life in Buenos Aires.
- C) Its depiction of the colonies during their decline and the struggles against a harsh nature.
- D) Its complete absence of Jewish cultural references.

Correct Answer: C

The text highlights a significant element of Mactas's work: the unique perspective of:

- A) The J.C.A. administrators.
- B) Young male pioneers.
- C) The indigenous gauchos.
- D) Female pioneers and their roles within a patriarchal tradition.

Correct Answer: D

In stories like "La casa" and "La vuelta del hijo," the "city vs. country" dichotomy often represents:

- A) An easy choice, with the city always offering better quality of life.
- B) An irreconcilable conflict, where city life offers opportunities but country life retains spiritual value.
- C) A harmonious blend of both lifestyles.
- D) A preference for the city as the sole place for cultural development.

Correct Answer: B

Which of the following literary devices does Mactas employ at the beginning of each narrative in Los judíos de Las Acacias?

- A) A detailed historical introduction.
- B) A dramatic dialogue between two characters.
- C) An introductory poem that sets the central theme.
- D) A humorous anecdote.

Correct Answer: C



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