

The Wet Nurse and the Subversion of the *Ángel del Hogar* in Medical and Literary Texts from Nineteenth-Century Spain

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Breastfeeding was one of the important topics of the day in nineteenth-century Spain, as it was in much of Western Europe. The idea that great societies required a large, robust population was commonplace in Europe at this time, and Spain was no exception (Rodríguez Ocaña 10). As modern European states actively sought to increase the size, health and vigor of their populations, the practice of wet nursing came under attack for working against these aims. In addition to the high mortality rate of children who were sent to wet nurses (Sheriff 21), doctors feared hereditary transmission through breast milk. Thus, insisting that the biological mother breastfeed her own children was regarded both as way of warding off infant mortality as well as of safeguarding the offspring of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy from the genes and characteristics of the lower-class wet nurse. It was seen as a way of preventing degeneration, one of the greatest fears of nineteenth-century Spanish society. The well-known, nineteenth-century Spanish hygienist, Ángel Pulido Fernández, invokes these anxieties in his *Bosquejos medico-sociales para la mujer* (1876),

warning that “siempre que los pueblos han caído en la degeneración y el envilecimiento, la lactancia mercenaria ha sido una de sus prácticas más extendidas” (26). He also exploits fears about high infant mortality by introducing his chapter on the topic of lactation with a scene in which a number of child-size coffins are being carried down the street (19-21). The reason for these children’s death is the practice of wet nursing (25).

If there were all these incentives for the biological mother to breastfeed, why was it that so many women continued to use wet nurses in Spain? Although affluent women had sent their children to wet nurses for many centuries, it was not until the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, with the rise of the middle class, that it became a service that many more women could afford. Hiring a wet nurse not only freed up these women’s time for more leisurely activities, it also was believed to make women more sexually available to their husbands and to preserve their youthful beauty. Doctors often advised women to abstain from sexual intercourse while nursing arguing that it could spoil or dry up their breast milk (Sheriff 21). For example, according to Felipe Monlau, in the second edition of his highly influential *Higiene de matrimonio* (1858), “hay que evitar, o limitar, el sexo durante la lactación” because it can turn the breast milk into “un líquido seroso, insípido y amarillento” (430-31). If a choice had to be made between breastfeeding and sexual intercourse, a husband was in his right to insist that his wife employ a wet nurse (Sheriff 21). Furthermore, fears about husbands straying into adulterous relationships and/or turning to onanism even led many religious confessors to advise women to seek out a wet nurse in order to be able to fulfill their “wifely duties” and save their husbands’ souls (21). Added to this was the belief that breastfeeding destroyed the firmness and shapeliness of the female breast and women’s overall beauty (Aldaraca 86; Jacobus 60-62). Since breastfeeding was seen as both damaging to the woman’s beauty and encroaching upon the couple’s sexual life, many women chose to hire a wet nurse over risk losing their husbands’ sexual attentions.¹ In addition to these reasons for women’s not wanting to breastfeed, it is my contention that the highly sexualized and often grotesque portrayals of wet nurses, breastfeeding and even of breasts themselves undermined idealized images of the chaste *ángel del hogar* with which women wanted to identify. This led many women to seek out wet nurses in spite of the risks to themselves, their children and the women they employed to nurse their children.

The nineteenth century is a period noted for its sanctification of women's roles of wives as mothers. According to Catherine Jagoe, what was unique about nineteenth-century discourses on female domesticity was the way in which they exalted, rather than denigrated, the female character (26). While in previous eras the justification for women's subordination to men and their restriction to the home was often found in misogynist arguments about woman's weak moral character and lasciviousness, in the nineteenth-century the same restrictive roles were explained in terms of women's pure, self-sacrificing natures that destined them to be the moral pillars of the family (26-27). With the Virgin Mary serving as the ideal model of motherhood, discourses on women's divine mission in the home were imbued with religious symbolism that presented wives and mothers as angels or saints (24).² Women's interest in men and marriage was attributed to women's "natural" inclination to nurture and care for others rather than to sexual feelings (Jagoe 32). Thinness, as a physical manifestation of women's role as saintly martyr, was also held up as the feminine ideal (31-32). According to Elaine Showalter, nineteenth-century Darwinian psychiatry viewed the anorexic woman as a "self-sacrificing Victorian heroine" who by "refusing to eat, [...] acted out the most extreme manifestation of the feminine role, flaunting her martyrdom, literally turning herself into a 'little' woman" (128).³

