

unfit for civil rights, because they were able to think only in subjective terms (see Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization*, 221–222).

40. Sinclair notes that envy is “the most pervasive expression of desire in the novel” (*Dislocations of Desire*, 59).

41. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 162.

42. Ngai, 1.

43. Alas, *La Regenta*, 2:107.

44. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 14.

45. Ngai, 14–22.

46. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1:341.

47. Alas, 1:341–347. This passage was used by me in a graduate seminar on “Reading Spanish Culture through Raymond Williams,” inspired by Williams’s attempt to trace the social circumstances that made possible the appearance in Elizabetan drama of the soliloquy as a dramatic mode. See Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 139, 145–147. The idea was to see if we could work out what might be the social frame that allowed free indirect discourse to first appear in the Spanish realist novel of the 1880s. The students observed that this example of free indirect discourse began and ended with an observation of the outside material world; this led them to hypothesize that free indirect discourse may have been an expression of concerns at the time about the difficulty of establishing a boundary between the external and inner worlds since free indirect discourse superimposes objective and subjective narration such that the two cannot be distinguished. I thank the students in the seminar for their acute observations, on which I have drawn here. The relationship between the self and the outside world is precisely what was at stake in the above-mentioned debates on naturalism in 1880s Spain. As previously noted, affect theory too is concerned with the relationship of the external to the internal, which it sees as mutually constitutive.

CHAPTER 11



Female Masculinity in *La Regenta*

Jennifer Smith

In her book *Female Masculinity* (1998), Judith Halberstam challenges the idea that masculinity must be tied to men. She argues that masculinity is actually most visible, and most threatening, when it leaves the male body and asserts that one of her aims is precisely to pry apart masculinity, maleness, power, and domination.¹ In order to deconstruct such linkages, she employs terms such as *hegemonic masculinity* and *heroic masculinities* to refer to conventional ideas that link masculinity to power, strength, and dominance. Hegemonic masculinity has generally been used to describe a model of behavior for men who seek positions of power within certain groups in society.² Traditionally hegemonic models of masculinity have required constant demonstrations of manhood enacted by social or physical dominance over other men, thereby creating a hierarchy in which certain males necessarily dominate others.³ In his historical analysis of models of hegemonic masculinity in the United States, Michael S. Kimmel cites the rise of capitalism, starting in the late eighteenth century, as pivotal in strengthening a dynamic that placed competition with other men at center stage in the achievement of manliness.

This concept of hegemonic masculinity is particularly useful in analyzing Leopoldo Alas’s 1884–1885 novel *La Regenta*, as the question of power and dominance in a decaying feudal and imperial society threatened by social and economic change is intimately intertwined with questions of gender or, more specifically, with the degree to which various characters perform or defy their respective gender roles. While the ruling elite of Restoration Spain was clearly reluctant to renounce its privilege and waning empire in order to embrace a social hierarchy determined solely by the marketplace, we see in the novel the beginnings of the replacement of ideals of aristocratic manhood with bourgeois models of masculinity, just as the nouveau riche—the *indianos*, Pepe Ronzal, and even Fermín De Pas himself, although within the hierarchy of the traditional institution of the church—vie for positions of power within the inner echelons

of society. This dynamic is played out most overtly in the power struggle between the canon and Don Álvaro Mesía to seduce Ana Ozores. Despite Fermín's genuine feelings for Ana, the central importance of the homosocial love triangle converts the female protagonist into a conduit for the interaction and competition between two men: a wealthy, middle-aged member of the ruling elite, Álvaro Mesía, and a more youthful, virile, ascending bourgeois, Fermín De Pas. This symbolic battle for dominance engages with medical and scientific discourses on gender and degeneration as well as those of Spain's national and imperial decline. Yet as the novel progresses, both men's inability to perform masculinity comes to the fore, leaving a void that is ultimately filled by masculine women.

Consequently, my approach to the discussion of female masculinity in *La Regenta* is two-pronged. First, I deconstruct the connection between the male body and masculinity by examining how the male characters' inability to perform masculinity undermines their claim to it. Then I turn my attention to the masculine women who populate the text. However, in contradiction to Halberstam's assertion that "female masculinity seems to be at its most threatening when coupled with lesbian desire,"²⁴ it is not same-sex desire that poses the greatest threat to society. Rather, it is a masculine, heterosexual woman with raw ambition and a strong capitalist sense who turns Vetustan society on its head.

The novel opens, appropriately, with the juxtaposition of images of virility and androgyny. We meet the protagonist, the canon Fermín De Pas, through the eyes of two prepubescent altar boys, Bismark and Celedonio, who, before the canon's arrival, are enjoying the feelings of superiority they receive from being atop the cathedral tower and looking down at the rest of Vetustan society. However, Celedonio quickly finds himself humbled and Bismark frightened when Don Fermín De Pas ascends to the top of the tower. Through the boys' eyes, the first thing we notice about Fermín is his size: "¡Qué grande se mostraba!"²⁵ (How huge he appeared!),²⁶ an observation that is followed by the narrator's statement that Celedonio barely reaches Fermín's waist.²⁷ The canon's refinement and impeccable dress also inspire awe and respect: "¡Aquello era un señorito!"²⁸ (This was real class!),²⁹ and his muscles and well-built frame reveal his physical strength and athletic potential. With thick black hair and no signs of aging, this thirty-five-year-old man in the prime of his life lengthens and brandishes his spyglass, which Bismark initially mistakes for a small cannon and then a rifle, over the various neighborhoods of Vetustia that he wishes to not only conquer but stab with his carving knife and devour.³⁰ His fascination with ascending hierarchies is represented by his passion for climbing to the tops of mountains and cathedral towers and by the tower itself, a sheath of muscles that shoots up into the sky like a gracious pyramid that cannot be matched in proportion and size.³¹ Such phallic descriptions of the tower both serve as synecdochal representations of masculinity itself and the Fermín's capitalist and colonial ambitions

to his insatiable sexual appetite, which we become more acquainted with as the novel progresses.

