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# Emilia Pardo Bazán, *folletinista* and ‘noveladora moral’: *La dama joven* and *Mujer*

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In her book, *Cigar Smoke and Violet Water: Gendered Discourse in the Stories of Emilia Pardo Bazán*, Joyce Tolliver dissects an example of a timeless trope: the ham-fisted male attempt to leap to a woman’s defence. The hapless male in this case was the Spanish writer Leopoldo García-Ramón; his would-be damsel in distress, the novelist Emilia Pardo Bazán. The incident in question arose over the critical reception of the latter’s *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886), specifically the claim made by Leopoldo Alas when reviewing the novel that its attempts at thorough-going realism would always be hobbled by the fact that its author—a woman and an aristocrat—could not access the underbelly of society.<sup>1</sup> García-Ramón’s response is, Tolliver observes, ‘almost comically equivocal’.<sup>2</sup>

[...] pienso que debe tratar esos asuntos aunque, para los imbéciles, *deje de parecer dama española*, pues antes que dama es artista; la contamos al lado de Galdós, y Pereda, y Palacio Valdés y el mismo Alas, y no al

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1 The relevant review can be found here: Leopoldo Alas, ‘Los pazos de Ulloa’, in Leopoldo Alas *Clarín, Obras completas*, ed. Jean-François Botrel & Yvan Lissorgues, 12 vols (Oviedo: Ediciones Nobel, 2003–2009), IV (pt 1) (2003), *Crítica (Primera parte)*, ed. Laureano Bonet, 817–29.

2 Joyce Tolliver, *Cigar Smoke and Violet Water: Gendered Discourse in the Stories of Emilia Pardo Bazán* (Lewisburg: Bucknell U. P., 1998), 24.

lado de las noveladoras *morales*—sinónimo aquí de *tontas*;—es más hombre que mujer, intelectualmente hablando y como tal debe portarse. Diré más, y es que, a mi juicio, Emilia podrá y querrá, cuando se le fije entre las cejas, tratar los ciertos asuntos a que Clarín se refiere. ¡Y al tiempo! ...<sup>3</sup>

What better way to defend a woman than to claim she is not a woman at all, but a man? Or to suggest that all the other Spanish women currently writing novels are idiots? And yet, the incident itself and García-Ramón's 'defence' of Pardo Bazán encapsulate three inter-related points of tension that will be the subject of the current article. They are the nature of a female writer's contribution to the project of the realist novel in Restoration Spain, the status of overtly didactic fiction in the career of Pardo Bazán, and the question of androgyny or gender critique in the latter's work. Those points of tension, which have attracted much recent critical commentary, will here be focalized through an analysis of a relatively neglected corner of Pardo Bazán's writings, her novellas *La dama joven* (1885) and *Mujer* (1893). This article will also reflect on the latter's hitherto neglected first appearance in print, prior to its publication in 1895 as one of three *Novelas ejemplares*.

According to Tolliver, Pardo Bazán kept her powder dry where Alas was concerned. In fact, she waited a full five years, until the 1892 prologue to the edition of *Novelas* by María de Zayas she published in her 'Biblioteca de la Mujer' series, which sought to buttress the feminist campaigns that had become her vocation.<sup>4</sup> Pardo Bazán quotes a previous commentator on Zayas' work who had also questioned a female author's ability to depict the seamier side of life: 'seiz[ing] the opportunity to reply obliquely to Alas' criticism in a way that neatly labelled him a sexual reactionary at the same time that it identified what she considered faulty assumptions about what constituted realism'.<sup>5</sup> By 1892, Pardo Bazán had adopted a policy of ignoring Alas' misogyny, such that the suggestion of obliquity in her riposte rings true. In that same prologue, she goes on to argue that Zayas' novels need not suffer in comparison to Cervantes' *Novelas ejemplares*, with the

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3 Leopoldo García-Ramón, 'Los pazos de Ulloa. Novela por Emilia Pardo Bazán', *Revista de España* (May–June 1887), 136–47 (p. 139, emphases in the original).

4 Emilia Pardo Bazán, 'Breve noticia sobre doña María de Zayas y Sotomayor', in María de Zayas, *Novelas*, Biblioteca de la Mujer III (Madrid: Agustín Avrial, 1892), 5–16. For an overview of the Biblioteca de la Mujer series, see Gareth Wood, 'Sugaring the Pill: Emilia Pardo Bazán, John Stuart Mill and the Biblioteca de la Mujer', *BSS*, XCV:6 (2018), 605–31; see also Ana María Freire López, 'La Biblioteca de la Mujer de Emilia Pardo Bazán: historia y cronología de un proyecto editorial', in *Et amicitia et magisterio: estudios en honor de José Manuel González Herrán*, ed. Santiago Díaz Lage *et al.* (Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2021), 262–74.

5 Tolliver, *Cigar Smoke and Violet Water*, 25.

clear implication that their merits have been eclipsed not by any lack of brilliance, rather by the sex of their author. However, if in 1887 she was content to allow García-Ramón to defend her in print, it could also have been because she was about to engage in a robust exchange of views with yet another antagonist in the next issue of the very same journal, the *Revista de España*, where García-Ramón had done his valiant best on her behalf.

Pardo Bazán had decided to respond to a review by the Ecuadorian writer Juan Montalvo of a theatrical adaptation of Émile Zola’s *Le Ventre de Paris*, which had also taken Gustave Flaubert to task over the alleged immorality of his masterpiece, *Madame Bovary*. There is, in that sense, a pleasing symmetry to the juxtaposed polemics: Alas alleges that a female writer cannot write about aspects of life that propriety suggests should be alien to ‘decent’ women, while Pardo Bazán defends ‘indecent’ fiction on the basis of its truth to life and aesthetic merit:

¿No ha de soliviantar al artista ver que a una novelaza, una señora novela, una joya, *Madama Bovary* [sic], se le roen los zancajos por si trata o no trata de adulterios? De incestos, sacrilegios y parricidios pudiera tratar, como muchas magníficas tragedias griegas, y no perder quilate de valor. Y si aún quedase la salida de decir que glorifica el pecado, no por cierto: al revés, que pone de realce sus miserias y horrores, sus heces nauseabundas y su inevitable reato de suplicios. Con poca molestia hago yo del argumento de *Madama Bovary* [sic] un libreo edificante, lo titulo *Infierno acá e infierno allá*, y lo vendo a peseta para sufragar misas por las benditas ánimas.<sup>6</sup>

We might note here that Pardo Bazán characterizes herself as both male and female in the space of a few sentences: she is at first ‘el artista’ who reacts with dismay at an attack on *Madame Bovary* and she is then the earnest ‘lady novelist’ turning out a hack version of that same text. By mock-offering to re-frame the narrative of Flaubert’s novel as a crude morality tale, Pardo Bazán is cosplaying a literary persona she is also explicitly repudiating—that of the ‘noveladoras morales’ from whom García-Ramón had sought to disassociate her. What allows *Madame Bovary* to eschew that label is ‘la lección austera, tanto más austera cuanto más desdeñosamente embozada en los pliegues de mármol de la impersonalidad y la ironía’.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the moral value of a novel derives not from the subjects it depicts, but rather from the authorial treatment of them:

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6 Emilia Pardo Bazán, ‘Literatura y otras hierbas. Una carta al señor don Juan Montalvo’, *Revista de España*, 117 (1887), 133–45 (p. 140).

7 Pardo Bazán, ‘Literatura y otras hierbas’, 139–40.

Me han contado de un eminente literato español, fervoroso católico, y no doy más señas porque no se adivine el nombre, que acalorado se dejó decir: —¡El arte es de suyo inmoral! ... ¡El arte es el diablo! —Presérvenme los benignos cielos de adherirme a tal sentencia: no y no: el arte no es el diablo; el arte en cuanto revelador de la belleza, es cosa divina; el yerro está en buscarle la consagración donde no la tiene; la moralidad, sólo indirecta y como luz solar quebrada y reflejada en claro espejo; el arte es arte, deleite estético, puro y sagrado; goce Vd., que gozando reza.<sup>8</sup>

Implicit in her arguments is a complex picture of high and low cultural values. Pardo Bazán repudiates as low the urge to treat *Madame Bovary* as a morality tale, for all the high-minded aims of those who would do so. Those, like Montalvo, who take aim at a novel's alleged immorality expose themselves as insufficiently cultured since they miss the 'pliegues de mármol de la impersonalidad y la ironía' in which its discourse is shrouded.<sup>9</sup>

Jo Labanyi and, more recently, Carmen Pereira-Muro have argued that the repudiation of serial novels, *folletines* and sentimental fiction as 'feminine' served three major purposes for Restoration novelists. First, it shored up the position of realism as the virile fictional mode capable of reinvigorating and defining the Spanish nation. Second, it helped to repudiate as foreign and invasive a literary aesthetic Benito Pérez Galdós in particular reviled as intellectually lazy.<sup>10</sup> Third, by turning away from literature aimed at mass audiences, the novelists of Restoration Spain emphasized the bourgeois exclusivity of their conception of the citizenry.<sup>11</sup> Only by aligning herself with this project, and proving herself to be one of its leading exponents, could Pardo Bazán secure begrudging acceptance among her male peers.<sup>12</sup> All the same, while they may indeed have

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8 Pardo Bazán, 'Literatura y otras hierbas', 140.

9 Pardo Bazán, 'Literatura y otras hierbas', 140.

10 Benito Pérez Galdós, 'Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea española', in *Prosa crítica: recopilación de escritos, prólogos y crónicas que Galdós publicó de diferentes periódicos*, intro. & ed. de José-Carlos Mainer, notas de Juan Carlos Ara Torralba (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 2004), 10–26.

11 Jo Labanyi, 'Relocating Difference: Cultural History and Modernity in Late Nineteenth-Century Spain', in *Spain Beyond Spain*, ed. Bradley S. Epps & Luis Fernández Cifuentes (Lewisburg: Bucknell U. P., 2005), 168–86; Carmen Pereira-Muro, *Género, nación y literatura: Emilia Pardo Bazán en la literatura gallega y española* (West Lafayette: Purdue U. P., 2013), 21–65.

12 Jo Labanyi and Luisa Elena Delgado summarize Pardo Bazán's position as follows: 'Determined to be accepted in the public sphere as an equal to men, Pardo Bazán was not interested in writing in the sentimental style associated with women authors and with male-authored serialized fiction, often conceptualized as "feminine" because of its appeal to emotion' (Jo Labanyi & Luisa Elena Delgado [with Helena Buffery, Kirsty Hooper & Mari José Olaziregi], *Modern Literatures in Spain* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023], 38).

repudiated the didacticism associated with 'female' modes of writing, both Alas and Galdós flirted with *folletín* literature and its assumptions in the former's *La Regenta* (1884–1885) and the latter's *Tormento* (1884).<sup>13</sup> Stephanie Sieburth has shown how the narrator of *La Regenta* allows his own novel to be colonized by the very discourse of *folletín* otherness he has been seeking to parody.<sup>14</sup> I want to argue here that by the time Pardo Bazán had established her right to a voice among those peers, she dared to embrace the very fictional modes they had sought to consign to the past—the *folletín* and the didactic novella. Cristina Patiño Eirín and David Henn are among those who have subjected Pardo Bazán's theory of the novel to greatest scrutiny. Both agree that she is chary of didacticism—and critical of it in others' work—while also reluctant to define exactly what she understands by the term.<sup>15</sup> That space of undefinition is one in which she will test the fictional possibilities of such genres as the *folletín* and the 'novela ejemplar' in characteristically sophisticated ways to highlight feminist causes.