While nineteenth-century domestic discourses tried to present the *ángel del hogar* as a monolithic ideal of womanhood that transcended class and social status, these texts were primarily aimed at an "aspiring bourgeoisie whose principal concern [was] to draw a sharp line between itself and the lower classes" (Aldaraca 64). However, attacks against aristocratic women's frivolous, spendthrift lifestyle and neglect of their wifely and maternal duties clearly indicate an attempt to make upper-class women conform to this ideal as well (Jagoe 29). Working-class women, on the other hand, simply could not embody these ideals. The harsh realities of their lives required strength and hardiness, not thinness and frailty, and their financial situations often made it necessary for them to work outside the home. Two legal occupations monopolized by lower-class women in nineteenth-century Spain were also two of the most marginalized: wet nursing and prostitution (Shubert 42-43).⁴ Connections were often made between wet nurses and prostitutes since both sold their bodies for money (Richter 17). Moreover, as we shall see, wet nurses were generally viewed as

sexually promiscuous and perverted. Thus, in many ways the wet nurse (along with the prostitute) represented the complete antithesis of the *ángel del hogar*; she was working class, she was strong and robust, she was carnal and sexual, and she worked outside the home.

Paradoxically, however, the wet nurse, as a primary caregiver and a surrogate mother, also represented motherhood itself. Thus, the wet nurse was both a representation of motherhood and, at the same time, the antithesis of everything that an ideal mother should be. In this way the wet nurse problematized the dichotomies of maternal/sexual and upper-class/lower-class reaffirmed by the image of the asexual and affluent *ángel del hogar*.⁵ Implied and explicit comparisons between the activities and duties of biological mothers and wet nurses revealed that all women, regardless of class, were both sexual and maternal and were expected to do the supposedly degrading work of breastfeeding. While many women tried to maintain the image of the *ángel del hogar* by disassociating themselves from the wet nurse and the services she provided, her image served as a reminder of the realities of motherhood and gender relations that artificial constructs of femininity tried to disguise.

While the ideal wet nurse was 35 or younger, with "apretadas carnes" and "pechos redondeados" (Pulido Fernández 47), wet nurses were more commonly portrayed as dark, robust, working-class women with thick arms and necks and large breasts whose lactating function tied them to animals (Schiebinger 55). Not only bad mothers for having abandoned their own children, wet nurses were also said to be unhealthy, unclean and sexually promiscuous (Schiebinger 67; Aldaraca 86-87). Indeed, doctors not only associated wet nursing with prostitution, they claimed that wet nursing resulted in the sexual molestation of children. Pulido Fernández claims that many wet nurses were formerly prostitutes who then came to pass on venereal diseases to the children they fed:

¡Cuántas veces tras un período de prostitucion y libertinaje, durante el cual se *ha pasado por todo*, la mujer entra á formar parte de una familia que la cree sana, cuando no virtuosa! [...]

Con decir que en numerosas ocasiones el médico tiene que curar ciertas enfermedades de los niños de índole contagiosa y que no han sido trasmitadas por la leche,

apuntamos uno de los más inícuos crímenes (asi debe llamarse) que se pueden concebir. (41 *emphasis in the original*)

And, according to an account given by V. Suárez Casañ in *Los vicios solitarios* [c. 1900]:

Hay ejemplos numerosos de niñeras y nodrizas que, para hacer callar y dormir a las tiernas criaturitas confiadas a su cuidado, emplean con ellas manipulaciones criminales.

Esta práctica se efectúa muchas veces como una gracia o como una travesura, y viendo después que produce resultado para acallar a los inocentes angelitos, la emplean con frecuencia para desembarazarse de ellos. (21)

Thesée Pouillet also echoes this idea in his *Del onanismo en la mujer* (1883) when he writes: “¿no se ven todos los días nodrizas mercenarias [...] que llevan su estupidez hasta el punto de hacer cosquillas en los órganos genitales de sus criaturas á fin de apagar sus gritos ó de calmar sus llantos?” (59).⁶ Pouillet, however, goes on to specifically relate a case where the wet nurse actually performed oral sex on the child in her care:

En una familia á quien cuidaba, había un niño pequeño, de doce á quince meses, al que criaba una nodriza, que no tenía leche suficiente: ahora bien, para calmar el apetito y los llantos del pequeño ser, y sin duda también por poner á salvo su interés, esta horrible mercenaria no había encontrado medio mejor que practicar, durante la noche, la succión de las partes genitales del niño. (60)

