2012

Hijos de la decadencia: transgressive representations of gender in the works of Emilia Pardo Bazán

Sarah Berard
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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HIJOS DE LA DECADENCIA: TRANSGRESSIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER IN THE WORKS OF EMILIA PARDO BAZÁN

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

by
Sarah Honoré Berard
B.A., Louisiana State University 2010
May 2012
DEDICATION

To my favorite New Women, my mom and my grandmother Irene.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank those who made this thesis possible. First, I must thank God for the many blessings that have allowed me to be a New Woman and champion her cause through my studies. I also owe my deepest gratitude to Dr. Dorota Heneghan who encouraged me to apply to the Master’s program and graciously agreed to direct my thesis even while on sabbatical. This thesis would not have been possible without your guidance and critical insight, and I am particularly grateful for your encouragement and patience throughout this past year. It has been a true pleasure to be able to work with you. To Dr. Elena Castro and Dr. Andrea Morris for accepting my invitation to be on my thesis committee; I sincerely thank you for all your time and for your helpful advice.

To Dr. Sharon Weltman for directing my undergraduate thesis which fueled my love of 19th century literature and began my interest in mythical images of women, and to the Baton Rouge Rotary Club for allowing me the scholarship opportunity to study in Spain which increased my love for Spanish culture and literature. To Marisol Hernandez, for participating in a language exchange with me; I am so grateful for our friendship.

To all my family and friends who have so kindly put up with me over the past two years. Particularly, to Mom, Dad, and Rachel, for always supporting me and loving me. Thank you especially for all the small, thoughtful gestures when I am sure I did not always deserve them.

To Kate, for our many late-night discussions on truth, beauty, feminism, and faith which have inspired me to believe that studies such as these are worthwhile and meaningful. Your friendship has meant more to me than I can ever adequately express.

To Caleb, for everything; your love has made all the difference.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................................................ ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................. iii

TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS ........................................................................................................ vi-vii

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................... viii-ix

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 The Situation of Fin de siècle Spain .......................................................................................... 1
  1.2 Feminist Theory and Degeneration ......................................................................................... 5
  1.3 Thesis Structure ....................................................................................................................... 9

CHAPTER 1: CONVIRTIÉNDOSE EN MARISABIDILLA: THE CELEBRATION OF THE NEW WOMAN ..................................................................................................................... 13
  1.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 13
  1.2 Narrative Strategies in “Cuento primitivo” ............................................................................. 15
  1.3 Eve as New Woman in “Cuento primitivo” ........................................................................... 17
  1.4 Feita as New Woman in Memorias de un solterón. Adán y Eva (ciclo) ......................... 20
  1.5 Minia Dumbría as New Woman in La quimera ................................................................. 26
  1.6 Minia as the Goddess of Wisdom and the Sphinx of Reason ........................................... 27
  1.7 Minia as Spanish Artist .......................................................................................................... 29
  1.8 Minia as the Moral and Motherly Caretaker .......................................................................... 31
  1.9 Conclusion .............................................................................................................................. 34

CHAPTER 2: HEROÍNAS FABULOSAS, DECAPITADORES DEL HOMBRE: THE AESTHETICISM AND AMBIGUITY OF THE FEMME FATALE ......................................................... 35
  2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 35
  2.2 Espina de la Porcel as Femme Fatale .................................................................................... 36
  2.3 Espina as Serpent .................................................................................................................. 37
  2.4 Espina as Venomous Flower ............................................................................................... 39
  2.5 Espina as Medusa .................................................................................................................. 41
  2.6 Espina as Vampire .................................................................................................................. 43
  2.7 Catalina de Alejandría as Femme Fatale and Ambiguous Sphinx ....................................... 48
  2.8 Catalina’s Spiritual Autonomy and Conversion from Aestheticism .................................. 55
  2.9 Catalina as Saintly Medusa and the Decadence of Patriarchy ........................................ 59
  2.10 Lina Mascareñas as Femme Fatale and Aesthete ............................................................. 65
  2.11 Lina’s Redemption .............................................................................................................. 74
  2.12 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 75

CHAPTER 3: TIPOS AFEMINADOS: THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY ........................................ 76
  3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 76
  3.2 The Dandy and the Femme Fatale: Valdivia and Espina .................................................... 78
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The Dandy and the <em>Femme Fatale</em>: Silvio and Espina</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 The Dandy and the New Woman: Silvio and Minia</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 The Dandy and the New Woman: Mauro and Feita</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>END NOTES</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fig.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>L’Origine du monde</td>
<td>Gustave Courbet</td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Sin</td>
<td>Franz von Stuck</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sensuality</td>
<td>Franz von Stuck</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Inferno</td>
<td>Franz von Stuck</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Flor de estufa</td>
<td>Emilio Sala</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Morphine</td>
<td>Albert Matignon</td>
<td>ca. 1905</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>La morfina</td>
<td>Santiago Rusiñol</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>La droga</td>
<td>Herem Anglada-Camarasa</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Kiss of the Sphinx</td>
<td>Franz von Stuck</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Sphinx</td>
<td>Franz von Stuck</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Oedipus and the Sphinx</td>
<td>Gustave Moreau</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Oedipus the wayfarer</td>
<td>Gustave Moreau</td>
<td>ca. 1888</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Medusa</td>
<td>Carlos Schwabe</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mercedes Mendeville, condesa de San Félix</td>
<td>Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Portrait of Maria Eulalia of Spain</td>
<td>Giovanni Boldini</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Self-Portrait with a Sunflower</td>
<td>Anthony van Dyck</td>
<td>1633</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Barbara</td>
<td>Hans Memling</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, or The Ghent Altarpiece</td>
<td>Hubert and Jan van Eyck</td>
<td>1432</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Close-up of scene from Adoration of the Mystic Lamb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Closed view of Adoration of the Mystic Lamb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Cleopatra</td>
<td>John William Waterhouse</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 22: *The Depths of the Sea* (1886) by Edward Burne-Jones

Fig. 23: *Lady Lilith* (1867) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti
ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the transgressive representations of gender in the works of Emilia Pardo Bazán. In her short story “Cuento primitivo” (1893) and her novels Memorias de un solterón (1896), La quimera (1905), and Dulce dueño (1911), the myths and images that surround the figures of New Woman, femme fatales, and dandies expose the fear fin de siècle Spanish society felt toward these models that did not conform to the gender stereotypes expected of them. Their straying from the established norm was seen as the symptom of decadence and the herald of the destruction of the race.

Each of the characters are marginalized in some way because of their gender or because they do not conform to the established gender order. Therefore, much of the theory used in this thesis is drawn from feminist sources including Elaine Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, Laura Mulvey, and Hélène Cixous. I also incorporate psychoanalytic theory and its relationship to the preoccupation concerning masculinity and degeneration from the work of Freud, Neil Hertz, and Max Nordau. My analysis of the representation of these transgressive figures extends to art as well as many of the cultural myths or images that surrounded these men and women can be found in the paintings of the time, such as those from Santiago Rusiñol, Franz von Stuck, and Hermen Anglada-Camarasa.

As a response to this problem of fin de siècle Spanish decadence, Pardo Bazán offers Spanish society a fairly unusual solution. She proposes a combination of the traditional in the form of the Catholic faith and the modern in the form of equality of the sexes. It is through this unique combination that she is able to integrate these foreign, subversive images of gender into Catholic Spanish society. She particularly celebrates the New Woman who demands to be seen as equal to man. Yet, the New Woman is foreign concept that she does not merely import to
Spain; instead, she adapts her to fit within her culture. At the same time, she can promote a modern Spanish society without strict gender hierarchy yet still retain the essential Spanish-ness of Catholicism.
INTRODUCTION

I.1 The Situation of Fin de siècle Spain

Bram Dijkstra, in his analysis of fin de siècle misogyny through the works of artists, writers, and scientists, observes that “[t]here is no more accurate documentation of the manner in which a culture perceives its moral and social mission than in the works of visual art it produces” (6). I would expand his statement to also include literature which often reveals the political, social, and economic concerns of a society, and the works of Spanish writer Emilia Pardo Bazán are no exception. Her short stories, novels, and essays reveal the intense fear of decadence and degeneration felt by all of Europe, Spain in particular. Daniel Whitaker described the last half of the 19th century as “a period of political stability and economic growth”, but notes that curiously, “the concept of decadence [took] a central role in western European thought” (746). He explains how during this period the word “decadent” implied decline and decomposition and “the closest meaning of decadence seemed in the nineteenth century to be one of falling away from previous accepted political, social, and moral norms” (746, italics in the original). Spain, however, did not experience the stable and economic growth of other European countries, which further contributed to their preoccupation with the concept of decadence. Catherine Jagoe notes that

[t]he fin de siècle era in Spain was marked by a sense of approaching national apocalypse, heralded by a marked increase in strikes, terrorist and anarchist acts, and assassinations [……] The bourgeois oligarchy was in the throes of crisis in a number of arenas: in class relations through the growth of working class and anarchist militancy, in empire and race relations through colonial uprisings in Cuba and the Philippines and the growth of the abolitionist movement, and in sexual relations. Women, the working class, and the natives were all threatening to seek independence. (121)

With the country in crisis, the State and the patriarchal hierarchy feared revolts against the established order and this anxiety “translated into an overarching preoccupation with questions of gender and sexuality” (Tsuchiya 4). This fear of decadence and decline aggravated the
antagonism felt towards those who did not conform to traditional gender norms and “reflects more widespread anxieties about the breakdown of established social categories during a critical moment of transition in European history” (Tsuchiya 3).

Out of this fear comes the proliferation of the images of the New Woman, the femme fatale, and the dandy, the representations of which “became the point of convergence for cultural anxieties about the crisis of gender in general, and, in particular, about women’s place in nineteenth-century Europe” (Tsuchiya 3-4). Western Europe became increasingly concerned with what was deemed the “Woman Question.” What were men to do with these unruly women who rejected the role of “the angel in the house” for that of the femme fatale or the New Woman and how were they to suppress the beginnings of what would become the feminist movement?

The “angel in the house” is a concept developed from the English poet and critic Coventry Patmore’s poem of the same name which was published in 1854 and revised through 1862. It became increasingly popular throughout the 19th century and is often used to reference the Victorian image of the perfect, domestic wife and mother who is wholly subservient to her husband. She is unable to participate in public affairs outside of her home and his prohibited from intellectual and physical activities. For instance, in Spain, Pardo Bazán notes in her essay “La mujer española” (1890), “Hoy ninguna mujer de España—empezando por la que ocupa el trono--- goza de verdadera influencia política; y en otras cuestiones no menos graves, el pensamiento femenil tiende a ajustarse fielmente a las ideas sugeridas por el viril, el único fuerte” (33). Women always had to defer to men and were not allowed thoughts or opinions of their own. Pardo Bazán also mentions Spanish sources with similar images of the perfect wife and mother in Coventry Patmore’s poem:

Para el español,---insisto en ello---, todo puede y debe transformarse; sólo la mujer ha de mantenerse inmutable y fija como la estrella polar. Preguntad al
hombre más liberal de España qué condiciones tiene que reunir la mujer según su corazón, y os trazará un diseño muy poco diferente del que delineó Fr. Luis de León en *La perfecta casada*, o Juan Luis Vives en *La institución de la mujer cristiana*. ("La mujer española” 32)

Pardo Bazán criticizes the situation of women in Spain whose role in society had not changed for a number of years, and both Pardo Bazán and many of her characters look for ways to transgress the established gender order and search for a new understanding of gender roles that does not confine but liberate. In fact, Susan Kirkpatrick notes that she was “la única escritora española prestigiosa que, en cuanto feminista declarada, cuestionaba abiertamente las definiciones opresivas de género” (*Mujer, modernismo* 94). According to Lina Dowling, in addition to the preoccupation with the concept of degeneration, this period also signaled the search for something new (449). The desire for the erasure of gender hierarchy and the opening of the public sphere to women that Pardo Bazán propagates is an example of this search. While many wanted to conserve and further the patriarchal discourse of male superiority and the need for women to be quiet, weak, and docile as a way to combat decadence, Pardo Bazán believed that the opposite was necessary.

In addition to her belief in the importance of equality between men and women as a solution to the problem of decadence, she offers another less common solution as well: the Catholic faith. As a woman in 19th century Catholic Spain writing in a subversive way about gender roles, she could hardly have abandoned the Catholic faith without appearing to be a complete transgressor against Spanish societal norms and creating a great scandal. By advocating the adherence to the Catholic faith she is able to defend herself as a traditional, religious Spanish woman even though she also supported revolutionary ideas about gender. Yet, Pardo Bazán used Catholicism not merely as a defense tactic, but she also seemed to really see it as a possible way to avoid the follies of decadence and support a new understanding of gender. Nelly Clèmessen
explains how Pardo Bazán “quería convencer a su público de que el catolicismo no era, como algunos lo pretendía, la principal causa de la decadencia española. Practicada según sus reglas, la religión católica hubiera sido, muy al contrario, una fuerza regeneradora de la raza” (qtd. in Kirkpatrick, Mujer, modernismo 22). Although it may seem like a contradiction to champion both sexual equality and Catholicism, as the Catholic Church has often been perceived as a prime example of patriarchal power and strict gender hierarchy, Pardo Bazán explains how in the true essence of the Catholic faith and Christ’s message no such contradiction exists: “La grande obra progresiva del cristianismo, en este particular, fue emancipar la conciencia de la mujer, afirmar su personalidad y su libertad moral, de la cual se deriva necesariamente la libertad práctica. No fue en la familia, sino en el interior santuario de la conciencia, donde el cristianismo emancipó la mujer” (“La educación 83-84). She also points out the importance in Catholicism’s role in the emancipation of woman’s conscience and continues explaining that

[el sentido de la enseñanza del divino fundador del cristianismo era éste: ‘De hoy más no habrá entre vosotros amo ni esclavo, hombre ni mujer, sino todos hijos de mi Padre.’ Pero así como largos siglos, hasta nuestros días, siguió habiendo amos y esclavos, hay todavía entre los cristianos hombres y mujeres, con todo el sentido jerárquico que se atribuye en la sociedad y en la familia a estos dos nombres […].
La voz del sacerdote, que un tiempo enseñó a la mujer a afirmar su independencia espiritual usque ad efusionem sanguinis, hoy le inculca la docilidad conyugal, la fe sin examen y rutinaria. Así y todo, justo es repetir que la enseñanza religiosa es la más equitativa, la que menos distingue de sexos. (“La educación” 84, italics in the original)

While members of the Catholic priesthood may have distorted Christ’s message of equality, Pardo Bazán affirms the value of the Church as a whole in the struggle to create a world without gender hierarchy. It is through this lens of understanding the importance of adherence to the Catholic Church as a defense tactic and as regenerating factor that Pardo Bazán’s seemingly contradictory solutions for the problem of decadence, equality between the sexes and the Catholic faith, can be reconciled and understood.
The New Woman, the *femme fatale*, and the dandy are the three main figures represented in Pardo Bazán’s works that do not conform to the gender stereotypes expected of them. I am indebted to Charnon-Deutsch, Bieder, Jagoe, Tolliver, Kirkpatrick, and Showalter for their research on the figure of the New Woman, which has greatly enriched my analysis. Most of the criticism on the New Woman in Pardo Bazán is centered on Feíta Neira, however, and I hope that my analysis of Minia Dumbría encourages further scholarship on her role as a New Woman.

The *femme fatale* in Western culture has been thoroughly studied by a number of critics such as Porter, Wood, Dijkstra, Litvak, Anderson, and Tolliver. In Pardo Bazán, Espina de la Porcel is the most apparent *femme fatale* as she is frequently described in terms of traditional images of feminine evil. One representation of feminine evil which is often overlooked in relation to Espina is the Medusa, whose importance as a symbol of rebellion against patriarchal norms is discussed in the section on theory. As the 19th century was so focused on the “Woman Question,” scholars commonly focus on issues of the feminine and feminism. In comparison with amount of research of femininity, there is very little on masculinity, particularly in Pardo Bazán. Therefore, my final chapter focuses on the crisis of masculinity and the dandy or *señorito* figure, incorporating research from Ortiz and Tsuchiya.

**1.2 Feminist Theory and Degeneration**

Each of the characters or types that I analyze are marginalized in some way because of their gender or because they do not conform to the established gender order. Therefore, much of the theory used in my thesis is drawn from feminist sources including Elaine Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, Laura Mulvey, and Hélène Cixous. I also incorporate psychoanalytic theory and its relationship to the preoccupation concerning masculinity and degeneration from the work of Freud, Neil Hertz, and Max Nordau. Elaine Showalter, in her book *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and
Culture at the Fin de Siècle, analyzes the turn-of-the-century crises and issues associated with the battle for sexual supremacy and the concepts of masculinity and femininity. Gilbert and Gubar expand upon the concept of binary oppositions with their analysis of the angel/devil dichotomy in The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, which is helpful in analyzing the shift from the image of woman as “angel in the house” to a femme fatale or a bluestocking. Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” is useful in my analysis of Catalina and Lina’s directing their own physical or social deaths in order to be outside of the realm of the objectifying male gaze.

Cixous’ essays “The Laugh of the Medusa” and “Castration or Decapitation?” contribute to my analysis of Freud’s Medusa head note. In his note, Freud explains,

To decapitate = to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something. Numerous analyses have made us familiar with the occasion for this: it occurs when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother […]. The sight of Medusa’s head makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him to stone. (“The Infantile” 272)

In other words, the sight of the Medusa’s head, a symbol of female sexuality, forces a man to recognize the possibility of his castration or impotence. Through Neil Hertz’s interpretation of Freud’s Medusa’s head note, readers can also see the political implications, for “these powerfully rendered Medusa-fantasies […] are offered as substitutes for a more patient, inclusive account of political conflict” (40). The horror of the woman’s genitals, or sexuality, reflects men’s fear of being castrated, losing their power due to revolution or rebellion. Hertz also draws from Freud’s belief that “[i]n later life grown men may experience a similar panic, perhaps when the cry that throne and altar are in danger” (“Fetishism” 215). He expounds upon this correlation between men’s similar reaction to the Medusa’s head and to political revolution, using examples of
prominent historical figures such as Maxime du Camp, whose writings represent “what would seem to be a political threat as if it were a sexual threat” (Hertz 27). In du Camp one can find an “explicit linking of what is politically dangerous to feelings of sexual horror and fascination” (Hertz 32). Du Camp links the political and the sexual in his description of Gustave Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde* (1866): “When one draws aside the veil one remains stupefied to perceive a woman, life-size, seen from the front, moved and convulsed” (qtd. in Hertz 34). Hertz suggest that “[t]o describe her body as ‘convulsed,’ for example, is to assimilate her horrid appeal to that of the political ‘convulsions’ du Camp is charting in Paris” (35).

![L’Origine du monde (1866) by Gustave Courbet](image)

*Fig. 1: L’Origine du monde (1866) by Gustave Courbet.*

In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous also comments that the appearance in society of women who speaks out for their rights “would necessarily bring on, if not revolution –for the bastion was supposed to be immutable—at least harrowing explosions” (879). Instead of seeing this negatively, though, she praises the Medusa figure saying

Too bad for them [men] if they fall apart upon discovering that women aren't men, or that the mother doesn't have one [penis]. But isn't this fear convenient for
them? Wouldn't the worst be, isn't the worst, in truth, that women aren't castrated, that they have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing. (885)

She charges men with being the true sirens and sees this transgressive Medusa as a possibility for hope and change in the way women are perceived and treated. Cixous admonishes her readers to close their ears to patriarchal discourse and see woman for what she truly is and is capable of doing. Eve, Espina, Catalina de Alejandría, Lina, and Feíta are all described in Medusa-esque terms by patriarchy in Pardo Bazán’s works. Only Minia escapes this strong criticism, although there are allusions to her detractors, her lack of beauty, and her “manliness.” Cixous also suggests in “Castration or Decapitation?” that it is this preoccupation with castration and the loss of power that leads them to want to silence and “decapitate” women, embodied by figures like the Medusa.

The Hungarian writer Max Nordau’s treatise Degeneration (1892) was essentially an attack on what he called degenerate art and the new aesthetic movements, and he too associated degeneration with feminization. He believed that a weak and decadent country was an effeminate country just as the decadent male aesthete was an effeminate man. In fact, in the 1902 translation into Spanish, Nicolás Salmerón’s prologue also associates the feminine and degeneration, noting that the degenerate aesthetic tendencies have an effect in Spain that revealed “‘la nota femenina, ficticia, hipócrita, sin energías’, ‘una literatura que no hiere, sino araña, no pinto, sino esboza, no tiene alientos varoniles, sino suspiros, no sabe rugir embravecida, se agita con impotente coraje’” (qtd. in Kirkpatrick, Mujer, modernismo 90-91, italics mine). As a whole, women were seen as degenerate, impotent creatures and Spain, instead of being virile and masculine, was being feminized and made more politically impotent, and this masculine anxiety encouraged the
backlash against men and women who dared to step outside of the gender norms prescribed for them.