The analysis of Pardo Bazán's thinking on gender and inequality has received considerable attention in recent decades, thanks in the main to pioneering work by a host of scholars, among them her two most authoritative biographers, Eva Acosta and Isabel Burdiel, alongside Maryellen Bieder, Denise DuPont, Jo Labanyi, Cristina Patiño Eirín, Geraldine Scanlon and the aforementioned Joyce Tolliver. Scanlon has produced a compelling case for seeing *La Tribuna* (1883) as inflected with anxieties about what it was to be a woman with a public role in a country where women were supposed to be socially invisible.<sup>16</sup> Pereira-Muro has likewise demonstrated how the misogyny directed at her by male contemporaries implied that she was a 'mujer pública', that is, a sex-worker.<sup>17</sup> Yet it is to the mid 1880s that both Burdiel and Labanyi look for the start of Pardo Bazán's systematic and conscientious unpicking of medically derived theories of sexual difference. For Burdiel, she emerged from her marital separation and the controversy over *La cuestión*

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13 Alicia G. Andreu, 'El folletín como intertexto en *Tormento*', *Anales Galdosianos*, XVII (1982), 55–61; Anthony Percival, 'Melodramatic Metafiction in *Tormento*', *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 31:2 (1984), 153–60; Stephanie A. Sieburth, *Inventing High and Low: Literature, Mass Culture and Uneven Modernity in Spain* (Durham, NC: Duke U. P., 1994), 100–36.

14 Stephanie A. Sieburth, *Reading 'La Regenta': Duplicitous Discourse and the Entropy of Structure* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1990).

15 Cristina Patiño Eirín, *Poética de la novela en la obra crítica de Emilia Pardo Bazán* (Santiago de Compostela: Univ. de Santiago de Compostela, 1998), 253–60; David Henn, 'The Evolution of Pardo Bazán's Views on the Novel, 1879–1891', *Neophilologus*, 72:3 (1988), 380–93.

16 Geraldine M. Scanlon, 'Class and Gender in Pardo Bazán's *La Tribuna*', *BHS*, LXVII:2 (1990), 137–50.

17 Pereira-Muro, *Género, nación y literatura*, 58–59.

*palpitante* invested with an even greater sense of vocation.<sup>18</sup> The latter comes through strongly in the ‘Apuntes autobiográficos’ which prefaced *Los pazos de Ulloa*, where she states the need for Spanish fiction to ‘vivir y reflejar, como epopeya que es, la naturaleza y la sociedad, sin escamotear la verdad para sustituirla con ficciones literarias más o menos bellas’.<sup>19</sup> Key to the renewed sense of purpose Burdiel discerns was a desire to explore twin factors affecting the lives of Spanish women: on the one hand, their negligible access to the public sphere and, on the other, the array of expectations and meanings society sought to inscribe on their bodies.<sup>20</sup> That exploration is central to *La dama joven*. Labanyi, meanwhile, has argued that by the time Pardo Bazán had completed *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886) and *La madre Naturaleza* (1887), she had come to see gender as a construct and not a stable entity at all. Her analysis of the tangled web of shifting gender roles across that pair of novels leads to the conclusion that ‘th[e] unhinging of gender from biology is Pardo Bazán’s most radical disagreement with naturalist physiological determinism’.<sup>21</sup>

As the various nineteenth-century discourses on women insisted, sexual difference is ‘natural’ in the sense that it is real; but, as the multiplication of discourses itself demonstrates, the ‘natural’ has no stable, inherent meaning. In turning reality into representation modernity turns sexuality into gender (that is, a social construct), subjecting women to a proliferation of contradictory norms whose very arbitrariness allows the possibility of alternative mappings.<sup>22</sup>

It is my contention that her earlier and later novellas, *La dama joven* (1885) and *Mujer* (1893) contribute significantly to our understanding of that same critique. The former asks readers to see how women have identity thrust upon them within a dispiritingly narrow range of non-options, while the latter questions the attribution of particular intrinsic characteristics to either sex.

### ***La dama joven* (1885)**

Evidence from Pardo Bazán’s correspondence indicates that *La dama joven* was a late addition to the collection of short fiction to which it gave a title

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18 Isabel Burdiel, *Emilia Pardo Bazán* (Madrid: Taurus, 2019), 135 ff.

19 Emilia Pardo Bazán, ‘Apuntes autobiográficos’, in *Obras completas*, estudio preliminar, notas & prólogo de Federico Carlos Sainz de Robles, 3 vols (Madrid: Aguilar, 1963–1973), III (1973), *Cuentos; crítica literaria*, ed. Harry L. Kirby, 719.

20 Burdiel, *Emilia Pardo Bazán*, 228–29.

21 Jo Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2000), 361.

22 Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel*, 384.

in the Biblioteca Arte y Letras series.<sup>23</sup> It is ironically apposite that it was written in circumstances which throw into sharp relief the issue of a woman’s freedom: specifically, in this instance, to travel as she pleased. Despite having completed the volume’s prologue (dated 5 September 1884), Pardo Bazán spent part of her winter sojourn in Paris at the start of the following year drafting the novella that became its titular work. In a letter to Antonio Machado y Álvarez, she laments that the very fact of her having come to Paris alone is likely to set idle tongues wagging. She recalls the plight of an acquaintance, a grandmother no less, whose visit to the City of Light prompted much malicious gossip among her peers. Perhaps with said precedent in mind, Pardo Bazán’s own mother reportedly described her behaviour as ‘de gravísima imprudencia’.<sup>24</sup>

*La dama joven* is, at first glance, the stock in trade of a ‘noveladora moral’: a solid morality tale of how a wayward young woman is saved from the penury and scandal of a career on the stage to be ensconced in the secure domesticity of marriage. That Pardo Bazán was prepared to embrace—at least temporarily—the label of a *folletinista* is evident from the fact that she published *La dama joven* in ten instalments under the banner ‘Folletín de *La Época*’ in July 1893, the same year that the second novella here under discussion, *Mujer*, first saw print (Figure 1).

Why, therefore, at a time when her feminist campaigns were at their zenith, should she have chosen to produce work in the very fictional mode repudiated by her peers and which most dangerously associated her with the damning sobriquet ‘lady novelist’?<sup>25</sup> In the analysis that follows, I hope to provide potential answers to that question.

The novella’s setting is Marineda and its action simple. Two orphaned sisters are living together in a modest garret, making their living as seamstresses in a city workshop. Dolores, the elder of the two by twelve years, has acted as surrogate mother to her sister, Concha, since their mother’s death when the younger sibling was no more than a year old. Central to Dolores’ tutelage of her sister is a determination to ensure that Concha does not commit the same mistakes she made as an impressionable young woman beguiled by the promises of a well-to-do ‘señorito’. She was left a destitute single mother to a child who died in infancy. So grave, in fact, was the indigence into which the sisters fell that only the charitable

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23 Marina Mayoral, ‘Cartas inéditas de Emilia Pardo Bazán a Narcís Oller’, in *Homenaje al profesor Antonio Gallego Morell*, ed. Concha Argente del Castillo Ocaña *et al.*, 3 vols (Granada: Univ. de Granada, 1989), II, 389–410 (p. 404).

24 Antonio Deaño Gamallo, ‘Las cartas de Emilia Pardo Bazán a Antonio Machado y Álvarez’, *La Tribuna. Cuadernos de Estudios da Casa-Museo Emilia Pardo Bazán*, 6 (2008), 173–233 (p. 225).

25 The ten instalments in *La Época* appeared on the 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 31 July 1893.



EMILIA PARDO BAZÁN

## LA DAMA JOVEN

Ann ardía el quinqué de petróleo, pero con qué tufo tan apesotado y negro! Para almenjar la carbonizada y exprimida mecha, quedaban sólo, en el fondo del recipiente, unas cuantas gotas de aceite mineral, envueltas en impurezas y residuos. La torcida, sedienta, se las chupaba á toda prisa.

Renegando de la luz maldita, subiéndola á cada momento, cual si, á falta de combustible, pudiese mantenerse del aire, las dos hermanas trabajaban con ardo. En medio del silencio de las altas horas nocturnas, se oía distintamente el choque metálico de las tijeras, el rechinar de la aguja picando la seda y tropesando contra el dedal, el crujido de la tela á cada movimiento de la mano. ¡Qué lástima que se apagasen el quinqué! Estaban en lo mejor de la faena; mas la luz, que no gustaba miramientos, parpadeó, y con media docena de bufidos y chisporroteos avisó que no tardaría en cerrar su turbia pupila. La hermana menor levantó la cabeza, respirando, y espiciendo para soltar una hebra de seda que tenía enredada entre los dientes.

—¿Dolores?  
—¿Qué?—murmuró la mayor, sin interrumpir la costura.  
—Que nos quedamos á oscuras, chica.  
—Si no me das otra noticia...  
—Pero es que yo á oscuras no cose. ¿Hay petróleo?

—Ni misja.  
—¿Cabe de vela?  
—Tampoco. ¡Echa cabos!  
—Pues entonces, ¿qué haces ahí, tonta? Á dormir. A mí ya me duele el cuerpo de estar doblada.  
—Sugirió Dolores, y el quinqué, suspirando también estertorosamente, dió principio á su rápida agonía. Apenas tuvieron tiempo las costureras de echar

la labor sobre un sofá inmediato, cubriéndola con un lienzo tal fué de pronta la usurea de aquella angustia luz. Al quedar en tinieblas, el primer movimiento de las dos muchachas fué soltar la risa. ¿Acertarán con la cama? Á tientas y con las manos extendidas avanzaron en busca de sus lechos, tropezándose en mitad del camino, lo cual las puso de mejor humor si cabe.

—Ahora no te equivoques, y por acortarte en la cama te acuestes en el sofá,—exclamó Dolores.

—Mujer... lo peor será si cojo la almohada para los pies.

Se parecía ruido de corchetes desabrochados, resale de sayas, músicas de enaguas con almidón; le siguió la estrepitosa caída del calzado, y el gomitado de los jergones bajo el peso del cuerpo. De una de las camas salió también un rumor confuso, como de voz que masullaba muy bajo oraciones diferentes. La otra cama no chistó, dando motivo á una interpretación de la rezadora.