This description of Fermín contrasts markedly with that of the twelve- to thirteen-year-old Celedonio, whose toothless mouth and large dirty-brown eyes reveal the salacious gaze of a street prostitute. This, combined with his feminine gestures and movements, lead the narrator to underscore this character's perverted nature.³² The small, prepubescent, and grotesque Celedonio represents marginalized masculinities associated with feminine males and same-sex desire between men. Indeed, the gender crossing that this character embodies is represented in the novel by his and other characters' association to amphibians, specifically toads.³³ These slimy creatures that inhabit two worlds allude to Darwinian theory, since they evolved from fish that lived solely in the water into creatures that inhabit both land and water. This link to evolution is also important, as it relates to anxieties about the blurring lines between the sexes, since evolutionary theorists were arguing that the more advanced a civilization, the more distinct were the appearance and behavior of its men and women. Thus amphibians serve as metaphors for sexual androgyny and evoke anxieties about degeneration that would entail a large-scale blurring of the sexes.³⁴

Yet in many ways, Celedonio is nothing more than a parodic representation of Fermín himself. Forced to hide his virility under a priest's cassock that feminizes him in the same way that it does other men in the church, Fermín desperately tries to prove his masculinity to Ana through displays of his physical strength—for example, by rescuing Obdulia when she is trapped in the swing—and to himself by dressing in hunter's attire and admiring his own masculine physique in the mirror. Yet his ultimate inability to get Ana to see him as a man rather than as an asexual priest shows the male body's inability, no matter how strong and sexually potent, to automatically confer masculinity. This is exemplified best in the scene in which De Pas is looking at himself in the mirror with his shirt off as he shaves:

Estaba desnudo de medio cuerpo arriba. El cuello robusto parecía más fuerte ahora por la tensión a que le obligaba la violencia de la postura, al inclinarse sobre el lavabo de mármol blanco. Los brazos cubiertos de vello negro ensortijado, lo mismo que el pecho alto y fuerte, parecían de un atleta. El Magistral miraba con tristeza sus músculos de acero, de una fuerza inútil. . . . el mozo fuerte y velludo que tenía enfrente, en el espejo, le parecía otro yo que se había perdido, que había quedado en los montes, desnudo, cubierto de pelo como el rey de Babilonia, pero libre, feliz. . . . Le asustaba tal espectáculo, le llevaba muy lejos de sus pensamientos de ahora, y se apresuró a vestirse. En cuanto se abrochó el alzacuello, el Magistral volvió a ser la imagen de la mansudumbre cristiana, fuerte, pero espiritual, humilde: seguía siendo esbelto, pero no

formidable. Se parecía un poco a su querida torre de la catedral, también robusta, también proporcionada, esbelta y bizarra, mística, pero de piedra.¹⁵

He was naked from the waste up. His powerful neck seemed even more powerful now, because of the strain put upon it by his tense position as he leaned over the white marble wash-basin. His arms, like his broad, powerful chest, were covered with fine black curly hair; they were the arms of an athlete. The canon looked sadly at his muscles of steel, charged with useless power. . . . The brawny, hairy young fellow before him in the mirror somehow seemed like a lost alter ego which had stayed behind in those hills—naked, as hairy as the king of Babylon, yet free, happy. He was alarmed by this sight, which carried his thoughts far away, and he dressed hurriedly. As soon as the canon had buttoned up his collar he was once again the image of Christian meekness, strong, yet spiritual and humble, still well built, of course, but no longer formidable. He was a little like his beloved cathedral tower, also powerful, well proportioned, well built and elegant and mystical; but made of stone.¹⁶

Without his vestments, Fermín is a muscular Hercules and a hirsute king of Babylonia, but as soon as he is dressed, he is emasculated and desexualized by being compared to a cathedral tower made of stone.

Ana's view of Fermín as androgynous is seen when, considering the possibility that the canon might actually be in love with her, she shakes as if she had come into contact with a cold, viscous body.¹⁷ And Celedonio as a representation of Fermín's androgyny is seen most clearly at the close of the novel by Celedonio's taking Fermín's place and planting a toad's kiss on Ana's lips. In the end, the most masculine man in *Vetusta* is emasculated by Ana's inability to see him as a man, by Ana's choosing the cowardly and aging Álvaro as a lover over him, by Fermín's being the eroticized object of gaze of women such as Obdulia, by a society that provides no acceptable means of climbing the social ladder other than through the unnatural and desexing institution of the church, and finally, as the reader learns, by the complete control his masculine and tyrannical mother exercises over him.¹⁸

We meet yet another male "amphibian" in the opening chapter, Don Saturnino Bermúdez, the town historian, whose fear of women leads to his suspicious nighttime activities that leave him physically depleted the next morning and cause his chronic indigestion. This indirect reference to medical discourses on masturbation and seminal depletion in men—indigestion being just one of the many ills it was said to bring on¹⁹—is important as a motif that reappears throughout the novel and serves as the other principal threat to a man's masculinity. The nineteenth century saw an explosion of discourses warning against the ills of seminal depletion, which included nervous disorders, paralysis, and even death.²⁰ According to the prominent nineteenth-century doctor and hygienist Felipe