These representations of sexually lascivious wet nurses subvert the nineteenth-century image of the pure, chaste *ángel del hogar*. The similarities between wet nurses and mothers were also highlighted in accounts of biological mothers whose behavior resembles that of the most vile wet nurse. Pouillet, for example, cites a case in which the biological mother herself used masturbation as a means of pacifying her child:

Una niña de cinco años había contraído la costumbre de la masturbación, y se entregaba á ella día y noche con verdadero frenesí. Su madre, ¡y qué madre!, no había

imaginado cosa mejor para impedir á su hija practicar con tanta frecuencia estos viciosos tocamientos, que prometerla que, si abstenía por el día, ella intervendría por la noche en el momento de acostarla y cumplía su promesa, porque no dudó una vez en realizarla ante una de sus amigas que se hallaba presente al acostar á la niña, y la cual escuchó estupefacta la explicación de la causa y que la madre parecía encontrar muy natural, de su culpable debilidad. (60-61)

As biological mothers themselves were said to engage in behaviors associated with wet nurses, a clear division between the asexual, domestic woman, and the sexualized, mercenary wet nurse became more difficult to maintain. In addition, although nineteenth-century doctors sought to maintain clear class divisions by encouraging women to nurse their own children, paradoxically this very request blurred such divisions by demanding that all women do the labor normally relegated to lower-class women. In other words, doctors argued that biological mothers should breastfeed in order to protect middle- and upper-class children from inheriting the undesirable traits of the lower classes, yet, this very request erased class divisions in the case of women as it meant that gender, rather than social status, determined who performed this type of work.

It was not only the wet nurse, however, but also breasts themselves that conflated the sexual with the maternal. Female breasts, as one of women's most visible secondary sexual characteristics, historically have been valued and emphasized in Western society for their ability to excite and attract members of the opposite sex, clearly making them an eroticized body part. Moreover, medical comparisons of the time between the breast and the penis further sexualized breasts and breastfeeding. Many doctors made connections between the breast and the penis by focusing on the erection of the nipple, the secretion of fluids and the sexual arousal women were said to experience during breastfeeding (Richter 9; Perry 228). The particularly phallic nature of the wet nurse's breasts further highlighted this connection. Cultural anthropologists of the nineteenth-century classified breasts of the different races ascribing the "preferred" "hemispherical" type to "whites and Asians" and the "flabby and pendulous" type "similar to the udders of goats" to African women (Schiebinger 64). This comparison of the "undesirable" African women's "pendulous" breasts with the udders of an animal is

important as it is an image frequently invoked in literary depictions of the wet nurse that we will examine more closely in works by Benito Pérez Galdós and Emilia Pardo Bazán. An animal's udder is clearly more phallic in shape than any female breast. Thus, the closer the breast resembled the phallus, the more clearly sexual it was and less desirable as a feminine ideal. According to Londa Schiebinger, the wet nurse's breasts were generally associated with the old, used-up, drooping breasts of witches, whose withered breasts were a symbol of lust (53). Not only were they portrayed as flaccid, but often with black nipples due to overuse (62). In this way breasts that performed their nurturing function most closely resembled the phallus, were the least sexually desirable, and were more starkly contrasted with ideal breasts, which were firm and unused (60). Thus, breasts, as symbols of female sexuality and as appendages that could resemble the male phallus and an animal's udder in both appearance and function, could not be divested of their sexual significance, making it difficult to view breastfeeding as an appropriate activity for a respectable wife and mother.

These conflicting messages about breastfeeding are clearly seen in Benito Pérez Galdós's novel, *El amigo Manso* (1882). The wet nurses in the text are coarse, bestial beings whose lactating breasts are droopy, repulsive appendages that provide a service rather than decorate the female body and add to its sexual attractiveness. At the same time, however, the novel promotes the nineteenth-century hygienists' pleas to get mothers to breastfeed their own children, thereby unintentionally blurring the very division between the *ángel del hogar* and the wet nurse that the text sets up. The first wet nurse that we meet is the woman who cares for Manso's nephew. She is referred to as a "vaca humana" and described as a stocky, manly woman from the backwoods with dark skin and large breasts (226-27). More incriminating is her character description. She is a volatile and capricious woman who uses the implicit threat of not feeding the child and putting its life in danger in order to get more money and gifts from the family she works for (279). The position of power that the wet nurse is placed in is such that at one point Manso's sister-in-law claims that she is willing to give the wet nurse everything she has so that the wet nurse will continue to provide her services and keep her child alive (279).

