

REININGER, MOLLY R., M.A. Social vs. Sensual: The Struggle for Identity within the Characters of Clarín's *La Regenta*. (2016)
Directed by Dr. Ana Hontanilla. 69 pp.

This study approaches the novel *La Regenta*, by Leopoldo Alas Clarín, by exploring the three types of forces that act upon the characters of Fermín de Pas and Ana de Ozores as they construct their personal identities. The Catholic Church acts in the novel as it controls its female devotees and protects its corrupted clergy. Physical influences in the form of scientific discourse and corporal desires also motivate and control the characters. Societal expectations are expressed in the form of filial duties and behavioral pressures on women to conform to the ideal of the *ángel del hogar*. The conflicting influences of these forces create a world in which Fermín and Ana must struggle in order to understand themselves.

SOCIAL VS. SENSUAL: THE STRUGGLE FOR
IDENTITY WITHIN THE CHARACTERS
OF CLARÍN'S *LA REGENTA*

by

Molly R. Reininger

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
2016

Approved by

Ana Hontanilla
Committee Chair

© 2016 Molly R. Reininger

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Molly R. Reininger has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair Ana Hontanilla

Committee Members Claudia Cabello-Hutt

Carmen Sotomayor

November 7, 2016
Date of Acceptance by Committee

November 7, 2016
Date of Final Oral Examination

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Review of the Literature	3
II. FORCES OF PURITY AND PASSION IN 19 TH CENTURY SPAIN	7
The Divine: The Catholic Church.....	7
The Physical: Science and Sexuality	12
The Female Ideal: The <i>Ángel del Hogar</i>	16
III. ANA DE OZORES	20
Ana as a Burden: Daughter, Charge, Niece	23
Ana as a Wife: An Angel of Her Home	29
Ana as a Catholic: A Spiritual Daughter.....	32
Passion for Life: Purpose, Motherhood, Love	35
Carnal Passion: The Seduction by Don Álvaro	38
IV. FERMÍN DE PAS.....	43
Fermín as a Priest: Keeping up Appearances	46
Fermín as a Son: The Power of Doña Paula	48
Fermín as a Confessor: An <i>Hermano del Alma</i>	49
Corrupted Canon: Ambition, Power, and Greed.....	51
Chastity Compromised: Desires, Realized and Repressed	55
V. CONCLUSIONS.....	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	63

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

La heroica ciudad dormía la siesta. ...en las calles no había más ruido que el rumor estridente de los remolinos de polvo... Cual turbas de pilluelos, aquellas migajas de la basura, aquellas sobras de todo se juntaban en un montón...¹

The city of heroes was having a nap. ...the streets of the city were silent, except for the rasping whispers of whirls of dust, rags, straw and paper... this miscellany of left-overs, remnants of refuse, would come together...²

It could be said that Leopoldo Alas Clarín's novel *La Regenta* is centered on the problem of personal identity. In the setting of the novel, the fictional Spanish city Vetusta, there is a disconnect between inner identities of its characters and the identities they try to represent to the world. This is apparent from the first sentences: the city itself is described as "heroic," but the reader's first glimpse of the setting is of trash-littered streets. This immediate representation of the city in a state of identity crisis continues throughout the work, as the same type of crisis manifests itself within the individual characters. A variety of forces create violent internal conflict within the characters of Ana de Ozores and Fermín de Pas, forcing them to choose between spiritual purity and carnal passion, between duty to their society and desire for personal fulfillment, in their search to construct their identities.

¹ Alas, Leopoldo, 55

² English translation drawn from the Rutherford edition (21).

The imposition of spiritual as well as physical purity overarches the lives of the habitants of Vetusta through the omniscient power of the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, carnal nature and its passions, whether sexual or otherwise, also forms a part of the dynamic of the city. The two characters most torn between their private desires, for romantic love and physical satisfaction, and their public duties, which require them to honor their social and religious responsibilities, are Fermín de Pas and Ana de Ozores. Their internal conflicts between the forces of duty and imposed purity and the forces of internal desires and passions compose the majority of the drama in the novel. This dynamic creates tension between the public identities that the characters present to the world and those that capture their true essence.

The present study explores the tension that these two contrary forces place on the identities of Ana and Fermín, highlighting the constant vacillation of the former and the deceitfulness of the latter. In order to achieve this goal, I study how social conventions in Vetusta's society impose behavioral expectations on its inhabitants, specifically on Ana, setting an unachievable ideal. I explore her search for a fulfilling love, a manner to express her sexuality, and a source of meaning in her life while struggling against this restrictive context. I also analyze how Fermín uses the Catholic Church as a vehicle to infiltrate the private and social lives of the habitants of Vetusta, allowing him to enforce lifestyles of purity, focusing especially on his control over Ana. Fermín's ability to control benefits his greed and ambition for power, as well as allowing him opportunities to satisfy repressed carnal desires. I focus on the interaction of these two poles of influence – social expectations versus sensual drives – in order to emphasize the

complicated dynamic that exists between the forces that control the lives of Ana and Fermín and how they choose to react to them, resulting in the formation of their personal identity.

Review of the Literature

Because of its wide variety of themes and its lack of direct commentary on many controversial topics contained within the work, Clarín's novel has been the subject of multiple and often conflicting interpretations. For example, García de Cortázar calls Fermín de Pas the "verdadero protagonista de la novela"³ (25) while Mandrell writes "Ana is the protagonist, the *only* protagonist" (24, emphasis original); Jan van Luxemborg states that the novel is "possibly anti-clerical" (74) while Ramon Resina calls it "ferociously anti-clerical" (247); and so on. It is beyond the scope of this section to touch on all of the possible approaches to *La Regenta* – indeed, the current body of analyses on the Spanish classic leaves much still to explore, and is constantly accumulating new works – however I hope to mention some of the studies which are particularly relevant to my own interpretation of the text. These articles view *La Regenta* through the lens of male desire (Mandrell), the social significance of childlessness (Overton), classism and sexism in the novel (Rich), the relationship between sex and religion in *Vetusta* (Nimetz), and the contrast between characters' imaginations and reality (Urey).

³ "the true protagonist of the novel"

In his essay titled “Malevolent Insemination: *Don Juan Tenorio* in *La Regenta*,” James Mandrell emphasizes the critical role that desire – particularly, male desire enacted on the bodies of female subjects – plays within the novel. The “insidious presence” of the play in the novel, he argues, is indicative of a society with a very narrow definition of femininity affects said society’s organization, understanding of gender, and individuality of its members (4). It is in this way that “woman – as an absence – becomes part of the dream of men, she exists only as an object on which fantasies of masculine desire are projected” (7).

According to Mandrell, Ana is a perfect example of this: she is a blank slate, waiting to be written on by Álvaro Mesía and Fermín de Pas, both versions of the archetypal character Don Juan. Additionally, Ana’s plight can be extended to all of womanhood: “*La Regenta* addresses the status of woman and her desires in nineteenth-century Spanish society and demonstrates the very real extent to which an escape from the strictures of patriarchy is unpracticable” (23).

Like Mandrell, Diane F. Urey sees Ana as a lack, an incomplete being that is “a representation and not a presence” (31). In her article “Writing Ana in Clarín’s *La Regenta*,” she argues that it is really through imagination that Ana exists. While she creates her own image of herself, also “Vetusta, De Pas and Mesía write Ana through their own readings” as well (32). Because of this, after the series of disenchanting occurrences that bring Ana back to reality, there is a “destruction of her image that threatens her existence” (40). This destroyed image is not just the one that Ana has of herself, but also the ones that she holds about Fermín and Álvaro as well as the one that

the entirety of Vetusta hold about her and her moral infallibility. Such veils removed, Ana is abandoned to suffer a social death caused by such harsh reality.

According to Bill Overton, it was long before the enactment of adultery that Ana should be seen as failing to live up to society's ideals. In an exploration of the general tendencies that appear within the genre, his article "Children and Childlessness in the Novel of Wifely Adultery" explores the patterns of reproduction that appear in such novels as *La Regenta*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Ana Karenina*. Ana's childlessness, he argues, draws to the surface several issues present in the novel, including clerical versus secular establishments (57), corruption and decadence (57), and the complete lack of honest love that Ana experiences in her relationships with the men in her life (58). In the novel, after all, all sexual desire is "blocked, misdirected, or perverted," and no offspring can come from such circumstances.

Lawrence Rich, in his article "Fear and Loathing in Vetusta: Coding Class and Gender in Clarín's *La Regenta*," argues that Vetusta's twisted reality has a cause: women and the lower classes. He notes, "the negative portrayals of the four women I have discussed [Paula, Petra, Visita, and Obdulia] are based on a group of associated motifs in which the most prominent are filth and lasciviousness" (512). He adds that the ideal, rather, was the high-class *ángel del hogar*, a self-sacrificing, home-focused woman without sexual desires. Free sexuality in woman was viewed as a threat to society. As the one female character who at first seems to achieve the image of the ideal woman, Ana appears to be the one exception in the novel; yet, even she descends to the level of the fallen woman, affirming the idea that women's sexuality leads to social decay.

Finally, Michael Nimetz tackles what is perhaps the most pervasive influence in the novel in his article, “Eros and Ecclesia in Clarín’s *Vetusta*.” Nimetz points out the confusing dynamic between sex and religion, in which they “occupy the same shrine and neutralize one another in the process... perversion... is the result” (243). Characters are inauthentic and must struggle between “private essence and public pose” (253). This tension expresses itself in physical or mental illness, social degradation, general falsity, adultery, and other illicit sexual affairs. Nimetz believes that since corruption and immorality are so rampant in the city of *Vetusta*, “perversion of character is inevitable” and the fault lies with the characters’ “disobedience to nature” (251).

While each of these approaches presents an important interpretation of Clarín’s master work, the novel truly cannot and should not be approached through one single lens. It is this complicated and realistic nature of Clarín’s characters and setting that makes the novel so fascinating. However, it is along the lines of Nimetz’s study that I wish to continue my own work, further expanding on the complicated relationship between religion and sex, purity and passion, duty and desire.

CHAPTER II

FORCES OF PURITY AND PASSION IN 19TH CENTURY SPAIN

In order to approach the analysis of the fictional novel within its literary and historical context, this section will discuss in greater detail the forces acting on 19th century Spain. First, I will explore the position of the Catholic Church and the reach of its influence within Spain in the 1800s, focusing on the negative influence over female sexuality and corruption of its clergy; next, I will outline the scientific discourse of the time as pertains to the female body and sexuality; and finally, I will discuss the cultural attitudes and practices in relation to women, as represented by the ideal of the *ángel del hogar*. Each section links directly to examples within the text of *La Regenta*.

The Divine: The Catholic Church

Without a doubt, the Catholic Church was the one institution in a position of dominating power in nineteenth-century Spain. Its presence in the novel *La Regenta* is ubiquitous, as the institution attempts to invade all aspects of the lives of the habitants of Vetusta: from their mental processes to their moral compasses to their physical bodies, the Catholic Church aims to monitor all of Vetusta's inhabitants by creating an obsession with piety of the soul.

Historically, the Catholic Church's ability to enact this control arises from its monopoly over religion and its resolve to attract, monitor the behavior of, and implement

its will upon the pious. García de Cortázar writes that during the second half of the 19th century, the Catholic Church found itself to be losing control of its territories. After a disastrous loss of ground and power, the Church was on the defensive, and desperately needed a new approach to remedy its damages. It began a voracious campaign during the first years of the Restoration period – 1875-1880 – to recuperate its influence “como si de una conquista se tratase”⁴ (25). García de Cortázar continues to note that the focus of the Church was the creation of a culture of obedience, dependence on sacraments and ritual, and maintenance of a general monopoly over religiosity and education. The Church wanted to establish that “fuera de la Iglesia no hay salvación”⁵ in order to solidify the dependence of its followers, condemning those that strayed from Catholicism as doomed and without hope of salvation (García de Cortázar 42). Additionally, as the Church successfully implemented these tactics, its increasing power was fortified by the acceptance of the concept of papal infallibility and a push for unconditional faith, which created an atmosphere in which the church and her sworn servants could not be questioned.

The resulting obsession over the moral and physical purity of the devout as a vehicle for control was directed primarily towards the female sex. One specific technique that was used to establish and maintain the desired power over Spanish women of society was the use of the confessional. García de Cortázar writes that the church tried to “hacer del sacramento de la penitencia un instrumento política”⁶ (41). This tactic focused

⁴ “As if it were a conquest” (my translation).