I.3 Thesis Structure

In my first chapter I discuss Pardo Bazán’s celebration of the modern phenomenon of the New Woman. Pardo Bazán re-writes the Genesis story in her short story “Cuento primitivo” (1893), showing how woman has become subjugated under man, not through any inherent moral, physical, or intellectual debility, but because she would not fulfill the role of “angel in the house” to which man wished to subject her. In her novels Memorias de un soltero (1896) and La quimera (1905), the New Women Feíta Neira and Minia Dumbria serve as figures of redemption and highlight the intellectual and creative capacity of women, stressing their equality with men. Feíta sees other goals for herself than just marriage and concerns herself with intellectual pursuits as opposed to attention to her appearance and dress as a way to catch a husband. Although she does marry in the end, her marriage to Mauro Pareja symbolizes what a progressive marriage among equals would look like.

Minia Dumbria is the central guiding force in Silvio Lago’s life that ultimately leads him to redemption and to repent for his decadence. She also is everything Silvio is not as an artist. She is original, creative, world-famous, and draws from Spanish influences while Silvio only imitates, is only known in certain circles, and looks to foreign influences for inspiration. Through these two women Pardo Bazán shows the value of women who are allowed to be educated and step outside of the traditional domestic realm set aside for women. Furthermore, these women’s redemptive influence illustrates how independence for women not only is positive for the women themselves but also for society as a whole.
My second chapter focuses on the image of the *femme fatale*, embodied by the figures of Espina de la Porcel in *La quimera* (1905) and Catalina de Alejandría and Lina Mascareñas in *Dulce dueño* (1911). While the New Woman was often criticized for being too masculine and wanting to erase gender lines, the *femme fatale* was demonized for being too “feminine.” She represented many of the stereotypical images of women as passionate, materialistic, and corrupt taken to the extreme. In both literature and art the *femme fatale* was depicted through a number of images of women as mythical creatures that wish to destroy and ensnare men. Pardo Bazán seems to suggest, however, that it is because of their lack of opportunities and education that women act this way. Forced to see courtship and marriage as their only goal in life, unless they were to enter a convent, it is no wonder that they act out against the men that try to entrap them in these undesirable affairs or marriages. Espina is perhaps the supreme *femme fatale* as she appears completely decadent and perverse. She holds extreme aesthetic principles, advocates materialism and consumerism, and is a morphine addict who actively plans ways to humiliate all of her lovers such as Valdivia and Silvio. Instead of looking for equality with men, she sets out to destroy them. She also rejects the tenets of Christianity and, in the end, dies both a physical and spiritual death.

In *Dulce dueño*, the story of Catalina de Alejandría is told to Lina Mascareñas by her priest friend Carranza. Both Lina and her patron saint Catalina suffer from their materialism and aestheticism at the beginning, yet both find another outlet for their love of beauty – the heavenly splendor and beauty of Christ. Furthermore, they both search for equality with men and desire Christ as their spouse as no earthly man can live up to their ideals. Catalina rejects all of her suitors, including the emperor, which results in her martyrdom for her faith. Lina rejects all but her last suitor, agreeing on a platonic marriage for power, but once he professes his love for her,
she grows suspicious of his sincerity, putting him to the test which results in his death. The novel closes with Lina in an insane asylum where she appears to have mystical experiences. Both Catalina’s and Lina’s deaths can be read as a silencing of their voices by patriarchy. Catalina physically dies while Lina suffers a sort of social death. Yet, though the endings of each of their stories is not particularly happy, Catalina and Lina both seem to have scripted out their own “deaths” in such a way to set themselves apart and to escape patriarchal judgment and discourse. This bittersweet ending points to the need for options for women outside of marriage and religious life and the importance of religion in the redemption of their characters. The fate of Espina also points to these two needs for society. With her lack of options and rejection of the Catholic faith, she dies without redemption.

My final chapter concentrates the image of the dandy in La quimera and the Memorias de un solterón and their relationships with the femme fatales and New Women. In La quimera, both Valdivia and Silvio are dandies who find themselves ensnared by Espina and through her influence they find themselves further weakened, humiliated, and impotent. Valdivia is a good example of the perfectly coiffed dandy whose love for aesthetics and beauty encourages his jealous obsession with Espina. She scorns him a number of times, though, apparently delighted each time he finds himself once again embarrassed by her actions and his obsession. His relationship with her is destructive and there is no suggestion in the novel that either one is redeemed. Silvio’s desire for fame and fine things also associates him with the image of the dandy. He too almost suffers the same fate as Valdivia if it were not for the influence of the New Woman Minia to counteract that of Espina. Espina does help Silvio along his artistic and religious conversion by revealing to him the possibility of art that is more than just imitation which leads to his artistic conversion to Catholicism through the Pre-Raphaelite painters. It is
ultimately Minia’s influence, though, that leads him to a true religious conversion and allows his
confession before death. While he may die, he does not experience the spiritual death that Espina
and Valdivia do. Finally, In Memorias de un solterón, Mauro, like Valdivia, is an impeccably
dressed gentleman, yet he leads an idle and voyeuristic life. He is always spying on others, but
happy to remain a confirmed bachelor. It is only through developing a friendship with Feita that
ultimately leads to love and a marriage between the couple that he is able to set aside his idle
ways and become a productive member of a family and society.
1.1 Introduction

The image of the New Woman was a reflection of the fears of the age, particularly of decadence and degeneration. Spain was in turmoil at the turn of the century, and there was a strong sense of instability and a fear that Spain would not properly be able to modernize. Elaine Showalter notes the political connections to the horror of the New Woman in fin de siècle culture: “Politically, the New Woman was an anarchic figure who threatened to turn the world upside down and to be on top in a wild carnival of social and sexual misrule. Journalists described her in the vocabulary of insurrection and apocalypse” (38-39). This image of the New Woman was seen by most men as a frightening social harbinger of doom. This antagonism towards and fear of the New Woman extended throughout all of Europe, and “the impending success of the struggle for political and social rights for women in Anglophone nations seems to have set off alarms, loudly, and clearly, in the minds of those who upheld the ‘traditional’ Spanish values” (Tolliver 44-45). For instance, in the August issue of La España Moderna of 1895, Pero Peréz suggests that rights for woman may lead “al bastardeamiento y a la destrucción de toda la raza humana” (qtd. in Tolliver 48). Keeping women silenced was seen as an imperative for the sake of the country and the race. Although, “in some circles the new woman acquired a certain tenuous cachet, she represented for most people one of the most powerful symbols of decadence in a Europe preoccupied with the concept of degeneration” (Jagoe 157).

This New Woman who sought independence from male rule became a prominent symbol of degeneration and decadence. Kirkpatrick points out that modernity was often associated with femininity and that the New Woman was an example of “modernity gone awry” (“The
Pardo Bazán, on the other hand, celebrates the New Woman as part of the way to cure the ills of the age and the problem of the modernization of Spain. Instead of seeing her as a symptom of decadence, she sees her as solution for it. She explains in her essay “La mujer española” that:

> [e]l cambio social tenía que traer, como ineludible consecuencia, la evolución del tipo femenino; y lo sorprendente es que el hombre de la España nueva, que anheló y procuró ese cambio radicalísimo, no se haya resignado aún a que, variando todo –instituciones, leyes, costumbres y sentimiento—, el patrón de la mujer también variase. Y no cabe duda: el hombre no se conforma con que varíe o evolucione la mujer (30).

Spain could not continue to live in the past of traditional gender norms if it wanted to become a modern country and not fall prey to decadence.

In her works, Pardo Bazán portrays the New Woman as a hope for society and as a character who redeems others. She helps to redeem others through her intelligence and independence, though, instead of through the subservient image of the “angel in the house,” the moral guardian of the family. In both her short story “Cuento primitivo” and her novel Memorias de un solterón. Adán y Eva (ciclo) she re-envisions the Genesis story, although each has very different conclusions. “Cuento primitivo” shows what happens when man does not embrace the New Woman: the loss of Paradise and discord between the sexes. In Memorias de un solterón, on the other hand, gender roles are re-imagined and the New Woman is valued. As a result, the New Woman Feíta Neira and the dandy Mauro Pareja form a complimentary pair who find happiness in marriage. In La quimera, Minia Dumbría, who serves as a symbol of Pardo Bazán herself, is the most independent of all three women and seems to escape the marriage-or-death imperative. Pardo Bazán also faces head-on the accusation that women are merely derivative creatures through the creation of Minia, a world-renowned and highly original musical composer. The character of Minia Dumbría confronts a number of the stereotypes about women
propagated during the turn of the century and shows how the New Woman is not degenerative, but progressive.

1.2 Narrative Strategies in “Cuento primitivo”

In order to discuss the modern New Woman that Pardo Bazán imagined, perhaps it would be best to begin by examining a short story published earlier in her career in 1893, “Cuento primitivo.” Possibly written as a response to her critic Clarín’s “Cuento futuro” published in 1892, this short story is essentially a subversive re-writing of the creation story in Genesis. Depicting Adam as the villain and cause of humankind’s woes and Eve as the heroine, it was quite the opposite of the more traditional depiction of Eve as evil temptress. Additionally, Estrella Cibreiro explains the importance of not only the content of Pardo Bazán’s works, but also her narrative strategies in revealing feminist themes:

La fuerza de las convicciones feministas de Pardo Bazán, así como su manera de enfrentarse, como escritora, a un panorama cultural decimonónico fundamentalmente masculino y en muchos casos misógino, determinaron no sólo el contenido de sus escritos, sino también las estrategias discursivas empleadas para transferir a sus textos una postura autorial que cuestionaba las normas que gobiernan el uso de los géneros literarios, así como las limitaciones literarias impuestas tradicionalmente sobre el sexo femenino. (60-61)

Pardo Bazán cleverly distances herself from the story through a long and elaborate opening by an acquaintance of the narrator who describes the narrator as a somewhat peculiar old man with a grudge against all things religious, but a “loco de buen capricho” (“Cuento” 26). The opening is almost apologetic and depreciating towards the narrator’s acquaintance. Tolliver, in her introduction to the story, notes how he is “elaborately characterized as eccentric, obsessive, heterodoxical, and perhaps even a bit crazy” (Pardo Bazán, “Cuento” 26). Therefore, Pardo Bazán is twice removed from the acquaintance who actually tells the revised Genesis story. It also, perhaps unfortunately, may have seemed to add a sense of authority to the story to
have a man re-tell the story. Tolliver suggests that Pardo Bazán may have used male narrators in order to “dissociate herself from the discredited female literary tradition and partly because of readers’ tendencies to read female-authored narratives written in personal voice through a petty moralizing prism” (90).

Her narrative strategies also serve to protect her from being seen as heterodoxical for the narrator explains that while his acquaintance may insinuate that Father Scío, well known for his Bible translation and scholarship, is ignorant as to how to properly interpret scripture, he is even less suited for the task. After all, it is only a story told by a seemingly crazy old man, not a revolutionary, modern woman. The setting of this re-telling of the Genesis story also contributes to the apparently flippant attitude of the narrator: It is one of a dark and stormy winter evening where his story is seemingly a source of entertainment, not something to be taken too seriously. Furthermore, the acquaintance who relates the story explains that his version may very somewhat from the original: “Yo no hago sino transcribir lo esencial de la relación, aunque no responda de ligeras variantes en la forma” (27). Through this humorous and intricate web, Pardo Bazán finds the freedom to express some of her feminist ideas without seeming too openly subversive or heterodoxical herself. Charnon-Deutsch notes how “[t]he humor masks the fact that a serious revision of Genesis is the wise fool’s truth” (The Nineteenth-Century 69). Tolliver affirms that Pardo Bazán often uses “a masculine narrative voice—or a focalization through the perspective of a male protagonist—in which we detect intonations that are ironic, antagonistic, in Bakhtinian terms, or even fully parodic. In these stories, the deployment of the masculine narrative voice itself results, curiously, in an interrogation of some aspect of masculine discourse” (92). Here, Pardo Bazán is able to effectively interrogate the patriarchal discourse that sees Eve as evil temptress and suggest a new understanding of the creation story.
1.3 Eve as New Woman in “Cuento primitivo”

The story begins more or less similarly to the Biblical version with Adam growing lonely in Paradise and God, wishing to make him happy, creating a host of animals to keep him company. After time, however, Adam “notó que iba cansándose de los seres inferiores” (30). As a result, God creates the first woman. How he creates her differs from the Biblical account for here God takes out “no una costilla, como dice el vulgo, sino unas miajitas del cerebro, unos pedacillos del corazón, unos haces de nervios, unos fragmentos de hueso, unas onzas de sangre..., en fin, algo de toda su sustancia” (31). Instead of being formed from Adam’s rib, she is formed from some part of all of him, emphasizing her equality with him. Furthermore, that God creates Eve as a response to Adam’s desire for an equal also stresses the equality of the sexes. In fact, if there is any inequality, it seems to favor Eve as “Dios, puesto a escoger, no iba a optar por lo más ruin, claro que tomó lo mejorcito, lo delicado y selecto, como si dijéramos, la flor del varón, para constituir y amasar a la hembra” (31). In her introduction to the “Cuento primitivo”, Joyce Tolliver observes that this idea is very similar to the modern-day joke that “Adam was a rough draft” (25) for with her creation, “Adán quedó inferior a lo que era antes” (32).

Adam is absolutely entranced by Eve and believes her to be “un ser celestial, de un luminoso querubín. Y en esta creencia siguió por algunos días, sin cansarse de mirar, remirar, admirar, ensalzarse e incensar a la preciosa criatura” (32). Adam’s blind idolization of Eve sounds eerily similar to the paradigm of the perfect “angel in the house.” In fact, he literally describes her as an angel, and his adoration of her continues until one day when “sin necesidad de ninguna insinuación de la serpiente traicionera, vino en antojo vehementísimo de comerse una manzana que custodiaba Eva con gran cuidado” (32-33). Here the Biblical version is completely abandoned and rewritten for according to the narrator, “este pasaje de la Escritura es de los más
In this version, there is no evil serpent and no blame can be attributed to Eve; instead, Eve is the careful protector of the forbidden fruit and the blame for the fall is completely attributed to Adam who overpowers Eve and eats of the fruit.

Upon eating of the forbidden fruit, a powerful change occurs in the way in which he sees Eve. Now, “en vez de tener a Eva por serafín, la tuvo por demonio o fiera bruta; en vez de creerla limpia y sin mácula, la juzgó sentina de todas las impurezas y maldades; en vez de atribuirle su dicha y su arrobamiento, le echó la culpa de su desazón, de sus dolores, hasta del destierro que Dios les impuso, y de su eterna peregrinación por sendas de abrojos y espinas” (33). Even here in the story of the first man and woman, the concept of the angel/devil dichotomy that Gilbert and Gubar expanded (28-31) appears. If Eve is seemingly no longer pure, virtuous, and angelic she must be wholly perverse and evil, the cause of all humankind’s sufferings. And this is the situation in which every Spanish woman found herself at the turn of the century. She could not be simply a human with virtues and vices as could man; she was either an angel or a demon. The last lines of the revised story assert, “Y el mito genesíaco se reproduce en la vida de cada Eva: antes de la manzana, el Adán respectivo le eleva un altar y la adora en él; después de la manzana, la quita del altar y la lleva al pesebre o al basurero…” (33).

The recounted story ends in a set of ellipses, implying the lengthy and continued history of this dichotomy without a foreseeable end.

What is not often emphasized in the analyses of this story, though, is Eve’s reaction to Adam’s adoration of her before the fall. Instead of reveling in Adam’s admiration, she tries to convince him that she is not a perfect, celestial being, but just a human being like him: “Eva juraba y perjuraba que era hecha del mismo barro que él” (32). Like the New Woman, all Eve asks is to be treated as a human being, not to be put on a pedestal. Furthermore, instead of
wanting to *become* a man, as so many men feared, the New Women of the turn of the century wanted just to be treated as an *equal* of man. God creates Eve to be the equal partner of Adam, but in fin de siècle Spain women were treated as inferior beings, just as were the animals in the story. In fact, Dijkstra highlights the link many late nineteenth-century scientists and intellectuals made between the degenerative nature of women and their relation to animals. For instance, he notes that “ultimately one was likely to discover that it was impossible to take the animal out of the woman—that woman and animal were coextensive […] In literature, as in the realm of visual arts, fantasies concerning women’s resemblance to animals increased steadily in frequency, ranging from simple comparisons (‘cat-like grace’) to elaborate psychological characterizations” (283-288). A good example is a series of paintings Franz von Stuck painted that showed the link between women and snakes such as *The Sin* (1893) (Figure 2).

Unfortunately, women have been oppressed for so long with stories and images of their supposed perversity that many have come to believe it. The story explains how “[e]l caso es que, a fuerza de oír [que es demonio], también Eva llegó a creerlo; se reconoció culpada, y perdió la memoria de su origen, no atreviéndose ya a afirmar que era de la misma sustancia que el hombre,”
ni mejor ni peor, sino un poco más fina” (33). Both instances of Eve’s understanding of herself in relation to Adam the word “mismo/a” is used, highlighting their sameness. They are both made of “[el] mismo barro” and “la misma sustancia.” Although the lines of her body appear a bit softer, she is neither better nor worse than man. She asked to be treated as an equal, and it is man who put her up on a pedestal and made her an “angel of the house.” When she was no longer angelic enough, she became the femme fatale who must ensnare men as she is denied the possibility of her own productive and independent role in society. And if the onset of temptress women trying to ensnare men was not enough, this new breed of women the New Woman seemed even perhaps more terrifying for not appearing to need men at all. What Pardo Bazán shows, though, is that the New Woman is not at all a hateful and monstrous creature as so many men believed her to be. Instead, she is the cure for many of the ills of the age, and it is only through her that man can glimpse back and remember Paradise and perhaps learn to create a new sort of earthly paradise. In the end of “Cuento primitivo” the narrator concludes by telling the audience that man “sólo logra entrever [Paráíso] un instante en el fondo de las pupilas de Eva, donde se conserva un reflejo de su imagen” (34).

1.4 Feíta as New Woman in Memorias de un solterón. Adán y Eva (ciclo)

A few years later, in 1896, Pardo Bazán published Memorias de un solterón. Adán y Eva (ciclo), another sort of re-envisioning of the story of Adam and Eve, this time with a happier ending. Unlike “Cuento primitivo” in which Adam desires a mate and, once he has one, despises her, in Memorias de un solterón the narrator Mauro Pareja is a confirmed bachelor but finds happiness by the end of his tale through his marriage with Feíta Neira. Of all of Pardo Bazán’s novels, this is the one “which most clearly traces a blueprint for the modern woman and for enlightened marriage between equals” (Wietelmann Bauer 23)
Feíta, the new Eve of the story, is a modern, New Woman; she is strong, independent, wishes to further her academic studies, and does not have the desire to marry. She does not spend much time in grooming herself or wearing stylish clothes as she considers these things pointless vanities. Unlike many of the women who dressed to seduce men or ensnare a husband, in her eye “no se descubre ni el menor asomo de coquetería, reserva o ternura femenil” (151). Feíta lacks many of the qualities deemed “feminine” such as a soft-spoken, gentle attitude or flirtatious manner. She was not “una beldad, ni menos poesía esta ciencia del tocado y del adorno, de la palabra y del gesto, del mirar y del reír, en que funda su avasallador dominio la mujer” (217). In fact, in many ways she is described in terms of being manly, and even in her physical aspect she has some qualities that seem masculine. For example, Mauro says of her, “Sobre el labio superior hay indicios de bozo: no puede llamarse una dedada, sino a lo sumo leve sombra, que con el tiempo oscurecerá” (151). Feíta is not preoccupied with her appearance because she is too preoccupied with her studies. She would like to pursue a career and enjoys reading scientific books; she is anything but an “angel in the house.” As Mauro comments, “[L]os arrechuchos de laboriosidad doméstica no son en Feíta muy frecuentes” (52). Mauro, in fact, seems more like a traditional example of femininity than Feíta. He is passive, domestic, likes to read novels, is very concerned about his appearance, and enjoys gossiping. Mary Lee Bretz observes that “[i]n ironic inversion, the time that Mauro normally devotes to setting out his clothing and meticulously grooming himself is the time that Feíta, ungroomed and indifferent to her physical appearance, chooses to study science and economics in the library next to Mauro’s bedroom” (90). Each seems to take on qualities traditionally associated with the other sex and does not conform to the established gender norms.
Jagoe notes that “[t]he new woman blurred the oppositional gender system of masculinity and femininity which the bourgeoisie had constructed. The stirrings of a revolution in gender identities which the new woman represented was rejected with extreme violence” (156). This straying from gender stereotypes was so strongly rejected because of the fear that it was the sign and symptom of decadence and degeneration. Urbano Gonzáles Serrano, a late nineteenth century Spanish philosopher, psychologist, and literary critic, explained clearly this preoccupation with degeneration, particularly in the case of the woman saying, “Alpinismos, supresión de contrastes, agilidad de sportman, opresión de los pechos (fuentes misteriosos de la vida), supresión del encanto de la pasión, ingreso libre, semianárquico de la mujer en expansiones de íntima amistad con varios: todo esto produce esterilidad, desencanto, y hombres con faldas” (24-25, italics in the original). The complaints he makes are two-fold: He criticizes the New Woman for the “suppression” and “oppression” of her stereotypically feminine attributes such as breasts and passion. She has suppressed the contrasts, the differences between herself and man. Through her suppression of difference, she transgresses in another way, acting and moving about freely as a man might. She has the athletic prowess and agility to climb mountains, and she speaks freely and intimately with men. Obviously, she is quite the opposite of a quiet, weak, subservient housewife. Yet, instead of this activity and independence being something positive, for Gonzáles Serrano, she is the symbol of sterility, ugliness, and the seemingly ridiculous image of men in skirts.