Monlau, the loss of one ounce of semen was equivalent to the loss of forty ounces of blood.²¹ A virile male body wisely economized its semen. While masturbation was considered the most wasteful form of spending this vital fluid, any and all sexual activity was said to weaken the male body. The importance of this theory is related not only to bourgeois capitalist discourses that warned against profligate spending of any kind but also to the emasculation of other male characters in the text. Don Álvaro's waning sexual stamina is put to the test when this forty-something Don Juan, upon finding himself in the unnatural position of having to satisfy the desires of two sexually ravenous women, Ana and Petra, is unable to perform—a situation, however, he admits to having experienced before.²² Even the young son of the Marquis, Paco Vegallana, exhibits "carne blanda" (flabby flesh) and a lack of muscular strength because of his sexual conquests, or "fides de amor"²³ (battles of love).²⁴ Thus here and elsewhere, the male body proves itself unable to reproduce heroic ideals of masculinity, as it has finite reserve of semen, an essential vital fluid, and a "currency of masculinity."²⁵ As seminal depletion was said to lead to nervous disorders such as hysteria and spermatorrhea (a dubious but greatly feared disease at the time in which the male body started to involuntarily leak semen), it further feminized the male body, tying it to leakage (the female body was said to be inferior precisely because it was always leaking), excessive spending (a vice associated mostly with women), and feminine nervous diseases such as hysteria. The result was a masculinity precariously held in place by a male body under constant threat of emasculation. It is important to note that in the novel, seminal depletion and/or impotence only affects men of the ruling classes (Álvaro, Paco, Saturnino, and Víctor), indirectly critiquing the ruling elite's lack of wise capitalist investment into the economy, which leaves the nation too enervated to hold on to its empire. Don Fermín, on the other hand, the son of a "licenciado en artillería"²⁶ (artillery graduate),²⁷ has an excess of sexual desire and vital bodily fluids, since neither Petra nor Teresina—nor any of the other maids whom he appears to have impregnated—dampen his sexual appetite or ability to perform sexually. This connects his capitalist acumen and successful political conquests to the strength of his promiscuous, savage, and bestial, ascending, working-class male body that will inevitably replace the unproductive, effete, and lazy upper-class elite male.

While these hygienic discourses on seminal depletion tried to discredit the idea that masculinity was conferred through heterosexual conquest, they do so by acknowledging this idea's hold on the cultural imaginary of the time. For example, Ciro Bayo in his 1902 *Higiene sexual del soltero* (*Sexual Hygiene for Single People*) argues that while sexual conquest is the most valued symbol of masculinity within society, the truth is, such men are less masculine than men who practice moderation in their venereal activities.²⁸ It seems that in *Vetusta*, few heed the words of the hygienists, as Don Álvaro's claim to hegemonic masculinity is conferred precisely through his sexual conquests, which he acknowledges

he carries out solely for political reasons.²⁹ His conquests are publicized, and he himself boasts about them—most tellingly in the scene at the casino, where he recounts stories of former conquests, even a brutal rape, to the delight of his male interlocutors.³⁰ The more virtuous the women and/or the more formidable the male rival, the more cultural capital a conquest conferred. Thus the fact that Fermín, one of the most powerful men in Vetusta, is his rival in his pursuit of Ana only makes the battle more potentially rewarding. The canon recognizes this early on: “Había adivinado en [Álvaro] un rival en el dominio de Vetusta.”³¹ (He had conjectured that he [Álvaro] was a rival for the control of Vetusta.)³² While De Pas publicly displays his physical superiority over Álvaro, it is of secondary importance, since only the seduction of Ana can confer the spot at the top of Vetusta’s hierarchy of men.

The warnings of the hygienists, however, come back to haunt Álvaro. Finding himself “bankrupted” from the ravenous sexual appetite of his last lover, he spends months attempting to recover his vigor. He reads hygiene manuals, goes to the gym, goes horseback riding, and most important, abstains from sexual activity.³³ While Álvaro exercises to restore his supply of essential bodily fluids, the canon exercises to burn off excess sexual energy despite all the women at his disposal.³⁴ Fermín therefore has the upper hand not only in terms of youth and physical strength but also in terms of sexual stamina. Toward the end, Álvaro admits to faking both youth and virility in exchange for social status,³⁵ an idea that is brought home when he tries to flee the duel with Don Víctor and when, during the duel, he cowardly shoots the man who just spared his life.

Interestingly, as is the case with Fermín, Álvaro’s other claim to masculinity is his physical attractiveness, refinement, and elegance. Indeed, Ana and other women are attracted precisely to Álvaro’s good looks, impeccable dress, and sophistication. Yet in this instance, Álvaro actually defies bourgeois norms of masculinity that recommended downplaying one’s attire and avoiding the eroticized gaze. He acknowledges that it is his good looks that women admire in him and puts much care into his clothes, making purchases in Paris at a time when French fashion was discouraged for men, since it was seen as too feminine. Thus the contradiction is clear: Álvaro acquires masculine status by willingly accepting the feminine role of the eroticized object of the gaze and of the *elegante*, or dandy, who was criticized in nineteenth-century Spain for being frivolous and effeminate. This makes Álvaro conform to Kimmel’s description of the genteel patriarch as “an anachronistic feminized dandy” who was “ineffective and outmoded”³⁶ and who would come to be replaced by bourgeois capitalist models of masculinity better embodied by Fermín De Pas and his mother—that is, if Fermín were not a dignitary of the church and if Paula were not a woman.