—¿Concha?  
—¿Eh?  
—No rezas hoy, ó qué te pasa?  
—Mujer... tengo más gana de dormir que de rezar.

—Vaya que un credo y una salve, no te privarán al sueño.  
Concha obedeció, y después del rezó dió varias vueltas en la cama, lo mismo que si alguna inquietud la desvelase. Volvió su hermana á interrogarla que tenía.

—No tengo sueño. Me he desahilado.  
—Pues mañana ya sabes que hay que madrugar.  
—Madrugar! ¿Tú qué hora piensas que es?  
—Que sé yo... ¿Las dos y media?  
—Las cuatro, chica. En el reloj de la Inocencia las acabo de oír.  
—¿Tú estás loca?  
—Sí, sí, desconfíate... Las cuatro.  
—Eh, pues chitto y á dormir.  
Callaron ambas, pero la excitación de la afanosa vigilia producía su efecto, y, aunque rendidas y desahucadas de sueño, no podían conciliarlo. Era el instante en que se piensa en todo, recordando lo pasado,

evocando con terror ó ilusión lo futuro. Mientras los ojos ven en la sombra abrirse un círculo de livida luz, una especie de foco tremulo y oscilante, verde, violado y amarillo, la imaginación, exaltada, acumula cuidados y memorias, un tropel de deseos, esperanzas, dolores muertos que renacen, figuras y escenas ya borradas que vuelven á tomar cuerpo al calor de leve fiebreclia.

Dolores, la mayor, cavilaba. Tenía doce años más que su hermana, y contaba apenas trece cuando quedaron huérfanas. Se veía tan chiquilla aún, calculando el biberón por la mañana, antes de salir para el taller donde trabajaba, y haciendo el pesón artificial, tibio y blando, en la boca del pobre angelito, para que no llorase. Los domingos era dichosa, porque podía tener en brazos todo el día á la neté. Por fin, el rollo de carne con patas echaba á andar, y Dolores, hecha ya una mujer, un tanto relevada de sus tempranas obligaciones maternales, empezaba á dejarse tentar, alguna vez que otra, á ir á los bailes de los Circos. En Carnaval asistía á tres seguidos, con flores en el pelo y guantes prestados. Después... un episodio que Dolores no quería recordar, pero cuyos menores detalles tenía grabados, como en bronce, allá en no sé qué rincónes del cerebro donde habita la memoria de las cosas tristes...

Unos amores breves, la seducción, la deshonra, el desengaño... Historia vulgar y tremenda. La enfermedad trajo de la mano la miseria: el fruto de las entrañas de Dolores, mal nutrido por una leche escasa y pobre, languideció y sucumbió pronto, dejando contagiada á la niña ó cuatro años, á Concha, con la horrible tose ferina, tos que arrancaba de sus tiernos pulmones estrías de sangre. No tuvo Dolores tiempo de llorar á su hijo: era preciso cuidar á su hermana, hacerla mudar de aires en seguida... Y no podía un céntimo, y había empeñado hasta sus botas de salir á la calle y su único mantón. No olvidarla, no la tarde en que á cuerpo, tirando de frío, entró en la iglesia de San Efraín, á rezar una salve á la Virgen del Amparo. Al lado del amarrar careaba la raja de un confesionario: tras de la raja un escordeote. Arrodiada, sin inexplicable consuelo, refririó todas sus

cuotas. Al otro día la visitaban dos socias de San Vicente de Paul: al final de la semana le daban bonos de pan, chocolate y carnes: de allí á medio mes le colocaban á Concha en casa de una lechera que vivía á dos leguas, en una aldehueta alegre y sana: al mes y medio, la niña regresaba robustecida, curada de sus tos y acostumbrada á comerse una libra de pan de azúar en un cuartillo de leche. Dolores la adoraba: ya no tenía más pensamiento que aquella criatura. Anhelaba borrar lo pasado y proteger á Concha. Aborrecía á los hombres: que no la hubiesen de bailes ni de jaleos. Confundíase primero «da mes, luego cada domingo. Ya no necesitaba el socorro de los padres, y se había apresurado á decirle, redimiéndolo, no sin cierto vanidoso contentamiento, de una protección que el artesano laborioso juzga siempre humillante, por lo que trasciende á limosna. Mas le restaba el auxilio moral, la recomendación de las socias, que jamás la consintió estrechar de trabajo. Prefería las casas al taller, porque en las cocinas le permitían dar de comer á Concha, y aun le rogaban que la llevase, enamorados de la hermosura y despejo de la rapaz. Así que ésta fué creciendo y pudo cozer también, se hizo preciso mudar de sistema y volver á los talleres: no era fácil que en las casas facilitasen labor á dos modistas á un tiempo, y antes se dejaba Dolores cortar una mano, que apartarse una pulgada de su chiquilla, alta ya y formada, tendadora como el fruto que empieza á madurar. ¡Eso sí que no! Para desgraciada bastaba ella: á Concha que no la tocase ni el aire: corría de su cuenta do fenderla con dientes y uñas. Todo cuidado era poco en aquella ciudad de Marinoda, donde chicos del comercio, calaveras y señoritos ociosos, no pensaban más que en seguir la pista á las muchachas guapas. Temió Dolores, en particular, á los señoritos: ¡por qué no se dedicaban á las de su clase? ¡Tanta señorita sin novio, y las artesanas obsequiadas, perseguidas, cazadas como perdices! Mirando lo que sucedía, era cosa de temblar cuántas chicas preciosas, que serían buenas si no se hubiesen encontrado con un picaro, y que se veían perdidas, desgraciadas para siempre! Una, teniendo que mantener dos y tres criaturas; otras, decendiendo poco á poco desde el

primer desfilé hasta caer en la vida airada... Dana compasión. ¡Y el lujo! Eso, eso era lo que podía á Dolores fuera de sí. ¡Bailes, chaquetas de terciopelo, disfraces en Carnaval, botitas de ó cuatro áforos! ¡Muchachas que ganaban una peseta y cinco reales diarios, dígame usted por Dios de dónde lo han de sacar! Ya se sabe: teniendo un oficio de día y otro de noche. ¡Malvadas!

No eran tales solloquios nuevos en Dolores, sino tan antiguos como las inquietudes respecto á su hermana; mas lo curioso del caso fué que, sin que un solo día dejase de hacer semejantes reflexiones, á medida que Concha se desarrollaba y empezaba á celebrarse su linda presencia, desperdiciaba en la hermana mayor esa vanidad característica de las madres, y á costa de privaciones y ocasiones le empreñaba y componía, para que no quedase por bajo de las demás, y por el delito de mantenerse honrada, no pareciera la puerca Centineta. Con este motivo sufrió Dolores alguna fuerte reprimenda de su confesor, ¡señta agua, que le decía.—Si tú misma fomentas en la chiquilla la presunción, ¿cómo quieres que no te dé á la hora menos pensada un disgusto? Pónia de hábito, anda. ¿No has aprendido en tu cabeza?

¡Eh! ¡había! Dolores lo sabía hacia muchos años, desde su desgracia: pero... cubrir con aquella estameborda el gentil cuerpo de Concha! Preferió confesarse menos, y se retrajo algo de sus devociones, á fin de no ser retida por su inocente vanidad maternal. Redobló, eso sí, la vigilancia, y se hizo centinela asiduo, infatigable, alerta siempre. Concha era fácil de guardar: no quería salir sola: á los bailes, á los terribles bailes, prefería el teatro, su única abdición.

(Se continuará.)

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Figure 1  
First instalment of *La dama joven* as it appeared in 'Folletín de *La Época*'.  
Image taken from the Archives of the Biblioteca Nacional de España.  
Reproduced by courtesy of the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.

intervention of the Church saved them from starvation. As the main action of the novel begins, Concha is eighteen or nineteen and betrothed to a young cabinetmaker named Ramón. She has, moreover, discovered a talent for acting which she deploys in amateur-dramatic performances through her local 'Casino de Industriales'. The director of the company, Manuel Gormaz, is a veteran of the stage seeing out his twilight years against the modest backdrop of provincial chamber theatre. He has given her the lead role in the latest production, having noted her facility for learning lines and breathing life into her character. He is curious to hear a second opinion on Concha's talents and, to that end, has invited along an erstwhile colleague, the renowned actor Juanito Estrella, to ask his view. The first and only night becomes something of an apogee for both her potential career and her future marriage. Estrella is more than favourably impressed by Concha's beauty and skill, so much so that he begins building castles in the sky, imagining the stardom that awaits her. Meanwhile, her fiancé Ramón, already frustrated by the fanatical tenacity Dolores has exercised in chaperoning the young couple, bridles at the attention Concha receives on stage and in particular the unchaste remarks he overhears from some male spectators. So incensed is he that he tries to insist during an interval that Concha refuse to wear the low-cut dress that is her assigned costume for the play's final act. When she emerges with it on, he storms out of the theatre in a rage, casting their betrothal into doubt. Early the following morning, Gormaz visits the sisters' humble garret and invites Concha to launch a professional stage career. Dolores is distraught at the idea of her sister, on whom she has lavished such care, throwing away her reputation. Concha finds the prospect enticing but is unsure. Gormaz asks for their decision by the end of the day, at which point the sisters leave for their workshop. Dolores seeks advice from her confessor in the church that has been their mainstay since her fall from grace. The Jesuit priest initially suggests that Concha be invited to enter a convent or brought before him so that he might talk her round. Then, realizing how tenaciously Dolores has controlled her sister's behaviour, not least by denying her any time with Ramón, he tells the elder sibling that a decision on the future must lie with Concha herself. Ramón has meanwhile recovered from his fit of petulance and, more importantly, has secured the funding to set up his own carpentry business, the establishment of which had been seen as the last needful condition for his marriage to Concha to take place. Dolores tells him to go to the garret (unaccompanied this time) so that the engaged couple can talk matters over. She returns some time later to find Gormaz and Estrella on their way up the multiple flights of stairs to their flat. A final interview takes place as to which path Concha will choose—tread the boards or settle for domesticity. Concha tries at first to defer to her sister's wishes but Dolores refuses to offer an opinion. Concha opts for marriage, much to the disappointment of the ageing

thespians. They reflect bitterly as they make their way back down the stairs that Ramón is likely to saddle her with a child per year and, if she's unlucky, regular beatings.