At the beginning of the novel, Mauro expresses the general opinion, clearly articulated by Gonzáles Serrano, of educated women which reveals the violent rejection of the figure of the New Woman as hateful creatures. He notes that Feía does not do domestic housework and that “[p]or lo general paga tributo a otra manía, insólita y funesta en la mujer: y es su malhadada
afición a leer toda clase de libros, a aprender cosas raras, a estudiar a troche y moche,
convirtiéndose en marisabidilla, lo más odioso y antipático del mundo” (152). Even Feita’s own
father says of her, “con dolor lo declaro…es un monstruo, un fenómeno afflictivo y ridículo”
(164). That her own father would call her a monster highlights the intensity with which the New
Woman was rejected. She is not even a person, but a monster or a phenomenon, and a ridiculous
and afflictive one at that. Charnon-Deutsch explains that “[Mauro] is a somewhat worn reflection
of society’s collective view of women, a catalogue of generalizations, misconceptions and
perceptions crying out for contradiction […]. Happily, society’s spokesman for the patriarchal
order turns out to be a defector” (“Feita's Decision” 31). Mauro describes his “conversion” to see
Feita and the New Woman as admirable and valuable:

Feita era la mujer nueva, al albor de una sociedad distinta de la que hoy existe. Sobre el fondo burgués de la vida marinedina, destacábase con relieve singular el tipo de la muchacha que pensaba en libros cuando las demás pensaban en adornos: que salía sin más compañía que su dignidad […] que no se turbaba al hablar a solas con un hombre […] En suma, todo lo que al principio me pareció en Feita reprobable y hasta risible y cómico, dio en figurármelo alto y sublime, merecedor de admiración, y aplauso. (219)

Feita is exactly the sort of woman Gonzáles Serrano and those like him feared. Instead of
concerning herself with her appearance to enchant men or desiring them passionately, she does
not desire marriage or romantic relations with men. She feels free to walk the streets alone,
something that at that time only a prostitute would do. Instead of a man’s company, she keeps
only her dignity, and even though she may walk out alone yet not desire intimate, romantic
relations with men, she feels free to talk with them and build friendships.

Instead of being a disgrace to her family like some of her other sisters or her brother,
Feita ends up being a savior to her family. Her father counted on his only son to help him with
his eleven daughters, but when his son does not live up to his father’s expectations, it is Feita
who takes over her father’s place once he passes away. Admittedly, she does so through becoming a “respectable” woman and marrying Mauro. Their marriage has divided critics who have debated whether the ending is a happy one or not as the ending seems somewhat ambiguous. This ambiguity, however, is a main characteristic in the works of Pardo Bazán. Susan McKenna observes “[c]onflict and contradiction, ambivalence and ambiguity are the salient characteristics of Pardo Bazán’s radical expropriation of the short story’s narrative conventions” (4). This ambiguity also carries over into her novels, and for some critics such as John Kronik, “[e]l atractivo de su prosa […] reside concretamente en la ambigüedad, en la no resolución de las contradicciones y de los sentimientos dispares.” (italics in the original).

Pardo Bazán does not often write in a very straightforward manner; instead, she uses narrative techniques such as those mentioned by McKenna as well as those mentioned earlier such as humor, irony, and “narrative cross-dressing” to invite the reader to tease out the meaning. Through her use of what Bakhtin termed “polyphony,” she is able to introduce a myriad of different voices and viewpoints including both the traditional and the modern conception of gender roles. It is this “ambiguous nature of Pardo Bazán’s narrative [that allows] for the creation of double, open, or alternative endings” (McKenna 72). She gives no perfect solution, although she does seem to make suggestions, and her endings are often bitter-sweet. The ending of Memorias de un solterón is no exception.

The bitter aspect of the ending is Feita’s giving up her dream of independence and settling down into the role she never seemed to want, that of wife and (surrogate) mother to her siblings. Maryellen Bieder notes that her “freedom is limited by contemporary society to freedom-through-marriage” (107). Beider also suggests that the novel is not really about the New Woman at all, but rather about how to integrate her into society. Yet, must not the goal of the
New Woman be to find a place within modern Spanish society? What Beider implies, though, is that this integration is at some level still compliant with patriarchal standards for women. Mauro notes as much himself in his attempts to convince Feíta to marry him:

La sociedad actual no la reconocerá a usted esos derechos que usted cree tener. Sólo puede usted esperar justicia... ¿de quién? Nunca de la sociedad; de un individuo, sí. Ese individuo justo y superior será el hombre que la quiera a usted y la estime lo bastante para proclamar que es usted su igual, en condición y en derecho. ¿Qué más da, Feíta? Nuestro corazón está formado de tal modo, que parece inmenso en sus ansias, y sin embargo, otro corazón puede bastarle, puede llenarle por completo. En la vida íntima, en la asociación constante del hogar, encontrará usted esa equidad que no existe en el mundo. Conténtese con eso, y habrá resuelto el problema de la dicha. Yo seré ese hombre racional y honrado, ese que no se creerá dueño de usted, sino hermano, compañero... y qué diablos ¡amante! (261, italics in the original)

Mauro recognizes that the acceptance of a single, completely independent woman would not be possible at that time and the best she can hope for is a marriage among equals. Perhaps the ending is meant to leave the reader with the desire for something more for Feíta and highlight her lack of options. Pardo Bazán often noted pessimistically that she did not see the feminist movement really moving forward in Spain anytime soon as it had in other European countries such as Britain. For instance, she laments, “Para el español, por más liberal y avanzado que sea, no vacilo en decirlo, el ideal femenino no está en el porvenir, ni aun en el presente, sino en el pasado. La esposa modelo sigue siendo la de cien años hace” (“La mujer española” 30). Another interpretation is offered by Charnon-Deutsch who suggests that Pardo Bazán does not aim to create a story that would have been completely unrealistic or utopian: “Feíta’s renunciation of the ‘free life’ in Madrid typifies Pardo Bazán’s tactical retreat from what she knew readers would consider either an impossible utopia or an undesirable one. Taking the more common ground, she opts for the romance of the exceptionally perfect pareja” (“Feíta's Decision” 29).
The sweet aspect of their marriage is that while still seemingly complying with societal norms, it can be subversive and progressive. Mauro emphasizes the fact that in their union he has no desire to be her master, but her equal. He learns how to value a woman like Feita and “[i]nstead of trying to change anything about her character, he allows himself to be molded into her ideal mate” (Charnon-Deutsch, “Feita's Decision” 30). Charnon-Deutsch also cautions, “Unless we carefully study the relationship between male and female subjects, Feítas [sic] choice will seem a tragic negation of her life goals, or their subsumption to the goals society expects women to embrace” (“Feita's Decision” 30). Likewise, Susan Kirkpatrick sees Feita as “carrying out her unorthodox ideas about women, and in the process [she] reconstructs the sexual imagination of a confirmed bachelor and forges with him a forward-looking, modern, marriage alliance” (“The ‘feminine’” 148). This “New Couple,” can still be subversive as they typify a new understanding of power relations and gender norms within marriage. Although society may fear those men and women who step outside of gender norms, it is precisely because they do this that they are able to become each other’s ideal mate and have a marriage between equals. Pardo Bazán can support this type of marriage because both Feíta and Mauro have feminine and masculine qualities and, as a consequence of this, one does not dominate the other. They can re-imagine the Genesis story with a happier ending of mutual respect and equality.

1.5 Minia Dumbría as New Woman in La quimera

In order to regain Paradise in this fallen world, Pardo Bazán seems to offer as part of the solution for man to embrace the New Woman and to see her as his peer and equal. Minia Dumbría in La quimera is an excellent example of a New Woman who is anything but hateful and useless and who serves as a central figure in helping Silvio fight his chimera and redeem himself. Like Feíta, she is unconcerned with her appearance and focused on her study and
creation of music instead. When Silvio is painting her portrait the narrator notes that she “no
fijaba la vista, ni aun por curiosidad, en el trabajo del pintor” (147). Indifferent to her portrait,
she looks outside the window, concentrating on the nature outside the window that inspires her
art. Often ignored in critical studies of the New Woman, Minia serves as an example of a woman
who seems to fulfill Feita’s dream of independence. Pardo Bazán also characterizes her to
combat three prevalent stereotypes about woman: her intellectual incapacity, her derivative
nature, and her subsequent moral and even physical degeneration should she engage in
intellectual pursuits.

1.6 Minia as the Goddess of Wisdom and the Sphinx of Reason

The opening section of La quimera is a two act tragicomedy entitled La muerte de la
quimera and is Pardo Bazán’s retelling of the story of Bellerophon’s slaying of the chimera
through the help of the Roman goddess of wisdom, Minerva. This play serves as a sort of
foreshadowing of what is to come in the rest of the novel where Silvio, the modern Bellerophon,
must defeat his false fantasies, the chimeras, through the help of Minia, the modern Minerva. In
an interesting role reversal, it is Silvio who is consumed by his desires and illusions in an almost
manic or hysterical way and the New Woman Minia who is the calm voice of reason in his life.

Dijkstra notes how the old adage “Long of hair, short of wit” seemed to say it all for the
pseudoscientists who developed a number of theories about the intellectual ineptitude of women
where both “[n]ature and nurture conspired to drain woman’s brains” (172). In fact, the German
scientist Carl Vogt (along with many others) believed that woman was physically and mentally
less evolved than man and that she retained “in the formation of the head, the earlier stage from
which the race or tribe has been developed, or into which is has relapsed. Hence, then, is partly
explained the fact, that the inequality of the sexes increases with the progress of civilization”
In Spain, Pero Pérez wrote an article on the “woman question” to *La España Moderna* in 1895 in which he explains three fundamental differences between men and women: “En el hombre prepondera la impresión de la observación, de la percepción; en la mujer, la del sentimiento. La mujer está incompletamente organizada para las operaciones superiores de la mente, sobre todo para el pensamiento abstracto. La transformación de la voluntad en movimiento y en acción se realiza más difícilmente en la mujer que en el hombre” (qtd. in Tolliver 47). Of course, Pardo Bazán rejected the pseudo-science and psychology used to determine these “differences” between the sexes. Instead, as she pointed out in “Cuento primitivo,” it is the systematic oppression and brainwashing of women which is to be blamed for any enfeeblement of their minds and bodies. Nonetheless, woman was seen as a creature who gives in to her passions and man as self-controlled and endowed with reason. In *La quimera*, however, Minia is the wise and reasonable one who attempts to curb Silvio’s wild fantasies.

The mythical creature of the sphinx is appropriated in *La quimera* to symbolize the admirable qualities of Minia. One day while visiting Silvio, who is painting her portrait, she recites an excerpt from Flaubert’s *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* containing the dialogue between the sphinx and the chimera which she seems to know by heart. The translation into Spanish of the text is Pardo Bazán’s and this excerpt describes succinctly the differences between the two creatures. The chimera exclaims,

¡Yo soy rauda y regocijada! Descubro al hombre deslumbrantes perspectivas, paraísos en las nubes y dichas remotas. Derramo en las almas las eternas locuras, planes de dicha, fantasías de porvenir, sueños de gloria, juramentos de amor, altas resoluciones… Impulso al largo viaje y la magna empresa… Busco perfumes nuevos, flores más anchas, goces desconocidos…. (172)

Minia stops just short of the chimera’s declaration to strangle any man full of wisdom, and Silvio’s response to the chimera shows that he is firmly in its grips:
Silvio, con los ojos muy abiertos, conteniendo la respiración, bebía el contenido del diálogo maravilloso. El hálito de brasa de la Quimera encendía sus sienes y electrizaba los rizos de su pelo ceniza; las glaucas pupilas del monstruo le fascinaban deliciosamente, y so cola de dragón, en roscándosele a la cintura, le levantaba en alto, como a santo extático que no toca al suelo. (172)

The sphinx, on the other hand, whom the chimera taunts as being “eternamente quieta, o dibujando alfabetos en la arena con las uñas de [sus] garras” responds calmly, “Es que guardo mi secreto: calculó y reflexionó” (171). Just as Silvio’s pursuits are symbolic of the chimera, Minia symbolizes the sphinx of reason. She responds to Silvio’s outburst in which he cries, “¡Triunfar o morir! Mi Quimera es esa, y excepto mi Quimera… ¿qué me importa el mundo?” (172) as the sphinx would respond to the chimera. She is “[c]allada como la Esfinge que enmudece justamente porque sabe” (172). Minia understands Silvio’s predicament and instead of talking about it further she takes him to a place where perhaps he will be disillusioned by the chimera: a tomb. Horrified by what he sees, Silvio asks to leave and Minia exclaims, “¡Bah! Está usted entregado a las carcajadas y a los ladridos de la Quimera!” (174). Silvio continues on his destructive path, aided by his acquaintance with femme fatale Espina, for the majority of the rest of the novel. Only once his sickness debilitates him to the point where he must stay with the Dumbrías and realizes that he too must face death and one day will be entombed does he listen to reason and find redemption.

1.7 Minia as Spanish Artist

The French politician and philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon clearly stated the contemporary assumption concerning women and art in fin de siècle Europe when he declared that ‘[a]rt only has one gender, it is masculine’ (152, my translation). Leopoldo Alas, often known as Clarín, was a contemporary and critic of Pardo Bazán who also emphatically noted that “no cabe duda que, en general, comparadas con los hombres se quedan tamañitas” (135). Women
artists and women in general were seen as derivative and only capable of imitation of the original male. In fact, Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger’s very popular book *Sex and Character* boldly asserted that “[i]t is enough to make the general statement that there is not a single woman in the history of thought, not even the most man-like, who can be truthfully compared with men of sixth-rate genius” (69). Creative energies in the fields of art and music were deemed out of reach for women. In creating art then, women were judged no matter whether they actually were original or not. If they created original things they were often deemed subpar, and if they created works just as good as men, they were called mere imitators.

Silvio and Minia are both artists, Silvio, a painter, and Minia, a composer of music. Of the two, though, only Minia creates original work that is fresh and without imitation. Furthermore, she uses her native Spain as inspiration. Minia looks to the countryside and the beauty of Spain to inspire her, unlike Silvio who often wants to draw from foreign resources such as France. At a time when Spain was worried about staying a world power and after having just lost the last of its colonies, it is important that the art Minia creates, which is world-famous, comes from Spain. Silvio expresses his admiration to her saying her art is “[c]ontra la corriente de los convencionalismos; desdeñando ataques y groserías, escribió usted sus famosas *Sinfonías campestres*, empapándose en el sentimiento aldeano: en la realidad. Así han llegado a todas partes, por la verdad que contienen. En Buenos Aires las oí tocar, las vi aplaudidas” (150). Minia, a New Woman, is able to create beautiful symphonies that glorify and bring honor to Spain despite the critiques of her detractors. Silvio, on the other hand, is the impotent one who relies on foreign inspiration. Furthermore, Silvio is always the imitator, trying to become a great and famous artist by drawing upon the works of others such as Joaquín Sorolla. Being an artist is
frustrating for him, unlike Minia. While Silvio is painting a portrait of her, the narrator describes how

[s]us ojos de miope descansaban en el familiar paisaje que encuadraba la ventana. La cañada suave, el bosque de castaños, la espesura de pinos, las tierras de labor segadas, todo tostado y realzado con oros rojos por la mano artística del otoño, y a los lejos el trozo de ría como fragmento de rota luna de espejo, entraban una vez más por su retina en el alma, y la adormecían con sorbos de beleño calmante. El oleaje de notas musicales que en ella se agitaba, aplacábase ante la naturaleza. Y eran los únicos instantes en que Minia reposaba algo; no percibía la música como tensión y esfuerzo de facultades, son que la sentía como un frío fresco, como baño de dulzura, y repetía mentalmente versos de Fray Luis. (147-148)

While the description of Minia as being nearsighted may appear to be a negative quality, it can also be read as Pardo Bazán’s irony. Silvio is constantly looking for inspiration, particularly in places other than the familiar landscape around him, yet Minia, who is nearsighted, can see inspiration all around her in Spain\(^2\). Furthermore, Minia’s focus is on creating beautiful art instead of becoming famous as Silvio is. While “merely” a woman artist, Minia becomes internationally famous for her work centered on Spain while Silvio dies a relatively unknown artist whose life was spent imitating others, especially foreign sources. Pardo Bazán clearly celebrates Minia as a strong and inventive Spanish artist, much like herself. In fact, many critics such as Walter T. Pattison believe Pardo Bazán to be “thinly disguised as Minia Dumbría” (87).

\subsection*{1.8 Minia as the Moral and Motherly Caretaker}

Fin-de siècle Spain feared that the education of women would cause their moral and even physical degeneration. Pardo Bazán’s essay entitled “La educación del hombre y la de la mujer” (1892) exposes how male education is viewed very optimistically but “la educación femenina derívase del postulado pesimista, o sea del supuesto de que existe una antinomia o contradicción palmaria entre la ley moral y la ley intelectual de la mujer, cediendo en daño y perjuicio de la moral cuanto redunde en beneficio de la intelectual” (74). Once again Minia subverts
patriarchy’s expectations by being perhaps the smartest and most moral character in the novel. In fact, it is through her knowledge, the books she has read and the art she has studied, that she is able to defend her personal beliefs and help Silvio towards redemption. It is she who talks to him about faith, reason, and God and hangs an effigy of Cristo del Dolor in his sickroom to prompt his full conversion and confession.

Physical devolution was also something greatly feared by men with the emergence of the New Woman and it was often suggested that ‘women really interested in intellectual matters are sexually intermediate forms’ (Weininger 70). Gonzáles Serrano, as mentioned earlier, believed that a result of being a New Woman was sterility. Showalter also notes that “[d]octors maintained that the New Woman was dangerous to society because her obsession with developing her brain starved the uterus; even if she should wish to marry, she would be unable to reproduce” (40). Nicholas Cooke’s influential Satan in Society also emphasized the supposedly negative aspects of feminism saying, “[I]f carried out in actual practice, this manner of ‘Woman’s Rights’ will speedily eventuate in the most prolific source of her wrongs. She will become rapidly unsexed, and degraded from her present exalted position to the level of man, without his advantages; she will cease to be the gentle mother, and become the Amazonian brawler” (86). Although the reader never sees Minia in the specific role of wife and mother, it is clear that she has in no way degenerated to some type of “Amazonian brawler.” She still retains the characteristics needed to be a loving mother – compassion and patience, which is obvious in how well she takes care of the ailing Silvio and tries to nurse him back to health. Furthermore, the new creations that flow from her may not be children, but they are art. While acceptable for a man to pursue other activities besides married life and fatherhood, at this time this was seen as an unacceptable option for women. Joaquín Sánchez de Toca explains,
En épocas de agitación, de inquietud y de transición, como la nuestra ha surgido en la mente del filósofo y de los ensueños del reformador teorías extrañas sobre la condición social de la mujer, que no merecen otro nombre que el de locuras y desvaríos del entendimiento. Pero [...] la ley natural, que quiere que la mujer pase su existencia dedicada exclusivamente a los trabajos del hogar, nunca ha podido desaparecer. (456)

Pardo Bazán saw this view of women as a grave error that “el papel de la mujer corresponde en la funciones reproductivas de la especie, determina y limita las restantes funciones de su actividad humana, quitando a su destino toda significación individual, y no dejándole sino la que puede tener relativamente al destino del varón” (“La educación” 75). Pardo Bazán does not suggest that New Woman ought not to marry or have children, she only affirms that it must not be demanded of all women that that be their sole role in life. Should a woman decide not to marry and have children but pursue other interests, she should be able to do so with the same freedom granted to men.

