

## Women, Mysticism and Alternative Technologies of the Self in Selected Writings of Emilia Pardo Bazán

According to Elaine Pagels, the main difference between orthodox Christianity and gnosticism has to do with the understanding of Jesus's divinity (*Gnostic xx*). For orthodox Christians, Jesus is divine in a way that humans could never be (xx).<sup>1</sup> It is therefore hubris to believe that one could ever reach a Christ-like state. In contrast, the gnostics believed that all humans had divine potential that simply needed to be developed by following the teachings of Jesus (xx). Thus the gnostics encouraged their followers to emulate Christ, whereas for orthodox Christians this was the worst of all heresies. This different understanding of Jesus's divinity led to a major difference between the two traditions' teachings on Jesus's role in human salvation. According to orthodox Christians, Jesus came to earth and sacrificed himself in order to cleanse us of our sins and lead us to salvation. Since Jesus did for us what we never could have done for ourselves, we are not in a position to try to emulate Him. In the gnostic tradition, however, Jesus came as a teacher to show us the way to enlightenment and salvation. The gnostics believed that by following Jesus's model we could all come to experience spiritual death and resurrection during our lifetime. The ultimate objective of gnostic teaching was to discover the Christ within us.

Although the Catholic Church effectively suppressed gnosticism, similar mystical teachings have reappeared throughout history at different times and on different soils. In the case of Spain, for example, there are many similarities between the teachings of Saint Teresa of Ávila and the *alumbrados* and those of the gnostics. Like the gnostics, both Saint Teresa and the *alumbrados* claimed to be able to reach a state of perfection and experience union with God. Unlike orthodox Christians, they believed in their own divine potential. However, while both heretical mystics such as the *alumbrados*, and those who would later be canonized, like Saint Teresa of Ávila, shared certain beliefs and practices

with the gnostics, the similarities are greater between the gnostics and heretical groups since mystics within the Church had to try to make their beliefs and practices conform to Church doctrine (Pagels, *Beyond* 75). Nevertheless, both forms of mysticism are in defiance of orthodox Christianity and Church authority, which can account for why the Inquisition also investigated mystics within the Church such as Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross.

Michel Foucault, in his documentation of technologies of the self from the pagan to the Christian era, reveals the same differences in the understanding of the relation of the individual to authority as can be seen between the gnostic and orthodox Christian traditions.<sup>2</sup> According to Foucault, during the pagan and early Christian period (the first two centuries AD—when gnostic teachings still had not been declared heresies) technologies of the self were more concerned with caring for the self rather than in knowing the self. In other words, one was to study one's conscience and personal conduct in order to improve upon them. Although one often made use of a teacher or mentor in this process, the ultimate objective was to reach a state of autonomy in which one no longer needed to submit to an authority. A student studied under a master until the student had internalized the teachings and made them part of his/her behavior. At this point, the student became autonomous and no longer needed a master (Foucault 246). However, in later orthodox Christian technologies of the self, one sought to know the self by acknowledging one's essentially sinful nature. Confession was the principal practice of revealing this true self. Unlike in the pagan and early Christian traditions, the objective of this sacrament was not necessarily to improve upon oneself but rather to recognize the baseness of one's nature and consequent need for guidance and submission to authority. For this reason, under this tradition, a state of autonomy was never reached. Because all humans were sinners, an orthodox Christian had to continually show humility and subservience towards Church authority; one did not seek to obtain autonomy through self-perfection (Foucault 246). Thus while in many of the early Christian traditions, self-cultivation was a process which, if successful, resulted in the individual's independence from the master, in the orthodox Christian tradition, the individual always remained subjected to institutional authority. Pagels recognizes this same difference between gnostic and orthodox Christian teaching when she stresses that the hierarchical

relationship of the student to the master was always temporary for the gnostics, even when that teacher was Christ himself (*Gnostic* 131).

While the gnostic and mystical idea that the perfection of the self leads to a state of autonomy did not take hold in the Catholic Church, it did appeal to Emilia Pardo Bazán who, in her discussion of lyricism in *El lirismo en la poesía francesa*, argues that freedom from institutional authority is a privilege earned through education and self-cultivation.<sup>3</sup> This concept, fundamental to mystical theology, accounts for Pardo Bazán's view of mysticism as a viable path for female emancipation. It explains why, in her fight for woman's rights, the Galician writer emphasized the issue of equal education for women. It also provides insight into Pardo Bazán's interest in hagiography as well as her decision to write about female mysticism in her last published novel, *Dulce dueño* (1911). In the present study I explore Pardo Bazán's belief that education provided the tools, and mystical theology the philosophical basis and model for personal emancipation for women. First I examine *Lirismo en la poesía francesa* in order to show the relationship between Pardo Bazán's philosophy of self-autonomy and its similarity to early Christian technologies of the self, as outlined by Pagels and Foucault. I then turn my attention to "La educación del hombre y la mujer," a speech Pardo Bazán gave in defense of women's right to equal education, delivered twenty-four years before she taught her course on lyricism, in order to explain Pardo Bazán's philosophy of education, her belief in its fundamental role in personal emancipation as well as its relation to Christian teachings. Finally, I turn my attention to *Dulce dueño* in order to demonstrate the way in which Doña Emilia's ideas play themselves out in the novel.