Despite critics' limited engagement with Pardo Bazán's novellas, *La dama joven* is a happy exception. Among those to have examined the text is Julia Biggane, whose analysis pays close attention to the pervasive use of focalized narration and free indirect style.<sup>26</sup> So extensive is that use of shifting perspective that 'the reader cannot anchor him- or herself to a consistent vantage-point'.<sup>27</sup> To her observation we might add that the shifting perspective gives the novella the air of life lived in the breathless here and now. Characters make potentially momentous decisions regarding their future but do so—the reader can discern—based on limited self-knowledge or a shaky grasp of their own motivations, epitomized by the narrator's remark that: 'La juventud suele vivir sólo en lo presente, o, al menos, en lo futuro inmediato'.<sup>28</sup>

As Henn has argued, the whole novel is steeped in ambiguity and ambivalence.<sup>29</sup> Carmen Parrón likewise states that '[l]a incertidumbre es el rasgo predominante de *La dama joven*'.<sup>30</sup> We might see it as an example of what Bieder calls Pardo Bazán's technique of shaping 'the conventions of different generic traditions to her purposes [...] thus diminish[ing] the authority of genre on reading and keep[ing] the reader in flux under the pressure of competing responses'.<sup>31</sup> In particular, the motivations of key characters at crucial junctures are left deliberately impossible to assess. One such is Dolores and her attitude to her sister. Does her insistence that Concha must pursue a life of respectable domesticity derive from a sincere understanding of what will make Concha happy or from terror that the younger sibling may commit the same mistakes she herself has made?:

[...] no era fácil que en las casas facilitasen labor a dos modistas a un tiempo, y antes se dejaría Dolores cortar una mano, que apartarse una

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26 Julia Biggane, *In a Liminal Space: The Novellas of Emilia Pardo Bazán* (Durham: Univ. of Durham Press, 2000), 15–29.

27 Biggane, *In a Liminal Space*, 20.

28 Emilia Pardo Bazán, *La dama joven* (Barcelona: Biblioteca Arte y Letras, 1885), 28–29. All subsequent references appear in brackets in the text.

29 David Henn, *The Early Pardo Bazán: Theme and Narrative Technique in the Novels of 1879–89* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1988), 17–18.

30 Carmen Parrón, *Arte y literatura en 'La cuestión palpitante' y las novelas cortas de Emilia Pardo Bazán*, with a foreword by Janet Pérez (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 163–66 (p. 164).

31 Maryellen Bieder, 'En-Gendering Strategies of Authority: Emilia Pardo Bazán and the Novel', in *Cultural and Historical Grounding for Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Hernán Vidal (Minneapolis: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1989), 473–95 (p. 479).

pulgada de su chiquilla, alta ya y formada, tentadora como el fruto que empieza a madurar. ¡Eso sí que no! Para desgraciada bastaba ella. (24)

The use of 'chiquilla' and the exclamatory tone of '¡Eso sí que no!' make plain that we are eavesdropping on Dolores' thoughts through free indirect style. We might further ask why, given her fears, does the quasi-maternal pride she takes in Concha's beauty inspire her to dress her sister up in the kind of finery that earns a rebuke from her Jesuit confessor?: 'Si tú misma fomentas en la chiquilla la presunción ¿cómo quieres que no te dé a la hora menos pensada un disgusto?' (25). Pardo Bazán aims to explore the opacity of motive that underpins a great deal of what human beings say and do.

This mode of characterization extends to the hoary actors Gormaz and Estrella whose interest in Concha is ambivalently couched as oscillating between sexual attraction and admiration for her histrionic talents. When the two men first meet during an interval in the play—Estrella has arrived late, with the performance already under way—the impression is of two old dogs sniffing out young blood:

Estrella sonreía: Gormaz le miró de un modo singular, y aquella ojeada que se cruzó entre los dos actores acostumbrados a declarar con la expresión tantas cosas, para Estrella fue equivalente a un discurso. Sin embargo, adivinó a medias.

—¿Qué?—pronunció. —¿Que hay algo bueno que ver, eh? ¿Una chica guapa? (54)

And yet, when they meet following the final curtain, their admiration for her skill appears sincere. For both men, her performance has summoned memories of great actresses of yesteryear and has convinced them that Concha could yet take up their mantle: 'Esta será encantadora: se escribirán papeles para ella. Esa juventud, ese aire de candor, esa frescura, unidos al talento, ya verá Vd. lo que dan de sí' (61). Patiño Eirín has analysed the admittedly fortuitous but none the less extraordinary coincidences between the descriptions of Concha's performance methodology and the theories of the great Russian theatre practitioner, Konstantin Stanislavski, which he would develop and formalize in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> The ways in which Concha thinks and feels her way into her character indicate natural ability and an unusually acute artistic intuition. It would seem that Estrella and Gormaz have every reason to believe a bright future awaits her, while their later pique at Concha's refusal, and jaundiced

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32 Cristina Patiño Eirín, 'Trashumancias de Talía: actores y actrices según Pardo Bazán', in *Emilia Pardo Bazán y las artes del espectáculo. IV Simposio, A Coruña, 25, 26, 27 28 e 29 de xuño de 2007*, coord. José Manuel González Herrán, Cristina Patiño Eirín & Ermitas Penas Varela (A Coruña: Fundación Caixa Galicia, 2008), 189–242 (pp. 201–06).

prognostications of what lies in store for her in marriage, must be seen against a backdrop of studied ambiguity. While they climb wearily to her humble garret the two men wheeze and splutter, making plain that good health has not been their reward for a lifetime treading the boards. Nor, seemingly, has prosperity been any easier to come by, since rumours are circulating that Estrella's company is close to bankruptcy: 'en Marinada se contaba que a Estrella le corrían mal los negocios, que le costaba trabajo pagar a su compañía, que en la fonda estaban algo recelosos ...' (75–76). Is their effort to recruit Concha a last, desperate throw of the dice? Dolores may well be right to fear that a life of financial insecurity awaits her sister in the acting profession. Evidence to that effect also sits outside the novella itself, in a two-part article published by Pardo Bazán almost exactly a year before she wrote *La dama joven* and rescued from obscurity in the chapter by Patiño Eirín referred to above. Prompted by a recent tour of Portugal, Pardo Bazán delivers a withering verdict on the state of Spanish theatre, in comparison to that of its nearest neighbour, condemning everything from the tastes of the theatre-going public to the quality of actors and companies.<sup>33</sup>

Concha's *fiancé*, Ramón, is likewise difficult to pin down. Margot Versteeg argues that 'Pardo confronts her readers with a young woman of great dramatic talents who turns down an offer to pursue a career as a professional actress and instead accepts the marriage proposal of a humble woodworker who proves to be extremely jealous and possessive'.<sup>34</sup> One response might be that such an argument is trying to read beyond the boundaries of Pardo Bazán's novella and provide an answer to a question—of Concha's future—which is deliberately withheld. Ramón is a typical product of his environment and class in his attitudes to his future bride 'exhibiting' herself in public. In that sense, Concha's body is to him already a proxy commodity in which his honour and ownership are bound up: any consumption of that 'private property' by the public gaze shames him. He has made clear that all thoughts of acting must cease once they are married. His jealousy at seeing his *fiancée* publicly admired may reflect petulance but it also points to a wider social unease over women who come to prominence in a public arena which otherwise systematically excludes them from view. Bieder has explored precisely this uncomfortable liminality in Pardo Bazán's response to women's presence in the acting profession: 'Es una carrera que la separa de la sociedad en vez de

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33 Emilia Pardo Bazán, 'Los actores portugueses', *La Ilustración Ibérica*, 23 February 1884, p. 123. The second part of this article appeared in the next instalment of the same journal on 1 March 1884, pp. 134 & 138.

34 Margot Versteeg, '“A Most Promising Girl”: Gender and Artistic Future in Emilia Pardo Bazán's "La dama joven"', in *Modern Spanish Women As Agents of Social Change: Essays in Honour of Maryellen Bieder*, ed. Jennifer Smith (Lewisburg: Bucknell U. P., 2019), 126–44 (p. 126).

integrarla en ella, aislándola sobre todo del mundo de las mujeres sin integrarla en el mundo del poder masculino y situándola en otra esfera marginada, la del teatro. Doble marginación, entonces'.<sup>35</sup> A final less-than-winning character trait is Ramón's recourse to emotional blackmail when Concha refuses him a first kiss on their unchaperoned walk to the theatre, a refusal to which he reacts by sulking until she changes her mind. But as the novella ends, he appears contrite about his earlier behaviour—'hice bastante mal y estuve un poco acalorado y un poco imprudente' (82)—and genuinely excited at the realization of his dreams of economic independence and self-employment: 'Pues, gracias a Dios—exclamó radiante de júbilo el mozo—, ya no habrá por qué mordernos y se acabarán todos esos disgustos. Aquí donde Vd. me ve tengo los cuartos para el establecimiento' (83). He has, moreover, treated Concha respectfully in the time they have spent alone together in her home prior to the arrival of Dolores, Gormaz and Estrella. The question of whether he will prove a loving husband hangs in the balance.

Biggane has argued of Estrella and Ramón that the 'use of unglossed dialogue to characterize the two figures and the use of external focalization make it impossible for the reader to decide' whether Concha has thrown up a golden opportunity and condemned herself to misery.<sup>36</sup> The trend continues with Dolores' Jesuit confessor, who is presented as both 'sagaz' (25) and yet unbendingly conservative in his views: his opposition to a career on the stage is absolute. Particularly striking is the limited physical description of him during the pivotal final interview with Dolores, when the only part of his body Dolores can see is his nose behind the grill of the confessional. Lou Charon-Deutsch would have it that by adopting this disembodied perspective Pardo Bazán is endorsing the caricature—so beloved of the contemporary liberal press—of the prurient priest who uses Spain's womenfolk to extend the reach of the Church into the private realm of the home.<sup>37</sup> In this reading, the nose would stand synecdochically for unwanted intrusion: in idiomatic Spanish, as in English, the nose is the part of the body that people stick into others' business. And yet, as Biggane observes, there is no evidence to support such a conclusion, which would in any case be bizarrely out of character for a lifelong Catholic and proud

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35 Maryellen Bieder, 'El teatro de Benito Pérez Galdós y Emilia Pardo Bazán. Estructura y visión en *Mariucha y Cuesta abajo*', in *Actas del IX Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas 18-23 agosto 1986*, ed. Sebastian Neumeister, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1989), II, 17-24 (p. 21). This is in contrast to Versteeg's claim that: 'While male authors constructed the actress as a dangerous force that needed to be contained, for women who pursued a literary career, such as Emilia Pardo Bazán, she was above all an example to emulate' (Versteeg, 'A Most Promising Girl', 126).

36 Biggane, *In a Liminal Space*, 22.

37 Lou Charon-Deutsch, *The Nineteenth-Century Spanish Story: Textual Strategies of a Genre in Transition* (London: Tamesis, 1985), 86-90.

member of the Third Order of Franciscans.<sup>38</sup> Instead, Pardo Bazán toys with the stereotype only to row back from it decisively. The Jesuit chides Dolores for the rigidity of her treatment of Concha during the latter's courtship. What Concha needs, he avers, is breathing space and a chance for her affection for Ramón to find full expression: 'Mi parecer es este, hija ... No contraríes de frente a la muchacha ... Si puedes, gana tiempo ... Y que el novio procure disuadirla ... hablándola ... a ... solas ... es decir, ... ¿con cierta libertad, eh? Y no te apures ... ánimo' (81–82).