While Minia is able to complete Feito’s dream of independence, traveling, and education, it is likely that she is only able to do so due to her wealth and social status. Unlike the typical middle-class New Woman, she is the daughter of a baroness and member of the upper class, similar to Pardo Bazán. She cannot quite serve as an example for the middle-class woman striving to be a New Woman because her social situation is very different. She can, however, serve as an example for the noblewomen. Most of the noblewoman’s time was spent in “tertulias, paseos y teatros” when she was not out looking for “un buen partido” (Gómez-Ferrer 33). As a result, the common denominator of these women seemed to be “[e]stupidez, superficialidad, falta de ingenio y de ideas” (Gómez-Ferrer 33). Minia stands in stark opposition to them, an example of what they could be as they have the position and means to make more of their lives. Furthermore, while man may have preferred a fragile, domestic angel-in-the-house to be his moral guardian, Minia shows that through education and the freedom to creatively express
herself, she is best able to be a moral guide. It is through wisdom, reason, and strength that she redeems others, not through being weak, docile, and uneducated.

1.9 Conclusion

Pardo Bazán celebrates the New Woman through her depiction of these three women, Eva, Feíta, and Minia, none of which is either frightening or destructive. They are heralds of the modern woman who demands equality and to be on even-footing in her relationships with men. She is creative, intelligent, and wise, and she is often the most admirable character in the novel. Pardo Bazán seems to suggest that if she is embraced, together as equals man and woman can face the challenge of the decadent world that surrounds them.
CHAPTER 2
HEROÍNAS FABULOSAS, DECAPITADORES DEL HOMBRE: THE AESTHETICISM AND AMBIGUITY OF THE FEMME FATALE

2.1 Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century in Spain, Joyce Tolliver notes how “[t]he fear of feminine sexuality is pervasive […] in the commentary that fills the pages of popular and intellectual journals alike” (53). For example, in 1902 Madrid Cómico published an erotic poem by Emilio Bobadilla from his collection Vórtice (1902). It is entitled ‘Pagana’ and “epitomizes the recurrent fin de siècle representation of the figure of the femme fatale in a surprisingly explicit way” (Tolliver 56). Having abandoned the role of the modest, domestic “angel in the house,” women began to be depicted as perverse and alluring creatures, much of this masculine anxiety stemming from fear of women’s sexuality. Pardo Bazán not only details the anxiety that men feel when faced with a femme fatale, but she also focuses on how women who have been delineated as femme fatales can find redemption and escape from the laws and gaze of patriarchal authority.

In this chapter I explore the prevalent representation in art and literature of the femme fatale during fin de siècle Spain, focusing on the characters of Espina de la Porcel from La quimera (1905) and Catalina de Alejandría and Lina Mascareñas from Dulce dueño (1911). The novel La quimera is set mainly during the turn of the century in Spain, although in other parts of Europe like Paris as well, and it describes the life of an artist Silvo Lago and the women that influence his life. Pardo Bazán includes the popular figure of the fin de siècle: the femme fatale, embodied in the novel by María de la Espina Porcel. She is described with many of the common images for femme fatales in art and literature at that time. Jennifer J. Wood explains that “Espina is a composite of the most popular of these images: the woman as flower, as
serpent, as vampire and as a cruel queen” (“Images”). Moreover, she is described as a Medusa, another type of siren or melusina.

In Dulce dueño, there are manifestations of the sphinx, the perverse princess, the melusina and Medusa that represent Catalina de Alejandría and Lina Mascareñas. The first part of the novel describes the hagiography of Catalina de Alejandría which has been adorned by the priest Carranza, and the rest of the novel tells how Lina reconstructs and reinterprets the life of her patron saint in her own life. For patriarchy, these three women are femme fatales that symbolize decadence, but I distinguish between the way Espina and, alternatively, Lina and Catalina, treat men and search for ultimate beauty. Espina tries to seduce and destroy men actively while Catalina and Lina have no interest in romantic love with human men and their destruction of men is a passive thing that just happens because men meddle in their lives. Also, while all three are looking for something new in aestheticism at first, Catherine and Lina realize that something new that can save them from the evils of their age is Christianity and a mystical union with God. Although patriarchy sees all three as femme fatales through and through, I think the only true femme fatale is Espina because she is unable to embrace the principles of Christianity.

2.2 Espina de la Porcel as Femme Fatale

Lara Anderson notes that “[i]ndividual characters in this novel are sick, particularly Espina; even so, the type of ailments from which they suffer indicates that the characters are intended to be viewed collectively. Reinforcing such a reading is the name ‘Espina’, which so closely resembles “España’” (18). According Anderson, “there are significant parallels between the bad health of character and country” (19). Espina as the “hija de la decadencia” (422), symbolizes the problems of the fin de siècle decadence. Likewise, Whitaker sees Espina as an
archetypal and international character as a result of “her diverse cultural experience (her mother was Andalusian, her father was Mexican, and by residence she is Parisian)” (748). Furthermore, instead of being completely Spanish, she is more cosmopolitan and looks for inspiration outside of Spain.

Whitaker observes that “[a]s a true decadent figure, Espina Porcel is dedicated to the cult of beauty and the artificial […] [M]ore importantly, Espina is the true femme fatale, who, like a spider or sphinx, tries to destroy the young and naïve Silvio Lago” (747-48). In fact, her name also emphasizes her role as a femme fatale. The name “María” alludes to the Virgin Mary; of course, the Virgen is not a femme fatale, but she is frequently associated with the image of the “angel in the house.” The femme fatale is the complete opposite of this sort of angel, and perhaps, this is the reason that she is generally called “Espina” instead of “María.” Espina has rejected the role of the angel in the house in favor of the femme fatale. When another character calls her “María” it is normally with the attitude of “¡Pobre María! ¡Pobre enferma!” (496).

Espina is the infirm Mary, and her illness is the illness of her decadent generation. Silvio describes her as “la mujer moderna, la Eva inspiradora de infinitas direcciones artísticas, agudamente contemporáneas” (337). Instead of the pure, Virgen Mary, the angel in the house, she is the fallen woman, Eve, the femme fatale.

2.3 Espina as Serpent

Eve is historically associated with images of serpents, representations of the devil. It was “[i]n the evil, bestial implications of her beauty, woman was not only tempted by the snake but was the snake herself. Among the terms used to describe a woman’s appearance none were more overused during the late nineteenth century than ‘serpentine,’ ‘sinuous,’ and ‘snake-like.’” (Dijkstra 305). In art there was also a proliferation of images of women with serpents or women
as serpents. Some prominent examples include Franz von Stuck’s *Sin* (1893) (Fig. 1), *Sensuality* (1891) (Fig. 3), and *Inferno* (1908) (Fig. 4). Each of these paintings shows the intertwining of the

![Sensuality](image)

Fig. 3: *Sensuality* (1891) by Franz von Stuck.
woman and snake and their relation to sins of the flesh. In *Inferno* (1908), all the men in hell are doubled over in what appears to be extreme anguish and grief. The woman entwined with the snake, on the other hand, appears to be in the throes of ecstasy, enjoying herself in hell. In *La quimera*, Silvio refers to Espina as a “criatura infernal” (364) and believes her to be “inconsistente. Es un ser instable; ondea y culebrea” (360). Words like “ondea y culebrea” clearly associate her with the image of a serpent, and Silvio describes her skin as “frío como un reptil” (412). Furthermore, as in *Inferno* (1908), Espina delights in the destruction and despair of the men around her such as Silvio and Valdivia, the lover she constantly strings along to make him jealous.

### 2.4 Espina as Venomous Flower

Similar to the contrast between the traditional contrast between the Virgin Mary and Eve, there also developed a contrast between image of the pure, virginal rose and the venomous and seductive rose. Dijkstra points out that that “[t]he search for woman as the lily, the paragon of
virtue, had carried within itself the discovery of Lilith, of woman as snake, the inevitable
dualistic opposite of the image of purity” (216). When Silvio describes an image he sees of the
Virgin in a cathedral he says that she is “[d]elante de la inmensa rosa” (390). This image of the
virginal rose contrasts with how Espina is often described as “una flor venenosa” (419) or a rose.
Furthermore, her name “Espina” suggests the thorns of a flower that can inflict pain. Lily Litvak
explains that “[a] las flores arquetípicas y tradicionales se unieron las que el fin de siglo
redescubrió y popularizó” (30). Flowers became symbols of the exotic and the erotic, and Litvak
points out Emilio Sala’s Flor de estufa (1893) (Figure 5) as an example of the popularity of
exotic flowers (30). The rose, particularly the red rose, also became a powerful symbol of the
erotic because its form, texture, and aroma all suggest the sexuality of women (Wood “Images”).

Fig. 5: Flor de estufa (1893) by Emilio Sala
Furthermore, the seductive flower that lures in men can then become a poisonous flower, as is the case with Espina (Wood “Images”). She lures in men like Valdivia and Silvio only to try to destroy them. In the novel, the rose is the inspiration for the portrait Silvio paints of Espina, and when she substitutes his painting for another artist’s work at a party as a form of revenge, she is elaborately dresses as a flower:

Vestía la Porcel con más originalidad que nunca: su traje era como formado de una nube de pétalos de flor, flor de gasa, con transparencias de seda plateada debajo. Cada pétalo de llevaba cosido, al desgare un diamantito, y flecos desiguales de diamantes formaban el corpiño y se desataban sobre los hombros. La cola del vestido parecía un copo de fina humareda, entre la cual nieva el almendro su floración y juega el rocío. Sobre el escote, las sartas, cerradas con extraordinario rubí. (496)

The description of her rose outfit highlights the attention to the body and the artificial adornments that Espina adores. The exterior of the dressmaker’s shop of is described in the same sort of terms, decorated in roses, petals, and foliage. Silvio remarks that “[a]quellas flores eran la voz insinuante de la sirena, y la mujer que lo escuchase indiferente tendría su alma enajenada en otro hechizo” (439). This love of the artificial and extreme aestheticism attracts Silvio as Espina does, luring him in as would a siren, but it has destructive consequences.

2.5 Espina as Medusa

As far as Espina’s seduction of men, Mariano Lopez notes, “[E]n La quimera nos presenta Pardo Bazán la relajación moral y el libertinaje sexual de un mundo de narcisos y ninfómanas, incapacitados para el amor en su cauce normal, como es el caso de Silvio Lago y Espina Porcel” (67). Espina is the femme fatale that seduces Silvio; she is the perverse princess or cruel queen, “una especie de Cleopatra” (358) and is “semejante al de las reinas y heroínas fabulosas, decapitadoras del hombre” (425). But critics often forget a prominent image of the femme fatale in the novel, the woman that men wish to decapitate: the Medusa.
The Medusa has the power to paralyze and petrify men, and if her head represents a woman’s genitals as Freud proposes, it is the sexuality of woman that petrifies men and produces feelings of impotence and fear of castration. Lopez says, “El influjo de este extraño personaje ultra modernista y decadente, que le seduce a la vez que le esquiva, le divorcia de su profesión de fe realista y le lleva a la duda, a la esterilidad creadora y al naufragio vital durante su estancia en París” (63, italics added). When Silvio is with Espina, he cannot paint anything; he is impotent. Moreover, when “[l]a idea de que nunca pintaría como hace sonetos Heredia sumió a Silvio en una de esas meditaciones desconsoladas en que se quisiera renegar hasta del ser y convertirse en piedra” (407-408, italics added). As a true Medusa, Espina’s influence in Silvio’s life causes him to feel as though he wishes to turn into stone. When Espina humiliates him in front of another artist Marley, the narrator remarks that “Silvio estaba petrificado […] y palideció” and that “[e]scuchaba Silvio petrificado” (433). Then, when she belittles him in front of the customers at her dressmaker “[l]a pérdida de la esperanza trajo a Silvio a un estado de entumecimiento, como parálisis de las energías orgánicas de la vitalidad” (447). And when he suffers the ultimate humiliation at the hands of Espina who switches out his painting for a painting of Marley at her party, “le dejaba petrificado” (500). Silvio is constantly petrified by Espina, and in the last moments of his life as he confesses to a priest, the priest tells him that his soul is probably “petrificado en diferencia absoluta” (535).

Silvio is not the only man that Espina renders impotent, though. Valdivia is almost driven insane with jealousy from Espina’s affairs, and his relationship with her literally makes him physically ill. Silvio comments, “Yo no puedo dudar de que Valdivia es un mártir de los celos […] Valdivia, como todos sus compañeros de tortura, gime en su potro, desconfía, no duerme; pero cuando se le antoja confiar, lo estaría viendo y negaría el testimonio de sus ojos, la realidad
que palpase” (368). Valdivia is unable to live a normal, happy life because of Espina. He exclaims to Silvio, “¡Ni una día de dulce sosiego, de serenidad, de fe!” (371-372). His love for her turns to hate, and he finds he has the desire to kill her:

[E]stoy embrujado. Hay días en que me parece que odio a María más que otra cosa […] Me da por ataques repentinos, como el dolor de estómago, y es gracioso, se me ocurren cien barbaridades que no cometo. Mi desgracia es tanta, que estoy gastado para la voluntad firme de realizar un acto de energía, y no lo estoy para el sufrimiento que dicta esos actos a otros hombres, a la gente ordinaria. Se me ha puesto aquí que si mato a María quedo libre de mi obsesión. (372)

He finds himself full of physical ills and of murderous desires, yet he does not have the power or energy to do anything. Complain and suffer as he may, he appears to be symbolically castrated by Espina, spending the rest of the novel obsessing over her. Clearly, Espina also serves as a Medusa figure that humiliates and petrifies men, for at the hands of Espina, men are impotent.

2.6 Espina as Vampire

It is also possible that her name anticipates the moment when Silvio discovers her secret: her addiction to morphine. “Espina” can mean “spine,” and when Silvio sees Espina with the morphine the narrator explains, “Sobre el nítido torso, donde la línea de la espalda se inflexiona tan graciosamente destacándose encima de nacaradas tersuras y morbideces de raso, había divisado Silvio algo horrendo, una informe elevación, vultuosa y rugosa como la piel de un paquidermo, una especie de bolsa inflada, que causaba estremecimiento y asco” (423). Her addiction to morphine associates her with the image of the vampire. In fact, Minia describes her as “una vampira” (357) and when Silvio writes to Minia, he also makes “caricaturas modernistas de la Porcel, representada por un vampiro con sombrero de plumas o una melusina que entre el esbelto rebujo de las ropas saca su cola de serpiente” (448). The drugs serve as a sort of “[el] veneno [que] también destruye el alma. El sentido moral desaparece” (424). Espina is
like a soulless vampire that destroys men and does not comply with the moral laws. When Silvio discovers Espina’s secret addiction to morphine, “[s]e disipaba el misterio de aquel alma, al ver sin velos su prisión de carne: la insaciabilidad, el tédio, tal vez el ensueño nunca realizado, la enfermedad de toda una generación, el lento suicidio, en la aspiración a momentos que hagan olvidar la vida, y que sólo proporciona la droga de muerte!” (424). Fin de siècle art linked morphine addiction and the image of the vampire as well. In fact, “[i]n the years after 1900, no major exhibition was complete without its images of opium-smoking women or morphine addicts” (Dijkstra 359). Prominent examples include Albert Matignon’s *Morphine* (ca. 1905)

![Morphine (ca. 1905) by Albert Matignon.](image)

**Fig. 6: Morphine** (ca. 1905) by Albert Matignon.
Fig. 7: *La morfina* (1894) by Santiago Rusiñol

Fig. 8: *La droga* (1901) by Hermen Anglada-Camarasa
(Fig. 6), Santiago Rusiñol’s La morfina (1894) (Fig. 7) and Hermen Anglada-Camarasa’s La droga (1901) (Fig. 8).

Each of the women in these photos shows the languidness that results from drug usage, and in La morfina (1894) by Santiago Rusiñol, the young woman appears as if she could be dead. Again, the reader can see how Espina’s sickness symbolizes the sickness of the fin de siècle culture, the moral and physical degeneration that results from extreme aestheticism (Porter 266). Her problem is that

art, as the highest value, excludes other values [...] Pardo Bazán saw this extreme aestheticism as dangerous ethically, and in the character of Espina she portrays the darker side of the Decadent sensibility: she is cold and calculating, quickly bored and can be perversely cruel. She suffers from ennui; she must continually titillate her jaded palate with new sensations, and she amuses herself with wild caprices. (Porter 265)

Her excessive aestheticism is connected to her drug use; she wishes to escape the common, everyday world that does not offer her many possibilities, and the desire to always have new and more dangerous experiences and sensations is similar to recreational drug use.

Espina’s enthusiasm for the artificial as a way to escape vulgar reality is reflected in her name “Porcel” that alludes to porcelain, “la porcelana”, artificial, fine, fragile things. In fact, Espina has a “galería de las porcelanas” (495) in her house. The porcelain serves as a symbol of the materialism and consumerism that she advocates. She explains her theory of art to Silvio saying, “Lo bello es... lo artificial” (355). Even her body itself seems artificial, a part of her clothing: “Su ropa sólo se diferencia de la que gastan las demás señoritas que visitan, en que parece inseparable de su cuerpo” (336). Later, Silvio remarks that Espina’s hand seems as though it were not real: “La mano, cautiva, en las mías, que se insinúan con hábil presión, no palpita, no se estremece; parece una de esas manos de plata del tesoro de las iglesias, en las cuales lo humano es un hueso inerte, una reliquia” (363). Espina’s moral deterioration is represented by
her almost deterioration as a human being into her clothing, her body appearing more and more as something artificial.

Dijkstra explains in more detail how the image of the vampire, the use of drugs, and Espina’s decadent way of dressing are related to consumerism:

Many middle-class women, impressed with the lesson that they were of value only as consumer goods, came to see it as their primary purpose in life to enhance their own status in marriage by surrounding themselves with other expensive consumer goods […] Thus woman, having been consumed in the marriage market, then having become consumptive as a wife through lack of respect, exercise, and freedom, took her revenge by becoming a voracious consumer (355).

In this way, consumerism for Espina can serve as a sort of revenge. When she is with Silvio she always wants him to buy her what he terms “porquerías” such as “[c]laveles, rosas, piñones, dátiles, macetas de albahaca, naranjas, panderetas, caricaturas de ministros, juguetes orginarios,” (362) and so on. When she returns home, though, she throws them into the trash “con desprecio” (362). For her, everything is dispensable, including people. Espina is “exaltadamente elegante y rematadamente mala” (358), and feels “indiferencia moral, el desprecio a la humanidad” (444). Although everything seems to be dispensable, she continues her desire to consume not only objects, but people like Silvio and Valdivia, much like a vampire. Furthermore, “[b]y 1900 the vampire had come to represent woman as the personification of everything negative that linked sex, ownership and money” (Dijkstra 351). The proliferation of vampire images reflect the ills of the age that associate the vampire with consumerism and the femme fatales with drugs to forget their pain.

Although Pardo Bazán seems to strongly criticize Espina and her decadence, through the voice of Valdivia there is a sense in which it is possible to read Espina’s decadence as not completely her fault but as a symptom of the inequality of the sexes and the lack of opportunities
for a woman in fin de siècle Spain. Valdivia tells Silvio, “Y, en el fondo, créame… ella no es responsable del mal que hace. Se encuentra sometida a una fatalidad” (373). Perhaps she is artificial and is addicted to consumption of people and things, but when women “[have] little else to do with their lives than be trivial and decorative” it is understandable that “they transformed the realm of trivia and decoration into a torture garden for the men who had collectively set out to turn them into the trained seals of a consumer society” (Dijkstra 355). During the 1870s, women such as Tennie Claflin and Abba Goold Woolson attempted to show how the energies of women “were, in a sense, being aggressively ‘vampirized’ by the males around them” (Dijkstra 30-31). Perhaps Espina “devolves” and becomes a “vampire” because all of her creative energy is “vampirized” by patriarchy. Even though Espina is obviously the decadent femme fatale through and through, one can see her as a product of her environment and understand her. Still, as a symbol of the ills of her decadent age, at the end, she must die. Silvio says of her, “[E]s la mujer de una civilización avanzada, y refinada y disuelta o ¿descompuesta? en la decadencia artística” (332). At the end, it is evident that is it the latter two. Silvio expresses towards the end of his own life his fear of dying like Espina, exclaiming, “¡Morir! ¡Morir también, como Espina, como la modernidad radiante, la de inimitable existencia!” (541). She is the symbol par excellence of the ills of modernity.

