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Spain

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Anales Galdosianos, Año 56, 2021, pp. 185-203 (Article)

Published by Asociación Internacional de Galdosistas

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ang.2021.0011>

ANALES
GALDOSIANOS



Revista a cargo de Jennifer Smith

ASOCIACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE GALDOSISTAS

185-203

2021

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(DE)PATHOLOGIZING LESBIAN DESIRE IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY SPAIN

Jennifer Smith

Abstract: Discussions of “tribadas,” “viragines,” “marimachos,” “hermafroditas,” “mujeres hombrunas,” and “lesbias” appear in works by prominent nineteenth-century sexologists. Vicente Suárez Casañ’s *El amor lesbio* (1892), seemingly the lengthiest account on the topic of the time, insists on tying masculine lesbians, or *marimachos*, as he refers to them, to hermaphroditism. He also underscores the distinction between masculine and feminine lesbians, while revealing the persistent belief in spontaneous sex change and connections between lesbians and witches. While Eduardo López Bago’s *La Pálida* (1884) and *La monja* (1886) reproduce long-standing beliefs that tie lesbianism to prostitution, hysteria, convents, and sorcery, the radical naturalist conspicuously shies away from the figure of the butch lesbian or “female hermaphrodite.” In contrast, Emilia Pardo Bazán features a masculine lesbian associated with witchcraft as the eponymous protagonist of her short story “Afra” (1894). And in 1901 she publishes the column, “Sobre ascuas,” about the first gay marriage in Spain between two women in A Coruña. Although most of these medical, literary, and journalistic discourses appear, in some way, to endorse heteronormativity and patriarchy by pathologizing female same-sex desire, they all simultaneously deconstruct arguments about the naturalness of universal heterosexuality.

Resumen: Discusiones acerca de “tribadas,” “viragines,” “marimachos,” “hermafroditas,” “mujeres hombrunas,” y “lesbias” aparecen en las obras de destacados sexólogos decimonónicos. *El amor lesbio* (1892) de Vicente Suárez Casañ, que parece ser el escrito más largo acerca del tema en la época, insiste en conectar las lesbianas masculinas, o *marimachos*, como él las denomina, al hermafroditismo. También subraya la distinción entre las lesbianas masculinas y femeninas, al mismo tiempo que revela la creencia persistente en el cambio de sexo espontáneo y la conexión entre lesbianas y brujas. Aunque *La Pálida* (1884) y *La monja* (1886) de Eduardo López Bago reproducen creencias antiguas que vinculan el lesbianismo a la prostitución, la histeria, los conventos y la hechicería, el naturalista radical ignora de forma ostensible la figura de la lesbiana *butch* o de la “hermafrodita femenina.” En cambio, Emilia Pardo Bazán presenta a una lesbiana masculina asociada con la brujería como la protagonista homónima de su cuento “Afra” (1894). Y en 1901 escribe la columna, “Sobre ascuas,” sobre el primer matrimonio gay en España entre dos mujeres en A Coruña. Aunque la mayoría de estos discursos médicos, literarios y periodísticos parecen, de alguna manera, apoyar la heteronormatividad y el patriarcado al patologizar el deseo homoerótico femenino, simultáneamente desconstruyen argumentos acerca de la naturalidad de la heterosexualidad universal.

Keywords: lesbianism, hermaphroditism, Vicente Suárez Casañ, Eduardo López Bago, Emilia Pardo Bazán

Palabras Clave: lesbianismo, hermafroditismo, Vicente Suárez Casañ, Eduardo López Bago, Emilia Pardo Bazán

Until now, there have been only a handful of studies on the medical and literary discourses dealing with same-sex desire in women in late nineteenth-century Spain. Nevertheless, discussions of “tribadas,” “viragines,” “marimachos,” “hermafroditas,” “mujeres hombrunas,” and even “lesbias” appear in works by leading nineteenth-century sexologists such as Felipe Monlau, Amancio Peratoner, and Vicente Suárez Casañ.¹ Vicente Suárez Casañ’s *El amor lesbio* (1892), seemingly the lengthiest account on the topic of the time, insists on tying masculine lesbians, or *marimachos*, as he refers to them, to hermaphroditism. He also underscores the distinction between masculine and feminine lesbians, while revealing the persistent belief in spontaneous sex change and connections between lesbians and witches.

While Eduardo López Bago’s *La Pálida* (1884) and *La monja* (1886) reproduce long-standing beliefs that tie lesbianism to prostitution, hysteria, convents, and sorcery, the radical naturalist conspicuously shies away from the figure of the butch lesbian or “female hermaphrodite.” In contrast, Emilia Pardo Bazán features a masculine lesbian associated with witchcraft as the eponymous protagonist of her short story “Afra” (1894). And in 1901 she publishes the column, “Sobre ascuas,” about the first gay marriage in Spain between two women in A Coruña. Although most of these medical, literary, and journalistic discourses appear, in some way, to endorse heteronormativity and patriarchy by pathologizing female same-sex desire, they all simultaneously deconstruct arguments about the naturalness of universal heterosexuality.

Sherry Velasco’s *Lesbians in Early Modern Spain* traces the history of same-sex desire in the Early Modern period. Drawing on a variety of discourses, such as religious writings, Inquisition documents, and literature, Velasco concludes that the public was aware of female homoeroticism and that moralists often portrayed these relationships as a menace to society. Challenging the post-Foucauldian critical tendency to disregard the term “lesbian” or “lesbiana,” in historical discussions of same-sex desire in women, Velasco shows that variations of the term “Lesbos” were frequently applied to female homoerotic relationships (2-5). Nevertheless, other terms, such as *marimachos*, *tribades*, and *hermaphroditas* were also used (5). In medical texts, lesbianism was primarily tied to hypertrophied clitorises and masculine characteristics, with numerous recorded accounts of spontaneous sex change where women transformed into men (22-23, 28-31). There was also a focus on the places that bred this kind of behavior, most notably residences where single women lived together: convents, brothels, and prisons. The writings on the dangers of “*amistades particulares*” in the convents were plentiful, appearing in convent constitutions and even in the writings of Santa Teresa de Jesús (7, 11), as were connections between prostitution, lesbianism, and incarcerated women (10, 35, 53, 56-57). Moreover, lesbianism was tied to demonic possession, sorcery, and witchcraft, connections captured most famously in the figure of *La Celestina* (10, 50-51, 60, 61, 64). Despite the acceptance, and even prominence, of famous lesbians and transgender people such as Catalina de Erauso and Queen Christina of Sweden,

¹ According to Maite Zubiaurre, these were the three most influential sexologists of the time (43). For a discussion of Monlau and Peratoner’s views on same-sex desire in women see my articles “Women and the Deployment of Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Spain” pp. 161-62, and “Female Masculinity in *La Regenta*,” pp. 195-96.

and the representation of female same-sex desire in literature and on the Spanish stage, examples of Inquisition cases demonstrate that same-sex desire between women was not generally tolerated (1, 11-13, 48).