So, what are we to make of Concha's decision? Does she renounce her theatrical ambitions out of love for Ramón, fear of disappointing her sister, or the true conviction that life on the stage is not for her? We are in no position to say. Moreover, at its *dénouement* the novella denies readers the hitherto limited access we had enjoyed to Concha's thought processes. Biggane sees this sleight of hand as a symptom of generic hybridity: 'the combination of novelistic presentation of discourse with conventionally short-story-like concise and limited characterization'.<sup>39</sup> It is here that this discussion parts company with her analysis. Instead, I would argue that the novella enacts the very phenomenon it seeks to denounce: the ways in which a woman's body and destiny become empty vessels into which society and individuals pour meanings and expectations in line with their own prejudices. We have no access to Concha's thoughts at the conclusion of the text because any transcription of them could not possibly pick a path through the minefield of motivations, expectations, and fears she is trying to traverse. What space is left for Concha herself, the novella asks us, when she is being required to stand for so many different things? Is she a talent lost to the stage by outmoded ideas? A housewife steered away from dishonour? A soul saved by a Jesuit priest? A sister who rewards her sibling's sacrifices and expiates her sins? A woman in love who chooses married life in the plenitude of her freedom? She is both all of them and none of them. Or, as Bieder has argued: 'In Pardo Bazán's novels to be a woman is to exist from a male perspective, to be seen and judged by men. Her central female characters are viewed objects, women perceived and written by individual men and, by extension, by the norms of the male community'.<sup>40</sup> Pardo Bazán's 'dama joven' experiences the full force of that scrutiny and is powerless to prevent it from enveloping her.

Versteeg has suggested in a recent study that the novella's use of intertextual reference to Adelardo Pérez de Ayala's play, *Consuelo*, presents a subtle critique of the decision Concha ultimately makes.<sup>41</sup> Relying on the ability of readers to cross-reference in a sophisticated way

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38 Biggane, *In a Liminal Space*, 25–26.

39 Biggane, *In a Liminal Space*, 28.

40 Bieder, 'En-Gendering Strategies of Authority', 480.

41 Versteeg, '“A Most Promising Girl”', 139–40.

belies the more *folletín*-like aspects of the novella. Thus, Pardo Bazán would be playing a double game by invoking intertextual reference points within *La dama joven* itself to undermine the novella’s disarmingly naïve appearance: ‘The *folletín*-esque topic and the illustrations bring readers and money, while Pardo Bazán’s sophisticated use of intertexts to undermine the *folletín*—apart from furthering her feminist agenda—brings her prestige and admiration in the literary community’.<sup>42</sup> The accompanying illustrations in the novella’s first edition, hallmark of the Biblioteca Arte y Letras series, arguably accentuated its romantic intrigue and melodrama, in line with expectations of a *folletín*.<sup>43</sup> Versteeg further argues that ‘the discourse of *folletines* and realism mutually deconstruct one another’ in *La dama joven*. Whereas ‘the *folletín* of the virtuous woman ends in marriage to reward the poor heroine’s chastity and abnegation [...] the realist novel, on the contrary, ends with the punishment of the individual who dares to challenge the social norms’. Pardo Bazán would thus have punished Concha with marriage for her being ‘just as narrow-minded as her sister’.<sup>44</sup> As indicated above, I do not agree with this conclusion, not least because it casts Pardo Bazán as a strange sort of feminist and a woman eager to blame the victim for social binds she did not choose and cannot overcome. Pardo Bazán’s decision to publish her novella as a ‘Folletín de *La Época*’ in 1893 ought perhaps to be seen as an effort to reach out to a wider readership: to those lower down the social ladder caught up in those very same binds but without sufficiently deep pockets to buy books, for whom access to a daily newspaper—whether in their familial or social spaces—was a more realistic possibility. It might also be seen as a scorning of the unwritten rules of the masculine project that was the Restoration novel at a time when many of its adherents had rounded on her feminist campaigns, denied her entry to the Real Academia, and publicly attacked her stance on women’s education.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Versteeg, ‘“A Most Promising Girl”’, 138.

43 Ángeles Ezama Gil, ‘*La dama joven* de Emilia Pardo Bazán y Mariano Obiols Delgado (1885)’, in Raquel Guitérrez Sebastián *et al.*, *Literatura e imagen: la ‘Biblioteca Arte y Letras’* (Santander: Ediciones de la Univ. de Cantabria, 2012), 155–82; Ángeles Quesada Novás, ‘Emilia Pardo Bazán: obras ilustradas’, in *Historia de la literatura ilustrada española del siglo XIX*, coord. Raquel Gutiérrez Sebastián, José María Ferri Coll & Borja Rodríguez Gutiérrez (Santander: Univ. de Cantabria/Santiago de Compostela: Univ. de Santiago de Compostela, 2019), 121–48.

44 Versteeg, ‘“A Most Promising Girl”’, 137.

45 See, for example, Leopoldo Alas, ‘Congreso pedagógico’, in *Obras completas*, ed. Botrel & Lissorgues, IV (pt 2) (2003), *Crítica (Segunda parte)*, ed. Laureano Bonet, 1852–55; ‘Palique’, in *Obras completas*, ed. Botrel & Lissorgues, VIII (2005), *Artículos (1891–1894)*, 433–37 (p. 436); Burdiel, *Emilia Pardo Bazán*, 429–66; and Ricardo Virtanen, ‘Abril de 1912: fin del sueño de Emilia Pardo Bazán por conquistar una plaza en la Real Academia Española de la Lengua’, *La Tribuna. Cadernos de Estudos da Casa-Museo Emilia Pardo Bazán*, 11 (2016), 23–45.



### The Question of Exemplarity and *Mujer* (1893)

As noted above, when selecting texts for the Biblioteca de la Mujer series, Pardo Bazán enlisted a historical ally for her endeavours, María de Zayas. Both writers denounced through their works ‘el desprecio y rebajamiento de la mujer’ which fuelled misogynistic violence every bit as much in the Spain of the Restoration as it had during the Golden Age.<sup>46</sup> Zayas was a self-declared writer of exemplary fiction: her novellas sought to instruct. And yet, by the time Pardo Bazán came to include Zayas in her ‘Biblioteca’, a whiff of scandal hung around her name. Juan Valera was one of those ready to dispute Zayas’ claims to moral rectitude. In 1860 he had huffed disapprovingly at the frank depiction of female sexuality and male stupidity in *El prevenido engañado*.<sup>47</sup> (The latter is among the novellas Pardo Bazán names as having omitted from her selection due to its unbuttoned nature, although it was helpful of her to supply the title in case her readers wished to source it elsewhere.)<sup>48</sup> Valera went on to include among the characters of *El comendador Mendoza* (1876–1877) a redoubtable aunt with a colourful past whose favourite bedtime reading are the (implicitly racy) novels of María de Zayas.<sup>49</sup> Pardo Bazán seeks to head off any criticism in her prologue: ‘Nuestro recato exterior ha progresado tanto desde el siglo XVII acá, que temo [...] se la juzgue mal por culpa de algunas frases vivas y algunas escenas poco veladas (aunque nunca realmente licenciosas) que pueden encontrarse en sus escritos’.<sup>50</sup> To include her in the ‘Biblioteca’ is at once a gesture of defiance as well as an assertion of the potentialities of didactic fiction in the national canon at a time when Pardo Bazán’s peers had declared it beyond the pale.

Yet, it was not only the shifting sands of public taste that had altered the ways in which readers might react to Zayas’ prose, there was also the question of advancing scientific knowledge. Pardo Bazán describes *La inocencia castigada*, in which a noblewoman is lured to the bed of a man who is not her husband with the help of a wax fetish created by a Moorish sorcerer, as a ‘curioso relato donde, más bien que patrañas mágicas, veo un caso de *sonambulismo y sugestión hipnótica a distancia*,—interpretado

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46 Pardo Bazán, ‘Breve noticia sobre doña María de Zayas y Sotomayor’, 16. See, for example, Cristina Patiño Eirín’s anthology of Pardo Bazán’s stories of violence against women: Emilia Pardo Bazán, *El encaje roto. Antología de cuentos de violencia contra las mujeres*, ed. Cristina Patiño Eirín (Zaragoza: Contraseña, 2018).

47 Juan Valera, ‘De la naturaleza y carácter de la novela’, in *El arte de la novela*, prólogo & selección de Adolfo Sotelo Vázquez (Barcelona: Lumen, 1996), 73–97 (p. 92).

48 Pardo Bazán, ‘Breve noticia sobre doña María de Zayas y Sotomayor’, 15.

49 Juan Valera, *El comendador Mendoza. Las cordobesas. Un poco de crematística* (Madrid: Administración de la Ilustración Española y Americana, 1877), 10.

50 Pardo Bazán, ‘Breve noticia sobre doña María de Zayas y Sotomayor’, 15.

como entonces se podía interpretar’.<sup>51</sup> Ambivalence of interpretation has been germane to the Spanish ‘novela ejemplar’ ever since Cervantes famously promised to cut off his one remaining hand before he put before the public any work that could do positive harm. As Barry Taylor has suggested, Cervantes’ *Novelas ejemplares* deliberately withhold easy or straightforward interpretation: ‘first and foremost, Cervantes does not want to be clear. This is an essential feature of his artistic make-up’.<sup>52</sup> Isabel Torres has likewise written of *La española inglesa*: ‘The surface text, however, is but a beguiling pretext carefully constructed by Cervantes to draw his readers into an often ambiguous and paradoxical interpretative space’.<sup>53</sup> The Spanish ‘novela ejemplar’ has thus been since its inception the antithesis of a crude morality tale, which is perhaps one of the reasons why Pardo Bazán found herself writing in that mode late in 1893.

If in *La dama joven* she had used the beguiling appearance of a *folletín*-like plot to denounce the fetishization of the female body, she would return to that same territory in the novella, *Mujer* (1893), which Pardo Bazán collected as one of three *Novelas ejemplares* in a volume of her self-published *Obras completas* in 1895. Of immediate interest is what the author understood by, or wished her reader to expect from, the designation ‘novela ejemplar’. Unlike Cervantes, Pardo Bazán gave no introduction to her volume. A potential—though by no means definitive—answer might be found in the mission statement of *La Ilustración Moderna*, the short-lived ‘semanario’ in which *Mujer* was first published in the final months of 1893 (Figure 2).<sup>54</sup>

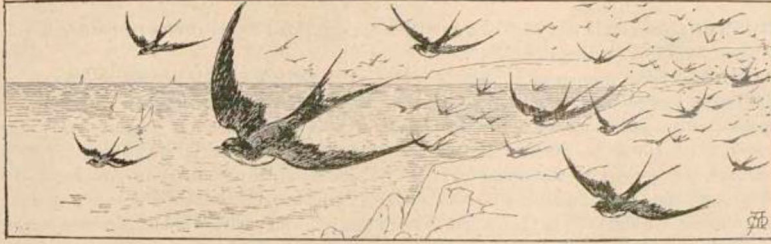
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51 Pardo Bazán, ‘Breve noticia sobre doña María de Zayas y Sotomayor’, 15.