### *El lirismo en la poesía francesa*

Pardo Bazán defines lyricism as individualistic and sentimental expression. She stresses the individualistic, or anarchistic, aspect of lyricism and writes that: "el lirismo es la afirmación del individuo, no diré que siempre contra la sociedad, pero siempre sin tomarla en cuenta, y muchas veces protestando contra ella tácita o explícitamente" (*Lirismo* 14). She does not reject the subversive element of lyrical expression, but rather embraces it as both a source of artistic beauty and as a means

of edifying society. She claims that a desire to break free from cultural restrictions has inspired many great artistic and literary works (25–26). She also argues that certain individuals, through their social criticism, have been able to improve their respective societies (246).

However, Pardo Bazán asserts that the right to criticize and defy society should be a privilege of the highly cultivated individual and not necessarily of anyone. This becomes clear in her discussion of what she perceives to be the dangerous nature of the lyricism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. According to Pardo Bazán, although lyricism did not begin with Rousseau, he was its modern initiator, and was therefore extremely influential in the formation of the romantic movement. As in all lyrical traditions, Rousseau exalts the individual over the group. Nevertheless, for Rousseau, the right to rebel against society is granted to anyone faithful to his/her instincts. In other words, Rousseau believes that in following one's nature the individual is superior to society, which is an inherently evil and oppressive institution (79). With Rousseau, the individual is not granted the authority to contravene society because s/he has demonstrated a certain degree of discipline and competence but rather because s/he is naturally good and society is unnatural and corrupt. For Pardo Bazán this celebration of "natural man" is an exaltation of the characteristics that make human beings similar to animals rather than of those which distinguish us from the rest of the animal kingdom. She fears that this sanctioning of our baser instincts will inevitably result in the decline, rather than in the edification, of society.

From her criticism of Rousseau, it is clear that Pardo Bazán felt that the right to challenge social norms should be a privilege earned by those who had learned to dominate their baser instincts (*Lirismo* 248–49). Only the subversive message of the educated and disciplined intellectual was worthy of being received and considered. She believed that giving everyone who acted intuitively the freedom to do as he or she pleased would be to condone even the most vile and criminal behavior (240–41). For Pardo Bazán, even exceptional individuals should hold themselves subject to morality in order to avoid a sort of over-exalted individualism that could be the consequence if they came to believe that they had earned the right to give free reign to any of their passions (237–49). According to Pardo Bazán the lack of moral restraint and humility before a higher ideal accounted for the perversions of the

elite decadent artists who had come to: "proponer, en tiempos más recientes, como ideal la perversidad, y como criterio de belleza la misma corrupción de las almas, refinada artísticamente" (247).

Pardo Bazán ties the beginning of the decline of lyricism in the 1840s with the turning away from the literary movement of romanticism (25). Nevertheless, she points out that after approximately forty years of obsolescence, romantic lyricism arose again in the literary movement of *décadence*: "Nadie ignora que si el romanticismo como escuela literaria había muerto hacia 1850, como escuela literaria reapareció hacia 1889 bajo otros nombres variados, entre los cuales prevaleció el de *decadentismo*" (25). Out of a desire to create an art that depicted life in its spiritual as well as physical aspects, decadent artists tended to underscore the limitations of reason and science. Pardo Bazán was attracted to this movement precisely because it defied the materialism of the age and emphasized the mystical and spiritual elements of existence. In "El porvenir de la literatura después de la guerra," a lecture given at the Residencia de Estudiantes in 1916, the same year as her course on lyricism, she claimed that the decadent movement had been able to "reaccionar plenamente contra las limitaciones del naturalismo y añadir cuerdas a la lira de las emociones místicas, amorosas y sentimentales, revelando aspectos nuevos de la belleza, del alma y del infinito" (1549). Particularly appealing to Pardo Bazán was that the lyricism of *décadence*, in contrast to that of the romantic movement, was expressed by a superior, cultivated individual who contravened nature and bourgeois, modern society rather than by "natural man" who, by following his instincts and passions, instinctively broke rules necessary to uphold a civilized society. While Pardo Bazán had rejected the barbarism of romanticism and the reductive materiality of naturalism, *décadence* appeared as a movement more in keeping with her own ideas, despite her objections to some of its perversions, as will be discussed in more detail later.

Pardo Bazán saw Christianity, particularly early Christianity, as a perfect example of lyricism. She pointed to the years leading up to the formation of the Catholic Church in the fourth century as a time in which lyricism flourished because this was a period in which Christianity was a persecuted religion with a revolutionary spirit. It was a time in which Christians represented a marginalized segment of society. In their struggle to maintain their faith, the early Christians had to assert

their individualism against the official religious beliefs of Roman society (*Lirismo* 34). Up until the time of the conversion of Constantine, Christianity was a heresy, and heresy by its very nature was lyrical because it was the voice of divergent thought. However, the formation of a universal, or "catholic," church with a monolithic doctrine was contrary to the lyrical origins of Christianity: "Lo que propiamente se ha llamado la Iglesia, la ortodoxia y la jerarquía eclesiástica, si no son abiertamente opuestas al lirismo, representan lo que puede contenerle y reprimirle o encauzarle" (*Lirismo* 36).<sup>4</sup> Yet, Pardo Bazán recognized that even after the formation of an official Catholic Church, lyrical voices reemerged in the various heretical and reform movements that arose afterwards (36–37). Interestingly, the Church came to embrace many of these mystics and reformers through the establishment of a hagiographic tradition that recounted their defiance and lyrical expression. Thus even though orthodox Christianity in general opposed individualism, paradoxically, it celebrated its own "heretical" history formed by early Church martyrs who fought against Roman society and later mystics and reformers who rebelled against the Church itself:

