



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (101)

TEXT: *María* (1867)

AUTHOR: Jorge Isaacs

CRITICAL EDITION: Flor María Rodríguez-Arenas (Colorado State University-Pueblo)

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on the *Critical Introduction* by Prof. Rodríguez-Arenas)

1. RECLAIMING "SENSIBILITY" (LA SENSIBILIDAD):

- **Beyond Mere Sentimentality:** Modern readers often criticize the novel for its abundance of tears. Prof. Rodríguez-Arenas argues that this must be understood through the 18th/19th-century concept of "The Culture of Sensibility" (derived from Rousseau and medical theories of the time).
- **The Physiology of Emotion:** In this context, "sensibility" was not a weakness but a physiological and moral link between body and soul. Tears, blushing, and fainting were physical signs of a superior moral constitution.

2. THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY:

- **The "Man of Feeling":** Efraín represents a specific type of masculinity: the "Sensitive Man." Unlike the coarse masculinity of characters like Emigdio, Efraín's ability to feel deeply establishes his refined class status.
- **Virility and Emotion:** The prologue demonstrates that in the 19th century, male tears were compatible with virility. They were proof of a refined nervous system and a capacity for virtue.

3. THE EROTICISM OF RESTRAINT:

- **Chaste Mystery:** The relationship between Efraín and María is defined by what is *not* done. The prohibition of direct contact creates a heightened sensuality focused on objects: flowers, perfumes, footprints, and the hair. This "eroticism of restraint" is a hallmark of the Romantic/Sentimental genre.

4. HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

- **The Jewish Heritage:** Jorge Isaacs was the son of a British Jew from Jamaica who converted to Catholicism. This background adds complexity to the novel's themes (María herself is a Jewish convert with a fatal illness), blending the Hebrew patriarchal tradition with Colombian Catholicism.



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PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

- **Nostalgia as Pathology:** Analyze the voice of the narrator (the older Efraín). Is his nostalgia purely emotional, or does it reflect the 19th-century medical view of nostalgia as a "sickness" caused by exile and loss?
- **Nature and the Pathetic Fallacy:** Discuss how the landscape of the Valle del Cauca mirrors the internal states of the characters. How does the description of nature change from the idyll of the beginning to the tragic journey of the end?
- **Social and Racial Hierarchy:** How does the novel portray the structure of the *hacienda*? Analyze the relationships between the white masters (Efraín/María) and the servants/slaves (Felicana/Nay). Is it a harmonious patriarchy or are there tensions?
- **Illness as Metaphor:** Discuss María's epilepsy/nervous condition. How does her illness function as a plot device and as a symbol of her fragility and spiritual purity?

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Isaacs, Jorge.** *María*. Edición Crítica de Flor María Rodríguez-Arenas. Stockcero, 2008.
- **McGrady, Donald.** *Jorge Isaacs*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972.
- **Sommer, Doris.** *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- **Molloy, Sylvia.** *At Face Value: Autobiographical Writing in Spanish America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

1. **What is the setting of the novel?** A) The Amazon Jungle B) Bogotá C) The Valle del Cauca (Hacienda "El Paraíso") D) The Caribbean Coast **Correct Answer: C**
2. **What illness does María suffer from?** A) Tuberculosis B) A hereditary nervous condition (Epilepsy) C) Yellow Fever D) Cholera **Correct Answer: B**
3. **Why does Efraín leave the hacienda for four years?** A) To join the army B) To manage a business in Bogotá C) To study medicine in London D) To escape a political persecution **Correct Answer: C**
4. **What ominous symbol frequently foreshadows death in the novel?** A) A black bird (ave negra) B) A broken mirror C) A dried rose D) A thunderstorm **Correct Answer: A**
5. **What is the religious background of María's family before their conversion?** A) Protestant B) Jewish C) Indigenous beliefs D) Atheist **Correct Answer: B**

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