52 Barry Taylor, ‘Exemplarity in and around the *Novelas ejemplares*’, *Modern Language Review*, 110:2 (2015), 456–72 (p. 460).

53 Isabel Torres, ‘Now You See It, Now You ... See It Again? The Dynamics of Doubling in *La española inglesa*’, in *A Companion to Cervantes’s ‘Novelas ejemplares’*, ed. Stephen Boyd (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005), 115–33 (p. 115).

54 The only critic to have hitherto noted the fact that *Mujer* was published in serialized form prior to its appearance in the 1895 edition of *Novelas ejemplares* is Ángeles Ezama Gil. See her ‘El lugar de la novela corta en la narrativa de Emilia Pardo Bazán’, in *Emilia Pardo Bazán: los cuentos, II Simposio, a Coruña, 27, 28, 29 e 30 de xuño de 2005*, coord. José Manuel González Herrán (A Coruña: Fundación Caixa Galicia, 2006), 197–223 (p. 202). There is no reference to *Mujer* in the biographies of Pardo Bazán by Acosta or Burdiel. The details supplied here correct the misleading bibliographical information supplied in Darío Villanueva & José Manuel González Herrán, ‘Introducción’, in Emilia Pardo Bazán, *Obras completas*, ed. Darío Villanueva & José Manuel González Herrán, 12 vols (Madrid: Fundación José Antonio Castro, 1999–2012), VI (2002), *Novelas ejemplares. Novelas cortas*, ix–xxvi. Subsequent in-text page numbers for *Mujer* refer to this edition. For an overview of *La Ilustración Moderna*, see Ángeles Ezama Gil, ‘Una ilustración atípica: *La Ilustración Moderna* (Barcelona, 1892–1894)’, in *La prensa ilustrada en España: las ‘Ilustraciones’ 1850–1920*, ed. Eliseo Trenc (Montpellier: Univ. Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, 1996), 315–25.



## MUJER

I

**H**AN enganchado ya,—dijo Alfonso de la Cueva entrando viva y alegremente en el tocador de su esposa, que en aquel mismo instante abría los brazos para facilitar á la doncella la colocación del abrigo, de brocado blanco y plata.—El movimiento del cuerpo de la dama fué tan gracioso al agasajarse en su magnífica *salida de teatro*; la cabeza chica y atrevidamente peinada á la griega resaltaba con tal donaire sobre el cuello aureolado de piel de cisne, que el joven marido, entusiasmado, iba á permitirse alguna familiaridad indiscreta, á no contenerle expresiva ojeada, entre maliciosa y suplicante.

La doncella, muy seria y digna, murmuró:

—No me ha mandado la señora sacar abanico ni pañuelo. ¿Se la olvida á la señora?

—¡Es verdad! exclamó Ana. Saque usted un pañuelo... cualquiera... de encaje... y el abanico de los pastores... el de concha.

Mientras la doncella abría y cerraba armarios, los esposos, alborozados y risueños, trocaban señitas como dos novios.

En efecto, eran casi novios todavía; su luna de miel contaría de fecha cinco meses. El casamiento se había verificado en Julio, con gran aparato y pompa, en casa de los padres de Ana, los marqueses de Monclares; y después de la ceremonia los desposados salieron hacia París, prolongando luego el viaje, perdiéndose en los bonitos y aislados hoteles de Alemania y Suiza, desgranando el tiempo á placer y según el capricho de su pasión nueva y fresca. Porque conviene advertir que, á pesar de las razones prácticas y de vanidad que habían influido en el enlace—los Monclares nobles recientes y opulentísimos, los la Cueva nada acaudalados pero de la pierna del Cid—á pesar de la vulgaridad y la rutina elegante que presidió á la boda, á pesar del pasado borrascoso y el bullicioso genio de Alfonso, que contrastaba con el carácter grave y firme de Ana,—la posesión, la vida común, y sobre todo alguna otra causa de esas que no se explican, porque pertenecen á la esfera de lo indefinible, hicieron germinar, crecer y abrirse la flor rara y exquisita de un grandísimo amor, que llamaré *conyugal* sólo porque Ana y Alfonso

TOMO III.—73.



Biblioteca Nacional de España

Figure 2

The first page of *Mujer* as it appeared in *La Ilustración Moderna*. Image taken from the Archives of the Biblioteca Nacional de España. Reproduced by courtesy of the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.

Its editors, while broadly welcoming the growth of equality before the law of all citizens in the Americas and Europe, express their dismay at the rush towards enfranchisement of the masses in societies which have had scant opportunity to remedy the benighted state in which those hordes still live. The journal will thus contribute to the enlightenment of the populace through the artistic, literary, and musical works it puts before the public:

Las clases directoras de la sociedad actual se hallan obligadas, a nuestro juicio, a darle al pueblo buenos ejemplos y saludables lecturas, procurando a su vez buscar para sí lo que enseña deleitando y lo que deleita enseñando, evitando cuidadosamente lo que corrompe, lo que afemina, lo que extravía la razón y apaga la fe, lo que fomenta los odios y ahoga la misericordia, lo que convierte en imagen de la bestia al que fue hecho a imagen de Dios.<sup>55</sup>

Edification is to be sought through a Christian outlook, reinforced by the beauty of works which instruct as much as they delight the reader. And yet, as Ezama Gil points out, that edification came at a price, since the lavishly illustrated journal cost more than double the average for a periodical of its kind. Far from being a journal aimed at the benighted hordes, therefore, it is better characterized by its 'más rígido elitismo'.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, whereas her decision to publish *La dama joven* earlier that same year in a daily newspaper speaks to a desire to democratize her possible audience, the choice of *La Ilustración Moderna* as a venue for *Mujer* pulls in precisely the opposite direction. Given that Pardo Bazán must have known that economic reality perfectly well, she tailored the setting, plot, and characters of *Mujer* to appeal to an audience of cultivated and well-off readers. Such was the eclecticism forced on a woman who was seeking to foment feminist thought where and with whom she could.

Testimony to that eclecticism is the act of publishing a novella in a journal which declared itself the sworn enemy of the realist school of which she was, for many, the infamous embodiment:

Así en lo que se refiere a las artes como a las letras procuraremos que no se publique nada que ofenda la moral, ni la decencia, ni el pudor, ni el buen gusto de las personas más exigentes en estas materias. Y como por desgracia, muchos escritores y artistas modernos están inficionados del virus materialista, no vacilaremos en acudir a los de épocas pasadas, en busca de obras maestras, siempre que la necesidad nos obligue a ello, pues las que merecen nombre de tales son eternamente bellas.<sup>57</sup>

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55 Anón, 'Nuestros propósitos', in *La Ilustración Moderna*, I (1892), 2–4 (pp. 2–3).

56 Gil, 'Una ilustración atípica', 315.

57 Anón, 'Nuestros propósitos', 4.

Certainly, *Mujer* does not feature the kind of *risqué* scenes that drew the ire of conservative critics in previous realist novels. On the face of it, the novella's exemplum is straightforward enough and consistent with the conservative leanings of *La Ilustración Moderna*. It is the tale of a husband who fails to protect his wife's honour and loses her respect. He has moreover squandered his vital energies through improvident licentiousness prior to marriage. And yet, Biggane describes the novella's exemplarity as 'problematic' since it contains a consistent undertow of criticism of 'gender divisions and norms of behaviour demanded by the honour code'.<sup>58</sup> Rather than see this as compromising the novella's exemplarity, I argue it encourages reflection on gender roles and social conventions, in particular on the instability of the former and the rigidity of the latter. It shows how gender expectations and social codes have the capacity to tie individuals up in knots of lifelong misery. Its exemplarity is, in that sense, far more subversive than the conservative mission statement of the journal where it first appeared might suggest.

The dilemma at the centre of *Mujer* arises between the newly-weds, Alfonso de la Cueva and Ana de Monclares. At issue is the latter's honour, which comes under attack from a former friend of her husband, a man who has in turn been left in private disgrace due to Alfonso's conduct prior to his marriage. Once more, Pardo Bazán explores the social pressures which dictate that a woman's body be inscribed with meaning by forces external to her personality or will. As its one-word title suggests, the novella explores the totemic qualities that accrue around the condition of womanhood and wifedom. Hence, when rumours of promiscuity begin to circulate regarding Ana, she cannot gainsay them by word or deed, rather they must be addressed via complex conventions tacitly understood among her husband's male peers. Yet the novella also picks apart the stable binaries of male and female by 'feminizing' Alfonso and depicting Ana as equipped with traditionally 'male' attributes of bravery, decisiveness and strategic thinking. This latter process begins with the very circumstances of the marriage itself. Ana is the daughter of the Marqueses de Monclares and has brought far greater wealth to their union. Although Alfonso's ancestors can allegedly trace their roots as far back as El Cid, he needed to marry money and thus failed to embody the male breadwinner equipped with the means to found hearth and home. He comes from old money fallen on hard times and, instead of seeking to reverse his family's decline, has lived the dissipated life of a feckless aristocrat. Such wanton 'expenditure' of resources, in both financial and sexual terms, was condemned by contemporary medical opinion as undermining the long-term health of the male body.<sup>59</sup>

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58 Biggane, *In a Liminal Space*, 43.

59 Collin McKinney, '“Enemigos de la virilidad”: Sex, Masturbation, and Celibacy in Nineteenth-Century Spain', *Prisma. Revista de Investigación Social*, 13 (2014–2015), 72–108 (pp. 81–88).

Monlau had insisted that sperm was the most precious product of the 'animal economy' and that it must therefore be released sparingly, calculating that the loss of an ounce of sperm was the equivalent to loss of forty ounces of blood. Santero likewise stressed: 'De todas las causas de debilidad que pueden actuar sobre nuestro cuerpo, ninguna lo es en tan alto grado, por la enervación que produce y por lo rico que es el humor que sale de la economía, como las pérdidas del semen'.<sup>60</sup>

The narrator traces the tawdry outlines of Alfonso's former existence in the novella's first chapter:

De sus tiempos de soltero quedábanle a Alfonso memorias de mil aventuras estériles, de amargo y vulgarísimo desenlace; de mil apuros y reprimendas paternas; de una existencia insegura, falsa, borrascosa, agitada por la mentira del placer, la humillación de amor propio del noble relativamente pobre ... (147)

Among those to have fallen for his charms was the sister of a fellow traveller on the road to dissipation, Ramiro Dávalos. Confronted over the betrayal, Alfonso had twisted the knife of humiliation by naming others who had also shared her bed, prompting Ramiro to swear vengeance. That threat hangs over the young couple as they make their first foray onto Madrid's social scene, still basking in the glow of a delightful honeymoon in Germany and Switzerland.