2.7 Catalina de Alejandría as Femme Fatale and Ambiguous Sphinx

In Dulce dueño, Pardo Bazán uses the ambiguous image of the sphinx throughout the story told by Caranza in order to show two ways of reading the figure of Catalina de Alejandría. Originally, the sphinx of the Egyptians was not a symbol of the femme fatale as it has grown to be. The Egyptian sphinxes are wingless and recumbent, and the type that has a human aspect is called the androsphinx and is a lion with a head or face of a man. They symbolized something
very different in ancient Egypt than what they symbolized in 19th century Western Europe.

Dorothy Norman notes that “[i]n one of its aspects, the sphinx was long an emblem of the achievement of wisdom in Egypt: ideal of mature, evolved kingship” (74). Instead of something perverse and evil, they were symbols of wisdom and royalty. Moreover, they had religious symbolism. Frances Yates explains that “[t]he Egyptians sculptured a sphinx on their temples, signifying that the mysteries must be kept inviolate” (150). They also guarded the important secrets of their religion. On the other hand, the sphinxes in ancient Greece had the face and breasts of a woman with wings and “[t]he ancient Greeks if not first to associate the sphinx explicitly with disease of mind (ignorance, forgetfulness, thought-crippling fear) and death, were almost certainly first to elaborate this association in detail. The Oedipus legend, an early (perhaps the early) example of such detailed elaboration, is well known” (South 183). In fact, the word for “sphinx” in ancient Greek meant “to draw tight, squeeze” (Chisholm 662). They are almost the image of the ignorant and deadly femme fatale that strangles men, a very different vision from the Egyptian sphinx, a benevolent figure of great wisdom and a protector of secrets.

Heinz Mode maintains that the Egyptian sphinx is the original and that other representations are false, especially the way in which the 19th century represented the sphinx. He asserts,

Only more recently has European art taken up the sphinx without falsifying it, deriving it directly from Egypt. In the nineteenth century it was misused for all kinds of symbolic fantasies. Many genre painters and late romantics attempted to portray the eternal feminine, enigmatic, erotically dangerous, by a more or less deliberate distortion of the original work. Thus for example Franz von Stuck painted not only the sphinx in its animal-human shape but also, as a parallel, a female nude lying on its stomach with the upper part of the body raised up. (78)

The paintings of von Stuck to which Mode refers are The Kiss of the Sphinx (1895) (Fig. 9) and The Sphinx (1895) (Fig. 10). Other famous 19th century representations include Oedipus and the Sphinx (1864) (Fig. 11) and Oedipus the wayfarer (ca. 1888) (Fig.12) among many others by
Gustave Moreau. Each of these works depicts images of the sphinx as a sort of *femme fatale*, seductive and perverse, but, according to Mode, it is the works of art that are perverted because they do not represent the original image of the sphinx.

The representation of Catalina de Alejandría manifests the same ambiguity as that of the image of the sphinx. On one hand, she is very wise and benevolent person that guards the mystery of Christianity in her heart; on the other hand, in the eyes of her suitors, she is a heretic and a perverse *femme fatale*. Firstly, it is obvious that Catalina is an exceptional woman that can discuss advanced topics like science and philosophy. She is also wise because she is able to dedicate herself to her studies as a man could. Carranza explains, “En Egipto, las mujeres se dedicaban al estudio como los hombre, y hubo reinas y poetisas notables […]” No extrañemos

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 9: The Kiss of the Sphinx** (1895) by Franz von Stuck.
que Catalina profundizase ciencias y letras” (51). The story emphasizes the fact that Catalina is very wise and can debate with anyone. In fact, it is the reason that many of the powerful men envy her and wish to possess her. When they realize that they cannot have her, though, they try to destroy her.

This happens with one of her admirers, Gnetes the sophist, for “más de una vez había envidado amarillamente la sabiduría de la princesa, y aunque feo y medio corcovado, la suposición de lo que sería la posesión de Catalina le había desvelado en su sórdido cubículo” (75). Because he cannot have her, Gnetes tells the emperor Maximino that Catalina has
Fig. 11: *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1864) by Gustave Moreau.
Fig. 12: *Oedipus the wayfarer* (ca. 1888) by Gustave Moreau.
converted to Christianity in order to denounce her as a form of revenge. When Maximino approaches her in order to see if she is a Christian, Catalina confirms it and insists on a philosophical debate after which the loser must convert to the winner’s religion. Maximino admits that “[e]l debate sería desigual” (80) because he is not very adept at forming arguments; Catalina, on the other hand, “es muy capaz de discurso” (81). As a compromise, he invites a number of philosophers to the palace to debate with Catalina in front of him. At the end, “[e]l triunfo de la hija de Costo era visible” (86). In fact, not only does she convert two of the philosophers, but Gnetes and Maximino also pause and reflect on her arguments. Gnetes thinks to himself that

\[ \text{en el fondo de su alma él tampoco creía en el numen de Apolo, aunque sí en su apariencia seductora y en la energía de sus rayos. Y la verdad, subiéndosele a la garganta, le atascaba la voz en la nuez para discutir. Empavorecido, reflexionaba: --- ¿Acaso pienso yo enteramente como Catalina?--- Y se propuso disimularlo, fingiendo indignación ante la blasfemia. (83)} \]

Although he can see that she is perhaps right, he rejects these thoughts because he envies her and wants to reject her as he believes she has rejected him. Maximino does the same. He proposes that if she would be his queen, together they would be very powerful and he would convert to Christianity. When she does not accept his offer, though, he become angry and orders that she must sacrifice to his gods or die. It is obvious that Catalina has won the debate with the philosophers, but Maximino does not uphold his promise to convert to Christianity should she win. He does not take her seriously nor does her respect her because his eyes and in the eyes of Gnetes, she is only a woman and her only purpose is to serve man. When she does not comply with his orders, he kills her. If he cannot be the only god in her life, he will not permit her to adore another. He fears her power, her independence, and her intelligence. That is to say, he
fears that she does not need him, that she could live a happy existence without him. In his own words, “[I]a virgen es peligrosa” (98).

2.8 Catalina’s Spiritual Autonomy and Conversion from Aestheticism

Maximino’s fear reflects a very common fear at the end of the 19th century in Spain: that woman had transformed from an “angel in the house” that lives only to support and serve her spouse to an independent woman that does not need a man. Dijkstra proposed that the total submission of the angel in the house “ultimately, was what the mid-nineteenth-century hoisting of woman onto a monumental pedestal of virtue was all about: a male fantasy of ultimate power, ultimate control—of having the world crawl at his feet” (19). Maximino desires maximum power and control (curiously as his name suggests) over the mind, spirit, and body of Catalina. When she rejects him, he no longer sees hers as the “perfect woman” but as a dangerous and perverse one. Dijkstra explains that

[i]t was inevitable that the unyieldingly dualistic requirement of the mid-century—which held that woman must be incessantly all-giving, and that she must be the embodiment of altruism to balance to the economic necessity of the egotistic ambitions of the male—should lead to its opposite: the myth of the completely self-sufficient and hence completely egotistical woman, whose only wish was to gaze into the mirror and spend herself into auto-erotic self-contemplation. (145)

This image of the egotistical woman, obsessed with her own beauty and “the self-contained round, the uroboros, began to appear with increasing frequency in turn-of-the-century art” (Dijkstra 129). Her mirror was a symbol of her narcissism and her vanity; [t]hus, a woman’s glance in the mirror became representative of her perverse unwillingness to recognize that it was her natural, predestined duty to yield her ego to man’s will” (Dijkstra 135). Now she was no longer an altruist but an egoist. If she was “[n]o longer the moon of reflected light, she had become the moon of circularity, of uroboric self-sufficiency. Egotistical, self-involved, she no
longer cared a hoot for men; all she cared about was herself. And in ceasing to be self-sacrificial, she clearly became destructive of the masculine ego” (Dijkstra 148). That a woman would prefer herself to man, to embrace her own reflection in the mirror “became the turn of the century’s emblem of her enmity toward man, the iconic sign of her obstructive perversity, her greatest weapon in her reactionary war against the progressive male” (Dijkstra 151). In order to maintain his power, he must destroy the threat that the independent woman represented.

For powerful men like Gnetes, Maximino, and her other suitors, Catalina de Alejandría seems to be a *femme fatale* not because she wants to seduce men, but precisely the opposite – because they can neither possess nor seduce her. She appears as the dangerous woman who admires herself and kisses herself in the mirror. In fact, she does look at herself in a mirror after being told by what appears to be Christ in a mystical experience before her complete conversion that she is not beautiful and cannot be his bride. She has her slaves bring her

> los altos espejos de bruñida plata. Y la princesa [...] se contempló prolijamente. ¿No era hermosa? Si no lo era, debía morir. Lo que no es bello no tiene derecho a la vida. Y, además, ella no podía vivir sin aquel príncipe desconocido que la desdénaba. Pero los espejos la enviaron su lisonja sincera, devolviendo la imagen encantadora de una beldad que evocaba las de las Deas antiguas. A su torso escultural faltaba sólo el cinturón de Afrodita, y a su cabeza noble, que el oro calcinado con reflejos de miel del largo cabello diademaba, el casco de Palas Atenea. Aquella frente pensadora y aquellos ojos verdes, lumínicos, no los desearía la que nació de la mente del Aguileño. ¿No ser hermosa? El príncipe [Cristo] suyo no la había visto…” (68).

At this point her role as a decadent princess is obvious. She values Beauty above all things. Similar to descriptions of Espina, great attention is paid to describing her body and, in this case, its apparent perfection. She admires herself in a mirror which clearly flatters her. Her pride in her herself is why the men call her “[l]a hermosa, la orgullosa” (75). They believe that the reason that she rejects them is because of this pride. Carranza narrates, “[S]e ganó renombre de orgullosa, y se convino en que, bajo las magnificencias de su corpiño, no latía un corazón. Sin
duda Catalina no era capaz de otro amor que el propia; y sólo a sí misma, y ni aun a los dioses, consagraba culto” (51). Carranza articulates perfectly the image of the egotistical, self-absorbed woman. He also alludes to the fact that “the proliferation of the image of woman’s self-involved glance in the mirror and an even greater emphasis on her spiritual impoverishment and mental inanition went hand in hand” (Dijkstra 175). Not only does she not love man, but she also does not love the gods.

Although it is clear she is not mentally impoverished as she wins the debate with the philosophers, perhaps, at this point in the story, there is some truth to her spiritual impoverishment. She is prideful and has yet to have a conversion experience that orients her love outside of herself. At the beginning of the story it may be possible to say that she is spiritually impoverished, but she searches fervently for a divine and perfect love, saying, “Hacía tiempo ya que, con nostalgia profunda, añoraba el amor que no sentía” (57). She reveals this to the religious hermit that comes to see her in order to convert her to Christianity. In her discussion with him, she reveals that she truly wishes to learn more than anything. She explains to him, “¿De qué me sirve […] tanto libro en mi biblioteca, si no me enseñan la ciencia de amar? […] El amor es lo único que merece estudiarse. Cuando razonamos de ser, de identidad, de logos, de ideas madres… razonamos de amor sin saberlo” (57-59). Although not a Christian at this moment, her words strongly resemble those of the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians in the Bible:

Aunque yo hablara todas las lenguas de los hombres y el lenguaje de los ángeles mismos, si no tuviere amor o caridad, vengo a ser como un metal que suena, o campana que retiñe. Y aunque tuviera el don de profecía, y penetrase todos los misterios, y poseyese todas las ciencias; aunque tuviera toda la fe posible, de manera que trasladase de una a otra parte los montes, no teniendo amor, soy una nada. Aunque yo distribuyese todos mis bienes para sustento de los pobres, y aunque entregara a mi cuerpo a las llamas, si el amor me falta, todo lo dicho no me sirve de nada […] Ahora permanecen estas tres virtudes: la fe, la esperanza y el amor; pero de las tres el amor es la más excelente de todas. (13.1-13)
The problem for Catalina is the she has made Beauty her god and calls it “la única verdad” (60). She is an extreme esthetic, not too unlike Espina, and a member of the cult of Beauty, and this is why she cannot find true love. Speaking of her suitors, she tells the hermit, “Sería necesario que yo encarnase en ellos la idea sublime de la hermosura. ¿No acabas de decir que el cuerpo se corrompe? Mis pretendientes están ya agusanados, y aún no se han muerto. Yo sueño con algo que no se parece a mis suspirantes” (59). For her, a human man is not beautiful enough to be her spouse, and she does not think she could love him with a true love. The hermit responds, “Vengo de la escuela de amor, que es el desierto” (58). Here, in the desert, without decoration, where there is neither excess nor decadence, but, instead a barren world she will be able to find the love that she looks for.

And it is in the desert with the hermit where she converts to Christianity, learning to love and the difference between the cult of Beauty and Christianity in which beauty is exalted, but only as a reflection of the creator of all beauty – God. The first time that she went to the chapel to see her Spouse, she has a dream in which Christ says, “No puedo recibirla. No es hermosa. No la amo…” (67). Catalina cannot believe it because “[s]e bañó, purificó y perfumó, como en día de bodas; se vistió interiormente tunicela de lino delgadísimo, ceñida por un cinturón recamado de perlas […]” (62). In the eyes of an aesthete, she is extremely beautiful because she dresses herself with external luxury like the decadents. When she hears these words from Christ, she “cayó al suelo, con la caída pesada del que recibe herida honda del puñal” and after recovering consciousness, “[l]a memoria reanudó su cadena. Fue una explosión de dolor, de bochorno. ¡Ella, Catalina, la sabia, la deseada, la poderosa, la ilustre, no era bella, no podía inspirar amor!” (67). It is at this point that she admires herself in the mirror, not able to imagine that her promised Spouse does not think she is beautiful and does not wish to marry her. It is only in the desert that
she realizes that true beauty does not come from exterior things but from her heart. It alludes to the first letter of Saint Peter which says, “El adorno de las cuales no ha de ser por de fuera con los rizos del cabello, ni con dijes de oro, ni gala de vestidos. La persona interior escondida en el corazón, es la que debe adornar con el atavío incorruptible de un espíritu de dulzura y de paz, lo cual es un precioso adorno a los ojos de Dios” (2.3-4). What she learns from Christianity is that the beautiful things made by human hands only serve to inspire love for the Beautiful One, God. When she defends her belief before Maximino and the philosophers, she describes how in the past she had always adored Beauty, but now she understands it. Apolo Helios is only a simulacrum that represents the sun and is a creature of God. If Apolo is understood as a human structure, she says that she “no estaba a mal con el Numen” (83). When she refuses to sacrifice to the pagan gods she exclaims, “A ti voy, ¡oh hermosura incorruptible! ¡Dulce dueño, voy a ti!” (96) and before her martyrdom, she expresses her new understanding of beauty, interiorly invoking her Spouse to say, “Tú eres la hermosura” and believes she hears Him respond, “La hermosura ideal, Catalina” (99).

2.9 Catalina as Saintly Medusa and the Decadence of Patriarchy

What Pardo Bazán demonstrates is that while men represent Catalina de Alejandría as a femme fatale, in reality, she is not. In fact, it is Maximino that is all the terrible things he thinks of Catalina. He is not wise as she is and even admits himself that a debate with her would be unequal because “no [es] un retórico ni un sofista, y no [ha] aprendido a retorcer argumentos” (80). He does not have a spiritual life either or seem to actually believe in his gods as he admits he would convert would she marry him. If one of the two of them is mentally and spiritually impoverished, it certainly is not Catalina. Moreover, is it he who knows nothing of true love and only loves himself. Carranza narrates, “El amor propio envenenaba, en el alma de Maximino, la
flecha repentina del deseo humano” (80). Maximino realizes when he watches Catalina’s defense before the philosophers that she does possess a very fervent love. He thinks to himself, “¡No, no era fría ni severa como la ciencia la virgen alejandrina! ¡Cómo expresaría el amor! ¡Cómo lo sentiría!” (84). Instead of feeling love as does Catalina, he only feels lust, thinking “¿Qué pretendían de ella los impertinentes de los filósofos? Lo único acertado sería llevársela consigo a las cámaras secretas, frescas, solitarias del palacio imperial, donde pieles densas de salvajinas mullen los tálamos anchos de maderas bien olientes” (84). It is he who has base desires; all that matters to him is external and sensual pleasures. A woman is only worth something for him if she satisfies his sexual desires and supports his power and reign. When Catalina rejects him saying she already has a Spouse, Maximino decides that she is worthless and condemns her to death, saying it is for her religious beliefs, but truly it is to destroy a threat to his power and ego.

Although moments before he condemns her to death he thought she was a practically perfect woman, he changes his opinion when he realizes he cannot have complete control over her. Her offer of fraternal love is not sufficient for him because she has not made him her god. Her suitors cannot truly see her except through her sexuality, and, therefore, it is through sexual threats that Gnetes and various other young priests and courtesans want to “put her in her place.” In fact, Gnetes indicates that it is the only way to do so: “El único modo de reducir a una hembra tan soberbia sería amenazarla con una excursión forzosa al lupanar, o con una fiesta del Panoeum, en que ella hiciese de ninfa y nosotros de capripedes” (97). In other words, he essentially proposes a gang rape of Catalina and the others think it will be “una noche divertida” (97). As they feel threatened sexually by her, they plan the revenge of sexually threatening and violating her. Only Maximino says they cannot because he fears the reaction of Catalina’s father,
who also has power. He prohibits this mocking of Catalina not out of respect for her, but because he fears the loss of his power should he permit something so degrading to happen.

Yet, Kathy Bacon notes that according to a recent trend in hagiographical scholarship, the martyrdom of women “suggest that the male narrator and the implied male readers of such texts are complicit in sadistic voyeurism towards the virgin martyr, and imply that the torture and martyrdom of the virgin constitute a kind of displaced rape” (“Mi espíritu” 376). Therefore their punishment of Catalina can still be read as a sort of rape. On the other hand, Bacon draws upon the work of Katherine Lewis who proposes that there can be “multiple or resistant readings” (qtd. in Bacon “Mi espíritu” 161) of virgin-martyr legends. With a resistant reading, “a virgin martyr’s staging of her own death can be understood as a practice of autothanatography which has the aim of taking control of her own representation, in a way which resists patriarchal objectification” (Bacon “Death” 380). In doing so, she also resists the “determining male gaze [that] projects its phantasy on to the female form” (Mulvey).

Her rejected suitors construct a new machine that will kill her through four wheels that each turn. The wheels can serve as symbols of Catalina’s uroboric nature; if she tries to live independently from man, she will die through the symbol of her independence. This plan does not work, though, because “la máquina horrible saltó desbaratada, despedida cada rueda hacia distinto punto, hiriendo a los jueces, a los verdugos, a los espectadores y a los sacerdotes del Arquero” (101). This happens right after the hermit makes the sign of the cross in the air, and perhaps shows how God will not permit Catalina to die in this sort of grotesque spectacle that mocks her independence. In the end, the only way to kill her is to decapitate her by the sword. Feminist critic Hélène Cixous adds to the significance of this act by explaining that “[i]f man operates under the threat of castration, if masculinity is culturally ordered by the castration
complex, it might be said that the backlash, the return, on women of this castration anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution, of woman, as a loss of her head” (“Castration or Decapitation?” 43). The fear of being symbolically castrated by an independent woman is strong enough for man here that the only solution patriarchy finds is to silence her through decapitation. Although perhaps not a physical death, the same sentiment was still found in 19th century Spain which led to the only respectable options for women were death or marriage (or entrance into religious life, a sort of combination of both).