Paradoxically, it is actually certain female characters in the text who better exhibit many of the masculine traits these men lack or are unable to embody. Halberstam ascertains that in the early nineteenth century, the mannish woman

who actively desired other women would have been referred to as a “hermaphrodite,” a “tribade,” or a “female husband” rather than a “lesbian.”³⁷ S/he also makes clear, however, that there were surely “many examples of masculine women in history who had no interest in same-sex sexuality.”³⁸ Accordingly, I will first look at two female characters who exhibit same-sex desire, Visita and Obdulia, and how they conform to nineteenth-century discourses on tribadism. Then I turn my attention to the most masculine woman in the text, Doña Paula, who actually exhibits little sexual desire whatsoever.

Nineteenth-century Spanish hygiene manuals describe the tribade as a woman with an overtly developed clitoris who would inadvertently, and/or intentionally, stimulate herself by rubbing her enlarged organ against foreign objects or other people. For example, Juan Cuesta y Ckerner states, “El clitoris puede encontrarse enormemente desarrollado, y semejante disposición puede llegar a producir la ninfomania por el orgasmo constante que ocasiona el roce de los vestidos”³⁹ (The clitoris can be overtly developed, and such an arrangement can come to produce nymphomania due to the constant orgasm produced from the friction with clothes).⁴⁰

These women’s overdeveloped organ was believed to make them manly, sterile, and indifferent to men and heterosexual intercourse. Monlau refers to these women as “marimachos ó mujeres hombrunas {viragines}, de costumbres masculinas, voz ronca, barba poblada, clitoris muy abultado, etc.”⁴¹ (Tomboys or butch women {viragines} with masculine ways, a husky voice, a bushy beard, a bulky clitoris, etc.).⁴² And Suarez Casañ states that “mari-machos [‘viragines’] de los latinos, son casi siempre estériles”⁴³ (butch women [“viragines”] in Latin, are almost always sterile).⁴⁴ Both Monlau and Amancio Peratoner emphasize not only the lesbian behaviors of such women but also their proclivity to nymphomania, thereby tying tribadism and nymphomania together. Peratoner, for example, writes, “[E]l desarrollo excesivo de dicho órgano hacia las mujeres indiferentes á las caricias de los hombres y las arrastraba a apeteer asiduamente la sociedad de las personas de su sexo. La voluptuosidad clitoridea es para esta clase de mujeres, llamadas TRIBADAS entre los antiguos, una necesidad imperiosa que acrecenta incesantemente el delirio de sus imaginaciones”⁴⁵ (The overdevelopment of said organ made women indifferent to men’s caresses and led them to frequently desire the company of members of their own sex. The clitorian voluptuousness is for this type of women, called TRIBADES by the ancients, an urgent need that incessantly increases the delirium of their imaginations).⁴⁶ Doctors’ pathologization of the clitoris stems from anxieties about this organ’s role in female sexuality. Its lack of purpose in reproduction and its similarity to the penis challenged nineteenth-century views on sexuality. It blurred gender dichotomies by undermining theories of the sexes that posited that woman was man’s polar opposite. It “became the source of great anxiety because it represented another penis on the female body. . . . Anxieties arose about clitorides

capable of penetration; because of these anxieties, the clitoris, its size and function, was immediately likened to same-sex desire.⁷⁴

Visita and Obdulia are the two female characters who most clearly reveal same-sex desire. Visita is married to a petit-bourgeois, an employe at a bank, whose modest income leads her to look for entertainment outside of the home among her circle of friends, leaving her husband and children hungry and abandoned. Indeed, she spends most of her time engaged in helping Alvaro seduce Ana, who, as Cristina Mathews has argued, seems to be her real object of desire.⁷⁵ Her “perverted” gender identity is due to not only her extramarital affairs, cuckolded husband, and her failure to conform to bourgeois discourses on the separate spheres (it is her husband who occupies the private space of the home, while she occupies the public masculine sphere)⁷⁶ but also her dirty undergarments, which make Alvaro wince just at the thought of them, and her sticky fingers. Her constant consumption of sweets not only is a sublimation of her sexual desires, seen most obviously in the scene where she eats sweets as she watches over Ana in her bed,⁷⁷ but ties to the motif of the viscosity associated with amphibians, already explained as a metaphor for sexual androgyny. Indeed, her same-sex desire is seen most explicitly when she tries to excite Alvaro by describing what Ana looks like when she is in the midst of one of her hysterical attacks.⁷⁸ As James Mandrell asserts, “El torrente de palabras y los signos de exclamación nos dicen todo: la descripción de los ataques de la Regenta no sirve solo para informar a Alvaro, también estimula y hasta excita Visitación, como indican los puntos suspensivos”⁷⁹ (The outpouring of words and exclamation marks says it all; the description of La Regenta’s attacks serve not only to inform Alvaro but also to stimulate and even sexually excite Visitación, as the ellipsis suggests).⁸⁰