The next description of wet nurses comes when Manso visits the government-run wet nurse agency in order to find a new woman to breastfeed his nephew. Manso freely expresses his repulsion at

the sight of these "burras de leche" (321) and emphasizes their physical ugliness and low character above all else: "Rarísimas eran las caras bonitas, y dominaba en las filas la fealdad, sombreada de expresión de astucia. Era la escoria de las ciudades mezclada con la hez de las aldeas" (323). Manso is also repulsed by these women's breasts, which he refers to as "flácidos ubres" (324).

Although on several occasions Manso expresses his disgust with the practice of wet nursing and insists that he himself would never allow his own children to be cared for by a wet nurse (237-38), the text provides no examples of mothers who breastfeed their own children. While his sister-in-law insists that she wanted to breastfeed her child, she claims that the doctor and her husband forced her to hire a wet nurse because of her fragile health (321). Nevertheless, one questions whether the grotesque image of the wet nurse could possibly be reconciled with the ideal of femininity that Manso's sister-in-law must embody. The fact that her delicate health, a feminine quality in and of itself, spares her from assuming a task usually relegated to hardy, unattractive women of lower social standing, is of no surprise considering, as Bridget Aldaraca notes "feminine weakness was considered an acceptable excuse" (86). Thus, despite the narrator/protagonist's pleas for biological mothers to breastfeed their own children, the negative image of the wet nurse presented in the text clearly conflicts with the ideal of a pure, virginal mother figure, or *ángel del hogar*. In other words, the text conveys a conflicting message on the subject of breastfeeding. It insists that all good mothers should breastfeed their own children, but does not present us with such an image. The text, like Spanish society in general, does not reconcile the two incompatible images of the beautiful, feminine *ángel del hogar* with the coarse, masculinized woman who must actually make use of her lactating breasts out of economic necessity.

In Emilia Pardo Bazán's short story "Un diplomático" (1883) we see some similarities in the representation of the Duchess and her wet nurse. The narrator describes the wet nurse's body in terms of its strength and hardiness. She is a husky woman with a complexion resembling that of a figurine of "barro cocido" (62-65). Her arms are not simply arms but the "robustos brazos del ama" (63), her bust is referred to as the "seno de Cibeles" (63) and her nipple is an "ubre" (65). In contrast to the narrator's description of the strength and utility of the wet nurse's body, the decorative aspect of the Duchess's body is emphasized. In the first description of the Duchess, the narrator tells us that she wears a medallion

of turquoise and diamonds over a black velvet robe (62). And shortly afterwards, when the Duke and the doctor enter the room, the Duchess is described as part of the room's decor: "ambas notabilidades [...] se adelantaron hacia el rincón del gabinete, donde se destacaba la airosa cabeza de la duquesa sobre un fondo de aterciopelado follaje de begonias" (63). Thus, as we saw in Galdós's *El amigo Manso*, the text distinguishes two types of female bodies, the rough, sturdy, sexualized lower-class female body valued for its utility, and the delicate, unused, upper-class body valued for its decorative qualities.

However, these binaries of decoration/utility, lower-class/upper-class are more conspicuously subverted in Pardo Bazán's story than in Galdós's novel, as the implied author of "Un diplomático" intentionally underscores the similarities between the experiences of the two women, that is of the wet nurse and the mother. In Pardo Bazán's story, the wet nurse receives a letter from her family saying that her own child has died in her absence. Her pain is so great that she breaks down emotionally and physically and is no longer able to nurse the Duchess's child. As a result, the Duchess's own child perishes. What is unique to Pardo Bazán's story is the sympathy the narrator shows for the wet nurse and her suffering. We are able to see and feel her pain at the loss of her own child. This is in stark contrast to the descriptions of wet nurses in hygiene manuals and Galdós's novel where they are nothing more than repulsive, bestial beings on a par with prostitutes and beggars. In "Un diplomático," both women suffer the loss of a child because society insists on limiting the purposes and capabilities of the female body: it must be either untouched and decorative or sturdy and functional. The wet nurse must abandon her own child in order to provide her nutritional services to the aristocracy, so that the beauty and femininity of the upper-class female body, here that of the Duchess, can be spared and consumed by the husband. However, by making an explicit comparison between the wet nurse and the Duchess, what the text reveals is that all female bodies are both functional and decorative, both sexual and feminine, and that all women are both material and spiritual. The story suggests that patriarchy commits an act of violence against women of all social classes by creating a concept of femininity that denies women of certain social standing the ability to use and enjoy their bodies as they please, and forces working-class women to neglect their own bodies and families so that the *ángel del hogar* can live up to an artificially constructed