⁵ “There is no salvation outside of the church” (my translation).

⁶ “Make the sacrament of penitence into a political instrument” (my translation).

specifically on women, who were the majority of those who attended confession, because in this secluded and sacred space the servants of the Church were able to enforce their religious dominion over the ladies' consciences. The influence exercised within these private spaces then worked its way into the public sphere because of the women's ability to influence their spouses; those men, then, could affect society in general.

The underlying purpose of this repressive system was ironically to use women to support a patriarchal dynamic of power in which the Church was the authority, both within the public and private spaces of everyday life. In this way, the priest was “en definitiva, conciencia de los hombres”⁷ (García de Cortázar 42). However, despite the intentional creation of overly religious females, women's religiosity was often characterized negatively.

In addition to this exclusive monopoly on salvation and its sexist practices both using and controlling the female sex, another serious fault within this religious establishment was the corruption of some of its priests and other members of the clergy. Instead of living the supposed pure and saintly lives that the Church required, many Men of God fell prey to temptation and sin in spite of, and perhaps enabled by, their positions within the religious institutions. Their personal faults were excused partially by their proclaimed “infallibility.”

These various aspects of the Catholic Church's status in Spain during the 19th century clearly affect the characters of *La Regenta*, motivating, defining or even destroying them. For example, Ana is forced to obey the Church's monopoly over faith as

⁷ “definitively, man's conscience” (my translation).

she is repeatedly admonished for her spiritual explorations which occur outside of its control. Shamed for her socially devious spirituality, she is redirected instead towards a cold, institutional understanding of the faith by Doña Camila (142), her aunts and high society (158; 173), and her confessors (315).

There are also various examples in the novel of the strange combination of control over / control of women, as their confessors dictate their actions yet imbibe them with a sense of divine purpose to influence others. Olvida Páez and Doña Petrolina exercise such religiously-based power over males in their lives, such as fathers and husbands. Justified by the guiding forces of their confessors, these female characters act as the extended arm of the Church to influence male family members.

Yet, at the same time, such women are torn down from their legitimate power, since they are considered to be over-zealous in their piety. Jan van Luxemborg touches on this viewpoint in her article “*La Regenta: Rhetoric and Religion.*” She writes that in Clarín’s novel, “domination and fanaticism characterize female religiosity” (78). Van Luxemborg notes that the religious practices of most of *Vetusta*’s women is “downright risible,” since the women of *Vetusta* are either obsessively Catholic, like Doña Petrolina, or only pretending at religiosity to keep up appearances, like Visitación (77). Yet the critic shifts the blame off of the characters themselves when she states that “the narrator’s insistence on the negative qualities of female religiosity severely narrows the possible choices of religious authenticity” (78). Therefore, female characters are incapable of achieving an “appropriate” level of religiosity. So, within *Vetusta*, confessors intentionally make women into overbearing agents of the Church’s patriarchal will, yet

society keeps them from gaining any concrete power within social contexts due to classification of excessively religious females as “fanatics.”

Ana is certainly a prime example of this “overly-religious woman” when she is fanaticized by the overbearing force of Fermín de Pas. He attempts to utilize her pre-existing reputation as the perfect wife / model of femininity to amplify his own power while he acts as her confessor. This process of control climaxes in her humiliating barefooted walk through the city during the *Semana Santa* processions, and results in her realization of his manipulation and her attempt to reject his influence over her. Indeed, Fermín’s role as a confessor shows him to be a prime example of the aforementioned corruption of the Church, a state which is facilitated by the acceptance of religious leaders’ infallibility. Despite the dislike displayed by some within Vetusta against Fermín, there is an overarching attitude shared by most characters in which they are reluctant to criticize the Church and her servants, at least in a public manner. Even in the middle of a tirade against the priests of Vetusta, the narrator writes that one personage, Don Pompeyo, “Ni aun en tan amargos instantes insultaba al obispo y demás alto clero”⁸ (593). De Pas is protected by the Catholic Institution despite his personal corruption: though he initially began the profession as an honest follower of the faith, Fermín and his mother, Doña Paula, have turned his priesthood into something else. Instead of being inspired by pious motives, the two use Fermín’s position as a vehicle for accumulation of wealth, aggregation of influence, and even a cover that both allows and conceals illicit sexual relations.

⁸ “not even at such bitter moments did he [Pompeyo] insult the bishop and the rest of the higher clergy” (444)

In the words of Celedonio, an acolyte of the church, "...en la iglesia hay que ser humilde, como si dijéramos, rebajarse con la gente, vamos achantarse, y aguantar una bofetá si a mano viene"⁹ (58). Yet this ideal, pure behavior of the Church's servants is far from reality in Vetusta, and Clarín makes it clear that while the city is home to many greedy, lascivious, and power-hungry citizens, the hypocrisy does not stop at the doors of the cathedral.

The Physical: Science and Sexuality

As the Catholic Church did its best to stifle the female desires which were a threat to its power, the growing scientific movement within Spain also weighed in on its female citizens' sexual lives. In her article "El discurso de la higiene física y moral en la narrativa femenina"¹⁰, Lou Charon-Deutsch writes about the rise of scientific, secular thought concerning the growing interest in the female body and its health, leading to not only an obsession with the hygiene of a woman's body but also that of her spirit. It was in this time period that "se estableció una clara correlación entre la salud física y la moral"¹¹ (177). Charon-Deutsch notes how the concept of sickness was created by the current dominant ideology and how its definition was an expression of male medical concerns projected onto the female body (178, 181). The medical establishment, much like the Catholic Church, developed a great interest in the behavior of women and attempted to explain, regulate, diagnose, and treat her existence, especially in regards to her private

⁹ "The beneficiary said that in the Church you must be humble, climb down to the people, give in, and put up with a slap in the face if you've got to" (23).

¹⁰ "The Discourse of The Physical and Moral Hygiene in the Feminine Narrative" (my translation).

¹¹ "a clear correlation between physical and moral health" (my translation).

and sexual behavior. In fact the two forces – secular and religious – were in direct competition for control: Joan Ramon Resina writes in her discussion of “Ana Ozores’s Nerves” that “the medical profession was out to relax the religious hold on sexuality” (239).

Jo Labanyi, in her article “Pathologizing the Bodily Economy: Alas’s *La Regenta* (1884-1885),” discusses this difficult position of the woman in 19th century Spain. Due to this perpetual curiosity about and scientific investigation of the female being, women were constantly subjected to new and difficult definitions of what was healthy / sick or normal / abnormal (Labanyi 214). Labanyi writes that society’s fears of social decay were enacted on women’s bodies, and in order to control their dangerous potential, “19th century women were not kept ignorant of their bodily functions but subjected, like Ana, to obsessive monitoring” in order to regulate them (246). Labanyi outlines a myriad of interlocking scientific concepts: she mentions flow and circulation of bodily fluids; the bodily economy of male surplus / female lack; placement of responsibility on the mother for education and health of her children; concerns about hysteria; and an overall conviction that women were organically unstable due to menstruation. These were all prominent ideologies that converged on the female body in an “obsessive attempt to classify human behavior as either ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’” (256).

Yet the observation and regulation of the feminine was not executed only in order to diagnose many constructed illnesses, but was rather an expression of “the struggle for authority over the body... between a still powerful Church and secularization spearheaded by science” (Ramon Resina 245). Indeed, throughout the text of *La Regenta*

Ana's body serves as a battleground for this power struggle. As she tries to distance herself from the religiously-justified power of Fermín, she searches for a new guiding influence over her life, which she finds in the form of the young doctor Benítez.

A modern man with a materialistic approach towards medicine, which was classified as scientific by the modern discourses, Benítez prescribes countryside, activity, and fun to help Ana recover from her frequent nervous attacks. Using the concept of hygiene that was explored by Labanyi, Benítez does his best to help Ana, who proclaims that she will be an “esclava de la higiene”¹² (797). Fearing overstimulation, the doctor tries to keep Ana from her constant imaginings, and in a letter to Fermín – which he certainly finds an alarming indicator of his loss of control – Ana writes, “Benítez me prohíbe, y creo que con razón, analizar mucho”¹³ (797). The doctor even indirectly suggests that Ana needs an active sexual life: when Quintanar asks, “¿Qué necesita?” Benítez answers, “Eso... un estímulo fuerte, algo que le ocupe la atención con... fuerza...; una actividad... grande..., en fin, eso”¹⁴ (821). In line with the scientific tendency to pathologize everything female, despite the fact that Ana seems happy Benítez still thinks she is at risk for relapse. He says, “Esa misma exaltación de la alegría, ese optimismo... no son más que el reverso de la misma medalla”¹⁵ of her earlier fanatic tendencies (821). Ana does indeed take her new lifestyle of physical delights too far when she at last takes Álvaro as her lover.

¹² “a slave to hygiene” (601)

¹³ “Benítez forbids me to analyse things too much... and I believe he is right” (601)

¹⁴ “What does she need?” ... “What I have said. A strong stimulus, something to engage her attention in a – forceful way; some activity on a grand scale. In short, as I have said” (620)

¹⁵ “this exultant happiness itself, this optimism... is simply the other side of the same coin” (620)

Ana is far from the only character so affected by the call of sexuality. This basic instinct of human nature – governed by emotions, animal desires, and an obsession with greed, lust, and luxury – is one of the most universal powers in *Vetusta*. Despite the priests' constant battle against such frivolous bodily pleasures, the natural tendencies of all *Vetustans* cannot be eliminated, only repressed. While the majority of high society pretends to be or attempts to present themselves as moral and respectable creatures, the narrative style in the novel allows exploration of the hidden thoughts and secret behaviors of socialites like Visitación, Obdulia, Álvaro, and others to show that all of this expressed righteousness is just a farce. This group of high-class merrymakers with whom Ana associates, especially later in the novel, pass time on countryside diversions, indulging in conspicuous luxuries, engaging in adulterous relations, and enjoying other scandalous pursuits that are condemned by the narrator as well as by certain other characters within the novel.

Much of this behavior points to a sublimation of the characters' sexuality, which is so repressed and often warped within the confines of *Vetusta* that it can only be expressed in similarly secretive, displaced manners. For example, the married Visitación is always indulging in some form of sweets to assuage her lascivious tendencies, and the widowed Obdulia is obsessed with seductive fashion and flirting (246, 252-53; 84, 107). But these habits are only a recourse when they are unable to act upon their desires. The two women have had various extramarital relations with upper-society men, two of which, Don Álvaro Mesía and Paco Vegallana, make a habit of engaging in such illicit

relations with married or widowed women. Those who are not capable of realizing their sexual desires, such as Don Saturnino, are reduced to dreaming about them (81).

Lower-status characters are not subject to the same restrictions, yet their sexuality is also shown in a similar unflattering light. For example, the two housemaids Petra, in the house of Ana and Víctor, and Teresina, serving Doña Paula and Fermín, act upon their sexual desires much more freely than their class superiors. They even use such favors to further their prospects in life; Petra sees her cousin, a *molinero* with whom she occasionally has relations, as “una caja de ahorros donde ella iba depositando sus economías de amor”¹⁶ and plans to use him as a fallback in case her more ambitious plans for herself are not successful (273).

Through these examples, it is clear that, even though it is set within a time in Spain’s history when the culture was collectively concerned with moral uprightness, *Vetusta* as a whole still answers to natural desires.

The Female Ideal: The *Ángel del Hogar*

Caught somewhere in between these two polar forces of social and physical influence over the female’s body and behavior, 19th-century women were immersed in a world of restrictions and policing of their existence. Despite the competition between the Church and the scientific establishment, the two discourses did agree on many points about women and their roles in society. They both posited that women belonged in the home, to care for their spouses and children, and to stay away from dangerous activities

¹⁶ “a bank in which she was accumulating her amatory savings” (191)

that might induce mental strain and therefore bouts of hysteria or other illnesses. This regulation was deemed necessary in order to avoid the anticipated social decay if women's presence in society was unrestrained: she would, if left unchecked, cause a breakdown of the thoroughly patriarchal society, merely by existing in the public sphere.