While Visita’s same-sex desire for Ana implicitly associates her with the nineteenth-century tribade, it is Obdulia who more clearly exhibits a phallic sexuality. Beginning in chapter 1, her sexual behavior, like the canon’s, is dominating and described in militaristic terms of conquest: she wears a breastplate of scarlet silk from which her bosom appears about to explode and imperial boots.⁸¹ Obdulia, like the “masculine and possibly predatory woman” Habertan describes, has extramarital affairs and exhibits “aggressive sexual tendencies.”⁸² Her status as a beautiful young widow ties her to nymphomaniacs and hysterics and partially explains her predatory, sexual pursuits that objectify both men and women. For example, she actively pursues men of all professions and social classes, from the bishop of Nauplia, to the coachman Diego, to Pedro, the cook.⁸³ As Lawrence Rich insightfully points out in the case of Pedro, it is Obdulia who puts a spoon in Pedro’s mouth, “which she has just caressed with her lips to excite him sexually,” forming a parallel with the scene in which Fermín puts a biscuit in his maid’s mouth. According to Rich, “Obdulia’s behavior inverts bourgeois class and gender expectations: whereas Fermín gives and Teresa receives (the biscuit), Obdulia is shown as sexually active rather than passive, as she

gives (the spoon) to a lower-class male who docilely receives it from her.”⁸⁴ Obdulia’s objectification of Fermín is actively resisted by the canon himself, who seems to sense Obdulia’s dominating role as the bearer of the gaze.⁸⁵ Obdulia’s masculine sexuality is explicitly tied to same-sex desire when she lusts after Ana, who is about to appear barefoot in the Holy Week procession: “¿Cuándo llegará? preguntaba la viuda, lamíendose los labios, invadida de una envidia admiradora, y sintiendo extraños dejos de una especie de lujuria bestial, disparatada, inexplicable por lo absurdo. Sentía Obdulia en aquel momento así . . . un deseo vago . . . de . . . ser hombre”⁸⁶ (“When is she coming?” asked the widow, licking her lips, possessed by admiring envy, and conscious of the strange promptings of a kind of crazy, brutal lust, so absurd as to be inexplicable. Obdulia felt a—vague desire—to—to—to be a man).⁸⁷ The fact that Obdulia already “plays the man” in her sexual relationships with men, particularly with men of lower socioeconomic status, suggests that Obdulia’s gender crossing in this scene is more than just a whim.

Despite these displays of aggressive female sexuality and same-sex desire between women, the manliest woman in the text is Paula Raíces, the canon’s mother. For Doña Paula, her own sexual desires are of secondary importance, as she puts her own sexuality to the service of her ambition and desire for money. Rather, Doña Paula’s claim to masculinity is secured through physical and character traits. Physically she resembles a man: she is almost as tall as her son and appears to be wider in the shoulders.⁸⁸ Her large masculine frame is coupled with a physical strength superior to most men, demonstrated by her ability to break up brawls among the miners in her bar as well as successfully fight off these men’s sexual advances on her own.⁸⁹ She has a narrow, bony forehead; cold blue eyes that hide all emotion; and like her son, a large nose, thin lips, and a pointy chin.⁹⁰ And unlike the dandy Don Alvaro, Doña Paula follows the fashion advice for men that recommended dark, discrete clothing, especially black, so as not to draw attention to oneself. Indeed, she wears a black habit and shawl that conceal everything but her wide shoulders and choppy frame.⁹¹ Her cigarette smoking is also a decidedly masculine activity with imperial connotations, as tobacco was a source of wealth coming into Spain from its American colonies.

Doña Paula’s masculinity is also conveyed by her complete control over the men in her life (the first priest she worked for; the second, who is now a bishop; and her son). Indeed, she believes in “la omnipotencia de la mujer. Ella era buen ejemplo”⁹² (the omnipotence of woman. She herself was a good example).⁹³ We see Paula’s dominance over men specifically in the positions she has occupied. Her job as *ama de llaves* (head housekeeper) dialogs with J. E. Hartzbusch’s sketch in *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos* (*Spaniards Painted by Themselves*; 1843–1844), in which we learn that the *ama de llaves* was generally understood to be an ugly, masculine, single or widowed, servant woman who lived with a bachelor or widower that she came to control completely.⁹⁴ Hartzbusch underscores

these women's virile appearance, describing one with a mustache and another with wide shoulders, a thick waist, and huge feet.⁶⁸ Doña Paula's character seems to have been lifted not only from these pages but also from José de Grijalva's description of the *cantinera* (barmaid), which appears in the same volume. Like Doña Paula as a canteen owner and barmaid, the *cantinera* is an ugly woman of manly appearance married to a man who lets her do all the work at the bar.⁶⁹

Doña Paula's past positions also allow her to develop her business skills at a time when economic matters were strictly considered the domain of men. First she makes a pretty penny selling cheap food and wine that has been watered down to exhausted and famished miners and later saves the priest Fortunato Camoirán from bankruptcy twice. These experiences then translate into a brutal *laissez-faire* capitalism in which she creates a monopoly on the selling of religious items, illegally using her son's influence to ruin the business and life of their competitor. These profits are then secretly deposited in the bank and used to purchase properties outside of Yetusta. But her most lucrative capitalist venture is her own son, whom she refers to as "su capital" (investment) and "una fábrica de dinero" (mint) from whom she has the right to "cobrar los réditos" (charge interest):

Fermo, además de su hijo era su capital, una fábrica de dinero. Ella le había hecho hombre, a costa de sacrificios, de vergüenzas de que él no sabía ni la mitad, de vigiliias, de sudores, de cálculos, de paciencia, de astucia, de energía y de pecados sórdidos; por consiguiente no pedía mucho si pedía intereses al resultado de sus esfuerzos, al Provisor de Yetusta. El mundo era de su hijo, porque él era el de más talento, el más elocuente, el más sagaz, el más sabio, el más hermoso pero su hijo era de ella, debía cobrar los réditos de su capital. Y si la fábrica se paraba o se descompañía, podía reclamar daños y perjuicios, tenía derecho a exigir que Fermo continuase produciendo.⁷⁰