Their honeymoon has proven to be an awakening for both parties, albeit for different reasons, and they are very much in love: 'la posesión, la vida común, y sobre todo alguna otra causa de esas que no se explican, porque pertenecen a la esfera de lo indefinible, hicieron germinar, crecer y abrirse la flor rara y exquisita de un grandísimo amor' (146). Needless to say, husband and wife have entered marriage with a wide disparity in their respective knowledge and experience of sex. In spite of which, for Alfonso, the sanctification of their relationship 'unía la dulce seguridad de los afectos lícitos a la inquieta vehemencia de los extralegales' (146). A particular alignment of circumstances has meant that he experiences his marriage as legitimizing, for the first time, both sex and the ritual of seduction. Those circumstances surround Ana's path towards sexual awakening, which has been less straightforward, as the narrator outlines in detail:

Ha de saberse que en el alma de la esposa no brotó la flor así de pronto. Recelos de niña millonaria, que teme no ser querida por sus propios atractivos; pudores de un espíritu que necesita tiempo para no avergonzarse de la dicha, involuntario miedo al hombre, que ya nada ignora, y tal vez se ha cansado de todo; recato de mujer honesta, tardía en

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60 Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel*, 227.

rasgar el último velo, aplazamientos naturales en un carácter que sabe aguardar porque sabe perseverar también, todo esto hizo que la conquista de Ana no fuese fácil para su marido, habituado a más rápidas victorias. (146)

While Ana is typical of her class—she worries that wealth makes her attractive for purely mercenary reasons and she is chaste—she is also individuated: she carries herself with reserve but has an underlying vehemence of character that will allow her to love with constancy. The paragraph that begins with the lines just quoted culminates with a description of Ana in the fullness of emotional and sexual satisfaction. Implicitly focalized from Alfonso's perspective—'Alfonso tuvo la suerte de asistir al espectáculo'—it employs a simile evoking the quasi-miraculous dissolves of the diorama shows that captured the popular imagination in nineteenth-century Europe: 'al diorama en que el país nevado se borra, y le reemplaza insensiblemente el Vesubio en ignición, derramando lava y coronándose con un penacho de fuego' (146). Alfonso thus perceives his wife as having passed from the frigidity of indifference—the snowy mountain top—to the eruption of true passion: the flushed flesh of energetic love-making matches the red tinge of lava, with its obvious overtones of his own satisfied ejaculation. It is tempting to ask why Vesuvius should be the volcano invoked. In the decade prior to the novella's publication, a more natural candidate would have been Mount Etna, whose near-constant activity was widely covered in the Spanish press.<sup>61</sup> The fact that Mount Vesuvius' most famous eruption had such devastating consequences for the city at its foot may well have dictated Pardo Bazán's choice in a subtle piece of narrative foreshadowing.

So complete is Ana's transformation that Alfonso feels 'la gran adhesión femenil', a hitherto unique sense that lust and love are embodied in one woman, his new bride. It is one of Ana's prideful vanities, meanwhile, to let her husband's past float on the fringes of her imagination: 'la vieja y gallarda silueta del *Tenorio* flotaba en su fantasía, y la idea de haber *redimido* a Alfonso la estremecía de placer' (148). She has accepted sexual inequality as part of the natural order: a man behaves promiscuously in early adulthood before 'el verdadero amor le aparta de la extraviada senda' (148). The narrator's next intervention is telling: '¡Pobre Ana!' Little does she know how large a part Alfonso's past indiscretions are to play in shaping her future.

At the close of the first chapter, the semantic fields of money and sexual licence bleed into one another once more. Just as Ana is saying to herself 'Alfonso valía tanto'—meant in an emotional sense—his thoughts turn to the

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61 See, for example, Luciano García del Real, 'Actualidades', *El Viagero Ilustrado Hispano-Americano*, 30 January 1880, pp. 1–2 (p. 1); 'Apuntes', *La Discusión. Diario Democrático de la Mañana*, 23 March 1883, p. 1; 'Prensa Extranjera', *La Época*, 21 May 1886, p. 2; 'Noticias', *La Iberia. Diario Liberal*, 22 October 1890, p. 2; 'Últimos telegramas', *El Heraldo de Madrid*, 24 August 1892, p. 3.

'debts' he has incurred in his former life of dissipation: 'Él sabía que al hacer corte de cuentas con la vida de soltero, no había saldado todas sus deudas morales con la puntualidad escrupulosa del pagador honrado ... Más de una vez se había declarado insolvente, y más de una vez, con astucia y descaro, eludiera reconocerse deudor' (150). The trend continues in the next chapter as the couple, now safely restored to Madrid, sally forth on their first social engagement since their wedding, a 'tertulia' in a private home. Pardo Bazán noted in a prologue she wrote in 1898 for a book celebrating Madrid's literary salons that such gatherings were, at certain seasons, among the only places where a woman of standing could socialize with the opposite sex: 'los salones y sus derivados (como los palcos y el foyer del teatro Real) son los únicos lugares donde, al menos durante el invierno, se encuentran y conversan hombres y mujeres'.<sup>62</sup> Good sense would suggest therefore Alfonso should be on his guard, especially when bad luck dictates they should encounter none other than 'el maldito deudor', Ramiro Dávalos, among their fellow guests. Prudent management of domestic resources—the much-lauded 'buen gobierno'—was a duty delegated by a husband onto his wife.<sup>63</sup> And yet, it is a feature of Alfonso's feminization in the text that he should be responsible for the 'debts' which hang over the household.

Ramiro, meanwhile, is a picture of solicitousness, chatting amiably to Ana, and giving her a tour of the porcelain collection in their host's possession. It is during this interlude that he leads her into corner which he knows to be visible to other guests and plants what appears to be a kiss on her back as she leans over a display. Alfonso witnesses the scene as do others, including a notorious scandal-seeker and gossip. The narrator captures the grotesquery of the scenario:

Una sola persona, una no más, incapaz de darse cuenta de lo acontecido, permanecía asombrada, herida de estupor. Ya se comprenderá que era Ana, en quien se fijaban todos los ojos con avidez burlona o compasiva. ¡Vamos, que no se estrenaba mal la Monclaritos! ¡Para primera salida, menudo escándalo! (159)

There could be few better examples than this of a woman's body and conduct inscribed with meaning from without.

Alfonso extracts her from the house as best he can and demands an explanation. Her bafflement convinces him that what he and others saw

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62 Emilia Pardo Bazán, 'Prólogo', in Monte-Cristo [E. Rodríguez R. de la Escalera], *Los salones de Madrid*, notas & estudio introductorio de Germán Rueda (Madrid: Ediciones 19, 2014), 15–21 (p. 16).

63 See, for example, Pilar Sinués de Marco, *Un libro para las damas* (1875), cited in Catherine Jagoe, Alda Blanco & Cristina Enríquez de Salamanca, *La mujer en los discursos de género: textos y contextos en el siglo XIX* (Barcelona: Icaria, 1998), 93.



was no more than an elaborate charade. Ramiro had only pretended to kiss Ana's back so as to ensure their debt of honour would be settled over her conduct, rather than that of his own sister. Ana sees matters clearly at once: 'No quiso fuese su hermana, sino tu mujer, la que anduviese en lenguas de la gente. Y lo ha conseguido de plano. La jugada es segurísima, Fonso mío; es redonda' (164). When her husband replies that Ramiro has behaved like a 'canalla', she disagrees:

Hay casos de guerra en que todo es lícito. ¡Caramba! Ya que la sociedad nos ha colocado a las pobres mujeres en tan difícil situación, a los que tenéis encargo de mirar por nosotras no os basta el valor, sino que necesitáis la astucia; tenéis que ser algo así... como generales que sostienen una plaza contra enemigos sin número. (164–65)

Once more, traditionally male and female semantic fields overlap: the assault on Ana's honour is a war requiring the tactical nous of an army general. Debt, money, and moral responsibility are likewise intertwined in an observation she makes in the same speech—'Yo que nada malo hice, pago las ajenas culpas' (165). Alfonso declares that their predicament has only one solution but will not name it before he retires to bed, exhausted with worry. It does not take Ana long to guess what he has in mind—a duel.

Duelling was illegal in Restoration Spain, yet remained a socially tolerated means for upper- and middle-class men to settle disputes over questions of honour. Raquel Sánchez explains that honour sat in the grey area between transgressions the State could officially define and punish, and those to be settled in private between 'gentlemen':

[...] los intentos de los legisladores por regular este tipo de delitos eran interpretados por parte de los 'hombres honorables' como una intromisión del Estado en cuestiones absolutamente personales. [...] Una ofensa al honor era algo que el individuo 'sentía', era un ataque personal que no podía tipificarse (y, por tanto, positivizarse) en ningún código penal porque una afrenta de esa naturaleza revestía caracteres de excepcionalidad en la convivencia cotidiana de las élites.<sup>64</sup>

Alongside such tensions over the reach of the State sat a need for men to prove both their masculinity and refinement.<sup>65</sup> That need was all the more acute in the final decades of the century: 'el ideario del honor terminaría

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64 Raquel Sánchez, 'Honor de periodistas: libertad de prensa y reputación pública en la España liberal', in *La cultura de la espada: de honor, duelos y otros lances*, coord. Raquel Sánchez & José Antonio Guillén Berrendero (Madrid: Dykinson, 2019), 305–32 (p. 313).

65 Collin McKinney, 'How to Be a Man', in *Spain in the Nineteenth Century: New Essays on Experiences of Culture and Society*, ed. Andrew Ginger & Geraldine Lawless (Manchester: Manchester U. P., 2018), 147–73 (pp. 160–61).

por convertirse en un elemento identitario que sería asumido por las nuevas élites en ascenso, proporcionándoles un nítido marcador de distinción' in an era characterized by the blurring of class boundaries.<sup>66</sup> Collin McKinney argues that among the most important touchstones for idealized masculinity in nineteenth-century Spain was El Cid, from whom, we must remember, Alfonso can apparently trace his lineage: a 'man who worries most of all about defending his king and family from enemies and yet still knows how to navigate the social intricacies of the court'.<sup>67</sup> According to that model,

[t]rue masculinity, so the theory goes, is sturdy, constant and composed, not wild and unrestrained. The ideal Spaniard was violent, yes, but his acts of violence were considered legitimate, controlled, and always employed with just cause. Ideal men directed their aggression at appropriate targets and were equally capable of achieving their goals through non-violent means. It is this model of chivalric masculinity, rough and refined, that would serve as a template for respectable masculinity in the nineteenth century.<sup>68</sup>

Ana's initial reaction to the prospect of her husband endangering his life for the sake of erroneous assumptions about her conduct is to see savagery unleashed in the name of civilization:

Todo era, en este caso, como en otros muchos, extraño e ilógico ante el pensador, ante el hombre que raciocina; pero dado que no había de dirimir la cuestión un individuo que pensase rectamente, sino el conjunto de vulgaridades que forman la entidad llamada *mundo*, había que someterse, como a legislación de país salvaje, a la rutina tradicional ... (165)

Yet another stable binary begins to crumble.