There is still much work to be done on understandings and representations of lesbian desire in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Spain. Marta Vicente's *Debating Sex and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Spain* shows how the desire to clearly delineate the male from the female and tie all sex to the Enlightenment value of utility, led to the medical discreditation of theories of hermaphroditism and spontaneous sex change (6-8). Nevertheless, the ideas of the public did not necessarily change along with those of medical doctors, and ideas on sexual fluidity continued to circulate (33-34). Moreover, Vicente shows the ways in which these theories on the polarization of the sexes had to grapple with individuals whose bodies and behaviors challenged these categories, including cases of men who passed as women, and women who passed as men. Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez-García corroborate this understanding of the historical evolution of hermaphroditism in Spain in their book *Hermaphroditism: Medical Science and Sexual Identity in Spain: 1850-1960*. They argue that the nineteenth century was an intermediary phase between the denial of the existence of hermaphrodites and the rise in the concept of pseudo-hermaphroditism, or individuals with exterior sexual characteristics of both sexes, but not internal ones (gonads and ovaries) (15). Both *Debating Sex and Gender* and *Hermaphroditism* address the question of homoerotic relations between women in the sense that the category of the female hermaphrodite was closely tied to beliefs concerning the masculine or butch lesbian prominent in Mediterranean conceptions of female homoeroticism (Cleminson and Molina Artaloytia 123). On the literary front, analyses of nineteenth-century representations of lesbians include Itziar Rodríguez de Rivera's examination of Francisco de Sales Mayo's *La Condesita*. (*Memorias de una doncella*) ("Placer solitario"), Akiko Tsuchiya's study of Eduardo López Bago's *Prostituta* series (*Marginal Subjects* 180-81) and *Cura* trilogy ("Entre la ciencia" 52-58), Joyce Tolliver's analysis of Emilia Pardo Bazán's journalistic piece "La inaudita novela," and my own discussions of *La Regenta* ("Female Masculinity") and the *Cura* trilogy (*Women, Mysticism, and Hysteria* 96-104). This paper builds on this work by focusing on the portrayal of different lesbian identity categories, the unwitting naturalization of the homoerotic activities these texts often seek to denounce, and the persistence of popular beliefs about lesbianism and intersexuality, such as the belief in spontaneous sex change and connections between lesbians and witches.

At first glance, nineteenth-century thinking on same-sex desire in women appears to have changed little from the Early Modern period. Similar terminology continued to be used and doctors continued to argue that lesbianism was produced by deviant anatomy. Moreover, just as Sherry Velasco finds examples of lesbian desire amongst marginalized female groups that lived in all-female communities, nineteenth-century hygienists would call out nuns, prostitutes, and witches for their proclivity towards same-sex desire. The most notable difference, however, was the change in understanding of hermaphroditism. Doctors

of the day argued that most individuals with ambiguous external genitalia were pseudo-hermaphrodites since the measure of true hermaphroditism now meant possessing the internal organs of reproduction (Cleminson and Vázquez García, *Hermaphroditism* 3). The renowned Catalan hygienist Felipe Monlau exemplifies this change. He asserts that while female hermaphrodites have overdeveloped clitorises and manly features and are sexually attracted towards members of their own sex, these women are not true hermaphrodites because they do not possess the internal reproductive organs of both sexes (107-08).²

Vicente Suárez Casañ's *El amor lesbio* is a pivotal text in understanding conceptions of same-sex desire in women at the turn of the century. *El amor lesbio* is volume nine of Suárez Casañ's multi-volume work *Conocimientos para la vida privada* (Cleminson and Vázquez García, 'Los invisibles,' 58). This series went through at least twenty editions, which, as Cleminson and Vázquez García note, attests to its popularity with the reading public (58).³ *El amor lesbio* intends to serve as a history of lesbianism from the time of ancient Greece and Rome. Dividing his work into six chapters, plus a brief introduction and appendix, Suárez Casañ introduces his topic with dire warnings about how "[el] amor lesbio" o "[el] amor sáfico," "amenaza con corromperlo todo" (v). He adds that it is a vice that young women commit out of a lack of legitimate outlets for their sexual desires and because they become overly intimate with their female friends, a clear repetition of Early Modern fears about "amistades particulares" (vi-vii). His proposed solution is to expose this hidden "vice": "todas esas asquerosidades hay que sacarlas á la luz para que se vean y se conozcan en toda su verdadera repugnancia, y se avergüencen de sí mismas" (viii).

The focus in chapter one is on Sappho. Suárez Casañ states that although lesbianism did not start with Sappho, she actively taught the superiority of love between women (11). He reminds his readers that the term "lesbia" is derived from the Island of Lesbos, where Sappho and her female disciples lived (12). He claims that Sappho initially married and had a child, and only started loving women after she became a widow (14). He also asserts that Sappho was a hermaphrodite and directs his readers to volume seven of the series for a detailed discussion of hermaphroditism (14). He writes: "La naturaleza, en efecto, había indicado en ella el sexo masculino, desarrollando el femenino" (14).⁴ However, he prefers to view the cause of her lesbianism as psychological, arguing that it was not caused by her masculine anatomical configuration, but rather her desire to take revenge on men (15). As proof, he reiterates the unproven legend of her suicide by jumping off a cliff when her love for Phaon was not reciprocated (15). He concludes that "Así, pues, Safo comenzó amando los hombres y amándoles murió" (15). This is the first example of Suárez

² Noël Valis, citing the thirteenth, revised edition of the same work, underscores Monlau's focus on the "monstrousness" of the hermaphrodite (male and female), through his use of terms such as "monstruosidades," "vicios de conformación," "marimacho," and "marica" (196)

³ The earliest edition of *El amor lesbio* in the National Library of Spain has a publication date of 1892.