femininity. Thus, the text implies that the liberation of women involves a more comprehensive concept of womanhood, or femininity, that recognizes that a woman's physical and spiritual existence is multi-faceted and that one aspect cannot be partitioned off from the other along class lines without negative consequences.

Pardo Bazán returns to this theme three years later in her novel *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886). Again we see the same sort of division between the refined, "feminine" upper-class woman and the coarse, sexual, lower-class woman. Like "Un diplomático," *Los pazos* underscores the fact that motherhood, the supposed epitome of femininity, requires both a strength and sexual nature that stereotypically feminine women do not embody. Or, in Lou Charnon-Deutsch's words, *Los Pazos* "challenges the idealized mother—the serene virgin idolized in Spanish religious rite, art and romantic literature—by juxtaposing to it a physical reality of a cruder kind" (79). It is the priest, Julián, who presents us with society's ideal of the *ángel del hogar*. He bases his concept of femininity on his own mother who was "tan modosa, siempre con los ojos bajos y la voz almibarada y suave, con su *casabé* abrochado hasta la nuez" (171) and on the Virgin Mary.⁷ For Julián the ideal woman is chaste and reserved with strong religious inclinations (218; 222). In addition to these qualities, Nucha, Julián's choice of wife for Don Pedro, the Marquis of Ulloa, is also young, highly sensitive and frail. Julián's attempts at creating an ideal Christian family fail, however, because Nucha is not up for the realities of marriage and motherhood. Her physical weakness prevents her from breastfeeding and, therefore, from being her child's principal caregiver. This separation from her child combined with her husband's abusive and callous treatment takes its toll on her already frail emotional and physical health and ultimately leads to her death.

Opposed to Nucha are Sabel (the maid and mother to Don Pedro's illegitimate child) and the wet nurse who is hired to feed Nucha's child. The wet nurse is a "muchachota color de tierra, un castillo de carne: el tipo clásico de la vaca humana" with enormous breasts and stomach (285; 294; 298). Nucha, trying to convince herself of the solely material role that the wet nurse plays in the upbringing of her child, compares the *ama* to a barrel of milk and her breasts to spigots from which her child drinks: "El ama [...] era un tonel lleno de leche que estaba allí para aplicarle la espita cuando fuese necesario, y soltar el chorro: ni más ni menos" (298). The wet nurse is so uncouth that she eats with her hands and has

to be reminded to wear shoes on a regular basis. Like the wet nurses described in the hygiene manuals of the time, her virtue is suspect given that she appears to have given birth to a child out of wedlock.⁸

Nevertheless, unlike the vile attack on the wet nurse's character in *El amigo Manso*, in *Los pazos*, the wet nurse is something of a noble savage. In his description of the women from the wet nurse's village, whom he refers to as *amazonas*, the doctor, Máximo Juncal, claims that "las hembras de Castrodorna suelen ser tan honestas como selváticas" (299). Furthermore, unlike the woman employed by Manso's brother in Galdós's novel, here the wet nurse does not do anything to exploit the family's vulnerability for her own financial profit. We actually feel sympathy for this woman who has been forced to abandon her own child and risk her family's reputation in order to provide nourishment to the child of an aristocratic family. When Juncal explains to Pedro that the family's honor might be at stake if they allow their daughter to nurse his child, Pedro claims that as the daughter of a man in his employ, neither she nor her father are in a position to refuse: "Que yo necesito a tu hija, ¡zás!, pues contra tu voluntad te la cojo. Que me hace falta leche, una vaca humana, ¡zás!, si no quieres dar de mamar de grado a mi chiquillo, le darás por fuerza" (280). Thus, again, Pardo Bazán's representation of the wet nurse differs from that given in hygiene manuals and Galdós's text because of the sympathy shown for the wet nurse and the way in which she is exploited. Like Pardo Bazán's short story "Un diplomático," *Los pazos* suggests that society's restrictive concept of femininity fuels the industry of wet nursing and is often responsible for middle and upper-class women's physical and emotional demise, the death and abandonment of young children and lower-class women's exploitation.