Los gémenes líricos se revelan en la herejías, tan numerosas, ya desde los primeros siglos de la Iglesia. El sopro emancipador de la conciencia individual había sido tan fuerte, tan huracanado, que las individualidades sublevadas contra la organización religiosa se contaron por centenares de millares. He aquí cómo podemos ver en cada heresiarca un lírico, y no sólo en los heresiarcas, sino también en los renovadores dentro de la ortodoxia. (36–37)

Furthermore, although the Church had historically excluded women from positions of authority within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, women's prominence in early Church history, as well as in their roles as mystics and saints revealed a space within the Church where women had, and could, assume leadership roles. Thus Pardo Bazán clearly embraced the hagiographic tradition because she saw examples of women who were able to realize themselves in that environment. Mysticism also appealed to her because it allowed for a unique kind of self-assertion, like the lyricism that she endorsed. Through discipline, virtue, education and submission to God, female mystics had earned the authority to contravene the rules of society and to forge new paths. It was a venue for the exceptional woman to perfect and show off her talents.

Nevertheless, there is a seeming contradiction between the mystic's humility and complete subordination to God, and her self-assertion and defiance of society. How could mysticism allow for the bolstering of the ego and the affirmation of one's superiority while at the same time insist on complete subservience to God? This is precisely where the paradoxical nature of mysticism lends itself to both the affirmation of the privileges of exceptional individuals as well as the requirement that they must govern their baser instincts. As Pardo Bazán argues in *Lirismo en la poesía francesa*, adherence to morality and ideals was a prerequisite for personal emancipation. Thus for Pardo Bazán, it is precisely the state of perfection of the female mystic and her humility before God that both gave her the authority to contravene societal norms and the means of keeping in check the perversions of exaggerated egoism. This is Pardo Bazán's correction to the fall into immorality of some of the decadent artists and the lesson the protagonist of *Dulce dueño* will have to learn in order to assert her individuality.

### "La educación del hombre y de la mujer"

Pardo Bazán's views on education are fundamental to her understanding of women's potential for self-realization, Christianity and the individual's relation to society. In "La educación del hombre y de la mujer" (1892) Doña Emilia elaborates on her conception of the role of education in improving both the individual and society. She argues that learning is the very essence of life itself ("el ser humano tanto vive cuanto se educa" [16]) and that education has as its aim the perfection of the self (18). She objects, however, to the fact that while education for men is based on the positive belief in the perfectibility of human nature since it allows men to develop all their intellectual skills to the best of their ability, education for women is based on a pessimistic view of women's nature and prefers to foster obedience to authority, rather than true intellectual growth and independence (20; 51). These same differences are seen in early Christian and orthodox Christian technologies of the self. As we saw earlier, the gnostics had a positive view of human nature in that they believed that it was possible for the individual to reach a state of enlightenment, self-mastery and autonomy. Orthodox Christianity, however, held that human beings could not rise above

their essentially sinful nature and therefore always needed to submit to the authority of the Church. Pardo Bazán saw these same distinctions between the education of men and women. While men were given the opportunity to educate themselves to the best of their abilities in the hopes of reaching a state of self-perfection (“la educación masculina se inspira en el postulado optimista, ó sea la fe en la perfectibilidad de la naturaleza humana” [19]), the lack of belief in women’s ability to rise above their inferior natures, led to women simply being trained in “la obediencia, la pasividad y la sumisión” (51):

Es la educación de la mujer preventiva y represiva hasta la ignominia; parte del supuesto del mal, nace de la sospecha, nútrese en los celos, inspírase en la desconfianza, y tiende á impedir ó á creer buena y cándidamente que impide las transgresiones de la moral sexual por el mismo procedimiento mecánico de los grillos puestos al delincuente para que no pueda dañar. La educación positiva, de instrucción y dirección, verdadera guía de la vida humana, está vedada á la mujer. (51–52)

Thus throughout her speech, Pardo Bazán argues that women, as individuals and representatives of humanity, have just as much right as men to a “positive” education in which they are given the opportunity for self-realization and autonomy. Pardo Bazán recognizes, however, that only a minority of people, of either sex, will ever reach such a state. Arguing that most people are of mediocre intelligence and/or character, all other factors being equal, only exceptional individuals would rise to the top: “Iguálense las condiciones, y libre evolución hará los demás” (44). Thus, for Pardo Bazán, a just society was one in which superior talent was recognized and in which all individuals were given the tools, primarily education and the opportunity for social participation, to improve oneself. However, by closing off such opportunities for women, society was inhibiting personal female development by forcing many great female minds to languish in the stagnant environment of domestic life. Unlike a man, a woman who yearned for more was restricted by a lack of opportunity (*Lirismo* 270).

In the same speech Pardo Bazán argues that Christianity itself had not only asserted the equality of men and women’s souls, but the right of every individual to exercise free will: “La gran 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” (“La educación” 36). She also points



out that Church history has provided examples of women exercising such freedom to the benefit of themselves and society as a whole. As in *Lirismo en la poesía francesa*, she cites early Church martyrs and mystics as examples of consummate women who assumed leadership roles within the Church and society:

El Cristianismo, en su pureza, en su íntima esencia, tan afirmativa de la dignidad humana, contiene el principio armónico que puede conciliar á las dos mitades de la humanidad. Dentro de la Iglesia, las mártires han sellado con su sangre la independendencia espiritual; las predicadoras como Santa Rosa de Viterbo y las heroínas como la pastora de Orleans, han confirmado su acción social y política; las doctoras como Santa Teresa, su plenitud intelectual, y hasta—á pesar de las palabras de San Pablo,—su función docente. (38)

Thus, for Pardo Bazán, Christianity not only asserted the equality of the sexes and the right of every individual, regardless of sex, to make important choices regarding the direction of one's own life, but it also provided many examples of highly intelligent women who were able to do so successfully and rise to positions of power.