⁴ Later, in chapter five, he writes, "Algunas de estas mujeres tienen toda la apariencia de un hermafroditismo real, puesto que pueden yacer con un hombre ó con un individuo del mismo sexo. Así parece estaba conformada Safo, si hemos creer á varios historiadores" (54).

Casañ's oscillation between anatomical and psychological explanations of lesbianism.⁵ While he clearly includes Sappho among the group of female hermaphrodites whose enlarged clitorises supposedly determined their attraction to women (biological cause), he insists that Sappho's deprivation of heterosexual love was a bigger factor (psychological cause). By establishing that her lesbian tendencies were the result of both nature and nurture, he inadvertently argues that female same-sex desire is a naturally occurring phenomenon even though his intent is to do precisely the opposite. It is also worth noting that the Catalan sexologist reproduces unsubstantiated claims about Sappho's life, clearly indicating his account is based more on popular myth than on any real historical research, as is the case in the "historical" discussions in the next two chapters.

Chapter two continues with a discussion of the auletrides ("flute-players") and hetairai of the Classical World. These entertainers-courtesans, in addition to providing sexual services, entertained men with music, dance, and conversation. According to Suárez Casañ, the auletrides and the hetairai "se permitían, entre sí, amores que tenían todas las trazas del amor desenfrenado, que no era otro que el amor sáfico" (19). He recounts that these women would organize gatherings without men present and hold beauty pageants where they were both judges and contestants (20-21). He proceeds to relate the erotic details of one such gathering (21-24). He then moves onto Rome, citing disparate accounts of followers of Sappho (24-26). Ultimately, the purpose of this chapter is to connect lesbianism to prostitution by references to the Classical World. In the Catalan sexologist's words: "En Roma, lo mismo que en Grecia, el amor sáfico tuvo por principales sacerdotisas á las cortesanas y por templo los lupanares" (26).

In chapter three Suárez Casañ focuses on the supposed sexual practices of the court of Marie Antoinette, asserting that these women put their same-sex activities on open display and changed lovers daily, turning the court into a brothel (29-30). Regarding the queen herself, he tells us that "la misma soberana era la que aventajaba a todas y tal vez la que dió primero el ejemplo" and that "Hombres, mujeres, todo le gusta[ba]" (31). He goes on to relate her fall in popularity and eventual execution to her licentiousness. He juxtaposes a scene of elated crowds cheering on Marie Antoinette on her wedding day, to the angry mobs that came out to witness and celebrate her beheading (36-40). He laments, however, that "[l]a muerte trágica de María Antoineta la ha lavado ante la historia, en cierto modo, de los desórdenes de su vida" (36). As in the case of his accounts of Sappho and the auletrides and hetairai of ancient Greece, there is a clear absence of historical rigor in his retelling of Marie Antoinette's life. Indeed, as renowned French historian Lynn Hunt has argued, the proliferation of pornographic pamphlets—as many as 126—depicting fabricated sexual encounters of Marie Antoinette had less to do with her actual behaviors and more with the use of her body to serve a political agenda (108-09). A similar dynamic is seen with Isabel II where the rumored sexual behaviors of the queen (including lesbianism, group sex, and

⁵ In Iziar Rodríguez de Rivera's words: "Sus ideas sobre la homosexualidad femenina oscilan entre lo que el crítico Arnold Davidson llama un razonamiento de tipo anatómico-que asocia la identidad sexual con las características anatómicas de los genitales—y un estilo de pensar psiquiátrico que se inicia en la segunda mitad del XIX y que toma en consideración los impulsos, los gustos y los rasgos psíquicos de los individuos" ("Mujeres de papel" 77).

bestiality) were depicted in the anonymous collection of pornographic watercolors *Los Borbones en pelota* (1868).

It is in chapter four that Suárez Casañ sets out to show that lesbianism is more widespread in his day than it has ever been, and that it extends across all social classes (44). He claims it is nearly impossible to find a prostitute that has not engaged in same-sex practices, and cites a well-known case of a woman who abandoned her husband for her female lover (44-45). He spends the rest of this chapter listing the moral and social causes of the “disease”: too much unsupervised intimacy between female friends, enforced and prolonged celibacy, unfortunate romantic relationships with men, a desire to satisfy sexual desire without the scandal or the risk of pregnancy that a woman might incur with a man, the cohabitation of women in convents, prisons, and boarding schools, exalted imagination and fantasy, widows who fear losing their pensions if they marry a man, and most importantly, the example and influence of other women who engage in same-sex activities (46-51).

Chapter five focuses on supposed biological causes and descriptions of lesbian behaviors. The sexologist asserts that the principal biological cause of same-sex desire is an overly large clitoris, which in some women is the size of a penis (53). He connects this state with pseudo-hermaphroditism when he states that, “[a]lgunas de estas mujeres tienen toda la apariencia de un hermafroditismo real, puesto que pueden yacer con un hombre ó con un individuo del mismo sexo” (54). These *marimachos*, as he calls them, tend to exhibit facial hair and other masculine traits, and tend to play the masculine role, or the role of *incubo*, in sexual relations (54). This section is important because it is here that the sexologist clearly divides lesbians into two categories:

Este desarrollo del clitoris puede ser, y es casi siempre natural; pero en algunos casos, su anormal volumen es consecuencia de vicios solitarios ó de la misma práctica del amor lesbio.

Estas mujeres suelen tener un aspecto exterior varonil y desgarbado, el labio superior y la barba cubiertos de pelo, y hasta la voz hombruna.

Sus aficiones son todas extrañas á su sexo; gustan de alternar con los hombres; pero de igual á igual, les imitan en el traje y juegan, fuman y juran como un cabo de gastadores.