Yet, after Catalina’s death all the spectators saw that “[d]el trance manaba un mar, no de sangre bermeja, sino de candidísima, densa leche” (102) that simbolizes her purity and sanctity. Moreover, this milk, according to Pardo Bazán, represents “la leche de la sabiduría” (Santa Catalina 1595). Maximino does not have the revenge he hoped for because after watching this miraculous scene, the people turn against him shouting, “¡Muerte, muerte al tirano Maximino!” (102), and Carranza describes how Catalina’s body seems in Maximino’s eyes:

Maximino, repentinamente desembriagado, miraba atónito, castañeteando los dientes de terror frío, el puro cuerpo de cisne flotando en el lago de candor, la cabeza sobrenaturalmente aureolada por los cabellos, que en vez de pegarse a las sienes, jugaban alrededor y se expandían, acusando con su halo de sombra la palidez de las mejillas y el vidriado de los ojos ensoñadores de la virgen. (103)

Here, Catalina’s hair, as Kathy Bacon signals, “evokes both a saintly halo and Medusa’s snakes, pointing out the ambivalence of the hagiographical text towards its female protagonist” (“Death” 379). As with the image of the sphinx, there are two ways of reading this image. Maximino seems both enticed and threatened by her “pelo encrespado” (51). It is similar to her ambiguous representation in art. Dijkstra notes that “[m]any of the painters of the turn of the century depicted Medusa frontally with her mouth half-part […] wide open in a silent scream, the snakes of her viraginity threatening the male viewer even as he was being lured by the enticements of
bestial forgetfulness emanating from the cavernous vulval round of this ultimate siren” (310). One such example is Carlos Schwabe’s painting Medusa (1895) (Fig. 12) which clearly depicts this dual sensation of enticement and fear. Dijkstra points out that in this representation of Medusa she has “her claws poised, her cat’s eyes staring, her mouth wide open, and her snake hair coiling into a bright bouquet of poison-toothed pink labia” (Dijkstra 310). Particularly in the depiction of her hair, the spectator finds the snakes threatening, yet they are somewhat ambiguously drawn so they also appear as flowers or female genitals, things the male view may have found alluring. Moreover, it serves as an excellent portrayal of the fear of woman’s sexuality and their ability to “ensnare” and destroy men.

Fig. 13: Medusa (1895) by Carlos Schwabe.

At the same time, her hair can also be “su halo de sombra”, reflecting her triumph over the temptations of this world and over Maximino. Her death becomes “the sign of the tyrant’s own mortality, and as the text ends he recalls the prophecies of his own overthrow and death” (Bacon “Death” 379). Maximino realizes that Catalina was right and has triumphed after all. He believes “sin duda el Dios de Catalina era más fuerte que Apolo, que Hathor, que Serapis, que el mismo Imperio de la loba y le había sentenciado a perder trono y vida, a deslastro fin, a la derrota de sus enseñas y a que todas sus ambiciones se frustrasen” (103). In a turn of events, the
readers can clearly see who is the true symbol of the decadent. There are clues throughout the story that it is actually Maximino that best symbolizes the decadent. When he presides over the tribunal, he is “coronado de hiedra y rosas marchitas, completamente embriagado, y destutanado además por caricias diestramente impuras” (100). It is a perfect description of decadence. On one hand, there is excess and luxury, and, on the other, Maximino fades away like his roses. Carranza reveals that Maximino was overthrown by Constantine, who was a supporter of Christianity, and then commits suicide (103-4). In the end, Catalina, although decadent to begin with, finds redemption through Christianity and triumphs over decadent patriarchy represented by Maximino.

When Carranza finishes his story, Polilla remarks that he would prefer that Carranza only talk about modern things because, “¿Quién se acuerda de la hija de Costo [Catalina de Alejandría]?” (104). It seems as though Pardo Bazán gives Polilla his answer, for outside there are “grupos de niñas, a saliente de la escuela, cantaban en corro” (104) a song about Catalina and her martyrdom. As they sing in a circle, they become the image of Catalina’s Wheel and her independent and uroboric nature. Her legend still lives on through these girls what have not forgotten her. Moreover, the last sentence of this section of the novel declares, “Aún la canción, obstinada, volvía de tiempo en tiempo: Que Jesucristo te llama…” (105). Once again there is the suggestion that her legend will continue to circulate, traveling in its obstinate and uroboric form as Catalina did.

2.10 Lina Mascareñas as Femme Fatale and Aesthete

After the conclusion of Carranza’s story, part two entitled “Lina” begins, and the rest of the novel Dulce dueño is narrated in first person by Lina Mascareñas. Similar to her patron saint in many ways, Lina reinterprets the story of Catalina de Alejandría in her own search for divine
love. Lina finds that she has inherited a large sum of money along with many valuable objects and expensive jewelry from her aunt, who she later discovers was actually her mother. Once she comes into her inheritance, she becomes very much of an aesthete as was her patron saint at the beginning of Caranza’s story. After realizing that she is now a wealthy woman she remarks, “Por primera vez me doy cuenta de que soy opulenta, ponderosa” (108). She expresses her love for all things beautiful and that now she has the ability to do all the things she has always wanted to do but could not: “Siento el fervorín de entusiasmo que me produce siempre lo bello. Ahora que soy rica, veré el mundo, que no conozco; buscaré las impresiones que no he gozado. Mi existir ha sido aburrido y tonto (afirmo apiadándome de mí misma). Y rectifico inmediatamente. Tonto, no; porque soy además de inteligente, sensible, y dentro de mí no ha estepas” (108-109). Yet, she has a problem in that she must fulfill “las obligaciones de ‘señorita decente’” (109). The respectable woman was weak, docile, and would not leave the house without a male escort. Lina explains, “Arrinconada, sólo puede vegetar… Rectifico otra vez: ha vegetado mi cuerpo; que mi espíritu, ¡buenas panzadas de vida imaginativa se ha dado!” (109). She begins to transgress the societal standards by going outside unaccompanied, for instance, in going to the train station to visit Carranza and Pollila “completamente sola” (133).

She also is intelligent and has received a fairly good education for a woman at that time. She says that she has studied in the library of Carranza and “est[á] fuertecita en los clásicos, casi [sabe] latín, conozco la historia y no [le] falta [su] baño de arqueología” (110). Moreover, she has earned herself the nickname “la Literata” (110, italics in the original) for wanting to read archived manuscripts. Lina notes how being a learned and intelligent woman only causes trouble: “¡Literata! No me meteré en tal avispero. ¿Pasar la vida entre el ridículo si se fracasa, y entre la hostilidad si se triunfa?” (110). She recognizes that she will be caught between ridicule and
hostility. Yet, she decides that she will use the knowledge she has gained for her pleasure and to show herself superior: “¡Cuánto me felicito ahora de la cultura adquirida! Va a servirme de instrumento de goce y de superioridad” (110).

As a superior and smart woman, Lina longs for the ability to live her life as she wishes and to move about freely in the world, yet she is surrounded by a culture that demands that she either enter a convent or marry. She expresses how she has become dedicated to herself and her search for happiness but remains “en un pueblo decaído, pero todavía grandioso en lo monumental y por los recuerdos” (109). This town is depicted almost as if it were the ruins of a once-great town; it is a town in deterioration, a symbol of the decadence of the age. Here, “no [hizo] amistades de señoras, porque a [su] alrededor existió cierto ambiente de sospecha, y no atend[ió] a chicoleos de la oficialidad, porque a lo sumo, podrían conducir[la] a una boda seguida de mil privaciones” (109). It is within this world of decline that Lina is only offered two options in life. She questions Pollila and Carranza: “Ayer me quería usted meter entre rejas [en un convento], hoy casarme” (135). Lina rejects both of these options, though. She declares, “Iré en primera, por primera vez. Voy sola” (108). She also rejects the traditional laws and customs that have been placed upon her. When told that she must kiss her dead aunt/mother by Farnesio, who takes care of the estate (and who she finds out is her real father), she responds, “‘Desde hoy no conozco más ley que mi ley propia’” (114). She decides to follow her own laws and put herself first.

In her search for pleasure and superiority, she becomes captivated by the jewels and fine things which she now possesses. The objects in the house Lina inherits are described in great detail, particularly the jewels, highlighting her love of fine things. Lina explains, “No he tenido otra joya, y por la joyas siento pasión magdalénica” (112). When she sees the jewels, “[le] late
aprisa el corazón. ¡Las joyas! […] ¡Las piedras, y sobre todo, las perlas! […] ¡Las joyas! Piel virginal de la perla; terciopelosa sombra de la esmeralda; fuego infernal del rubí; cielo nocturno del zafiro…¡qué hermosos sois!” (120-121). She constantly talks about her jewels, describes them, and puts them on. Even with all of the beautiful things she now owns and describes, she still insists that she is living in practical comfort and not in aesthetic luxury, for “[e]l lujo no se improvisa. El lujo, muy intensificado, constituye una obra de arte de las más difíciles de realizar” (124). She further explains, “Yo tengo un ideal de lujo, hambre atrasada de mil refinamientos; ahora comprendo lo que he sufrido en la prosa de mi vida alcalaina” (124). Believing that only now does she understand the wretchedness of her former life, she sets about to transform her house which she thinks is decorated in bad taste by her aunt/mother, a member of the bourgeoisie. One of the things she does is to commission “un prendero de altura para que [le] busque cuadros que no representen gente escuálida ni martirios; retratos de señoras muy perifolladas, y porcelanas del Retiro y Sajonia” (125). Even in her choice of paintings, she rejects the idea of the martyr or those emaciated either from poverty or fasting. Instead, she celebrates luxury and refinement. Two examples of paintings of that time period that may fit the description of what Lina desires for her home are Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida’s *Mercedes Mendeville, condesa de San Félix* (1906) (Fig. 14) and Giovanni Boldini’s *Portrait of Maria Eulalia of Spain* (1898) (Fig. 15). Both of these paintings depict women of the nobility luxuriously dressed in a variety of refinement.
Fig. 14: *Mercedes Mendeville, condesa de San Félix* (1906) by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida.
Once she has surrounded herself with the extravagant, though, she realizes that she is still missing something. She exclaims, “Yo necesito apurar los sabores de la vida, su miel, su mirra, su néctar. ¡Yo necesito ir a su centro, a su núcleo, a su esencia, que son la hermosura y el amor! En estos meses he podido cerciorarme de que la comodidad, las riquezas, en sí, no me satisfacen, no me basten” (126). In this moment, she begins her search for beauty and love. She takes a bath
and afterwards “proced[e] al examen detenido de [su] cuerpo y rostro, planteandose por centésima vez el gran problema femenino: ¿Soy o no soy hermosa?” (127). Much like her patron saint, her search for perfect beauty leads her to question her own beauty. She looks at herself in a series of mirrors and “[l]a triple combinación de espejos reproduce [su] figura, multiplicándola” (128). Like Catalina de Alejandría, she sees herself replicated in the mirror, signaling her desire for self-sufficiency and rejection of men. What Lina sees in the mirror, though, differs somewhat from her patron saint. Instead of admiring herself for her physical beauty, she notes what she lacks:

Me estudio, evocando la beldad helénica. Helénicamente… no valgo gran cosa. Mi cabeza no es pequeña, como la de las diosas griegas. Con relación al cuerpo, es hasta un poco grande, y la hace mayor el mucho y fosco pelo obscuro. Mi cuello no posee la ondulación císnea, ni la dignidad de una estela de marfil sobre los hombros de una Minerva clásica. Mis pies y mis manos son demasiado chicos ante la proporcionalidad estatuaria, y mis brazos mórbidos y mi pierna nerviosa miden un tercio menos de lo que deben medir para ser aplicables a una Febe. (128)

Undressed, she can see clearly all of her “flaws.” She notes the change she feels when she begins to dress saying, “Empiezo a vestir mi desnudez, y cada prenda me consuela y me reanima” (128). Her adornments bring her comfort, and as she looks back in the mirror after fully dressing, she tries to define herself by consulting her face: “[La] cara… La consulto como se consulta a una esfinge, preguntándola el secreto psicológico que toda cara esconde y revela a un tiempo” (130).

The image of the sphinx resurfaces, guarding the secret to understanding herself which consists in the desire to be found beautiful; what she and her patron saint must both struggle with, though, is to realize this beauty internally as opposed to through external adornments. At this point, however, Lina is still consumed by luxury and exterior refinement. In fact, her language describing herself through her clothing and jewelry seems strikingly similar to the way in which Silvio describes Espina. Lina explains,
Her body appears to serve as a way to set off her jewels, and it seems to become indistinguishable from her clothing. For example, her foot is not really a foot, but a shoe brought by a fairy as a gift from a prince. She creates the illusion that even she herself is artificial and admits that the mystery of her soul lies in her adornment and attire. With this description of herself, she also hints at her desire to be considered superior and admired by someone imperial and princely who recognizes her worth. She admits, “Toda yo quiero ser lo quintaesenciado, lo superior, porque superior me siento, no en cosa tan baladí como el corte de una boca o las rosas de unas mejillas -sino en mi íntima voluntad de elevarme, de divinizarme si cupiese. Voluntad antigua, que en mi primera juventud era sueño, y ahora, en mi estío, bien puede convertirse en realidad” (131). Her desire for superiority begins with lavish, external shows of wealth and fine things, yet like her patron saint, she yearns for some sort of eternal and perfect love. She remarks, “me arrojaré a descubrir ese ser que, desconocido, es ya mi dulce dueño” (131).

She rejects many her suitors, however, as they do not live up to her standards, although she considers marrying her cousin Jose Maria until she finds him having an affair with her lady’s maid. From this point she become disillusioned and instead of looking for love, decides that as a “sola[ta], vivir[á] muy a [su] placer” (216). This possibility is denied for her though and is expressed by Carranza’s admonishment, “En serio, que la situación es seria. O el claustro, o el matrimonio” (216). Once again, the reader sees the only two acceptable options open for women, marriage or the convent. Here, Lina differs from Catalina though, in finally deciding to marry a
young man named Agustín Almonte, although her matrimony would exclude carnal relations and is settled on as an alliance of power rather than love, something similar to what Maximino offered Catalina. Both Almonte and Lina seem to believe that “el amor no existe” (223) at this point, and Lina explains that if she is “la desilusionada, él debe ser el escéptico” (219). Instead of a marriage for love, they decide to marry for “[l]a conquista del poder” (224).

Pardo Bazán foreshadows that this relationship will not turn out well, though, as Lina describes her thoughts about Almonte and their union using descriptive images of two famous femme fatales: Salomé and Cleopatra. Lina relates, “Desde el primer momento -es una impresión plástica- su cabeza me recuerda la de San Juan Bautista en un plato; la hermosa cabeza que asoma, lívida, a la luz de las estrellas, por la boca del pozo, en Salomé. Cosa altamente estética” (219). This analogy situates Almonte in the role of the decapitated John the Baptist and Lina as Salomé and prefigures the Almonte’s death. Furthermore, Lina associates herself with the figure of Cleopatra saying, “Analizado y destruido mi antiguo ideal, él me promete una vida colmada de altivas satisfacciones; una vida ‘inimitable’, como llamaron a la suya Marco Antonio y la hija de los Lagidas, al unirse para dominar al mundo” (235-236). Though they plan to unite for reasons of power instead of love, after time Almonte believes he has fallen in love with Lina and declares his love for her. She is willing to still marry him, but after his constant insistence that he would do anything for her, even going so far as to say, “¡Qué dicha, arrostrar peligros por ti! ¡Salvarte, a costa de mi existencia!” (248) she begins to doubt his intentions. She decides subconsciously to put him in a dangerous situation while riding in a boat on a lake to see if he is true in what he says and would sacrifice himself for her. When they both fall out of a boat into the water, he does not attempt to save her, even rebuffing her when she tries to hold on to him: “Dos brazos rígidos, crispados, me rechazaron; un puño hirió mi faz, un esguince me desprendió;"
la expresión del instinto supremo, el ansia de conservar la vida, la vida a todo trance, la vida mortal, pisoteando el ideal heroico del amor…” (247). Almonte is revealed as a liar who attempts to save his own life rather than Lina’s, and it is he, not she, who drowns in the lake. Bacon observes how this scene is “a reversal of the virgin-martyr plot, it is thus his death, and not hers, which saves the virgin from the sexual passion with which he threatened, in her terms, to besmirch her” (“Death” 383).

While Lina clearly had a hand in what resulted in Almonte’s death, the reader must question whether Lina is a true femme fatale. After confessing to Carranza, it is clear that he, a symbol of patriarchal society, is horrified by her actions. For him, Lina is a femme fatale that lures men to their deaths. After her confession he exclaims,

¡Asesinato! ¡Asesinato! Has asesinado a quien valía mil veces más que tú […] Mujeres como tú, doblemente peligrosas son que las Dalilas y que las Mesalinas. Estas eran naturales, al menos. Tú eres un caso de perversión horrible, antinatural, que se disfraza de castidad y de pureza. ¡En mal hora naciste! […] ¡Mira, Lina, yo no quiero insultarte; eres mujer…aunque más bien me parecees la Melusina, que comienza en mujer de acaba en cola de sierpe! Hay en ti algo de monstruoso, y yo soy hombre castizo, de juicio recto, de ideas claras, y no te entiendo, ni he de entenderte jamás (264-265).

Carranza uses extremely strong and negative language that clearly defines Lina in terms of the femme fatale, but Lina seems to reject the idea that she is wholly evil while Almonte is worth a thousand times more than her. She argues, “Agustín no era caballero, no era ni aun valiente. Por miedo a morir; me dio con el codo en el pecho, me golpeó, me rechazó” (265). Although she does repent for her hand in Almonte’s death, she refuses to believe that she is the monster Carranza believes her to be. Similar to the situation of both Espina and Catalina de Alejandría, one of the underlying reasons man suffers death (although indirectly) at her hands is because of her lack of options. Carranza admonishes her for what she has done to such an excellent suitor: “Te resististe, en otro tiempo, a entrar monja. Bueno; preferías, sin duda, casarte. Nada más
licito. Te regala la suerte una posición estupenda; ya eres dueña de elegir marido, entre lo mejor” (264). What he fails to realize, however, is that Lina desired and deserved the possibility of a life outside of these limited options. In fact, Dijkstra notes how images of women as monsters, sirens, and Melusinas were popular at the fin de siècle because “these women represent that unabashed independence and elemental sense of freedom the men of 1900 feared, and found most fascinating” (265). Projecting onto Lina the image of the mermaid serves as a way to demonize her for rejecting life as a nun or a wife to try to be an independent woman who wants to follow her own path. Before taking his leave, Carranza says, “Adiós, Lina; siempre he desconfiado de las hembras… Tú me enseñas que el abismo del mal sólo puede llenarlo la malignidad femenil. Siento haberme descompuesto tanto” (266). He even further reveals his misogyny and the association of feminine nature (which he says she has taught him is evil) with decadence through his word choice of “descompuesto,” meaning rotten or decomposed.

2.11 Lina’s Redemption

By the end of the novel, Lina finds herself in a mental hospital, suffering a social death instead of a physical one like her patron saint. While it may seem that patriarchy has triumphed, it is possible to again see her “death” as her own choice. Elisabeth Bronfen notes that “an aesthetically staged performance of death may […] signify a moment of control and power” (qtd. in Bacon “Mi espíritu” 162). Although Farnesio comes to see her in an effort to help her leave, she admits that she would prefer to stay. Bacon explains how “Lina removes herself from the lethal objectifying gaze of the hagiographer-pornographer only through an act of autothanatography whereby she writes her own symbolic death” (Bacon “Death” 375). In order to “[v]iv[ir] interiormente” (281) she must situate herself outside of patriarchal control and the male gaze. It becomes clear that she claims her body as her own and not subjugated under
patriarchy in her discussions with Farnesio. She decides to give up her inheritance to lead a simple, non-decadent lifestyle and tells him, “Usted, Farnesio, manda y dispone de todo y en todo… Y después de una pausa: -- Excepto en mí” (273). She affirms her physical and spiritual autonomy as outside his control, subjugating herself only to Christ. The final line of the novel echoes Catalina de Alejandría as she exclaims, ¡Estaba tan bien a solas contigo, Dulce Dueño! Hágase en mí tu voluntad…” (291).

2.12 Conclusion

Porter notes that “[i]n the character of Espina, Pardo Bazán implies that aestheticism masks this female figure’s inability to come to grips with the vulgar reality of modern life” (266), and this observation can also be made about Catalina de Alejandría y Lina Mascareñas. Each of these women looks for a new way to define themselves and live outside of the demands of patriarchy, searching for their own space in modern Spain. For Espina, art is her “refuge from and consolation for a most imperfect world. She rejects the delusions of love and seeks ideal beauty through the perfection of form. For her, art is all that is worthwhile in life, and life must be transformed into art” (Porter 266). Her glorification of art and the perfection of form lead to her contempt for other virtues, and for this reason Espina serves as an excellent example of the femme fatale and a symbol of decadence. On the other hand, Catalina de Alejandría and Lina Mascareñas both have conversion experiences and find the best happiness they can in their circumstances through a mystical union with Christ through which they remove themselves from the objectifying male gaze. Although patriarchy sees Catalina and Lina as femme fatales, it is often the men and not Catalina or Lina who are symbols of decadence and corruption that suffer a death without redemption.
CHAPTER 3
TIPOS AFEMINADOS: THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY

3.1 Introduction

The 19th century saw “[a] new admiration […] for the special beauty of the male. Man, it was now argued, with numerous quotations from Plato, had all the ‘soft,’ physical attractions of woman, plus the male’s exclusive capacity for intellectual transcendence. The ephebe, the sensitive male adolescent, not woman, was the true ideal of aesthetic beauty” (Dijkstra 199). As women had rejected the role of beautiful domestic angels, the phenomenon of the dandy or “señorito,” as Ortiz calls him, was born. Originating in England and France and perhaps best illustrated by men like Oscar Wilde, the dandy was the image of the impeccably dressed aesthete who was often “moneyed—and therefore unconcerned and idle—or bent on conveying the impression of wealth and idleness” (Ortiz 18). Yet, Ortiz cautions against viewing the dandy as a type “since his characterization varies from novel to novel in the different countries” (7).