### *Dulce dueño*

Much of the commentary surrounding Emilia Pardo Bazán's last published novel, *Dulce dueño* (1911), is critical of the mystical conversion of the narrator/protagonist. Phoebe Porter Medina asserts that Pardo Bazán creates a female *décadente* whose cult of the self, related through Lina Mascareñas's first-person narration, is ultimately undermined by the implied author who, through Lina's fall into madness (not mysticism), conveys the message that "the individual cannot succeed in transcending the problems of origin and heredity" (244). Marina Mayoral, in her introduction to the novel, complains of what she sees as a lack of verisimilitude in the final spiritual conversion of Lina Mascareñas (39). David Henn criticizes it for being a "rather traditional remedy" (398). Lou Channon-Deutsch reads the ending as a punishment of the superior woman who refuses "to be satisfied with what conventional society expects will make women happy" (*Narratives* 176). She goes on to add that Lina's mystical conversion is "an exaggerated representation of women's total submission to the masculine will" that "marks the death

of the self" (*Narratives* 178). Similarly, Raquel Medina believes that the ending converts the novel into a plea for morality in which there is no liberation for a female subject who ultimately becomes both a slave to a patriarchal God and a hysteric locked inside a mental institution (302). Susan Kirkpatrick, although more sympathetic and receptive to the novel's attempt to redefine the female subject, argues that the ending of the novel, the female's submission to God, the supreme patriarch, keeps intact the male/female gender binary that earlier parts of the novel seem to deconstruct ("Gender" 134; *Mujer* 125).<sup>5</sup>

Maryellen Bieder was the first critic to read the ending itself as somewhat subversive. In "Intertextualizing Genre: Ambiguity as Narrative Strategy in Emilia Pardo Bazán" Bieder argues that hagiography is merely one of the various competing genres in the text that serve to destabilize gender constructs. In another article published the same year, she claims that the novel emphasizes the incompatibility of marriage with the emancipation of women and that Lina's ultimate withdrawal from society allows her to assume a space of her own in which she can write ("Emilia Pardo Bazán y la emergencia" 96). In her most recent article on the novel, Bieder argues that the mystical discourse is "un discurso de apoderamiento que libera a la mujer de los hombres y de las instituciones dominantes a la vez que la subordina" ("Divina y perversa" 15). Continuing in this vein, Pau Pitarch Fernández, Carmen Pereira-Muro, Kathy Bacon and Cristina Sánchez-Conejero have explored in more detail the subversive aspects of the mystical references. Pitarch Fernández argues that Lina's mystical narrative creates an individualized space in which she can attempt to artistically recreate herself (194). Pereira-Muro, building on the ideas of Luce Irigaray, affirms that the mystical discourse can be seen as a type of *écriture féminine* that rejects phallogocentrism and asserts a fluid, feminine subjectivity. In her book *Negotiating Sainthood*, Bacon argues that Lina makes use of the misogynist narrative of saintly martyrdom by rewriting it and appropriating it "for her own ends" (161). Most recently, Cristina Sánchez-Conejero shows how the mystical discourse in the novel contributes to an interdiscursive postmodern hybridity that renders the novel impossible to classify. Following the lead of Bacon, Bieder, Pereira-Muro and Pitarch Fernández, I shall argue that the protagonist and narrator of *Dulce dueño*, Lina Mascareñas, is a female *décadente* who turns to mysticism in an attempt to distinguish herself as a superior individual. While

she initially attempts to refine her existence through luxury, artistic refinement and the pursuit of ideal love, her efforts are thwarted both by a society that insists that a woman's biology determine her social destiny, as well as by Lina's own egotism and consequent moral depravity. However, through her mystical conversion the narrator/protagonist is finally able to realize herself by dominating her baser instincts and eluding oppressive cultural discourses on gender.

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Spain, the female body, which was being read or studied through the scientific "knowledge" of the time, served as a referential sign for the essence of woman. Greatly due to the influence of Positivism, science sought to understand the female in terms of her material being. According to Peter Brooks, "the rise of materialism as a philosophical position made the body, in the absence of any transcendent principle beyond nature, the substance to which any metaphysical speculation must ultimately return as the precondition of mind" (34). Thus women's mental and spiritual existence, that which could be considered the non-material aspect of their being, was now understood in terms of women's material existence. This was more restricting for women than for men since the female's role in reproduction was used as a means of restricting her *raison d'être* exclusively to marriage and motherhood. Out of this understanding of women, an abundance of discourses arose on the illness of hysteria. In Spain, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, hysteria was still considered to be primarily a female disease that originated in the female reproductive organs (Jago, "Sexo y género" 342). The most disturbing aspect of the diagnosis of this disease was that it encompassed an extremely wide range of symptoms, some quite serious, such as paralysis and epileptic seizures, and others somewhat more ambiguous, such as arrogance and rebelliousness. According to Catherine Jago, a woman could be diagnosed as a hysteric simply for refusing to fulfill the conventional obligations of her sex and class ("Sexo y género" 344). Thus the diagnosing of hysteria was, at least in part, a way to control women and to uphold traditional gender roles.