As Bridget A. Aldaraca so succinctly outlines in her book, "El Ángel de Hogar: Galdós and the Ideology of Domesticity in Spain," the situation of the 19th century woman had changed little since the Catholic Church's Counter-Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries. While the exact concept of the ideal woman did evolve somewhat due to changes in society and class interests, the variety of justifications made by the current dominant discourse still led to the same conclusions recommending the limitation of women's behavior. The accepted ideology was that women were, by nature, lacking in certain skills and abilities such as capacity for higher thought, self-regulation, and moral or physical strength which made them incapable of functioning within the public sphere without causing some kind of damage, whether to herself or to the men around her.

Instead, it was generally accepted that women were best suited to remain at home and fulfill a role as the virtuous, innocent, willing servant employed in the service of her husband. By the 19th century, this ideal woman had come to be called an "Angel in the home." The "Angel" was a woman best suited to the private sphere, living with the sole purposes of supporting her husband's participation in the public society, raising and educating his children, and gracefully accepting the necessary self-denial in order to serve as a moral model for the middle classes.

Specific rationalizations for this confinement to the home came from several sources, many of which were self-contradicting or based on thin logic. One was the idealization of women as “an eternally young and virginal mother,” which was certainly unattainable, as most women lacked access to immaculate conception (Aldaraca 19). Another rationalization came from the pseudo-scientific medical discourses that were circulating during the 1800s, which offered warnings against overstimulation of women’s delicate brains, which could cause nymphomania and hysteria (75-84). Aldaraca outlines how, since women were considered morally superior to men, people believed that specific measures had to be taken in order to protect the gentler sex so that they would not be corrupted; therefore, women needed male protection, so that they would not fall prey to dangerous forces of the male world (30; 61). Aldaraca writes that within the minds of those perpetuating these ideas,

Considerable effort [was] required to sustain the inherent disjunction between an ideology which pretends to worship women as morally superior to men, and a social structure which... maintains a legal and economic sexual hierarchy within the family. (61)

Thus, the treatment and confinement of the “weaker sex” was assumed to be necessary due to her inherently superior disposition, leading to her need for male protection and her natural position in life as a wife and mother.

When taken into account together, these self-opposing expectations cause a huge strain on the physical and mental wellbeing of Spanish women trying to achieve the feminine ideal. How could an upper-class woman simultaneously fulfill her wifely duty

by bearing her husband's children and still emulate the Virgin Mary? How could she possibly supplement her husband's wealth when she could not work without risking her high-class position? What could she do to avoid being labeled as insane or as a nymphomaniac when the definition of each was constantly shifting? It is no wonder that some women were indeed driven to nervous attacks.¹⁷

Within Clarín's *Vetusta*, Ana is considered the epitome of this ideal; she *is* the *ángel del hogar*, the *perfecta casada*¹⁸ of the city. Indeed, she is the silent sufferer, desperately trying to fulfill all of these ideals at once, failing only in motherhood, since she has borne no children. This fault, however, does not lie with Ana, but rather with her husband's lack of sexual interest in his wife. Her childlessness is also a great personal despair in Ana's life, due to her personal history of lacking mother figures and her resulting desire to become one herself.

Ana finds herself caught between, on one hand, a great number of religious and scientific dialogues, social forces, and imposed male desires, and on the other her own thoughts and internal urges. Her hysterical attacks are persistent reminders of the danger caused by so many conflicting influences upon a human mind.

As such, the array of conflicting interests pervading every aspect of Spanish life is the perfect context in which to place *Vetusta* in order to watch the characters struggle. Each must face his or her own demons as well as external influences, and the outcome might be triumph over temptation, a fatal failure, or some mixture of the two.

¹⁷ See Aldaraca's Prologue, Introduction, and Chapters 1 and 2 for a detailed outline of the interplay of these forces.

¹⁸ "Perfect wife"; a concept made famous by Fray Luis de León's treatise of the same name.

CHAPTER III
ANA DE OZORES

It is within the character of Ana that this fight between individual drive for fulfillment and societal ideals is the most unresolved and violent. While a great number of other characters show themselves to be affected by the interplay of forces, most have come to some kind of resolution in which they lean to one side or the other; Ana, however, has not yet reached such a decision. Consciously, it seems that she wants to dedicate herself to everything that is considered pure and good in life: as a daughter, niece, wife, and daughter of confession she is always trying to fulfill her familial, social, and religious obligations. Yet her subconscious is constantly searching for more than this completion of duties. She wants to live for emotion, happiness, love, freedom, and pleasure. In her trapped position as a woman, a wife, and a Catholic in the high society of Vetusta, she is desperate to find a way to reconcile the self which she must represent to others with her true desires.

The entirety of the novel is a testament to the complicated push and pull between different aspects of human life. It follows the protagonist, Ana Ozores, a child who grew up motherless and later became an orphan. Under the dominion of her cruel governess Doña Camila, and then later her resentful aunts Anunciación and Águeda, Ana is taught that she is a shameful burden, a ruined charge and an embarrassment as a niece. The tension that this creates in her young mind – between the identity that is assigned to her

and the one she feels she truly has – causes her to begin having nervous attacks which occur periodically throughout her life in times of great stress. In an attempt to remedy this fractured understanding of herself, she does everything possible to remedy her supposed shortcomings and pay back her debts to her aunts, including agreeing to a marriage to the absent-minded Don Víctor Quintanar, more than 20 years her senior. Her childhood, defined by the loss of her mother and the subsequent lack of a mother figure, leaves her anxious to have a child of her own. However, since she is married to a disconnected and disinterested husband, this dream turns out to be an impossibility: a fact solidified when several years into their marriage they decide on a “separación en cuanto al tálamo”¹⁹ for convenience’s sake (126). Any other youthful passions that Ana had hoped to fulfill with Quintanar must also be abandoned; for Ana, as far as her love life, “todo había concluido, sin haber empezado”²⁰ (186).

Searching for other ways to make her life meaningful, Ana begins to feel the stirrings of adulterous attraction to the local Don Juan, Don Álvaro Mesía. Instead of giving in to these scandalous inclinations, Ana attempts to revive her childhood desire to discover the divine, but this time does so through the Catholic Church. This brings her straight into the path of Don Fermín de Pas, the power-hungry and corrupt Canon Theologian of Vetusta’s cathedral. In his own design of proving himself to be an unquestionable leader in the Catholic Church, and sensing the attraction between Ana and Mesía, he attempts to convert her – who is already known as a *santa* and called *la perfecta casada* – into a *beata*, a prime example of a daughter of confession. However,

¹⁹ “a separation with regard to the connubial bed” (76)

²⁰ “It was all over – without ever having started” (123)

Ana takes her trust in Fermín too far and allows him to turn her into a religious fanatic. What neither of them anticipate is his eventual infatuation with her and the dangerous imbalance that it causes within his own life as he strives to possess her in all manners of the word.

Upon the discovery of Fermín's ulterior motives, Ana is disgusted at the hypocrisy of her confessor, and attempts to escape from under his influence. Looking for a new guide to direct her in a healthy lifestyle, Ana comes under the care of the young, modern-minded doctor, Benítez. With the enthusiastic support of Quintanar and Ana's circle of friends, the doctor recommends that she devote herself to a life of happiness and freedom in the countryside, enjoying natural and physical pleasures. Upon his advice and with the encouragement of her husband, Ana partakes in excursions to the theater and journeys out into the country, parties, and other social events with friends.

Regardless, this new lifestyle focused on fresh air and physical activity certainly improves Ana's health. Yet her new-found liberty and vigor, as well as her still-present sexual desires, lead her to finally succumb to the persistent charms of Don Álvaro. Yet their adultery is short-lived: they are discovered, Álvaro duels with and kills Quintanar before fleeing to Madrid, and Ana falls into an intense attack of *nervios* which leaves her bedridden and socially isolated for months. Not one of her hypocritical friends wanted to associate with the newly-exposed adulteress.

When Ana is finally recovered enough to leave her home, she returns to the Church to try to redeem herself with her confessor. Unwilling to forgive his fallen spiritual daughter, Fermín displaces his rage against her onto his own being, and nearly

strangles himself upon seeing her before fleeing from her presence. In horror, Ana swoons to the floor of the cathedral in a culminating, all-encompassing social death.

It is clear that throughout her life, Ana is constantly trying to become what others wish her to be. As a child and a woman, she passes through a series of caretakers, who impose upon her their desires and wishes for what they imagine to be or should be her identity. Due to her constant belief that she is insufficient and shameful, Ana discovers what is expected of her by her aunts, by her husband, or by her confessor and tries her best to become this ideal. Poor Anita truly believes that she is what others think of her, however untrue that may be, and acts accordingly.

Later in the novel, despite her attempts to escape the pattern, Ana is still in the habit of fulfilling the role required of her. As a married woman, she understands what her society considers ideal and puts forth every effort to become it. However, despite how much she wishes to be true perfection in the eyes of others, the best that Ana can do is only act the part. She is constantly in a state of inner turmoil because her true self – the one that longs for love, freedom, purpose, and passion – is rebelling against the strangling force of others trying to bend her to their will.

Ana as a Burden: Daughter, Charge, Niece

The only life that Ana has ever known is a motherless one; she is the daughter of Don Carlos de Ozores, a military engineer, and a *modista italiana*²¹ who died in childbirth. Don Carlos, a man with many new ideas and aspirations and with no idea how

²¹ Italian dressmaker

to raise a daughter, took for her a governess, Doña Camila. Already, Ana finds herself to be an inconvenience for her father, and this feeling is only exaggerated by the malicious Doña Camila. Using the questionable heritage of Ana's mother as a rationalization for cruel treatment of the girl, Camila makes many "alusiones maliciosas, vagas y envueltas en misterios a la condición social de la italiana"²² and makes it clear that she, along with the rest of Vetusta's high society, thinks that Ana is already a lost cause (136). They feel that "muerto el perro no se acabase la rabia,"²³ reasoning that although Ana's mother might be dead, her tainted legacy lives on in her daughter (132). Doña Camila, who holds a grudge against Don Carlos because he rejected her seductive advances, finds herself armed with a justification to submit "la hija de la modista"²⁴ (153) to a ruthless regimen of false morality. She simultaneously condemns Ana as beyond hope of redemption to anyone who will listen ("¡Como su madre! ...El instinto... la sangre... No basta la educación contra la naturaleza"²⁵ [138-39]) while doing everything she can to bend the child to her will in order to "better" her. This included frequent lectures and punishment in the form of confinement to her room.

Thus Ana is raised with an internalized, deep sense of shame, one that she has been taught is inherent within her, and because her governess feels it cannot be changed Ana finds herself constantly trying to compensate for a fault that was not her own. Camila seems to find her fears confirmed about her charge when Ana has what is in reality a harmless adventure involving a fisherman's son, in which the two children

²² "with sly, vague allusions, wrapped in mystery, to the Italian woman's social condition" (83).

²³ "although the dog be dead, the biting should not cease" (80).

²⁴ "the dressmaker's daughter" (97)

²⁵ "Just as I said! Instinct – blood – there is little education can do in opposition to nature" (85).

attempt to sail a boat to the ocean and on to other lands. Instead, they spend the night stranded on a sandbank, but the resulting scandal in which Ana is assumed to have committed a grave sin with Germán serves to further shame the child into believing she is guilty and worthy of all judgment and punishment that Doña Camila sees fit to inflict upon her. The innocent Anita does not understand the accusations and condemnations of her governess, but they are repeated with such vigor and conviction that even she becomes to believe she has committed some great wrong, despite her having no idea what it could be. Even after the scandal had been forgotten by society at large, Ana herself remembers the trauma. She internalizes the shame laid upon her and “se declaró vencida, siguió la conducta moral que se le impuso, sin discutirla, ciegamente, sin fe en ella, pero sin hacer traición nunca”²⁶ (141).

Though Ana is in reality guilty of nothing, the constant overbearing force of Camila’s hypocritical religiosity causes her to develop a complex in which she feels is always unworthy, always guilty of some sin or misstep. This scarring treatment and its resulting habit of self-deprecation remains with her for the rest of her life, and she is often on a desperate search to find some manner of redemption for herself.

One such attempt comes with her discovery of religion and her attempt to draw upon a personal connection with the Virgin Mary. This endeavor brings her comfort as she develops a relationship with a mother figure that has been so lacking in her life, and ignites a sudden passion for writing poetry. Inspired by her readings of religious works such as *Confesiones* de San Agustín and poetry by Fray Luis de León, Ana quickly

²⁶ “declared herself defeated, and followed the moral conduct imposed upon her, without arguing, blindly, lacking any faith in it, but never playing false” (87).

becomes obsessed with the Virgin and, when praying is not enough to express the depth of her devotion, she decides that “quería inventar ella misma oraciones”²⁷ (150). By herself on the mountaintop by her home, Ana feels struck by divine inspiration and writes verses «A la Virgen», driven by the power of an “espanto místico”²⁸ (152).