Dorota Heneghan notes that while he may not be a type, the figure of the dandy was “[d]eeply connected to modernity and its cultural expressions in fashion, urbanization, and the cult of self, [and that] dandyism has provided a rich ground for observing changes in modern life” (57). The dandy’s connection to modernity was not always seen positively, though. Dandies broke away from the traditional norms for men and, therefore, were often described as effeminate. Rita Felski observes that the dandy was an “emblem of the contemporary crisis of values and the much proclaimed decadence of modern life. Masculinity, it seemed, could no longer be taken for granted as a stable, unitary, and self-evident reality” (qtd. in Tsuchiya 112-113). The breaking down of gender roles seemed to parallel the breakdown and decadence of society for many, and it is their effeminacy that seems to be the most transgressive factor, explains Dijkstra, for effeminacy, was seen as “the main obstacle against human progress” (220).
In fact, “Max Nordau’s 1893 book *Degeneration* […] used gendered terms to describe the perceived decline: a strong, balanced virile European society was becoming soft, hysterical and feminized” (Kirkpatrick “The ‘feminine’” 147). Like the *femme fatale* and the New Woman, the dandy found himself defined as a symptom of Spain’s decadence for not conforming to the traditional gender norms.

Within *La quimera* and *Memorias de un solterón* Pardo Bazán sets up three different pairings between the *femme fatale*, the New Woman, and the dandy. From *La quimera*, Valdivia and the *femme fatale* Espina create a destructive pair in which both are morally and physically ill, victims of their own decadence. Espina also begins a relationship with and heavily influences Silvio Lago, and it is her influence on him that furthers his impotence as an artist and physical and moral sickness as well. Silvio Lago also is largely influenced by another woman in the novel, Minia Dumbría, an example of the New Woman. It is through their friendship and her guidance that Silvio ultimately finds redemption before his death. *Memorias de un solterón*, on the other hand, offers an more idealistic romantic pairing that ends in the marriage of the dandy Mauro Pareja and the New Woman Féita Neira. Pardo Bazán seems to suggest that for modern Spain to be redeemed from her ills, she needs to embrace the New Woman. As the male characters who come into contact with the New Woman are eventually redeemed, so might Spain be. The dandy’s straying from the established gender norms appears not necessarily to be inherently bad, though. While each of the dandies are portrayed as effeminate, impotent, and often sickly characters, the reader detects that at least in the case of Mauro, his effeminacy may not be entirely a negative thing. It is this movement away from the hyper-masculine, macho attitude that allows him to properly love and understand Féita and not want to dominate and
control her. Through both transgressing the traditional stereotypes for male and female behavior, they are able to form an example of a modern, progressive couple.

3.2 The Dandy and the *Femme Fatale*: Valdivia and Espina

From Valdivia’s first description, it becomes apparent that he can be defined as a dandy. He arrives, “retocado, peinado, perfumado, con una ropa inglesa que quita el sentido de bien cortada, con esta superioridad de actitud y esa calma algo triste, de buen gusto, señoríal, que sólo cria el hábito de vivir en grande” (359). Perfectly perfumed, with his hair and self retouched, he clearly takes on the traditional role of woman consumed with her appearance and adornments, a representation of the artificial art Espina admires. He also is consumed by two stereotypical female characteristics: jealousy and infirmity. He is insanely jealous over Espina’s numerous affairs, which she makes no effort to hide from him almost as a sadistic way to torture him more. Silvio describes Valdivia’s sad situation: “Valdivia, como todos sus compañeros de tortura, gime en su potro, desconfía, no duerme; pero cuando se la antoja confiar, lo estaría viendo y negaría el testimonio de sus ojos, la realidad que palpase” (368). Furthermore, “para espiarla la sigue a todas partes” (349). She becomes his obsession which literally makes him ill. He and Silvio discuss their problems one day, and Silvio reveals that “Valdivia no tiene hueso que bien le quiera, es un mapamundi de alifafes; le fastidia unos días la cabeza, otros el estómago, siempre las articulaciones, muy a menudo los riñones y no poca veces el corazón” (371). He has a long list of physical ailments that associate him more closely with the image of the weak, helpless woman than with a strong, independent man. When he hears accounts of Espina’s betrayal of him “[le] da por ataques repentinos, como el dolor del estómago” (372), and it drives him to thoughts of murder. When he falls seriously ill and is consigned to bed rest, instead of caring for him, Espina goes out to the underground theater (397). Espina also does not find satisfaction
with him, for “no son felicidad sus relaciones con un hombre machuco y dispéptico” (359). Although some sort of perverse relationship exists between the two, it seems clear that neither one is happy and that it is a destructive factor in both of their lives.

3.3 The Dandy and the Femme Fatale: Silvio and Espina

Silvio, like Valdivia, is also described as a dandy figure. Varela Jácome notes that “[l]a vinculación de Silvio Lago con los prototipos decadentes se concretiza en el tedio, la búsqueda angustiante, el idealismo exaltado y, sobre todo, en su ambigua anormalidad sexual” (141). Physically, Silvio appears somewhat sexually ambiguous or effeminate, and Minia observes that he “[e]ra todavía más juvenil que de veintitrés la cara oval y algo consumida, entre el marco de pelo sedoso, desordenado con encanto y salpicado en aquel punto de hojitas de acacia. El perfil sorprendía por cierta semejanza con el de Van Dyke ... Se lo habían dicho, y él se recreaba alzando las guías del bigote para vandikearse más” (153). He is elsewhere noted for his “distinction y afinamiento” and the “dulzura atrayente de los verdazules ojos, la juventud y romanticismo de la figura, inspiradora de simpatías fácilmente transformables, el prestigioso parecido con los retratos de Van Dick [sic]” (432). A good example of this image of the foppish van Dyck with his mustache is van Dyck’s Self-Portrait with a Sunflower (1633) (Fig. 16).

Fig. 16: Self-Portrait with a Sunflower (1633) by Anthony van Dyck.
From the beginning of the novel, Silvio also is gripped by his “chimera,” to be a famous
and original artist. He explains, “[Y]o sólo estimo la fuerza. O pintaré como un hombre,
virilmente, o soy capaz de pegarme un tiro” (158). He wants to be able to paint like a powerful
man and looks to the renowned artists of the past for inspiration, but is unable to create the
original work he desires and to fulfill his dreams. As discussed in my first chapter, art was
considered the realm of men into which women could not successfully enter for they were only
capable of imitation and not of creativity or originality. Silvio, though, seems to be a “tipo
afeminado” (207) who, like the stereotypical woman, is unable to be original. His effeminacy
and impotence as an artist and man is often alluded to through his physical debilities and moral
sickness, including his loss of faith. After Silvio’s arrival in Paris he confesses, “Soñando se me
derrumbaron mis convicciones, me sentí cambiado; otra es ya mi fe, o por mejor decir, lo que es
fe, no la tengo; al contrario, vivo de dudas y de incertidumbres; también dudar es un modo de
vivir y de creer, antes imaginé poseer método para realizar un poco de arte; ahora no sé por
dónde ir la perfección antigua me desespera y me abruma” (356). Like Valdivia, in losing his
moral compass, he also begins to succumb to physical ailments as well.

Silvio and Valdivia become acquainted through Espina and a sort of camaraderie, at least
for a time, exists between the two as they recognize their victimhood at the hands of Espina.
After hearing Valdivia confess his insane jealousy and all of his physical and spiritual ailments
resulting from his relationship with Espina, Silvio cannot sleep well and relates, “Me ariá la
frente. Y, en el alma, bochorno, dolor inexplicable. Me golpeaba el corazón el recuerdo de las
palabras de Valdivia” (375). He realizes that his clandestine affair with Espina causes Valdivia
great pain, and he rebukes himself for taking advantage of him. His affair also leads him down a
path that only furthers this physical and moral sickness he has developed.
Silvio often describes how he is cold, lacking in food, and has bodily pains, especially of the stomach. Many of these ailments stem directly from his relationship with Espina. He spends most of his time with her instead of painting and her constant humiliation of him makes him feel incapable and powerless. Furthermore, he spends most of his money on Espina, buying her things that she soon throws away, and, as result, has little left over for food and heating. He says of his food, “[M]i comida es una desolación, y apenas digiero” (178). There are numerous references to his food and stomach issues such as him saying, “Me siento mal, muy mal; parece que dentro del estómago tengo una barra de plomo; la cabeza me duele…” (181). Moreover, he often complains that he has “otro día de comer frío” (244) and “el estómago helado” (250). His food and stomach are also described with words like “cold” and “frozen” which highlight his immobile and petrified-like state at the hands of Espina. And if for a moment his stomach does not hurt, Silvio exclaims, “mi cerebro se ensombrece, y de puro nervioso echo chispas como los gatos. ¡Miseria, nulidad de la vida!” (188).

These physical ailments reflect his “eterna mediocridad” (377) as an artist. For a good while after their acquaintance, Silvio mistakenly sees Espina as the key to understanding art and adopts her principal that “[l]o bello es… lo artificial” (355). He notes, “En Espina no sé distinguir la forma de la vestidura. En esto debe de consistir el arte supremo” (345). He follows after Espina, but only finds himself getting weaker as she gains more power over him. He describes a scene in which she smokes a cigar, noting her indifference to the world and her affected state of contentment: “con calma e indiferencia en que había menosprecio, sacó un cigarro de su primorosa petaca y lo encendió, demostrando, como casi siempre que fuma, impresión de bienestar, de euforia, debida, sin duda, al opio que encierran sus papelitos largamente emboquillados” (375). She not only shows her apparent indifference, however. In
smoking a cigar she shows off what can be read as the power of a man, with the cigar being a clear phallic symbol. As she coolly smokes the cigar, Silvio symbolically is losing his manly power and becoming more impotent.

Silvio is both lured in and repulsed by Espina, and even though he finds himself perversely attracted to her, he still also despises her. In fact, he admits to despising all women in general saying, “La mujer es un peligro en general; para mí, con mis propósitos, sería el abismo. Por fortuna, no padezco del mal de querer. Hasta padezco del contrario. No hay mujer que no me cause a los ocho días. Cuando estoy nervioso me irritan; las hartaría de puñetazos” (201). He actually does receive a marriage proposal from one of the women whose portrait he paints, Clara Ayamonte, but he rejects her with disdain. From his acquaintance with Valdivia, another male aesthete, Silvio is introduced to Perico Aladro, a pretender to the throne of Albania whose portrait he paints. Aladro is pleased with the painting as it is neither “afeminada ni muelle” (399). As a pretender to the throne, he certainly cannot be seen as effeminate, as that would link his country to a symbol of degeneracy and decline. From this point, Silvio decides that “[l]os mejores modelos son los hombres” for “el retrato tenía el arranque, la vitalidad infundida” (400). Unlike his portraits of women, Silvio finds in his male model the energy and liveliness he feels he had been lacking with his female models who he describes in less than flattering terms saying, “mi clientela, mi mundo, reunido y luciendo el tren de sus vanidades, de sus pretensiones de tono, riqueza, belleza posición, galantería, superioridad social; éste es el momento crítico en que la pequeñas Quimeras, las Quimeritas, revolotean ladrando, soltando humo por las fauces” (379). Espina particularly fits this description and serves as one of Silvio’s greatest chimeras in the novel. It is through her influence that he ultimately finds himself sick to the point of death, just as she finds herself.
3.4 The Dandy and the New Woman: Silvio and Minia

Daniel S. Whitaker notes how Silvio has been exposed to the decadent forces of “the abnormal desire for fame and glory, the power of money, [and] the lack of traditional values of society” (Whitaker 746). For instance, Silvio exclaims to her about his vocation as an artist, “¡Vocación... o delirio!, una cosa que parece enfermedad. Me posee, me obsesiona [...] ¡Ser alguien! ¡Ser fuerte, ser fuerte!” (154). He experiences an intense desire for the qualities that traditionally make men feel secure such as fame, glory, and strength. Minia is able to see the flaws in his obsession though and replies, “Malo, malo [...] El caso está bien caracterizado. Todos los síntomas. Espero, en interés de usted, que rebaje la calentura” (154-155). Minia advocates moderation, self-control, Christian faith, and reason to combat this “desequilibrio de aquel temperamento de artista” (169) that Silvio often experiences. Silvio explains, “Lo desmedido del júbilo, la imposibilidad de moderarlo, parecíanle a Minia --idólatra del self control-- síntoma de debilidad” (169). She and her mother, the baroness, suggest ways for Silvio to practically reach his goals, but Silvio rarely takes their advice, turning instead to artificial ways to enhance his talent as an artist and expand his clientele bases. For example, he redecorates his studio with fine and expensive furniture, and the baroness chastises him for spending so much money on decorations when it could have better been spent elsewhere. Minia also reproves him saying, 

Se ve que no quiere usted ser libre y dominar al destino [...] No me alarmaría este mueblaje si no revelase su adquisición que no tiene usted paciencia para esperar a ver reunido el dinero. Derrochando, se ata usted de manos y pies. Lo que nos hace dueños de nosotros mismos es la moderación en los deseos, y mejor si se pudiesen suprimir. Es la filosofía de la pobreza franciscana, que va segura y posee el mundo. (198-199)

Silvio succumbs to the decadent force of the power of money and spends what little he has to impress others. This results in his lack of food and warmth which only contributes further to his
physical and moral sickness. His interactions with the *femme fatale* Espina also contribute to his degeneration as he falls away from traditional societal values and any sort of Christian faith, describing at one point his experiencing “una especia de nausea moral” (412).

Although he does not follow the advice of the Dumbrías, Silvio knows that ultimately they are right, and Minia serves as a mirror in which he sees his true self clearly. Unfortunately, what he sees is an image he does not like. He admits,

> Lo que me irrita es justamente la conformidad de estas ideas con las mías; con las más íntimas, y que no practico porque no puedo. No hay cosa que nos fastidie, a ratos, como encontrar encarnado en otra persona el dictamen secreto de nuestra conciencia. Ante Minia me avergonzaré de mis pasteles comerciales como de una desnudez deforme. Su mirada, a un tiempo llena de serenidad y de incurable desencanto, es un espejo donde *me veo...* y me odio. (198-199, italics in the original).

It is through the New Woman that man is properly able to see himself, although Silvio does not follow Minia’s advice because he feels does not have the strength and courage to do so.

When Silvio leaves for Paris, however, he goes to visit Notre Dame and before the cathedral he recognizes the truth to what Minia has told him about her theory of art:

> El sentimiento que despertaba Nuestra Señora en Silvio era especial, poco sincero, facticio; en aquel instante precepto deseaba ser uno de esos misalistas o imagineros de que Minia le había hablado, que sin dolor y sin lucha, sin la dura angustia humana de nuestro siglo, produjeron labor de arte anónima para generaciones y generaciones La edad presente, por un momento, le repugnó; la serena hermosura secular de la Catedral se impuso a su conciencia artística. Se vio deleznable, falso y, sobre todo, pequeño, inútil, impotente. (388)

Minia has advised Silvio, “¡Sea modesto, fórmese un corazón humilde puro, como los de los grandes artistas desconocidas de la Edad Media[?]” (157). The value of anonymous art is that one is not searching after fame and losing their true chance at originality. When before Notre Dame, Silvio remembers Minia’s words, and the present decadent age disgusts him. Furthermore, he is disgusted with himself, as a sort of symbol of decadence, for he realizes he is unoriginal, idle,
and impotent. Upon a trip to Belgium and Holland, however, Silvio begins to conceive an alternate understanding of art and life. He writes to Minia on his travels, and it is his letters to her that the reader finds in the section of the novel entitled “Intermedio artístico.”

On his trip, he befriends a Swedish man Nils Limsoë who helps him on his conversion to Catholicism through explaining the tenets of the Pre-Raphaelites. Silvio exclaims in one of his letters to Minia, ¡En primer término, mi conversión al catolicismo!” (478). His conversion at this point, though, is more of an artistic conversion as opposed to a true religious conversion. It is a start, however, and influenced greatly by his new understanding of Pre-Raphaelite art. The Pre-Raphaelite movement, founded and defended by the English art critic John Ruskin, included the likes of such painters and poets of William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the three of which are mentioned specifically by Silvio (479). Whitaker notes the importance of religion and “an honest rendering of reality” (748) to the Pre-Raphaelites. Silvio becomes enthralled by this type of art and “[e]n el arte digno de este nombre, en el arte que no da náuseas, no hay sino religiosidad, religiosidad, caballería andante, alma en busca del cielo… ¿Sabe usted cuál es la última palabra del arte? La misma del amor: el éxtasis” (483).

Soon after he writes of the central place of ecstasy in art, he comes across an image of Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Barbara (1479) by Hans Memling (Fig. 17) which depicts the mystical nuptials between Saint Catherine of Alexandria and the Christ child. He exclaims, ¡Se descubre allí la firme resolución del artista de no conceder su pincel sino a cosas bellas, ilustres, ricas de forma y de materia; de no reproducir sino caras redimidas de la miseria humana, vírgenes que son reinas o emperatrices, y bajo cuyos pies la impureza, la bestialidad y la violencia no se atreven a desatar sus ondas de fango!” (485). He admires the beauty, purity, and even ecstasy of the characters in the painting, and, apparently, the Pre-
Raphaelites felt the same way about this painting. Thomas J. Tobin notes that the Pre-Raphaelites were largely inspired by Hans Memling and also by Jan van Eyck. In fact, Rossetti was “struck speechless” (Tobin 27) by this painting of Saint Catherine of Alexandria and even wrote a sonnet dedicated to it. The other painting that really catches Silvio’s attention is the triptych *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, also known as *The Ghent Altarpiece*, which was begun by Hubert van Eyck and finished by his younger brother, Jan van Eyck (1432) (Figs. 18-20). Silvio calls this triptych “*la obra maestra* de este momento de mi vida” (488, italics in the original). Upon his return to Paris, however, Silvio finds himself once again caught in the clutches of Espina, humiliated by her the last time before his death when she switches out his portrait of her for that of another painter at a party.

Fig. 17: *Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Barbara* (1479) by Hans Memling
Fig. 18: *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, or *The Ghent Altarpiece* by Hubert and Jan van Eyck (1432).

Fig. 19: Close-up of scene from *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*. 
Silvio returns to stay with the Dumbrías thinking he will soon recover, but they both know that “[v]iene a morir” (512). The emphasis on food and cold resurfaces in his last days as he learns from a doctor that he has tuberculosis, “un fenómeno de desnutrición” (520) and complains to Minia that he “[tiene] [m]ucho frío… [Se] hielo…” (533). It becomes clear that his death results from his decadent ways of not taking proper care of himself physically and spiritually. He tells Minia, “Y a mí lo que me ha consumido, lo que me tiene tan débil, es... mis
sueños... ¡mis sueños, Minía! ¡Eso me ha emponzoñado mis venas! ¡Eso es lo que me devora!” (537). Spiritually, he has allowed himself to fall prey again and again to the moral depravity of Espina and search after fame at the expense of his health. Lara Anderson also notes that “by his admission it is his dreams rather than the tuberculosis which devour him” (21).

Silvio eventually completely converts to Catholicism by the end of the novel and confesses to a priest before his death. Most critics such as Whitaker (1987) and Anderson (79) see his final conversion and spiritual rebirth as resulting from Silvio adopting the tenets of the Pre-Raphaelites. I believe they are missing a last and final step, however, in which Minía and the artistic values she has espoused from the beginning come full circle to aid in Silvio’s conversion. Silvio’s journey began “en Alborada, y en Alborada vino a concluir” (561). Whitaker points out the cyclical nature of the story and how Minía is both present at the beginning and end of Silvio’s journey (750), yet does not seem to see her influence as so centrally important to the text as that of the Pre-Raphaelites. Jennifer J. Wood also agrees that the Pre-Raphaelites do not play as central of a role as often believed, suggesting instead that it is Franciscan thought that guides and shapes his spiritual rebirth (115). Minía through her knowledge as New Woman, uses Franciscan thought in her attempts to redeem Silvio, which is ultimately successful. What Wood does not do, though, is critique the Pre-Raphaelites for their failure to serve as an ideal example of redemption.

