



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (152)

TEXT: *Belarmino y Apolonio* (1921)

AUTHOR: Ramón Pérez Ayala

EDITOR: Juan Herrero-Senes

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on the Introduction by Juan Herrero-Senes and critical interpretations of the work)

1. PÉREZ AYALA AND THE SPANISH SILVER AGE:

Literary Significance:

Published in 1921, *Belarmino y Apolonio* is considered Ramón Pérez de Ayala's (1880-1962) most accomplished novel and a key work of Spain's Silver Age (1898-1936), praised as one of the most important Spanish novels after *Don Quijote*.

Author's Evolution:

Pérez de Ayala, initially a realist and decadent writer, evolved towards a more symbolic, humorous, and essayistic narrative style, deeply engaging with psychological analysis and passions, moving away from the avant-garde.

2. DUALISM AND THE RELATIVITY OF PERSPECTIVE:

Contrasting Protagonists:

The novel features two shoemakers embodying antithetical ways of confronting reality: Belarmino (a philosopher, abstract, who invents a unique, personal language) and Apolonio (a dramatic, emotional figure who speaks in verse). They represent reason versus emotion, generalization versus particularization.

"Chinese Box" Narrative:

The novel utilizes a complex, multilayered structure with multiple narrators and shifting temporalities, often presenting different perspectives on the same events. This "bilateral" vision underscores the impossibility of a single, objective truth and the inherent incompleteness of human understanding.

Language as a Defensive Mechanism:

Both Belarmino and Apolonio's idiosyncratic languages (Belarmino's abstruse jargon, Apolonio's versification) function as unique means of understanding the world and as defense mechanisms against an increasingly hostile reality.

3. THEMES, SYMBOLISM, AND TRAGICOMIC TONE:

Novel "About" and "Of" Language:

Belarmino y Apolonio reflects on the nature of language itself—how words shape our perception of reality—while also showcasing a rich, peculiar style that blends classicism, erudition, colloquialisms, and regional Asturian speech.

Tragicomic Spectrum:

The narrative embraces a tragicomic tone, uniting the ridiculous and the pathetic to reflect the absurdities and sorrows of life. It combines philosophical reflection with dramatic action, offering a compassionate yet detached view of human foibles.



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Symbolism of Passion and Redemption:

Set during Holy Week, the novel frames the story of Pedro and Angustias within themes of passion, suffering, and salvation, drawing parallels between Pedro's journey and Christ's, and exploring the redemptive power of friendship and love.

PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Dualism in Character and Philosophy:

Analyze how the contrasting characters of Belarmino and Apolonio embody different philosophical approaches to life and language. What does each represent?

The Role of Language:

Discuss how language is central to the novel, both as a subject of reflection ("about" language) and as a defining stylistic feature ("of" language). How do the characters' idiolects influence their reality and communication?

Narrative Structure and Perspective:

Examine the complex narrative structure, including multiple narrators and varying accounts of the same events. How does this technique contribute to the novel's themes of relativism and the incompleteness of knowledge?

Tragicomic Tone:

Discuss how Pérez de Ayala blends tragic and comic elements. How does this tragicomic vision reflect his perception of human existence and societal behavior?

Symbolism of Holy Week:

Analyze the significance of setting the story during Holy Week. How does this timeframe add layers of meaning to Pedro's journey and the novel's broader themes of suffering, passion, and redemption?

Social Commentary:

What criticisms of society (e.g., class distinctions, religious authority, hypocrisy) does Pérez de Ayala embed within the narrative, and how are these conveyed through the characters and their interactions?

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

1. Who is the author of *Belarmino y Apolonio*?

- A) Miguel de Unamuno
- B) Ramón del Valle-Inclán
- C) Ramón Pérez Ayala
- D) Benjamín Jarnés

Correct Answer: C

2. What two contrasting figures do *Belarmino* and *Apolonio* primarily represent?

- A) Rich and poor
- B) Young and old
- C) Philosophy and drama (or reason and emotion)
- D) City and countryside

Correct Answer: C

3. The novel's narrative structure is characterized by:

- A) A single, omniscient narrator
- B) A "Chinese box" structure with multiple narrators and perspectives
- C) A purely linear plot
- D) Direct autobiography

Correct Answer: B

4. What is *Belarmino*'s primary characteristic, beyond his profession as a shoemaker?

- A) His ambition to become a famous actor
- B) His profound philosophical musings and unique language
- C) His skill as a master craftsman
- D) His jovial and outgoing personality

Correct Answer: B

5. Which literary classic is *Belarmino y Apolonio* frequently compared to due to its philosophical depth and narrative complexity?

- A) *La Celestina*
- B) *El Lazarillo de Tormes*
- C) *Don Quijote*
- D) *Fuenteovejuna*

Correct Answer: C

Explore the "Modernism & Avant-Garde: The Renewal of Poetic Language": This book is part of our comprehensive collection on the renewal of poetic language in early 20th-century Spanish literature: *Luces de Bohemia* (Valle-Inclán); *Niebla* (Unamuno); *Belarmino y Apolonio* (Pérez Ayala); and *Locura y Muerte de Nadie* (Jarnés).

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