The governess Doña Camila finds such spiritual explorations outside of the Catholic Church, and the girl’s inappropriate affinity for literature, to be improper and redirects the girl towards the governess’s own cold and unforgiving understanding of religion. Adding this to the list of Ana’s many faults, real or invented, Camila resigns herself to her work and “educó a la niña sin esperanzas de salvarla”²⁹ (139).

Even after Camila is dismissed by a returned Don Carlos, now a republican and *librepensador* (freemason) and a social outcast due to his new convictions, Ana treads carefully so as not to be a burden to her father. For his part, Don Carlos believes himself to be a member of a group of philosophers and conspirators, men who “debían de estar solos en el mundo; si tenían hijos y mujer, no los presentaban ni hablaban de ellos nunca”³⁰ (145). Without consideration for her needs and certainly not for her wants, Don Carlos does wrong by his daughter not by controlling every aspect of her life, as had Camila, but rather by more or less ignoring her. Instead of treating her as an equal, as his supposed forward-thinking belief system should dictate, it is noted that “en el fondo de su

²⁷ “she wanted to compose prayers herself” (94)

²⁸ “a mystical terror” (96)

²⁹ “she educated the girl without any hope of saving her” (85)

³⁰ “must have been alone in the world: if they had wives and children, they never introduced them or talked about them” (89)

conciencia tenía a la hembra por un ser inferior, como un buen animal doméstico”³¹
(144).

The narrator emphasizes how Ana’s father struggles to relate to her. Don Carlos treats her “como si fuese ella el arte,” something he greatly admires; to him, she is an inanimate object, “sin sexo”³² rather than a daughter to be cared for (144). Since she has indulged her religious curiosity and passion for faith and the Virgin by reading from the bookshelves of his vast library, perhaps his lack of parental presence is due to the fact that he “no sabía vivir con una hija que ya entendía más que él de asuntos religiosos”³³ (142). Regardless of its cause, Ana is aware of the distance between them. She attempts to engage with her father; she even expresses a resolve to try to convert him, as an honorable project inspired by her newfound religious passion (149). Yet, for the most part, their relationship remains distant.

Ana’s brief respite from life under the tyranny and overly zealous moral guidance of coldly religious women ends abruptly when her father passes away suddenly. Left an orphan, Ana falls victim to a serious mental breakdown – the first of her many nervous attacks – that keeps her bedridden until one of her Aunts arrives. Ana finds herself transplanted from Loreto, where she had lived with her father, to her family’s ancestral home in Vetusta to live with his spinster sisters, Anunciación and Águeda. The move throws her back into an unstable state, which causes her aunts to resent the inconvenience of her sickness instead of care about her wellbeing. Ana only manages to get well after

³¹ “at heart he regarded woman as an inferior being, an agreeable pet animal” (90)

³² “as if she were art”; “sexless” (89)

³³ “[he] had no idea how he should behave with his daughter, whose understanding of religious matters was already greater than his own” (88)

overhearing a conversation about her own future between her aunts, in which she is reminded of “aquella vergüenza,”³⁴ her inherited shame (158). Afterwards, she “comprendió su obligación inmediata; sanar pronto... A no haber oído aquella conversación de las tías, la pobre huérfana no se hubiera atrevido a comer mucho, aunque tuviera apetito, por no aumentar el peso de aquella carga: ella”³⁵ (161). This was to be achieved, of course, by her marrying as quickly and as wealthily as possible. She puts forth every effort to get well because “...quería poder librar pronto a sus tías de su presencia”³⁶ (162).

Once again, her mother’s heritage and her own innocent childhood adventures are dredged back up in order to be held against her. Ana’s shame for her own existence is intensified as she experiences Vetustan high society and begins to come of age. While she is accepted and admired within the higher social circles because of her beauty, she is constantly reminded by her aunts that “tú no has de casar con ninguno de ellos”³⁷ – Ana is and always will be inferior to these upper classes (170). She is not permitted to express her own thoughts and opinions, and on the rare occasion that she does, she is reprimanded by her aunts to the point that she thinks “Soy una bestia... debí haber callado”³⁸ (168).

³⁴ “the disgraceful...” (101)

³⁵ “So Ana realized that her first obligation was to get well quickly. ...had the poor girl not overheard her aunts’ conversation, she would not have dared eat much, even if she had wanted to eat, so as not to make their burden – herself – any heavier” (103)

³⁶ “she desired to free her aunts of her presence” (103)

³⁷ “You won’t be marrying any of them” (110)

³⁸ “I’m an ass... I should have kept quiet” (109)

Their emotional manipulation and even abuse of the young Ana comes to a head when they find her a suitor that they deem appropriate: an American, Don Frutos Redondo. In presenting the offer to Ana, they give her next to no option to say no:

Nosotras no te hemos recordado jamás lo que nos debes (se lo recordaban al comer y al cenar todos los días), nosotras hemos perdonado tu origen, es decir, el de tu desgraciada madre, todo, todo ha sido aquí olvidado. Pues bien, todo esto lo pagarías tú con la más negra ingratitud, con la ingratitud más criminal, si a la proposición que vamos a hacerte contestaras con una negativa... incalificable.³⁹ (181)

Yet, in an act of rebellion, Ana instead manages to commit herself to Don Víctor Quintanar, who is 20 years her senior and recommended by her trusted friend Frígilis.

Ana as a Wife: An Angel of Her Home

In this next epoch of her life, Ana dedicates herself to being Vetusta's *perfecta casada*, or perfect wife. When her husband Quintanar proves himself to be mostly uninterested in her, and behaves more like a father than a spouse, Ana takes on the role of the martyr. Thinking of her duties as a wife as "como poética misión que explicaba el por qué de la vida,"⁴⁰ she becomes determined to sacrifice her own happiness in order to maintain that of her husband (120). The entirety of Vetusta, which has long forgotten about her innocent but misunderstood escapade with the young Germán, now considers

³⁹ "...we have never reminded you of what you owe us' (they reminded her every day at luncheon and at dinner), 'we have forgiven you your origins, that is to say those of your unfortunate mother; all, all has here been forgotten. Well then, you would be repaying all this with the darkest ingratitude, with the most criminal ingratitude, if, to the proposition which we are about to put to you, you were to reply with a refusal which would be – indescribable'" (119)

⁴⁰ "as a poetic mission which explained the meaning of life" (71)

her to be the epitome of ideal womanhood. She is called “una fortaleza inexpugnable,”⁴¹ and “incapaz de pecar,”⁴² and even is compared to her idol, the Virgin: those around her comment, “la Regenta se parece mucho a la Virgen de la Silla”⁴³ (210; 334; 256).

It is not her husband Víctor that imposes this ideal upon her. While at the beginning of their union she notes “No le amaba, no; pero procuraría amarle,”⁴⁴ throughout their marriage she still expresses a resolve to love him and care for him: “Ella le era fiel de hecho y de voluntad y se lo sería eternamente”⁴⁵ (184; 271). Though she views this commitment as a huge burden, due to their lack of love and physical relations, her childlessness, his senility and absence of involvement with her, she is aware that “Su don Víctor... era el deber”⁴⁶ (302). Yet the man himself is not the inspiration for her behavior. It is society at large that dictates with its expectations how Ana should act; Víctor, in contrast, seems almost not to notice as Ana structures her being around the Spanish ideal of the *ángel del hogar*, until he finally realizes that she is unhappy and makes plans to distract her by drawing her out to social events. The only reason Ana obliges him in his sudden interest in her is because participating in these activities is “como manda el señor Quintanar”⁴⁷ (401).

Ana is investing all of her efforts to become the *ángel del hogar*, as was discussed previously, and she attempts to represent the societal expectations on her as a woman to achieve the epitome of the Spanish wife in the 19th century. Ana feels she should be a

⁴¹ “an impregnable fortress” (141)

⁴² “incapable of sinning” (240)

⁴³ “the judge’s wife looks just like the Madonna of the Chair” (178)

⁴⁴ “no, she didn’t love him; but she would try to love him” (122)

⁴⁵ “She was faithful to him in body and in mind, and would remain so for ever” (189)

⁴⁶ “Quintanar was her duty” (214)

⁴⁷ “as señor Quintanar commands” (292)

creature who, as an *ángel del hogar*, stays at home to do such duties as care for the household and the children she must bear. Additionally, an *ángel* would practice complete physical and moral purity and execute any necessary self-sacrifice or martyrdom that may be required of her. Ana throws herself into this role with such fervor that Vetustans use her as *the* example of wifely perfection, much to the annoyance of many of the other high-society women, who themselves fall far short of the ideal.

In only one of these requirements does Ana find herself incapable of completing her wifely duty: the bearing of children, which has been one of her deepest desires since her own motherless childhood and her obsession with the Virgin. This is through no fault of her own, but due to the fact that Quintanar has no interest in her physically, and she must resign herself to a life with “un hombre que prefería un buen macho de perdiz a todas las caricias conyugales”⁴⁸ (293). Not only does she experience great frustration at their lack of physical intimacy – in the few instances that do demonstrate affection, although he does kiss her, are always described as “un beso paternal”⁴⁹ or “un casto beso”⁵⁰ (122, 304) – but Víctor’s unfulfilled role as husband makes her dream of motherhood impossible to achieve.

Desperate for a purpose, Ana takes to the extreme the one part of being an *ángel del hogar* that she can achieve, and chooses a “vida consagrada al sacrificio, a una prohibición absoluta del placer”⁵¹ (276). As always, Ana is looking to fulfill an expectation and, when she finds herself coming short of the ideal, she tries to find some

⁴⁸ “a man who preferred a good male partridge to all the conjugal caresses in the world” (206)

⁴⁹ “a paternal kiss” (72)

⁵⁰ “a chaste kiss” (216)

⁵¹ “her life devoted to sacrifice and to an absolute prohibition of pleasure” (194)

way to compensate. This mix of self-sacrificial tendencies, her obsession with purity, and her search for purpose in life, all catalyzed by the presence of the power-hungry Magistral of Vetusta, sets Ana on a quest to become a truly devoted daughter to the Catholic Church.

Ana as a Catholic: A Spiritual Daughter

While the majority of Ana's perceived duties to the Catholic Church spring from Fermín's manipulation of her, as a younger woman she did experience some personal, authentic religious desires unmet by the establishment. Yet, she was always restricted in her spiritual explorations by her aunts Doña Águeda and Doña Anunciación, who try to squash Ana's mystical inclinations and replace them with their own, dry understanding of religion. At first, after discovering and reading several religious books in her father's library, such as San Agustín's *Confesiones*, Ana finds herself desperately drawn to the idea and comfort of the Virgin Mary. Never having had a mother, the concept of *la virgen* was an enchanting one that brought some motherly comfort to the neglected young Anita. She was even inspired to attempt to influence her father once she realized his lack of religion: "Pero su padre llegaría a convertirse; como ella, que tenía lleno el corazón de amor para todos y de fe en Dios"⁵² (148).

In seeking a manner of expression for her newfound passion, Ana began to compose a book of verses "A la virgen,"⁵³ a practice that was quickly squashed by her

⁵² "but conversion would come to her father one day, just as it had come to her, filling her heart with love for everybody and with faith in God" (93)

⁵³ "To the virgin"

aunts upon its discovery. Instead, she is taught that hers is a “falsa devoción” and “falsa piedad,”⁵⁴ and that women should serve as inspiration for literature, not write it themselves (172; 173). It seems that the poor Anita can do nothing right; even her natural inclination to the divine and interest in morality is considered a fault by those around her.

After her rediscovery of the Catholic faith through Fermín, while she notes that “la virtud y la piedad eran cosas bien diferentes de lo que le habían enseñado sus tías,”⁵⁵ Fermín still encourages a culture of self-sacrifice, saying “suceda lo que Dios quiera; si es preciso sufrir por bien de la fe una prueba terrible, se sufrirá; porque el nombre de cristiano obliga a eso y a mucho más”⁵⁶ (271; 350). Fermín often frames her religiosity in terms of her duties to her husband, saying “lo principal es cumplir la voluntad de don Víctor”⁵⁷ (400). Thinking of how to serve her husband, Ana echoes her childhood desire to convert her father when she attempts to draw Quintanar away from his dear theatrical readings and towards sharing her faith: she tells Fermín about “un proyecto que tengo, que es convertirle poco a poco y hacerle leer libros santos en vez de patrañas de comedias”⁵⁸ (635).