El vulgo las distingue con el nombre gráfico de mari-machos.

En el amor lesbio viene á haber también dos papeles que desempeñar, como en la pederastia, uno pasivo y otro activo, ó el de incubo y el de súcubo.

Los mari-machos desempeñan siempre el de incubos ó de lesbias activas.

Las muchachas que éstas conquistan para saciar en ellas su asqueroso apetito, desempeñan la parte pasiva ó de súcubos.

No es necesario el desarrollo del clitoris para que una mujer tenga aficiones lesbianas y hasta haga de incubo. Hay también muchas que alternan en ambos papeles.

Ni es preciso tampoco que la mujer tenga el mencionado órgano más ó menos voluminoso.

Esto no deja de ser una disposición física que facilita más bien que predispone, á este acto obsceno. (54-55)

There are several noteworthy details in this passage. First is the use of the term “natural” to describe “hermaphrodites,” or intersexed individuals. In other words, he himself describes as “natural” that which he sets out to prove as unnatural. Second is the belief in spontaneous sex change, a belief which circulated in the Early Modern period, but was largely dismissed in the eighteenth century. According to this conception, clitorises could become larger and closer in appearance and function to penises because of sexual behavior. The third item of note is the clear distinction between the active/masculine and passive/feminine lesbian, or in contemporary terminology, the butch/femme dichotomy. However, the Catalan doctor then undoes this assertion by claiming that lesbians often alternate in these roles.

Suárez Casañ goes on to add that *marimachos* tend to be jealous and violent in their relationships, and are the ones who entice more feminine lesbians into their supposedly pernicious ways (55). Although, as we saw above, he claims that there is often a switching of dominant and passive roles in sexual activities within lesbian relationships, he insists that *marimachos* are more strongly and passionately inclined to women of their own sex than women with smaller genitalia and more feminine characteristics (55). Indeed, he asserts that the latter tend to be attracted to men as well as women. He also argues that these more feminine lesbians are usually naively corrupted and exploited by masculine lesbians (55).

In the same chapter he then turns his attention to nymphomania as a cause of lesbianism. Here the biological cause is an itching sensation in the labia (*ninfas*) that can never be satiated (56). He argues that since a man’s sexual stamina does not permit them to satisfy these women, nymphomaniacs turn to other women (57). He adds that while they are suffering from the disease, nymphomaniacal lesbians are “quizás las lesbianas más peligrosas por su atrevimiento y desmoralización que lo avasalla todo, y en todas partes hacen víctimas” (57). As in the case of *marimachos*, he emphasizes these women’s violent natures: “se las ha visto emplear la violencia ni más ni menos que un hombre desalmado haría con una muchacha” (57). Ultimately, he equates these types of lesbians with witches possessed by the devil:

Los antiguos aquelarres, aquellos conciliábulo en que los hechiceros de ambos sexos uníanse carnal é indistintamente á la terminación de la misa negra celebrada por el demonio, no eran otra cosa que ninfomaníacas, perturbadas mentalmente á causa de la continua agitación lujuriosa, y libertinos que buscaban entre estas desgraciadas, la ocasión de satisfacer sus apetitos carnales. (58)

Citing a 1610 Inquisition case in which 29 *hechiceros* were put on trial, most of them women, he highlights these women’s indiscriminate lesbian activities (58).

The sixth and final chapter is dedicated to warning the reader of the dire consequences of these behaviors, both for the women themselves and on society. Among the moral and social consequences, he notes these women’s inability to fulfill their roles in life as wives and mothers, sterility, deformation of the genitalia, paranoia, nymphomania, and social and familial isolation (68-70). Among the physical ailments

lesbianism can cause, he lists tuberculosis, marasmus, nymphomania, disorders of the womb, problematic menstrual cycles, cancer, syphilis, and many other venereal diseases (74). He concludes that religion is the only true antidote to this behavior. The appendix expands on the discussion of nymphomania, without a strict focus on same-sex desire.

Thus, the similarities between Suárez Casañ's text and Early Modern accounts of lesbianism are striking not only in their terminology, but also in the supposed causes of the disease: anomalous genitalia (hermaphroditism); masculine physical attributes; unsupervised, intimate female friendships; the cohabitation of women in convents and prisons; exalted imagination and fantasy; general lasciviousness; and witchcraft and sorcery. Unique is the disease of "nymphomania," though even this medical construct has its roots in the uterine fury of the ancient world (Groneman xvii-xviii). Furthermore, just as Velasco concludes that Early Modern Spanish society both did and did not tolerate lesbian behavior, the same seems to be true in turn-of-the-century Spain. Throughout his work, Suárez Casañ laments that society seemed not to be bothered by "el amor lesbio" in the same way it was by "pederastia." Furthermore, he bemoans the fact that some men even found sexual activity between two women appealing:

los estravíos de las mujeres con ellas mismas no arrancan la misma indignación ni iguales protestas.

Hasta hay individuos que lo miran como una gracia y que lo toleran ó les es indiferente en la mujer que aman.

[...]

Preguntad á la mayoría de los hombres si les es repugnante una mujer lesbia y se encojerán de hombros ó responderán sencillamente que no.

Esta indiferencia es un mal gravísimo que contribuye á hacer menos odioso este vicio por lo tanto á propagarlo. (45)

Nevertheless, Suárez Casañ does not shy away from doomsday language, asserting that lesbianism "amenaza destruir la Sociedad [...] y si bien hoy no lo llena todo, ¿quién sabe á donde puede llegar!" (44). Such language suggests that moralists like himself were most certainly bothered by it. Moreover, the public reaction to the first gay marriage between two women in 1901, which I discuss more below, indicates that society was not accepting of openly gay women.⁶ Indeed, Cleminson and Vázquez argue that the category of pseudo-hermaphroditism was employed precisely to create a legal category that would make gay marriage impossible (*Hermaphroditism* 20).