Since we know that Pardo Bazán went against the traditions of her social class and breastfed her own children (Castro 6), are we to see these works as a plea to mothers to breastfeed? This is difficult to say. Pardo Bazán was clear about her disdain for the medical movement of the day which was arguing that a woman's entire existence be determined and restricted by her reproductive and maternal functions (Pardo Bazán, "Una opinión" 194-96). It is therefore doubtful that she would be in accordance with the medical texts insisting that it was women's duty to bear and nurse children. As a mother, however, she probably chose to do so because of the empirical evidence (the high mortality rate of children raised by wet nurses) that it was beneficial for her children. Nevertheless, what seems more important in these works than the issue of

breastfeeding itself is that it reveals how artificial constructs of femininity exploit women of all social classes and how they prevent women from realizing their full potential as complete human beings.

In nineteenth-century Spain, wet nurses, and breasts themselves, served as ambiguous symbols that underscored the inherent contradictions of a constructed femininity that attempted to impose a division between maternity and sexuality. Breasts, as sexual adornments and as substitutes for the phallus (both in their more phallic representation as udders and in their capabilities for erection, secretion and sexual excitation) resisted "domestication" as bodily appendages solely intended for the chaste duties of motherhood. Similarly, the wet nurse, as a type of mercenary mother, came to represent motherhood itself and thereby subvert idealized images of maternity. It was a reminder to all women that gender, rather than social class, determined their inferior position in society, and that despite all the homage paid to the *ángel del hogar*, a mother's work, when outsourced and placed on the market, was equated to the work of prostitutes. These undesirable images of motherhood, combined with fears about becoming less sexually desirable to one's husband, made it difficult for hygienists and moralists to convince middle- and upper-class women to breastfeed their own children. These negative images of wet nurses and of the material realities of motherhood are clearly seen in the medical and literary texts examined above. Only Pardo Bazán's works, however, clearly blame patriarchy and artificial constructs of femininity for forcing women to choose between motherhood and sexuality, and between their children and their husbands. This unnatural scenario is portrayed as a form of violence which, in "Un diplomático" results in the death of two innocent children and the emotional and physical suffering of two mothers, and in *Los pazos* in the death of a mother and the consequent abandonment and neglect of her child.

NOTES

¹Moralists and doctors alike criticized such reasons for avoiding breastfeeding as frivolous and vain (Perry 215; Sheriff 21). For example, Pulido Fernández attacks the vanity of women who chose not to breastfeed and insists on the utility of female breasts over their decorative function (30; 42).

²According to Geraldine M. Scanlon, "La Virgen María fue proclamada en el siglo XIX en España como el ideal al que deberían tratar de emular todas las mujeres, pues era la encarnación perfecta

de todas las cualidades que un hombre podía desear para su propio bienestar" (160)

³Anorexia nervosa was first labeled a disease in 1873 (Showalter 127).

⁴Prostitution was legal in Spain until 1935 "although after 1850 it was increasingly regulated by local governments" (Shubert 42).

⁵In her article "*La vaca humana: The Wet Nurse in Galdós's *El amigo Manso* and Beyond*," Beth Wietelmann Bauer discusses the wet nurse's ambiguous position as both the Other against which the bourgeoisie sought to define itself and as an image of a nursing mother, an image so degraded that it may have undermined doctors' attempts to persuade middle-class women to breastfeed their own children (64-66).

⁶This is a Spanish translation of the French text *Essai médico-philosophique sur les formes, les causes, les signes, les conséquences et le traitement de l'onanisme chez la femme*.

⁷Julian makes implied and explicit comparisons between Nucha and the Virgin Mary throughout the text. For example, observing Nucha while she is pregnant, Julián is reminded of paintings of the Visitation and is convinced that "Nucha era viva imagen de Nuestra Señora" (274). And when Julián goes to visit her grave at the end of novel he remembers her as "la santa, la víctima, la virgencita siempre cándida y celeste" (415).

⁸Nucha's doctor, Máximo Juncal, tries to explain to Pedro that the woman's family may not want her to work as a wet nurse because they may not want the birth of her child to be made public. The doctor tells Pedro: "Lo que no sé es si los padres la dejarán venir. Creo que son gente honrada en su clase y no quieren divulgar lo de la hija" (280).

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