This focus on her role as a wife is a rationalization, which Ana finds essential to keep her from acquiescing to the looming power of adultery: “estaba segura de salvarse

⁵⁴ “false piety” (112)

⁵⁵ “virtue and piety were quite different from what she had been taught by her aunts” (189)

⁵⁶ “God’s will be done. If it is necessary for the good of the Faith that we suffer a terrible trial, we shall know how to suffer it, because being a Christian requires this and much more of us” (252)

⁵⁷ “It is of paramount importance to obey Don Víctor’s wishes” (291)

⁵⁸ “I am going to begin a project to convert him, little by little, and make him read holy books instead of mendacious plays” (477)

de la tentación francamente criminal de don Álvaro, entregándose a don Fermín”⁵⁹ (398). Yet she still maintains the secret from her confessor despite the guilt that it gives her, and “no habló de la gran tentación”⁶⁰ (481).

As the relationship between confessor and devotee continues, Fermín’s control becomes less religiously motivated in nature and more individually interested. Ana only realizes this after she begins to resist his influence: she asks herself, “¿Qué tenía que ver la iglesia con el Magistral?”⁶¹ (755). As she vacillates between the influence of the Church as understood by Fermín and her own internal desires ignited by the presence of Álvaro, her constant wavering becomes a personal matter for the priest. He recognizes that “su poder se tambaleaba”⁶² (672). His mental manipulation of her becomes more violent, causing her to go to extremes to please him, declaring “si necesita pruebas, si quiere que sufra penitencias, hable, mande, verá como obedezco”⁶³ and even thinking, “estoy dispuesta a morir por este hombre”⁶⁴ (633-34; 678).

Yet, after agreeing to walk barefoot as a *nazarena* in the Semana Santa processions to bolster Fermín’s power, she regrets her declarations, thinking “tomo resoluciones extremas en los momentos de la exaltación y después tengo que cumplirlas cuando el ánimo decaído, casi inerte, no tiene la fuerza para querer”⁶⁵ (780). Finally, she

⁵⁹ “[she was] so certain that she could save herself from the frankly criminal temptation of Don Alvaro by giving herself to Don Fermín” (290)

⁶⁰ “she did not talk about the great temptation” (357)

⁶¹ “What had the Church to do with the canon theologian?” (570)

⁶² His power was tottering” (506)

⁶³ “And if you need proof – if you want me to do penance – only say so, command me, and I shall obey, you will see” (476)

⁶⁴ “I am ready to die for this man” (511)

⁶⁵ “I take extreme decisions in moments of exaltation and then I have to carry them out with my courage sapped and exhausted and unable to make me want to do anything” (589)

comes to recognize the extent of the abuse of power that Fermín had displayed towards her, thinking “¡...había caído en una especie de prostitución singular!”⁶⁶ and realizing “Ella había sido tal vez un instrumento en manos de su *hermano mayor*”⁶⁷ (787; 803). At last, Ana tries to shake off the insidious power that had replaced what should have been a pure and guiding force within her life.

Passion for Life: Purpose, Motherhood, Love

As a girl, burdened by Doña Camila’s tyranny and lacking parental love to satisfy her loneliness, Ana often finds herself searching for meaning in her life, something to be passionate about and a reason for which to live. She fills her time alone with daydreams, telling herself consoling fantasies in which she enjoyed the simple pleasures of life that she is denied in reality. Upon her initial discovery and interest in religion, specifically for the Virgin Mother, the virgin Ana for the first time feels the stirrings of excitement and purpose; she wonders, “¿aquel vacío de su corazón iba a llenarse?”⁶⁸ (147).

To Ana in her childhood, the concept of an all-encompassing motherly love is a comfort too good to be true. Because “María, además de Reina de los Cielos, era una madre, la de los afligidos,”⁶⁹ of which Ana considers herself one, she finally has a maternal force watching over her with all of the love she longed for (149). Later in life, once married, Ana now desires more than anything to have a child of her own. From her repeated declarations while imagining a life across the sea for herself and Germán (“¡Yo

⁶⁶ “[she] had fallen into a singular kind of prostitution!” (594)

⁶⁷ “Perhaps she had been a tool in the hands of her elder brother” (606)

⁶⁸ “Was that emptiness in her heart going to be filled?” (92)

⁶⁹ “Mary was not only the Heavenly Queen but a Mother, the Mother of the afflicted” (94)

soy una mamá!”⁷⁰), to longing for a child to hold while experiencing a nervous attack (“¡Si yo tuviera un hijo...!”⁷¹), Ana desperately wants to experience the gift of motherhood. She wonders how the other Vetustans see her to the point that she feels the whole world is judging her and she worries “...lo que pensaban de aquella loca, de aquella mujer, sin madre, sin hijos, sin amor”⁷² (116; 121; 293). The other women of Vetusta know vaguely of her desires. Visita tells Álvaro, “creo que la pobre lo siente mucho no tener un hijo”⁷³ (257). However, Quintanar’s disinterest in the act denies her this great fulfillment and she comes to see their marriage as “aquel presidio de castidad”⁷⁴ (297).

So Ana must content herself with emulating the Virgin Mother in other ways. She is gratified that, even in her childlessness, Ana’s beauty is compared to that her idol: “la belleza bondadosa de aquella cara de María Santísima les imponía admiración y respeto”⁷⁵ (276). While she cannot serve as a mother, her link to *la virgen* still serves as a source of motivation in her life, a reason to exist and a goal to strive for. Yet her apparent religiosity is not strictly divine in nature, since the desire to relate to the Virgin Mary is more of an obsession with motherhood than it is devotion to God; it is a personal passion, not a traditional, institutional piety.

In addition, Ana’s desire for human connection runs deeper than wanting a child to fulfill the role of mother. She wants more than anything a true kind of love. Because of

⁷⁰ “I’m a mamma!” (68)

⁷¹ “If I had a child...!” (71)

⁷² “what they thought of that lunatic, that woman without a mother, without children, without love” (206)

⁷³ “I believe the poor thing is very sad because she hasn’t any children” (178)

⁷⁴ “in that prison of chastity” (210)

⁷⁵ “the benevolent beauty of her features – those features of a madonna – commanded admiration and respect even from them” (193)

her misadventure with Germán and its consequences, she mistrusts and fears men (144). Yet she maintains the hope for a pure love, but this is also unachievable because of Víctor: “no había gozado una sola vez esas delicias del amor de que hablan todos... El amor es lo único que vale la pena de vivir, había ella oído y leído muchas veces. Pero ¿qué amor?, ¿dónde estaba ese amor? Ella no lo conocía”⁷⁶ (297).

While her social commitments to Quintanar keep her from planning to act upon any kind of romance, she still wants to be desired. In fact, she thinks that the effort of such resistance to the temptation that a man like Álvaro might offer her will give her purpose: “... luchar con un hombre hermoso, ...esto era algo, esto era digno de ella. Lucharía”⁷⁷ (302).

Yet her dreams are not in concordance with this purity of mind that she holds consciously. They are peppered with subliminal and disturbing images (562, 574); impure thoughts and desires (556); and sexual relations with Álvaro (480). She is jealous of the adventures of her maid, Petra; on suspecting some imprudence between her servant and her *molinero* (miller), “Sintió un poco de ira. «¿Cómo serían aquellos amores de Petra y el molinero? ¿Qué le importaba a ella...?» ...revelaba una curiosidad que quería ocultar en vano la Regenta... Est[a] obsesión estúpida que era casi un dolor”⁷⁸ (273). She aches to know the intimacy experienced by the sexually free lower-class woman.

⁷⁶ “not once had she enjoyed those delights of love about which everyone talks... Love is the only thing worth living for, she had often heard and read. But what love? Where was this love? She had never experienced it” (210)

⁷⁷ “To fight against a handsome man...this was something different, this was worthy of her. She would fight” (214)

⁷⁸ “Ana felt annoyed, without knowing why. ‘What sort of love could there be between Petra and the miller? But what did it matter to her?’ ...she displayed a curiosity which she tried, in vain, to hide. ...this stupid obsession which was almost a pain” (191)

Petra is not oblivious to her mistress's jealousy. She catches glimpses of Ana's frustration and "había adquirido la convicción de que aquella señora estaba muy aburrida"⁷⁹ (264). Ana, too, recognizes the fact that she is "bien cansada de aquella sombra en que había vivido siempre"⁸⁰ (267). To Ana's chagrin, even the man whom, in her private thoughts, she calls her *enemigo* (enemy) knows it is the truth: Don Álvaro notes in one of their infrequent conversations, "Debe de aburrirse usted mucho en Vetusta, Ana,"⁸¹ after which she finds herself paying altogether too much attention to the would-be seducer (285).

Carnal Passion: The Seduction by Don Álvaro

Despite all of her appearances, attempts at perfection, and aspirations to an angelic lifestyle, Ana has identified within herself the rebellious force that keeps her constantly out of balance. She is aware of her interest in Don Álvaro and its sinful nature, as revealed by her hesitancy to admit the fact to her confessor, Fermín: "¡Le había dado la absolución y ella no había dicho nada de su inclinación a don Álvaro!"⁸² (271). Trapped between this growing desire and her moral duty to Quintanar, Ana attempts to express her needs to her husband. She tries to kindle in him some interest in having a child and incite physical contact between the two of them, but he rejects the advances of

⁷⁹ "had become convinced that she [Ana], too, was bored stiff" (184)

⁸⁰ "she... was tired enough of the shade in which she had spent her whole life" (186)

⁸¹ "You must get very bored in Vetusta, Ana," (200)

⁸² "He had absolved her of her sins, yet she had said nothing about her inclination towards Don Alvaro" (189)

his wife, and thinking of the act, “no se atrevió,”⁸³ and besides, he thinks, he doesn’t have time; he must be up to go hunting soon (124).

Despite herself, and her attempts to avoid the growing danger presented by Vestusta’s Don Juan, Ana intermittently enjoys his attentions. She dreams about him “casi todas las noches”⁸⁴ (480). She revels in the fact that she is desired, albeit by a man who can never possess her: “no sería jamás suya, eso no; ... pero tenerle a su lado, sentirle quererla, adorarla, eso sí: era dulce, era suave”⁸⁵ (576-77). However, Ana’s idealizations of the man are far from reality. While she sees him as a “buque salvador”⁸⁶ and, later on, comparing him to Fermín, thinks that “Mesía era más noble,”⁸⁷ she has merely fallen for the farce that he has put on in order to woo her (488; 749). A particularly poignant example of her blindness to his true nature is the moment that Ana regards Mesía during the *misa de gallo*, thinking him a noble figure and idealizing his love for her, when in reality, he is “medio dormido en pie. ... estaba borracho”⁸⁸ (709). She thinks that he is a fine example of a gentleman, yet a story told by Álvaro himself about a “seduction” achieved by brute force paints him not as a great and irresistible Don Juan, but rather as a man who has actually resorted to rape in order to add to his list of conquests (617-18). This is an unsurprising detail about a man whose conquests are constantly described by terms of violence, by himself and by others: he makes “ataques

⁸³ “But he did not dare” (74)

⁸⁴ “dreamed about him almost every night” (357)

⁸⁵ “she would never be his, never... but to have him at her side, to feel him loving her, adoring her – that she would permit herself. It was sweet, it was tender” (432)

⁸⁶ “ship which comes to save her” (363)

⁸⁷ “Mesía was nobler” (566)

⁸⁸ “He was asleep on his feet and he was drunk” (534)

bruscos”⁸⁹ (225); any woman he seduces is his “víctima”⁹⁰ (399); Ana calls him her “enemigo”⁹¹ (709).

Little by little, Ana’s defenses against her would-be seducer are worn down; at first wholly rejecting and suppressing her feelings, she begins to modify her strategy of resistance. As she is won over by the idea of being loved, she confirms, “no pecará mi cuerpo, pero el alma la tendré anegada en el placer de sentir esas cosas prohibidas”⁹² (495). Yet later on, she longs for the gentleman to appear to her, thinking if he were there “qué haría sino sucumbir...”⁹³ (714). After her discovery of Fermín’s impure intentions, she actually considers her feelings for him to be a way to “huir de los amores de un Magistral”⁹⁴ (837).