These scientific readings of the female body worked together with social and legal texts to further solidify woman's "natural" role in society as that of wife, mother, and homemaker. A woman's biological function was directly linked to her social destiny. In an attempt to codify the natural role of women, the domestic woman was idealized

as the *ángel del hogar* in a wide range of social texts (Jagoé, "La misión" 23–24). Women who did not conform to this ideal were portrayed as depraved, unnatural and/or hysterical. The Spanish legal system also played its role in solidifying these social norms. Women's dependence on men was ensured by laws that made it nearly impossible for women to act independently. According to the *Código Civil* of 1889, within a marriage a woman was required to get approval from her husband before making any sort of monetary decisions, even if it involved assets that belonged to her before entering the marriage (Enríquez de Salamanca 236).<sup>6</sup> The *Código Civil* of 1889 actually made it a crime for a woman to disobey her husband on any matter (Enríquez de Salamanca 240). While similar laws existed before the *Código Civil* of 1889, by having redefined the subject as a free, rational individual who is proprietor of both his own body and property, and by denying women these very rights, the liberal regimes converted woman into an inferior and incomplete subject before the law (Enríquez de Salamanca 224, 236). Indeed single women under 25 were not allowed to leave their father's home; the greatest legal freedom was granted to the exceptional case of a single woman with wealth and over the age of 25 (Jagoé, Blanco and Enríquez de Salamanca 268). This happens to be precisely the position of Lina Mascareñas. However, this freedom was still greatly limited, as we have seen, by a society that viewed women who did not assimilate these new bourgeois values as deviants and hysterics.

It is in this social milieu that Lina attempts to redefine herself as the superior woman who is allowed to defy social conventions. Due to the death of her half-brother Diego, Lina, the illegitimate daughter of doña Catalina Mascareñas y Lacunza de Céspedes, becomes the sole heir to her mother's fortune. Favored by her newly acquired economic status and her civil status as a single woman over the age of 25, Lina believes that she is immune to the discourses that define and control the married, middle-class woman. Toward the beginning of the novel she proclaims that "La mujer que posee un capital, debe considerarse tan fuerte como el varón" (*Dulce dueño* 136). She also makes it clear that for her, marriage is a social institution that has nothing to do with love and merely serves to imprison women. For Lina, marriage not only results in the male's usurpation of a woman's property, but also of her body and soul, the latter being of utmost importance to the novel's protagonist (178). When don Antón de Polilla, an older male friend from the villa in which Lina grew up, also tries to steer her toward marriage by

proclaiming that love is women's biological destiny, she is quick to point out that love and marriage are not the same thing: "¿Y se ha enterado usted de que no hablábamos de amor, sino de matrimonio?" (136).

Having abandoned marriage and maternity as her life's goals, Lina embarks on a search for personal refinement and ideal love. Unlike society's understanding of love as a natural drive which leads us into marriage and parenthood, Lina views love as an escape from the material world. Although she gets a taste of this love at a performance of Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*, her search for love, in the form of a real male companion, is fruitless (152).<sup>7</sup> Not only does she show herself to be intellectually superior to her male suitors but she also quickly recognizes that they are unable to view her as an equal. Her first suitor, Hilario Aparicio, lacks Lina's material refinement and reveals his mundane ideas about love by making it clear that for him, love is synonymous with the reproductive instinct. The second suitor is no better. As Lina soon finds out, her uncle Juan Clímaco wants her to marry his son, Juan María, so that he can have access to her wealth. But, even before Lina is made aware of her uncle's objectives, she views José María as her inferior. She points to his lack of intellect by portraying him as a stereotypical Andalusian man, whose "pensamiento no va más allá del sensualismo de su raza" (190). While Lina admits to the physical desire he arouses in her, she realizes that this allure, although powerful, is not the same as the ideal love she seeks. And her belief is affirmed when she sees her cousin coming out of her female servant's room. This proves to Lina that José María's attraction to her was the same instinctual attraction he feels toward all women.

The third suitor, Agustín Almonte, is perhaps the most ingenious. Aware of Lina's aversion to marriage and sexual union, Almonte attempts to win Lina over by convincing her that they are bound together by friendship and their innate superiority. Lina is attracted by this idea and Almonte becomes her platonic companion. However, the nature of their relationship makes it difficult for Almonte to convince Lina to marry him. He eventually begins to profess a passionate love for Lina, a love so selfless that he claims that he would give his life for her. Not overly convinced by Almonte's words, Lina decides to test them by placing him in a situation where he would have to risk his life to save her. During a boat ride on their vacation in Switzerland, a storm sweeps the two of them into the treacherous waters of the lake. Almonte strikes

Lina in the face and pushes her away, in an attempt to save himself, rather than rescue her. His efforts to survive fail and he drowns in the lake while Lina is pulled out of the water by the boatman. Therefore, Lina discovers that her suitor has only paid lip service to her lofty ideals of love in order to marry her and take control of her purse. Lina comes to realize that, despite her education, refinement, civil status, and economic independence, she has been unable to find a male companion who truly considers her an equal. She also discovers the dangers of her over-exalted individualism as she comes to feel the pangs of guilt for being largely responsible for Almonte's death.