What is interesting in Suárez Casañ's work is that to convince the reader of the pathological nature of lesbianism, he essentially argues that it is a naturally occurring phenomenon that can only be controlled by artificial social and religious restraints. By dividing lesbianism into two categories—masculine lesbians/hermaphrodites who are biologically more like men in their appearance and genitalia and are "naturally"

⁶ For more on the public's response see Tolliver and McDaniel.

inclined to members of their own sex, and feminine lesbians who turn to lesbianism only because of frustrated heterosexual urges that transform into hysteria, nymphomania, and excess lasciviousness—he portrays these behaviors as “naturally” occurring phenomena. Lesbianism is either the result of hereditary or instinctual urges that seek release in one form or another. Regarding “heterosexual” women’s turn to lesbianism, Suárez Casañ compares their cases to running water that has been dammed up, arguing that whenever you build a dam, the water will find another place to flow (49). Moreover, he asserts that the sex of an individual is irrelevant in terms of sexual pleasure: “Pues bien, si se busca el placer por el placer mismo, poco importa que este placer lo proporcione un individuo del mismo sexo, y una vez vencida la primera repugnancia pronto cae el hombre en la pederastia y la mujer en el amor lesbio” (64). Though the purpose of this argument is to elevate heterosexual union to a lofty spiritual realm beyond pure sexual pleasure, it simultaneously undoes his arguments about the unnaturalness of homosexual relations. Moreover, the draconian measures he suggests for putting a stop to homosexual behavior between women suggests that it can only be thwarted by artificial barriers. For example, he advocates for ostracizing lesbians: “A esta clase de mujeres debiera marcárselas con un estigma de oprobio para que todos la reconocieran y se apartaran de su lado con asco” [71]). He also emphasizes that religion is the only antidote to a problem that finds no restraints in human nature (77-78).

As Pura Fernández has shown, nineteenth-century novels on prostitution often made connections to lesbianism (*Mujer* 200-01; *López Bago* 49). In addition to the manifestation of the homoerotic relationship between Estrella and Rosita in López Bago’s *Prostituta* series, Fernández cites the relationship between Delfina and Blanca in Remigio Vega Armentero’s *La Venus granadina* (1888); between Carmela and Julia in Enrique Sánchez Seña’s *Las ramerías de salón* (1886); and most famously between Nana and Satin in Emile Zola’s *Nana* (*Mujer* 201; *López Bago* 161). In *Marginal Subjects*, Tsuchiya underscores this connection in relation to nymphomania, criminality, autoeroticism, and the male gaze in the second novel of the *Prostituta* series: *La Pálida* (180-83). Many of these associations, as we have seen, have long standing historical precedents. What is new is the contemporary terminology employed to reframe prejudice and religious morality as a question of modern science. López Bago’s *La Pálida* is a good place to examine the prominent stereotype of the lesbian prostitute. While the naturalist author makes heavy use of a variety of the medical clichés already mentioned above, conspicuously absent are portrayals of the *marimacho/hermafrodita* or butch lesbian/intersex individual so frequently discussed in the hygiene manuals of the day.

The sexual relationship between Estrella and Rosita in *La Pálida* is between two young, beautiful, women. Both women’s turn to lesbianism is provoked by mistreatment by men and a lack of sanctioned outlets for their “healthy” heterosexual urges. Estrella, aka La Pálida, initially turns to prostitution (in the previous novel, *La prostituta*) because she was abused and molested by her alcoholic, working-class father. Later, her pimp, Arístides, aka El Chulo, prostitutes her for the first time, blindfolded, to the Marquis of Villaperdida, who immediately infects her with syphilis. El Chulo also murders her fiancé so that there are no impediments to his prostituting her. These events lead Estrella to sour on all men and desire

nothing less than to take revenge on the opposite sex. Thus, Estrella fits the mold of women who turn to lesbianism because of bad relationships with men. Indeed, the narrator stresses that for Estrella sex with men was nothing more than a commercial exchange, in contrast to her interactions with Rosita:

[Los hombres] [l]a pagaban para eso, y era necesario ganarse el jornal. Pero en cambio, viciado y pervertido su organismo cuando extinguía con la saciedad los brutales deseos del hombre, de los que no era partícipe, entregábase con voluptuosa delicia á lo monstruoso de sus grandes arrebatos con Rosita Pérez. (133)

The narrator also stresses that Rosita and Estrella's reasons for turning to each other were different since

en la viciada virginidad de la huérfana [Rosita] no se habían producido las repugnancias al hombre, que eran cada vez mayores en Estrella; y esto se explica y define fácilmente, en la Pálida por el hastío resultante de la prostitución, en Rosita por el histerismo de la doncellez, cuyos dos estados diversos concurrían al mismo fin. (135)

Indeed, in contrast to Estrella, Rosita is a sexually frustrated hysteric/nymphomaniac. Rosita's mother, doña Angustias, desires to maintain her status as a member of the bourgeoisie despite her severe reduction in income after her husband's death. Doña Angustias openly and unabashedly puts her daughter Rosita on the marriage market at the Café Nuevo del Siglo where Rosita allows herself to be courted by various suitors. While Rosita does not have sexual intercourse with these men, their romantic interactions, and the number of men with whom she becomes involved, are enough to gain her a reputation and ruin her prospects of marriage. Moreover, Rosita's enforced chastity (the narrator refers to her as virgin on several occasions), combined with the constant temptations by her various male suitors, cause a full-blown hysteria that swiftly metamorphosizes into a nymphomania that she attempts to satisfy through autoerotic activities (Tsuchiya 182). López Bago's narrators subscribe to the view, shared by many other doctors of his day, that unmet sexual urges that first manifest as hysteria, if not remedied, quickly transform into nymphomania (Smith, *Women, Mysticism, and Hysteria* 87-93). The same situation applies to Rosita: "¡Histérica, no! No eran aquellos los fenómenos propios del histerismo. Eran algo peor, algo más horrible, algo que no se saciaba con la hartura, una podre viciosa que consumía su carne, de la que sentía grandes rubores por los extraños deseos que la atormentaban" (101-02). Nevertheless, despite Rosita's progression from hysteria to nymphomania, the narrator continues to use both terms to define her illness throughout the novel, thereby failing to make any real clear delineation between the two. Regardless, it is Rosita's hysteria/nymphomania that leads her to initiate the sexual relationship with Estrella. When the latter tries to plant a kiss on Rosita's cheek, Rosita reciprocates with a kiss "en la boca, en el

cuello, en las orejas, en todas partes,” then “largo rato se complacieron en confundirse y ponerse al mismo nivel el cuerpo prostituido y el cuerpo virgen” (107).