In her attempt to escape the influence of her corrupted confessor, Ana moves from one controlling force to another when she comes under the care of the young doctor Benítez. Her improvement is so marked that Quintanar thinks “Es otra... Ese Benítez me la ha salvado”⁹⁵ (794). Ana too is astonished by her improvements, so much so that she writes “Benítez me acaba de salvar la vida, tal vez la razón...”⁹⁶ (798). It is clear that she has placed herself once again in a position of servitude, this time to a man representative

⁸⁹ “sudden attacks” (153)

⁹⁰ “victim” (291)

⁹¹ “enemy” (535)

⁹² “my body will not sin but I will submerge my soul in the pleasure of these feelings forbidden me” (369)

⁹³ “what could I do... but surrender” (538)

⁹⁴ “avoid the love of a canon theologian” (631)

⁹⁵ “She’s a different woman. Benítez has saved her” (599)

⁹⁶ “Benítez has saved my life and perhaps my reason” (602)

of current medical discourses, when she signs a letter to her doctor with the phrase “la esclava de su régimen”⁹⁷ (797).

The recommendations made by Benítez that are so successful in improving her health take Ana to the countryside and encourage happiness and freedom, and importantly, further from the suffocating influence of Fermín. Primed by her new liberty and stimulated by the provincial lifestyle, when Álvaro at last makes a confession of love, Ana accepts it happily. Despite the possible condemning circumstances that it puts her in, the narrator writes, “la Regenta cayendo... era feliz”⁹⁸ (851). For a while, she resists Mesía’s insistence on physical adulterous relations. Upon the suggestion from her lover, “Ana se opuso, lloró, suplicó... «No, no; eso no, Álvaro, por Dios no, eso nunca»,”⁹⁹ but at last she succumbs. By sneaking into her room through the balcony, Álvaro finally convinces her to take this final, condemning step and take him into what once was her marital bed (865).

At the end of the novel, Ana is a far cry from the virtuous, perfect wife that she was before. She has lost her way due to disenchantment with the religiosity that was meant to save her, bringing to a head the long-looming crisis in her understanding of herself. Before falling to Álvaro, she mourns, “dentro de ella ya no había nadie que fuese ella, Ana, principal y genuinamente”¹⁰⁰ (804). She does not even know who she is without Fermín’s guidance. So when the doctor Benítez offers a new way of life, she falls back into the habit of complete unquestioning devotion. It offers her happiness and a new

⁹⁷ “The slave of your regimen” (601)

⁹⁸ “the judge’s wife was happy as she fell” (642)

⁹⁹ “No, no, not that, Alvaro, for God’s sake no, never” (652)

¹⁰⁰ “inside her there was nobody who was *she, Ana*, essentially, really” (606, emphasis original)

kind of identity, one that is outside of the influence of her corrupt confessor; and one that is capable of falling prey to a new influence, like Don Álvaro. Though to Ana it seems a fulfillment of a long-held desire, Álvaro is only one more controlling being in the long string of forces that attempt to make Ana their own.

CHAPTER IV
FERMÍN DE PAS

While the constant push-and-pull of forces within Ana expresses itself so clearly through her physical symptoms as well as other behaviors that lead many Vetustans to suspect her inner turmoil, with Fermín de Pas the conflict between spiritual purity and passion for power and physical fulfillment is less outwardly apparent. It is no less violent, yet its violence is very distinct in terms of the forces dictating each character's actions.

As I have established, Ana has lived her entire life adjusting her identity based upon what others see in her. At first, compensating for her perceived sinfulness and later, trying to reconcile her private being with the saintly visage that Vetusta sees in her, Ana regularly confuses what is real and what is perceived. De Pas, in contrast, is completely conscious of the fact that the priestly farce that he presents to the world is in contrast to his true hypocritical self.

Fermín has spent his whole life presenting a persona of spiritual and physical purity to the world, but he spent only a short period of his youth actually attempting to embody this ideal. The child of the avaricious Doña Paula, who is the inspiration behind his own ambitions, Fermín begins his career within the Church honestly; but soon his naïve devotion becomes a search for power and a consuming need for control, which his position as a priest can afford him. Considered to be undeniably talented within his profession, he works his way quickly through the ranks of the church to become both

Canon Theologian and the Bishop's Vicar-General in Vetusta. His numerous enemies often attempt to diminish his power by spreading accusatory rumors of varying veracity, invoking among other things his involvement with commerce which is prohibited by his position in the church and allegations of abuse of power in the form of sexual relations with daughters of confession.

Under the constant influence of his tyrannical mother, Fermín escapes repercussions of even those claims against him that are true, and is able to pursue his continuing ambition to expand his influence over Vetusta and over Spain in general. Upon his inheritance of Ana as a daughter of confession, Fermín thinks he has discovered a jewel hidden in Vetusta's ambience of filth and corruption, and immediately plans to employ her already-existing reputation as a saint to augment his own power. His initial intentions to use Ana for his own gain evolve as he begins to consider her as something of a spiritual equal, a kindred spirit and a friend. He then finds himself experiencing a complicated emotion that could be love, desire, or lust for Ana, which he initially refuses to recognize. Yet despite his denial, these sentiments only grow and result in an uncontrollable desire to possess Ana in all meanings of the word.

When he finally pushes Ana to the breaking point by compelling her to walk barefoot in the *Semana Santa* processions as a *nazarena*, she escapes his pernicious pseudo-religious influence and vacillates to the opposite extreme, dedicating herself to what her modern-minded doctor Benítez calls a "healthy lifestyle" of freedom and diversion in the countryside. Frustrated by his loss of control to the doctor, Fermín is

determined to regain control over her. For this reason, he recruits Ana's maid, Petra, to act as his informant on the actions of her mistress.

When Petra reveals Ana's adultery with Don Álvaro to Fermín, he becomes enraged, and arranges for Petra to expose the infidelity to Quintanar. The result is not only Víctor's murder, Álvaro's flight from Vetusta, and Ana's public fall from grace and the resulting attack of nerves, but also a great blow to Fermín's reputation as a spiritual father. His resentment is so great that when Ana finally returns to the Church after her long illness, Fermín is so overcome with wrath that he physically cannot contain himself. Yet instead of attacking her, he nearly chokes himself, causing Ana to swoon before he abandons her on the floor of the cathedral.

Throughout his career within the church and especially during his bid for monopoly over Ana, Fermín knows that he is a hypocrite and consciously presents a carefully constructed façade to the Vetustans. He knows that in order to maintain his position and facilitate progression in his career, a reputation as a model of religiosity is essential. He must construct an external identity that suits the expectations of society and the Catholic Church in order to further his own ambitions.

His motivation for this behavior is a complicated mix of his own desire for power and his mother's pervasive influence over his life. Doña Paula is so instrumental in Fermín's accomplishments that he feels impossibly indebted to her; yet, as his obsession over Ana grows, he rebels against her suffocating influence. As his spiritual daughter, Ana has a vast influence over her confessor of which she is unaware: she makes Fermín feel new and foreign emotions which are both pure and impure in nature, and even cause

him to aspire to be a better man in the face of her apparent purity. Fermín is caught between the influence of two women, both of whom inspire and limit him in their own ways.

Fermín as a Priest: Keeping up Appearances

Although Fermín de Pas grew up in the countryside, his mother Doña Paula had greater aspirations for him than to allow him to follow in the rural footsteps of his father. When she was widowed by a hunting accident, her son was 15 and she was finally able to start him on the path to become a Man of God. Initially, Fermín began his education with true dedication: “se preparaba, lleno de pura fe, a entrar en la Compañía de Jesús...”¹⁰¹ but as an adult, Fermín finds that he has long since lost his honesty in the profession, thinking: “¡Todo aquello estaba lejos!”¹⁰² (318). Instead, he has taken on the greed and ambitions of his mother: “Fermín era la ambición, el ansia de dominar; su madre la codicia, el ansia de poseer”¹⁰³ (334).

Instead of really being so, Fermín must dedicate himself to *seeming* pure: as his mother tells him, “hay que aparentar más virtud que se tiene, aunque se sea un ángel”¹⁰⁴ (332). Indeed, Fermín is very good at keeping up appearances, at least while fulfilling his priestly duties. Yet, “la elegancia, riqueza y pulcritud que ante el mundo lucía el

¹⁰¹ “full of pure faith” (227)

¹⁰² “All that was so far distant!” (227)

¹⁰³ “Fermín was ambition, the need to dominate; his mother was cupidity, the need to possess” (239)

¹⁰⁴ “You’ve got to pretend to be more virtuous than you really are – even if you’re an angel” (238)

Magistral, desaparecía concluido el trabajo”¹⁰⁵ (309). His true nature, one dominated by greed and need for control, appears when he is in private. He knows that the façade he presents to the world is necessary, so he continues with the pretense: “Entonces haré yo la comedia de la humildad... ¡Farsa, pura farsa!”¹⁰⁶ (320). He consciously creates a persona that the people of Vetusta will trust to be their spiritual guide in order to exercise his influence over the most private parts of their lives: “conocía el interior de... todas las almas que podían servirle para algo”¹⁰⁷ (316). After all, his spiritual influence over individuals is only a tool to increase his power within the city as a whole.

One of the most important aspects of Fermín’s priestly pretense is his supposed chastity. Because of the fact that Fermín has had at least one sexual relationship in the past, and that he continues on to break his vows of chastity by engaging sexually with two housemaids later in the novel, Doña Paula must put in great effort to help him keep face. She ensures that “la castidad de ella... y la de su hijo, que era sacerdote, se tenían por indiscutibles”¹⁰⁸ (322). When Paula senses her son’s beginning weakness for La Regenta, she berates him, demanding, “Te acuerdas de la brigadiera?”¹⁰⁹ reminding him of a time in his youth where he made some missteps in the realm of physical relations (331). In this way the Catholic Church and, more directly and successfully, Doña Paula attempt to enforce at least the appearance of purity in Fermín.

¹⁰⁵ “neatness, elegance and splendour which the canon displayed to the world, disappeared as soon as his work was done” (219)

¹⁰⁶ “It’s a farce, one great farce” (228)

¹⁰⁷ “He knew the inside of... every soul that could be useful to him” (225).

¹⁰⁸ “the chastity of Doña Paula... and that of her son, the priest, were indisputable” (229)

¹⁰⁹ “Do you remember the brigadier’s wife?” (237)

Apart from his faults in personal character, Fermín abuses his power in the public realm in order to benefit his mother's business. By directing the Cathedral to make all of its purchases through her bazaar *La Cruz Roja*, which sells supplies for churches, Fermín ensures a constant source of revenue. His detractors declare that “contra las leyes divinas y humanas, el Magistral es comerciante, es el dueño, el verdadero dueño de *La Cruz Roja*”¹¹⁰ (311). Perceptions such as these about Fermín's corruption and perversion, as well as the fact that through the confessions of many women “el Magistral conocía los deslices, las manías, los vicios y hasta los crímenes a veces, de muchos señores vetustenses,”¹¹¹ make enemies of many other influential men in Vetusta (317). In the most violent of oppositions against him, the hatred leads some of his opponents to cry, “muera el señor Provisor... -¡Muera! ¡Muera!”¹¹² (622).

Fermín as a Son: The Power of Doña Paula

De Pas is painfully aware of the fact that he owes nearly everything to his mother's efforts. It was she that started him on the path to be a priest, she who sacrificed so much to give him an education, she who protected him against the attacks of his enemies. He may be rich, but remembers “mi dinero es de mi madre...”¹¹³ and Fermín is always conscious of his need to fulfil his duty to her as a son, thinking, “...ella primero

¹¹⁰ “the canon theologian, breaking both divine and human law, is a tradesman – that he's the owner, the real owner, of *La Cruz Roja*” (220)

¹¹¹ “the canon knew all about the lapses, the manias, the vices and even, occasionally, the crimes of many Vetustan gentlemen” (225)

¹¹² “death to the vicar-general... Death to him! Death to him!” (468)

¹¹³ “my money belongs to my mother” (228)

que todo”¹¹⁴ (320; 336). For her part, Paula controls him easily, loving him and protecting him yet using him for her own gain: “el Magistral era su instrumento inteligente” (377). Despite all of his own influence, rather than being his own man, Fermín answers to his mother.