Having failed to find satisfaction in egotism and romantic love, Lina begins a search for spiritual perfection following the hagiographical model provided by Saint Catherine of Alexandria. The novel opens with the story of the conversion and martyrdom of Saint Catherine, a female Christian saint renowned for her great erudition and thereby exemplifying many of Pardo Bazán's ideas on female emancipation, education and Christianity. According to legend, Saint Catherine successfully debated the wisest philosophers in the region. Her fame as a great female intellectual appealed to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz who dedicated a series of *villancicos* to the Egyptian saint in the seventeenth century. The sixth *villancico* in particular celebrates her singular victory over the wisest men of Egypt as proof that God never intended for women to be excluded from intellectual pursuits, and that one's sex was of no importance when it came to the question of learning and intelligence:

De una Mujer se convencen  
 todos los Sabios de Egipto  
 para prueba de que el sexo  
 no es esencia en lo entendido (vv. 9-13)

Sor Juana's *villancicos* to Saint Catherine, which were written a few months after her *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, continue to build on the theme of "the equality of women with men in intellectual matters" and deliver the message strategically through the "unimpeachable figure" of a Catholic Saint (Underberg 311, 299). The narrator/protagonist, Lina, and the real author, Pardo Bazán, were clearly drawn to Saint Catherine for similar reasons: the Egyptian martyr was an example of a highly educated women who defied society, yet her status as a Church heroine sanctioned her behavior. Moreover, her exceptional beauty and

elegant attire made her something of a proto-decadent figure and therefore a model for the narrator/protagonist of *Dulce dueño*, and perhaps for Pardo Bazán herself.

Lina listens to Saint Catherine's story in the first chapter of the novel and identifies with the saint's intellect, beauty and overall sense of superiority. And, later in the novel, once it becomes clear to Lina that she is not immune to succumbing to vice—her worst offense being her role in her last suitor's death—she decides to repent and to follow what she understands to be the hagiographical model of spiritual perfection provided by Saint Catherine. Yet, as Kathy Bacon points out, her objective is still the same: her pursuit of saintliness is merely another attempt to distinguish herself as superior to others (170).

The beginnings of Lina's spiritual journey, however, do not gain her the happiness she seeks because she follows the orthodox Christian technology of the self in which she must recognize her inherently sinful nature and assume a position of humility and subservience. Lina renounces vanity by having a prostitute trample on her, resulting in the loss of one of her front teeth. She renounces her material wealth by telling her father to give her estate over to her uncle, Juan Clímaco. And despite her disdain for the common person, she attempts to rid herself of her pride by living with and helping two destitute women whom she finds repulsive. Nevertheless, these actions in and of themselves do not bring Lina the ecstasy she seeks. Her failure to reconcile her sense of superiority with an ability to truly feel compassion for other human beings proves to be a major obstacle. Even as Lina goes through the motions of helping and caring for two beekeepers, Torcuata, a young teenager, and her blind grandmother, she admits that "En lo recóndito, en el escondrijo de la verdad, ningún afecto sentía por las dos mujeres" (*Dulce dueño* 279). Only after Torcuata comes down with smallpox, does Lina's transformation actually commence. It is then that Lina comes to feel love and compassion for another person for the first time: "La piedad al fin; la piedad humana, el reconocimiento de que alguien existe para mí, de que el dolor ajeno es el dolor mío" (285). Not surprisingly, it is precisely at this moment that mystical ecstasy comes to Lina (285–86).

Although Lina comes to experience spiritual fulfillment through self-renunciation and the practice of charity, she discovers that such a state does not require total abjection and self-denial. Lina is able to experience mystical union once she is able to overcome her most serious

vice: her lack of compassion for other human beings. In this way Lina's transformation is in keeping with mystical/gnostic technologies of the self that insisted that self-mastery be a prerequisite for personal emancipation, as well as with Pardo Bazán's belief in the need for even select individuals to always exercise moral restraint so as to avoid a possible fall into egomania and vice. This differs from the negative view of human nature, as seen in orthodox Christian technologies of the self and scientific determinism, where no such prospect could ever be achieved considering the inherently sinful/instinctual nature of all human beings. Thus what Lina learns is that cultivation of the self must include a morality whose guiding tenet is empathy for others.

Lina's mystical conversion and her new understanding of self also allow her to escape the scientific gaze and to remove herself from the realm of the knowable. By proclaiming that her body and its actions do not reveal her interior experience of self, Lina can elude the scientific discourses of the time that held that the essence of woman could be revealed by an empirical study of her body. Toward the end of the novel Lina tells her father that she is happy despite the way things may look from the outside: "Mi felicidad tiene, para los que miran lo exterior (lo que *no es*), el aspecto de completa desventura" (286). This remark demonstrates the divide that Lina now recognizes between the exterior (materiality and language) and the interior (essence). Although, throughout the novel, Lina in effect rejects the materialist limitations that Positivism imposed on women, it is only through her new understanding of mysticism and its affirmation of the invisible nature of reality that Lina can withdraw herself from the scientific gaze and the positivistic discourses that were controlling women at the time.

It must be pointed out that the mystical discourse in the text is far from being completely victorious in shaping Lina's identity. Scientific understandings of mysticism as hysteria render Lina an inmate in a mental institution. Just as many nineteenth- and twentieth-century doctors diagnosed religious experiences as forms of insanity, many novelists of the time used mystical discourse ironically to indicate the mental disorders of their characters. Realist and naturalist writers such as Gustave Flaubert and Leopoldo Alas (Clarín) undermined their characters' romantic, or lyrical, aspirations by using their mystical language to signify their hysteria. Pardo Bazán's novel also plays with these ambiguities. Yet here an ironic, omniscient narrator does not undermine Lina's first person unmediated account of events. Rather, Lina is able



to present herself as female *décadente*, whose embrace of mysticism is successful, since this novel includes characters, Torcuata and her grandmother, who have benefitted from Lina's charity and truly believe her to be a saint. What is more, the novel provides a validated model of sainthood in the figure of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, whose story is presented at length in the first chapter.