Thus, the lesbian relationship occurs between a prostitute who has lost her ability to feel affection for men and a hysteric turned nymphomaniac desperate for a sexual outlet.⁷ However, neither Estrella nor Rosita is portrayed as a “hermaphrodite” or *marimacho*. Indeed, the absence of the masculine or trans lesbian typologies is conspicuous. In this way López Bago’s portrayal of lesbian women is more heterosexist than similar portrayals in canonical works such as those by Leopoldo Alas and Benito Pérez Galdós. Alas’s Doña Paula and Pérez Galdós’s *amazonas*, for example, clearly depict female masculinity (Smith “Female Masculinity”; Tsuchiya “Tarascas y amazonas”). The absence of masculine lesbians in a text about lesbian prostitutes not only suggests that butch or trans identities were not as readily tied to prostitution, hysteria, and nymphomania, but also that they were not desirable material for consumption by the implied male reader of López Bago’s works.⁸ Indeed, the *ménage à trois* with Estrella and Rosita, proposed and demanded by the Duque de Tres Estrellas at the end of *La Pálida*, serves as a metafictional reminder of the voyeuristic pleasures being derived from the observance of the homoerotic activities between Estrella and Rosita (253-54).

A similar dynamic unfolds in the third novel of López Bago’s *Cura* trilogy, *La monja*, where lesbianism is tied primarily to the convent life and mystical discourse. According to Fernández, “el convento toledano en que ingresa Melita es un gineceo donde se practica el lesbianismo y se castiga con la muerte a las desertoras” (49). Here again, just as in *La Pálida*, none of the lesbians embody the more masculine characteristics of the *marimacho* or “hermaphrodite.” All the nuns who populate the convent in Toledo are young, beautiful, and feminine. The mother superior, María Egipciaca de la Ascensión, “[e]ra mujer de treinta años recién cumplidos, blanca y de buen color, llena de carnes y fuerte” who “á pesar de [las] modestias del traje, estaba hermosa sobre toda ponderación” (58). The description of her feminine beauty is hypersexualized: full, moist, sensual lips; thick, black eyebrows; feminine voice; affectionate gestures; large breasts and hips (58-59). Apart from the thick eyebrows, suggestive of her nymphomania and lesbianism, she is not portrayed as masculine. Also, reenacting a narrative foot fetish, reminiscent of the one in the Holy Week procession scene in *La Regenta*, the narrator highlights Sor María Egipciaca’s tiny, white feet: “Iba descalza, no por ser la Regla, sino por voto especial. Los pies eran muy pequeños y blancos” (58).

The mistress of novices, Sor María Josefa de Consuelo, is even younger, only 23 years old. She, like all the nuns in the convent, is also exceptionally beautiful, with a few more masculine characteristics to highlight her lasciviousness:

⁷ Although she later seemingly falls for the Duque de Tres Estrellas.

⁸ For a discussion of the role of the male gaze in *La prostituta* series, see Tsuchiya’s chapter on the subject in *Marginal Subjects* (162-90).

Una palidez cálida y apasionada en su moreno rostro; grandes ojeras, que daban incitantes sombras á los brillante ojos negros; era no menos bien formada que la abadesa; más ágil y suelta, en razón de su mayor juventud; iba también descalza, [...]; manos y pies estaban muy bien cuidados; la toca blanquísima, ocultaba el cortado cabello, que dejaba traslucir en el lienzo su negrura intensa. Gruesa la nariz, de fosas nasales muy abiertas y móviles. La voz timbrada de contralto, aunque algo echada á perder por la costumbre de ganguear en los cantos del coro. Entre las novicias [Melita] no encontró ninguna fea. (70)

Although her black hair and eyes, large flaring nostrils, and contralto voice are masculine traits that suggest a voracious sexual appetite, she is not masculinized to the extent that she is unfeminine. Her youth, beauty, shapely figure, and well-manicured feet and hands make her conform to heterosexual standards of beauty. And, as Melita notes, all the other nuns are beautiful as well.

Unlike the exclusive relationship between Rosita and Estrella, the nuns sleep indiscriminately with each other:

Teniendo muy presente lo convenientísimo de no contraer amistades y predilecciones las hermanas las unas con otras, ni ella con cualquiera de las hermanas, había ordenado que cada noche fuesen distintas las parejas, y daba el ejemplo la superiora durmiendo á diario con una monja diferente. (80-81)

This is a clear parody of the language in convent rules and constitutions, examples of which Velasco cites in the Early Modern period. The implied message of such language was to warn against homoerotic relationships, but here it is reinterpreted as a rejection of monogamy in the nuns' condoned (and even required) sexual practices with each other. However, it is not only the language on the dangers of "amistades particulares" that is reinterpreted. In *La monja* mystical ecstasy is also recast as sexual climax. This doublespeak, absent in the relationship between Estrella and Rosita in *La Pálida*, allows the self-censoring narrator of *La monja* to depict the way the mistress of novices is able to induce the young, naïve Melita into the nuns' lesbian ways (108). Similar to *La Pálida*, however, is the way in which these young, beautiful, and feminine women perform homosexuality for the delectation of a masculine voyeur. Just as the male gaze is personified in *La Pálida* in the figure of the Duque de las Tres Estrellas, in *La monja*, the priest Román insinuates himself into the nuns' nightly activities.

The incorporation of Román into the nuns' sexual orgies also resembles a witches' sabbath with Román, frequently referred to as a faun because of his affliction with satyriasis, as the *macho cabrío* (Smith, *Women, Mysticism, and Hysteria* 99-104). Moreover, the nuns' sadistic treatment and brutal murder of Soledad, who is pregnant with Román's child, not only resembles a black mass (99-104) but connects to discourses on the supposed jealous and violent nature of nymphomaniacal lesbians. As we saw above, Suárez Casañ asserts that nymphomaniacal lesbians are the most dangerous of all, seemingly possessed by the devil, as they show no restraint in their depravity and violence (Suárez Casañ 57). The nuns' gruesome murder of Soledad, by burying her and her unborn child alive at the end of the novel, is an

unsettling representation of the supposed wickedness of lesbian nuns and their connection to evil and witchcraft, a connection that will be made again in Pardo Bazán's tale "Afra."