Fermo, as well as being her son, was her investment, her mint. She had made a man of him through self sacrifice, shameful deeds, half of which he knew nothing about, sleepless nights, sweat, calculation, patience, astuteness, energy and sordid sins. She was not, then, asking for too much if she asked the result of all her efforts, the vicar-general of Yetusta, for her interest. The world belonged to her son, because he was the most talented man of them all, the most eloquent, the shrewdest, the wisest, the handsomest; but her son belonged to her, she had a right to charge interest on her capital. And if the mint stopped working or broke down it was her prerogative to claim for damages; she had a right to demand that Fermo should maintain production.⁷¹

Doña Paula's natural talent for marketplace competition is also tied to her rejection of women and all things associated with femininity. In contrast to her son, Paula is devoid of affection or compassion and can only understand love

as tyrannical control: "Doña Paula no se enterneceja, tenía esa ventaja. Llamaba mojiangas a las caricias, y quería a su hijo mucho a su manera, desde lejos. Era el suyo un cariño opresor, un tirano"⁷² (Doña Paula had the advantage of never being moved by anything. She called caresses tomfoolery, but she was very fond of her son in her way, from a distance. Her love for him was an oppressive tyrannical love).⁷³ Along with her lack of empathy is her blatant misogyny. She insists that prostitutes are better than the average woman, who sucks the life and honor from a man: "Cien veces, mil veces peor, que es que le tiran de la levita a don Saturno, porque ésas cobran, y dejan en paz la que la ha buscado; pero las señoras, chupan la vida, la honra . . . deshacen en un mes lo que yo hice en veinte años"⁷⁴ (A hundred times, a thousand times worse than the ones who tickle Don Saturn's fancy, because they take their money and leave the man who came for them in peace. But these fine ladies suck away at your life, your honour, they destroy in a month what it took me twenty years to build).⁷⁵ She therefore tries to prevent her son from idealizing any woman by procuring mistresses for him. She even has sadistic fantasies about Ana that include sitting her throat, dragging her by her hair, turning her into her son's sex slave, pulling out her tongue, and killing her:

Pensó en mil absurdos, en milagros de madre, en ir ella misma a buscar a la infame que tenía la culpa de aquello, y degollarla, o traerla arrastrando por los malditos cabellos, allí, al pie de aquella cama a velar como ella, a llorar como ella, a salvar a su hijo a toda costa, a costa de la fama, de la salvación de todo, a salvarle o morir con él. . . . De estas ideas absurdas, que rechazaba después el buen sentido, le quedaba a doña Paula una ira sorda reconcentrada, y una aspiración vaga a formar un proyecto extraño, una intriga para cazar a la Regenta y hacerla servir para lo que Fermo quisiera . . . Y después matarla o arrancarle la lengua.⁷⁶

She thought of a thousand absurdities, of a mother's miracles, of going herself in search of the infamous woman who was to blame for it all, and cutting her throat, or dragging her back by her damned hair, back to the foot of that bed, to watch over him like her, to weep like her, to save her son at any cost, at the cost of reputation, of salvation, of everything to save him or die with him. . . . These absurd ideas, which Doña Paula's good sense dispelled, left her with a pent-up, concentrated anger and a vague notion of forming a strange plan, a plot to catch the judge's wife and make her submit to being used by Fermo for whatever he wanted—and then kill her or tear out her tongue.⁷⁷

Thus in her exaggerated masculine appearance and behavior, Paula is both a con-summate and a parodic portrayal of dominant forms of masculinity.

Paradoxically, gender hybridity is simultaneously portrayed in the novel as both natural and artificial. The church, because of its "unnatural" rules on

celibacy, creates sexually perverted gender hybrids guilty of sexual aberrations and crimes such as homosexuality, pedophilia, and solicitation. Yet “naturally” occurring phenomena, such as male physical beauty, impotence, and seminal depletion, “naturally” emasculate the male body by converting it into an eroticized sex object and easily leaving it physically and sexually depleted. Similarly, society causes Ana’s hysteria by placing her in a marriage in which her “natural” urges for intercourse and reproduction are stifled. Yet at the same time, those women who give free expression to their “natural” sexual desires, such as Ysita and Obdulia, are portrayed as nymphomaniacs, predatory sexual vampires who “suck” the life force from males, and tribades who turn their sexual desire from men onto women. This contradictory representation of gender hybridity is echoed in the motifs of amphibians and Frigilis’s grafting (*los injertos*). While the omnipresence of viscous amphibians suggests the constant “natural” threat of gender ambiguity, Frigilis’s pseudoscientific grafting experiments create sterile and/or deformed hybrids that cannot survive.

The term *hybridity* has its roots in biology, where it refers to “the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, ‘hybrid’ species.”⁷⁸ However, it has more recently been incorporated into linguistics and racial theory to refer to the mixing of languages and races, respectively. Although hybridity has historically been a negatively charged term that reinforced racist beliefs of purity and authenticity, Homi Bhabha has stressed that it is also precisely the space in which categories of hierarchical purity are contested:

The word hybridity has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose analysis of colonizer/colonized relations stresses their interdependence and the unusual construction of their subjectivities. . . . Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space [of hybridity], which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical ‘purity’ of cultures untenable. For him, the recognition of this ambivalent space may help us overcome the *exoticism of cultural diversity* in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate.⁷⁹

While Bhabha is speaking specifically of culture and race, the same can be said of gender, as nineteenth-century medical and social discourses were insisting on the equally untenable polarization of the sexes. Thus while gender hybridity is employed in the novel to critique social degeneration and Spain’s national and imperial decline, at the same time it appears as a naturally occurring phenomenon that disrupts artificial gender hierarchies. Perhaps most disruptive is Doña Paula’s performance of masculinity, which can be seen as an example of *ministry*,⁸⁰ which actually reproduces and contests the proclaimed superiority of men. The strong, competitive, and ruthless Doña Paula represents both what Spain needs (strength and capitalist enterprise) and what it should avoid (greedy

self-centredness and corruption). Moreover, by projecting the most dominant form of masculinity onto a working-class female body, the novel grotesquely critiques precisely what it suggests the nation is lacking and portrays a supposedly “unnatural” gender hybridity as an inherent, “natural” threat that society must combat—an aporia that the novel does not, and cannot, resolve.