However, as Ana comes into his life, Fermín begins to feel the stirrings of resistance to her dominion. He calls Paula a tyrant: “un tirano consentido, amado, muy amado... pero ahora sentía una rebelión en el alma”¹¹⁵ and finds his spirit “...cansado de vivir nada más para la ambición propia y para la codicia ajena, la de su madre”¹¹⁶ (336, 318). He begins to resist her influence, resenting that “¡mi madre me trata como a un niño!”¹¹⁷ and starts to keep secrets from her: “Pero no se lo digas a mi madre”¹¹⁸ and acts like “un estudiante que escapa de la férula de un dómine implacable”¹¹⁹ (374, 336). Ironically, the fact that this mother treats him like a child drives him to be even more childish in his evasion of her monitoring and his increasingly earnest attempts to free himself from “aquella esclavitud en que vivía”¹²⁰ (432).

Fermín as a Confessor: An *Hermano del Alma*

When Fermín first inherits the role of Ana’s confessor from the ageing Ripamilán, his goals are clear: to encourage her religious tendencies and use his spiritual authority to

¹¹⁴ “mother before everything else” (241)

¹¹⁵ “a dear, beloved, deeply beloved tyrant... but now there was rebellion in his soul” (241)

¹¹⁶ “weary of living only for its own ambition and for another’s cupidity, that of his mother” (227)

¹¹⁷ “my mother treats me like a child!” (318)

¹¹⁸ “don’t tell my mother” (271)

¹¹⁹ “a boy escaping from the rod of an implacable schoolmaster” (241)

¹²⁰ “the happy servitude in which he lived his life” (432). A more direct translation would be, “the slavery in which he lived”

dictate her actions. Because Ana is already considered to be such a pure, saintly woman, Fermín is anxious to capitalize on the opportunity to prove to Vetusta that he can be a positive influence even on those considered already perfect. But his plans are complicated when Ana no longer is the passive recipient of his ideals, but begins to unconsciously exert her own type of influence over him. He discovers that Ana isn't the only one who needs spiritual companionship: "pensaba lo mismo que la Regenta: que había hecho un hallazgo, que iba a tener un alma hermana" (324). In great contrast to his life dictated by a cold (yet protective) mother, in Ana he finds not only a tool to be manipulated, but a living, breathing, beautiful, admirable woman. He feels he needs a mutually-supportive relationship such as theirs when he is so often surrounded by harshness: "necesitaba su alma alguna dulzura, una suavidad de corazón que compensara tantas asperezas..." (318). He begins to hope not only that he can oversee her salvation, but that she might also have a hand in his: "yo la salvo a ella y ella, sin saberlo por ahora, me salva a mí"¹²¹ (484).

In fact, he is so inspired by how honestly Ana believes him to be a saint, a spiritual father, and a *médico del alma*, that he begins to feel ashamed of his true identity in the face of such naïve respect for the falsified one that he presents to her. He thinks that while he doesn't care about lying to the rest of the world, lying to Ana is a different thing: "engañar a los demás no me duele; ¡pero a ella!"¹²² (676). He speculates if he might one day be able to confess his own sins to her, and whether he might be forgiven, wondering "si algún día su amistad con Ana Ozores llegaba al punto de poder él

¹²¹ "I am saving her and, although she does not know it, she is saving me" (360)

¹²² "It does not hurt me to deceive the others, but her! (510)

confesarse ante ella también y decirle cuál era su ambición...”¹²³ (338). As their relationship progresses – purely spiritual for Ana, but increasingly personal for Fermín – his own hypocrisy begins to disgust him.

... él sí que no merecía besar el polvo que pisaba aquella señora... si la Regenta supiese quién era él, no le confiaría los secretos de su corazón. ...si él hubiera sido un hombre honrado, le hubiera dicho allí mismo: “¡Calle usted, señora!” 336-37¹²⁴

He places the blame for his own reprehensible actions on Doña Paula: “recordó que su madre era quien le empujaba a todos aquellos actos de avaricia”¹²⁵ (337). With his realization that his mother is at least in part responsible for some of the unsavory aspects of his character, Doña Paula’s influence begins to wane. Fermín’s commitment to the goals and aspirations that she has for the both of them is fading, and instead he is reconsidering who he is because of Ana. With Fermín caught up in trying to live up to Ana’s misconception of him, it is now La Regenta who is, albeit unconsciously, dictating his actions.

Corrupted Canon: Ambition, Power, and Greed

Don Fermín de Pas is considered to be very successful by his colleagues, admirers, and even enemies. His success, inspired by Doña Paula, is also certainly a

¹²³ “If some day his friendship with Ana Ozores reached the point where he could confess to her and tell her about his ambition...” (242)

¹²⁴ “He was not worthy to kiss the ground *she* trod on... if the judge’s wife knew him she would not have confided the secrets of her heart to him. ...If he had been an honorable man he would have said to her there and then, ‘Hush! Be silent!’” (241-42)

¹²⁵ “he remembered that it was his mother who pushed him into all those acts of avarice” (242)

product of his insatiable desire to possess. Though he does exert great influence over all of Vetusta and its citizens, Fermín never seems satisfied, especially in the area relating to Ana. In reference to his habit of seeking out the highest possible altitude wherever he may travel, it is revealed that “cuanto más subía más ansiaba subir,”¹²⁶ a mantra that holds true in his clerical aspirations as well (63). Fermín is always searching for more, pushing things to a breaking point – a fault that makes him emotionally unstable and nearly causes his ruin when it backfires.

When first presented, de Pas seems to be a watchful guardian, viewing Vetusta through a spyglass from his vantage point at the top of the Cathedral tower. But it is quickly apparent that he is far from a benevolent force. Not only does he compare the cities below him to playthings (“como si fueran juguetes”¹²⁷) but is himself compared to a gastronome, intending to consume the city (“como el gastrónomo que busca los bocados apetitosos”¹²⁸) and a lion devouring Vetusta as his prey (“devoraba su presa, ... como el león”¹²⁹) (64, 65, 66). Perhaps the initial responsibility lies with Doña Paula, who instilled in her son the hope of greatness, but Fermín has long since grown into his role as a dominating spiritual master, accumulating control of as many souls as he can manage.

Fermín’s role as a priest often limits him in directly expressing the amount of power that he holds over Vetusta, but he still manages to put into practice the many private and self-interested designs that he has for its high society. He counts many upper-class women to be firmly within his influence, from Doña Lucía de Carraspique (through

¹²⁶ “The higher he climbed the stronger was his urge to continue climbing” (27)

¹²⁷ “As if they were playthings” (27)

¹²⁸ “like the gastronome who searches out the tastiest morsels” (28)

¹²⁹ “he devoured his prey... as a lion” (29)

whom Fermín dominates her husband and directed the devotion of two of her daughters to monasteries) to Olvido Páez (who managed to convert her father from his atheism), to name a few. With such a web of connections, Fermín is able to keep an eye on and a finger in everything that goes on in the city.

Throughout the novel, Fermín watches his power vary in strength, as rumors pass from mouth to mouth, deaths occur, conversions are made, and Ana dances in and out of his complete control. Especially when he is irritated do we see Fermín display his power and position. With his mind on the problem of Ana, de Pas intentionally ignores other priests because “esta era una de las maneras que usaba para hacer sentir el peso de su tiranía; así humillaba a los subalternos”¹³⁰ (369). Despite all of his superior airs, Fermín abuses his power when frustrated, occasionally offering a glimpse of his true identity as a small-minded and selfish man. As Ana repeatedly pulls away from him, nearly succumbing to but then rejecting his total domination of her will, she is calling into question his true ability to control not only over her but over all of Vetusta. This, of course, only increases his desperate desire to make her an unquestioning follower, to prove to all of Vetusta his true prowess as a religious guide.

Although he prefers to inspire obedience in his followers by presenting to them the anticipated rewards of religion, he is also not above using his authority to scare them into submission, all the while maintaining his seductive tones: “la voz del Magistral en el

¹³⁰ “This was one of his ways of making others feel the weight of his tyranny. In this manner he humiliated his subordinates” (267)

estilo terrorista no era menos dulce que cuando sus ideas eran también melosas”¹³¹ (350). He is a master of manipulation, employing whatever means necessary to grow and maintain his dominion. With Ana in particular, he uses a two-pronged attack of terrifying her only to console her in practically the same breath, making her fear and need him at once. It is unsurprising that their relationship causes several of her nervous episodes throughout the novel.

It is interesting to note that Fermín does at several points question his role as a priest – and not in the manner of regretting his falseness in the profession. At one point he thinks, while walking through the luxurious manor of one of Vetusta’s richest families, “él... había nacido para aquello,”¹³² that is, such extravagance. He even thinks that had circumstances been different, “podía ser hombre de sociedad como cualquiera”¹³³ (382). As his interest in Ana becomes carnal, he frequently regrets his position as a priest – often equated with femininity, or at the least a lack of masculinity – because it keeps him from being seen as a man, thinking “...la culpa de todo tenía la odiosa, la repugnante sotana...”¹³⁴ (835). He wants to be free of the emasculating cassock, to show Ana that he is more than his mask of purity and remind her, “Ana, yo soy de carne y hueso también...”¹³⁵ (744).

¹³¹ “when the canon theologian preached terror his voice was no less mellifluous than when the ideas which he was expressing were pleasant” (252)

¹³² “he had been born for such surroundings” (277)

¹³³ “[he could] take his place in society as well as anyone else” (277)

¹³⁴ “and the blame for it all lay with the odious soutane, the repugnant soutane” (269)

¹³⁵ “Ana, I am made of flesh and blood, too” (562)

Chastity Compromised: Desires, Realized and Repressed

Through a series of vague hints placed throughout the novel, it seems true that Fermín has had at least one if not several sexual escapades during his time as a priest. As aforementioned, the run-in with the *brigadiera* cost Doña Paula no small amount of effort to keep Fermín's reputation clean. Fermín himself considers how strange it is that Ana has made him “sentir con vigor las pasiones de la juventud que creyera muertas”¹³⁶ (676). Before his relationship with Ana, Fermín considered himself to be a man above such “apetitos que a él no le atormentaban”¹³⁷ (635). Due to this mindset, for a long time Fermín is in a state of denial, refusing to acknowledge his growing desires for Ana and especially the sinfulness of their nature.

At first, Ana seems to be nothing more than a tool for him. He immediately sees the potential for her to bolster his reputation as a daughter of confession and looks forward to the gains that will be made through their relationship. However his interest in her quickly escalates as he recognizes the truly admirable qualities of Ana (who, as it happens, withholds the essential information about her constant inappropriate interest in Don Álvaro). What begins with uncharacteristic reactions to small things (excitement upon receiving a letter from Ana, dismissed as “cosas de los nervios”¹³⁸ [329]) escalates to feelings that he can't (or won't) name: “sintió un agradecimiento dulcísimo, un calor en las entrañas completamente nuevo; ... de unas fibras del corazón que no sabía él cómo

¹³⁶ “[feel] the powerful passions of his youth, passions which he had believed dead” (510)

¹³⁷ “appetites which were not tormenting him” (478)

¹³⁸ “It was just nerves” (235)

sonaban”¹³⁹ (414). This causes an internal confusion that begins to escape physically in his repeated tendency to strike nearby objects (“dio un puñetazo”¹⁴⁰ [320]; “descargó un puñetazo”¹⁴¹ [351]; and, this time, “un puñetazo formidable”¹⁴² [373]; etc.).

The truth is that what he is feeling for Ana scares him: “a don Fermín le asustó la impresión que le produjo”¹⁴³ (414). He had been sure of himself, who he is, what his goals are, and what he is capable of; but as Ana works her way into his life, all of this is thrown off. Even while he refuses to completely recognize the budding feelings (“Amor no era; el Magistral no creía en una pasión especial”¹⁴⁴ [431]) he certainly is aware of the fact that he is quickly losing control of his normally stoic composure. He has to find an outlet for the new experience which keeps him questioning, “¿Estaría enfermo? ¿Se iría a volver loco?”¹⁴⁵ (379).