At the beginning of the novel, Minía discusses her personal theory of art and how Silvio can escape this burning desire to create a masterpiece and become famous: “arte anónimo” (157). She suggests so Silvio, “¡Sea modesto, fórmese un corazón humilde y puro, como los de los grandes artistas desconocidos de la Edad Media […] El arte anónimo es el Romancero, es las Catedrales…Usted, de seguro, está dispuesto a batallar por la victoria de unas letras y unas
sílabas: ¡Silvio Lago! Veneno de áspides hay en el culto del nombre” (157, italics in the original). Minia, often noted for representing Pardo Bazan (Whitaker 750), expresses of the importance of looking back in order to move forward. She admires the past artists and religious art in particular who were humble and searched to create something new that would uplift souls instead of bring them fame and renown. This is Silvio’s chimera, the desire for fame, and so to curb this Minia points to the anonymous art of the Middle Ages. Silvio never creates something original because he is too focused on it. Yet, he often belittles Spanish artists such as Diego Velázquez saying “Ese tío no pensaba; lo que hacía era copiar” (179, italics in the original).

Pardo Bazán seems to be critiquing the contemporary Spanish art for its lack of originality and what these imitations lead to: the commodification of art (Anderson 73). Another artist friend of Silvio also comments that “hoy la pintura debe estudiarse en Londres y en París y en Berlín…y dentro de poco en Chicago” (300). Anderson notes how there were two opposing currents in how Spain should properly modernize – if it should look outside of its own country to others or close itself off. For instance, “the Regenerationist continuum [believed] that Spain could progress if it followed the model set down by its more advanced European counterparts” (Anderson 3). On the other hand, “the integrists associated Spain’s past grandeur with the concept of heroic protection against foreign heresy […] therefore, in order to recapture this moment of grandeur, Spain needed to look inwards, freeing itself of any foreign influence” (Anderson 2). In his discussions with Minia, it is clear that she is inspired by Spanish nature and beauty and draws from this and her own self to create her musical masterpieces. Therefore, Silvio’s artistic journey begins with the desire to create a set of paintings depicting rural life in Spain, yet he soon abandons this idea because he is unable to breathe life and originality into his work. He rejects Minia’s advice and then begins his relationship with Espina. Perhaps paradoxically, though, his change from his
desire to only paint portraits and imitations is encouraged through his relationship with Espina. (Anderson 73). Silvio announces, “Estoy divorciado para siempre del verismo servil, de la sugestión de la naturaleza inerte, de la tiranía de los sentidos. Soy libre y dueño de crear mi mundo; ya no venero a los que se limitan a copiar; ya no tengo fetiches; si imitase, sería para dar muerte” (419). While Espina’s decadent ways and love of the artificial may ultimately lead to her death, her appreciation of the imagination possible in art ultimately leads Silvio in a positive direction for “the lesson learnt from Espina, that art need not merely copy, leaves Silvio receptive to the philosophy of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood” (Anderson 78). Silvio admits as much himself saying, “‘Esto tengo que agradecer a la Porcel, a su individualismo aristocrático y poético, a su desprecio de la imitación literal y de la verdad gruesa” (419).

What Silvio finds in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is art that leads to a sort of ecstasy that inspires the soul. Most critics see Silvio’s acceptance of Pre-Raphaelite tenets as the last stop on his journey to finding fulfillment, yet I believe the Pre-Raphaelite art has two flaws which do not make it the ideal source of fulfillment for Silvio: It is both foreign and often misogynistic. When Silvio goes looking for inspiration he goes outside of Spain, to Belgium and Holland, in order to view art from all over Europe. He is enthralled by the Pre-Raphaelites and their precursors such as Memling and van Eyck, all who are foreign as well. It appears as though he allows these foreign influences to pervade his life; in fact, even the concept of the dandy itself is foreign. The reader must question whether it is truly these foreign influences that can ultimately save and regenerate Silvio. While he claims to have converted to the Catholic faith, his conversion seems more an aesthetic conversion than a true religious conversion. Furthermore, he still seems prone to his misogynistic tendencies, and many of the works depicted by the Pre-Raphaelites depict women as the femme fatale or self-absorbed, uroboric women. Examples
include John William Waterhouse’s *Cleopatra* (1888) (Fig. 21), Edward Burne-Jones’ *The Depths of the Sea* (1886) (Fig. 22), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith* (1867) (Fig. 23). Each represents woman as a figure who destroys men. Bram Dijkstra notes of *The Depths of the Sea*: “[W]oman with hypnotic eyes and a vampire’s mouth has already completed her seduction and is carrying her prey— as if it were a huge, flowery bouquet of lost male mortality—into the oblivion of her sensuality” (269). Underneath the original frame of Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith* are lines from Shelley’s translation of Goethe’s *Faust*: “Beware of her fair hair, for she excells [sic]/All women in the magic of her locks,/And when she twines them round a young man's neck/she will not ever set him free again” (qtd. From “Dante Gabriel Rossetti”).

![Fig. 21: Cleopatra (1888) by John William Waterhouse.](image)
Fig. 22: *The Depths of the Sea* (1886) by Edward Burne-Jones.
Limsoë, who convinces Silvio of the value and beauty of the Pre-Raphaelites, also has a misogynist attitude towards women. While in the art gallery together, Limsoë whispers, “Desde que conozco la verdad en la belleza, no he cometido pecado impuro; huyo de la mujer como de un abismo; mejor diría, como se huye de una charca cuando se va vestido de blanco...” (481). He speaks of women in the same way Silvio often speaks of them – as an “abys.” At this point of his conversion, Silvio is in a foreign country, looking at foreign art, speaking to a foreign misogynist man about the Pre-Raphaelites, an artistic movement foreign to Spain and filled with depictions of stereotypical images of women. Can these influences really be the definitive factor in Silvio’s redemption?
Perhaps, instead of serving as the definitive factor, they act as another stepping stone towards the influence of the Spanish countryside and the value of humble and anonymous art which Silvio once despised, shown to Silvio by the Spanish New Woman Minia. Firstly, while Silvio once found no inspiration in nature, now everything appears to be blooming and joyful, serving as a strong contrast to his advanced state of decay. The narrator relates, “Mientras él sufría como un réprobo, la naturaleza desplegaba galas de fiesta nupcial” (542). Now the countryside which formerly held no charm for Silvio is one of the things he most likes to see. For instance, he always wants his window open so he can see the countryside (558). Wood also notes the importance of the flowers Minia keeps in his room for Saint Francis saw “all nature, animate and inanimate, each creature or element with its own unique characteristics, reflects the perfection of the Creator. And in all of nature, St. Francis especially loved flowers” (116). Silvio’s coming to value Spain and its natural beauty helps him along his spiritual and artistic journey.

Secondly, while Silvio is dying but refusing to recognize it, Minia brings in an effigy to his room entitled of “Cristo del Dolor” (538) on the pretext that it could inspire in him a sketch or painting. The narrator describes this image as of the “más ardiente romanticismo; trágica, sugestiva. Dos cirios la alumbraban, y su luz incierta, amarilla como un diamante brasileño, deteniéndose un punto en el Rostro, le prestaba apariencia sobrenatural. Silvio se detuvo impresionado” (538). Minia hopes that it will help bring Silvio to his senses by facing death as she did at the beginning of the novel when she takes him into the tomb after learning of his chimera. This image is both religious and anonymous and keeps in line with her advocating the anonymous, religious art seen in places like cathedrals as well as her espousal of the philosophy of Franciscan poverty (199). She does not show him a famous painting, but an anonymous, yet
beautiful piece of art. Furthermore, Minia follows in the footsteps of the Franciscans who would often use images of Christ’s passion to encourage repentance (Wood 116-117). Once again, Silvio rejects it saying that it frightens him, yet he eventually changes his mind, accepting his coming death and confessing to a priest. During his confession he acknowledges his sins of decadence saying, “Pequé. Soy arcilla amasada con fermentos de impureza… He palpitado por glorias y triunfos…¡Engaño! ¡Polvo! ¡Nada!” (557). Here, in the Spanish countryside where his story began, Silvio ultimately finds hope and tranquility in Christianity. With the death of Silvio as a symbol of masculine decadence, perhaps this abundance of thriving nature images suggests the hope of new life and prosperity in Catholic Spain resulting from the death of decadence.

The main factor in Silvio’s conversion, however, is the influence of Minia. Minia serves as his spiritual and artistic guide and his friendship with her combats the repulsion he normally feels before women. Through her knowledge, independence, originality, and Catholic faith, Minia is able to redeem Silvio. Although he dies as a result of his decadent ways, he does not suffer spiritual death as Espina does. Pardo Bazán seems to suggest that while the femme fatale may encourage at some level a search for something more than imitation and foreign influences can lead to a further understanding of art and faith, in the end, what is needed most is the Spanish New Woman who teaches the value of her homeland and of looking back to the Middle Ages and the Catholic Franciscan way of life in order to properly face the future.

3.5 The Dandy and the New Woman: Mauro and Feito

Mauro Pareja is another example of a dandy figure in the works of Pardo Bazán. *Memorias de un solterón* begins with Mauro explaining, “A mí me han puesto de mote el Abad” (85, italics in the original). He then goes on to both question and answer what he believes this means: “¿Qué intentan significar con eso de Abad? ¿Que soy regalón, amigo de mis
comodidades, un poquito epicúreo? Pues no creo que estas aficiones las hayan demostrado los abades solamente. Además, sospecho que el apodo envuelve una censura, queriendo expresar que vivo esclavo de los goces menos espirituales y atendiendo únicamente a mi cuerpo” (85-86). Mauro also describes the detail to which he attends to his clothing saying, “He formado costumbre de vestir con esmero y según los decretos de la moda; mas no por eso se crea que soy de los que andan cazando la última forma de solapa, o se hacen frac colorado si ven en un periódico que lo usan los gomosos de Londres. Así y todo, mi indumentaria suele llamar la atención en Marineda, y se charló bastante de unos botines blancos míos” (86-87). His careful attention to his body and clothing clearly marks him as a dandy who loves the attention his fashionable and sometimes effeminate accessories such as his white boots bring him. Mauro denies the effeminacy of dressing himself in such a manner, though, asserting that it is that “practic[a] (sin fe, pero con fervor) el culto de [su] propia persona, y cre[a] que esta persona, para [él] archiestimable, merece no andar envuelta en talegos o en prendas” (87). While Silvio may have strove to create new and original art, Mauro sets his own self up as a work of art, carefully designed and groomed. In fact, he affirms, “[N]o soy capaz de producir obras maestras de arte, a no ser que tal se juzgue el arreglo de mi vivir, que es realmente un capolavoro” (107, italics in the original).

Mauro is a confirmed bachelor committed to the ideals of “egoísmo” (94) and to observing the lives of others without becoming directly involved. In fact, he says at one point that the nickname “el Expectador” (126) would be more appropriate than his current nickname of “abbot.” His selfish and voyeuristic tendencies mark him as a decadent and dandy figure in conjunction with his manner of dress and choice of pastimes such as reading fiction novels and short courtships with women. He enjoys the courtship of women as at that time everything seems
magical and sublime, but he is horrified by the idea of growing old together with the romance gone. He explains: “Lo único que buscaba era la dulce fiebre del sueño amoroso, lo más bonito, la irisada sobrehaz del amor, y no su amargo y turbio sedimento” (111).

Upon getting to know the New Woman Feita Neira, however, Mauro’s world slowly begins to change, and he begins to realize the value of the New Woman and his love for her. She becomes the only one who can save him from his decadent ways. With Feita, Mauro need no longer be idle and a mere spectator in the lives of others because he has a family of his own. He also learns to subjugate his ego, and put others before himself. Overall, as Maryellen Bieder notes, “The two are ideally suited for one another is evident in the fact that Feita is the only female capable of enticing Mauro out of entrenched bachelorhood and redeeming him for society” (104). Once again, it is the New Woman who is able to redeem the dandy; in this case it is through an equal marriage among partners.

3.6 Conclusion

Through the relationships between the dandy characters and both the femme fatale and the New Woman in La quimera and Memorias de un solterón, Valdivia and Silvio both have relationships with the femme fatale Espina which cause their physical and moral health to deteriorate, and the decadence espoused by all three cannot bring about positive societal changes and only ends in death. Relationships with New Woman such as Minia and Feita, however, are redemptive and lead to an acceptance of the Catholic faith, in Silvio’s case, and a precedent set for a modern marriage among equals between Feita and Mauro. Through these different relationships, Pardo Bazán points to the two important things she believed are needed for Spain to be successful as a modern society: the adherence to the Catholic faith and equality between the sexes. She effectively combines both tradition and modernity with these two suggestions. Spain
had long been a Catholic nation, but Pardo Bazán calls for modern society to look back and become revitalized by the Catholic tradition instead of abandoning its faith. Yet, she also wants to modernize traditional rhetoric that viewed women as inferior beings that should be devoted solely to domestic life. It is through this unique combination of values that Pardo Bazán’s solution to the ills of the age is set apart from many of her contemporaries.
CONCLUSION

Emilia Pardo Bazán’s works are often filled with ambiguous, bittersweet, and open-ended conclusions, leaving the reader to search for himself or herself the meaning among the polyphony of voices. Throughout many of her novels, short stories, and essays, however, run two important themes that she seems to suggest as a solution to the problem of Spanish decadence: equality between men and women and the Catholic faith. Pardo Bazán champions feminism, particularly the education of women, and believes that only through the acceptance of women in the public sphere can Spain properly become a modern country and keep up with the rest of Europe. She also touts the importance of religious faith, something very unusual for her contemporaries which sets her and her literature, especially her last three novels which include *La quimera* and *Dulce dueño*, apart from most of the Spanish fin de siècle literary canon.

Her adherence to the Catholic faith serves as a defense tactic as she was already pushing boundaries with her feminism and desire for equality, but it also is a way for her to effectively integrate these foreign figures, especially the New Woman, into Spanish society. Catholicism was an integral part of Spanish identity, and Pardo Bazán does not merely import the idea of the New Woman and do away with all the traditional aspects of Catholic women in Spain. Part of the problem of the *femme fatales* and dandies such as Espina and Silvio is that they come from foreign places and find inspiration primarily in foreign sources. When placed within a Spanish context, they fail. With the figure of the New Woman, however, Pardo Bazán takes her good aspects from foreign sources, yet situates her within a Spanish context, making the New Woman a figure that Spanish women can embrace. She at once opens the eyes of Spain to the importance of the New Woman, yet adapts her to her own Spanish, Catholic culture.
The New Women Feíta Neira and Minia Dumbría are excellent examples of independent and intelligent women that combat the stereotypes of the New Woman as hateful and hybrid creatures. Feíta’s marriage to Mauro is an example of what a progressive and modern relationship should look like. Neither party dominates the other or is subjected to a gender hierarchy that favors men. By each subverting the traditional gender norms, they can fulfill roles other than the ones patriarchal society has prescribed for them and find harmony within themselves and their relationship. Minia’s role as a New Woman has been studied very little as it has been overshadowed by Feíta who is often seen as the quintessential New Woman. Although Feíta’s marriage may be a happy one, there is still a sense in which the reader hopes for her also to be able to fulfill her dreams to study, travel, and make a life for herself outside the confines of marriage. Minia, on the other hand, is able to fulfill the dreams of Feíta. She enjoys the independence to not only study but also create new art of her own and travel the world playing her musical compositions. As *La quimera* is one of Pardo Bazán’s later novels, perhaps it suggests the progression she hoped to see for women, that they would not necessarily be limited to marriage should they desire to pursue something else or be unable to find a mate with whom an egalitarian marriage would be possible.

Most of the scholarship on women in *La quimera* has focused on the other main female character: Espina de la Porcel as a *femme fatale*. She is one of the most interesting and thoroughly evil examples of female decadence. She is an incarnation of the ills of Spain and reflects the need for serious societal changes. Espina seeks out and destroys men, yet the text hints at the fact that with the lack of an outlet for her desires and creative energies, she has little else to do than play the coquette and then humiliate men as she has been humiliated through the oppressive atmosphere of gender inequality. Lina Mascareñas and Catalina de Alejandría are
both also scripted into the role of the *femme fatale* by patriarchal society, yet their destruction of men is more passive than Espina’s active mortification of Valdivia and Silvio. Maximino and Agustín Almonte only suffer death because they aim to take advantage of Catalina and Lina and will not accept their desires to live outside of both traditional marriage and the convent. Even though Catalina and Lina begin their stories as reflections of the decadent, through their conversion to Catholicism they are able to have a mystical relationship with Christ that allows them to be outside of the male gaze and not suffer a spiritual death like Espina, although still subjugated to either a physical or metaphorical death.

Much of 19th century Spanish narrative scholarship, especially that focusing on the works of Pardo Bazán, focuses on the images of women rather than men. Therefore, in my investigation I analyzed how characters such as Mauro Pareja of *Memorias de un soltero* and Silvio Lago and Valdivia of *La quimera* also serve as symbols of decadence and if and how they are redeemed. The redemption or lack of these characters seems centered on their relationships with women and whether they have a conversion experience. Valdivia is rarely mentioned but in passing in most analyses of *La quimera*, but he is a clear example of the dandy who is not redeemed as he has no conversion experience and the only relationship the reader sees him have with women is with Espina. This combination of the *femme fatale* and the dandy only intensifies each other’s decadent tendencies. Valdivia is consumed by his obsession with Espina, and Espina continues to purposely encourage this jealousy to humiliate him. When Silvio begins his relationship with Espina, his sickness and impotence as an artist only increases, even if her desire for something more than imitations does artistically inspire him. It is only once Silvio begins to follow the advice of the New Woman Minia and finds comfort in her influence does he have a true conversion experience. Mauro also appears as an idle, impotent, and voyeuristic dandy before his
marriage to Feita. It is only through her influence that he finds himself a redeemed man whose life has meaning and purpose.

It would be interesting to see further studies done on masculinity in Pardo Bazán and the relationships of men to each of the different “types” of women – “angel in the house,” *femme fatale*, and New Woman. I have analyzed in more depth some of the secondary or less studied characters such as Valdivia and Minia, and I think it would be fruitful to more profoundly study the secondary characters in each of these works such as Clara Ayamonte in *La quimera* and Feita’s sister Rosa in *Memorias de un solterón*. Minia, in particular, is often overlooked even though she is central to Silvio’s conversion and clearly set up as a New Woman figure.

Emilia Pardo Bazán, through her life and works, hoped to help pave the way for a new generation of independent, smart, and creative women who do not allow themselves to be subjugated under the patriarchal discourse that demonizes them for stepping outside of traditional gender roles. She also encouraged a new sort of man who transgressed gender roles to become an equal partner and helpmate to woman. Pardo Bazán proposes that through combining the traditional and the modern, the Catholic faith and equality between the sexes, Spanish society can properly modernize and avoid the fate of decadence it so desperately feared.
1. The ambiguous image of the sphinx as a creature perverse and cruel as well as wise and benevolent will be discussed further in chapter 2.

2. I am indebted to Dr. Dorota Heneghan for this astute observation.

3. Mary E. Giles studied Pardo Bazán’s prose style from five novels before La quimera and noticed that in Pardo Bazán’s “Modern” literature there is a much greater use of adjectives and a more musical quality to the prose. This may be an example of form reflecting content. As Pardo Bazán is describing the decadence of her characters and their attention to detail and artifice, she too gives elaborate descriptions of external, artificial things.

4. Various other famous artists incorporated the image of the sphinx in their work including Fernand Khnopff in The Sphinx, or The Caresses (1896) and The Supreme Vice (1885) and Jan Toorop in The Sphinx (1892-97).

5. Rossetti and Courbet have a number of paintings of women kissing themselves or staring into a mirror. Juan Valera’s Gênio y Figura (1897) also contains this image of a woman kissing herself.

6. Tolliver (5-60) highlights some illustrations from the Madrid Cómico such as one comic entitled, “Progresos del feminismo” (1902) Santana Bonilla. This comic makes fun of what might occur if feminism were successful, but does so in such a way that the women’s entrance into public spaces is marked by sexual innuendos and advances.

7. Pardo Bazán herself was interested in St. Francis and wrote a biography of his life entitled San Francisco de Asís.
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VITA

Sarah Berard was born in Northampton, Massachusetts but grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She graduated from Louisiana State University in May 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts in English. She will graduate from Louisiana State University in May 2012 with a Master of Arts in Hispanic studies where she has worked as a teaching assistant for the past two years.