As indicated above, Lina's spiritual conversion has not sat well with many critics of the novel. Apart from appearing forced and overly moralistic and didactic, the nuptial metaphors, Lina's masochistic behavior, and her ultimate submission to a patriarchal god, seem to reinscribe traditional gender hierarchies.<sup>8</sup> While these analyses clearly problematize facile feminist readings of *Dulce dueño*, they do not invalidate an examination of the novel in terms of Pardo Bazán's ideas on the connection between mysticism and female emancipation, ideas that the author continued to develop and elaborate throughout her writing career.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Marina Mayoral criticizes the ending of the novel for its lack of verisimilitude, arguing that Lina's turn to mysticism is unconvincing and completely out of character: "Lina es muy dura, muy seca de corazón, a lo largo de su vida no ha querido a nadie. Su búsqueda de Dios parte del desprecio hacia las criaturas y no del amor" (39). This is a contradiction Mayoral also extends to the author herself:

Y otra contradicción muy llamativa se produce entre [su] defensa de los ideales cristianos (espíritu de sacrificio, ascetismo, desprecio de los bienes mundanos), que encontramos en gran parte de su obra, y su conducta personal, que nos parece movida por el deseo de triunfar y de disfrutar de todo cuanto la vida da de sí. (21)

It has been my contention, however, that these are precisely the paradoxes the author is addressing in the works examined above, both on an intellectual and personal level. Whether or not we, as modern-day readers and critics, are convinced by the way in which she came to terms with these contradictions, is another question entirely. Nevertheless, these ambiguities most certainly leave Pardo Bazán's work and life continually open to new and different interpretations.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Here I use the term *orthodox Christianity* to refer to all forms of Christianity that accept the New Testament as the official canon of the faith, and reject the gnostic gospels as heresy. This includes almost all forms of contemporary Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> Foucault uses the term *technologies of the self* to refer to practices “which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thought, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (“Technologies” 225). Some examples are forms of self-examination such as confession, for Christians, or reading, writing and meditation, for the Stoics. Such practices should lead, in turn, to changes in behavior in the service of self-improvement.

<sup>3</sup> The third volume of *La literatura francesa moderna* was completed in 1914. Pardo Bazán had planned a fourth volume on French *décadence*, which she never wrote. However, in 1916 she taught a course on French lyricism that dealt extensively with the lyrical sources of *décadence*. The notes for this course were compiled and published posthumously in 1923 with the title *El lirismo en la poesía francesa*. Hereafter I will use the abbreviation *Lirismo* when referring to this text.

<sup>4</sup> Beginning in the second century AD, as Christianity became institutionalized, a group of Christian leaders attempted to strengthen the fledgling and diverse religion, still a marginalized heresy under the Roman Empire, by creating “a single church they called catholic, which means ‘universal’” (Pagels, *Beyond* 80).

<sup>5</sup> In her most recent article on the novel, Charnon-Deutsch, in light of alternative feminist readings of the novel, reasserts her original argument and concurs with Kirkpatrick that: “Aunque la novela desafía la hegemonía masculina y problematiza la diferencia sexual, sus imágenes nupciales y su desenlace reinscriben el texto en los discursos de género de los cuales intenta desligarse” (“Tenía corazón” 335).

<sup>6</sup> This law did not apply in Catalonia (Enríquez de Salamanca 236–37).

<sup>7</sup> Decadent writers such as Charles Baudelaire and Joris Karl Huysmans greatly admired Wagner’s compositions (Hanson 29). Many of the themes peculiar to Wagner’s operas, such as the preoccupation with feminine evil, sin and redemption, and a passionate and mystical conception of love, occur frequently in decadent texts (31). According to Hanson, in Wagner’s operas love is “a metaphysical agony. It is by his [Wagner’s] own description an endless yearning and an unquenchable hunger” (31).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Lou Charnon-Deutsch (in both *Narratives*, 176; “Tenía corazón,” 335), Susan Kirkpatrick (“Gender” 134; *Mujer* 125), and Raquel Medina (302).

<sup>9</sup> My reading is more in keeping with those critics who view Lina's turn to mysticism as an attempt, although perhaps not completely successful, to find a path to personal emancipation. See Bacon, Bieder ("Divina y perversa," "Emilia Pardo Bazán," and "Intertextualizing"), Pereira-Muro, and Pitarch Fernández.

## WORKS CITED

- Bacon, Kathy. *Negotiating Sainthood: Distinction, Cursilería and Saintliness in Spanish Novels*. Oxford: Legenda, 2007. Print.
- Bieder, Maryellen. "Divina y perversa: La mujer decadente en *Dulce dueño* de Emilia Pardo Bazán." *Perversas y divinas: La representación de la mujer en las literaturas hispánicas: El fin de siglo y/o el fin de milenio actual*. Ed. Carme Riera, Meri Torras & Isabel Clúa. Valencia: Ediciones ExCultura, 2002. 7–19. Print.
- . "Emilia Pardo Bazán y la emergencia del discurso feminista." *Breve historia feminista de la literatura española*. Vol. 5. Barcelona: Anthropos, 1998. 75–110. Print.
- . "Intertextualizing Genre: Ambiguity as Narrative Strategy in Emilia Pardo Bazán." *Intertextual Pursuits: Literary Mediations in Modern Spanish Narrative*. Ed. Jeanne P. Brownlow & John W. Kronik. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1998. 55–75. Print.
- Brooks, Peter. *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993. Print.
- Charnon-Deutsch, Lou. *Narratives of Desire: Nineteenth-Century Spanish Fiction by Women*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994. Print.
- . "'Tenía corazón': *Dulce dueño* de Emilia Pardo Bazán." *Arbor* 182.719 (2006): 325–36. Print.
- Enríquez de Salamanca, Cristina. "La mujer en el discurso legal del liberalismo español." Jagoe et al. 219–52. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "Technologies of the Self." *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. Trans. Robert Hurley, et al. New York: New Press, 1997. 223–51. Print. *The Essential Works of Foucault: 1954–1984*. Vol. 1.
- Hanson, Ellis. *Decadence and Catholicism*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997. Print.
- Henn, David. "Continuity, Change and the Decadent Phenomenon in Pardo Bazán's Late Fiction." *Neophilologus* 78.3 (1994): 395–406. Print.
- Jagoe, Catherine. "La misión de la mujer." Jagoe et al. 21–53. Print.
- . "Sexo y género en la medicina del siglo XIX." Jagoe et al. 305–67. Print.
- Jagoe, Catherine, Alda Blanco, and Cristina Enríquez de Salamanca, eds. *La mujer en los discursos de género: Textos y contextos en el siglo XIX*. Barcelona: Icaria, 1998. Print.
- Juana Inés de la Cruz, Sor. *Obras completas*. México D.F.: Porrúa, 1996. Print.
- Kirkpatrick, Susan. "Gender and Modernist Discourse: Emilia Pardo Bazán's *Dulce dueño*." *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America*. Ed. Anthony L. Geist & José B. Monleón. New York: Garland, 1999. 117–39. Print.