Fermín’s bid for control is generally centered around the Cathedral of Vetusta, but he also uses other spaces to his benefit when pursuing domination. As his infatuation for Ana grows, he begins to desire a different type of control over her, one not necessarily linked to the Church; he attempts to move their conferences and confessions into the house of one of the very religious ladies of Vetusta, where he knows they can meet in private, in order to personalize and privatize their relationship. He no longer wishes to be simply her confessor and spiritual guide; he has begun to want more. Yet despite

¹³⁹ “he felt a tender thankfulness and, deep inside his body, a warmth which was new to him ... which affected the very fibres of his heart and made them ring in some strange and unknown way” (302)

¹⁴⁰ “banged the table with his fist” (228)

¹⁴¹ “he struck his clenched fist (on the marble banisters)” (252)

¹⁴² “dealt... a formidable blow” (269)

¹⁴³ “Don Fermín was alarmed by the impression which Ana’s look... made on him” (302)

¹⁴⁴ “It was not love. He did not believe in a special passion” (315)

¹⁴⁵ “Was he ill? Was he going mad? (274)

accepting that new emotions exist and that passion is among them, he continues to lie to himself about his intentions: he thinks, “la pasión que él sentía nada tenía que ver con la lascivia vulgar (estaba seguro de ello) ni era amor a lo profano”¹⁴⁶ while the narrator notes “seguía el Magistral ocultándose a sí mismo las ramificaciones carnales que pudiera tener aquella pasión ideal que ya se confesaban los dos *hermanos*”¹⁴⁷ (661; 635).

Things begin to reach a breaking point as Don Álvaro draws closer to his goal of seducing Ana, and Fermín begins to prove himself to be a man completely capable of carnal passion and base desires, drawn out of him through jealousy.

He feels the depth of his emotions upon seeing Álvaro and Ana walking together: “el Magistral sintió entonces impulsos de arrojar de la torre”¹⁴⁸ and, returning to his confessional, “cuando... se vio encerrado entre las cuatro tablas de su confesionario, se comparó al criminal metido en el cepo”¹⁴⁹ (555). There is no pretending anymore. Despite his earlier protestations that “no caería en la tentación de convertir aquella dulcísima amistad naciente ... en vulgar escándalo de las pasiones bajas,”¹⁵⁰ his desires have escalated to a point that he no longer seems to care that he is a priest: “¿Era aquello pecado? ¿Era aquello amor del que está prohibido a un sacerdote? Ni para bien ni

¹⁴⁶ “his passion had nothing to do with base lasciviousness – he was sure of that – and was not profane love” (498)

¹⁴⁷ “The canon was still keeping hidden from himself the fact that the ideal passion which brother and sister had declared to each other could well turn into sexual passion” (477-78)

¹⁴⁸ “the canon theologian was seized by an impulse to hurl himself from the tower” (415)

¹⁴⁹ “when Don Fermín found himself enclosed within the four wooden walls of his confessional-box he compared himself to a criminal in the stocks” (415)

¹⁵⁰ “he would not fall into the temptation of turning the tender friendship which was growing... into a vulgar scandal of base passions” (359)

para mal se acordaba don Fermín de tales preguntas”¹⁵¹ (483, 658). And indeed, in the middle of a great religious spectacle in which Ana demonstrates her greatest act of devotion to him by walking barefoot in a parade through the city, “De Pas sentía que lo poco de clérigo que quedaba en su alma desaparecía. ... era la cáscara de un sacerdote”¹⁵² (788). Because of Ana, his concept of himself as a priest of the Catholic Church has been completely erased. Instead of playing the part, as he has for so many years, Fermín has given himself over to the pursuit of physical pleasures, and it is all because of Ana.

Divorced from the forces of purity acting on his life, having rejected the Church and wormed his way out from under his mother, Fermín has now given over to his human instincts and finds himself unashamed to have such carnal desires for Ana. In fact, he sees himself as entitled to every kind of influence over her, thinking his own influence and rights are greater even than those of her husband: “él era allí el dueño, el esposo, el esposo espiritual..., don Víctor no era más que un idiota”¹⁵³ (741).

It only follows that, upon losing his control over Ana, he feels entitled as well to the emotions of a cuckolded husband. As he begins to suspect her insubordinate behavior, “se sintió herido, le dolió el amor propio al verse en ridículo por culpa de su amiga... todos sus enemigos se burlarían”¹⁵⁴ (516). Yet as this initial concern for his own power and position gives way to a full-blown desire for Ana, the true nature of his emotions can no longer be hidden: “después pensó en aquella hermosura exterior incólume, en la

¹⁵¹ “Was it sinful? Was this the kind of love which was forbidden to a priest? Neither for better nor for worse did Don Fermín remember these questions” (496)

¹⁵² “De Pas could feel that what little of the clergyman he had left in his soul was disappearing. ... he was the shell of a priest” (595)

¹⁵³ “He was the master, the husband, the spiritual husband – Don Víctor was just an idiot” (559)

¹⁵⁴ “[he] felt wounded: it hurt his self-esteem to find himself ridiculed because of his new friend... all his enemies would make fun of him” (384-85)

esperanza de saciar su amor sin miedo de testigos, solo, solo él con un cuerpo adorado...”¹⁵⁵ (744).

At this point, Fermín’s transformation from an outwardly pure Man of God to a man dedicated solely to fulfillment of carnal passion is complete. No longer is he attempting to deny what he has become. His relationship with Ana has changed his very identity, causing him to put his possessive and sexual desires for Ana first, and only maintain the façade of priesthood knowing that it is essential to preserve his control over her. No longer living to fulfil the dreams of his mother or his own fantasies of power, “ahora no era más que un egoísta, no vivía más que para su pasión”¹⁵⁶ (688-89).

Interestingly, like Ana, he finds that this internal turmoil threatens to descend into insanity. Unable to categorize the whirlwind of emotions that Ana invokes in him, with each new crisis in their relationship Fermín questions, “¿Estaría enfermo? ¿Se iría a volver loco?”¹⁵⁷ “¿Estaría malo? ¿Serían los nervios?”¹⁵⁸ “¡Estoy loco!, ¡estoy borracho...!”¹⁵⁹ (379, 431, 442). After all, Ana has driven him to act in ways that he would not have thought himself capable. He has deceived and abandoned his only true ally, Doña Paula, to whom he owes so much. He has blatantly broken his vows of chastity through relations with two women, Teresina and Petra, acts motivated both by his unexpressed passions and by his need to recruit the two maids for his own manipulative purposes. He has given up his own ambitions for power over Vetusta in

¹⁵⁵ “then he had thought of her untouched external beauty, and of sating his love without fear of witnesses, alone, alone with a body he adored” (561)

¹⁵⁶ “Now he was simply an egoist, living for his passion alone” (519)

¹⁵⁷ “Was he ill? Was he going mad?” (274)

¹⁵⁸ “Might he be ill? Might it be his nerves?” (316)

¹⁵⁹ “I’m mad! I’m drunk!” (324)

favor of seeking complete control over Ana, and he has even lost his prized self-control in his desperation to reach said goal. His carefully maintained mental prowess has been broken down so much that as he longs to tell Ana “yo soy de carne y hueso también,”¹⁶⁰ the transition from conscious control over himself towards a need for fulfillment of basic physical pleasure is complete (744).

Yet Fermín is never able to fulfill his desires: Álvaro triumphs over the priest when he achieves his goal of seducing Ana. Fermín suffers a great deal due to Ana’s fall from grace, both personally as a would-be lover and professionally as a confessor incapable of controlling his spiritual daughter. Yet, unlike Ana, who suffers a complete, isolating, social death, Fermín only suffers a blow to his control over the city. His illicit relations with women are not discovered and he is not removed from his positions of power. In the end, due only to the restrictions that kept him from acting out his corrupt desires, Fermín is allowed return to his life as a priest and a figure of power.

¹⁶⁰ “Ana, I am made of flesh and blood, too” (562)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This study has focused on the struggle for identity within Clarín's work, exploring the difficult process experienced by the two characters in the novel whose concepts of themselves are still in evolution. Other characters seem not to suffer in the same manner, as their choices between social expectations and their own hidden desires are already made; they have found a way to balance these influences and reach some internal equilibrium, a satisfaction with their existence. However, Ana and Fermín are still being pulled in many different directions by forces both external and internal. These two characters must fight to understand their place within the web of forces that control the city of Vetusta while still trying to satisfy their own desires.

The Catholic Church, with its keen interest in controlling female religiosity and its great flaw in the corruption of its clergy, plays an indispensable role in the novel. It defines the religious inclinations of many women in Vetusta, specifically drawing Ana to its power and encouraging her complete submission to her confessor. On the part of Fermín, the institution enables him to take such dominating control of Ana as well as in many other areas of Vetusta, allowing him to escape persecution for his illegal or sexually illicit behaviors. His internal passions for possession and power are, for the most part, able to escape judgment precisely because of his position in the Church.

Society itself, and the conventions that it imposes on its members, also plays a huge role on these two characters. In Ana's formative years, her social obligations to her governess, her father, and her aunts fostered her enduring habit of submission to power. Fermín is also subject to filial responsibilities, allowing himself to be controlled by his mother Doña Paula because of the debt he feels he owes to her. Non-filial relations, such as the social contract between a woman and her husband, keep Ana from acting out her own inclinations although Quintanar is a neglectful husband, instead directing her to take the role of the *Angel del hogar*.

The scientific discourse, which arises in opposition to the religious one, takes its toll on Ana as medical doctors try to diagnose and treat her nervous attacks. The prescribed treatments in the form of an active, country life allow her just enough freedom from society's control over her to make her susceptible to the charms of the persistent Don Juan of Vetusta, Álvaro. Yet, since she cannot ever fully escape from the social climate in which she lives, the discovery of her adultery results in rejection and abandonment of Ana by the entirety of the city.

As discussed, mine is one of many interpretations of the novel; many of which are rather complementary. Whether approaching *La Regenta* through the lens of male desire, focusing on the significance of motherhood, highlighting power dynamics within the social classes and between the sexes, outlining the interaction between sex and religion, attempting to distinguish what is real from what is imagined, or exploring how social and physical forces pull the characters in different directions, it becomes clear that part of readers' fascination with the novel comes from the rich variety of themes that it contains.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alas, Leopoldo. *La Regenta*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1998. Print.

---. *La Regenta*. Trans. John Rutherford. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984.

Print.

Aldaraca, Bridget Ann. *El Ángel del Hogar: Galdós and the Ideology of Domesticity in Spain*. Chapel Hill, NC: Department of Romance Languages, U of North Carolina, 1991. 33-54. Print.

Charnon-Deutsch, Lou. "El discurso de la higiene física y moral en la narrativa femenina." *La mujer de letras o la letraherida: discursos y representaciones sobre la mujer escritora en el siglo XIX*. By Pura Fernández and Marie-Linda Ortega. Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 2008. 177-88. Print.

García de Cortázar Ruiz de Aguirre, Fernando. "Iglesia y religión en la España de *La Regenta*." *Revista Letras REL* 15.32 (1985): 25-44. Web. 16 Feb. 2016.

Labanyi, Jo. "Pathologizing the Bodily Economy: Alas's *La Regenta* (1884-1885)." *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. 209-62. Print.

Mandrell, James. "Malevolent Insemination: *Don Juan Tenorio* in *La Regenta*." "Malevolent Insemination" and Other Essays on Clarín. Comp. Noël Maureen Valis. Ann Arbor, MI, USA: Dept. of Romance Languages, U of Michigan, 1990. 1-27. Print.

Nimetz, Michael. "Eros and Ecclesia in Clarín's *La Regenta*." MLN 86.2 (1971): 242-

53. JSTOR [JSTOR]. Web. 13 Feb. 2016.

Overton, Bill. "Children and Childlessness in the Novel of Wifely Adultery." *Fictions of*

Female Adultery, 1684-1890: Theories and Circumtexts. Houndmills,

Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. 49-67. Print.

Resina, Joan Ramon. "Ana Ozores's Nerves." *Hispanic Review* 71.2 (2003): 229-52.

JSTOR [JSTOR]. Web. 13 Feb. 2016

Rich, Lawrence. "Fear and Loathing in *Vetusta*: Coding Class and Gender in Clarín's *La*

Regenta." *Revista Canadiense de estudios Hispánicos* 25.3 (2001): 505-

18. JSTOR [JSTOR]. Web. 01 Feb. 2016.

Urey, Diane F. "Writing Ana in Clarín's *La Regenta*." "Malevolent Insemination" and

Other Essays on Clarín. Comp. Noël Maureen Valis. Ann Arbor, MI, USA: Dept.

of Romance Languages, U of Michigan, 1990. 29-46. Print.