NOTES

1. Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 2.
2. R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 832.
3. Michael S. Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity” in *The Masculinities Reader*, ed. Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 272–275.
4. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 28.
5. Leopoldo Alas, *La Regenta*, 2 vols., ed. Juan Oleza (1884–1885; Madrid: Cátedra, 1989), 1149.
6. John Rutherford, trans., *La Regenta*, by Leopoldo Alas (London: Penguin, 2005), 25. All English translations of *La Regenta* are taken from Rutherford.
7. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1149.
8. Alas, 1149.
9. Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 26.
10. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1151–152.
11. Alas, 1138.
12. Alas, 1148.
13. Celedonio is most directly related to an amphibian in the last chapter, when the kiss he gives Ana resembles that of the belly of a toad.
14. In *Degeneration* (1892), Max Nordau argued that degeneration was associated with effeminacy as well as a blurring of the distinctions between the sexes. See Lawrence Rich, “Fear and Loathing in Vetusta: Coding Class and Gender in Clarín’s *La Regenta*,” *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 25, no. 3 (2001): 513.
15. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1494–495.
16. Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 232–233.
17. “Ana se estremeció como al contacto de un cuerpo viscoso y frío. Aquel sarcasmo de amor la hizo sonreír a ella misma con amargura que llegó hasta la boca desde las entrañas” (Alas, *La Regenta*, 2391–92). See the translation in Rutherford, *La Regenta*: “Ana shuddered as she had felt the touch of something cold and slimy. That travesty of love made her smile to herself with a bitterness which came to her mouth from deep in her body” (563–564).
18. Fermín himself recognizes the complete control his mother has over him:

Aquel era su tirano: un tirano consentido, amado, muy amado, pero formidable a veces. ¿Y cómo romper aquellas cadenas? A ella se lo debía todo. Sin la perseverancia de aquella mujer, sin su voluntad de acero que iba derecha a un fin rompiendo por todo ¿qué hubiera sido él? Un pastor en las montañas, o un cavador en las minas. Él valía más que todos, pero su madre valía más que él. El instinto de doña Paula era superior a todos los raciocinios. Sin ella hubiera sido él arrollado algunas veces en la lucha de la

vida. Sobre todo, cuando sus pies se entredaban en redes suíles que le tendía un enemigo ¿quién le libraba de ellas? Su madre. Era su égida. Sí, ella primero que todo. Su despotismo era la salvación; aquel yugo saludable. Además, una voz interior le decía que lo mejor de su alma era su cariño y su respeto filial. (Alas, *La Regenta*, 1505)

She was his tyrant: a dear, beloved, deeply beloved tyrant, but sometimes an overpowering one. And how could he break his chains? He owed everything to her. Without her perseverance, without her iron will-power, which went straight to its goal, breaking through everything in its path, what would he be now? A cowherd in the mountains or a hewer of coal in the mines. He was able than all the rest of them, but his mother was able still. Doña Paula's instincts were superior to all reasoning. Without her he would have been routed more than once in the struggle of life. In particular, when his feet were emmeshed in the fine nets put in his path by his enemies, who pulled them free? His mother. She was his aegis. Yes, mother before everything else. Her despotism was his salvation; her yoke was a beneficent yoke. And, furthermore, an inner voice told him that his filial affection and respect were the best part of his soul. (Rutherford, *La regenta*, 241)

19. Collin McKinney, "Enemigos de la virilidad? Sex, Masturbation, and Celibacy in Nineteenth-Century Spain," *Prisma Social* 13 (2014–2015): 81.

20. McKinney, 82.

21. McKinney, 87.

22. "Decaer y decaer en presencia de Ana era horroroso; era ridículo y era infame. Si él faltaba a su juramento envejeciendo, perdiendo fuerzas. Recordaba con escalofríos épocas pasadas en que decadencias pasajeras, producidas por excesos de placer, le habían obligado a recurrir a expedientes bochornosos" (Alas, *La Regenta*, 2514). And see the translation: "Declining, and declining in front of Ana, was horrible, it was ridiculous and it was infamous. He shuddered as he remembered past periods of his life when temporary shortcomings, produced by excesses of pleasure, had made him resort to embarrassing stratagems" (Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 652, translation slightly modified).

23. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1604.

24. Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 307.

25. McKinney, "Enemigos de la virilidad," 88.

26. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1639.

27. Translation mine.

28. Mark Harpring, "Sexo, sexualidad e ideal masculino en *Higiene sexual del soltero*, de Ciro Bayo," in *Memoria histórica, género e interdisciplinariedad: Los estudios culturales hispánicos en el siglo XXI*, ed. Santiago Juan-Navarro and Joan Torres-Pou (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2008), 163.

29. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1369.

30. Alas, 2:239–241.

31. Alas, 1:504.

32. Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 240.

33. Alas, *La Regenta*, 2:397–398.

34. Alas, 2:399.

35. Alas, 2:514–515.

36. Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia," 270.

37. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 50.