Even though neither *La Pálida* nor *La monja* portrays lesbianism as anatomically determined through representations of the masculine lesbian or "female hermaphrodite," both novels still inadvertently reaffirm the idea that the supposed perversion of lesbianism is a "normal" consequence of frustrated heterosexual urges.⁹ In *La Pálida* this is done both through the figures of Estrella and Rosita. Estrella, abused early on by the men in her life, initially turns to a woman for a source of release for the sexual desires she feels incapable of expressing with the opposite sex. Her earlier, non-consummated love affair with her fiancé, and her later relationship with the Duque de Tres Estrellas, show that her homosexual relationship merely served as a temporary substitute for her unsatisfied heterosexual desires. In an analogous way, Rosita turns to Estrella for a sexual relationship because, as a young virgin with sights on marriage, she has had no socially sanctioned outlets for her heterosexual desires. However, once the opportunity arises to fulfill those urges with a man, she drops her female lover. Similarly, in *La monja*, lesbianism is portrayed as a "natural" consequence in women deprived of heterosexual relations due to their cloistered lifestyle. Yet, again, once a man is incorporated into their sexual activities, there seems to be little opposition to forging heterosexual sexual relationships. In short, the ease with which these women substitute homosexual relations for heterosexual ones, and *vice versa*, suggests that the former is a "natural" substitution for the latter. Or, in Suárez Casañ's words, "si se busca el placer por el placer mismo, poco importa que este placer lo proporcione un individuo del mismo sexo" (64).

In contrast to López Bago's portrayal of lesbianism as perverted heterosexual desire as well as sexual titillation for the male gaze, a portrayal that shuns discourses on gender fluidity, masculine/feminine (butch/femme) dichotomies, and "hermaphroditism" (intersex individuals), Pardo Bazán, in her 1894 story "Afra," figures a masculine lesbian as the eponymous character of a story about a bisexual love triangle. The story tells of two close female friends, Afra and Flora, whose relationship is challenged when Flora becomes engaged to her cousin. Shortly after the engagement, Flora meets her death when the two women go swimming together in rough waters. Susan Walter rightly notes that the narrative frame, comprised of two unreliable male narrators, forces the reader to "actively work to fully understand the story" (15). However, while for Walter the principal enigma of the story is whether Afra is guilty of murdering Flora, another enigma of just as great consequence is whether Afra was in love with Flora or with Flora's fiancé.

The initial first-person, extradiegetic narrator opens the story by relating how he came to Marianeda to admire the beauty of the women. A 25-year-old man, he spends his time in the theater using his binoculars to observe the *mujerío* in the balconies, rather than pay attention to *La bruja*, the zarzuela being enacted on stage (307). As his binoculars pan the female attendees, his gaze falls upon Afra Reyes, who contrasts markedly with

⁹ Rodríguez de Rivera cites a similar dynamic in the sicaliptic literature of the early twentieth century: "In spite of their prominence in sicaliptic novelettes, lesbian liaisons are customarily depicted in a negative light, as the consolation for a failed marriage, the overture to a heterosexual encounter, or the only available form of solace in the absence of men" (80).

the other fair, feminine beauties in the audience. Her “cejas negrísimas, casi juntas,” “nariz de [...] alas movibles,” “cara de corte severo, casi viril,” “casco de trenzas de un negro de tinta,” and “acentuada barbilla,” alarm the first narrator for their clear message of strength, which communicate not feminine passivity, but masculine assertiveness: “Aquella fisonomía, sin dejar de atraer, alarmaba, pues era de las que dicen a las claras desde el primer momento a quien las contempla: ‘Soy una voluntad. Puedo torcerme, pero no quebrantarme. Debajo del elegante maniquí femenino escondo el acerado resorte de un alma’” (307). Afra’s colorless complexion, thick black hair and eyebrows racialize Afra Reyes, as does her very name, which evokes the image of an African queen. Buttressing this masculine image of Afra, Castro informs his friend that Afra was educated for a time in “un colegio inglés,” a detail in and of itself that was associated with same-sex practices in women (Cleminson and Molina Araloytia 120). Indeed, this English education manifests itself in Afra as a strong sense of independence and in a predilection for rigorous physical exercise: “el barniz de Inglaterra se le conocía: traía ciertos gustos de independencia y mucha afición a los ejercicios corporales. Cuando llegó la época de los baños no se habló en el pueblo sino de su destreza y vigor para nadar: una cosa sorprendente” (309).

While the initial narrator’s gaze is fixated on Afra, Alberto Castro, a friend and fellow naval officer interrupts him. This second, unreliable, extradiegetic narrator feels the need to inform his friend that no man has ever had success with Afra:

es de las muchachas más formales y menos coquetas que se encuentran por ahí. Nadie se puede alabar de que Afra le devuelva una miradita, o le diga una palabra de esas que dan ánimos. Y si no, haz la prueba: dedícate a ella; mírala más; ni siquiera se dignará volver la cabeza. Te aseguro que he visto a muchos que anduvieron locos y no pudieron conseguir ni una ojeada de Afra Reyes. (308)

Despite Castro’s characterization of Afra as serious and reserved in her romantic relationships, he fails to consider another reason for her behavior: her lack of sexual attraction to men. Insisting on reading Afra’s indifference to men’s advances as signs of her “honra” and “pureza,” he consistently proves himself unable to fathom the possibility that Afra had had a love affair with Flora Castillo (308).