Ana's mind turns to duels depicted on the page, on the stages of operas and plays, or on the canvas of a contemporary painting. The particular example she evokes is *El duelo interrumpido* by José Garnelo y Alda (Figure 3), which suggests both a solution to her predicament and an opportunity for heroic protagonism. The ekphrastic use of the Garnelo's canvas, which won a silver medal in the Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes in the spring of 1890, reflects the Spanish public's growing appetite

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66 Alberto José Esperón Fernández, 'Honor y escándalo en la encrucijada del sexenio democrático: la opinión pública ante el duelo entre Montpensier y Enrique de Borbón', in *La cultura de la espada*, coord. Sánchez & Guillén Berrendero, 245–85 (p. 246).

67 McKinney, 'How to Be a Man', 151.

68 McKinney, 'How to Be a Man', 152.

for naturalistic and historical painting in lavishly curated national exhibitions.<sup>69</sup> Ezama Gil further notes that a particular strength of *La Ilustración Moderna*—the ‘semanario’ where *Mujer* first appeared—were its copious (and occasionally coloured) illustrations.<sup>70</sup> In fact, the magazine urged its readers to help it source such material:

Agradeceremos en extremo cuantas fotografías, representando vistas de ciudades, monumentos, obras artísticas, retratos de personajes y antigüedades, nos envíen nuestros corresponsales y suscriptores, y en particular los de América, acompañándolos de los datos explicativos necesarios, para reproducirlas en **La Ilustración moderna**, siempre que a nuestro juicio sean dignos de ello.<sup>71</sup>



Figure 3

*El duelo interrumpido* (1890) by José Garnelo y Alda.

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The painting Ana calls to mind captures a moment of exceptional drama: two women, still attired in evening-wear, have driven as fast as horse and carriage will carry them to the woodland clearing where two men were about to compete in a fencing duel. Palpable in the scene is the women’s

69 Jo Labanyi, ‘Horror, Spectacle and Nation-Formation: Historical Painting in Late Nineteenth-Century Spain’, in *Visualizing Spanish Modernity*, ed. Susan Larson & Eva Woods (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 64–80.

70 Ezama Gil, ‘Una ilustración atípica’, 321–22.

71 *La Ilustración Moderna*, 1 (1892), 992.

relief and the frustration of the duellists, who retain the tension of combat in their stances: one stands, stony-faced and with eyes downcast, as his second tries to wrest the *épée* from his grasp, while the other gesticulates in conversation with a companion who has stepped between him and the unfolding events. The pale light of dawn picks out the light fabric of the women's dresses and the white of the men's shirt fronts as the horses whose efforts have brought about this happy conclusion pant heavily from their exertions.

However, Ana's imaginings of a last-minute intervention give way to a very different train of thought; one bound up not only with her perceptions of masculinity but also her husband's heroic lineage: 'En medio de su agitación horrible, Ana saboreó cierto pueril orgullo, recordando la hidalga alcurnia de su esposo y enlazando esta idea con otras de dignidad y bizarría' (167). All the same, she resolves to act. Just as a symbolic dawn is breaking—daybreak is the duelling hour, after all—she slips out of the house and seeks an interview with the Civil Governor of Madrid. Once again, it is she who demonstrates resolve, in contrast to her husband who, at the very moment his wife is leaving the house, ought to be facing off with Ramiro. Despite the far-from-sociable hour at which he is summoned from his bed, the Governor receives Ana courteously. He is described as 'un título, antiguo diplomático, algo literato y muy observador, hombre de exquisita cultura, el más a propósito para acoger a una dama en casos tales como el de Ana la Cueva' (169). It falls to this urbane man to break the deflating news that life rarely imitates art and, more importantly, Ana's fears are most likely groundless: 'si el lance entre su marido y Ramiro Dávalos es serio, no está en mi mano evitarlo, y si no es serio, se evitará él solo... Y como lo segundo es lo que más a menudo pasa...' (171). Most challenges to a duel end in nothing, he informs her, to which she reacts with something verging on disgust: '¿Según eso, he de pensar que la humanidad se compone de cobardes?' (172). The Governor's efforts to reason with her—what crossed words can justify taking another's life?—fall on deaf ears. As she prepares to leave, he laments his inability to get through to her: 'Lo peor es que no habré conseguido quitarla [*sic*] de la cabecita la funesta idea de que ha casado con el mismo Cid Campeador' (173). Strong as Ana's desire for protagonism might be, Pardo Bazán's novella will demonstrate the awful irony of her situation: not only does her intervention come to nothing, she must also bear a disproportionate share of the social ostracism, irrespective of the outcome.

If Ana's honour is a commodity whose value fluctuates in accordance with events outside her control, Alfonso realizes that his life hangs similarly in the balance and depends not on anything he might do, rather on the skill of his seconds in negotiating terms for the duel: 'Forzosa consecuencia del primer absurdo, que consiste en fiar a la ajena custodia cosa tan personal e íntima como la defensa de la honra y conservación de la vida, de la cual no somos

más que depositarios, no dueños' (175). He does not see the parallels with his wife's situation; the irony is lost on him. When his team arrive to discuss the challenge he will issue, the narrator dwells on a telling description of Alfonso's dressing room, in which there is once more a jarring interpenetration between distinct semantic fields:

El lavabo de mármol rojo con grifos de plata, era muy amplio, y en sus tabletas se alineaban en orden de batalla, de mayor a menor, las esponjas, los cepillos, las tijeras inglesas, los frascos de colonia y vinagre, los limpiaoidos y los menudos y relucientes chirimbolos con que se completa el aseo de la dentadura y el pulimento de uñas y piel. (177)

This is a man who possesses serried ranks of hygiene products and personal grooming paraphernalia. In the paragraph that follows, he collapses into 'la butaca donde solían peinarle', broken in spirit. This feminized male sits in heavy contrast with the Cid of his wife's imagination. He ruminates on the possible outcome of the duel and, in a passage of exceptional imaginative force, fixates on the euphemism used of those who have sustained crippling injuries in combat—'inutilizarse':

Equivales a caer de bruces dando antes la terrible voltereta de la lesión traumática mortal; equivales al frío del acero penetrando en un corazón que latía lleno de juventud y salud y amor; equivales al agujero en la cabeza, por donde asoman fragmentos de masa encefálica; equivales al brazo que cuelga inerte, a la pierna que se desangra, al ojo que se vacía, al rostro que se desfigura, a todo lo que horripila y consterna, todo lo que sabe al alma como al paladar el zumo del ajeno. (179)

The hypotactic accumulation of detail suggests a mind in overdrive, loading horror onto horror.

A final twist in the drama comes when his seconds return from their interview with Ramiro's delegation to announce that their rivals are playing down the previous night's incident and see no reason why a duel should take place. Alfonso says he will make his decision in a few hours' time and broods on what to do. He is described as a spent force, in the most literal sense: 'Solo ya Alfonso, a la manera del banquero que próximo a declararse en quiebra hace balance exacto de sus haberes, calculó la provisión de energía y fuerza con que contaba, y espantado y trémulo vio que no podía alcanzarle para hacer frente a la pavorosa situación' (184). He realizes with an increasing sense of shame that he lacks the willpower to fight: 'la fuerza misteriosa de la volición, que es como la virilidad del espíritu, Alfonso notaba con humillante dolor la vergonzosa deficiencia' (184). Alfonso could in that sense be a textbook case of a man whose vital energies have been exhausted by his improvident lifestyle prior to marriage. When Ana asks him the state

of affairs, he does his best to explain but cannot resist feeling like a coward under her searching gaze. She flees to her room, staggered that her honour has found such meagre defence. Alfonso is left to contemplate the artificial and arbitrary state of gender relations in modern society:

[Y] sería necesario que alguien más sagaz, alguien hecho a discernir sentimientos y a encadenar los hechos en demostración de la lógica de las leyes morales, le dijese al oído que la base de la relación entre las dos mitades de la humanidad, entre el varón y la hembra, es tan anómala y artificial, en medio de su secular persistencia, que ni él puede perdonarle a ella jamás un instante de flaqueza, ni ella a él un segundo de miedo ... (190)

The novella closes with the devastating realization that Ramiro has indeed had his revenge: 'había sabido robar a Alfonso el honor y la dignidad ante el público, y la dicha y el amor en la intimidad conyugal' (191).

On the surface, the exemplum of the novella is clear enough: Alfonso has failed the masculinity test set for him by his rival and by 'civilized' society. He is the embodiment of a pathology which preoccupied Spain's Restoration novelists to an obsessive degree: that of profligacy, excess, over-expenditure.<sup>72</sup> Alfonso is spent of both seminal fluid and money due to his dissipated youth. But a more attentive reading of *Mujer* reveals a quite different set of questions.<sup>73</sup> What if biological sex, or the attributes we associate with gender, were not stable binaries but culturally constructed and maintained by the inertia of 'secular persistencia'? How much happier might humanity be if women were allowed to determine their own selves rather than have meaning woven into them as if they were a kind of fetish? Is it truly the mark of a civilized nation that a man must risk having his brains blown out to defend the fetishized wife-totem?

## Conclusion

Analysis of these novellas reveals pivotal aspects of Pardo Bazán's feminist campaigning. Firstly, her desire to cast her net widely across the sea of potential readers, from those with access to a cheap daily newspaper to people who could afford the priciest of illustrated journals. Secondly, her willingness to test the possibilities of two genres hitherto repudiated as 'feminine' and foreign by her male peers. Thirdly, her inclination to scrutinize both the stability of binaries around gender and the tendency for contemporary society to pour meaning into individual women from without.

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<sup>72</sup> Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel*.

<sup>73</sup> Parrón finds the exemplarity of *Mujer* similarly slippery. See Parrón, *Arte y literatura en 'La cuestión palpitante'*, 176–81.

*La dama joven* and *Mujer* appear to tell conventional, conservative, acceptable stories. In the case of the former, about a young woman saved from her flighty ambitions. In the latter, about a bride failed by her profligate husband. And yet, they also exemplify a tendency among female writers first described decades ago by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar: ‘such women have created submerged meanings, meanings hidden within or behind the more accessible, “public” content of their works, so that their literature could be read and appreciated even when its vital concern with female dispossession and disease was ignored’.<sup>74</sup> Pardo Bazán was engaged in what Gilbert and Gubar call ‘[t]racing subversive pictures behind socially acceptable façades’.<sup>75</sup> Except that, in her case, to embrace the role of both ‘folletinista’ and ‘noveladora moral’ in the same year was to trace subversive pictures behind culturally unacceptable façades.\*

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74 Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, with an intro. by Lisa Appignanesi, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London/New Haven, CT: Yale U. P., 2000), 72.

75 Gilbert & Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 82.

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