38. Halberstam, 57.

39. Juan Cuesta y Ckener, *Enfermedades de las mujeres: Extracto de las asignaturas que tienen que estudiar los cirujanos de segunda clase que aspiran al título de Facultativo habilitados por medio de estudios privados* (Madrid: Tomás Alonso, 1868), 7.

40. Translation mine.

41. Pedro Felipe Monlau, *Higiene del matrimonio o el libro de los casados* (Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1858), 108.

42. Translation mine.

43. V. Suárez Casañ, *Enciclopedia médica popular*, vol. 2 (Barcelona: M. Maucci, 1894), 476.

44. Translation mine.

45. Amancio Peratonei, *Fisiología de la noche de bodas: Misterios del lecho conyugal* (Barcelona: N. Curriols, 1892), 111.

46. Translation mine.

47. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 60.

48. Cristina Mathews, "Making the Nuclear Family: Kinship, Homosexuality, and *La Regenta*," *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 37, no. 1 (2003): 83.

49. James Mandrell, "Estudios gay y lesbianos: La revelación del cuerpo masculino: Una mirada gay," in *El hispanismo en los Estados Unidos. Discursos críticos/prácticos textuales*, ed. José Manuel del Pino and Francisco La Rubia Prado (Madrid: Visor, 1999), 219; Rich, "Fear and Loathing," 509–510.

50. Rich, "Fear and Loathing," 509–510; Mathews, "Making the Nuclear Family," 83.

51. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1:412; Mathews, "Making the Nuclear Family," 83.

52. Mandrell, "Estudios gay y lesbianos," 217.

53. Translation mine.

54. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1:177.

55. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 51.

56. Rich, "Fear and Loathing," 511.

57. Rich, 512; Alas, *La Regenta*, 1:403.

58. "Las miradas más ardientes, más negras de aquellos ojos negros, grandes y arasadores eran para De Pas; los adoradores de la vida lo sabían y le envidiaban. Pero él maldecía de aquel bloqueo" (Alas, *La Regenta*, 1:178). And see the translation: "The most ardent, the darkest look of those large, dark burning eyes were for De Pas; and the widow's worshippers knew it, and envied him. Yet he cursed her blockade" (Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 44).

59. Alas, *La Regenta*, 2:428.

60. Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 591.

61. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1:497.

62. Alas, 1:645.

63. Alas, 1:497.

64. Alas, 1:497.

65. Alas, 1:503.

66. Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 239.

67. I. E. Hartzbusch, "El ama de llaves," in *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos*, ed. Ignacio Boix (Madrid: I. Boix Editor, 1843), 124.

68. Hartzbusch, 126.

69. José de Grijalva, "La cantinera," in *Los españoles pintados*, 271–272. A word about Petra, a woman who seems destined to follow in Paula's footsteps, seems in order here.

While Petra is physically much more conventionally feminine than Doña Paula, both women willingly use their sexuality as an item of exchange, manipulation, and blackmail to improve their own economic standing, revealing a pragmatism and ambition more associated with bourgeois capitalistic ideals of manhood than with bourgeois femininity.

70. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1:636.

71. Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 330–331.

72. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1:635.

73. Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 330.

74. Alas, *La Regenta*, 1:633.

75. Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 328–329.

76. Alas, *La Regenta*, 2:412.

77. Rutherford, *La Regenta*, 578.

78. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 118.

79. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 118, 120–121, emphasis in the original.

80. “Mimicry has come to describe the *ambivalent* relationship between colonizer and colonized. When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to ‘mimic’ the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather the result is a ‘blurred copy’ of the colonizer that can be quite threatening. This is because mimicry is never far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. Mimicry therefore locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behaviour of the colonized” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 138, emphasis in the original). The same occurs in terms of gender in *La Regenta*: Doña Paula’s “mimicry” of masculinity both imitates and mocks the supposedly essential characteristics of the dominant sex.



Afterword

A few concluding words seem in order, as a lot has transpired in terms of feminist politics since I penned the introduction a little less than a year ago. During that time, Merriam Webster named *feminism* as the word of the year because it was the most frequently looked-up word in 2017; their online dictionary experienced a 70 percent increase in searches for the term.¹ Summarizing what appears to be the reasons for this renewed interest in feminism, Kristine Phillips of the *Washington Post* cites the size and impact of both the Women’s March and the #MeToo movement.² The latter was sparked off by high-profile women speaking out against the sexual abuse they had experienced and was followed by thousands more women coming forward and many of the accused resigning or being fired.³ More than anything, the #MeToo movement revealed how endemic sexual harassment still is despite all the gains women had made in the last century.⁴

Another reason for the spike in searches for the meaning of *feminism* was a comment by Kellyanne Conway, counselor to president Trump, in which she sought to distance herself from the term: “It’s difficult for me to call myself a feminist in the classic sense because it seems to be very anti-male and it certainly is very pro-abortion, and I’m neither anti-male or pro-abortion.”⁵ This statement alone sent many to their online dictionaries in search of an answer to the question, What is feminism?

The recent prominence of and controversy surrounding feminism take us full circle to the discussion in the introduction. In the Conway quote, we see the persistence of many women’s rejection of feminism, a phenomenon Emilia Pardo Bazán herself cited as the biggest obstacle to women’s obtaining equality. Moreover, the discursive ambiguity of the word *feminist*—which Conway’s comment highlights—is one of the themes of Pardo Bazán 1909 story “Feminista” (“Feminist”) about a young woman, Clotilde Peregales, who marries an older man, Nicolás Abreu, who is both an incorrigible womanizer and an outspoken defender of the traditional gender order. To ensure that Clotilde knows her place