



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (139)

TEXT: *El Zarco*

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PART 1: CRITICAL CONTEXT

*(Based on the provided Introduction by Maria Eugenia Mudrovcic *)

1. IGNACIO MANUEL ALTAMIRANO (1834-1893): LIBERAL AND LITERARY MASTER

- **From Jacobin to Porfirista:** Altamirano was a key intellectual figure in 19th-century Mexico, evolving from an ardent Jacobin during Juárez's era to a staunch supporter of Porfirio Díaz.
- **The "Maestro":** His influence on Mexican literature and his role as a "letrado orgánico" (organic intellectual) earned him the title of "El Maestro" among the younger generation of writers.

2. "EL ZARCO": VIOLENCE IN TIMES OF PEACE

- **Context of 1861:** The novel is set in 1861, a pivotal year post-Reform War and pre-French Intervention, marked by chaos and pervasive banditry.
- **Porfirian Propaganda?** The introduction argues that *El Zarco* serves (perhaps unintentionally) as a justification for the later *Pax Porfiriana*, glorifying the origins of the *rurales* (federal mounted police) who eventually eradicated banditry.
- **The "Bandit" as Social Enemy:** The novel actively demonizes "los plateados" (bandits) to unify society against a common foe, aligning with the Porfirian state's narrative of order and progress.

3. THE "FIRST MEXICAN POLICIAL NOVEL"?

- **Genre Innovation:** While not a detective novel, its narrative ideology aligns with the nascent police genre, where the state's legitimate violence triumphs over criminal disorder.
- **Moral Purpose:** The novel serves a pedagogical function, instructing citizens in the values of the liberal reformist civil code and promoting civic responsibility and hard work as pathways to social integration.

PART 2: CLASSROOM DISCUSSION TOPICS

THEME A: "Civilization and Barbarism" in the Mexican Context

- **Discussion:** How does *El Zarco* engage with the prevalent 19th-century Latin American debate of "Civilization vs. Barbarism"? Who represents each side in the novel, and how are these lines blurred or reinforced?
- **The Rurales as Heroes:** Analyze Martín Sánchez's character as the embodiment of the "new man" of the Porfirian era: disciplined, productive, and the "angel exterminator" of banditry. How does his "virility" contrast with the emasculated bandits?



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THEME B: Gender, Class, and Social Order

- **Manuela's Fate:** Discuss the tragic fate of Manuela. Why is her defiance of bourgeois values (honor, family, property) by eloping with a bandit deemed irredeemable? How does her death serve as a moral lesson for transgressing social boundaries?
- **Nicolás and Pilar:** Examine the "happy ending" of Nicolás and Pilar. How do their characters embody the ideals of the new bourgeois order (hard work, property, civic marriage) that Altamirano implicitly champions?

THEME C: The Problem of "Indio" Identity

- **Controversy:** The introduction critically examines Altamirano's use of "indio." How did the term function in 19th-century Mexico, and how does Nicolás (the "ennobled Indian") reflect the liberal project of assimilation?
- **Altamirano's Own Background:** Discuss how Altamirano's own identity as an "indio puro" who rose through education and adherence to liberal ideals informs his portrayal of Nicolás and the critique of communal indigenous structures.

PART 3: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

1. In which historical period is *El Zarco* primarily set? A) The Mexican Revolution (early 20th century). B) The 1860s, during the aftermath of the Reform War. C) The colonial period. D) The late 19th century under Porfirio Díaz. (Correct: B)
2. What is the explicit purpose of Martín Sánchez's mission in *El Zarco*? A) To find a treasure hidden by the bandits. B) To avenge his family by eradicating banditry and restoring public security. C) To join the bandits and become their leader. D) To negotiate a peace treaty with the bandits. (Correct: B)
3. How does the novel *El Zarco* contribute to the image of the "rurales" (mounted police) during the Porfiriato? A) It critiques their excessive violence. B) It glorifies their origins and presents them as heroes of order. C) It portrays them as ineffective against banditry. D) It suggests they were no different from the bandits themselves. (Correct: B)
4. According to the introduction, what ultimate fate befalls Manuela for her relationship with *El Zarco*? A) She becomes the leader of the bandits. B) She is captured and forced to marry Nicolás. C) She succumbs to madness and dies spectacularly, punished for transgressing social norms. D) She escapes to another country and lives happily. (Correct: C)
5. How does Altamirano's "indio" character, Nicolás, differ from "indios" who resist assimilation to capitalist economy? A) Nicolás is a wealthy landowner. B) Nicolás is educated and integrated into the capitalist economy through hard work. C) Nicolás leads a rebellion against the government. D) Nicolás advocates for indigenous communal land ownership. (Correct: B)



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PART 4: CITATION GUIDE (Stockcero Edition)

Why cite this edition? This Stockcero edition (ISBN 978-1-934768-55-6) provides an incisive critical introduction that explores Altamirano's novel within the political and literary context of 19th-century Mexico, making it ideal for studies on nation-building, social order, and the origins of Mexican realism.

Sample Citation (MLA): Altamirano, Ignacio Manuel. *El Zarco*. Stockcero, 2012.

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