- . *Mujer, modernismo y vanguardia en España (1898–1931)*. Trans. Jacqueline Cruz. Madrid: Cátedra, 2003. Print.
- Mayoral, Marina. "Introducción." *Dulce dueño*. By Emilia Pardo Bazán. Madrid: Castalia, 1989. 7–44. Print.
- Medina, Phoebe Porter. *A Vision of Decadence in the Last Three Novels of Emilia Pardo Bazán*. Diss. Brown U, 1985. Print.
- Medina, Raquel. "Dulce esclava, dulce histórica: La representación de la mujer en *Dulce dueño* de Emilia Pardo Bazán." *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 51.2 (1998): 291–303. Print.
- Pagels, Elaine. *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*. New York: Random House, 2003. Print.
- . *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Vintage, 1989. Print.
- Pardo Bazán, Emilia. *La cuestión palpitante*. Ed. and intro. José Manuel González Herrán. Barcelona: Anthropos, 1989. Print.
- . *Dulce dueño*. Ed. and intro. Marina Mayoral. Madrid: Castalia, 1989. Print.
- . "La educación del hombre y de la mujer: Sus relaciones y diferencias. Memoria leída en el Congreso pedagógico el día 16 de Octubre de 1892." *Nuevo Teatro Crítico* 2 (1892): 14–82. Print.
- . *El lirismo en la poesía francesa*. Madrid: Pueyo, [1923]. Print.
- . "Una opinión sobre la mujer: El discurso del Marqués del Busto en la Real Academia de Medicina." *Nuevo Teatro Crítico* 2 (1892): 71–84. Print.
- . "El porvenir de la literatura después de la guerra." *Obras completas*. Ed. and intro. Harry L. Kirby, Jr. Vol. 3. Madrid: Aguilar, 1973. 1543–51. Print.
- Pereira-Muro, Carmen. "Mimetismo, misticismo y la cuestión de la escritura femenina en *Dulce Dueño* de Emilia Pardo Bazán." *La Tribuna* 4 (2006): 153–80. Print.
- Pitarch Fernández, Pau. "Las armas del martirio. Una lectura del misticismo en *Dulce dueño* (1911) de Emilia Pardo Bazán." *La hijas de Eva: Historia, tradición y simbología*. Coord. Inés Calero Secall & Virginia Alfaro Bech. Málaga: CEDMA, 2006. 183–95. Print.
- Sánchez-Conejero, Cristina. "*Dulce dueño*, de Emilia Pardo Bazán: Una novela posmodernamente anticanónica." *Crítica Hispánica* 30.1–2 (2008): 161–73. Print.
- Underberg, Natalie. "Sor Juana's *Villancicos*: Context, Gender, and Genre." *Western Folklore* 60.4 (2001): 297–316. JSTOR. Web. 15 Jun. 2009.

### Resumen:

La idea mística de que el perfeccionamiento del yo conduce a la autonomía personal atrajo a Emilia Pardo Bazán, quien en *El lirismo en la poesía francesa* argumenta que la libertad de desafiar a las autoridades institucionales es un privilegio ganado a través de la educación, la disciplina y el desenvolvimiento del individuo. Este concepto, fundamental a la teología mística, explica por qué Pardo Bazán presentaba el misticismo

como un camino viable para la emancipación personal y por qué, en su lucha por los derechos de la mujer, hacía hincapié en la importancia de la educación. También nos ayuda a entender su interés en la hagiografía y su decisión de tratar el tema del misticismo femenino en su última novela, *Dulce dueño*. En el presente estudio se explora la creencia de Emilia Pardo Bazán de que la educación provee las herramientas, y la teología mística la base filosófica, para la emancipación femenina. Primero se estudia este concepto en *El lirismo en la poesía francesa* y “La educación del hombre y de la mujer” para después demostrar cómo las ideas presentadas en estas obras se desarrollan en la novela *Dulce dueño*.

**Palabras claves:** Emilia Pardo Bazán, *El lirismo en la poesía francesa*, “La educación del hombre y de la mujer,” *Dulce dueño*, el misticismo, la emancipación femenina, tecnologías del yo, la mujer, la mujer escritora, la mujer escrita.

Date of Receipt: May 26, 2010

Date of Acceptance: July 18, 2010

Copyright of Revista de Estudios Hispánicos is the property of Washington University and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.