Castro sets up the story of the love triangle by emphasizing the close relationship between Afra and Flora before the arrival of Flora’s suitor:

Afra era amiga íntima, inseparable, de otra señorita de aquí: Flora Castillo; la intimidad de las dos muchachas continuaba la de sus familiares. Se pasaban el día juntas; no salía la una si no la acompañaba la otra; vestían igual y se enseñaban, riendo, las cartas amorosas que les escribían. No tenían novio, ni siquiera notaban predilección por nadie. (309)

The women’s close friendship read in light of contemporary discourses warning against unsupervised intimate relationships between women makes their friendship suspect. Not

only have we seen a parody of religious discourses on the topic in López Bago's *La monja*, but Suárez Casañ's opens *El amor lesbio* with a dire warning against unsupervised, intimate friendships between young women (vi-vii). Moreover, the passage above shows Afra and Flora's prioritization of their own relationship over interactions with men as they giggle over the love letters men send them and show no interest in the prospect of a male suitor.

However, the women's exclusive relationship is disrupted when Flora's cousin comes to town. According to Castro, everyone initially thought the naval officer had his eyes on Afra and that Afra reciprocated his feelings because "los ojos de Afra no se apartaban del galán, y al hablarle, la emoción profunda se conocía hasta en el anhelo de la respiración y en lo velado de la voz" (309). While such signs could signal a romantic interest, they could also signal the jealousy inspired by a competitor for Flora's love and attention. Castro tells his interlocutor that when Flora and her cousin became engaged, Afra, although sad, accepted the situation (309). Yet, only a month later, Afra oddly insists that Flora venture out into the rough waters with her for a swim even though "la rubia y tímida Flora, sintió miedo al ver el aspecto amenazador de las grandes olas verdes que rompían contra el arenal" (309). Afra, covered in scratches and bruises and screaming for help, returns to shore without Flora, whose injured cadaver resurfaces the next day. While Afra insists that her effort to save Flora failed when Flora hit her head on the keel of a sunken ocean liner, the idea that Afra murdered Flora persists.

Afra's version of events is clearly suspect since she had motive for the murder (jealousy), she initiated the venture out to sea despite the rough waters, she was an exceptional swimmer and should have been able to save the drowning Flora, and she returns from the escapade covered in scratches and bruises that imply a struggle with Flora. Moreover, Afra and Flora represent the butch/femme dynamic with Afra cast as a scorned *marimacho* who becomes violent and jealous when the "rubia y tímida Flora" abandons her for a man. This adheres to Suárez Casañ's assertions about the supposedly jealous and violent nature of masculine lesbians and the supposed bisexuality of feminine lesbians who tend to turn to lesbianism only at the urging of the *marimacho* (55). Additionally, the intertext with *La bruja*, and its insinuation of witchcraft, is key. As Walter notes, Castro takes his friend from one stage (where the zarzuela of *La bruja* is being performed) to another, the docks near the water where Flora's death took place (307). Afra's luring of Flora into the deadly waters also ties Afra to another kind of witch, the mythological siren (Ashworth 110, 115). While in Greek mythology only men, specifically sailors like the naval officer who courts Flora and the men who tell and listen to Afra's story, are susceptible to the siren's song, here the naval officers are immune. Rather it is a woman, Flora, who appears to have been lured into the ocean, and to her death, by the siren's song. While critics have tended to analyze the unreliable framed narration in terms of its imputation of Afra's guilt (Ashworth 110, Walter 14-15), Castro does not pass judgment. Moreover, one doubts whether his judgment would be worth much considering his obliviousness to all the indications of the implied homoerotic relationship between the two women. Rather he ends his story with an ellipsis

on the question of Afra's guilt and concludes with: "acuérdate de lo que dice la Sabiduría: 'El corazón del hombre..., selva oscura. ¡Figúrate el de la mujer!'" (309).

Interestingly, a modified version of this same saying ("los misterios del corazón humano, selva oscura, que dijo la sabiduría") makes its way into Pardo Bazán's discussion of the first gay marriage in Spain. In "Sobre ascuas," which appeared in her regular column in *La Ilustración Artística* on July 8, 1901, Pardo Bazán writes about the scandal produced by the marriage between Mario Sánchez and Marcela Gracia Ibeas in A Coruña, when it was discovered that Mario Sánchez had been born Elisa Sánchez Loriga. With great irony and rhetorical strategy, as Joyce Tolliver notes, Pardo Bazán belies her own comment about the unprecedented nature of the situation by providing four concrete examples from history of similar cases, among them, that of Catalina de Erauso (Tolliver 752). Though Pardo Bazán refers to both Mario/Elisa and la Monja Alférez as "una equivocación de la naturaleza," she simultaneously praises their skill in acquiring the legal rights and status of a man ("Sobre ascuas" 442).¹⁰ She concludes that these matters cannot be solved collectively because one's sexual identity "Es del fuero de la conciencia y cada cual lo resuelve sin coacción posible" and exhorts Spaniards to stop foolishly thinking they are the only ones in Europe to have seen such a case ("Sobre ascuas" 442). Put otherwise, Pardo Bazán also makes the case for the acceptance of these women's relationship.

Unlike Suárez Casañ or López Bago who argue that lesbianism is natural but pathological (and therefore also unnatural), Pardo Bazán abandons biological determinism or questions of "nature" altogether to assert that sexual preference and gender identity are matters to be resolved only by one's own conscience. Moreover, her historical account of similar cases of exceptional individuals effectively puts into question the idea that such people are necessarily perverted or depraved. In light of this journalistic piece, "Afra," written seven years earlier, could be read as a corrective to literary representations of lesbians as frustrated and victimized heterosexual women (à la López Bago). While Afra is not to be lauded for her jealousy or violence within the story, on a literary and cultural level she serves as a repudiation of a heterosexist literary canon and culture. She successfully thwarts the phallic gaze and is the active perpetrator, rather than the passive victim, of an apparent honor killing, a privileged theme of Spanish fiction. "Afra" as a dark celebration of the power of masculine women and witches puts the usually pathologized *marimacho* or "female hermaphrodite" front and center as she proclaims, "Soy una voluntad. Puedo torcerme, pero no quebrantarme."

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¹⁰ In the case of Mario/Elisa, she writes: "Declaro que, para conseguir esta transmigración de hembra a hombre [...] se necesita una habilidad extraordinaria, y que quien la ha realizado, cualesquiera que sean sus fines, no es un ser vulgar" ("Sobre ascuas" 442).

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